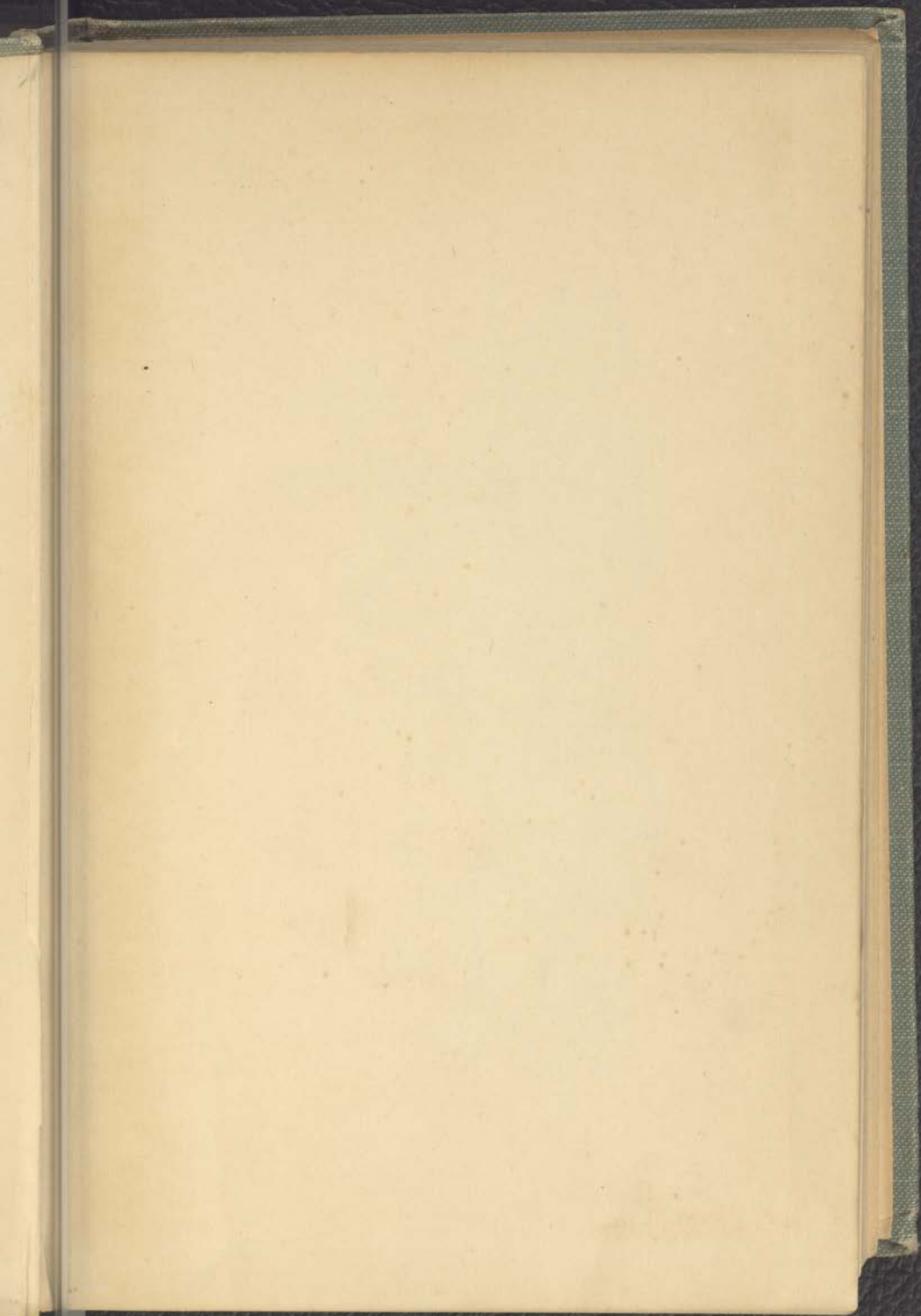


VIRGINIA
of the
AIR LANES

HERBERT QUICK

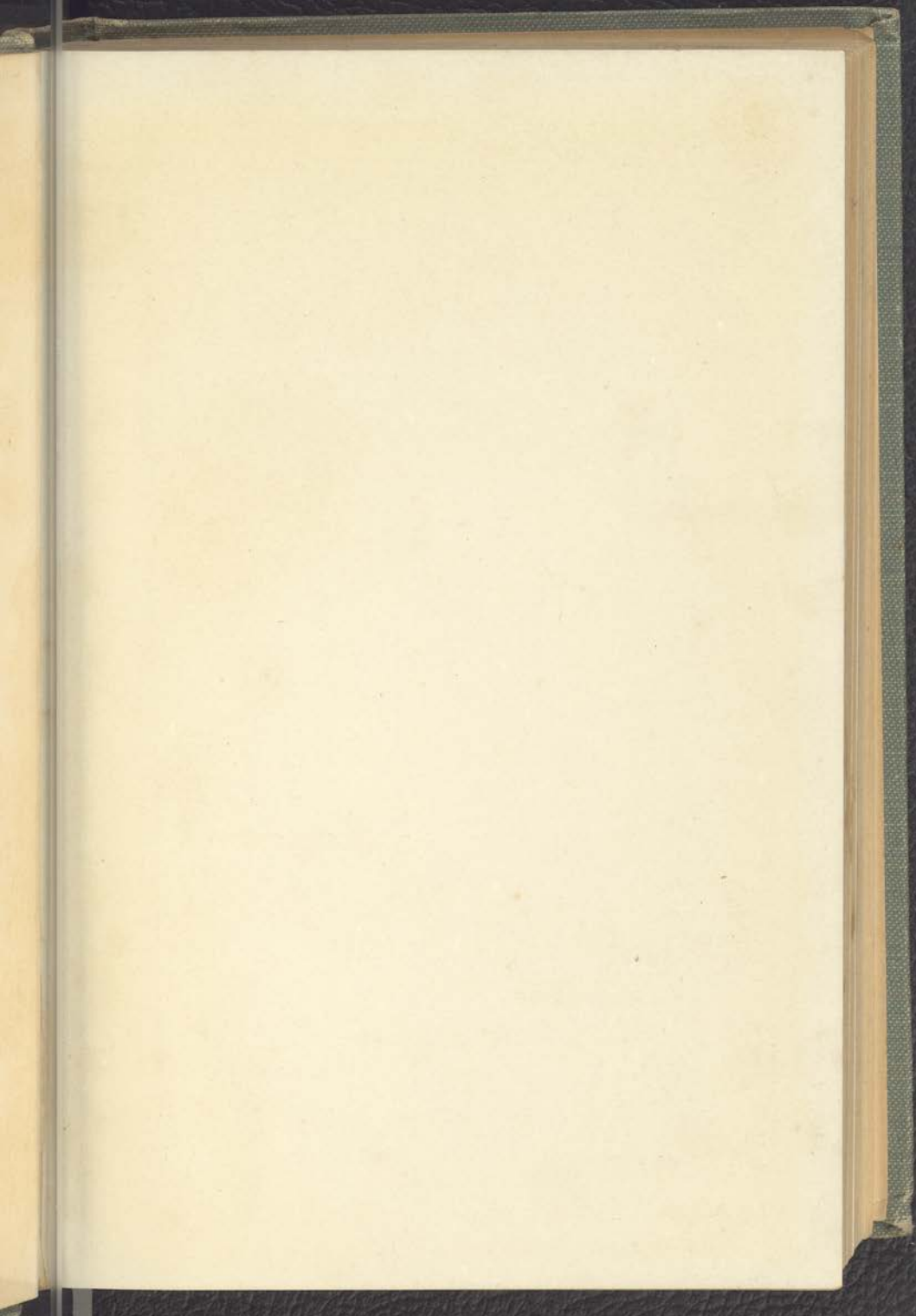
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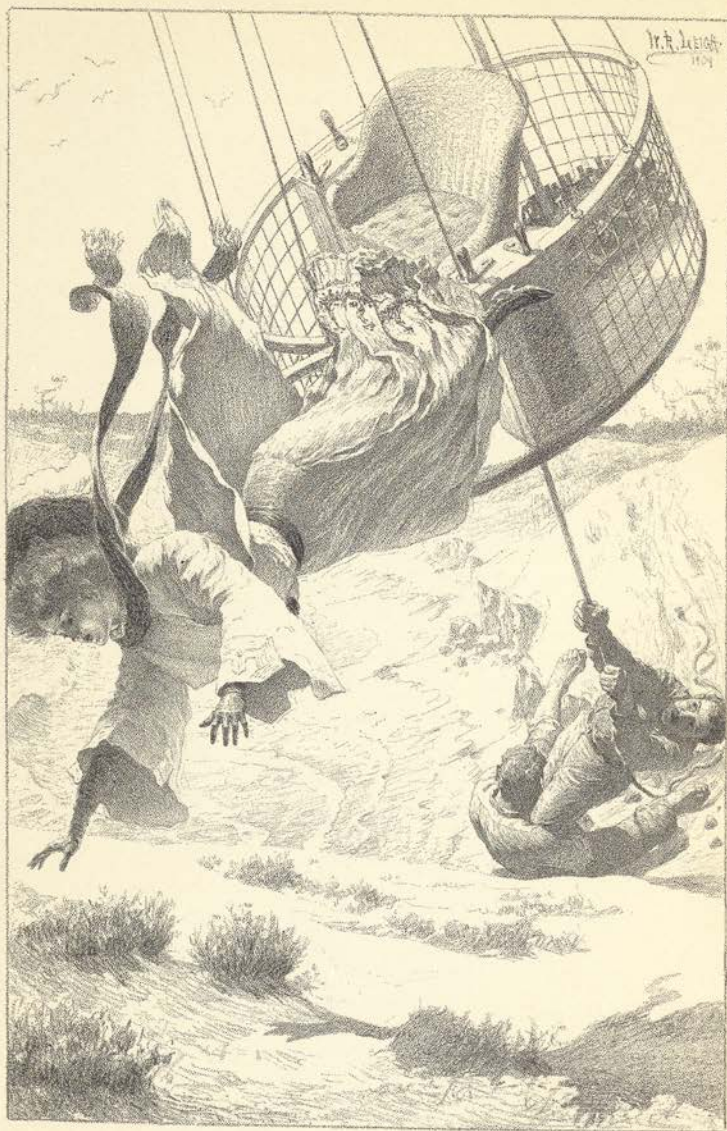


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VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES







There fell out a mass of red hat, crimson scarf, piqué and
silken fallals Page 19

VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES

By
HERBERT QUICK

Author of
Double Trouble, The Broken Lance

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILLIAM R. LEIGH

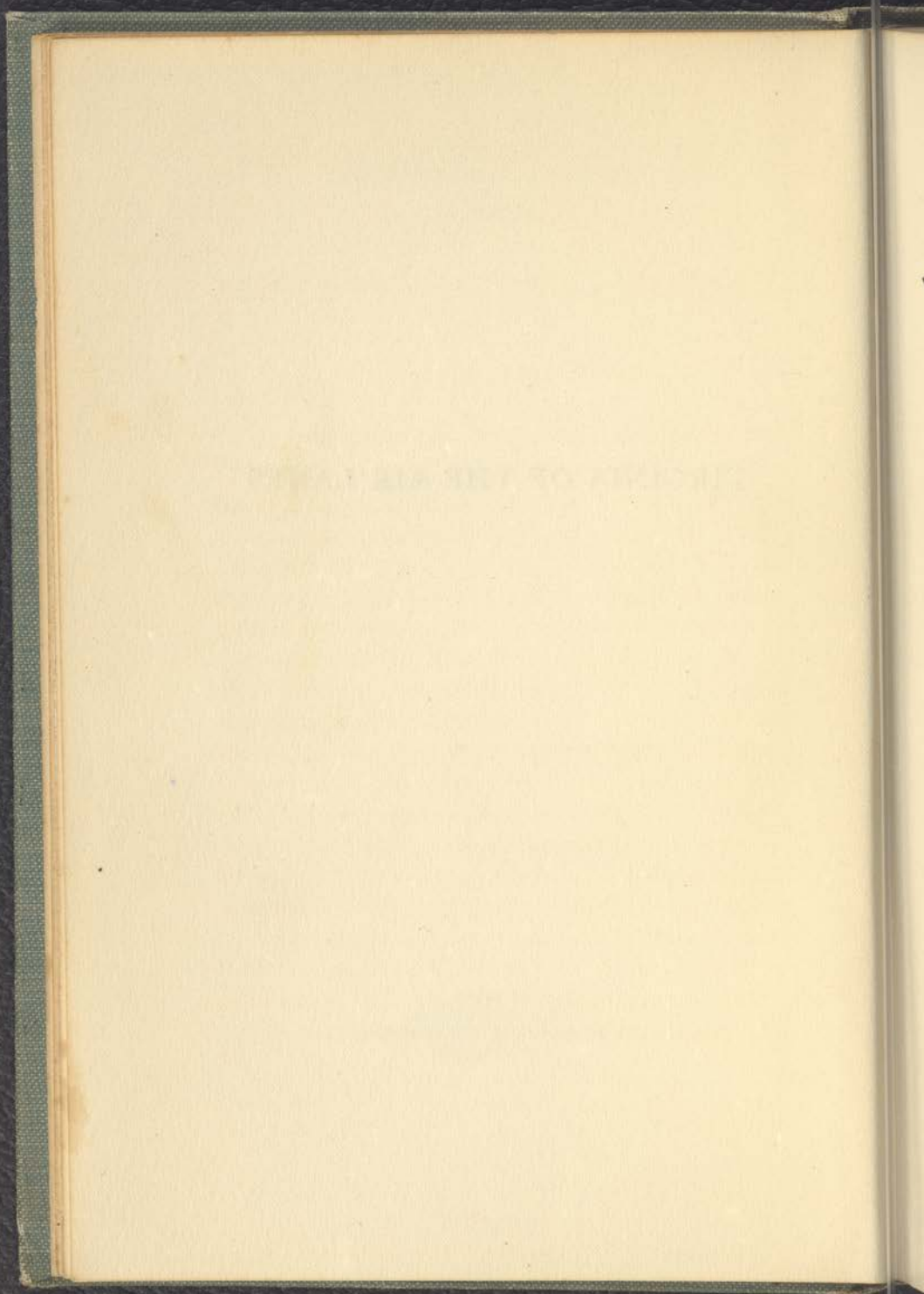
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VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES



VIRGINIA OF THE AIR LANES

CHAPTER I

WHEN MAIDENS FELL FROM THE SKY

FOR twenty shimmering miles the Gulf beach lay in the sun, a white straight-edge against blue. Mistily through the surf haze glimmered the tower of Sand Island light save when obscured by the smoke-plume of a fruiter standing in past Fort Morgan for Mobile. It was early forenoon. The yellow globe of the mooring-balloon at the fort shone in the sun like a dome of some audacious new architecture, flung high into the pulsating air. Two men, far down the coast toward Pensacola, caught the far-off splendor and noted, in the very act of casting off from it, a long, cigar-shaped aëronat—an immense, elongated bubble of quicksilver. It floated seaward, rounded to, stood a moment end on, librating like a balancing top.

"She's boun' fo' N'Yawlins, Ah reckon, suh."

The speaker was a typical Gulf fisherman, long-bearded, soft of speech, courteous as a diplo-

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mat, barefooted, weathered in garments and skin. Over his cheeks and nose were scattered broad brown blotches which, had it not been for their size, might have been called freckles. He rolled a cigarette, lighted it, turned his almost colorless eyes on his companion, repeating, "She's sho' boun' fo' N'Yawlins."

In the mien of the young man there was something of kinship to the elder, as there might be in a New England chemist or engineer something that is like his forty-second cousin fishing on the Newfoundland Banks. The softness of speech was modified to a subtle firmness and a subdued decision. The slight, tall frame was arrowy and erect; as if the youth had imbibed from some winier air a latent self-esteem expressed in the hint of incisiveness in speech, if one may call that incisive which was still soft and almost caressing. The boy also had the areas of mottled freckling, overlaying a pink glow. He wore a blue flannel shirt with a bright silk cravat; his shoes were scoured gray by the beach sand, and his well-shaped hat was powdered with it; his trousers were of cadet gray and were striped down the side; seemingly they were a part of some obsolete uniform. He sat on a great square timber half-buried in the sand, and had been studying a blue-green Portuguese man-of-war cast ashore and rolled up before the breeze, dragging its yard-long

tentacles. On the beam lay a steel square, a brace and bit, a roll of blue-prints, some steel drills and a book of logarithms. He had returned to the sea bladder, investigating it with the tip of a slim oil-can, and had mentally formulated a parallel between this helpless thing, beaten about by every breeze, and the dirigible balloon up the coast, when the speech of the old fisherman made him look up.

His face was small for a man's, his eyes dark, his lip blackened by a tiny mustache of jet. In the manner of one who does not feel obliged to reply to the speech of a constant companion, he picked up a pair of binoculars from a cast-up crate and studied the distant air-ship.

"Mo' likely bound for Pensacola, Captain," he said. "She's coming this way—a Condor with bow rudder. Winter resorters, I reckon."

"Then she don't keer whar she goes," replied the fisherman. "It's thisaway o' thataway, jist as some lady says."

"I don't know that it matters," said the younger man, "whether they see us or not; but I reckon we'll go under the shed."

"All raght, Miste' Theodo'," answered the captain. "Hyah's doin' the gophah act ag'in."

The aëronat, drawing nearer, swelled like a great silver moon. The men admired her as they

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walked inshore through soft, trodden sand, down to a lower level of yellowed palmettoes, and scaled a steep dune-slope thicketed with curious scrub-oaks only a few feet high, but hoary with age, their ancient and stunted limbs contorted fantastically by the rheumatism of age, and covered with moss. Beyond was a deeper hollow, quite out of sight of the sea, but lulled continually by its roar. Here was hidden a cabin of rough boards with a wide veranda or gallery, on the columns of which were to be seen bleached barnacles telling of the storm-tossed voyage which had brought them hither. Abutting on the cabin by one end was a spacious shed, without visible door or window. So thoroughly was the edifice concealed by the oak scrub and the low-growing bastard-spruce, that one might have passed a dozen times within a stone's throw of it without seeing it; and even from the air-ships, its drab roof powdered with blown sand was well-nigh invisible. Under the gallery was perfect safety from observation from aloft.

As seen through the glass, the air-ship was swelled to impressive bulk, now. Her rudder stood aslant, a stripe of brown against the silver foil of her bilge. On the seaward side ran the darker line of a toy aeroplane—a matter of appearance more than use—and slung beneath by a gossamer nacelle, steady as the deck of a liner, hung her roomy car,

the engine-room astern, the three great screws half invisible, like the vibrant wings of bees. On the forward deck was a splotch of white and red, like a brilliant gown, and grouped about it were two or three darker forms of men.

"How she cracks on!" cried the young man. "No end of power—the new nineteen-cylinder, fan-type engines, I suppose."

"She'll be wuth' about fo' bits when we get through, Miste' Theodo'," said the captain. "Ain't she sheerin' off?"

She was, though with no knowledge of them. She veered to the north and stood inland as if to cross the Little Lagoon,—that beautiful salt lake which for ten miles lies within sound of the Gulf surf, but separated from it by a little wilderness of dunes—then by a majestic swooping movement she threw her whole vast sweep of broadside open to their gaze. The captain's dimmer eye now made out the woman and the two men on her deck, while Theodore Carson's, keen for such a sight, and armed with the glass, observed that the woman wore a broad hat of vivid red, a scarf of the same color, and—a woman would have told him—a piqué gown. The young man who did not wish to be discovered knew only that it was white.

"They're past the Palmetto Beach resorts," observed Carson, "and—"

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"Eight mile past," interrupted the captain. "They're on this side o' Bon Secour."

"Making for the hotels on the Lagoon," said the young man.

"They bette' moor," said the fisherman. "They's a norther comin' out."

Carson scanned the sky for signs of the "norther," but saw nothing more threatening than a blue sky barred by a few white scarfs of cloud puffing up from the north.

"I see no signs of a blow that she can't be held to by her engines," said he. "The sky looks fine."

"They'll sho' hev a fight to keep from blowin' out to sea," returned the captain, "unless they tie up. What they doin' now, Miste' Theodo'?"

"Why," said Carson, studying the aëronat with the glass, and clipping off his sentences as the astounding evolution of the incident far up there in the blue rendered every utterance obsolete before it was finished, "why, they have thrown off a package of . . . it's mechanism . . . of some sort . . . in operation, and . . . They're making a tow of it. . . . They're reversing and rounding to. See them drift off! They're excited and all aback about something . . . Heavens! See that thing shoot up! It's some sort of helicopter, I believe—and the girl's alone in it, Captain! Alone, I say! Why did they . . .

She's lost control—she's lost! It's shooting over this way and coming down! It will—it will . . . My God! My God!"

The thing had parted from the great *aëronat*, like an insect scared from its seat on some great animal. It was a little speck topped with a broader, mushroom-shaped shimmer which Carson knew for the revolving blades of a helicopter, that insidious toy that promised so much for the conquest of the air and paid so little. For a moment it paused, sucked along in the wake of the huge ship as if in tow; then, as though released from the pull of gravity, it shot skyward, leaving the silver air-ship far below, as a fly might speed from a floating bubble. The two spectators drew their breaths sharply in, their hearts frozen in fascinated apprehension.

The air-ship floated fifteen hundred feet, perhaps, above the tall pines in the slashes of the narrow isthmus which divides the Lagoon from the Gulf. The slow-flapping buzzards on their way to some reported feast over near Three Rivers never noticed the glittering bilge of the giant craft, so high she soared above them; but the helicopter flew like a rocket, up above the balanced ship, so straight into the cool heights of the inane that those remaining on the deck it had left lost it, behind the overhanging hull of the *aëronat*.

But the men on the beach saw *it*, saw it rise sky-

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ward like a boy's dart until they shuddered at the abyss that yawned between it and the earth; saw it struck by the far-advanced loftier vanguard of the north wind predicted by the fisher-captain; saw it hurled southward before the blast like a feather; and then, as if with slowing engine, saw it fall, with the red hat and the white dress glimmering appealingly from under the shimmering helices, curving obliquely toward them, like a projectile hurled outward and downward from the battlements of highest heaven. And Carson gripped the barnacled column fiercely; he thought of the girl in the red hat and piqué skirt, for he was young and his heart was gripped as in a vise.

The Condor had a name. She was the *Roc*, owned by Mr. Finley Shayne; and her home port was Shayne's Hold, in the Catskills. Those who are familiar with the scope, power and spectacular success of Mr. Shayne's operations in Aërostatic Power stocks in the latter part of the first quarter of the present century, will surmise that the *Roc* was the finest product of the art of aviaional construction up to that time. Her speed, her stanchness, her airworthiness, her luxurious appointments—the fame of these had preceded her to the Gulf resorts, where she awaited favorable breezes to Cuba, and, from island to island in the Antilles—an attractive itiner-

ary, but rather hazardous, the aërostat being an unsafe craft for the open sea.

This fateful morning she had moored in the aërial harbor at Mobile, in her berth hard by the lift near the Bienville statue. Mrs. Shayne, a native Mobilian, pleaded indisposition; but went out to see some old houses dear to her youth. Mr. Shayne and their guest, Mr. Max Silberberg, had insisted upon the presence of Virginia Suarez, Mrs. Shayne's niece, on a trip down the Bay in the *Roc*, to witness the demonstration of a new flying-machine, and she had yielded.

The inventor, a suspicious, foxy, middle-aged man, proved personally objectionable to Miss Suarez because his thumbs turned back so far that the sight of them made her feel creepy; and as he gesticulated freely while denouncing all devices for aërial navigation except his, his thumbs were much in evidence. He showed wonderful capacity for fury, flying passionately at all who said that his helicopter might not be the key to the aviation situation. So Virginia was relieved by his going aft to convince the engineer that the *Roc's* screws were fundamentally wrong in construction.

"Unfortunate devil," said Silberberg.

"Why," she queried, "because of those awful thumbs?"

"Because he failed to please you," replied Silber-

berg, with the hissing termination of the "please" that constituted the one race-betraying slip in his speech. "To displease you—the greatest calamity."

"I don't believe he feels it much," said she.

"Another misfortune," replied he, "not to know what he's losing. Yes, he's an unfortunate devil."

Virginia wished Wizner back, crooked thumbs, fury and all; for no thumbs or voice could be so offensive as the unrelieved presence of Mr. Silberberg, the head of the Federated Metals concern, controlling the copper, gold and silver output of a continent. He was so insistent on little encroachments upon her reserve, as he fussed about with rugs and deck chairs, tucking her wraps about her as they rose into the high south-blowing upper drift, constantly touching her with his bediamonded fingers in little ways, his breath, heavy with cigarettes, floating to her like a whiff from some fetid smoking-room. Virginia wished herself anywhere away from Silberberg.

She felt herself thrown at his head by her aunt. Little privileges, which in another would not have offended, seemed like the unspeakable liberties of prospective purchasers with slaves offered in the market. She was getting morbid and almost hysterical. Silberberg's slight baldness, running up in shining coves from his forehead, his well-groomed grossness of body, his oily black curls, made of him

a beastly sultan gloating over the last importation from Circassia. And yet, his appearance and behavior were not inherently bad—the situation made them unendurable. Perhaps Mrs. Shayne's tributes to his greatness, and her emphasis on him as an opportunity open to Virginia, a mere dependent, were more chargeable with producing this tension, of which Silberberg was quite unaware, than anything actually done by him.

"So you think, Aunt Marie," she had said, "that Mr. Silberberg is one of the great ones of the earth?"

"Most certainly," rejoined Mrs. Shayne. "He is retaining and increasing the enormous wealth and power inherited—"

"From old Israel Silberberg," supplied Virginia.

"Virginia," said Mrs. Shayne, "we should not mention an origin of which Max never speaks.

. . . But to do what he is doing, takes a great man. Your uncle will tell you so."

Silberberg made the hay of courtship in the sun of opportunity. Virginia pondered on her aunt's standard of greatness. The dark line of pines at the fort drew nearer; and beyond lay the Gulf, a sparkling, blue, outspread diagram.

"Where's Uncle Finley?" she asked. "We are getting a long way south."

"Giving the helicopter a private examination," replied Silberberg. "It is a happiness to me that he

is; but the inventor would go wild if he knew the sort of expert his precious machine is alone with!"

"Wild?" repeated Virginia. "Listen, even now!"

Above the purr of the screws came the angry voice of the inventor in the engine-room abusing the *Roc's* second engineer for some remark derogatory to helicopters. Already he was quite wild enough, Virginia thought.

"Why don't we try his machine?" she asked. "Must we go out over the Gulf? Isn't the Bay big enough?"

"Mr. Shayne wants to pick up a specialist at the fort," replied Silberberg, "the man who wrote up the Chinese war-aërostats. He's here on some aëronautical business for the army."

Miss Suarez gave her attention to the wonderful landscape spread about her and below her. Far astern she could dimly make out the aërial harbor at Mobile, a cluster of khaki-colored bubbles floating over the old city. To starboard lay the gardens and orchards of the western shore. The white scarp of the eastern cliffs gleamed through the haze far to the northeast past the sharp spit of Mullet Point. Away to the east lay the wide, blue Bon Secour semicircle beyond which she imagined she saw the triangular splotch of Perdido Bay. A fleet of white-sailed smacks bore off toward the western oyster-beds, and lay foreshortened and out

of drawing below her. Virginia looked, and wished she were alone, or that Silberberg might for a moment be content to pay his court by being rather than by doing.

A battleship was coaling at the Fort Morgan wharf, her decks alive with blue-jackets; and, while Virginia watched them, the retractile telephone was tossed down, and brought word that Captain Wickham could not accompany them. At Shayne's order they cast off; and it was then that Theodore Carson, at his mysterious shed in the dunes, had observed their ship.

The *Roc* circled to the west to avoid the inhibited passage over the batteries, and stood east along the beach. Wizner abandoned his quarrel and came forward to make the test. He set the helicopter on the deck, where it stood unsteadily on its slender bamboo legs, its painter hanging over the rail, its top crowned by the screw-wings, slanted a little outboard for the launching.

"How will you get her off, Wizner?" asked Mr. Shayne.

"Easy enough," answered Wizner tartly.

"Maybe we'd better make a descent for you," suggested Silberberg. "It may be one of these terrestrial helicopters."

"I'll ask, when I want you to go down," replied Wizner, glaring. "You'll see whether it's a ground

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machine or not. May I take down a section of that rail?"

"Certainly," answered Mr. Shayne. "But don't let the helicopter topple off. It might fall on a fisherman. What are you doing, Virginia?"

The girl had stepped forward as if to take a seat in the little cany car of the helicopter.

"Let me sit in it," said she. "I want to imagine how you feel when you get out-into space."

"I wish you would," said Wizner. "It will hold her still. It's perfectly safe."

Virginia, laughing at playing paper-weight, entered the car, where she sat fascinated by the inventor's turned-back thumbs as he went over the bearings, the lubrication, the feed and the ignition, and, with a word of reassurance to the girl, started the tiny engine. Softly, steadily, the finely adjusted mechanism revolved, setting the car into tingling vibrations which thrilled like electricity.

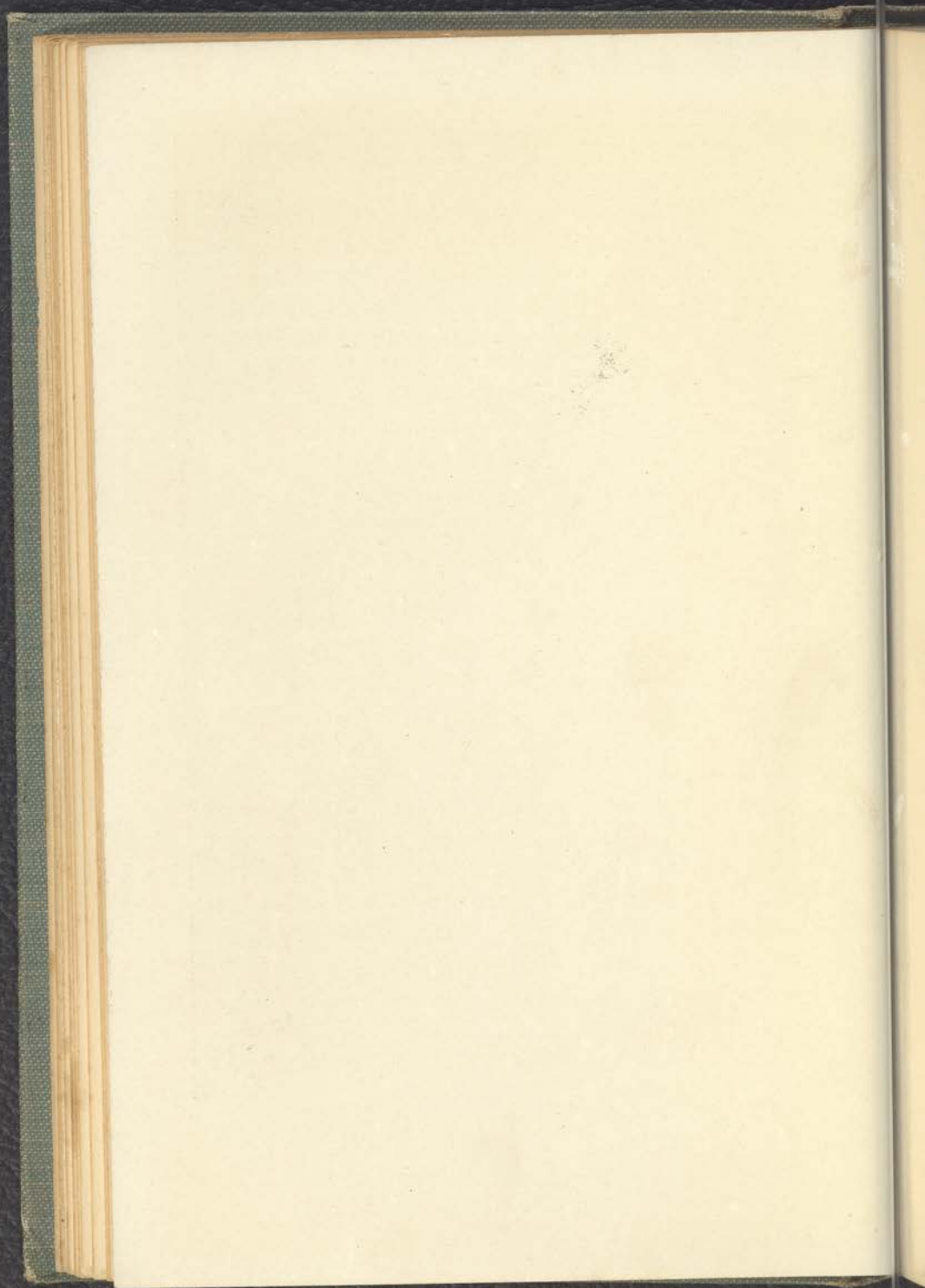
"Which is the clutch-lever?" she asked.

"This," said the inventor, pointing. "I'm going to the engine-room; when I come back I'll show you how it works."

Mr. Shayne went aft with Wizner, in animated conversation, leaving Virginia in the throbbing car. The rail had been removed, and a little push would have been quite sufficient to shove the girl and the machine overboard into the empty air. The thrill



The car slipped off and swung in mid air Page 15



of the vibration, the sense of risk, or the intense gaze of Silberberg made her face flush. He had never seen her so charming. She laid her hand on the clutch-lever.

"I could move this lever a little," said she, "and fly away. I feel as if I should fly!"

"I shall not let you," said he. "I shall hold you!"

"Mr. Silberberg!"

The rebuke was evoked by his putting his arm about her. One white, jeweled hand was slipped behind her, the other laid on her arm, the oily perfumed curls stooping until the red lips approached hers. Perfectly aware of what she was doing, but quite reckless of consequences, Virginia pushed the lever, threw in the clutch—and the wings started. The pull of the vivified mechanism, drawing him out to death, made Silberberg's very fingers tingle with terror, and he let go girl and car, and leaped backward. Under the lift of the wings, the car dragged to the edge, slipped off with a grating sound, and swung there in mid air, the painter dangling almost within reach, three hundred fathoms in the air, supported only by the spinning helices driven by an engine that one man only knew how to manage, and he as far removed from it, potentially, as if he had been in Mars!

The carmine tint that had stimulated the aggres-

sion of Silberberg faded from Virginia's lips as her mouth set in a white line; and her face turned deathly pale. Half-rising, she stretched her hand toward the aërostat, whence there came to her ears the cries of Silberberg and her uncle, and the wild profanity of Wizner.

"Listen to me, damn you," he yelled, "listen!"

He was trying to tell her how to use the levers—but she could not understand for the wild drumming in her ears. She felt stifled, her hand trembled so that she could not hold to anything, no matter how she tried. At last—it was over in a moment—more by accident than design, she moved something. With appalling velocity the thing shot upward, the aëronat fell away toward the earth, the fisherman's house far beneath was whisked down to the littleness of a toy. The air struck her face, blowing downward more and more chill. Overhead the screws hummed implacably, the only sound she heard. She was in the midst of the illimitable silences, now for the first time broken save for the eagle's scream or the rustle of the wide wings of the osprey or the man-o'-war hawk. Her heart felt gripped in an iron hand, and throbbed smotheringly. She was climbing upward, drifting north toward the Lagoon. If she could only descend in landlocked water, she might yet be saved—and she was not the girl to give up.

She studied the machinery, trying to apply her picked-up knowledge of engines. Here was the thing with which to stop it, she felt sure of that; but to stop it suddenly was mere suicide, a swift fall to death. Some means there must be, she knew, to ease it down; but she saw nothing she dared touch. That was the horror of it,—she dared touch nothing. She could only sit there awaiting whatever might betide, away up in the awful isolation of the sky, with a demon-machine that buzzed in ferocious energy and mounted upward.

She was growing calmer now. It would surely slow down of itself, she reasoned; and if it did not—well, she had escaped from Silberberg, anyhow. It was a clean, unsullied place in which to meet the end. She would rather live—but—already nature's ether, which makes death easy, was stealing into possession of her senses.

And then the north wind struck. The puff smote her cheek, the helicopter yielded to it and swept southward, like a feather before a fan. The Lagoon moved from under her, pulling the Gulf after it. She was blowing out to sea. As the new thought added itself to her conception of the desperate situation, the sinking of her heart told her that until now she had never given up hope. She reached out to stop the engine; but as the vision passed through her mind of falling, falling like the stick

of a rocket, being dashed to pieces on the earth, and nuzzled over by wild hogs until some one discovered her, she withdrew her trembling hand again, deliberately choosing a grave in the sea.

Then a voice seemed to speak in her ear from the chill solitude, senseless words, as of one stammering, like the phantasms of voices heard in the delirium of fever, finally growing distinct, and repeating over and over a command: "Retard the spark!" it said, "retard the spark!"

The *Roc* was far below and to the north, now, the Gulf breakers foamed nearer and nearer, and still rang in her ears the ghostly command, "Retard the spark." She tried to remember about engines—but this one was so different! Aimlessly she put her hand out, touched a little sliding thing, and paused, afraid to move it, yet quite confident it was the thing to move. She would fall now, if she fell, into the green water of the Gulf—that was a grim sort of comfort. She moved the sliding thing, and thought the buzz of the helices less strenuous. The ground—a landscape of almost pure white picked out in dark green blotches of rosemary and bastard-spruce—the ground seemed rising to her. The roar of the breakers swelled in her ears, like the crescendo of some tremendous, up-rushing music—and she realized that she was falling, in a great parabola that might carry her into the sea, or might

dash her upon the driftwood and wreckage of the beach. By the breadth of a hair she advanced the spark; and the helicopter assumed a more level slant, toward the frothing water, and above the driftwood.

Suddenly the machine careened; and she thought she had struck, to be dashed broken on the ground, lost. She had not seen Theodore Carson on that highest dune; but he had grasped the painter as it dragged over him; and it was he who had thrown the flying-machine from its level swoop, even as it jerked him down the dune, with Captain Harrod clinging to his legs, dragging them almost to the water's edge. The car swung horribly; and, finally, spilled from it by its careening, there fell out of it a mass of red hat, crimson scarf, piqué and silken fallals. The helicopter tore loose and fled out to sea before the gale; and this young man who did not care for visitors found himself burdened with one in the form of a rather good-looking girl, as he could see even in the chaos of her land-fall, who lay in the soft sand apparently unhurt, but in a dead faint—come to him literally out of the sky.

CHAPTER II

A HOSPITABLE BANDIT

THE helicopter commanded the attention of Captain Harrod: his bare toes buried in the sand, he stood gazing after it, as after having brought Virginia Suarez, it had risen as by some sort of negative gravity, and shot out to sea with its engines firing like a gatling; whither it was now disappearing from the watcher's sight after the manner of a lost toy balloon.

Theodore Carson, being young, ignored the machine. He stared for a moment in amazement at the prostrate girl, then took her tenderly in his arms, carrying her toward the hidden cabin. At the steepest spot Captain Harrod overtook him; but the young man paid no heed to offers of aid, wading steadily on to the door, which the captain unlocked and opened, standing aside for Carson and his interesting burden. Theodore took her into the large single room, laid her softly on a clean-looking bed covered with a Navajo blanket, smoothed the white skirt down decorously, removed the long pin and laid aside the red hat, seeming

scarcely to know what he was doing. There she lay like a dead bird, her plumage unruffled; for the white sand had shaken from her dress and she looked unsoiled and pure, and hopelessly still.

"She is dead!" said Theodore, in a hushed voice.

"O, Ah reckon not!" replied the captain. "You ort to do something! She's swounded!"

"What can *I* do?"

A child asked to put to rights a power-loom, a perfecting press, a telautograph, or any other complex and delicate contrivance, might have used the same tone. The captain approached, put his hands behind him, and looked, hat in hand.

"Is her heart beatin'?" he inquired.

"I don't know!" cried Carson, twisting his fingers. "I don't know!"

"Ah reckon," said the captain, in an awed whisper, "that she wouldn't keer—seein' how things is—if you'd listen, an' see, Miste' Theodo'!"

Carson laid his ear lightly to the white blouse. Some fluttering he seemed to feel; but he could not be certain. Harrod brought water in a watering-pot, which he seemed to have planned to use as upon a lily or rose.

"Do it beat?" he asked.

"I can't tell," said Carson, "nor whether it's my pulse or hers that beats. Oh, I wish—what do they generally do, Captain?"

"They's some paht o' they frock that always has to be unrove, ain't they?" inquired the captain anxiously.

"Captain," said Carson, the perspiration standing on his brow. "I'm going out on the gallery for air. You do what has to be done, Captain—or she may die!"

"Put some watah on huh face, suh," said the captain, in judicious avoidance of extreme measures. "Ah don't reckon this hyah's a case fo' vi'lent o' oconse'vative remedies. I'll oncork that ha'tsho'n bottle!"

Carson pressed the wet towel to the girl's face; the captain held a bottle labeled "ammonia" to her nostrils; she gasped, drew a quivering sigh, opened her eyes, and saw over her head a sloping roof on which the mud-wasps were plying their masonry, rude walls of rough boards, a rack of guns, some instruments nautical-looking to her unschooled eyes; a tall, rough-looking, sailor-like man stuffing the cork in a bottle of pungent emanation, and a young face which would have been girlish had it not been for the little black mustache and the deep coat of tan. The older man was looking at her in a fatherly way, and the young one was sponging her forehead, his face near hers. She sat up suddenly, felt her coiffure, and looked about for her hat.

"You have had a fall, madam," said Carson,

"and are shaken up a little; but you are safe and among friends."

"Oh, thank you," she said, in a tone of the most correct formality. "It's ever so kind of you, sir—I—I—I—Oh, I thought I was lost! I thought I—Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! O-o-o-h!"

Suddenly, from the polite commonplaces of speech, she broke into hysterical screaming. Then she bowed her face in her hands as if to shut out some terrifying sight, and moaned and shivered piteously, asking them to pardon her, promising to be calm presently, sometimes looking up for a moment with a smile forced through the horror stamped on her face by memory of the ordeal through which she had passed, and then breaking down into hysterical crying again. Captain Harrod poured a stiff glass of red liquid from a bottle, diluted it, and took it to the shuddering girl, who looked pathetically up into his face for a moment, swallowed it obediently, and coughed as if strangled by it.

"And now," said Mr. Carson, "we will leave you, if you will excuse us. Please feel at ease. You are quite safe, and the cabin is yours. We are in all ways at yo' service. The captain here is my friend, and we belong to a race that sees a sister in every helpless lady. I think you will desire to sleep; and I hope you may awake refreshed; after which

we shall place ourselves mo' definitely under your command."

She looked at him questioningly. The softness of his voice, his little inconsistent lapses into dialect as he uttered the old-fashioned chivalric sentiments won her trust.

"Ah'd lie down, ma'am," suggested the captain, "ontil that medicine gits a chance to wuk. Good-by, ma'am."

Virginia lay back and closed her eyes; but the potion brought no drowsiness. Her face grew hot, and she knew her eyes would shine if she opened them, with a brilliancy quite fascinating to the young man with the little black mustache. The fact that she thought of this startled her. Was she growing flighty with fever? Why this abnormal hilarity of spirits, in the exaltation of which all anxiety departed? She was unable to dwell long in thought on the uncertainty and grief of her aunt at so losing her, first into the sky, and then, supposedly, into the Gulf. What difference did it make? The world grew unaccountably roseate with hope; more joyous because she could not tell why. The one insistent impulse of the moment was to burst forth into song—restrained with difficulty by dwelling on the bad form of vocalization. She was sure, however, that she was about to do something shockingly unladylike. Perhaps it was

the ozone of the immense altitude of the helicopter. The room seemed afloat on the waves that roared outside, but this struck her as extremely jolly. Really, it appeared selfish to enjoy this funny aberration of the nervous system alone. Her old, old friends outside—the young man with the girl's face, and his bewhiskered companion, the relations of both of whom to her past life seemed vague just now, though they were undoubtedly old and dear friends—she would hunt them up and talk with them. She rose, and walked out unsteadily upon the veranda, and saw Mr. Carson and the captain sitting idly just beyond earshot of the cabin. They came to her respectfully.

"I came out to thank you, sir," said Virginia flightily, "for your heroic behavior—heroic, romantic, mediæval behavior! Don't my eyes look funny?"

She turned up her face to his appealingly, her cheeks flushed, her pupils dilated.

"I beg of you not to mention it, madam," urged Mr. Carson, with infinite solicitude. "But may I not insist upon your allowing me to escort you back to your room?"

Virginia took his arm, leaning upon it with much of her not inconsiderable weight, and as they paced across the veranda, with a mischievous expression in her face, she whirled him off into a few turns of

a waltz. Suddenly grave, she then resumed the march into the cabin, exhibiting every sign of weakness in the knees. Carson was pale with anxiety at these symptoms, so at variance with those expected.

"Lovely dance," she said, "lovely! So dear of you! I could waltz for ever—with you!"

"Thank you," said Theodore gravely. "It would be an honah beyond estimation—"

"But just a little teeney bit pokey after a few centuries?" she queried coquettishly.

"Not in the least!" he exclaimed reassuringly. "Quite the contrary. And now, may I beg you to lie down until you are quite restored?"

Virginia sat upon the bed, reached down to lift her skirts with the upward swing of her feet into the position for reclining, and tumbled into the young man's arms with a laugh. She knew she was doing extraordinary things, but did not care a jot.

"So awkward of me!" she said. "But you'll forgive me?"

"I feel sure," said Carson, looking down gravely, "that if you would compose yourself and try to sleep—"

"If some one would sit by me," said she. "I'm perfectly sure—sit by me, and hold my hand—"

"Just close yo' eyes," he replied, "and if you don't

drop asleep, I'll, I'll— At present, I think I'd better read to you."

"So good of you," said she. "Intellectual soporific. That looks like a sleepy book."

"It is," said Carson, taking up a great quarto volume. "Let me read on from where I stopped, chapter four. 'In most dynamos—'"

"My hand—," said she, dropping it on the blanket. "It's cold."

Theodore took the hand a moment—and covered it with the blanket.

"That doesn't warm it much," said she. "I think you're funny!"

"'In most dynamos,'" read the young man hastily, "'the principle of reduplication is involved; that is, commencing with a very small amount of residual magnetism in the field-magnets, the inductive action between them and the revolving armature results in the production of a feeble current—'"

"Feeble magnetism," said the girl, opening her eyes and looking at him with sleepy reproach. "Quite so!"

"—a feeble current in the coils,'" read Theodore stolidly. "'The current may be made to pass through—'" And he plodded on and on, never lifting his eyes, reading of compound-wound, series-wound and shunt-wound dynamos, until Captain

Harrod, tiptoeing in, found Virginia asleep, and took away the book.

Theodore rose in relief at this respite from the problem of the sky-maiden, darkened the windows, and went out.

"Have you any game in the larder?" he asked.

"All them partridges you shot last night, suh," replied the captain.

The "partridges" were plump little bob-whites of the rosemary scrub, fat by feeding on the small, oily, yellow berries. The two men dressed them in silence.

"She'll be shipshape when she wakes up," said the captain, at last.

"I hope and pray she may. She was quite flighty. I'm much concerned for her," said Carson.

The captain for some time maintained a pregnant silence.

"You don't allow, suh," said he at last, "that it's that redeye that ails huh?"

"Captain," said Theodore sternly, "any gentleman can see that this young girl is a lady! I beg to remind you that a lady does not take more liquor under any circumstances than what may be necessary gently to restore the weakened faculties—and I hope you will forgive a young man for saying so much to an older one!"

"Ah reckon yo' raght, suh," said the captain.
"An' please excuse *me!*"

Their cookery was an operation in progressive broth-making. Theodore made broth of one quail, peeped in to see if his guest were awake, served the broth to the captain, and made more. The sun wore to the west, the last quail was cooked, the captain was providently gorged with alternate courses of bird and broth, when Virginia, very stately and very reserved, opened the door and walked out upon the gallery. Carson shrank back into the kitchen and shoved the captain into the breach.

"How do you do, ma'am?" he inquired solicitously. "Ah sho' hope yo' bette' aftah yo' sleep."

"Much better, thank you," she replied.

"We have some pahtridge broth, ma'am," he went on, "with rice; and a baked yam; and a planked green trout from the lake back hyah; and some coffee. Sit down, ma'am, and Ah'll suhve it."

The little table was spread on the gallery, its top made of the head of a derelict cask, its legs of barnacled sections of a boom. Virginia's head ached in dreadful similitude to the traditional feeling of the morning after; but the coffee fragrance was pleasant.

"You are too good," said she, accepting the chair.

"I shall be glad to eat a little. Where is your—your friend?"

"He's som'eres about," replied the captain. "Ah really don't know, ma'am. Won't you please take yo' coffee?"

The coffee was black and strong; the broth was a temptation, and she sipped with increasing appetite. Buttered yam and planked trout brought the meal to a triumphant end, with the world not such a chamber of wild horrors as it had seemed when she had awakened. Yet where was she, and how should she depart? Where was the *Roc*? Who were these men? The guns, the brass instruments that looked as if they pertained to navigation, the big windowless shed, all suggested things nautical, bold and nefarious. The kindness and courtesy of the rough-looking fellows reassured her as to her personal safety. Yet if they were smugglers or freebooters, how could they safely return her to the civilization of coast-guards and constables? It was deliciously romantic—but how creepy! There was a horde of them; and this pretty boy was too young to control their turbulence. The blackavised captain with the red sash—necessary to the color-scheme—would be less deferential than this girl-faced lieutenant (he must be lieutenant) with his meticulously proper attitude. Far less!

The red-faced captain was habitually "maddened

with drink" and always roared to the pretty girl captive, "Come 'ere, my pretty, an' give us a kiss!"

Silly, but it made her heart flutter to imagine the motley sea-rovers with blunderbusses at the right shoulder shift, filing toward the cabin. The lieutenant must arrange her departure at once. In the midst of her panic, she recalled vaguely the influence of the medicine, her waltz with the lieutenant, the holding of her hand, and the shunt-wound dynamos. Were these things true, or fragments of a wild dream? Now if there be added to visions of leering pirate captains, a hot and cold and shivery feeling arising from the conviction that one has done something horrid, Virginia's impulse to see the young robber and end the idyl for ever may be accounted for. She turned to Captain Harrod with an expression so agitated that he was somewhat startled.

"I wish you would say to the lieutenant," said she, "that I must see him at once if possible."

The fisherman analyzed this speech for perhaps a minute, in absolute silence. Then he said, "Yes, ma'am," and instantly produced Carson, who, so far as Virginia could judge, had been within the captain's sight when she had been assured that his whereabouts were unknown. This was felonious and covert-looking. She must fly this lonely shore.

"You are," said the young man, avoiding any

reference to her recovery, "doubtless wondering where your companions may be, and thinking it strange that they have not returned?"

"It is strange," said she. "Something must have happened to the engines."

"No," said Theodore, "not that. They all but blew out to sea. They simply had to fight their way off toward Pensacola, where they must have made harbor. It was almost half a gale."

"And so—they went—and left me?"

"They really couldn't help it," urged the young man.

"It shows the sort of man Silberberg is," she cried hotly, "and—"

"Quite so," assented Theodore. "And yet, in the present state of the art, the aëronat will not allow you to do quite as you would, especially on a lee shore off a thousand miles of open sea, you know, with a good deal more than a capful of wind. They really could not be expected—"

Virginia silenced him with a gesture in which dissent was mingled with emphatic dismissal of the subject.

"And now," said she, "perhaps you will be so good as to help me to some conveyance to Mobile?"

"I have a boat on the lake," said Carson, "half a mile inland. There is a channel to Palmetto Beach. The boat and crew are at your service."

"I should prefer to walk, if you please," said she.

"Unless you have a day or two to spend in the journey, I should not recommend the attempt."

"I know some people," said she, "at the Yupon Hedge Inn at Palmetto Beach. Can you—"

"If we go at once," he replied, "you may be there for dinner."

"I am ready," said she, rising. "Let us go, please, immediately."

There were few preparations to make. Captain Harrod led the way, easterly alongshore to a spot where the scrub grew well down toward the beaten beach. A long square-hewn timber lay half-rotted and sunk in the sand; and on this, like persons striving to conceal their trail, they walked back between clumps of dark-green rosemary, over a low place in the dunes, down to the dry, hard bottom of a former pool, under a thicket of scrub-oaks so dense that the *Roc* or any of her tribe might have scouted for them in vain, among black ponds fringed with wiry bent-grass, past ghostly clumps of tall pines, and, finally, through a dense tangle of persimmon, palmetto, thorny "hack-and-be-damned" and low-growing cedar, they emerged upon a little north-looking hillock crowned with magnolias, cedars, hickories and live-oaks, and looked forth upon a strange tarn of inky water, ridging somberly in the north wind,

its black waves crested with foam, like white plumes on funeral crape. The shores of this sinister lake were densely wooded by sullen ranks of pines and cypresses standing like sour-faced soldiery knee-deep in swamp. Virginia gasped at sight of the somber mere—it seemed such an eery spot in which to be cast away with these strange men who lived behind closed doors and walked the sands so as to leave no footprints. Surely, her worst suspicions

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“Haul out the launch, Captain.”

Why was the trim, speedy-looking launch so completely hidden in the tall cane? The puldoos puddling in the reeds made sounds like prowling accomplices. Virginia was trembling to be off as Carson went aboard and inspected the engines with the air of an expert.

“And now, madam,” said he, “if you will do me the honor to step aboard—”

She turned to the captain who, holding the painter, stood with one bare foot in the water, the other planted hardily among the sharp shells on shore.

“I want to thank you,” said she, offering him her hand, “for your delicious cookery—and all your kindness to me.”

“Yo’ kindly welcome,” returned the captain, bowing over her hand. “It’s been a pleasu’ an’ a

privilege to suhve you, ma'am; but the cookin' wasn't mine, ma'am."

"It was delicious, whosever it was," she said, throwing a little smile at Mr. Carson.

"Ah'm sorry," resumed the captain, "about that 'ere medicine. If it seemed a leetle too strong . . ."

Miss Suarez, remembering the waltz, swept haughtily to her place in the boat. Carson, with his eye steadfastly fixed on his engine, quickly shoved off.

"Evenin' to yeh," said the captain, still with one foot in the water, like a heron.

"Good evening," responded the young man.

Virginia said nothing. Carson, stealing a look at her, saw the flush dying out upon her face and a smile taking its place—a dimpling, spasmodic smile, accompanied by little quick dilations of the nostrils, as if Miss Suarez was desirous of indulging in a laugh, but saw no citable reason for so doing. She waved her handkerchief at the captain.

"Do you see," said Carson, pointing to the receding shore, "that the little hill at the landing is just a mass of shells?"

"Why, so it is, I believe," she exclaimed. "How came so many there?"

"It's a prehistoric kitchen-midden," said this most extraordinary young pirate. "So many peo-

ple lived there that they literally made a hill of the shells of the mollusks they ate."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Virginia, and after a long pause she added, "*how* odd!"

Mentally, her speech was: "How odd that this young outcast should know about archæology—or is it palæontology?" It was easy to study him, he looked so religiously away from her. He was rather interesting. If she really had said those things to him, and waltzed with him, what a dreadful thing it was! But how much more fine and chivalrous he had been, in view of her own behavior. Of course, if he was a criminal—one owed a duty to society; but ought she to allow him to enter the radius of action of the authorities? He must be more sinned against by society than sinning—his profile was so perfect—and how fine and soft his mustache looked! How different from Silberberg he was in every way, especially in his attitude toward girls. Society be plagued! She would be perfectly silent as to the cabin in the dunes, and she would never, never, give evidence against these people. She would refuse to know their names, and refuse to testify. There! She was in a fine flush of defiance as she heard Carson finishing some further observation about the shell-mounds.

"Down along the Lagoon," he said, "the shells are those of oysters, prehistoric like these. At Strong's

Bayou they are twenty feet deep. What hosts of inhabitants!"

"Tremendous hosts," assented Virginia, who had just defied the courts, "to be so deep."

"I mean the savages," he explained.

"To be sure," she ejaculated. "What dreadfully deep creatures they are! One learns that from Cooper."

"But back where we started," he went on, hoping for a painless adjustment of her ideas to his—"back where we started, they were clams."

"The—the people?" she inquired hesitantly, "or—or what?"

"I was referring to the shell-fish," said he with a little stiffness, arising from doubts as to whether she might not be making game of him. "But in this little sea, it is hard to talk connectedly and manage the launch."

"That isn't it at all," she replied. "Your class wasn't paying the slightest attention. Pardon me."

He threw over the tiller to round into a little reedy cove; but instead of running ashore he entered a narrow creek which he followed through such amazing tortuosities that the sun, low in the west, was now on the right, now on the left, sometimes astern, and again dead ahead. An indolent current flowed with their course, its water ruddy and clear like wine, and beautifully placid save where

touched by the dying wind. Tasseled reeds cut off the horizon, and at no time was anything to be seen but the reeds, the water, the aquatic birds that flew off like figures from a Japanese screen, the silent little launch, and the young and interesting outlaw with whom she seemed to have entered into a new world consisting of a labyrinth as complex as that of Crete, from which, so far as she could see, there was no escape.

The reeds beside the lazy stream shivered with the motion of scampering fish; and when the boat entered the still ponds, strung on the tiny waterway, like beads on a cord, the glassy surface would suddenly bulge up into swift, shining swells, as the finny giants took flight. How beautiful it was, she thought, the perfection of marshy loveliness!

"I'm having," said she, "a perfectly delightful time!"

"I am very, very glad," said he.

Lily pads now rose and fell in the wakes of fish and boat—great green disks with no notch in their sides for the stem, but only a slit, as if nature had used a pair of scissors and made but one snip at it. Negotiating a passage so narrow that the strakes of the launch softly scraped both rooty shores, they emerged into a lakelet not much larger than a good-sized theater, which was quite green with the floating leaves, like a rich, flat meadow. And over there

were one, two, three, a dozen blooms—waxy, creamy, pure, and sedately beautiful.

"Oh!" cried Virginia. "How exquisite!"

Carson cruised about and piratically robbed the pond of every blossom.

"They are smaller than the northern lilies," said he, "and they have little fragrance; but I love them all the better."

"They are daintier," she said, "and not so pronounced."

"Like the southern girls," said he.

"I'm a southern girl," said she, "if I *am* a northern tourist."

"I knew that," he replied. "I had that in mind."

This talk was verging upon the personal, and therefore to be discouraged. How keenly observing he must be to detect in her cosmopolitan English the old Alabama accent! She supposed herself to be quite rid of it. His own occasional and inconsistent lapses into ultra-softness of intonation seemed quite like dialect to her. He waxed more and more interesting. Surely, surely, he was not so very much worse, at heart, with his love of flowers and his chivalrous delicacy, than some people in—in other walks of life. She was quite recovered from her alarm, quite in control of the situation now, snuggling bewitchingly down and looking at her lilies, as they emerged from the Narrows and shot

out into the Lagoon, the blue waves of which had subsided into round-rolling short swells.

"Good-by," cried Virginia, looking back into the enchanted marsh. "Good-by! This is the world again!"

Carson was looking the other way with less persistence now. There was something mysterious in the charm of this girl's manner. Her good-by to the Narrows seemed a subtle *rapprochement* to him. They were in the world, and therefore—figuratively—she let him come closer.

The lights of the hotels and villas along the north shore swept by them in a panorama of fairy illuminations. A great tow-boat slowly pushed its two acres of barges toward Mobile from the Perdido Bay inner passage. The Lagoon was filled with launches. The evening had so far grown quiet that the air-ships had come out, sweeping the skies like enormous phosphorescent insects. From a hundred yards overhead fell the twangling of a banjo and the voice of a tenor in full song. Virginia, whose glances at her robber had been extra-hazardous recently, because more likely to meet his, could safely look at him again, absorbed as he was in the management of his craft. He stood up once, lithe and graceful as a leopard, and, after scrutinizing an approaching sloop, sheered off, saying that there was better water to port. He was evading

detection, she thought; and she felt companionably furtive and guilty.

"We have been very impersonal," said he. "May I introduce myself? My name is—"

"Oh, please don't!" she exclaimed. "Forgive me, but I'd rather not know."

"It is mo' interesting," said he, with a slow smile, "not to know. I shall always think of you as—"

"As the girl from Mars," she suggested. "I came tumbling down to you in a heap, out of the sky."

"Hardly from Mars," he demurred. "More properly, from Venus."

"I don't like that very well," she protested.

"There's Andromeda," he suggested.

"Too tragic," she said. "And too far off."

"Then the Pleiades are eliminated," Carson went on.

"Quite so," she assented. "There's only one of me, and—"

"And there will never be another!" he rejoined.

No answer to this little gush seemed either demanded or available. So Virginia merely shook her head.

"I struck like a comet," said she; "but they all have numbers, don't they—or those funny little cuneiform symbols?"

"Isn't there an asteroid named Psyche?" he

inquired. "I'm going to assume that there is, and name you after that."

"A purely telescopic star—"

"Because of its distance, only, Psyche."

"A little body whirled about among the great ones, because it can't help it. I believe—"

"And I shall not have the satisfaction, unless it sends me word, of knowing whether it actually exists or not," said he meaningly.

"And of course," she said, "Psyche will have neither the means nor the inclination to enter into communion with—with any one on this mundane globule. What shore is this?"

Theodore was mute, rebuffed, silenced. She repeated quite blandly her inquiry about the shore, into which they seemed about to dash headlong.

"It's where we enter the canal," said he, rather sulkily. "The Eastern Inner Passage, you know."

"There's something I want to say to you," said she, as they approached the entrance. "Do you feel quite free to visit the hotels with their lights, their crowds, and— isn't there any danger?"

Theodore sat in silence while he steered into the canal, as if totally at a loss to guess her meaning.

"If you would prefer," said he, as if at last he had the clue, "not to be seen with—"

"Oh, no, no, no, no!" she cried. "How can you

be so cruel! I meant . . . Oh, you *are* cruel!"

Her protest rang back from the rows of dark magnolias, under which he was guiding the launch, a protest of perfect and pained sincerity.

"I beg your pardon, Psyche," said he. "I did not understand. We will go on to the beach."

"Thank you," said the girl. "I thought only of your safety."

"Ah!" he said. "It's quite too late for that!"

"If anything happens to you," said she, "I shall never forgive myself. Listen, my dear friend. I think that no girl was ever so beautifully treated. You and the captain have been perfect, absolutely perfect. I—I can't tell you what the beautiful things were; and I know that neither of you will *ever* know. That's what makes it so fine. If you were a girl, and had lived for years where I have lived, you'd know, though, and you'd thrill with admiration for the men who are, are—immense enough to act so! There!"

The boat quietly passed out across the woven threads of light that webbed the water from a thousand points about Strong's Bayou, and gently came to at the dock of the Yupon Hedge Inn. The promenades were crowded with people in evening clothes, and waiters with trays. It was a gay scene,

and Carson felt the pull of it as they stepped ashore.

"Can I do anything mo' for you?" he asked.

"No, no, you must go now! But thank you a thousand times!" said she. "I'm just a little nobody, or I'd say to you that if ever you need a friend—"

"Your mentioning it will be joy enough for me," said he.

She put out her hand, walking up close, looking into his face gratefully. She was astonished to see how white and set his features were; he thrilled to feel that her hand trembled in his, and was touched to note the moisture that filled her eyes as she poured forth her little oration of gratitude.

"You are agitated," said she, "you are in danger. Go, with my best wishes for your escape and safe return to your company!"

"Phyche," said he fervently, "your God-speed and your anxiety make me happy; but I fear it is too late. I shall never escape, Psyche, from the toils you have lured me into, never!"

She looked about for the slouching form of the officer she feared; but she saw no one except tourists in nautical or aeronautical toggery, coming down the wharf. She was in an agony of terror for him. He pressed her hands convulsively, she returning the pressure, and begging him again

to go. He carried her hands to his lips, kissed them passionately, and leaped into the boat. Virginia watched him amazedly as he darted away like a frightened tarpon, not toward his cabin in the dunes, but out through the entrance of the bayou and off across the Bay toward Point Clear. One more mystery to ponder over, when thinking of her mysterious malefactor.

CHAPTER III

CARSON'S LANDING

IT has always been a point of genealogical dispute as to whether or not Theodore Carson's father was of kin to the founder of the old Carson place up Fish River. It was one of those controversies in which one side is supposed to be trying to climb, the other to be oblivious of the climbing, and both are in a position of peculiar delicacy from the fact that they are all Americans, and disbelievers in anything like inherited rank.

General Carson, in his lean years, used to sell turpentine to his namesake at the dingy ship-chandlery on the wharf near the Eslava Street oyster dock. On these commercial occasions, the general, when mellowed by juleps, with his foot on the brass rail and his elbows on the bar, used to call the ship-chandler "cousin." At other times, however, he made no bones of his opinion that the Mobile Carsons were damned common people, and branded as impudent any fool claim of kinship between the humble tradesman and the Carsons.

of Marengo County. The ship-chandler was too proud to make any claim, but privately believed in the kinship theory; and when the general died, having lost his Marengo estates in trying to breed the one-fifty trotter, it was discovered that he owed the ship-chandler on mortgage more than the value of the Fish River plantation, which passed to the rejected branch of the Carsons. Theodore's father, delighted to have come into what he felt to be his own, rode his horse through the cut-over waste clinging to the horse's mane and feeling like a rightful heir reinstated; and accepting the obligation to restore the glories of the family, he embarked so unreservedly and unskilfully upon the development of a cotton plantation according to the general's plans, that Theodore fell heir, at his father's death, to nothing but this waste of second-growth pine, scarcely self-sustaining, and a policy of life insurance, which he invested in such education as he most desired, a combination of electrical engineering and mechanics. He was a little bitter sometimes as he recalled the phantoms, the pursuit of which had ruined two successive owners of the estate: the general's breeding maggot, and his father's curious pride in a mere name. Whereupon he gave chase to a phantom of his own, with what success we shall see, and followed what his friends called a rainbow, with such true Carson en-

thusiasm, that when he left Virginia Suarez on the dock at Strong's Bayou, on that sandy, deliciously dreamy, southern shore of Mobile Bay, he steered through the night for a house very nearly dismantled, on an estate growing up to persimmon thickets, dewberry beds and palmetto slashes, the very title to which was about to pass to his creditors. His *ignis fatuus* was in the cabin among the Gulf Beach dunes; but neither that, nor the precarious state of his fortunes could account for his alternate joy and gloom as he fared north in the night. The sky-maiden was the thing that really mattered.

A gray dawn was broadening into morning as he approached his own landing; and the chill was one to make the wanderer long for warm blankets and a wisp of flame in the grate; but Theodore sat on the wharf thinking, though his bed was within five minutes' walk. Who was the young woman who had so strangely fallen from the clouds at his feet? What had become of the great air-ship from the deck of which she had flown in that little flying machine of the management of which she seemed to have no knowledge? Why had she refused to learn his name, and concealed her own? Whose air-ship was it from which she had been lost overboard, *and who was the girl?*

He wondered whether her people knew of the chance by which he and Captain Harrod had res-

cued the fair castaway. Probably they believed her lost. The helicopter had scarcely paused when she struck the dune, but had shot out over the Gulf like a flying gull. They must mourn the girl as lost. Doubtless they were filling the air with wireless messages from Pensacola, calling upon vessels to look out for a runaway helicopter carrying a young girl to her death in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, somewhere off at the limit of the flying-machine's radius of action. As in formal duty bound, they would, no doubt, soon return to the place where they had seen her last, and make hopeless search. They would be likely to be seen of Captain Harrod, and to see him. Theodore, trusting the old fisherman to preserve the secret of the hidden cabin, dismissed the matter from his mind and went into his house, where a colored mammy was shuffling leisurely about, but assumed an ant-like activity at his demand for breakfast.

But if he was so hungry, why, she thought, did he let her delicious coffee grow cold, slight her omelette and hot corn-pone, and neglect the fresh dewberries and cream? He sat there, building air-castles in true Carson somnambulism. He had, like the old general, a system by which to beat the game—and he had a girl's name to discover.

The *Roc*, according to Theodore's forecast, came

coasting back in the same tardy dawn that lamped that young somnambulist to his home. Mr. Silberberg lighted and smoked countless cigarettes. Mr. Shayne nervously walked the deck and debated the question of letting Mrs. Shayne know of her niece's tragic death at once, or of waiting for a personal interview. For the *Roc* had had no word of either the helicopter or the girl, and they saw no gleam of hope for her. She was a dependent, and something of a problem for Mrs. Shayne. Any ordinary circumstance that would have separated the aunt and niece would not have been mourned inconsolably by either of them; in fact, Mrs. Shayne had expressed to her husband some wonder as to what Silberberg saw in the girl; but to lose her like this, with all the unpleasant publicity of the terrible affair. . . .

"Marie will never get over it," said Shayne. "What the devil ails that fellow aft?"

The fellow aft was Wizner, inventor of the lost helicopter, discoursing to the crew in pure assorted maledictions, which he heaped on all concerned in the loss of his machine. This got upon Mr. Shayne's nerves so that he went aft, gave him a check for what he asked, and informed him that unless he kept still, they would descend and put him off the aëronat.

They crossed Perdido Bay, passed the savannas

and crawfish meadows and cruised about aimlessly until dawn. The light found them far down toward the Lagoon, flying high for safety in the darkness. The long, straight beach lay white, cold-looking and solitary in the pure light, which touched the great gas-holder to silver while the earth and sea were still in gloom. Away south in the offing were two steamers, and from the wireless overhead could be heard the discharges by which the operator was making a last despairing effort to obtain news of the lost girl.

"It's not far from here," said Silberberg.

"Oh, we haven't come nearly far enough," replied Shayne. "We began preparing the helicopter for the test between Three Rivers and Collins' Bayou. That's miles and miles west."

"But we were coming east," urged Silberberg, "and it took some time."

The buzzer from the engine-room was sprung with a sharp rattle. Mr. Shayne went to the speaking tube.

"We all think, sir," said the engineer, "that we've about reached the place where the young lady went out to sea."

"Mr. Silberberg thinks so, too," replied Shayne; "but I think it was west of here."

"There's a man on the beach, sir," said the engineer. "Shall we speak him?"

"Do," replied Shayne. "He may know something."

The *Roc* circled about like an alighting swan, all the time descending. The man seated himself on a log to await her libration. Finally she paused above him, and in the purr of the leveling screws Mr. Shayne spoke. Had he seen anything of a flying-machine which went out to sea, yesterday? Yes, he had.

"It was raght close hyah, suh," replied Captain Harrod.

"Did you see the young lady?" asked Shayne.

"Yes, suh."

"Was she still clinging to the helicopter when you last saw her?"

"No, suh, she wasn't clingin' to nothing—with the han' to'ds me—when Ah lost sight on huh, suh."

"Let down the lift," commanded Mr. Shayne; "I'm going down."

The three men, Shayne, Silberberg and Wizner, gathered about the fisherman on the beach. Captain Harrod seemed busy removing the sand from between his toes with a crooked and nodular forefinger.

"Do you think," queried Silberberg, "that there is the slightest chance for her to—to be saved, my good man?"

"Was the helicopter—was it going when you last saw it?" interrogated Wizner, "or did it fall?"

"Ah think the lady hez a chance to make po't," replied Harrod calmly. "An' as f'r the chicka-nanny dingus she come hyah in, the last Ah seen of it, it were poppin' to'ds the snapper-banks raght peart."

"It'," repeated Shayne, "'it' was going! Where was she? Tell us all you know."

"Ah'm a raght ig'nant man, an' don't know much," replied the captain; "but Ah'm slow spoke, an' it would take a half houah to tell all Ah knows—gen'ly speakin'. But if it's jist about the young lady, she tumbled out on the sand, in fair shape; an' if she's made good weathah she's about bo'din' the boat f'r Mobile. We was raght proud to hev huh as ou' guest!"

"There!" shouted Wizner triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you that machine would stand grief? Struck the ground—"

"Keep out of this!" commanded Mr. Shayne. "Was she hurt seriously?"

"But I say, Mr. Shayne," protested Wizner, "don't you see that with my machine you've got the business coopered? Put your money on the helicopters, and you'll—"

"Ah you Mr. Shayne?" inquired the captain.

"Yes, yes," replied Shayne; "what have you done with her?"

"A gentleman Ah'm employed by," replied the captain, "has done carried huh ove' to the Inn. Axin' yo' pahdon, ah you the Mr. Shayne that's called the Prince o' the Powers of the Aiah?"

"I reckon I am," replied Mr. Shayne irritably. "But tell us of the rescue of this dear girl. Tell us!"

While Silberberg and Shayne listened, Wizner began scouting up and down the beach. Guided by some instinct for mischief he went west, and as the captain's story rambled on, he scrutinized the sands for traces of his beloved machine. Harrod moved uneasily as Wizner paused at the spot where the helicopter struck, examined the beach tracks, and passed through the dunes toward the cabin. Yet he finished his tale unhurriedly, and placed the whole story tardily in their possession. At once they signaled the Palmetto Beach wireless station, and in a moment the news came in that Miss Suarez had sent messages to Mrs. Shayne that morning, and had taken an early boat for Mobile. Mr. Shayne grasped the hand of Mr. Silberberg, who sat on a log, burying his face in his handkerchief.

"I know how you feel, old fellow," said Shayne. "And I want to say to you, my good man, I can't

repay you, you know; but so far as money can go, I hope you will ask, or, rather, accept—"

"Ah couldn't accept anythin, suh," said the captain; "thank'ee kindly. But maght Ah ask whar you-all's going now?"

"Straight to Mobile," replied Mr. Shayne; "why?"

"Ah unde'stand," went on the captain, "that you ah int'rested in all sohts of flyin' craft—aiah-ships, an' flyin' dinguses lahk what the young lady come in, an'—"

"Well," answered Mr. Shayne, laughing, "not in that sort any more, I reckon; but I'm supposed to control in aëronautics, if that's what you mean. Got a machine that solves the problem? Most every one has."

"No, suh," replied the captain; "but a friend o' mine, raght on yo' way, Ah'd pow'ful well like to hev you stop by an' see. He's got something. If he could jist git yo' attention fo' a minute, it maght—It's Mr. Theodo', my employah."

"The gentleman who took my niece to the beach?"

"Yes, suh."

"We are in a hurry," urged Mr. Shayne. "We are about starting for Chicago. Won't any other time do?"

"It's raght on yo' way, suh," persisted the cap-

tain, "an' it's all the favo' Ah'll ask of you-all. Ah leave it to you, suh, of co'se; but—"

"Will you go and pilot us to the place?"

"Ah cain't ve'y well leave hyah, suh," replied the captain; "but if yo' pilot knows these piny woods as well as he orto do, suh—"

"Come and tell him the place," said Shayne incisively. "Toot the horn for Wizner, up there! Yes, yes; don't say any more. We'll go. But I tell you, my friend, your man might have spent a lot of car-fare reaching Finley Shayne!"

"Ah reckon that's so, suh," replied the captain, stepping into the lift. "He's been a-stud'in' ve'y heavy about the mattah, suh, fo' a long tahm."

In that era of the changing world, dwellers in this land of sun and dream, half coastal swamp, half teeming pleasure-ground, were much habituated to the sight of aërial craft then affected by the wealthy. The bicycle long ago had shown the attractiveness of any new mode of ambulation. The automobile, following, had become the favorite extravagance of the rich. Vulgarized by commerce and trade, this was in turn abandoned by Dives, who now, still envied by Lazarus, rose above the thronged roads, in the great aërostats of the day. The discovery of the methanose mixture, with ten times the explosive force of gasolene, had

made ascensional and depressive screws an efficient adjunct of the *aëronat* with its barely buoyant gas-bag; and, with the improved propellers which followed, made the old-fashioned "dirigible" a fairly dependable craft in ordinary weather. It was along this line, rather than by way of the heavier-than-air *aëronefs*, that development had marched, to the enormous enrichment of Finley Shayne, who controlled the Keewatin methanose marshes. Even after the discovery of the Alaskan methanose and the loss of this monopoly, his hold on the industry by patents and secret processes could not be shaken off. He was still "The Prince of the Powers of the Air," and it was of him that Theodore Carson thought as he sat on the columned gallery of his house, watching the far-off *aërial* monsters that were always in sight.

His barren estate lay under the lane between Pensacola and Mobile; and above this ran the sparser drift from Atlantic and Appalachian forest points to the Mississippi Sound resorts. He knew the type of every air-ship. Most of these huge objects dropping like swifts into the chimney of the *aërial* harbor at Mobile, were Shayne's Condors, of which the *Roc* was the type, modeled after the early creations of Count Zeppelin. The smaller, quicker, low-flying ones without the gas-holders, were the still unsuccessful *aëronefs* of the Wright

and Farman types. The scene was varied by an occasional orthopter with flapping wings, or by helicopters, on each of which Carson looked longingly, wishing it might bring again the treasure fetched by the fugacious machine of Mr. Wizner. The problem of life was in these various vessels, and he studied them wistfully, so wistfully that the *Roc's* wild honk sounded thrice before he heard it. He stepped out upon the Bermuda grass, saw a retractile telephone spinning down from the great silver fish balanced in the calm sky, caught it and put it to his ear.

"O, Aunt Chloe," cried he, running in for his hat and coat. "Here's some one above the house asking for me, and who do you suppose it is?"

"Mout be the angel Gab'el," replied Chloe, "f'm whah he is, an' de way he blow dat ho'n; but Ah reckon it's jes' some triflin' sky-hooter. Who is dey?"

"The greatest luck you ever heard of!" cried Theodore. "Where's that new parachute? Never mind, I've found it."

And with no further explanation, Mr. Theodore ran out, stepped into the lift, and was whisked up to the *Roc's* polished deck with his new parachute over his shoulder.

Mr. Shayne met him with something less than the steely coldness with which he was wont to

freeze the vitals of the man representing an undeveloped business opportunity, and with much less than the degree of warmth with which, had it not been for the business opportunity, he would have greeted the rescuer of his niece.

"I am under great obligations to you, Mr. Theodore," said he, "for your service to my niece. To be entirely frank, I should not have appropriated the time to call on any business account."

Mr. Carson felt repelled. He traced the "Mr. Theodore" to Captain Harrod's mode of referring to him. Seeing nothing in Mr. Shayne's air evincing thirst for personal data concerning himself, he offered none as to his name.

"I am sorry," said he, "that you have gone even an inch out of your way on account of any fancied obligations. I prefer the basis of business."

"By Jove," said a voice at his elbow, "you ought to be able to meet him on that basis, Shayne."

Carson's ear was affronted, his nerves tautened by the voice; and he felt a sudden disinclination to meet its owner. Shayne waved the man away.

"But," went on Silberberg, "it seems to me, old chap, we'd vastly better put the whole thing on a basis of breakfast, first. Send this good man aft, and let's fall to!"

Carson wheeled round and stared Silberberg in the face curiously, with the impersonal disfavor of one

studying the picture of some noxious thing, like a Gila monster or a feast of vultures. He made no effort to avoid affront, but remorselessly bored into Silberberg's visage with his eyes, until that gentleman began to squirm in disquietude, whereupon Carson turned his back suddenly on the head of the Metals Trust, and faced Mr. Shayne just in time to detect a fleeting blush departing from his countenance.

"I trust that you will take breakfast with us," said he, "we shall—"

"Thank you," said Theodore. "I have breakfasted; and while it is very hygienic, I have no doubt, kosher food doesn't appeal to me."

"By God, my man," shouted Silberberg, "if you say another word—"

Carson turned upon him, and Silberberg sank into a seat. Carson walked back to the engine-room, saying that he would look the craft over, and see Mr. Shayne after breakfast.

For the tourists it was not a jolly meal. Silberberg conceived himself vastly insulted by this fellow they had picked up, and gave his host rather a bad half hour.

"We owe it to him to allow him to be a little nasty," said Shayne, secretly smiling at the thought of the reception awaiting this story of the kosher food in certain clubs where all Silberberg's wealth

had not made him a social favorite. "Think what he did for Virginia, you know, Silberberg."

"By Jove," cried Silberberg, "I would rather she had—er, that is, I would not allow any service even to her to atone for such an insult. I don't allow any one to— He must leave the *Roc*, Shayne, or I will."

"But his machine may be worth while," urged Shayne, using what he judged would be a valid argument with his guest. "An idea is an idea, Max, and this art of flying needs improvement."

"No idea," insisted Max, "is worth that much. Suit yourself, Mr. Shayne, but as for me—"

Silberberg waved his hand, closing the debate. Mr. Shayne prided himself upon his ability in handling people, and was, moreover, most pig-headed himself. He grew fonder of Mr. Carson's project as Silberberg grew hotter in urging the young man's dismissal. The ship passed Magnolia Springs, left Point Clear far to port, sailed majestically over Fairhope, and was half-way across the bay before the meal ended, with the argument still undecided, though Shayne was winning progressively by force of nearing their harbor. As they rose they detected Wizner standing behind them, hat in hand, as if awaiting a word with them: or eavesdropping, as the case might have been.

"Well," said Shayne, rather angrily.

"I just wanted to say," replied Wizner, "that I know what this young fellow's proposition is."

"So do we," said Mr. Shayne. "It's some kind of flying-machine."

"Yes," said Wizner. "And if you don't find him reasonable to deal with, come to me. I've seen his model. It ain't protected, of course, and I can build one like it in a few weeks—with money enough. I'll learn him to butt in and take a customer from me!"

Silberberg and Shayne looked significantly at each other.

"When inventors fall out," began Shayne.

"Monopolists get their hooks in," supplied Silberberg. "Let's take the fool north, and see what he's got."

"Most sensible thing you've said," replied Shayne.

Now this conversation must not be taken as proof that Mr. Shayne had decided upon any unfair treatment of this cocky young chap who walked the *Roc's* deck like a young bull in his own proper pasture. His services to Virginia entitled him to fair treatment in business, or fair payment in money. They might not entitle him to both. In matters aëronautical, business was business. If Wizner could learn Carson's secrets, it would do

nobody harm for Shayne to know them. All these things were mere business truisms. So he talked with Wizner aside, and by the time the aëronat librating over the aërial harbor and obeying her descent screws, gently purred into her berth, he had discovered that Wizner really knew nothing, but was in position, as he said, to find out a deuce of a lot, having seen a mysterious something in the hidden shed on the South Beach, which he declined to describe, principally, as Shayne plainly told him, because he couldn't; but it might be worth his while, he added, for Wizner to take another look, and make a sketch or so.

Carson waited in glum silence until the second descent of the lift, refusing to occupy it along with Silberberg. Shayne urged him to stay aboard for the night trip to Chicago. It was only one day there and another back, for the weather map indicated northerly winds outward and southerly ones returning—one of those fine prosperous flights that sometimes gave to the aëronat cruise the semblance of real rulership of the air.

"The weather, north," said Shayne, "is the mildest known for March. We've plenty of furs and top-coats if it falls cold. We can discuss your project, Mr. Theodore, over our high-balls going up. It's your only way to file your tale of woe. Come with us."

Very well, said Mr. Theodore, he would go, with many thanks.

He wondered about the niece and Silberberg, but he asked no questions. His fervent wish that "Psyche" might go was born of a natural desire to know if she had recovered from her terrible experience. He yearned so strongly to pay her the merely formal attention of inquiring about this that he wandered about aimlessly, growing red and tingling to his fingers' ends at imaginary passages between himself and Psyche, running into dangers from moving trams and motor vehicles, and walking in a dream slap aboard a Guayaquil liner, under the impression that he was strolling up Government Street. With unseemly haste he got off, or his next land-fall would have been the Canal Zone, not Chicago.

He cleared his eyes of Psyche dust, strode directly to the lift, and went aboard the *Roc*. It was late in the afternoon. The engineer was impatient for his party, and swore an unblasphemous oath of relief as they appeared below. Carson looked down and saw a rising oval spot of black-and-white checks, which he knew to be the flat cap of Silberberg, and he breathed hard. Also, however, there was a parterre of millinery under which must be at least two women, and he breathed easier. That hound was going, then,—and Psyche, too. How

inexpressibly annoying, and completely ecstatic it was! They went forward; and when Carson joined them, the ladies had vanished into the cabin, with Silberberg.

"What do you think of the weather?" asked Shayne.

"The low has reached Omaha," replied Carson, "and has deepened rapidly. We ought to get into stiff south winds soon, increasing all the way."

"Let 'em increase," rejoined Shayne. "We'll make port quicker. If it should be northerly weather, now—"

"We'd have to moor?" queried Carson.

"Naturally."

"What I'm going to talk to you about," said Carson, "is a machine that could make Chicago against the fiercest gale quicker than this flying palace can do it to-night."

"Oh, yes," lightly replied Shayne. "I've had 'em offered me that would do it in an hour—in the inventor's mind. And they've been announcing them ever since the time of Santos-Dumont, and we are still about where the old Brazilian left the art. Methanose and light engines help some; but we're helpless yet in a forty-mile wind."

"We may be so to-night," said a voice at their elbows. "The forecast is mist and clouds north of Meridian; and it's blowing hard at Memphis, sir."

"How hard?"

"Thirty-two per," replied the engineer. "But it's freshening every minute, they say."

"It'll be with us," answered Shayne. "Put her tail to it, and hike."

The earth was a concave cup with the setting sun a flaming wick on its rim. To the north was a huge, black accumulation of clouds which seemed swelling with startling rapidity; but the weather-wise aviators knew it to be their own headlong flight which brought the clouds nearer with such speed, giving them the swift upheaval which mimicked the approach of a storm. The silence was absolute, save for the muffled exhaust of the engines and the purr of the driving screw astern; for the *Roc* kept pace with the blast, and the light breeze that swept her decks was from prow, eastwardly to stern, as she edged up into the great cyclonic whirl and outfooted the wind. Darkness stole over the earth, and the foreshortened landscape was blotted out, even while the sun's rays still silvered the great bulging overhang of the *Roc's* majestic hull. The light drew up to the zenith and left the ship, too, in shadow. The conning lamps threw long white cones down thousands of feet of space to the earth, and, shifting back and forth, looked like the lambent legs of some unearthly monster awkwardly straddling in an attempt to walk. Far

off shone the lights of river steamers, Pleiad-like constellations of massed stars. The arc-lights of the towns shone up vividly as the flying ship neared their lighted area, and then winked out, like snuffed candles, as she crossed the shadows of their reflectors. Carson, for a moment left alone, walked aft. Looking rather concerned, the engineer was turning his ear downward, listening to the sullen roar that now droned up from the ground.

"A hell of a wind," said he to Carson. "Hear it howl, and not a leaf stirring up here."

"Yes," assented Carson, listening, "it is blowing; but what of it?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the engineer, looking at the manometer, "only—did you ever try to bring one of these gas-bags to in a gale? Not to mention nursing her into the boss's Chicago garage! Hey?"

"No," answered Carson. "It must be difficult."

"Oh, it isn't bad," returned the engineer. "In a twenty-mile wind it's just an even break, that's all, whether you punch a hole in her and drop two hundred feet to the street, or get dumped by a down draft among the sky-scrapers with the depressors running. But difficult? The devil of it is it's so infernally easy! Unless we find Chicago in the calm spot in the middle of the low, it's the Canada woods for ours. And I despise Nature!"

Carson smiled at this gloomy forecast, followed

as it was by a sprightly whistle. The young man wanted his serious talk with Shayne. So far they had spoken nothing but generalities, and he felt frustrated, held off, played with as a skilful fencer plays with a novice. And he had had no glimpse of Psyche. This made him irritable—the trip was such a waste of time. Well, as to Shayne, he must take things into his own hands, buck up, and come to a definite parley. As to the girl—

Miss Suarez stood by the rail, looking off into the blackness, her hair heavy with a mist now just becoming perceptible. She was listening, as to something with which the ship had no concern, to the howling of the wind down on earth. Mrs. Shayne, from the cabin door, looked forth at the young woman, with distinct displeasure, for Virginia had just said a very naughty thing to Mr. Silberberg, in a golf discussion, which had unaccountably aroused her temper. Silberberg gloomed forth darkly over Mrs. Shayne's shoulder into the darker night. Mr. Shayne was asking the pilot for data as to distances and course, having audibly wished the women at the devil. It was not all bliss—and in walked young Carson to make things worse.

Virginia, taking him for Silberberg, turned on him a face hot with anger, stood looking at him a moment; then all the displeasure faded away and

something quite irreconcilable with it took its place. Because she held out both hands and looked so divine, Carson took them and held them close.

"My robber!" she whispered. "Are you a stow-away? Are you escaping?"

"Psyche! Psyche!" he gushed, under circumstances distinctly unfavorable for outpourings of souls. "Oh, I'm glad! No, escape is quite hopeless! And you are well after, after—"

"After my orgy?" she queried.

A farmer thought he heard the first bobolink of spring, as her laugh tinkled down from the clouds.

"Virginia!"

It was Mrs. Shayne who called.

"Please come in," said she. "It's wet out there."

Mr. Carson gave Virginia his arm, and she swept into the cabin, leaning proudly on it.

"Uncle Finley," said she, "I don't know how he happens to be aboard; but this is—this is my—"

"We know," said Mr. Shayne. "We picked up your deliverer down in the woods, Virginia."

"Oh," said she. "Then I—"

"You were the only one, it seems, in ignorance of Mr. Theodore's presence. We have some business to talk over. What's up, Willett?"

Willett, the pilot, appeared at the door with a salute. He was a stooped little scholarly-looking

man who wore great mica goggles shoved back on his forehead.

"You sent for the course and distances, sir," he replied.

Mrs. Shayne sank back on a broad upholstered divan built into the wall. Silberberg twitched Shayne's arm to gain his attention, but the owner of the *Roc* received his pilot's report.

"We seem to be breaking records," went on Willett. "The distance gage shows St. Louis nearest, with low variation for headway. Indianapolis is weak, right around a hundred and fifty miles; and we're getting indistinct registry that's either Nashville or Chicago, depending on whether it falls off or increases. Plotting the course on the theory that it's Chicago showing up, we're shooting into Illinois a good deal faster than the wind. Here's the trial sheet, sir."

"By George!" cried Shayne, looking at the sheet. "That's going some, isn't it? What's the matter, Max?"

"I want to see you a minute," growled Silberberg, and drew Shayne out upon the deck.

Willett went back to his work; Mrs. Shayne bowed grandly to the empty air which her gaze indicated as occupying Carson's position; Virginia, begging his pardon with her eyes, excused herself and followed her aunt, and Carson was alone.

He felt the insult, the condescension, the utter contempt of him which the treatment accorded to him by all but Virginia made plain. He hated them. He wished fervently that he had never stepped aboard to ask a favor of the great and arrogant Shayne. He would enter into no arrangement with him, now; he would win his own victory, or fail. He would make the world gasp. He was in a simmering fury; a silly, reasonless, boy's fury; but his instincts were true.

Silberberg was making it unpleasant for Shayne again. This fellow, he said, has been taking liberties with Miss Suarez, and he, Silberberg, would not stand it. He was a stickler for Turkish propriety now, forgetting the episode which had made Virginia throw in the clutch of the helicopter, and thus brought Carson into the tragi-comedy. Perhaps he was suspicious that Miss Suarez would not have thrown in the clutch if it had been this young chap paying her his court.

"I tell you, Shayne," he urged hotly, "he must be put off! He must be paid and put off. If he isn't—"

"If he isn't," smiled Shayne, "it wouldn't be a serious matter, would it, Max?"

"Yes," spluttered Silberberg. "He insulted me! I tell you, it's all over between Federated Metals

and Aërostatic Power, if I'm forced to take things like this."

Shayne laughed heartily; but he heeded. Silberberg wandered off into incoherent profanity. He was ready to do almost anything in his jealousy, which was a weakness of his well-known in circles in which his *affaires du cœur* were known. Mr. Shayne saw real danger of a breach to which no obligation to Carson could have forced him, and grasped Silberberg's hand warmly. He made his decision without much real difficulty, though he hated being bullied by Silberberg. Yielding, he yielded completely, as a diplomat should.

"Max, old man," said he, "you're quite right! We can't go down in this wind to let him land; but we can settle with him, and send him aft. Come with me."

Theodore was examining his parachute. As the pair entered the cabin, he had loosened the lashings, and was closing and spreading a pair of light, collapsible Gossett deflectors. He slung the case over his shoulder, and stood with black brows frowning, the slim parachute in his hand.

"I have decided," said Shayne, "that your aëro-nef doesn't interest me."

"Very well," replied Theodore. "You are the sole judge of that, of course."

"And you may consider the negotiations off," went on Shayne.

"I adopted that theory some time ago," replied Carson.

Shayne took out his purse and ostentatiously removed from it a number of bills.

"I think I ought to pay you for your time," said he, "and your service to my niece. Please take these, and be good enough to go aft with the crew!"

If Silberberg had not seen fit to indulge in a sardonic laugh at this exigency, the explosion would not have occurred; but that sneering chuckle acted as a detonator for Carson's temper. He struck Shayne's extended hand, scattering the bills over the floor. One of them slid slithering across to the door and was just blowing out when Silberberg caught it. The others lodged in corners like green snow. Shayne stood with flaring nostrils and white with rage. Silberberg, the money rustling in his fear-shaken hand, appealed to Shayne not to be rash.

"Don't notice the fellow, Shayne," said he. "He wants to keep his hold on the girl, and—"

The speech was cut short by a blow from Carson's flat hand, delivered with lightning quickness, and with stinging force. As calmly as though bidding Silberberg good morning Carson spoke to him.

"Be careful how you speak of her," said he, "or I'll throw you over the side. Mr. Shayne, permit me to say that you are a cur. I shall leave this craft at once!"

He started to go on deck, but as if reconsidering, he turned and rapped on the door through which Virginia had disappeared. The girl opened it and looked breathlessly into Theodore's face, read the story of passion and strife and insult. Shayne still stood as if fixed; Silberberg was stanching a bleeding nose with his handkerchief. Virginia gasped, and looked at Theodore questioningly.

"I am about to leave the *Roc*," said he. "I could not leave without bidding you good-by."

"Going?" said she, clinging to banalities because she could think of nothing else. "Have we descended?"

"Keep away from that man!" screamed Silberberg. "He struck me! And he knocked your uncle's money all over the ship!"

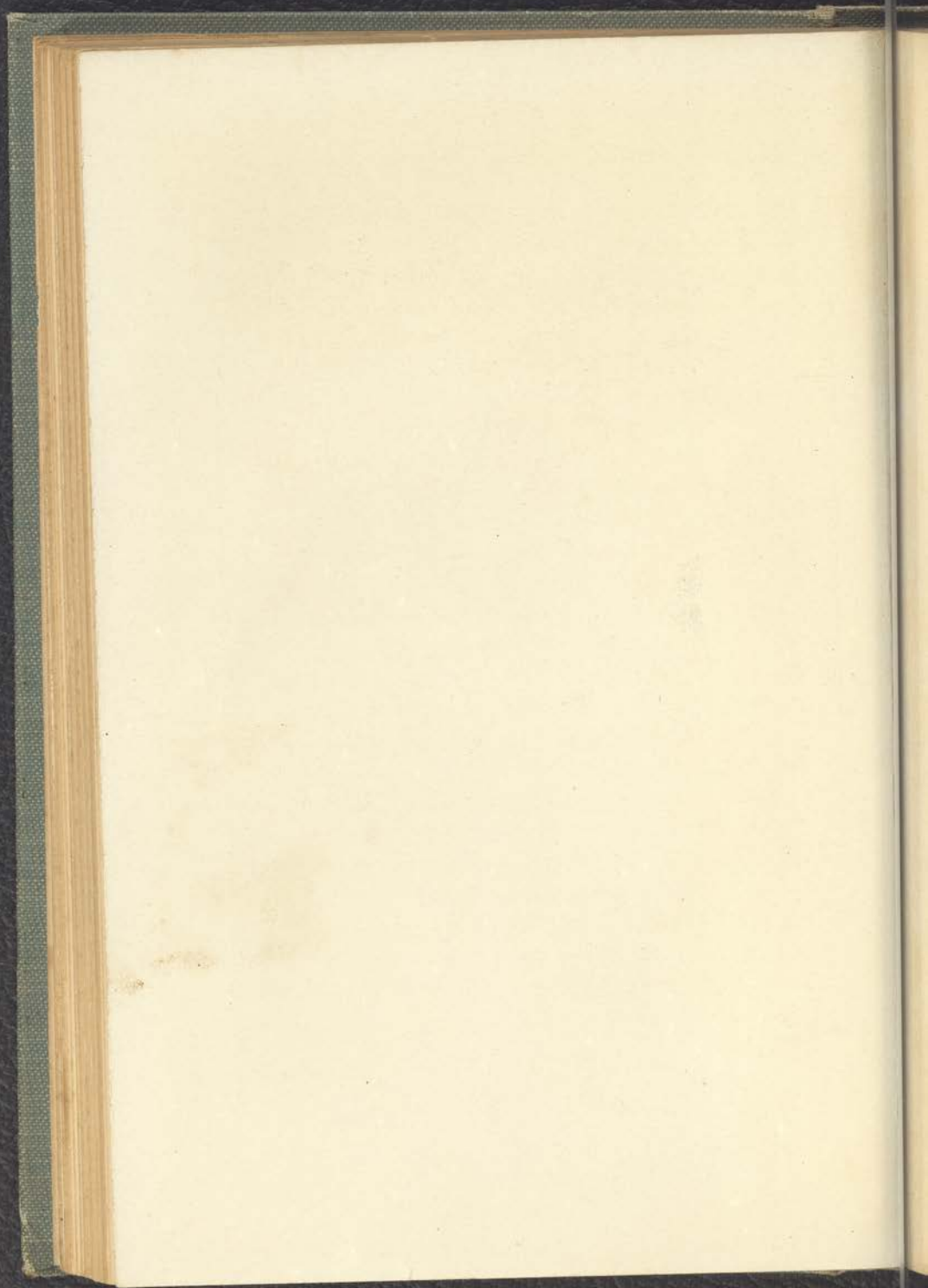
The girl looked at the fugitive bills which Silberberg had begun laboriously to pick up, and shot a glance of comprehension at Theodore.

"You are a man!" said she. "Let me see you safe aground."

Carson stood aside for her, and they went out upon the mile-high deck. She halted, aghast to note



Like a stone he fell, lost in the mists Page 75



that they were still high among the clouds of the storm, plowing on through a wild waste of tossing vapor, while the hoarse growl from the earth was so distant as to admonish her of the giddy height from the ground. Beyond the illumination of the lights, it was absolutely dark.

"You must be going aft?" said she interrogatively. "I'll go with you."

"No," said he. "I shall never see you again; but I shall never forget you! Good-by, Psyche, good-by!"

That instantaneous leave-taking the trembling girl never forgot. Pressing her hands, he started forward as if to clasp her in his arms, while she made no gesture of either yielding or resisting. He turned from the embrace already half begun, stepped upon the rail, and dropped off into that black abyss of night and tempest. Like a stone he fell, lost in the mists.

The parachute, so far as she could see, had not opened in the least when he vanished; and with pallid face she stood there, peering over into the unpeopled space, her soul filled with horrible visions of the end of that wild and reckless leap at the behest of pride. As she pictured his fall to the solid earth, she covered her face with her hands and sank down on the deck.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALL THAT FOLLOWED PRIDE

THEODORE fell like a stone, so swiftly that the *aëronat* seemed to dart incontinently toward heaven. All about him were the tossing folds of the cloud, streaming horsetails of fog, fleeces of *aërial* wool, invisible, save for the lights of the *Roc*, which intermittently revealed the vaporous details and partly dispelled the weird illusion that he was falling eternally, like a soul hurled forth into a purgatory of limitless descent. Like the retinal image of a quenched flame, he saw in the murk the eyes of Shayne's niece, and her white face under the quaint pointed hat, blankly amazed at his desperate leap from the air-ship. Suddenly the pull of the parachute admonished him that at last it was doing its work, and restored to him an acute perception of his situation.

He felt none of the effects of the gale; but the wind of his fall burst upward as from the mouth of some huge blower, fighting his descent, stripping off his hat, and snapping his hair like whip-lashes.

Black as the heavens was all below until directly beneath him there suddenly burst forth a great red light that kindled the cloud to crimson, turning the heavens to a sky of sanguinary vapor spanning a sea of flame. The mysterious light swelled like an outbursting conflagration; filled the falling boy with terror; and then, as swiftly as it had grown, it waned, faded, and the sky was dark again. The fear of the eery and inexplicable chilled him more than did the fierce March blast. The expanded parachute suspended him over fiery mystery and an unknown land, wondering, wishing for day, or for clear darkness even, that he might see on what or into what he was falling.

If he but knew the land, he might set the defectors and work his fall over into safety—if safety the neighborhood afforded. How the wind's voice grew! Whether on church spire or chimney or tower, into garden or wood or graveyard or into open grave, it was a wild, dangerous night in which to land.

Suddenly he burst from the floor of the cloud like a meteorite, and saw a long procession of white and violet lights speeding past and away into the distance, the arc-lights of a town set into apparent flight by the speed of his headlong career before the wind. Far off in the glare of a locomotive fire-box he could see a devilish black fireman, weirdly

stoking. Had there been light for it, Carson had scant time to survey his land-fall; but he judged instantaneously that on either side would lie the open fields; and to avoid the roofs and chimneys, he set the deflectors to nurse off his descent toward farms and soft earth.

The town fled away; the roar of the wind rose about him; he was whipped stingingly by the branches of a tall tree; then a lower one bowed him through its dense top; he laid hold of a slim birch, and, as it bent like a fishing-rod under his weight, he let go the sheets of his parachute, the wind spilled from the silken leach, and he tumbled heavily into a mattress-like bridal-wreath bush, over an asphalted walk, and, eased down by the shrubbery, he rose unhurt, so far as he could feel, to find himself by a rustic seat near a dry fountain. On his left he could make out a long building three or four stories high, the roof of which he had barely missed, looming against the night sky, black, solid, "dark like the fool's heart," and to his eyes, immitigably sinister.

A high wall running back from each end of this structure, seemed to him to bound the garden—for a garden he guessed it to be. Back in some crepuscular jungle he heard the throaty bellow of a great dog, and thanked Heaven that he had left no trail. He found his parachute almost uninjured, whipped

it about with the lashings, and slung it on his back. The dog's felonious bark seemed angrier now, and, he fancied, nearer. Feeling for his pistol and finding it lost, he limped—for he now discovered that one knee was hurt—across the lawn to the place farthest from the dog.

Following the wall, he found it integral with that of the house. For two or three hundred feet back, it was blank and high and insurmountable. The dog was still now, and, though Theodore's legs prickled with the fear of fangs at each rustle in the shrubbery, he reconnoitered the rear wall to a brick barn into which it was built. Everything was depressingly secure and substantial and workmanlike. Like the walls that surround the terrestrial paradise, these structures were as the native rock of the eternal hills.

In the other corner was the dog; and he shrank from exploration in that direction. So, through beds of dry phlox, iris and tiger-lilies, he returned to the long house, and stole across to the fourth side, where he found a door through the wall, tight-shut and impregnable. Back by this last long wall he felt his way, still baffled. A sense of durance and incarceration began to overpower him, in the desperation of which he ventured back, even to the barn again, thus having completely circumnavigated both the garden and the Cerberus guarding it. He felt as he

passed the kennel much as Ulysses must have done with the blinded and furious Polyphemus feeling about the cave for him; but on he stole, only to make sure that there was no way out. The very sternness of the architecture pointed to this conclusion as a moral and mural certainty. Only one course remained: to knock at the Dark Tower at the rear and ask to be let out; and from this he shrank. He knew nothing of the place, its people, or its laws. Still, it was America, and well along toward the middle of the twentieth century; and his punishment would be endurable, he hoped, praying fervently that the laws of whatever state it might be, would not make burglary of his offense, which was "entering," to be sure, but not by "breaking"—unless one counted the birch limbs and the bridal-wreath—and which quite lacked malice aforethought. Calling up his scattered courage by the drumming in his ears, he went with some steadiness up to the long veranda, and was about to violate its columned shades, when a shrill whistle sounding from the top of the porch instantly commanded his attention.

It was one of those sharp, hissing boy's whistles, made with the curved forefinger stuck into one corner of the mouth and out at the other—an enviable and fiendish trick. It shrilled above the blast like the signal to go swimming. Theodore backed into

the open, and saw a man on the roof, just in the act of swinging himself down over the eave.

"Get under here, old sport," said the voice, "and give a liberty-loving classmate a leg down."

Theodore received on his shoulder a rather small shoe, reached up and steadied a somewhat bony leg, and was about to let his burden down, when the liberty-loving one collapsed in all his members, and came down by the run, in all ways, and, as it seemed, on all sides at once of his helper.

Carson started forward to raise the demoralized fugitive to his feet; but he was already up and in the darkness seemed to be bowing and kissing his hand to an imaginary audience, like a tumbler acknowledging applause.

"My celebrated Avernus act," said he. "Special gravitation expert to the crowned heads! But hist! Let me greet thee! An' ye be noble, salute my cheek; an' ye be slob, receive my contemptuous thanks!—Hey, old sport?"

"I hope you aren't hurt," said Carson.

"Nay, that's past hoping!" answered the other. "I am busted in all ways! Compound, comminuted and stellated fractures are now desirable, in view my worser scath. I am sore shent, and I fear I have torn my panties. But I have escaped—" (here he spoke piercingly into Carson's ear)—"a doom that in another moment would have topped the agonies

of deepest hell raised to the Nth power! But I am selfish! I talk only of myself—and things. Let us fuse our souls, reveal the secrets of our beings. I wot we are kindred spirits, rectified, one hundred proof, aged in the wood and bottled in bond—bottled tight! Wottest thou not so, w'at?"

Unable to account for his affinity's uncommon mode of address, and quite as unable to escape, Carson stood mute, alone with a possible lunatic and a very probable dog, in a walled garden into which he had dropped from the night sky, in an Alabama suit of clothes, in a climate which in all likelihood belonged to Illinois, but reminded one of Greenland. There seemed to be nothing adequate to say.

"If your being remains reticent as to its inner springs of joy and sorrow," remarked the stranger, as if speaking of some foreign and recalcitrant thing, the proper treatment of which might present a delicate problem, "let me unlock its refractory atomic nature with the ferment of my celebrated system of cross-examination, elaborated in the case of *Gorrell vs. Gorrell*. If in generalities thou wilt not wilt, let us reverse the evolutionary process and proceed from the abstract to the concrete, from the general to the particular. In what orchestra do you play traps?"

"I am not a musician," answered Theodore.

"Stricken out as not responsive," rejoined the

stranger. "I never hinted it; but from your caput cometh a rattle like a muted castanet, and anon like a battery of telegraph sounders. Stay! Is it possible that it emanates from the clattering of your teeth? Caitiff, you are scairt—or in an ague that would reduce a foundry rattler to matchwood! Art cold, fair youth?"

"A little," replied Carson. "I am lightly dressed."

"Then come, come away, tra-la-la, with me," said the strange denizen of the dark house; "to a realm of balmy air and breezes of Ceylon. To heel; and if thy heavy hoof but scrape the gravel to betray our flight, thou diest, and all thy wad is gobbled by the privy coffer of the emporium. To heel!"

With a swift darting movement the stranger turned, and followed obediently by Carson, went by the bridal-wreath bush of concussive memory, and across to a building which Theodore guessed to be a greenhouse. His guide opened the door, and stood back with elaborate courtesy that Carson might precede him. Entering, Theodore found himself among beds of flowers which filled the house save for a central passageway, all in deep shadow, fragrant and warm.

"I shall not freeze," said he to himself; "and that is some comfort."

The stranger stayed so long at the door that Carson began to feel quite sure of having been beguiled

into a prison by his polite companion, and that the next phase would be the constabulary and arraignment. He was guilty of trespass; and the case for attempted burglary might be plausible; but, surely, they would not be severe. He was safe from the dog, now, and what matter if the trial should delay his return to the south? In the confusion of his mind, hard, obvious exigencies lost importance to him, numbed as he was by the amputation of a great hope. Shayne had meant everything that might make or mar his life; and he had defied and angered him irremediably. That was irreparable; but he had struck Silberberg's thick-lipped mouth—and that was worth much. He had had another meeting with the nameless niece; she had stood by him against her uncle and Silberberg, who was a great figure and a suitor for her favor. These were unavailable assets financially, but they meant so much to the foolish boy that he forgot the man who had enticed him into this flowery jail; forgot everything except the white face of Shayne's niece, pleading against his foolhardiness, as he leaped from the aëronat, and, spurning her deck in youthful indignation, shot downward into the cloud. Her one arm was about the aluminum stanchion, its hand on her breast, the other to her hat. She had changed the flowery bonnet for a little bycocket of bottle-green velvet, brooded over by a graceful plume, and

worn with the point over her eyes, the turned-up brim behind, and the sharp crown flattened over like the top of a mountain struck while plastic by a huge paddle. He could see it all, the great air-ship lessening to a dim blur in the high mists, the face and eyes and the quaint little bycocket hat glowing on and on with faithful steadiness. Constables! A fig—

"It is too dark," said his guide, rejoining him, "to make the exchange of cards more than an empty and invisible formality. Yet, I would fain know more of you than the bare data of your instability as a ladder and the bright and snappy technique of your tooth-chattering. Quite material enough, it is true, had one the time to work it out, but, to coin a phrase, what's the use? Beyond your nocturnal habits, what peculiar volitional defect brings you here? To follow the usual conversational forms here, are you a steady, or a periodical?"

"I don't understand," answered Carson. "I came here quite by accident. I had no intention of coming. I—"

"Quite so," interposed his interlocutor. "Let's sit down by the American Beauty bed—there. If we might strike a match, now . . . I estimate that half us lush-logged derelicts go ashore here, in a state, to coin a word, of orey-eyed wooziness. I may say that I came myself by accident, and without

meaning to do so—or otherwise . . . I must have a smoke!"

He seemed to be feeling for a cigar-case, tapping his person in various places where it might be secreted. Then came the scratch of the match; and Theodore scrutinized the face in the flare of the matches, as, with nervous, unsteady movements the stranger lighted the weed.

He was a medium-sized person, with deep-set eyes flickering from their caverns with a blurred sharpness, like tungsten-lamps seen through a veil. His face was sallow and colorless, with hollows in the cheeks, whose announcement of ill-health was contradicted by the general appearance of hardness of face and neck, like that of seasoned oak. He wore a flat cap with the crown piled forward; and his heavy and long hair of a neutral brown matching his complexion, fell to his collar in a mass that made any cap seem superfluous. Two or three heavy witchlocks lay like a disordered mane over his forehead, mingling with eyebrows of youthful lightness. His nose was irregularly notched in profile, like the stub of something else broken off his face with an angular fracture like crystallized iron. He had sensitive lips, and a mouth which was shapely and rather fine, but drooped at the corners pathetically. His chin was deeply hollowed at the base of the lip, and cut through by a perpendicular crevasse

which must have been a bother to his barber. Altogether it was a curiously complex face, both in feature and expression, and spoke to Carson of the inborn wildness, and wild ability of its owner. But he looked anything but insane.

His dress, however, brought back the impression of abnormal eccentricity. He had on a colored shirt, and from his high collar streamed a huge red silk cravat, untied, and spreading over his breast like the banners of the social revolution, now greatly overdue. The white evening waistcoat was too low for the shirt, revealing secrets of construction never meant for the scrutiny of any stranger except the laundress. His coat was a long black frock, the skirts of which, gathered about his legs, fell wide, discovering inexpressibles of Scotch plaid, much turned up, and evening shoes, the shine of which was obscured by successive accretions of dried mud. So much was revealed by the series of matches which he lighted, sitting humped up in an evident attempt to keep the light hidden in the spread of his coat. Carson's head swam in the growing conviction that he had reached a condition in which it was impossible to distinguish between dream and reality, and that this was some disordered nightmare.

"I hope you don't smoke," said the vision, "for two reasons. Firstly, when we light a match we run the risk of detection, and of consequences, at the

contemplation of which my purely hypothetical mind constructively reels. Secondly, I find myself wearing for my own use and behoof in my own proper countenance, my last cigar."

Carson protested that he did not care to smoke, and they sat on in unexpected quiet, the cigar glowing and waning like a far-off revolving light.

"I suppose I might explain, sir—"

So began Theodore; but the other's hand waved in dim protest across the sky, checkered by the sash of the roof, and his voice interrupted him.

"Explain?" said he. "Nay, nay! Leave explanations for the crass followers of ebriety. Already I begin clairvoyantly to see the depths of your being. I know from the seventeenth-century quirk to the 'ou', the slighted 'vanish' of the long 'i', the ceremonious address derived from the racial practice of private war, that you are a gentleman, suh, from the South, by gad! And your obliviousness of your arrival here furnishes proof, *prima facie*, but not conclusive, that you are that most difficult of cases for Doctor Witherspoon, a periodical. Rousing from what your attendant took for slumber, yearning for liberty, you came into the garden, Maud, leaving your jag-boss, if any, snoring like mine, who fills himself with the east wind, or, to coin a phrase, any old wind, and holds his breath until you feel the fond hope that he is dead, and then lets it burst from

his lips in one grand 'splroof' that moves the draperies like the breath of a gale, and drives the wakeful listener mad—mad, I say! And he, the said listener, flies, rules or no rules, as I have done!"

"My name is Carson," said Theodore, "and I am from the South, from Alabama. I—"

"Craighead is mine," rejoined the other. "I am from here and elsewhere. There are twenty places where I might vote were there any question under the sun worth voting on, and fifty places where my residence would be vehemently disclaimed by the authorities. I think I may venture to give you, sir, as my permanent residence—until further notice—only—the Rat Mort, Paris; got that down?"

"I—" began Carson.

"The Rat Mort," interposed Craighead. "One deep midnight in the dear, dread past beyond recall, I was ejected from the Rat Mort because my conduct was not up to the theretofore undisclosed standards of the place—from the Rat Mort—actually trun out, to coin an expression! Doth it not open glimpses of a depravity hitherto fabulous? And when I have been graduated from this emporium, I shall return, pride in my port—meaning nothing vinous—defiance in mine eyes, and I shall sit down in the Rat Mort and behave myself for long, long periods of time, for ages, in the mad, mad whirl of silk hats, Latin *Quartier* ties, rounded

and eyeleted hose and shimmering lingerie, the only person plunged into beastly sobriety, a rock of propriety, standing four-square, or mayhap three-cornered, to every bacchanalian wind that blows, with its scent of garlic, and Roquefort cheese, and spilt wine, and volatile oil of wormwood, the active and deadly principle of absinthe! That's what I'll do!"

After this somewhat complicated pronunciamiento, Mr. Craighead fell silent, and even forgot to smoke. Languid from the long hours of strain and sleeplessness, and physical as well as mental reaction in the warm and fragrant greenhouse, Carson grew somnolent. At short intervals the sky was illumined by a far-off glare which Theodore identified with the burst of flame that had so startled him in his fall from the *Roc*, and the regular recurrence of which proved it to be either the flame from the nostrils of some slow-breathing dragon, or the chimney of a gas-house. Mr. Craighead sat upright, making occasional elocutionary gestures with his cigar hand. Once he spoke again of the Rat Mort.

"Oh," said he, "I'll be the pink of perfection of desirable citizenship—when I graduate from this emporium."

Silence again, save for the barking of the dog. Craighead's breathing now indicated his capitulation to sleep,—crumpled prone against a Norfolk Island pine. Carson, who had classified him as a

lunatic, now found himself uncertain. The man behaved like a boy playing truant, rather than an adult prisoner escaping; yet, of what detection was he afraid? Why was he flying from the mysterious "emporium"? What did he mean by his talk of "steadies" and "periodicals," and by putting Carson down as the latter? All mystery! Only one thing was certain—the superiority of the greenhouse over the open garden with its chill airs and its dog. Carson's head nodded topplingly; and when he became conscious, it was day. Whistles were blowing; a train could be heard leaving the yards of the near-by town. The clearness of the morning sounds advised him that the wind had fallen; and as proof that it had not been all a dream, there lay Mr. Craighead against the tree-pot, his face pale, a pathetic droop saddening his mouth, his hair woefully tousled, the flat cap at his feet by the half-smoked cigar. Yes, Mr. Craighead stood the test of daylight. Like the flag, he was still there.

Two or three men came past the greenhouse, went round it and walked away again, as if making some sort of search. They came back after a time, and entered. One was a tall, athletic, ruddy-complexioned, youngish man, who seemed to be the leader of the trio. They gazed at Carson and Craighead as if taking stock dispassionately of returned estrays, in the form of dogs or horses.

"Well, Mr. Craighead," said the tall one in accents distinctly British, "I'm no end sorry to find you out of bounds again, sir!"

Instantly wide-awake, Craighead assumed an attitude of jocular familiarity.

"It agonizes me to have given you a moment's pain, Dennis," said he; "but believe me I should have been gnawing the electrolier and howling like a banshee—they howl, don't they?—had I stayed longer in the storm-center of Mr. Waddy's pneumatic slumbering. As between annoying you, and becoming daft, one may find difficulty in choosing, Dennis; but self, self, Dennis! I fear we are all selfish!"

From his evident irritation at the mention of his "pneumatic slumbering," Carson guessed that the shorter of Dennis' companions was Mr. Waddy. He was blocky and strong in build, and bearded with gray excrescences that grew forward and upward from all points, as if eyebrows, whiskers and mustache had been trained through a knot-hole for a long time, and then suddenly cropped off and left standing. He was puffing audibly. This labored breathing coupled with his appearance of having dressed hurriedly, gave him the general effect of one who has leaped suddenly from bed and chased something at high speed. He had on a top-coat over a dishabille of shirt and trousers; on one foot was

an arctic overshoe; the other was shod in a Wellington boot. He leaned toward Craighead with a sort of perplexed fierceness.

"Mr. Craighead," said he, as if carefully choosing terms of scathing rebuke. "I've seen all kinds, and you do—beat—the—Dutch!"

"Thank you," said Mr. Craighead, bowing. "The Dutch, Mr. Waddy, are a race not easily beaten, and I am modest, as you know. Yet in my specialties, I may be able to—but, pardon me, Dennis, have you not met my friend, Mr. Carson, from Alabama? A new arrival. Oblivious of his trip hither. A periodical, I believe. Mr. Carson, Mr. Dennis O'Grady; Mr. O'Grady, Mr. Carson. Mr. O'Grady is the official dispenser of dope—"

"Tonic, Mr. Craighead, if I may correct you, sir!" said Mr. O'Grady, his accent as correctly British as his name was Hibernian.

"Of course, Dennis," protested Craighead, "I meant tonic! Please do me the justice to believe, Mr. O'Grady, that I meant tonic! And is this Mr. Carson's jag-boss? I hope his slumbers are less sonorous than Mr. Waddy's, Mr. Carson. I—"

"Attendant," suggested Mr. O'Grady softly. "Mr. Evans is the attendant of Mr. Wylie. No doubt an error on Mr. Craighead's part, Mr. Wylie, but we understand perfectly that you are the Mr. Wylie who arrived, very ill, last night, sir, and who de-

parted before we could give him the examination and the formal admission. Mr. Evans will attend upon you, Mr. Wylie; and we hope, sir, to have you feeling much better in a few days, sir!"

"You are greatly mistaken," exclaimed Theodore. "I don't belong here at all!"

"Quite right, sir!" responded Mr. O'Grady heartily. "*Quite* right! I am glad that you are already able to see, sir, that you belong with Mr. Evans in Room 34, sir, where he will now conduct you. Mr. Craighead, I fear, sir, that this failure to remain within bounds will force Doctor Wither-
spoon to—"

Mr. O'Grady ended this speech with a dismal shake of the head.

"But I am not Mr. Wylie," interposed Carson fervently. "I don't know what people are sentenced to this place for, but I am not guilty. I have done nothing. I am from Alabama; my name is Theodore Carson; I am an engineer—an inventor; I—"

"Pardon me," softly suggested Mr. O'Grady; "but I find you here, Mr. Wylie, where none but inmates can come."

"I dropped in," began Carson.

"For a social call," supplied Craighead. "Entirely plausible, Mr. O'Grady, and shows how essentially man is a social being!"

O'Grady's face softened in no line or curve. He

was one of those efficient persons to whom business is no joke, neither the proper subject of one.

"I dropped into this garden from an aëronat," reiterated Theodore. "And I couldn't find my way out."

"Pardon me, Mr. Wylie," protested O'Grady, "if I observe that that is not a very convincing narrative, and quite disproves your claim to being an inventor, you know. Your condition, sir, is not that of a person who has fallen from the clouds, you know."

"But I have!" insisted Carson. "Literally, I fell from the clouds. I came down by parachute."

"In the night, sir?" asked O'Grady. "And with no knowledge of what you were falling into or on to, sir?"

"Exactly so," asserted Carson; "and I really must go by the next—"

"And swallowed your parachute?" interpolated O'Grady, still unsmiling.

"No!" cried Carson, producing it from under the bench. "Here it is! I broke this coming through the tree-tops—see?"

"I have no knowledge of machinery," said O'Grady. "But the existence here of so common a contrivance does not at all prove the absence of Mr. Wylie; and Mr. Wylie is accounted for by no personality except your own, sir. The Slattery Insti-

tute loses no patients. You are Mr. Wylie, or Mr. Wylie is lost. Hence, sir, you are Mr. Wylie. You will not be detained against your will, sir, longer than is necessary for so far getting it out of your system as to enable you to make a rational choice. Please accompany Mr. Evans, and prepare for morning treatment. Mr. Evans has your tonic. More assistants will be provided if you fail to see the propriety of compliance, sir. Good morning, sir. Mr. Craighead, please go with Mr. Waddy. I shall have a conference with Doctor Witherspoon as to your case, sir."

Mr. O'Grady's calm commands carried with them deep and high suggestions of irresistible force. He was a born autocrat. Wondering how it would all end, Theodore went with his attendant, walking in a daze.

Room 34, to which the putative Mr. Wylie was taken, was like the ordinary apartment of a good inn, save that it had two beds. Mr. Evans ushered young Mr. Carson into it as if conferring a great favor in thus naming him Wylie, and arresting him instantaneously under the new cognomen. He was a brawny man with a little quavering voice like that of a school-boy just bursting into tears. Theodore took his measure, and promptly decided that Evans could break him in two in a clinch, but might be outrun.

"Now, Mr. Wylie," wailed Mr. Evans, in a tone

that seemed to require that the sentence be completed with the words: "Don't whip me, sir! I won't do it again;"—"we'll get along nice, I know, for you're a gentleman, an' you won't do me no dirt. I'm an awful poor man; an' this is my livin'. Don't ruin me an' put a stigmer on the Institute by takin' any hikes, Mr. Wylie—you wouldn't, would you, now?"

"I am not Mr. Wylie," reiterated Carson. "I am Theodore Carson, as I said; and I—"

"This matter of names is so complicated," quavered Mr. Evans, pushing up his cuffs as if about to attempt some feat of physical prowess. "No man drawin' my pay c'n be expected to work it out. I git awful small wages, Mr. Wylie! My duties is simple. You git your tonic an' treatments reg'lar, an' keep hours. You git a gill of whisky in a bottle every night till the tonic gits in its work. Other treatments as per rules. A whole lot of gentlemen comes here under special names—I would! Le's drop this name discussion, Mr. Wylie, an' agree that we'll be reg'lar as per rules, an' you won't deprive my family, an' turn me out to starve, by doin' me dirt!"

Mr. Craighead rapped and entered. Evidently the surveillance of the attendants was not of the strictest.

"I quite agree with the remarks of my querulous

friend, Mr. Evans—who should have made public mendicancy his profession,” said Mr. Craighead. “Your position, Mr. Carson, is an equivocal one. Your presence or absence, Mr. Wylie, seems to me to be a question purely academic in character, and not within the purview of practical statesmanship. You are an inventor. That is conceded. The question is, what’s your field?”

“It is aëronautics,” replied Theodore. “I have devised the first effective aëronef. I—”

“Very interesting,” returned Craighead. “I have made that a specialty. I know the defects of the present-day aëronefs; and I understand the failure of the gas-supported aërostats, except as toys for us parasitic capitalists. But to the point in controversy. Are you the Fulton of the empyrean, or the Edison of the hot air? Mr. Evans’ porcine tonality has expressed the only conclusion open to him—to accept the Wylie theory as a working hypothesis, and to work it at the regular per diem. Dost foller me?”

“I suppose that this Wylie must turn up, sooner or later,” mused Theodore. “But why should I take treatment? What are you—I mean, what are people cured of here, anyhow?”

“A very difficult question,” replied Craighead. “My first difference with Doctor Witherspoon, now unhappily culminating in a diplomatic *impassé*, grew out of my desire to discuss with him that very

question. He said with crude brutality for me to move on, and let the other jags come within the radio-activity of his million H. P. thought-wavery. The first question is, are we cured of anything? That being disposed of—a matter not so easy as might be thought—the question rises to a higher plane, and bores its snoot right down into the roots of things. We hit hard-pan in the unsearchableness of ultimate phenomena. Teleologically—”

“What do they do to you?” persisted Theodore.

“They give you dope; they feed you for a few days on bran mash; they shoot you twice a day; they give you a little bottle to assuage what they call your thirst the first night or so, though why they call that a thirst which is only a cerebrospinal tendency entirely unconnected with irrigation, deponent saith not. The dope is the summation of all villainies—and that’s no ribald bar-room jest, eyther or either; but I am assured that it heals the sick and makes the well a harder physical proposition from moment to moment. The shooting will do no harm. They might use dish-water, and it would do just as much good. I don’t say it is dish-water—Witherspoon guards his sacred secret well—but it won’t do you any more harm than would that by-product of the scullery. Altogether, you’ll find it wplier to be Wylie. Let’s to breakfast.”

Breakfast! Here was something to be “under-

standed of the people." Carson was famishing. Swallowing the yellowish "summation of all villainies" presented tearfully by Mr. Evans, he took the arm which Craighead ceremoniously offered, and walked down a broad stairway ornamented with potted palms, and through a spacious lobby, in which a clerk behind a desk, a platoon of bell-boys, and groups of ordinary citizens, clothed, and apparently in their right minds, imparted an impression almost amounting to a guaranty that the place was only a hotel. They entered a café, where Mr. Craighead moved to a table already half occupied, with a familiarity born of use.

"I bring with me, gentlemen," said he airily, to two men who had preceded them, "a fellow-lover of the *hortus nocturnus*. Greet him with the grand hailing sign!"

"I didn't know," said one, "that they treated them cases here."

"They do, Mr. Bascom," returned Mr. Craighead; "but, thank whatever gods there be, they can't cure them! What they lack here is sense of humor, Mr. Bascom. Let me introduce my friend Mr. Carson-Wylie, of Piccadilly."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Carson-Wylie," said Mr. Bascom, stirring his soft-boiled eggs; "and I hope they do you as much good here as they have me."

"Thank you," replied Carson. "But the fact is—"

"But me no buts," broke in Craighead. "I think I may venture, among friends, to say that Mr. Bascom is our most popular freak. He had read the seventy-fourth *Rubaiyat*, which saith:

"'Drink! for you know not whence you come, nor why!

Drink, for you know not why you go, nor where!'

—and made a whole-hearted endeavor to follow its teachings. He succeeded in the realization of the Tent-Maker's inability to state whence he came nor why, why he went, nor where, or, in fact, whether he was going or coming. But in the matter of financing further obedience to Mr. Omar's bibulous teachings, he was, to coin a phrase, up against it. Hence, he marketed the plugs in his teeth. Mr. Bascom is passionately fond of Khayyam."

"Never under no such fancy name," replied Mr. Bascom gravely; "but I've been fond of most everything that would make the drunk come."

"That includes Khayyam," responded Craighead.

"It was this way," went on Bascom. "If you're a periodical, Mr. Carson-Wylie—"

"I assure you," asserted Mr. Craighead, "that in London, where Mr. Carson-Wylie is forced to live in order to keep his hyphen healthy, he is rated in the best asylums as a periodical."

"Then you will understand," resumed Mr. Bascom, "that, after being drunk in Peoria for six weeks I was in kind of bad shape. Clothes gone; took both hands to get a glass to my mouth; kicked out of places; had some fits—ever have a whisky fit?"

"Never!" cried Theodore.

Mr. Bascom was a venerable-looking man with a William Cullen Bryant beard and a lofty forehead. To see him looking so like a poet and hear him discourse of his debaucheries, sickened Theodore. But Mr. Bascom continued like another Ulysses telling of windier wars than those of Troy.

"The tortures of hell," said he, "are vaudeville skits to 'em. I had sold my sample cases—I was traveling out of Bloomington for Fuller and Fuller—"

"How appropriate!" ejaculated Craighead.

"And," went on Bascom, "hocked everything loose. Now, when those whisky fits come on you have to have booze. I had made friends with a highwayman, an' he loaned me a little dirk, stood by to keep me from cutting my throat while I dug the gold out of my teeth, sold it, and accounted for every cent. He was a good feller for a highwayman."

"That shows," interposed the fourth man, "how we jags are foreve' hangin' by a tow string ove' the

aidge of hell, an' makin' bets whether it'll burn off or not! I tell you, I shivah—"

"I join in the shiver," said Craighead. "I often—I beg your pardon; Colonel McGilvray, permit me to make you acquainted with Mr. Carson-Wylie, of Belgrave Square, London. Colonel McGilvray is the scourge of his home county, Mr. Carson-Wylie, and is here being denaturized."

"I'm right pleased to know you," said the colonel. "And I want to encourage you to stick when you get out, Mr. Ca'son-Wylie. I am not—if Mr. Craighead will allow me—the scourge of my county; but my kin thah feared I was gittin' so I could shoot single-mindedly while seein' double, an' they-all presented a petition, suh, askin' me to come hyah; an' I'm hyah as a public duty."

Colonel McGilvray was not the last to urge upon Carson the advisability of "sticking" when he got out. The inmates gathered about him after breakfast and labored with him as the "workers" in an old-fashioned protracted meeting wrestled for the salvation of souls. There was really something fine in this.

He assured them of his good intentions. He was rendered humble and almost bashful by the hopelessness of trying to extricate himself from his equivocal position owing to his unthinkable manner of getting into the Institute, and the maze of fanci-

ful misrepresentations of Mr. Craighead. So he listened and thanked them. A man with locomotor ataxia said that he was ten years younger since coming—and went away, carefully calculating at every step just where he would put his feet next, and invariably setting them unexpectedly elsewhere. A distinguished-appearing personage was pointed out as a railway president taking the cure at the request of his company. Another had wasted six fortunes in succession. That fine-looking man had been here before and relapsed through the accidental taking of Jamaica ginger, while ill. And a jewelry salesman pointed out Craighead as a mighty bright fellow who was crazy and wouldn't observe the rules, and would be fired by Doctor Witherspoon. Carson felt that he should never, never stand in need of further admonition to temperance than the memory of this Sargasso Sea of the derelicts of drink.

"There's a new fellow here," said the jewelry man. "I haven't seen him; but he came in stinking paralyzed last night, and was found boozing with Craighead in the greenhouse this morning. Seen him?"

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY OF THE EMPORIUM

YOUNG Mr. Carson, detained at the Slattery Institute to balance the books, on account of the evanishment of Mr. Wylie, thought often of Shayne's charming niece, but, man-like, gave scarcely a thought to the situation on board the *Roc*, as she bore northward in the night sky, after dropping him as a hawk might let fall a too belligerent weasel. Theodore's visualizations of the party he had left were narrowly confined to a hat, a face peering over the *Roc's* rail, and a last hand-clasp in the high mists. All the rest was a blot on a page he would fain have white, a dissonance in a harmony he wished perfect.

Yet the warfare and insurrection which he left behind would have interested him had he known. Mr. Silberberg, hurt in *amour propre* as well as proboscis, was deeply disturbed in his sultanic regard for Virginia. He was too angry to follow her to the deck, as she swept out of the cabin to take leave of her bandit of the dunes; Mr. Shayne was too busy

quieting the shaken nerves of Mrs. Shayne to think of aught else; so for some minutes the girl lay, half fainting, wholly terrified, by the rail where she had fallen as Theodore dropped over the side into the cloud and the night.

"Where is Virginia?" queried Aunt Marie, at last, pushing from her nose the vinaigrette with which the agonized Shayne was plying it. "Don't force it into my nostrils—dear! Has she eloped with that creature?"

"She went on deck," said Shayne reassuringly. "No, my dear, she couldn't—from up here, you know!"

"Finley!" said Mrs. Shayne, "look for her! She's my niece, after all! If she has run away—"

"But Marie, dearest," protested Shayne, "she couldn't! We're a mile high in the air, you know!"

"What does a man know," exclaimed Mrs. Shayne, growing agitated again, "about affairs of the heart? I tell you, she's gone! Look for her! Look for her!"

Mr. Shayne, in an agony of anxiety, called Mrs. Shayne's maid and gave orders that Virginia be sought on deck. The maid looked about hastily, and failing to observe the little heap in which Virginia sat huddled up by the rail, ran in agitatedly and said that Miss Suarez was not on deck "in the least."

"I told you!" gasped Mrs. Shayne. "Ah! Finley,

you never did understand a woman's nature! She's thrown herself away!"

"Nonsense!" said Silberberg, who had walked glumly in from his cabin. "Did you look aft?"

"No," said the maid, applying her handkerchief to her eyes. "Miss Suarez would never go back there, sir!"

"She'd go anywhere—"

So far Mr. Silberberg got, stopped and recommenced.

"This assassin," said he, "must be aft with the crew. There's only one place where Miss Suarez can be!"

"Go, Finley!" cried Mrs. Shayne, "and rescue the wayward child before it is too late!"

Without pausing to think of the exact nature of the dreadful thing which could make it too late, Mr. Shayne ran aft and astonished the crew by bursting into their midst and staring wildly about as if demented. Willett took his eye from the chart he was plotting, removed his goggles from the top of his head and hung them up quite with the air of a man clearing his decks for action.

"What is it, sir?" he asked calmly.

"Where is Miss Suarez?" panted Mr. Shayne.

"I don't know, sir," replied Willett.

"Where's that fellow we picked up?" demanded Shayne.

"The young engineer?" queried Willett, as if to draw a distinction.

"The hound we picked up!" roared Shayne. "You know who I mean! Where is he?"

"I don't know," responded Willett.

"Haven't they been aft?" interrogated Shayne, "either of them? He or Miss Suarez? They must be here! Confound it, where are they, men? They aren't anywhere else. They must be aft here with you!"

Of this very logical statement the crew made earnest and serious denial, seeing how almost hysterical their commander was. Really, no denial was required, as Mr. Shayne's eyes showed him at once the absence of the pair he sought and the truthfulness of his men.

"They're gone!" he exclaimed, rushing into the cabin. "Max, they've gone over the side!"

"That parachute," said Max, "couldn't save two from death, even if they made a good drop. And in this darkness—"

Virginia, having recovered her self-possession and the control of her knees, rose, peered off into the gloom for a few minutes, as if to gain another glimpse of her falling preserver, and entering her cabin, threw herself on her bed. She knew not that she was supposed to be lost, or that this very spot had been searched for her until further examination

of it was not thought of. She felt a horror of Silberberg, a sense of disgust with the Shaynes. To think that they could so insult this young man who had saved her life and treated her so beautifully, no matter what he was! Couldn't they see that he was superior to any of *them*, were he a thousand times a smuggler or pirate—if there were such things as pirates? To offer him money! To send him aft like a servant! No wonder he had struck Silberberg's odious nose: the wonder was, considering his wild and untamable nature, that he had not torn both Max and her uncle limb from limb! The wonder was that he had not made Silberberg and Shayne walk the plank, subdued the crew, put Aunt Marie off at some safe place and flown in the captured and perverted *Roc* to some verdurous, languorous, sensuous tropical island, there to—

Miss Suarez awoke from a nap and was glad to assure herself that the ecstasy with which she had contemplated the commandeering of the *Roc*—and herself—by the young bandit, was one of those inversions of feeling to which, in dreams, we are so prone. She rose, preened like a bird before the mirror, and sat down to think. The voices of her uncle and aunt and Mr. Silberberg came to her ears from the main salon. Opening her window for air, she noted that the roar of the wind from the earth had ceased, and knew that they had reached the calm

area, of which Willett had spoken, in the middle of the "low." They would probably have an easy landing in Chicago. And then?

One thing was certain: she would not live longer with the Shaynes. They were too sordid, too hard, too cruel. They looked upon her too much as an animal to be sold. They had insulted—some one. They had insulted her by acting as if she could care anything for the young fellow who had saved her. And she would — not — stay—with — them — any longer!

These words she emphasized by rhythmically clenching and opening her hands. She was quite fiercely resolved. She would leave them and teach school or paint miniatures—or something.

Oh! If she only had just one relative in the world save Aunt Marie!

Stay! The thought struck her of her mother's father's people, somewhere in the south. Her mother had been disowned by her family for a perversely contracted marriage; but they were southerners, and they would not see an orphan girl of their kin go homeless. Her grandfather was long since dead; and just who might represent the family now, she had no idea; but she would nevertheless find out where they lived, and go to them. She would ask to be cared for until she could find employment. She would not humiliate herself by staying with the

Shaynes and the Silberbergs longer. She would leave Aunt Marie a note of thanks for all her many kindnesses, take her really, truly own belongings, and fly south. So there!

So resolving, she became quite calm, and walked into the main salon in a very matter-of-fact way. Aunt Marie gave a shrill scream and fainted. Silberberg said that he would be—tormented. Mr. Shayne stared blankly and reached automatically for his wife's smelling salts, which he applied, at first, to the swollen nose of his guest.

"Well!" said Virginia, "do you think I am a ghost?"

"Oh, child!" gasped Aunt Marie, "where have you been with him?"

Virginia stood still, her eyes ablaze, her cheeks burning. The *Roc* was coming into the Chicago garage on the roof of the Aërostatic Power Building, in a most beautiful landing; but none of the party knew it. Silberberg was gazing at the enraged Virginia in unbounded admiration—her splendid anger had won him back. Shayne spoke in foolish agreement with his wife, half believing for the moment that there was something questionable in Virginia's absence.

"With a beggar!" said he.

"A bandit!" said Aunt Marie, "an assassin!"

"A beggar!" repeated Virginia, in lofty scorn.

"Why, even if he were one, in rags and a hovel, he'd be worth a million like you! An assassin! Why he's the purest, noblest man in the world! If he ever draws a weapon, it's against a society that has driven him out from it by its vileness. A bandit! And if he is, what are you? You rob by syndicate, assassinate by general managers and superintendents, and make beggars by votes of shares! I loathe you, and I I—— I admire him as much as I loathe you. As between bandits like you and bandits like him, give me the brave man rather than the coward!"

Mrs. Shayne, restored, rose, stood, and was advancing upon Virginia with reproof in her mien, when Willett interrupted the scene by announcing their successful landing. They passed constrainedly into the tower, went down to the street, and to Shayne's Chicago hotel in a motor-car, all in silence. Virginia bowed and retired. Silberberg shook hands solemnly with his host and hostess, as in the presence of an affliction too great for words, and left them.

In the morning two letters were taken to the Shayne apartments—one for Mr. Shayne from Silberberg, saying that "under all the circumstances" he thought it better to leave them and go to New York, where his business really required his presence.

The other was a short, tear-stained missive of

gratitude, penitence and farewell from Virginia to her aunt.

"You have been as kind to me," it ran, "as any woman can be to a person she can not love. You have never loved me, Aunt Marie, and you will never see me again. I blush to be obliged by your unjust suspicions to say one thing more. I am not going to any one. You have misjudged me terribly. I don't even know where he is. I shall never know!"

And so it was, that while Carson stayed on with Mr. Craighead at the Institute, Virginia, with fluttering heart but steadfast purpose, fled southward to kinsmen whose very existence she was obliged to assume. Young Mr. Carson, a prisoner of the perfect system of the Slattery Institute, had caused all this, and knew nothing of it. So it has ever been since knights—aye, and pages, too—rode through the land and left trouble behind the casements from which beamed ladies' eyes. Methanose and mechanical flight haven't made a particle of difference.

Craighead and Carson walked through a stately peristyle, to a low building called the laboratory, but termed by the patients the "shot-tower." Theodore was astonished at the throng assembled for the

"shot" treatment of which he had as yet no conception—men of all sorts, anxiously watching the clock, like school-boys fearful of being tardy. They formed in two columns, resting on two aisles, across the farther ends of which stood two desks, exactly alike. All slung their coats over their right arms, disclosing slits in their shirts at the left shoulder.

Craighead, with Carson and Bascom following, sent back ripples of disorder along the line by offering bets as to whether Carson was himself or Wylie. Two young men, easily classified as new-hatched physicians, stationed themselves like sentinels at the desks; the clock struck; there was a jostling at the rear caused by late comers, at which the serious young doctors frowned fiercely; the lines moved forward; and the men, as they passed the physicians, seemed to undergo some sort of operation, performed by means of glittering instruments of which Theodore caught glimpses like lightning playing about those slitted shirt-sleeves. Once beyond this ordeal the patients threw on their coats and passed on to an imposing, smooth-shaven man to the left, who gave to each a handshake, and something the sort of audience that the populace gets at a presidential reception—excepting that the president is not in the habit of looking at the tongues of his constituents, nor of feeling their pulses, save in a way purely figurative.

Theodore found himself in the human current,

and drifted with it. On closer view, he saw that the doctors pricked the patients with little, glittering weapons; but he reasoned that it could be nothing very severe. More than any of the others, however, Craighead seemed to shrink from it.

"Any locomotor ataxia germs on that stabber?" he queried, "or cancer—or any of the extras of the curriculum?"

The doctor frowned as he reached for a syringe.

"What did I tell you?" asked Craighead as the physician received his inquiry with professional gloom. "No more humor than a hearse-drivers' union—ouch!"

With this sincere protest against the stab of the needle, Craighead passed on, and Carson took his place. The doctor looked searchingly in his face, seemed puzzled, and reached to another region of the tray for a syringe.

"You should have rolled up your sleeve, or cut it," said he sternly. "Roll it up."

Theodore rolled up his sleeve, whereupon, with an expertness quite startling, the man of medicine pinched up a bit of the brown flesh, shoved in the needle, pressed down the piston; and Theodore was "shot." With a stinging in his arm, and wondering as to the why of it all—though he knew by this time that he had dropped out of the night sky into full membership in a drink cure establishment—he passed on.

The imposing, smooth-shaven man was the great Doctor Witherspoon. He met each patient with a standardized smile, clasped each hand with a grip of absolute uniformity, and said: "*Good morning, Mr. Bascom*"—or whatever the name might be. "And how is the appetite this morning? And the tongue, please. Pulse regular, I observe. *Have you had your constitutional this morning? Improving nicely, Mr. Bascom. Good morning!*" But he met Mr. Craighead with a frown instead of a smile.

"Please stand aside, Mr. Craighead," said he; "I wish to talk with you!"

"The bowstring, the scimitar, or the Grand Viziership with the title of Emeritus Superintendent of Dope, O Illustrissimo?" inquired Craighead. "Or wasn't my jogfry done right?"

Doctor Witherspoon was holding out his hand to Theodore, smiling the standardized smile, somewhat hardened at the Craighead irreverence.

"*Good morning, Mr.—Mr.—*"

"Allow me," said Craighead suavely. "Let me present Mr. Carson-Wylie of 'Yphen Court, 'Yde Park Terrace, Lon'on. The bets are even as to whether Mr. Carson-Wylie came in a day-coach and a trance last evening, or dropped from an air-ship in the night and was treed by old Tige, whose honest bark terrifies all who do not know that his is a case of *vox, et præterea nihil*. Mr. Carson, Doctor

Witherspoon. Tell the doctor the secrets of your alimentary canal, Mr. Wylie. Know each other."

Paraphrasing a *Departmental Ditty*, "Red and ever redder grew the doctor's shaven gill," as he stood in horror and indignation contemplating this lost creature, so far below the ordinary D. T. victim as to stand and so brave him, here in his hold, his vassals near—in the very laboratory. The patients stared in amazement. The great doctor could scarcely credit his own impression, he was so outraged and upset. Yet, never for a moment did the iron discipline relax. The doctor looked at Mr. O'Grady, who, like a silent and substantial ghost, floated forward, wafted Mr. Craighead to an inner door which closed behind him as the portals of the Inquisition might shut in some doomed heretic.

"Good morning, Mr. Wylie," said the doctor, "and *is* the appetite better? Put out your pulse, please. Tongue *very* regular, considering last night, Mr. Wylie. Don't omit your exercise; and no more nights in the greenhouse, Mr. Wylie! *Good morning!*"

If any one noticed the transposition of tongue and pulse in the ritual, nobody allowed himself the luxury of a smile; and the routine of the great drink cure went on. Carson departed, now fully resolved to escape.

He went with Mr. Evans for a long walk through

the country town. Mr. Evans' pleadings had made him reluctant to run away—he saw the Evans family dying one by one of inanition if he did—but he must get away. He might appeal to Doctor Wither-spoon; but he felt that the unconvincing story of his arrival must be received with incredulity by that great man's thoroughly practical mind. The departure of Carson would throw the books out of balance. A credit item of one man was demanded. Theodore supplied the man. The accounting department would refuse to adopt the incredible notion that he was Carson, who had dropped from the clouds, thus forcing the corollary that Wylie had vanished into thin air.

He allowed these things so to depress his spirits that he was glad of the arrival that evening of Mr. Craighead, from whose excited manner Theodore surmised that something unusual might have happened.

"You," said he, "are a Latinist, Mr. Wylie?"

"Not a very profound one," replied Carson. "We engineers are stronger in the modern languages, you know."

"A mistake," replied Craighead. "I've made a specialty of the educational value of the dead ones. Sort of sympathy with 'em, you know. Maybe you can give me the passive form of the Latin verb *'possum*, however? *Possum*, meaning 'can.'"

"*Possum*," repeated Carson. "Why, it hasn't any passive."

"It hasn't?" groaned Craighead. "Stung again! But I must have the passive of *possum* for the motto of my armorial crest. "*Possum*" 'can,' passive 'to be canned'—my highest achievement. Fair youth, look upon me!"

Obedying, Carson noted that he still wore the evening waistcoat, the colored shirt, the frock coat, and the checked trousers—and that he had thrown himself into a despairing attitude with his fingers clutched in his hair.

"In me," he went on, "you see the world's most symmetrical character. To but one vocation have I e'er been true—tinware! To that am I ever attached. Fired from the kindergarten, for what? For becoming bored by basketry and piling straws, and heading a revolt. I never finished aught, save matters better never undertaken. I was six months shy, to coin a word, of graduation at the village high school. At the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute was I expunged from my *maligna mater*. The diplomas to which I am almost entitled would paper this room. I thought expulsion from Rat Mort the limit; but now, I am canned hence because I am corrupting the morals of the inebriates! Is it not the height, the crown, the apex of infamy, the ultra rays of the spectrum of disgrace? I sympa-

thize with Mr. Tomlinson, of Berkeley Square. I see in his post-mortem career a prophecy of mine own! But, old sport, what a wonderfully and unsurpassably complete structure it makes of my character!"

"It is too bad—" began Carson.

"Too bad?" interrupted Craighead. "Ow, down't put it that strong, owld chap! But it is pronouncedly unpleasant, down't y' kneow." And then with tragic intensity he concluded: "In the world's fields of highest endeavor, many are called, but few are chosen. My unique claim to distinction, sir, is in this, that, whatsoever ta-ran-ta-ra the bugles blow, I, Craighead, remain the Great Uncalled! Me for the blind baggage and the tomato-can hat—Happy Hooligan Craighead, minus the happiness. Begone dull fun! Tears, happy tears! And eke, O ye tears! Great jumping genuflexionists, what a world!"

"But," ventured Theodore, in a sincere desire to comfort his friend, "you've had the treatment, you know!"

"True, Eliphaz-Zophar—nay, I will dub thee Elihu, for you have not been cured of your right to call yourself a Boozite or a Gittite still—true, I have had the treatment: its dish-water is in my veins, its dope in my assimilative system. The Witherspoony truths, so well adapted to the Second Reader Grade, must remain in whatever vermiform appendix the

volume of my brain provides for the retention of platitudinous ponderosity. I shall lose my sense of humor. I shall become bourgeois, un-Bohemianized, Philistine, crass. I must go forth and rob folks like any other good citizen. Would that the chance might present itself ere I depart for home. By George! That reminds me—I have no home!"

This was delivered in exactly the tone in which one might announce the leaving behind of a handkerchief or cigar-case. Quite at a loss what to say, Carson said nothing; Craighead, meanwhile, smiling as if at a new and amusing thought. Into this silence entered Mr. O'Grady, Mr. Evans and a slender person of about Carson's size, who at once began the coursing of imaginary game on the wallpaper, slapping his thigh and laughing at every failure.

"This," said Mr. O'Grady, introducing the indoor huntsman, "is Mr. Wylie, Mr. Carson."

"My worst fears confirmed!" hissed Craighead. "The one man I ever loved turns out to be—oh, ye gods! both a teller of truth and a victim of regular habits! The last straw, and no julep!"

Carson looked at Wylie, awaiting Mr. O'Grady's development of his case.

"We are, of cawse," said O'Grady, "sorry to have interfered with your plans, Mr. Carson, but—"

Mr. O'Grady's grave discourse, in which Carson

could feel himself being placed irrevocably in the wrong, was interrupted by Mr. Wylie's making a swoop upon an imaginary animal on Mr. O'Grady's nose.

"I 'most caught him," he cried. "A bumblebee! A bumblebee! Sunday, gnats; mosquitoes, Monday; Tuesday, flies; bees Wednesday; hornets yesterday and bumblebees to-day. Big game soon! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Whoop!"

Craighead attentively scrutinized Mr. Wylie, who was lurching about the room with a wild simulation of mirth.

"Long-lost brother, evidently," remarked the Great Uncalled. "I note the Craighead strawberry-mark. Well, when he gets to elephants, I may claim relationship."

"Of cawse," went on Mr. O'Grady, paying no attention to the Wylie incident, except to use and examine for blood-stains a neatly folded handkerchief, "your being found in the greenhouse has been partially explained, sir; and we are not disposed to make you trouble. The usual payment for treatment will not be insisted upon, though always collected in advance, and those you have had will be a total loss. In fact, with our customary liberality, we shall leave to you both that and your board and lodgings since you so strangely came into our—into our midst."

"Hear, hear!" ejaculated Craighead. "Hooroar for the émporium! Hip, and again hip! Wither-spoon for ever!"

"And if you will kindly sign these mutual receipts in full for all claims on both sides, we will give Mr. Wylie his room; and—here's the pen, Mr. Carson, sir."

Theodore had already made the first stroke of the "T" when Craighead rushed upon him like a whirlwind, snatched the pen, hurled it into the door like a javelin, where it stood quivering, and interposed between Carson and O'Grady.

"Caitiff, avaunt!" he roared. "Wilt deprive the widows and orphans this youth may accumulate of their cause of action against this dope-shotten émporium? Back, slave! You reach him only over my dead body! Receipts in full? Not on your life—to coin an expression. You have shot his patrician blood full of dish-water and bug-juice; you have filled his innocent and unworldly stomach with dope; you have committed on him false imprisonment, assault and battery, and malpractice, if there be any *mal* to your practice. His spine is even as wet string for limberness. He is disintegrated so that he falls below the standard of the human wreck—he is mere debris and junk. His reputation—the immortal part of himself—is gone, and what remains is bestial. He has had jaghood

forced upon him, instead of being allowed to achieve it at the expense of his patrimony, as you, O'Dennis, and I have done. You have amputated his appetite for light wines, and may as well pass him the Darker Drink first as last. He has suffered, and must ever suffer, most excruciating pain and agony, and both mental and physical anguish. He's a gone gosling! And I, the greatest personal injury specialist in the legal world, as his attorney demand ten—thousand—plunks as damages; failing the receipt of which, well and truly to be paid in lawful money of the realm, we'll take the emporium in execution, make Witherspoon a stable-boy with you as assistant swipe, both of you to sleep with Tige! We don't sign nothin', see?"

He turned to Carson, drew himself up, and, with tragedy in every lineament—an astonishing feat in facial expression—he spoke with a deep-toned exaggeration of Carson's southern accent,

"Othello's occupation's done come back!"

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF OTHELLO'S OCCUPATION

FROM the hour of Carson's arrival at the Slatery Institute, Craighead had dominated him. He had accepted the character of Wylie, at Craighead's suggestion; and when, on Mr. Wylie's suddenly turning up, Craighead had demanded damages from the Institute for sufferings of which Carson was largely ignorant, he had allowed the demand.

Though Craighead was clearly no proper guide for a young man whose affairs were in so critical a condition, he had confided in him. Craighead had grasped the new and unique principle of Carson's aëronef at one leap of his oddly energetic and active mind, and as he soared into the skies in roseate plans for developing a monopoly of the air with it, Theodore believed, and allowed himself to dream of power and fame and the girl whose face haunted him, pale at his leap into the depths of the tossing cloud, under the drooping feather dragged with the high mist. And then the gadfly of his uncompleted

task stung him again. He must hie to the shed in the Gulf dunes, complete the flying-machine, and bring it to the notice of the world, in spite of the enmity of Mr. Shayne, upon which he now confidently counted. He *must*—

"I know," broke in Mr. Craighead, gazing at the ceiling through wreaths of smoke, "the yearnings of your subtropical Alabamian system. But be practical. Ordinarily, you might yield to the seductions of the South in spring, suh. I know how it is. The pomegranate goes off in explosions of vegetal fire. The buckeye hangs out its crimson banners. The magnolia buds swell, burst, and fill the world with the enchantment of fragrance and velvet purity. The cape jasmine upholds its load of creamy snow, the crape myrtle and hibiscus send out their call to the orthochromatic plate, and the doodle-bug lies in wait for the unwary ant, even as I have lain in wait for you; but none of these is really germane to the issues. The issues, suh, are these: You come to this emporium, of which, alas, neither of us is fated to be an alumnus, and you find me in fine fettle, save that I am unrelated to the world. I am an Antæus, with no immediate prospects of getting my tootsies to mother earth; a storage battery as big as Pike's Peak, but insulated from the mass of demagnetized humanity; a great force for a number of things, with no way of proving it. What do you do? You make a pro-

fession for me. I was naught, not to mention naughty. What am I now? A great personal-injury lawyer, developing into a prosperous ambulance-chaser. I was out of touch with the world of finance. I have now laid the foundation for the organization of the great Carson-Craighead Aëronef Corporation!"

"What do you mean?" ejaculated Carson.

"What I say! What I say! Through a long, colonnaded, peristyled vista of marble and onyx, I can see, nailed to the back fence, the hide of Mr. Finley Shayne. And just as I am closing something, you propose to leave me. It's unthinkable!"

Carson's momentary feeling that this wild denizen of dreamland really had something definite in view in the way of business departed, and he returned to the argument.

"But I have no clothes," he urged.

"Clothes," scornfully repeated Craighead. "What are they? Merely woven fabrics to fill bags to secure credit withal at hotels. And you need no credit; for this room is mine for the whole term of the treatments paid for by some one into whose company I dropped or rose during my last shore leave from the good ship *Lithia*, but by whom I have no idea. Clothes indeed! Scat!"

"But it's cold here," persisted Carson, feeling helpless in the toils of this serpentine logic. "I'm not prepared for this climate."

"Look abroad!" commanded Craighead, with a gesture toward the window. "The sun beats down upon the last remnants of the snow, and the little brooks give the glad ha-ha to the river, and send down the silky billet-doux of the catkin to remind him that they've busted loose and are hurling themselves into his arms. Why, damn you, it's spring! And you can stay right here—steam heat, bath, hot and cold water, padded cell in connection—oh, fair youth, I love thee! Let me finish bunkoing Mr. O'Grady, and start the Aëronef Company. Don't be a clam!"

"You know how I feel about those damages—but if I could get the capital for the aëronef—"

"Why, you don't doubt my practical genius, do you?" queried Craighead in astonishment, "in other people's affairs, I mean, of course? Why, sir, if, in view of my failure with my own, I can't handle other people's business, then what becomes of my ability? I tell you, haughty Southron, I'm good for *something*!"

"Well," asked Carson, "but what real prospects have you, now?"

Craighead peered into the hall, locked the door, threw up the window, scanned the wall as if for eavesdroppers secreted between the bricks, approached Carson on tiptoe, and whispered,

"I've found a billionaire," he hissed, "and got

him hypnotized. We see him to-night. Prepare to talk aëronef as one charming the bird from the tree or the woodchuck from the hole. I've done the real work; see that you make good in the insignificant details!"

Theodore's emotions were so obviously under control that Craighead called him a mollusk and refused to describe his billionaire.

"I'll go," said Carson, "it can do no harm. Now, as for collecting damages from the Institute, I protest—"

"A mere ten thousand," cried Craighead. "Say no more. Away with it! It's in the hands of your lawyer, the celebrated Craighead. You never mind; but nerve yourself up to control the subjective mind of the billionaire."

All that day Carson watched Craighead as one might study a recently captured inmate of the zoo. From a trunk covered with the labels of foreign travel, Craighead took a sheet of cardboard and painted upon it an elaborate sign which bore the legend:

CRAIGHEAD

ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR AT LAW

This he fastened outside the door, chuckling from time to time as the passers-by paused as if to read

it. After a while he added to it, "Personal Injury Cases a Specialty," and found a recess down the hall from which he could watch the employees pass the sign, sheering off as if from a man-trap. The height of Craighead's pleasure came when O'Grady himself finally paused, read the sign over and over as if to make sure that this unspeakable effrontery were not really a hallucination, and departed suddenly in a sort of dignified panic. Then Craighead went snooping about foraging for hotel stationery, on which he sketched an additional design advertising the new legal business in Room 37.

"We must be economical," said he. "If we can expropriate stationery enough for a month, it will pay to get a rubber stamp made."

Craighead went out late and brought back several legal-looking books, which he ranged upon the dresser in dusty formidability—an old set of Illinois *Statutes*, and a tattered Broom's *Legal Maxims*, from which he read unctuously such Latin aphorisms as "*De minimis non curat lex*," "*Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*," and the like, and lectured upon them very informatively. The remainder of the library consisted of a ten-years' file of Martindale's *Legal Directory*, containing nothing more authoritative than lists of the world's lawyers. In each of them Craighead interlined in ink, on the

proper page, his own name, with the highest professional rating, and financial standing.

"This, my dear colonel," said he, "may seem to you like trifling; but in the life of business and the business of life, there is no such thing as a trifle. Take care of the trifles, and the truffles will take care of themselves—and the terrapin and lobster also. This library I consider my master-stroke. When O'Grady's spies see it, I reckon, suh, it'll throw a crimp into 'em."

"Where did you get them?" asked Theodore.

"Second-hand man," replied Craighead. "On approval. We must keep up appearances even if we have to buy 'em."

They went out for a walk to give O'Grady a chance, as Craighead expressed it, to see what he was up against, a statement that mystified Theodore greatly.

On their return, Mr. O'Grady seemed to have been wrought upon by what he was "up against;" for he asked Mr. Craighead if he would be so good as to give him a few minutes. Mr. Craighead looked at his watch, pleaded lack of time, and asked Theodore if their business could wait. When Carson admitted that it could, O'Grady said "Thank you, sir," in the tone of a porter accepting a tip.

What under heaven had suddenly raised the

expelled Craighead from his despised position in the Institute to a thing to inspire terror and panic, Theodore could not imagine, nor guess the reason for Craighead's sardonic laughter, as he sat in their room, drawing indictments against O'Grady and Witherspoon. He saw, however, that these were awesome documents, which set forth in a large, round hand that these gentlemen had been guilty of obtaining money under false pretenses, false imprisonment, malicious assault, and the like, all done "feloniously, of malice prepense and aforethought, not having the fear of God before their eyes, but instigated thereunto by the devil," and "against the peace and dignity of the State of Illinois, and contrary to the statutes in such cases made and provided." They were carefully docketed, in a style so intensely legal that Theodore himself was impressed with the terrible nature of his case against the Institute. The personal injury specialist then read the accusations in round tones that rolled thunderously out into the halls through the transoms, and arranged them in careful disorder on the table, with their docketings plainly visible.

"Wilt inject thy bourgeois and moral-reform dope into the great Craighead?" asked he of the atmosphere. "Then take the retribution genius serves out! Theodore, when we return, this room will be full of corpses knocked stiff by these impeachments

of O'Grady and Witherspoon. One mercenary will see them, and drop dead. Another will look for the first, see my lethal handiwork, and collapse. And so on, and on, and on! If there's room for enough to die in the imminent deadly breach of the criminal code, we'll get Witherspoon; but I guess the room'll be full ere the deadly carbon dioxid of my brain can reach him. This is the master-stroke—and, under the authorities, we shall be guiltless. Fie upon their law! Come, now, fair youth! Here we leave our deadly gin—meaning no derivative of the juniper—and take the spoor of the billionaire. Hike, oh, hike with me!"

Explaining that they would be trailed by the hellhounds, Craighead effected the stratagem of "fetching a compass round about the tower of the interlocking switch" down the railway track. They crossed a dim field, followed a farm road, and came back into the village from the opposite side. Craighead peered up and down the street, hastily opened a gate before which they had been slinking, and hurried Carson to a broad porch, under tall elms and maples, knobby with swelling buds. He pushed a button and they waited.

Carson inspected its exterior, and pronounced the establishment distinctly odd. The house was a columned, old-fashioned edifice, which in an unpretentious colonial way was fine and impressive.

The grounds must have covered two acres. The trees were strong, wholesome specimens, so high and bosky as to make the place shadowy like a wood. The grass had been left unclipped the preceding year, and was uneven like a pasture. A cow peered at them around the veranda. Near the fence stood a farm wagon, equipped with sideboards for the hauling of corn. Harrows and other farm tools lay about as if got out in anticipation of the work of spring; and all these in the grounds of a well-kept house, thoroughly in repair. Even the escutcheon of the push-button, on which Craighead pressed again, was polished until it shone.

At slow steps in the hall Craighead squeezed Carson's arm spasmodically. The door opened and a low figure stood before them in which Theodore noted something familiar, and a voice not altogether strange, he thought, invited them into the "other room."

"Mr. Carson," said Mr. Craighead, "does not recognize in our host the erstwhile guide of my wandering and wabby feet. Mr. Carson, in your new and fully established capacity as a respectable citizen, let me present you to Mr. Waddy, to whose counsel, precept and example, while acting as my attendant, I feel myself indebted for my complete restoration to Philistine-hood. Mr. Carson, Mr. Waddy!"

Mr. Waddy, ignoring this reintroduction, led them silently down the hall, past a door, which gave forth scuffling sounds, female voices, and the peeping of young chickens, and took them into a snug den, the shelves of which were covered with books, tall, imposing, learned-looking tomes in time-darkened bindings; where they sat down in leather-covered chairs gray with dust. Mr. Waddy opened the swinging door of a small cast-iron stove, the pipe of which ran into the chimney above a fine old mantel, and threw in a double handful of corn-cobs from a box in the corner. The fire roared up, and, by its flickering light, Theodore saw that the curious-looking machine which flanked a fine bust of Shakespeare, was a cream-separator; and that what he had taken for a frieze in *alto-relievo* was a string of seed-corn, composed of pairs of ears tied together by their husks, and hung over a wire. In its deeper personal implications it was the most baffling room Theodore had ever seen.

"You see here," said Craighead, "an illustration of the manner in which the souls of things express those of people. Here we find the reflective mingled with the defective, the serials with cereals, literature with litter, the diary with the dairy, expressing our good friend Mr. Waddy, who combines the types of the more or less honest prince of *haute finance* and the horny-handed son of toil. The owner of eight

banks sits here in the shade of his own cream-separator and seed-corn, surrounded by art, Aldines and Elzevirs, all coated with the desiccated soil from which we are made, to which we return, and out of which, under moister conditions, all wealth is derived. I am touched."

"I ain't," said Mr. Waddy. "Not yit!"

A pause succeeded this Delphic remark. Either Mr. Craighead was doubtful as to Mr. Waddy's exact meaning, or he sought the psychological effect of silence.

"So you did reely drop into the garden?" their host finally asked.

"Yes," answered Carson. "I think it was foolish to take the risk—but I did."

"Why?" queried Waddy; and Carson explained.

"Boy foolishness," said Mr. Waddy; and silence fell again, broken at last by Theodore's inquiry as to whether Mr. Waddy was active in eight banks, and if he did not find his duties irksome.

"No," replied Waddy, still Delphic. "The things growed up on me. I never wanted to be a banker; but my rents kep' loadin' me up with deposits, an' I sort of got one bank after another—darn it! Country banks—the boys run 'em. I came here to have a quiet time in my own way—an' see how I make out!"

This conclusion was so full of rancor that Theodore felt hurt, and was about to say that if Mr. Waddy's privacy was so precious he would no longer intrude; when their host, at the sound of the dragging of some heavy body in the hall, ceased pulling his beard and eyebrows to the vanishing point in his facial perspective toward which they all seemed directed, stealthily peeped out and returned smiting his palm with his fist in unmistakable agitation.

"Takin' out the incubator!" he cried. "The hatch'll be ruined! Ruined!"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Craighead, "if I mention the fact that some change—or cataclysm—seems taking place here."

"I'd got shut of 'em all," wailed Mr. Waddy. "They wanted me to put on style! They reckoned I was going to when I bought this place. I could slick up an' go to stock-holders' meetin's—an' the boys never knowed! An' jest as I got things right, Caroline's man dies an' here she comes to 'take care' of me! I shan't be allowed to earn a cent by workin' for Witherspoon—and it brought me into such society! Them jags is mighty nice fellers, some of 'em."

"I thank you," said Craighead, with an excess of manner. "And as for your being condemned by

family pride to sterile uselessness, it is truly a shame. But, is Caroline a relative?"

"Only daughter," answered Mr. Waddy. "Come to live with me. Settin' things to rights!"

"Mr. Waddy," said Craighead, "bear up under this. It may be for the best. And let us take up Mr. Carson's great project for monopolizing aviation. I have long believed that some one would turn up with the machine to subordinate all others; but since the time of Santos-Dumont, Farman and the Wrights, aërial navigation has made no real progress. Mr. Carson is the genius. We offer you the unique chance to be with us co-master of the world. Mr. Carson will be glad to explain his aëronef."

"I wun't put a cent in it!" said Mr. Waddy.

Carson's heart sank; the unexpected affluence of Mr. Waddy had bred faith in Craighead's financial plans.

"Certainly not," replied Craighead, as if Mr. Waddy's refusal were the most natural thing in the world, "until you have ciphered the thing down to brass nails. And then—but tell Mr. Waddy about it, Mr. Carson. You need not enter into the offers of millions we have had, and spurned—just describe the machine."

Carson switched on the lights, and they gathered about the table. The boy talked slowly at first—

but as the theme grew the others had the rare experience of hearing a man discourse upon the thing which dominated an intense and repressed life. It was complex—much of it too technical for Mr. Waddy—though familiarity with the concrete things of his practical career had made him acute. Once in a while he interjected a question which evinced intelligent comprehension of the heart of Carson's explanation. The boy explained that his *aëronef* differed from all others, in having wings like a bird's; which did not flap, like those of the absurd orthopters, and yet used half their surface in beating the air, with a straight thrust like that of an oar in water.

"Don't yeh use screws?" asked Waddy at this point.

"Not at all," answered Carson. "The screw can never be effective, because it strikes with a slant. It will do in water, but air requires a more effective thrust. When your propeller-blade moves at a hundred miles an hour, say, you have a lift of thirty pounds to the square foot of surface—with the direct stroke. But the surface of the screw—"

"Now, how d'ye figger that?" asked Mr. Waddy.

Carson repeated laboriously; showed how, in his new wing, the whole surface revolved in sections striking straight against the air. Waddy nodded.

"Why," said Carson, "I can lift weights that none

of the other air-ships can stir, and fly off like an eagle with a fish!"

Mr. Waddy nodded his head now, instead of shaking it. Theodore's enthusiasm was infecting him. Craighead, out of the running, stood over them, peering silently at the drawings formed by the boy's pencil. Mr. Waddy was getting a grip upon the principles. The wing-blades were really long feathering-wheels, the slant of which, by a new application of old principles, was under perfect control, so as to lift directly upward, to drive obliquely in any direction, or to strike up and hurl the *aéronef* suicidally downward. The farmer-banker and the inventor were so absorbed that they scarcely noticed the entrance of a messenger from the Institute with a message from Mr. O'Grady, asking if Mr. Craighead would step outside for a moment, nor Craighead's withdrawal and return.

"The direction of the blow of the propeller," said Carson, "is under perfect control. A bird's wing isn't. This is a better wing than an eagle's."

"Kin you raise right straight up," asked Waddy, "without running along like a buzzard?"

"I sure can," replied Carson, falling into dialect. "No bird can do that—no big bird. It's a better, stronger flier than any bird. The best any other machine can do is to support four pounds to the square foot of surface; with my new motors, I can

fly off with five times that; and I've got four times their bearing surface! I can carry mail and express at a profit, or passengers that can afford it. I can hover over a ship with good heavy torpedoes and sink her, and overtake any vessel that floats. I can—"

"What kind of motors you got?" interrupted Waddy.

Carson went into details of cylinders, weight per H. P., revolutions per minute, fuel necessities, and the like, in the midst of which Craighead returned, secured Carson's signature to some document, of the nature of which the boy was quite ignorant, went out and reëntered whistling. The old man looked through his eyebrows, whiskers and mustaches at Carson and the drawings.

"What if your engines stop?" he asked. "When you're a mile high and over water, mebbe?"

"I can soar," answered Carson. "I can make headway and gain height with no power, if there's a wind—and I can stay up for hours, with the propellers set for aëroplanes. But the best thing I haven't mentioned — the gyroscopic balancing device."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Waddy.

"Why, it's the successful application of the gyroscope to aviation."

"They used to talk about that," observed Mr.

Waddy, "long ago—the Brennan single-rail roads—I thought it turned out that the gyroscopes was too heavy f'r air work."

"They are too heavy," cried Theodore, "if you use them to do the balancing—that's sure. And so we have had to balance by feeling, just as we do a bicycle. Thought isn't quick enough, so you have to rely on feeling, as a bird does. But I use little gyroscopes, not to control by their weight and stress, but to distribute power to the wings and rudders, positive, automatic distribution of power. Why, if the engineer of my machine should fall dead, it would fly on just as he set it, until the fuel was exhausted. It feels and thinks."

The three men sat looking at one another, so far oblivious of their surroundings that they did not notice the opening of the door, nor see the woman who entered.

"Papa!" she said.

Mr. Waddy rose hastily and faced her. She was rather young, rosy, and quite too jolly-looking for her half-mourning, which she filled to a smoothness that showed marvelous adaptation of fabrics to curves. She looked like Mr. Waddy but was undeniably pretty. He was blocky and short; she, round and plump, with small hands and feet. His eyes, lost in huge brows, seemed small and deep-set; hers were wide, with a glimmer of good

fun in them. His face was a hirsute jungle, growing all ways a well-kept beard should not; her cheeks were smooth and pink, her lips were red, and the Waddy anarchy of hair gave her coiffure a charming tousled and crinkly disorder which would have convicted a small girl of naughtiness. The turned-up pug nose of Mr. Waddy was modified to a delightful little *retroussé* effect in her. An apparent effort on her part to be stern and formal was mitigated by smears of dust on face and hands, and a slight trace of panting and heat, as if she had been exerting herself.

"Papa," said she, "this is hardly a place in which to entertain these gentlemen. We have cleared out the east parlor."

"Oh, yes!" assented Mr. Waddy, with feverish haste. "To be sure, Caroline! Take 'em in, won't you? I've got to see the hired man! My daughter, Mrs. Graybill, Mr. Craighead; Caroline, a— a friend of mine, Mr. Carson, of Alabama. Excuse me for a minute, gentlemen!"

"I assure you, Mrs. Graybill," said Mr. Craighead, "that when I say we are delighted, we mean the word in its descriptive sense, rather than its conventional nonsense."

"Oh, thank you!" replied Mrs. Graybill, looking about the den. "This is an unfavorable-looking place for conventionalities."

"Finding you here," went on Mr. Craighead, as they entered the parlor, "is discovering an unexpected rose in a patch devoted to the harmless and unornamental cauliflower, a delight all the more dangerous to a sensitive organism because of its suddenness."

"Oh, I dare say you'll recover—a great many people have. And we'll strengthen that sensitive organism with supper."

"And thus increase the pleasurable strain! Theodore, it looks deliciously dangerous!"

"And I may as well explain about the condition of this house," she went on. "Papa is reverting to type, that's all."

"Ah, yes!" replied Craighead. "I see!"

"No, you don't," protested Mrs. Graybill, "though it's polite to say so. When I say reverting to type, I don't mean printing, or anything like that. He's going back to the ways of his youth, and the youths of his progenitors. I dare say we shall all tend to do the same at his age, don't you think so, Mr. Carson?"

Theodore bashfully answered that he had never thought of it. Craighead quoted the melancholy Jacques on second childhood but denied the application to Mr. Waddy.

"Oh, I don't mean *that*," said Mrs. Graybill.

"But papa got rich, and we imposed on him gradually a life unlike that in which he was nurtured. Now, he elopes when he can, and sets up establishments with seed-corn, and cream-separators, and cows and harrows on the lawn, and works at any job he can find, and enjoys drawing wages more than anything, except teaching calves to drink. It's cruel of me to come and break up the idyl; but it's so absurd!"

"If that be cruelty," said Craighead, "then—to coin an expression, martyrdom for mine!"

"Supper," said she, smiling, "will be served very soon."

The long dining-room was gloomy with decayed gentility—black beams, dark wainscoting, and a broad plate-rail bearing wrenches, clevises, oil-cans, and baskets of eggs labeled as to breeds and dates. During the meal Craighead came out amazingly in his encounters with Mrs. Graybill, to whom, as it seemed to Theodore, he was making violent love. Mr. Waddy, deaf to the badinage which screened this courtship, sat buried in thought, save when he questioned Carson concerning the *aëronef*, and was answered in occasional outbursts of eloquence during which Mrs. Graybill ignored Craighead and watched Theodore absorbedly.

"There's no cinch in it," said Mr. Waddy, "no

monopoly; an' as soon as it's public, everybody'll build 'em. I do business on cinches."

"Oh, but the patents, Mr. Waddy!" cried Craighead. "You forget the patents!"

"They expire in a few years," said Mr. Waddy, "an' then where are yeh? Land, now—that I made my money in—land's an eternal cinch."

"Mr. Waddy," said Craighead, "this matter of securing exclusive control of the air is a part of our plans. It is one of my specialties. The law affords ample justification for the assurance, which I here and now give you, that that will be attended to. Our present task lies with the uncompleted aëronef down by the shore of the blue Gulf; to get the motors into her, and start business."

Carson was amazed, for he would have wagered that Craighead had never before thought of any monopoly except the patents; yet here he was, assuring Mr. Waddy of exclusive aërial dominion. Mr. Waddy grunted as if lightly impressed; as, no doubt, he was.

"How long will it take you," said he, "to kind of draw out your plan for clenchin' the control of the air, legally?"

"Oh, a very brief time," said Craighead. "I have installed a fine law library in my apartments, so the consultation of authorities will be easy; but—"

"Well," interrupted Mr. Waddy, "if you can have that done by the time Mr. Carson can go where his machine is, put it in shape an' fly back, it'll do. When he lights in the front yard, an' you bring me a good law-proof monopoly, I'll go in with yeh; but he's got to fetch a letter from Mobile, within twenty-four hours o' the time it's stamped there. I'm from Missouri! What say?"

"Done!" cried Craighead. "You've bought something!"

Theodore was trembling with the fear that they were throwing away their chance by reckless and impossible undertakings. Mrs. Graybill saw him grow pale and swallow hard, as if choking, and her eyes grew soft.

"Before we call it a bargain," said Theodore, "I should like a word with Mr. Craighead, if you will excuse us."

"Certainly," said she. "I should recommend careful consultation."

Craighead faced Carson inquiringly, as they found themselves alone in the hall.

"Something rising in your throat?" he queried. "Frost forming on your boots? No yellow stripe up your back, is there? Come, let's reel in and give him the gaff!"

"I wish to explain," said Theodore, "that I—I can't pay the charges on the motors; I can't get

them down to the beach. So how can we accept Mr. Waddy's offer?"

"Gad, cunnel," exclaimed Craighead, "I'm glad you told me in private, instead of disclosing our impecuniousness to His Waddiness. But, have no fear! You carry Cæsar and his fortunes. I have the fund for the motors."

Craighead drew from his pocket a roll of bills, the outer one of rather startling magnitude.

"Fees," said Craighead. "Damages, actual and exemplary. I've settled the case of *Carson vs. The Slattery Institute*. Fair sir, we have a swollen fortune."

"What do you mean?" asked Carson.

"I mean," said Craighead, "that this roll of tainted money is our loot of the emporium. Wit well, that I soaked 'em plenty."

"But I can't allow this!" cried Theodore.

"It's already allowed," answered Craighead, with an air of perfect innocence. "Come, callow sir, we can't begin now the ruinous policy of scrutinizing the sources of our supplies. We can endow a college later, and that— What you doing?"

Carson was cramming the bills into his pocket.

"Going back to Mr. Waddy," said he. "Come on."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Craighead, his hand to his forelock. "But I warns you, Capting, that there's

brokers dead ahead and on both bows, and that Craighead's the only pilot as knows these waters. But here's with you, if it's to Davy Jones!"

"Mr. Waddy," said Theodore, walking up to him and looking him in the face, "before accepting your offer, I must make sure that I can fulfil my part of it. I must install the motors in the aëronef. There are some financial arrangements to be made. It may be some weeks—"

"I'll let yeh have what money you need," said Mr. Waddy. "I know how it gen'ly is with these here geniuses."

Theodore grasped the old man's hands, his face flushed with joy.

"I accept your advances with pleasure," said he. "And within sixty days, I shall be here with the aëronef!"

"As certain," said Craighead, "as the world turns over sixty times on its shafting. Got your order, Mr. Waddy!"

As they took their departure, Mrs. Graybill drew them aside as for a private conference.

"Mr. Carson," said she, "do you know that papa is a dreadfully good business man?"

"I am quite sure of it," said Theodore.

"Do you think that you and Mr. Craighead are quite able to cope with him where business is business?"

"Fear not," said Craighead. "Colonel Carson has an adviser in me."

Mrs. Graybill laughed merrily.

"I had that in mind," said she. "I believe in you, Mr. Carson. I believe in your machine. And I believe fully in papa and his business ability."

"Mrs. Graybill," said Theodore, "we can do no better in these days of big business, than to trust to a man who has the honor to be your father."

"That was a great hit you made with the fair princess," said Craighead, as they went to their room. "You're a wonder, Sir Theodore. I didn't think you had it in you. Hanged if you haven't got me half hypnotized into the belief that you have some sort of rickety flying-machine down there! Why, we'll make a killing here that will put the beef trust in second place. And something tells me that Mrs. Graybill will be in it. My heart is my weak point. She's touched it. Ah, the ladies, the ladies! They're a specialty of mine!"

"I should say," said Theodore, "that you had better make a specialty of your plan for a monopoly of aërial navigation. I had no idea that you knew any such secret."

"No more had I, son," said Craighead. "But think how mean and picayunish it would have been

to refuse a promise at the psychological moment. Faugh!"

"But you told Mr. Waddy—"

"That it is a specialty of mine," supplied Craighead. "Certainly, I wanted to keep the psychic fluid flowing. While you are on your way to the more or less mythical spot where your fabulous air-ship does or does not exist, I'll take a few minutes some day and figure it out. Don't worry about the monopoly end of the deal. That's mere deviltry, and in derogation of the common good, and, therefore, easy. But you've got to bring forth actualities. Be calm about me, old scout, and look to yourself."

After retiring they lay awake exchanging remarks and suggestions across the dark room.

"Oh, about that money," said Carson. "I must return it to Doctor Witherspoon, Craighead. You won't misunderstand me, will you?"

"Not in the least," replied Craighead sleepily. "Ingrowing conscience, and all that rot. Get over it as you get richer, you know."

"I shouldn't much object," said Carson, "to your making a fair fee out of it; for they really confined me here—"

"I allowed myself a fee of fifty per cent," said Craighead. "It's buried, far, far beyond your ken,

even as Tige burieth the bone. That roll you've got is only your half, sonny. Any time Craighead, the sleuth, gets left—but let me sleep, gentle knight, I would fain dream of Caroline!"

CHAPTER VII

THE INCEPTION OF "UNCLE THEODORE"

TO a man like Theodore Carson, who, in a desperate sort of groundlessness for hope, had for a long time nevertheless hoped, arbitrarily and with youthful audacity, leaning the ladder by which he mounted against the clouds of his vision, the transition to a merely rational hope was uncomfortable, disquieting. Dreams are so plastic. The *château en Espagne* is built of smoke wreaths and based on morning mists; but the family dwelling rises through compromises with the exactions of other minds, in blue-prints, elevations, perspectives, title deeds and plumbing estimates.

His mind, habituated to the airy ease of an unuttered faith in his mastership of the air, felt the galling of reality as he walked westward from the station toward dilapidated Carson's Landing. While remorselessly computing everything relating to the *aéronef*, allowing for errors and providing cannily for the "margin of safety," while certain as experiment could make him that it would fulfil

his promise to Mr. Waddy, he had been, save in his engineering, a visionary, unacquainted with the world and its "margin of safety."

Seated on a stump he sought mental adjustment before entering his house. He had had his chance with Shayne, "the Prince of the Powers of the Air," and had thrown it away in hot words to Shayne, in a blow to Silberberg, and by leaping from the *Roc* into the unknown abyss of night. These were actualities. The broken deflector of the parachute he carried proved that, as did the memory of his foolishness over Shayne's niece, now happily for ever past.

The sun shone down with April warmth on the red soil, the Bermuda grass sod of the old fields, the bleaching shingles of the old house. Blue with magic was the clump of high pines across the clearing, the haze and dream of an Alabama spring. The woodpeckers wove festoons of flame from tree to tree; the tall Spanish bayonets stood like a row of saluting guards by the road; the buckeye touched every angle of the fence with fire; the oleanders at the corners of the gallery blushed faintly pink. He knew that from the scuppernong arbor the carpenter bees were voyaging back and forth, tiny black aërostats, from the blossoms to tunneled galleries in the red cedar rails of the old veranda. They were boring audibly in the rail, their saw-

dust scattered over the cypress floor. The whole familiar scene, so peaceful, so utterly at one with the irresponsible past, aided that enchanting southern haze in restoring illusion, obliterating realities, and relegating to dreamland the incredible Slattery Institute, Mr. Craighead, Mr. Waddy, his "reversion to type," and the great "Carson-Craighead Aëronef Corporation."

Mr. Waddy's money and Mr. Craighead's telegrams saved the day for the real. The former was actual currency, and felt comforting to his pocket. The latter proved the objectivity of Craighead—and if Craighead turned out to be substantial, anything might be believed.

The first three yellow despatches had come in one delivery at Nashville, addressed to "Theodore Carson, the Illustrious Inventor and Thaumaturge, Care Conductor, Train 75." Theodore, the Illustrious, could not accumulate the courage to ask for them, but the wise conductor had pounced suddenly upon him and said, "I reckon you're Mr. Carson?"

"Yield not to temptation, fear or cold feet," the first read. "Your Uncle Fuller is at the helm." This was signed "The Great Uncalled," with the first two words run together as "Thegreat" in a telegraph operator's effort to reduce to the semblance of a name Mr. Craighead's *nom de guerre*.

The second ran: "Have no fear; monopoly is as clear in the air as on the land. Apologies to Sir Humphrey Gilbert. None to any one else by a dam site. *Conspuez* Shayne." This was signed "Craighead, the Legal Bloodhound." "An old Broom," ran the more mysterious next, "albeit minus one cover and dog's-eared, nevertheless sweeps clean. He yokes the whirligig to our car, and sweeps the howling skies!" (Signed) "Dandy Jim of Caroline Graybill." The fourth, delivered at Birmingham, was addressed to General Theodore Carson, M. A. ("Monopolist of the Air"), and consisted of ten repetitions of "Eureka," signed "D. J. of C." The last came at Bay Minette, and was too astonishing to be explained on any theory consistent with Craighead's sobriety and sanity. "Caroline's dad," it read, "falls dead at unveiling of Broom idea. Sees absolute cinch, and rises to it as per lifelong custom. Formed to-day Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company. Laws of West Virginia. You come in for twenty-five per cent. Caroline impressed. Either universal genius or rodents in campanile. Greatly encouraged, not to say titivated. Almost converted to belief in my own schemes and self, but am cautiously suspending judgment. Will have Chicago surrounded by time you return. Go east to Wheeling (or is Charleston capital?) to-night, and will incidentally run

up and construct first line of circumvallation (see cyclopedia) about Greater New York. Monopoly end of deal absolutely nailed down; brass nails; with Waddy doubloons coming copious. Up to you to produce flier. Getting wabbly in head. Losing faith in you as concrete entity. Have you any aëro-nef? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' at once." This also was signed "D. J. of Caroline."

If the telegrams were inexplicable, his own yielding of command to this man Craighead, whose antecedents and surroundings should have made any one cautious, was more so. Yet Craighead had taken control by sheer audacity. These baffling communications, the odd skips and jumps of his intellect in conversation—were they the capers of insanity, or the fundamentally rational movements of a mind showing its devious course at intervals only, uttering things which appeared unrelated because the path from position to position was passed so swiftly and directly that the ordinary mind lost sight of it, as one catches glimpses of a hummingbird only at the moments of its rest before the flowers?

What could he mean by an "an old Broom"? The old copy of Broom's *Legal Maxims* in Craighead's "library" was indeed minus a cover, and dog's-eared; but how this "Broom" could, even in metaphor, yoke the whirligig to any car and sweep

the howling skies, Carson could not guess. Mr. Waddy's demand for aëronautical monopoly was being complied with, to Mr. Craighead's mind, and the last telegram seemed to imply that the bucolic financier had been convinced. His "falling dead" might mean much or little; but his "doubloons coming copious" was eloquent of faith. And what in the name of all the gods at once could a "Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company" mean in an aërial navigation deal? Or those mysterious expressions about "surrounding" Chicago and Greater New York?

Well, Aunt Chloe was in there, shuffling about, wondering where he might be, and here he was, looking on spectrally and unsuspected. With the common human impulse to secret approach, Theodore walked on, concealed between the Spanish bayonets and a somber line of red cedars, climbed the end of the veranda, scuttled into the broad hall and up to his room, into which he stepped quickly; breathing a little hard. He opened the closet for a change of clothes, and started back in wonderment quite as paralyzing as horror; for his clothes were gone! Instead, there sat a huge trunk with its lid back, its open tray full of silken hosiery, corsets, laces, gloves, handkerchiefs, and open-work things of mystery and terror. On the hooks were many, many others quite as awful: frilled and

tucked and ruffled and plaited garments; silks, dimities, cashmeres, linens, cottons and soft light woollens, filling his closet; and spread against the wall for occult reasons connected with keeping them in shape; and protruding from the trunk were more clothes, while in corners of the bedroom were more trunks.

To make sure that he was in his own house, and not a profaner of the shrine of some divinity of lace and open-work, he looked from the window. Yes, this was Carson's Landing. The gourds hanging from tall poles; the martins chattering from them; the china tree full of blossoms like lilac blooms, humming with bees and visited incessantly by crimson bee-birds—all these he knew. But this, this *corset*: with its lacings unrove it lay there like a mold awaiting the casting of a Phidian Psyche. The name entering his mind made him tremble. He picked up the fragrant garment with the pink ribbons edging it, and looked at it with something of the terror of Charmides in the shrine of Artemis. He had forgotten the marvel of their presence in that of the things themselves; for he was paradisiacally innocent, an engineering hermit.

A light step sounded without, and he froze with the corset in his hand to a statue of panic and trance and paralysis. Some one entered, his heart bounded, and then stood still; for it was Psyche of the dunes,

Shayne's niece, Virginia, entering jauntily, maddeningly, like a real woman taking possession of his bedroom as her own! She had a little subjectively derived smile on her lips, held in her hands a spray of huckleberry blooms, which she put to her nostrils, and then stuck in a vase by the old mirror. She took off the memorable red hat, and pulled up her skirt with affrighting recklessness, examined her dainty stockings for dust or burs, and dropped the skirt with a little flirt, like a wren shaking a raindrop from her tail. She did a dozen things to make one fear the fate of Tom of Coventry. Every time she looked his way, Theodore quaked, even more than at her alarming actions in ignorance of his presence. If she would only go out! Why was she here? *Was* she here? If he could only slip out! What was she going to do now?

She had opened the window as if discomforted by the heat. Sitting down with her profile to him and her side to the window, she fanned herself with the fan he used to dry his face after shavings! She smiled up at a college banner, his only chattel, save the fan, exempted from her writ of dispossession. She fanned herself quite vigorously; and then, as if still oppressed by the heat, she stepped to the mirror, unpinned the brooch at her throat—and began reaching back for the buttons of her dress. Providential instinct, and memory of his own

days of roundabouts and shirt-waists, admonished Theodore that it was time for action.

"Psyche!" he stammered.

With a little scream she darted toward the door; recognized him as he emerged from the closet; noted his paleness; turned back, her hand on her breast, and a quick palpitation in the "V" of her gown, like the heart of a snared robin. Yet she was the least excited of the twain. Her alarm ceased with her recognition of him; for this boy had shown himself one to be trusted. The sense of escape and secrecy which she had associated with him from their first curious meeting at the robber's cabin in the dunes, returned.

"My robber," said she, in a half whisper. "O, I'm so glad."

"Psyche," said he, "when you say you are glad—"

He pulled up short with a lump in his throat, unable to pass the Rubicon between strangers.

"Oh, I'm so glad you aren't dashed to pieces!" she cried. "I've seen you falling, falling, falling, in my dreams, and never alighting! But evidently you did!"

"Yes," said he, "quite safe! But how came you here?"

"Oh, I live here," said she. "But how did you know? Or did you just happen? Shall I hide

you? I'll never betray you, never! no matter what they say you've done!"

"You—belong—here?" repeated Theodore wonderingly. "Here? You—you live here?"

"Yes," said she hurriedly. "With my uncle. I couldn't endure the Shaynes and Silberbergs any longer. Why, the way they did just *drives* people to crime! And if you did anything, it was in open war with the officers, and not by stealth as the Shaynes and Silberbergs do. I told them so to their teeth—only you ought to reform and all that, you know. And I couldn't bear Aunt Marie any more," here the voice trembled, "though everybody will say I'm ungrateful, and all that. And General Carson's family are all my relatives in the world, except the Shaynes. And this is their plantation—my uncle that I never saw lives here—and I came to him. I hope he won't hate me! I'd rather not have to ask him to shelter a robber the *very* first thing; and so I hope you aren't pursued. But if you are, I'll hide you before I'll see you caught. There!"

Mr. Carson reeled back against the wall, drew his hands across his eyes, and looked again. She seemed to be there still, rather nearer than before, hands clasped in adorable anxiety, divinest pity in her eyes.

"I am in no danger," said he. "Pardon me for intruding here. It was by mistake. Permit me to

ask the honor of an interview at a more convenient time and place."

Mr. Carson of Carson's Landing, the last of the Carsons, now spoke—with some approach to manner and form as by tradition required.

"Oh, I'm so glad you are—are safe," she cried. "I want you to stay to luncheon. I can't give you any quail broth, nor strong remedies, but—"

"Thank you," he returned. "I shall esteem it an honor."

This was nearer to the conventional than anything yet. She gathered her gown about her throat, looked about at the room—and blushed. Luncheon with this girl-faced boy with the jetty mustache—compliments—they did not harmonize with the trunks spilling lingerie, the white counterpaned bed.

"Perhaps," she went on, "if you really aren't afraid of being caught—you might go away, now—to the parlor, I mean."

Carson turned scarlet, bowed grandly, and walked toward the door.

"And," said she, blushing still more rosily, "if you are quite sure you don't mind—please leave me—my corset!"

Mr. Carson looked down at his hand, saw with unspeakable horror that he had held, during the whole colloquy, the *Psyche* mold, dropped it

hastily, and rushed incontinently from the room in an agony of mind quite out of proportion to the real damage done by his involuntary act. He did not run and drown himself in Fish River, but when he tried to divine what Virginia's theory as to his purpose in taking possession of the garment in the first place must be, he felt like doing so rather than meeting her at luncheon. It was a terrible situation.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE MARGIN OF SAFETY

“O F course, it’s a shock,” said Miss Suarez,
“to find you—”

“I am sorry,” said Theodore, “to have shocked you by being visible. I—”

“Oh, now,” said Miss Suarez. “Try to supply ellipses—and those things. I meant, to find you, so—”

“So incapable of—so lacking in the qualities of—of—of—”

“You’re gradually getting closer to it,” commented Virginia. “Our danger, where there is nobody hanging about to sort of mitigate—no, not that—to—to—”

“To absorb and diffuse the ‘shock,’ ” suggested the engineer.

“The very word,” said she. “Why, uncle, you’re clever—once in a while—”

“Thank you, Miss Virginia! I—”

“Don’t interrupt, please. Our danger here in the wilderness, is that of not catching the shades

of expression, the nuances one has to have ground into one's system with regard to one's friends—if nuances can be ground into anything—and that we'll misunderstand, and fight, and pull hair needlessly. Doesn't that cover the case?"

"While a very concise statement of some of the dangers," said he, "I don't think it does, quite. But you were saying I lack some quality. Please go on."

"The quality of unclehood," said she. "You don't create the rôle. I suppose my image of a charming young robber—for you're not bad looking, uncle—you know?"

Theodore blushed, but strove to keep on a high and avuncular plateau of platitudes.

"Piracy and yeggism, and those things, are *so* incompatible with one's only surviving live-withable uncle," said Virginia.

"In *The Babes in the Wood*," said Theodore, "the uncle was quite that sort."

"I thought you were going to make another application," said she. "The odd thing with us—I like living with you immensely—is that, you seem a Babe in the Woods more than an uncle, and I the other."

"I scarcely think—," began Mr. Carson.

"Oh, I know you're venerable," she assured him, "or you wouldn't have invented so much. But after

tumbling out of that crazy helicopter at your feet, and being treated—you know what I mean—and being put to bed after that potion; and read to about dynamos—that was quite uncleish—and your carrying me home, and going north in the *Roc*, and acting so lofty and silly—and dear!—with Silberberg, until his beaky old nose bled, and jumping off the ship miles above a rocky and barbed and spiky country in the night and storm—and I feeling so superior, as one does to a brigand—and rather making a hero of you—and then to find you my uncle, with a little, silky, kid's mustache—isn't there an incongruity? Surely you can understand—"

"Perfectly," said Theodore, ignoring the frivolous things. "What I wish you to understand, is how honored I am to be your guardian—even though I don't deserve it."

"Oh, but you do!" said she. "You began babying me when I tumbled down. And if you *aren't* a Methuselah, there's the Carson blood, isn't there?"

"There's the Carson blood," assented Theodore uneasily. "And the trust that blood alone couldn't confer."

"And the relationship must stand in the place of years," said Virginia. "For I can't go back to the Shaynes. I'm afraid they'll find me, and make me—"

"You shall not go back!" said Theodore. "Never!"

"My, my!" said Virginia. "How fierce, uncle! And now, let's go fishing."

Yes, Theodore had fallen! Fleeing the best bedroom, in which Aunt Chloe had established Miss Suarez, he had unmoored his launch for flight, but, reconsidering, had demanded of Chloe an explanation—not of the changed lodgings, but of the incomprehensible mystery of the presence, under a statement that she lived there, of Shayne's niece, who had so stirred his life by falling from aloft to his feet, nameless to him save for the cognomen of Psyche.

"She's come to live with we-all," said Aunt Chloe, assuming in him the chivalrous fidelity of all southern gentlemen to their women relatives. "She's kin o' ou'n."

Theodore gasped. He was not aware that he had any kin, to say nothing of kinship with this girl from New York, niece to Shayne, and whose southern blood seemed her only claim to consanguinity with him.

"There must be some mistake," said he. "How can she be related to me, Chloe?"

"W'y, yo' some kine o' uncle to huh," replied Chloe. "Huh mothah was a daughtah to Ole Gin'ral Cahson. She married Lee Suarez, and

died. Miss Ginnie knowed about us, an' when huh aunt throwed huh off'n the aiah-ship foh stan'nin' up foh you, she come hyah, ez she had a raght to, suh."

"But she didn't know I was here?" Theodore suggested.

"Oh, law, no," replied Aunt Chloe. "She don't know yo' Mistah Carson yit, onless you tole huh."

"But, Aunt Chloe, we aren't any kin to old General Carson, are we? And I'm no uncle to this young lady, am I?"

Aunt Chloe drew herself up in indignation.

"I reckon yo' paw frail you out good, ef he hyah you say that!" said she. "Hev Ah been wuckin' foh po' whites all these yeahs? Yo' sho as clus as uncle. Yo' paw knowed he was a Cahson. Doan talk to me!"

"What have you told her about this relationship?" said Theodore.

"She done knowed all erbout it," said Chloe.

"Did she know how father—how nobody thinks we are any kin to the general, and—"

"Who you mean by nobody?" queried Chloe. "Ah reckon we some kin, o' ou' name wouldn't be Cahson, would it? Ah tuk huh in as a Cahson. If you tuk huh in yo' ahms, an' squenched huh teahs, I reckon you wouldn't be bringin' up these heavy arguments."

Ah, how close a shot did Chloe make when she used this plea. If he could only have held her in his arms! But she would think of him as a clodhopper—she must. If he had but gone more into society, instead of grinding all the time—at aëro-nefs, and the like. And now, he was irretrievably at a disadvantage, by his gross misbehavior in the bedroom—standing like an idiot, she deeming him a fugitive, holding in his hand—oh, the enormity of it!—her corset. The unpardonable sin, if ever one committed it!

Nevertheless, he sent Aunt Chloe to inform Miss Suarez that the robber of the South Beach, and the stowaway of the *Roc*, was no other than the man with whom, in a touching confidence in the old chivalry which regards an unprotected woman relative as a sacred charge, and lays the obligation of gratitude on the man rendering the service, she had come to live.

Uncle Theodore was stately, ceremonious, and with due allowance for sundry blushes when Miss Virginia emitted a little giggle, promptly smothered in her napkin, quite grand in his demeanor at luncheon. He formally kissed Virginia's hand—and when she told of her need, of her reliance on the Carson fidelity, he yielded to the temptation without a moment's hesitation. He became her uncle, entered calmly upon the deception, oblivious

of the vast consequences involved, or of the real right and wrong of the matter. She trusted him, she made claims upon him; and she was not to be pained by explanations. He was only a boy, you know.

"I have the honah," said he, "to drink your health—the health of the jewel and the hope of the Carson family."

She rose, as if at the formal signal for withdrawal, took both his hands, and kissed him on the forehead. There were tears in her eyes.

"Thank you, Uncle Theodore," said she; and went out slowly, without looking at him. He stood there, quite motionless, until he heard her walking about in the upper hall.

He was wrong, of course; but there were exculpating circumstances. The situation, almost immediately, however, approached the impossible. In the first place, Theodore had expected to make only a day's halt, to push on, get his motors, and go to the South Beach—where Captain Harrod wondered at his long absence—install his engines, and fly north, where Craighead was organizing companies at a rate that would have dazed Mr. Carson, had he not been already dazed.

The first day, he sent orders for the shipment of the engines, and began to provide better equipment for the house. He brought, as a companion for

Miss Suarez, an elderly widow, Mrs. Stott, who was addicted to the writing of poems of a love-lorn nature. Virginia's opinion of her new uncle's worldly wisdom rose at this provision for chaperonage; but she gave him too much credit. He merely thought of Virginia's becoming lonely.

He could not depart until sure that "Miss Virginia" would not feel slighted should he push on. Every morning opened new avenues of service. They began reading a book—and they had to finish it. She was fond of fishing. She wanted to explore the upper reaches of the river; and they spent long days on the stream. Mrs. Stott was afraid of the water—and still more afraid of Virginia—and they went alone, while that good lady wrote verses and mailed them to heartless publishers.

"How can she do such things?" said Virginia, one day.

"Why not?" inquired Theodore. "They sound a good deal like—like the other poets."

"But she's so—so puddingy!" urged Virginia. "And she has a mustache!"

"That," said he, advancing the spark, "would not seem material. Shakespeare had one."

Virginia was trailing her hand through the water, and looking at the bubbles.

"A great engineer," said she, "but you don't shine in literary criticism."

"Was it that kind?" he queried.

Virginia drew in her hand. The implied rebuke stung her.

"Of course, I'm a nasty little cat," said she, "to find fault. But you are not to jump on me like that, unkie. I won't have it. Now, take your old big handkerchief and wipe my hand. It's awfully cold with the wind blowing on it."

Theodore complied, and held the hand a moment—to warm it. She drew it away gently, and with a smile.

"We'll have Mrs. Stott go home," said he. "I should have known—"

"Now, please, uncle," said she, "don't be mad! I want her. And I'll try to resist her inflamed sentiments. She doesn't bother a bit—I'll say that for her."

So Mrs. Stott stayed, a most unsafe duenna under the circumstances. And Theodore stayed also. There were so many things to do. Craighead's telegrams came in from the east, still Delphic in significance. One reported that New York was practically "surrounded;" another, that the country would soon be "gridironed." Theodore was deaf to voices from the outer world. A letter from Harold, proving that the news of his return had reached the cabin in the dunes, lay on the old escritoire one morning. Theodore inserted a paper-knife in

the envelop, half cut it open—and saw Virginia's dress glimmering outside. The half-opened letter fell to the desk and Uncle Theodore leaped out on the veranda.

She came up to the gallery, and leaned her chin on the rail.

"Morning, uncle!" said she. "Have you slept well?"

"Fine."

"You don't look it," said she. "Your eyes look dull. You devote too much time to business while your family is asleep, don't you?"

"Uncle" thought of the unopened letter, the unanswered telegrams, the neglected business, Mr. Waddy's money, the uncompleted aëronef, the sleepless nights, tormented by—not business, at all, not business! Decidedly not!

"I slept too soundly," said he. "What's the program for to-day?"

She wanted some magnolia blossoms. Uncle Theodore thought there might be some down about Week's Bay, where they came early.

"Put on your hat," said he. "Have Chloe pack up luncheon, and we'll go down."

"Done!" cried she. "You're the best of uncles! Let's to breakfast! Can't we catch a speckled trout?"

"We ought to get all we want," said Theodore.

"And cook him over a fire?"

"Certainly!" said Theodore. "And soft-shelled crabs—we'll have a great day!"

"Happy, happy youth," said Mrs. Stott—and sighed.

"Uncle Theodore," said Virginia, "is neither youthful nor happy—he must have a nerve specialist or quit spilling his coffee!"

"Some pangs are more delicious than joy," said Mrs. Stott, scrutinizing Theodore until he was half wild. "Pangs of spring, youth and sweet fellowship!"

Theodore ate wolfishly, and drank great quantities of coffee to show that he was in fine fettle—quite unable to pick up his end of the conversation. It *was* youth and spring and sweet fellowship, though the items made him sick of Mrs. Stott's table-talk. He wanted the river and Psyche, knowing that he ought to go and leave her. Every night he vowed to go next morning—and laid plans for another day with her.

It was maddening. She brought him dresses, gloves and hats for criticism, and confided to him the state of her wardrobe. She reckoned the time before she must have any more dresses, told him what her stockings and underclothing had cost, and asked him if he didn't think such dreadful prices absurd.

"You know about some of the things," said she

roguishly. "I thought once that you must be a collector of corsets!"

Uncle Theodore writhed in agony, and said he was sure she had no clothing too expensive or too fine—well aware that, at the prices named, one month's purchases would bankrupt him.

"I've more jewelry than I need," said she. "I can sell that, you know."

"No, no!" protested Theodore. "Never!"

"But some of it," said she, "I don't want. Let me show you some perfectly absurd things!"

Rings, brooches, bracelets, a pearl necklace—none very absurd; then two bands of gold, embellished with Cupids and Venuses, cunningly linked to expand or contract with the elastic tape through them, and each clasped with clustered diamonds that dartled blue and red. Theodore took them up and admired them—for they were very lovely.

"How beautiful!" he cried. "How I should like to see them on you!"

"What good would that do you, silly?" said she. "I don't believe you know what they are!"

For once, the blush was Virginia's.

"They're bracelets, aren't they?" queried Theodore. "Or are they necklaces—or girdles?"

"Do you mean to say—?" She stopped and in desperation at his ignorance added plumply—"They're my Sunday-go-to-meeting garters."

Theodore stretched them to their full extent, not quite in possession of the idea; and looked at her as if in incredulity. Snatching them she ran to her room, really put to flight—she who had discussed things quite as intimate with dozens of men, without a quiver of the eyelash. But *they*, she said, weren't babies; and it was like talking ailments to a physician. But this boy-uncle—he really was the most disturbing creature! She felt put in an indelicate position by the immaculate character-sheet of the young savage. While he—he felt his skin freeze and burn alternately at that awful speech, beyond pardon. She had left him in anger. She would never speak to him again—she under his protection by his own deceit. If man ever was bound to suffer death rather than utter a syllable of respectful love, even, not to mention disrespect. Somehow, he must atone; and how to apologize without grave offense was a question sweated over at the escritoire in unavailing woe—until she peeped from behind the door and said:

"I can sell the absurd things, even if you don't know what they are. They obstruct the circulation, anyhow!"

Theodore tore up his *apologia* and they went after berries.

No wonder that it took much coffee to clear his eyes before the voyage for magnolia blooms. He

had walked the hall in his stocking feet for hours; kissed Virginia's door once or twice; and hurried to bed where he enacted enough two-character vaudeville sketches to have filled all the circuits in the world. In all these the avuncular relation was explained away, in eloquence which brought tears to the eyes of Uncle Theodore, the one dispassionate auditor. "I have deceived you," the man-actor would say. "But if ever man had highest claims for pardon, I am he! I loved you so, Virginia, I could not send you away! Will not love win pardon for deceit?" Sometimes the woman-character scorned him, and he died of a broken heart; while, oftener, she whispered that she must punish him, every day of their lives—by staying with him. Then he died of joy. So there was a new leading man at every performance but he was always Theodore Carson; and Uncle Theodore always shed copious tears on the pillow.

At a ferry *en route* Virginia kissed a little girl and called her "sweetheart." Virginia wanted to see some young woodpeckers, and almost wept when the one Theodore got out would not go back into the nest, but fluttered away, crying pitifully. They got some magnolia buds which the "creole" negro girl said would surely open, adding that "all the young couples came for them on Sundays." Virginia encountered a "spreadin' adder" ten inches

long, and ran to Theodore, gathering her skirts about her plump calves in terror; and he calmed and comforted her on a high and fatherly level.

That was the maddening thing. Everything was maddening; but crisis and explosion lay in the fact that, while keeping her within reach, he had palsied the arm to reach her withal; that he could drop no hint of those nightly visions; that, while their relation allowed affection, they shut out love. This life gave to him revelations mostly hidden from lovers, and vouchsafed to fathers, brothers and husbands only; but he was cut off from the endearments of an uncle, even. He was a tiger-cub licking his master's hand, and feeling the jungle hunger for it. All that day the cub had been on the very verge of devouring somebody. It was appalling. All unconscious of her parlous state, Virginia took his arm under the screening row of cedars, told him what a delightful day she had had, and squeezed his arm while she said it.

Something may have warned her that this was a ticklish thing with so young and inexperienced an uncle, for she dropped his arm and ran gaily toward the house, looking back and stepping lightly like a kid—when she trod in a hollow, and fell in a heap on the Bermuda grass. Theodore found her with her ankle gripped in her hands, and her lips tight to hold back a cry. A hurried question, a cheery

reply cut in two with a twinge of pain, and he picked her up. She threw her arms about his neck to ease the burden. Alas! it made it heavier! The fervor of his embrace did the ankle no good, and nearly crushed poor Virginia. The color rose slowly to her brow, as he set her down on the veranda, and stood over her, breathing hard. She rose on the sound foot and tried the other carefully.

"It isn't bad at all," said she. "I can almost walk on it."

Taking off the shoe, she held the little foot in her hand, examining the ankle critically.

"Do you think it's swelling?" she asked.

Theodore tenderly squeezed the shapely ankle, and rose to his feet.

"I don't know," said he. "I—*Virginia*—"

He had seized her hand, and was looking at her with none of the impersonality of the surgeon or physician. She did not take her hand away . . . He dropped it, and ran—ran—toward the river. It was very rude; yet she harbored no bitterness. She had Chloe bandage her foot, went to her room, took down Theodore's college pennant, restored some stitches to it, and communed with her magnolia blooms, pressing them to her cheek and lips. She called them "Poor dears! poor dears!" All very curious; for it ruins magnolia petals to be touched. Perhaps that is why they were poor dears; flowers

and people are rather pitifully interesting when so delicately made that it ruins them to be touched. But why did she put the pennant under her pillow?

Theodore was absent at dinner, without apology; and the women were in bed before he stole to his room, and lay tossing again. Desperate, he rose and went to the library, lighted a lamp, saw the still sealed letter from Captain Harrod, and slashed it open as if it had been the breast of his mortal foe.

"I hear," it ran, "that you are back south. I hope you can come right soon. The engines is here for ten days. I am right clos' run fer grub, and need sleep. The man that lost the flying thing the young lady come in, is back. He is right crazy, Mr. Theodore, from losing his machine. He keeps trying to git into the shed, and yells he is rooned, and tore off a plank, and I have to stay awake, and am about all in. They is a lot of letters and telegrams at Palmetto Beach. Hoping this will find you ready to start, I remain yours truly,

"CROCKER HARROD."

Theodore struck himself on the breast and started to his feet, determined to flee to his work, and from the dangers of his unclehood. Trembling with excitement he attempted a note to Virginia. Wizner at the cabin, messages at the Beach, meant danger

and disgrace if he neglected his task longer, infamy if he toyed on with temptation. He told Chloe through her door that he had been called away, and that she must explain to the ladies. He hastily packed a bag, ran down and unmoored the launch, and fled down the river at a speed made foolhardy by the darkness. Emerging into Mobile Bay, he stood toward Palmetto Beach, his eyes straight before him, steering with automatic accuracy. Only one thing roused him from his trance—a white object lying on the gunwale, which he picked up and placed in his note-book—the dropped petal of a magnolia bloom.

CHAPTER IX

MR. WIZNER SECURES A COMMAND

CAPTAIN HARROD, dignified, barefooted, soft-voiced, unkempt, kept his lonely vigil on the white straight-edge of beach that lay from Fort Morgan to Perdido Bay. All was of sand, sandy. The sand-colored sandpipers skittered across the beach before the breezes; pelicans in sober beach-gray deliberately skimmed the cottony combers bursting on the outer sand-bar; porpoises leaped and spouted in terror when caught in the receding tide among the sandy shallows near the shore; and once in a while an evil-eyed shark gloomed cruelly (like a spot of darker sand with cold little eyes) from the green water beyond reach of the fisherman's gig. To the unlettered man for seventy years familiar with such things, however, they wax uninteresting.

So one may understand why Captain Harrod, ignoring landscape and seascape, devoted himself to the study of tracks of all sorts; tracks of foxes examining the beach for turtles' eggs, months ahead

of time; talon-marks of opossums and raccoons prowling about for crabs, mice and birds' eggs; hoof-marks of wild hogs, rooting over the mast under the scrub-oaks; "crawls" of alligators, made in nightly journeys between Freshwater Lake and deep holes in the pools among the dunes; long scratchy claw-scores of herons from early morning minuets on the beach; trails of men going up and down the sparsely-traveled highway of the strand; and the footprints of one in particular, who lurked about and seemed to be thinking of the cabin and its inmates. Yes, this Bedouin sand-science can tell thoughts by tracks. Tracks in the sand were to Harrod book, newspaper, telegraph and circulating library. He knew the language of sand. He knew several things that this man might be. A deserter from the Fort, perhaps, though such an one would have been likely to be descried by the corporal's guard in the scouting air-ship, and should have slunk inland by the dense hummocks of Bon Secour. Or it might be some one connected with the revenue service.

This hypothesis should, of course, have given the captain no uneasiness. He was an exemplary fisherman, with boat on shore, and "tresmires" drying on their stakes, fishing formally on fine days for red-fish, Spanish mackerel and pompano. His cabin was "Harrod's fishing camp"—nothing more. What had

revenue officers to do with such humble piscatorial headquarters as these? *They* should not care about Theodore's hidden invention. The air-ships keeping their lanes, east, west, north and south paid no attention; and, if *they* were not interested, why need the revenues bother? The humble establishment had no connection with the world save through fish—as any revenue officer should have known.

And yet—one day the captain rearranged his drying nets, solicitous as to their draping; and soon a slimy sea-monster stuck a blunt nose out from the water at about the five-fathom contour line, opened a rectangular mouth, and flicked a square red tongue like an angry snake, until Captain Harrod, on the highest dune, opened a brilliant red handkerchief with a Chautauqua salute, and wiped his nose elaborately. Whereupon the sea-monster sank beneath the brine, and no one but the porpoises and sharks might say where it went. What took place that night was concealed by darkness. If Captain Harrod was busy carrying packages ashore until morning, he came by them honestly, no doubt.

An examination of the popular novels or periodicals of the past—say of the era of that president whose Christian name our Theodore bears—will be rewarded by a realization of prophecy gone wrong as to the influence on smuggling of aerial navigation. It must bring free trade, they said. Ships

navigating the air could land their cargoes anywhere, every acre being a potential port of entry. Yet, the air-ships gave the custom-house people an astonishingly small amount of trouble. Air-ships were so conspicuous; their loads were necessarily so light; the system of reporting them by wireless from Canada, Mexico and the islands was so efficient; the listing and registry regulations were so perfect; the risk of loss was so great; the perils of trans-oceanic flights were so prohibitive; and the coöperation between nations was so hearty that smuggling had little aid from aëronautical success, such as it was.

Very unexpectedly, it was the submarine that drove the "revenues" wild and filled the law-books with Draconian statutes. No trade ever grew faster. The submarines were shady characters, but they had pretensions to legitimate trades—like other dubious individuals; and it was their business to be lost to sight for long periods of time. The storms which kept in harbor the scouts of the law offered the submarines opportunities, and submarine can not pursue submarine. The boat-fish dived beneath the tempest, rose on some lonely coast like this by appointment with some Captain Harrod sitting like a bewhiskered bit of wreckage on the dunes. Driven to open lawlessness by detection, some of the devilish craft embraced open piracy, restored to the seas

a flavor of the seventeenth century, and waxed fat on spoils. Passengers on transatlantic liners learned to grow pale at equivocal objects in the sea, in expectation of the submarine's effective "stand and deliver," backed by torpedoes in place of the time-honored pistol. Maintaining relations with slimy sea-monsters was a fairly safe and lucrative diversion; but a mighty ticklish thing to be found out in. Hence, perhaps, Captain Harrod's profound interest in tracks, his nervousness at the rustling of the red-brown jorees under the scrub. Their whistles, too, sounded startlingly like human signals. He searched the thickets, in such cases, until he found his feathered friend, or established the absence of enemy.

It was thus that he found Mr. Wizner. The sea-monster's visit had occurred the day before, and the captain had slept late, and was taking a morning's stroll to see that rain and wind had quite obliterated all traces of a landing he knew of. Just over the first hillock he heard one of those startling, human-sounding rustlings in the leaves, with no joree whistle to explain it. Captain Harrod began peering into the thicket, with a stricture gripping his throat.

There was a dense growth of the rheumatic little old oaks on the inshore side of the hill, casting a deep shade; and in the damp hollow a thick clump of palmettoes—an ideal spot for a hiding-place. A

joree flicked out of the deepest shadow, perched for a moment on the rosemary and gave that mellow, human-sounding whistle. Relieved, the captain stepped boldly forward and trod on Mr. Wizner's head as he slept with mosquito-bar over his face, in a comfortable sleeping-bag. The inventor struggled forth with a wild yell, and began running. Captain Harrod, another Old Man of the Sea, leaped upon his back, bore him to the ground, and sat on him, panting. Wizner looked up at him in abject terror.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" cried he. "I know you! I know you!"

Captain Harrod was puzzled, but relieved, to note that the man did not act like an officer. In making the arrest, the captain had acted on impulse and was glad that he had caught no revenue. The man was quite as clearly not a deserter. His whine, his rolling eyes, his scraps of nonsense, all aroused doubts as to his sanity.

"You're one of 'em!" groaned Wizner, pounding his head on the sand. "Let me up! You and Shayne and Silberberg and the girl—all linked in together to rob me of my helicopter! You've got it hid there! You've ruined me! Kill me if you want to! Let me up!"

Captain Harrod slowly released him, and both rose, facing each other.

"Ah'm raght sorry, suh," said the captain, "that Ah trod on yo' haid. Ah didn't see you, suh."

Wizner approached the captain, took him by the shirt, looked about cunningly, and whispered in his ear.

"Tell me where my helicopter is!" said he wheedlingly. "It'll be all right, if you do! And I'll make you rich!"

"Oh," said the fisherman. "Yo' the flyin'-machine man, sho'. Aftah the young lady tumbled out when we hauled in on the painter, it fetched adrift an' went out to sea, you know, suh?"

"I put every cent I had into it," said Wizner. "It was worth a million. Give it to me!"

This argument lasted days and weeks; for Wizner saw that the fisherman's hospitality would not permit the driving away of a poor wrecked being, such as he seemed to be. So the sleeping-bag was placed on the veranda, and Wizner whined and glared; and whenever detected in an attempt to enter the shed, he had the severest sort of paroxysm, demanded his helicopter back, raved at Shayne, and refused to eat for fear of being poisoned.

Such was the state of things when Carson left Virginia Suarez, the girl who, after their first curious meeting, had come to him, not knowing who he was, save that she believed him to be her sole male

relative, and whom he had weakly allowed to remain, believing herself his niece. He was needed at the camp. It was impossible longer to refrain from violating the supposed relationship, so he appeared at the cabin one day, white and determined-looking, reread a pocketful of letters and telegrams, and said with no salutation:

"Where are those engines?"

"In the shed, suh," replied the captain. "Ah done unpacked 'em, suh."

Carson unlocked and opened the door from the cabin to the shed, let in light through a hatch in the roof, and for two hours studied the engines, his eyes lighting from time to time with a serious half-smile. Four powerful motors, they were, each of fifty horse-power, with eight cylinders, and so light that he picked them up with ease. Down the long shed a huge thing, like a great dragon-fly, lay in its cradle, with cheap launch-motors for experimental purposes in the engine pit. Theodore called to the captain to tear them out. Once more on the veranda, he noted the sleeping-bag stretched from column to column.

"What's this?" he asked.

"That's what the crazy man sleeps in," replied the captain.

Carson examined it with care, looked at the pneumatic mattress, saw the completeness and good

condition of the outfit, and turned grimmer of face than ever.

"Who turned it inside out to air it?" he queried.

"He did, suh."

"Did he ever do that before?"

"Allus does it, suh."

"What's this?" asked Theodore, picking something up.

"Thing he lays ove' his face, suh, to fend off the sand-flies. Had it ove' him when Ah done found him."

"Where was that?" asked Carson.

The captain explained the discovery of Wizner, and the preceding mystery of his tracks.

"When did you first see the tracks?" asked Carson.

"Raght soon afte' you went no'th, suh," answered the captain.

"Kept out of sight, and made no outcry about the helicopter, until you kicked him out of the palmettoes?" went on Carson.

"Yes, suh," replied the witness.

"Always careful to protect his face when he sleeps?"

"Yes, suh."

"Good appetite?"

"Yes, suh, he sho' has."

"Tries to get into the shed with the aëronef?"

"All the tahm, suh," replied the captain. "But when he got the plank off, he said the devils done druv him out with hot fohks, suh, so he didn't go in."

Carson laughed unsympathetically.

"Where is this systematic lunatic?" he inquired.

"That's him a-comin' ove' the ridge, thah," replied the captain. "He spends a heap o' tahm lookin' afte' his lost chickananny."

Mumbling to himself, and shaking his fists at vacancy, Wizner approached; but the start, showing guilt and embarrassment, which he gave on seeing Carson, violated all the conventions of lunacy. Theodore studied him with narrowed eyes, as he began making passes in the air, as if in the exorcism of evil spirits, or carrying out a physical-culture system.

"Another one!" he moaned. "All the devils'll be here soon—and then—and then—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that!"

For some reason the young man was furious where the captain had been pitiful.

"Take this stuff of yours," said Carson, "and get out of this! Understand?"

Wizner took down the sleeping-bag, lashed it up with the deflated mattress, and threw it down, rolling his eyes, and opening and shutting his hands.

"You're all linked in together!" he wailed, sitting

on a bench, and feebly pounding his head against the column. "You're the head devil! You pulled her down by the painter. You stole her! Give me my million or give her back—"

Carson took him by the throat, choked him purple, and banged his head against the post until the whining became an outcry of real pain.

"Like cures like," said Carson. "And pounding cures pounding! Clear out, now!"

Wizner moved away slowly, but turned at a safe distance, his eyes blazing.

"I'll fix you, you young fool!" he snarled. "You think you're an engineer! I'll show you!"

"Go!" said Carson. "Before I fix you so you can't—*you snake!*"

Captain Harrod stood transfixed at this terrible breach of hospitality on Mr. Theodore's part, puzzled by Mr. Wizner's sudden sanity as he paused between the dunes, ankle-deep in sand, and addressed Carson.

"I'll fix you, good and plenty," he said. "No man can choke and pound me and live!"

For the first time, Carson's face relaxed into a real smile.

"It's been a great thing for you," he flung at the man in the sand. "See how clear your mind is!"

"And you'll never get that mechanical devil's darning-needle of yours to fly," went on Wizner.

"It'll turn turtle in the first puff. And if it does fly, you'll have competition. You sliver-built son of a—"

Carson leaped from the veranda; but Captain Harrod was between them.

"Don't kill him, suh!" he exclaimed. "He may not be quaht raght yit."

"You old fool!" sneered Wizner. "You damned old smuggling fool! You'll get yours, too!"

He disappeared over the hillock, as a great revulsion of feeling passed through the old man's being. He felt wronged: Wizner suddenly became an enemy, capable of infinite harm.

"Miste' Theodo'," said he, in low, slow tones, "Ah have jist altogethe' done lost confidence in that man! He's sho' not straight, Mr. Theodo'!"

Carson had not heard, or had not comprehended Wizner's allusion to smuggling. In a belated frenzy of resolution, energized like a fully-charged battery, he donned his working clothes, and began the installation of the new engines which were to make good his promises to himself, to Craighead and Waddy, and to a world which had long awaited the command of the air—or to add the name of Theodore Carson to the list headed by Dædalus and Son, and in which the tragic end of Lieutenant Selfridge was less known than the comic mishaps of Darius Green. It was a crisis—for Theodore, for Craig-

head and Waddy—and for the world. Love! A mere illusion!

Wizner walked toward Fort Morgan, his teeth set, his fists striking vicious blows at nothing, nearer insane than he had ever been before. He hated Carson most violently, now, instead of sourly and inactively as before. His inventive genius was genuine and respectable, but he was insanely jealous, refusing to admit the correctness of any one else's ideas as to anything pertaining to aviation—and yet, the great dragon-fly in the shed had impressed him. It was so workmanlike, so trim—so poised; and the great wing surfaces beating the air in sections, while the wing itself was stationary, were eloquent of power in lifting and driving. He was impressed and immensely depressed. He had been so sanguine of his helicopter, so ambitious, with Shayne's money, to build another and better one, and conquer fortune; and to have this young sprout, with his logarithms and his "new knowledge" rob him of Shayne's attention and Shayne's money! If the fool girl had only not whisked herself into the air, and all but into eternity, and fallen two thousand feet into this young devil's arms! And, then, who had butted in, got Shayne away from him, gone north in the same air-ship with him, had all the chances in the world to hypnotize him, and was now back, with money for the engines that had been for

long months waiting to be paid for, the cock of the walk, choking and pounding the head of a better man and a better engineer? Carson—the young hound, with Shayne's money, with Shayne's influence—stolen from him! He would fix this fellow, good and plenty! He would stamp his face into the ground! He would crush his white teeth out and send them down his throat. He would kill him, in some slow, horrible way, if he waited until he was a hundred years old. Wizner's burning heat was so much more mental than physical that he scarcely felt the cool breeze that rolled in the vast volumes of lashing white water, and piled huge drifts of dry foam on the white beach. He plodded along unweariedly, making toward the crossing to the lagoon. Once in a while he gazed off to the north from a dune-top, saw that he had not yet passed the *Hinterland* of marsh and alligator-wallow, and walked on, the roar of the ocean in his ears, and the growl and snarl of vengeance in his brain.

Seated on a log he looked over his drawings of Carson's air-ship. He could understand the method of making so much wing-surface rotary, and the abandonment of the screw principle for that of the old feathering wheel; he understood how the clustered gearings along the dragon-fly's back could set these beating paddles at any angle or hold them firm for gliding, or make them strike down, forward,

or backward. These things meant perfect control—save in one thing: how could so great a craft be kept from overturning? It was too big to be balanced by feeling, like a bicycle or the Wright machines. It would turn turtle; he would bet on that.

"I'd give a hundred dollars to see it," snarled Wizner. "To see him fall out of the fool thing, breaking his bones. And before he croaked, to stamp in his mouth, and feel his teeth go! Damn him!"

But that mysterious glass globe in the center of the craft, with so many little gyroscopes beautifully mounted to run *in vacuo*? This was the mystery to Wizner. It looked like a round, compact, clear brain. And yet, those eight gyroscopes—set in pairs, like the right and left halves of the brain, were too light to hold the great *aéronef* stable in the air.

"If they were heavy enough to balance her, she couldn't lift the weight. What are they for? There's deviltry in that glass globe. I wish I'd smashed it!"

He struck off north, now, among the little ancient oaks, the rosemary, and the bastard-spruce. His trail ran to the left of a black pool, wimpled by tadpoles, as by falling rain; but fate turned him to the right, past a clump of palmettoes, the tall huckleberry-bushes lashing him with fragrant bloom. He stooped to pass under them, paused, and let the

boughs return without a rustle to their position. Under the bushes lay the light, portable, telescope go-devil of a submarine; and under it a man.

Wizner smiled, and started forward; paused; retreated out of sight, and stood as if working out some abstruse problem; flushed as if revived by wine; hurried away to the lagoon; drew a boat from concealment; and rowed rapidly over to a hotel, half a mile off on the north shore.

The submarine's boat had come ashore in the night, and her crew were awaiting, with many curses, no doubt, a sea in which they could reëmbark. The one man was sleeping away the absence of his mate. But why was this of interest to Wizner? Unless he were a revenue spy, they were apt to be people of whom it was better to know little than much.

At the desk of the hotel Wizner got paper, envelopes and a bit of copying carbon, sat down, wrote a letter, and addressed it to himself, in care of the chief of police of Mobile, to be turned over to the collector of the port, and by him opened if not called for by a certain date. He carefully copied the address of the original upon the envelop of the carbon copy, took them both to the clerk, handed him a fine cigar, and asked him as a favor to certify on the back of the copy that he, the clerk, had personally placed in the mail the original, addressed precisely as was the copy.

"Don't know what your game is, old man," said the clerk, "but I hope you get away with it all right."

Mr. Wizner rowed straight back, and made his way to the boat under the bushes. The man was sitting up, now, smoking. Wizner walked into camp jauntily.

"Hello, Faville," said he; "ain't you pretty near lost?"

Faville started and dropped his hand to his hip; but changed his attitude and shook hands cordially.

"No," said he, "but you are, I should think. Where'd you drop from?"

"You're ashore at a bad time," said Wizner. "Where's the *Stickleback*?"

"Oh," replied Faville, "I'm not on her any longer."

"Funny you brought away her boat!" said Wizner. "And her captain, too!"

This latter remark was evoked by the arrival of a third person, wiry, smooth-shaven, with a dark face, a dead-black eye, a straight line of mouth, three fingers missing from his right hand, giving the impression that he was perpetually pointing at something, and thin, palpitant nostrils, like those of a trapped rabbit. He came lazily in, and dropped to the ground.

"Hello, Wizner," said he.

"Hello, Captain Reagan," replied Wizner. "Can you give me a snack?"

"Sure," said Reagan. "Let's eat, Faville; I've got a grobeck for dinner."

The "grobeck" was a big, toothsome bird, like a bittern, in appearance. While the meal was cooking Wizner sat joking, like a man enjoying himself, while the others grew more and more taciturn. A couple of bottles of excellent wine washed down the meal, and the men sat looking at one another and smoking, in an atmosphere tense with misunderstanding.

"Which way you going, Wizner?" finally asked Reagan.

"I thought I'd go aboard the *Stickleback*," replied Wizner.

"The hell you did!" replied Reagan, with an easy laugh. "Well, you've got another guess!"

"You think Faville can handle the engineer's berth?" queried Wizner, with a covert sneer.

"The surf don't roar like it did," said Reagan. "The wind's off shore. It's quieting down. Stick up that signal, Faville."

Faville departed and Reagan, sitting up, spoke in the manner of one who scents a conflict.

"Whatever it is, Wizner," said he, "out with it. I'm not safe to fool with."

"I want the *Stickleback* for a while," said Wizner.

"What for?" asked Reagan.

"To stand off and on, do as I say, ask no questions, and to tell no tales."

Feeling mystery in this demand, Reagan controlled his temper, and let the case develop.

"And if this modest request is refused?" he queried.

"Why," said Wizner slowly, "I may let the authorities know that instead of salving mahogany, the *Stickleback* is prowling around off Harrod's."

Reagan lay gently back, this time on one arm. The other hand slid slowly to his hip pocket. He was the picture of slothful ease.

"Well," he said slowly, "that might interest them, but what is there in it?"

"Not much, maybe," said Wizner. "But I'm a law-abiding citizen, and I feel I ought to tell."

"You infernal fool!" said Reagan, speaking over a short, flat, automatic pistol. "You'll stay here till the hogs root you out!"

Wizner turned pale, and reached for the letter; Reagan's voice stopped him.

"Hands up!" said he. "I hate like hell to kill you; but I'll just give you time to pray!"

Wizner, his hands in air, and trembling like a reed, played out his hand.

"There's a letter in my pocket," said he. "Read it; and you won't shoot."

Faville, returning, saw and understood the tableau—Reagan on his feet covering Wizner, the inventor belligerent, but shaking.

"Take the letter from the cur's pocket," said Reagan. "Cover him while I look at it—and pick out his grave!"

"Don't spoil the certificate!" said Wizner. "Cut it!"

Reagan, after reading the endorsements informing him that if Wizner failed to claim the letter mailed it would go to the collector, read the letter itself. It was a succinct accusation of smuggling, with the names and addresses of two witnesses—imaginary—who could point out the contraband goods and testify to the facts, with Wizner's identification of the *Stickleback's* crew as the criminals to which the witnesses named would swear if confronted with J. J. Reagan, captain, and T. W. Faville, chief engineer. The witnesses, the letter concluded, had not been informed of the identity of Faville and Reagan.

Reagan tossed the letter to Faville.

"You get in on this," said he. "Put down your gun!"

"No, no!" crowed Wizner, "I won't run!"

"Don't be too cocky," said Reagan, "or I'll take chances on a shot at you! D'ye hear?"

"Seems to hold high cards," said Faville. "But if you say so, I'll—"

"How do we know," said Reagan, "that you won't peach after you get through with us?"

"If I make the play I expect to," replied Wizner, "I'll be in a damned sight deeper'n you are!"

"That means," said Reagan, "worse than smuggling."

"I mean," said Wizner, "the only thing the law punishes worse than smuggling with a submarine—by ——!"

"I didn't expect," said Reagan, "I'd ever go that far; but I guess I'll have to serve under you, Wizner. You're captain of the *Stickleback*!"

CHAPTER X

AN OVER-SUCCESSFUL EMBASSY

VIRGINIA, left alone, was rather glad of it. Her desertion of the Shaynes was a crisis in her life. She had acted impulsively in a matter of great moment and needed time for thought. She had taken flight to Carson's Landing and to shelter in the shade of the sole remaining branch of her family tree, full of confidence that she would find there a silver-haired uncle and a delicate old lavender aunt, redolent of the old régime and ready to receive her, tenderly loyal to the Carson blood.

Instead of silver hair, Theodore, the audaciously false uncle, had red lips and the "little, silky, kid's mustache," and there was no aunt. The grand-niece of old General Carson, related to Theodore Carson, by no chain of descent, save the dubious one of the original third Carson brother of hundreds of years ago and the ownership of this plantation, was weakly allowed to assume kinship from the place and name, and never thought of sitting down with

Theodore and tracing the thing out. Her flight, her astonishment at finding her rescuer, the supposed smuggler, as the head of her family, her guardian and protector, his disturbing influence over her mental faculties, their uninterrupted series of excursions by field and flood, the feeling of uncertainty—not to say apprehension—which their relations had begun to produce in her, all these made her glad of a day or so to herself. She wanted the current cut off so that she might become demagnetized.

Of course, she said, it was absurd of him to run away just after he had held her a little tighter than was necessary in picking her up—that was crude, and made the situation worse. She wondered just what the relationship was, anyhow. Chloe said that Cahsonses were Cahsonses, and she never bothered about different kinds. He couldn't be a real uncle, Virginia felt sure of that. He might be a son of General Carson by a second wife. He was the head of the family, anyhow; she *must* be satisfied with that. If he would only quit looking Sapphic odes and prowling about of nights—and oh, heavens! if he would only come back and make her happy again!

Of his invention, save that it was in the mysterious shed, chosen because of its remoteness and its unobstructed beach, she really knew nothing. She began to wonder, now, whether he was a world's

genius, or only the crude product of a country college, with nothing to command a second glance except his sinewy erectness, the pathetic yearning in his eyes, and the wonderful softness in his voice. She was enacting vaudeville skits, too. Oh, the dramatic uplift was active, down at Carson's Landing!

The devil was there, as usual, and helped the thing along. Virginia stood on a stool to reach the *Dolly Dialogues*, and Sathanas guided her fingers to *Doctor Pascal*, which he had had bound to match Anthony Hope's delicious piece of foolery. Like Eve, she bit; and Mrs. Stott found her deep in the love of Clotilde and her uncle—the sole specimen of the sort in literature, so far as I can remember. This particular book, to be read by this particular girl, on this particular day of all days!

"A great story of a great passion," said Mrs. Stott.

"Is it?" asked Virginia the Uncandid. "Zola is so uninteresting—I just happened to pick it up, you know."

"They were uncle and niece," said Mrs. Stott.

Virginia flicked the corners with her thumb, making a sound like a fly in a web.

"Shocking!" said she. "I didn't think the law allowed such—alliances."

"Love," said Mrs. Stott, "is very different from marriage—in France. Have you read where Pas-

cal finds Clotilde burning his papers—in the night—so lightly clothed? Or where she proposes?”

“It’s an unpleasant topic,” said Virginia.

“Very!” assented Mrs. Stott. “It is growing warm; you are quite flushed.”

“But what is the law?” asked Virginia finally.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Mrs. Stott.

“Being a question,” said Virginia, “that can never arise, the law wouldn’t cover it.”

“Zola,” replied Mrs. Stott, “would not have used an impossible case. To be sure, he put Clotilde and Pascal into constant and intimate contact, and—”

“Oh, it’s quite unthinkable!” said Virginia. “Pascal was old; and—and she’d always known him as her uncle.”

“Such circumstances,” assented Mrs. Stott, “make all the difference in the world.”

When the absorbed Virginia saw the force of this remark, she almost snapped at her companion.

“Not at all!” said she. “Not the *least* difference in the world.”

Resorting to Tennyson, she found the lines:

“Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of
Zolaism,—

Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward
too into the abysm,”

threw the book away, and went down to watch for boats—especially for a remarkably fast motor launch, which had cleared from Week's Bay up river recently, laden with magnolia blossoms, youth, and palpitations of the heart. It was a long time coming, so Virginia took up Penelope's occupation. She wove a web of fancies every night and raveled them out next morning.

One day her heart fluttered when Chloe announced a man to see her; for it must mean an emissary from the Shaynes or from Uncle Theodore, she thought. It was, in fact, Captain Harrod, unchanged, save that he wore boots. The captain thought her charming; and, as she shook his hand, her voice seemed mysteriously vibrant.

"Mistah Theodo," said he, "reckoned Ah'd bettah stop by an' ask how you-all is, an' tell you-all we-all ah tol'able well, an' gettin' the machine raght neah ready to la'nch, ma'am."

"Thank you," replied Miss Suarez. "Is that all?"

Captain Harrod felt himself in an equivocal position. It really was all his message, but it seemed too bald and Spartan for real courtesy.

"He says," extemporized the ancient mariner, "they's maghty little to see thah; but we'd be raght pleased, ma'am, if you-all could pass thataway an' stop by."

"We'd be in the way," said Virginia gratefully.

"Oh, no," the captain assured her. "Not at all; but it maght be onconvenient for you, ma'am."

"I found life quite—quite giddy there!" said she.

The captain did not allow himself the luxury of a smile. He consented to stay to luncheon, during which meal he described the aëronef with an approximation to enthusiasm.

"If she flies," said he, "an' Mistah Theodo' allows she sho' will, she'll mek the long-toms an' skaoucks think they's a new breed o' hawks loose."

"Uncle Theodore," suggested Virginia to Mrs. Stott, after learning about long-toms and skaoucks, "has invited us to visit him. And, do you know, I think we'll go back with the captain, if you can overcome your aversion to the water."

"Will the bay be rough?" asked Mrs. Stott, as if confident that the captain served out the weather.

"Dead ca'm, ma'am," said the captain. "Flat as a flounder."

"And think," went on Virginia, "how interesting it will be to see the first great aëronef launched! Please, please, let's go!"

"When do you start?" asked Mrs. Stott, wavering.

"Ea'ly this evenin'," replied the captain.

"We'll go!" said Mrs. Stott.

The captain, considering all that part of the day between the midday meal and nightfall as

"evening," and after dark as night, had to make this distinction clear to the ladies, who, when they understood it, hurriedly packed their dunnage, and embarked. They were a gay party; Virginia was full of laughter; her color rose and her eyes dilated as they took the stream early enough, to the captain's relief, to let them through the New Canal, from Strong's Bayou to the Lagoon by daylight; for there were ghosts in this region by night.

"Do you see any signs of a storm?" asked Mrs. Stott, noting his upward glances.

"No, ma'am," he returned. "Ah was just tryin' to make out if Ah'd eve' seen that craft befo' aloft thah."

The craft alluded to was a great silver Condor, gleaming in the sun, her rudder a dark line across her bow, and along her side the stripe of a narrow aëroplane.

Virginia studied her absorbedly with her field-glasses. She was standing over from Mobile, and was now above Montrose, sailing low as if for a short voyage.

"I think," said Virginia, "that she's the *Roc*. I'm sure of it!"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Harrod; and not another word was said, until the captain saw the air-ship librating, sinking, balancing like a hawk, far to the eastward.

"She's lyin' to," said the captain. "Thah goes huh lift down."

"Why," asked Virginia wonderingly, "what can she want over there in the woods?"

"She's jist about ove' yo' home, ma'am," said Harrod.

Virginia grew pale, and asking for the glass, scanned the great aërostat with the lowered lift, like a nexus, to the ground.

"Can't you go a little faster?" said she, laying down the binoculars.

"Aftah we clear Week's Bay," said the captain, "we'll go raght brisk, Miss. But we cain't go much faste' hyah, Ah'm afraid."

His tones were low, sympathetic, respectful, in-curious, perfectly courteous. She felt calmed. Why be agitated? She could not be forced to return with the Shaynes; and what chance was there, for that matter, for them to find this speck of a launch, and they so high above it and so far away?

Once clear of the channel they stood for the south shore, the engines firing in continuous explosion, as the captain threw on the last speed. The bay was a great mirror. A fishing schooner, becalmed with all sails set, floated like a cloud above her own elongated image; the cumulus clouds gleamed in pearly immensity from the glassy depths, more imposing than in the sky; and the pursuing gulls

occasionally embraced their own white wraiths as they dipped in the wave of the wake, the real kissing the ideal. So thought Virginia, forgetful of the great aërostat at Carson's Landing, forgetful of everything except the calm bay, the speeding boat, the meeting before her—the real kissing the ideal. Suddenly with a little scream, she leaned out to look upward past the awning. In the water, instead of bird or sail or cloud, she had seen, coming up from the depths under their rail, the *Roc*, under full speed, her great engines purring like tiger-cats, her screws shimmering, her giant hull a resplendent bubble of steel. Looking up, Virginia saw her overhead, and cowered back into the boat; for peering over the rail and calling like an evil bird, was Silberberg.

"Shall Ah answer the hail, Miss?" asked the captain.

"No!" whispered Virginia. "Take no notice, I beg of you, Captain!"

The *Roc* swept on like a meteor, leaving the launch behind. Virginia asked the captain if he supposed she had been recognized.

"Ah reckon not, Miss," said he. "Jist a chance meetin', Ah reckon."

The captain told of accidental meetings of sailors in strange parts, of rencounters in the woods, and of experiences along the waterside of Mobile and

Pensacola. The *Roc*, dead ahead, her reflection wimpling in the water like a stripe of nickel-plate, was miles away, and Virginia breathed freely. She was not frightened, she told herself—but she didn't care to meet the Shaynes, or Silberberg.

"She's come to, raght ove' the Inn," said the captain. "We're ove'haulin' her."

"Is there no way of getting to Theodore," said Virginia, adopting language that drew a smile from Mrs. Stott, "except by passing them?"

"No, Miss," said the captain. "It's thataway o' none."

Virginia sat under the middle of the awning, quite in a tremble. The boat slowly threaded the shelly entrance to the Bayou, and passed the wharf of the Inn. The people on the quay were craning their necks at the descent of the passengers from the *Roc*.

"Hurry, Captain, hurry!" urged Virginia.

"Ah cain't, ma'am," said he. "Ah'll hev to lie to a minute, foh that boat. Neve' fear, Miss; yo' all raght with me!"

"Here you see," said a voice from the wharf, "two soon-to-be-discarded modes of navigation—the boat displacing water, and the aërostat floating in the air upheld by gas. The hydroplane must replace the boat; the aëronef, the aërostat. I have made a specialty of this. I know. The value of that

cigar-shaped craft up there as junk, deducted from her present value, is the measure of Mr. Finley Shayne's loss when our big show opens its ticket wagon. Seest thou?"

Virginia looked attentively at the speaker, startled to hear her uncle's name mentioned almost in his presence. She saw a youngish man of medium height, thin habit of body, and long, thick hair, who was gazing, with every appearance of interest, not at the air-ship, but at a lady of perhaps twenty-seven years, short, plump, admirably gowned in a sort of reduced half-mourning, with her jolly little face turned toward the *Roc*, her brown hair tousled about her face, her prominent little chin carrying the facial angle forward and downward.

"That talk will do with me," said she, "but you've got to show papa something besides oratory pretty soon, or there'll be trouble. He tells me that you and Mr. Carson are the first ever to sell him a gold brick; and he proposes to make an example of you. You're supposed to be in custody now."

"Never mind, honey—"

"Now, that will do!" said she.

"Well, I'll think it," said he. "The tongue may be in custody with the body, but the spirit is free—begad! And my youthful Edison can't elude us much longer. Why, he's got to make good! If he doesn't—"

"I will grasp Theodore until
I feel his red wet throat distil
In blood through these two hands!"

That's what I'll do. Why, your father sees in the aëronef the missing link between the monkey of failure and the Caucasian of success. He's satisfied with the cinch of the Air Products Company—and when a cinch satisfies your respected dad, dear—I mean, of course—why, here he is, now!"

Mr. Waddy came down the wharf, combing his whiskers and mustache out in front of his nose with his fingers. He carried a daisy, which he handed to the lady, who began picking off its petals as if trying her sweetheart's love, turning toward the younger man an incurved back, up and down which ran a row of buttons, from the neck to the bottom of the shapely waist. As Harrod's boat glided within arm's length of the wharf, the lift descended from the air-ship, filling Virginia with terror.

"I don't think I'll get you another posy, Caroline," said the old man. "Pickin' it to bits like that!"

"I'm trying my fortune," said she, with a little embarrassed laugh.

"Humph!" said her father.

The younger man seemingly recovered from his

perplexity, was touching the row of buttons one by one; and as the launch gathered way, Virginia heard him say to button after button, "She loves me! She loves me not! . . . She loves me! Hooray!"

The shout greeted the favorable answer of the oracle. The lady, as if feeling the fingers in her curls, turned and gently slapped the gentleman's ears. The launch shot into the canal, and out of sight.

"Hooray!" shouted Virginia.

"Why," said Mrs. Stott, "you are quite excited, Miss Suarez!"

"It was the fortune-telling," said Virginia. "I wanted it to come out that way. And I said 'Hooray!' to echo him."

As for Captain Harrod, he did not shout. He wondered what Mr. Theodore would say when the launch discharged the cargo resulting from his over-successful embassy.

CHAPTER XI

STABLE AND UNSTABLE EQUILIBRIUM

WHATEVER anger Mr. Carson may have felt at Captain Harrod for bringing Virginia Suarez and Mrs. Stott into camp, was sternly repressed. The ladies were made sole owners of the cabin, and the men slept with the aëronef by night, while by day Captain Harrod stood by to aid Theodore, slipping away to the top of the dunes at times to scan the offing for the slimy-nosed *Stickleback*, inexplicably reappearing, with her oval deck just awash, her thin, semi-invisible periscope in air. Having arranged with Reagan for a cessation of the contraband business until the aëronef was off the stocks, the captain was worried. He waved the Chautauqua salute one day, whereupon the submarine sounded like a gal-lied rorqual. The captain's ingenuity was not equal to the task of developing a theory to account for her presence or her alarm. Perhaps she was not the *Stickleback*; but if not, why was she prowling about? And why was she frightened at the old signal?

So the superintendence of the work, the talking

of aëronautics to Theodore and inspiring him to greater application, fell to Virginia; for Mrs. Stott was studying shells. Carson suddenly became possessed of an unremitting energy that commanded Virginia's admiration; but if she wandered away for a little while, the sound of his tools ceased, and he came looking for her. As he told her again of his struggles, his experiments, his falling into the garden of Doctor Witherspoon, his meeting with Craighead, the financial enlistment of Mr. Waddy, and of the puzzling messages he had received, she became an enthusiast, too.

"I'd like to meet Mr. Craighead," said she. "I'd like to feel sure of him. How can he secure a monopoly of the navigation of the air?"

"I have no idea," replied Theodore, "but he says he has."

"Now, what," she queried, "could ever prevent the *Roc* from freely swooping down and taking me away?"

"I could!" said Theodore firmly.

"Maybe," said Virginia, "if you wouldn't be glad to have them—"

"Virginia!" he began, adopting the familiar address.

"—but," she went on, "from swooping, you know? Your Mr. Craighead couldn't prevent them from either snooping, or swooping, it seems to me."

This statement was worthy of consideration; so he sat down beside her—to ponder.

"No," said she, "you mustn't quit work. We must do our part, whatever Mr. Craighead does."

Theodore was really tired, but he rose and returned to work. A tired person helps himself to rise by putting his hand on something. Theodore placed his on the bench; and if Virginia's hand happened to be just there, was it his fault? He fell to work furiously. When he looked again, she was hugging the hand to her bosom as if it had become a doll and she was a little girl.

"You might form an opinion of him," said he, "by reading his telegrams."

"Of whom?" inquired Virginia, evidently thinking of something else.

"Craighead," replied Carson. "Here they are. What do you think of them?"

The first was dated Charleston, West Virginia. "Air Products incorporated," it ran. "Immense sensation in trust incubator and brooder. Why don't I hear from illustrious co-conspirator? Craighead, the Plute."

"Tries to be humorous," said Virginia. "Let's see the next."

The next was dated "*En route* to Cosmopolis from Incubator," and was unsigned. "To Him Who Commands the Winds, from Him Who Winds

the Commands, greeting," it ran. "Be of good cheer. The train is laid, the gin is set, the dogs of war strain forward in the leash. But is there any aëronef? Broom end of pipe-dream assumes terrifying concreteness. Noble, sir, assure me of thine! Just wire saying you are you, and there is an aëronef, collect!"

"Did you answer this?" asked Virginia.

Theodore shook his head.

"I feel," said Virginia, "that he was downcast, and could not believe in good things. It is the only convincing thing I've seen—so pathetic, as if he needed help. Why didn't you answer it, uncle?"

"It was days and days before I got it," said Theodore.

"Why didn't he send it to the plantation?" asked Virginia.

"I gave him this address," said Theodore. "I—I stayed there too—too long."

He opened the gyroscope globe, and began running the engines lightly, setting the heavy little wheels spinning, rocking the aëronef from side to side to note the operation of the balancing devices. Preserving their perpendicularity, as if of intelligent purpose, the gyroscopes moved the levers of the wing-differentials which would accelerate the propeller-wheels of the lowered wing and correspondingly slow the upper. Right or left, stern or

bow, the depressed area would work the harder, the raised part slower, while powerful rudders cooperated, moving like a fish's fins, even now while the propeller rested. Theodore was getting past an awkward reference to his long stay at the plantation by a painstaking examination of the brain of his air-ship.

"See how it works, Virginia!" he exclaimed. "It knows the levers to be moved! Why, if a puff starts to overturn her, she'll strike with the lowered wings alone like a bird. And see the intelligence of those rudders! And that fellow said she'd turn turtle!"

Virginia gazed in admiration. The clutch had been off ten minutes, and still the gyroscopes spun, so silent, so immovable, that one might have laid hold of them, thinking them stationary.

"How long they run!" she cried.

"Long!" said he scornfully. "Why, with the globe on and the air out of it, they'll run a whole day after the engines are stopped. They're the heart and brain of my invention, Virginia. I'm proud of it."

"And Mr. Craighead doesn't get any report of all this! What must he think?"

"I told him about it," said Theodore proudly. "And it was no time to telegraph apologies. It was a time to work."

"I won't bother you," said she, stepping from the car, "any more. I give you my word!"

He rose to follow, his foot on the gunwale, his eyes demanding explanation.

"If you go," said he, "I shall cease work—at once. You help me!"

"Then go back to work, uncle," she pleaded. "Please! And I'll read the rest of poor Mr. Craighead's telegrams."

She sat where he could see her by turning his head—quite the thing as between an affectionate uncle and a charming young niece. Blood is thicker than water, thought she—oh, vastly thicker!

The *Stickleback* outside, if her inexplicable prowling had to do with any one's desire to see what the air-ship would do, was not to have long to wait. While Virginia read the telegrams, Theodore, whose genius and strength were fast winning her rather fearful respect, was replacing the vacuum globe over the gyroscopes.

The next message was addressed to General Theodo' Carson, M. A., and ran: "A' God's name, sweet knight, discover. Art asset or liability? Answer yes or no!"

Then came one addressed to Palmetto Beach, "or somewhere it is hoped," and seemed to be regarded by Craighead as very important. "My luck hath turned! It is Craighead Felix now," said he.

"I could fall in a well and come up bearing the jewel of the tutelary toad in my nose. Have found a gang of grafters organized to get us grants in no time; will cinch New York by Friday; Chicago already hemmed in. New Thought: fee of roads in grangers everywhere. Will secure title except for road purposes. 'Tis ever sweet to see the engineer hoist by his own petard. Monopoly, we delve beneath thee! Shayne, thy sun sets apace! To your tents, O Israel! Whoop! Whoop! Whoopee! We've got 'em, we've got 'em! Caroline's dad ready to bust all eight banks to back scheme. You must make good, Theodorie. The Dread Sisters of the thread and shears never done nobody the dirt they'd do me to let you turn me down. Answer, for the sake of divine pity, just one leetle teeney peep!—Napoleon Bonaparte Hannibal Miltiades Craighead."

"What does he mean," asked Virginia, "by all this about grants, highways and fee simple? It's awfully queer."

"I don't know," replied Carson. "Some visionary thing."

"And who is Caroline?" asked Virginia.

"Mrs. Graybill, Mr. Waddy's daughter. Now, listen, Virginia, and watch. She's ready to try."

He threw in the clutch, and the wings began whirring like great buzzes, blowing the sand off the

floor into the farthest corners and setting light things flying in the tremendous currents of air, so that Virginia clung to her hat, wound her skirts about her legs and sat on them, in the cage of a domesticated tornado. Faster and faster the wing-sections whirled until the aëronef strained upward on her lashings like a restive horse. Theodore tipped a lever and she leaped forward, stretching the ropes at an angle of forty-five degrees; he reversed it, and she slacked backward, as might an eagle repulsed by a foe. Virginia swung her hat and shouted.

"Pull the line on the end of that wing," said he, "and see if you can tip her. Pull!"

Virginia walked gingerly forward, her dress flying, her hat whisked to the top of the room. Grasping the flying rope-end, she pulled downward. The wings settled slightly, and then, as the gyroscope-brain felt the depression, the lowered wings lifted as if consciously rising to a load. It was marvelous.

"Can't you pull harder?" cried Theodore, bare-headed, his hair flying. "Try!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" cried Virginia cheerily, "try it is! But suppose I lose my clothes in the gale? I haven't many!"

Reaching up she pulled herself clear of the floor, her strong little form swaying like a most charming pendulum. The enormous dragon-fly,

throwing its power into the depressing wing, rode level, with nine stone weight of solid American girl dangling from the tip of one wing,—a mechanical paradox. Back and forth she swung; until, with muscles weakened, she dropped to the floor. Instantly, the released side rose a thought too high, the other took the power; there was a momentary vibration, as the momentum of the swing was taken out by the differentials, and the boat stood in air, as level as a ship in a calm.

"Hurrah!" shouted Theodore, swinging his arms. "Never anything like it in the world. Carried you on one wing, and kept level. Hurrah for the *Virginia*!"

He eased her down, and stepped to where Virginia waited, hands outstretched, red from the rough rope, hair blown abroad.

"And *are* you going to name her that?" she cried. "Oh, how perfectly dear of you!"

Theodore held the chafed hands, triumph in his face, happy as he only can be who tastes the fruit of achievement.

"She carried you on one wing!" said he. "She did, didn't she?"

"She did," replied Virginia; "and it made my hands too sore for squeezing purposes, uncle! But she did."

Theodore opened the little red palms and kissed

them, over and over again. Mrs. Stott came in and saw him doing it.

"I hurt my hands," said Virginia, showing them. "And uncle is kissing them well."

"Very kind and self-sacrificing, I'm sure!" replied Mrs. Stott.

"I'm going with you, now," said Virginia, taking Mrs. Stott's arm.

"It may be as well," said Mrs. Stott.

Virginia looked back, rosy, smiling, a little reckless. Theodore went for Harrod, to help with the launching. They were all excitement; for by noon of the next day they would have her in the air. Mr. Wizner, outside in the *Stickleback*, thought it quite time.

CHAPTER XII

MR. CRAIGHEAD IN CUSTODY

MR. WADDY says that he never should have gone into Craighead's schemes, but for "the children," meaning Mrs. Graybill and the eight banker-brothers. He was comfortably "reverting to type," when Caroline interrupted the process—which was a return in old age to the ways of his youth. This was a family scandal involving a mode of life quite inconsistent with wealth,—live stock on the lawns, seed-corn in the library, a cream-separator by the bust of Shakespeare, cast-iron stoves burning corn-cobs, for radiators; and more scandalous than all, he had actually hired out to Doctor Witherspoon, and between meetings of directors and stock-holders, he was performing the more or less useful labor of a "jag-boss"; not for purposes of investigation, or to procure "materials" for a book, but with the horrible object of earning wages.

So Mrs. Graybill, under the pretext of house-cleaning, had the seed-corn taken down from over

the portraits of Dante and Æschylus, and removed the cream-separator from its place beside the bard of Avon—who had been looking at it all the time with a knowing air, as if entirely familiar with its operation. The wagons and harrows and cows were sold. The old democrat wagon and matronly Percheron mare, whose progress was impeded by the necessity of an occasional stop for purposes connected with the sustenance of her colt, were supplanted by a new automobile. Mr. Waddy, like the toes of the Barefoot Boy, was encased "in the prison-cells of pride."

It was galling; and so, sitting desolate in his deruralized library, the old gentleman, having no vocation for any other intoxicant, imbibed freely of Craighead. He knew that he was likely to lose money by it. He rather desired to do so, that he might say to his sons, and to Caroline: "Well, dumb it! If you'd have let me alone I wouldn't have lost anything!"

But that was at first. The money for the last touches to the air-ship was to be the extent of his venture; and then came Craighead with his new-hatched plan for actually monopolizing the air; and, Mr. Waddy, having submitted it to his local lawyer, hesitated, and was lost.

"I'll go into it," said he. "We'll make everybody come and settle that wants a trip by air-ship. Hey?"

"Exactly!" replied Craighead.

"Jest as if the whole country was our farm!" cried Mr. Waddy.

"It will be for circumambient purposes," replied Craighead. "And as you so well said, a farm's a cinch. And remember, Mr. Waddy: in putting Shayne and his pirates down and out, we and our pirates are making way for the matchless, unsinkable, double-acting, universal-speed, direct-drive, non-halation, orthochromatic Carson aëronef. Don't forget our haughty Southron co-conspirator who will wing his way to Illinois by the time we return. Don't fall down and forget that."

"Huh," ejaculated Mr. Waddy.

"Oh, say not so, Mr. Waddy, say not so!" urged Mr. Craighead protestingly. "Our aëronef has everything, the in-shoot, the drop, the float, the out—everything! Tested under all conditions; margin-of-safety factor completely looked after; basic principle so demonstrably correct; gyroscopic libration-devices, for automatic power-distribution to correct perturbations of all sorts, perpendicular, horizontal and oblique. Why, doubt these and doubt the advance of science, the improvement in corn, the advent of the general-purpose hen, the fixation of nitrogen in the soil by the nodules on the roots of legumes—or is it on the legs of rootlumes? Thou knowest, O son of the soil, which it is! All of us

knowest how crude it is to doubt 'em; and to doubt the Carson aëronef is waur, mon, a deil sight waur!"

"Well, you'd better have him on hand," said Mr. Waddy, "as he promised, or I'll know why he took my good hard money."

It was on occasions of this sort that Mr. Craighead had sweated telegrams begging to know if Theodore really *had* any air-ship, and asking of Carson's status as asset or liability; for Mr. Waddy had accompanied Craighead east; and these telegraphic moans of a spirit agonized by doubt had been evoked by his truculent attitude toward the possible failure of Carson to come north cleaving the air in the invention which was to change the world.

"But think, my dear sir," protested Mr. Craighead, "of the untold millions in the Broom idea—aërial monopoly! Even if Theodore should be only four clubs and a spade, we still hold the aces, my dear Mr. Waddy. Do not grind your teeth thus, so long as the American Nitrates and Air Products Company remains as the Archimedean lever with which to pry up and dump the world. We are ahead, whatever happens to the aëronef end of the deal."

"Well, the aëronef end," said Mr. Waddy, "had better come to the center, or I'll see what law there is for getting money by false pretenses."

And Craighead sent another frenzied query as to whether the tardy Theodore really had any aëronef; Carson, meanwhile, being oblivious of it all in his effort to be a well-behaved uncle to Virginia down among the pines.

The two men were the best of traveling companions. Mr. Waddy insisted on going in the smoker; Mr. Craighead took the state-room while his money lasted; and then borrowed of Mr. Waddy. In New York Mr. Waddy stayed at the Mills, and would not let Craighead go to the Vathek, because they ought to be where they could consult. This necessitated Mr. Craighead's sneaking to the nearest subway station every morning and going up-town to make the start for the day. Here he would enter the Vathek's lobby, solemnly fee a boy, buy a cigar, and rejoin Waddy in the street. This, he explained, was to get the proper psychological aura for financial operations; to complete which he took an electric hansom to Wall Street, and awaited in the ante-room of a friend's office the appearance of Mr. Waddy, who came by car, scrutinizing the buildings like a prospective buyer. Yet they got along swimmingly.

Mr. Craighead had advertised for people able to organize a rapid business campaign covering the civilized world to meet him in West Twenty-third Street at the studio of an acquaintance, to whom he

had neglected to impart any knowledge of the tryst with the specialists. Waddy and Craighead arrived somewhat late, on account of the time consumed in adjusting Mr. Craighead's aura, and found a crush of people entirely alien to the fine arts, filling the studio and the hall outside. Craighead's sculptor friend, with a lady model, escaped the angry mob into the scaffolding of an equestrian group representing an Indian maiden in a stampede of buffaloes. The model had been posing for something—an Indian maiden, perhaps—and had feathers in her hair. The sculptor was disputing acrimoniously with a Roman-nosed captain of industry, who wore sandals and no waistcoat, as to whether he would or would not contribute a nickel with which to free the telephone for the purpose of calling the police that he might be "pinched" for putting in "them ads."

Craighead broke through by impersonating an officer, shouting, "Make way for the police!" and upper-cutting the crowd with his elbows.

"Hello, De Land!" said he, nodding to the sculptor. "Most beauteous princess of the Apaches, how?"

"That you, Craig?" called down the sculptor. "What, not sober? Go after the police. Turn these people out, please, Craig!"

"Friends of mine," said Craighead. "I adver-

tised for 'em. Hope you haven't been incommoded, old man!"

"Not at all!" replied the sculptor sarcastically. "But get them out, so Miss Brown and I can descend."

Craighead's manner of disposing of the crowd commanded Mr. Waddy's sincere respect. He went about with marvelous rapidity, sending away those whose non-utility was unquestionable, and making engagements with others at "our Wall Street office," the name of which made everybody more respectful, save a lady in goggles, who demanded damages for having been detained forcibly in a disreputable place, the character of which she proved by putting in evidence Miss Brown and certain studies in the nude. Mr. Craighead cowed her by a lecture on the difference between the naked and the nude, which so horrified the lady that when he asked Miss Brown to illustrate certain points which were obscure in the abstract, she dashed off her goggles to shut out the awful sight and fled screaming.

The dinner to which Mr. Craighead took Mr. De Land, Miss Brown, and Mr. Waddy, was the first of a series which reduced Mr. Waddy to torpor. The old gentleman, in his long frock-coat, which buttoned to a surtout, his frowzy face, and his evident attachment to Mr. Craighead, was remembered in certain ultra-Bohemian circles for his surreptitious slinking

into the dimmest corners of cafés and roof gardens. He had a dark secret, Mr. Craighead said; which, he did not explain, originated in Mr. Waddy's agreement with the lady in goggles that the whole situation was improper. He felt obliged to keep with Craighead because of a suspicion that the aéronef was a figment of two Slattery Institute imaginations; and he did not purpose to let any guilty man escape. So he providently engaged a detective to shadow both himself and Mr. Craighead, the unremitting presence of whom in very plain clothes made Mr. Waddy feel and look guilty and fugitive. Mr. Kostomolasky, an artist, sketched him one midnight as a symbolic figure of Blue Funk, on the back of an engraving which he tore from its frame, and which Mr. Waddy bought at the suggestion of the almond-eyed management of the chop suey establishment.

His second reason for becoming Mr. Craighead's double was his sense of duty of preventing that pupil of Doctor Witherspoon from breaking the vow of abstinence. So he drank most of the intoxicants served to Craighead, somewhat to the injury of his health, but much to the betterment of his reputation as a roysterer. Altogether, it was a relief to get Craighead home, where he installed him as a lodger and boarder, charging him well for his accommodation, and lending him the money on his

note to pay for it. On arrival he went to bed and turned Craighead over to Mrs. Graybill, with strict injunctions to telephone the sheriff's office if he was unaccounted for for more than an hour. He told his daughter that no tongue could describe what he had been through, what with sculptors and models, and outlandish suppers toward morning, and wine and women and song. He was not to be disturbed except for something important.

"If Mr. Carson comes," said Mrs. Graybill, "I'll call you."

"And if Craighead slopes?"

"While in my charge," said Mrs. Graybill, "Mr. Craighead will not depart."

It was a situation with some unique aspects. Mr. Craighead began whiling away time with a work on the *Morphology of the Crawfish*, and dips into De Quincey's *Spanish Nun*. Looking from the library window, he saw Mrs. Graybill enter a summer-house, leaving a red hat on the railing outside.

The *Morphology* grew uninteresting. He shut his eyes, but the red hat blazed on inside his eyelids—red, yellow, green and finally purple. Craighead stepped from the window, scanned the skies for the aëronef, saw nothing aëronautical save the usual flight of aërostats, went into the summer-house, and started at finding Mrs. Graybill there, her hair tousled about her head, her little nose elevated in

that comical resemblance to her father's, her chin aggressively carried forward, her dress fitting as marvelously as ever.

"Don't insist on my going," he begged.

"I had no such intention," she replied. "You may smoke, if you wish."

"Thank you," and he lighted a cigar. "Mr. Waddy informs me that the late Mr. Graybill was a minister of the gospel," he ventured.

"Yes," she replied, "he was."

"And that he has been called," Craighead went on, "to a better life, a year or more?"

"Fourteen months," answered Mrs. Graybill.

"I have been reading," said Craighead, "a work on the *Morphology of the Crawfish*. It holds me enthralled."

"So I see," she replied.

Craighead looked up suspiciously, but she looked so innocent!

"The crawfish," he resumed, "is admirably adapted to a very lowly station; but how wonderfully his morphology illustrates the overruling design in nature. The person who fails to glean wisdom from the crawfish has never tested his intelligence with a bare toe, nor studied his morphology! Passing wonderful—"

"Mr. Craighead!"

Mrs. Graybill had dropped her work and looked at Craighead sternly.

"Don't pose!" said she. "Don't think that I want a beautiful lesson in everything, if I *have* been a minister's wife. Tell me of Mr. De Land, and—and Sadie Brown, and Mr. Kostomolasky and the chop suey, and—and that life. Tell me, Mr. Craighead!"

It was a very, very marine Bohemia of which Mrs. Graybill heard, I fear. Whether Mr. Craighead's statues were the equal of De Land's when the former took up chemistry may be doubted; but Mrs. Graybill got the impression that they were. The point here is that there was no danger of Craighead's running off while she listened with such breathless interest to his adventures. He explained his natural transition from the study of artistic anatomy to surgery, and then through medical jurisprudence to law; and over all gloomed the shadow of his wonderful, his poetic, his epic dissipations. Mrs. Graybill was shocked, but she asked for all the horrible tale, that he might so relive it that nothing would ever, ever induce him to drink again.

"Only one thing would ever do that," said he, "or maybe two. The pangs of despised love—"

"Which you have never experienced?" she asked.

"Never," said he, "as I am now likely to!"

"And the other shock that might overturn your self-control?"

"The failure of Carson," replied Craighead. "That would put me down and out—down and out!"

The jailer and the jailed walked together, motored, and played tennis, in growing familiarity and friendliness. The captive approached the edge of love-making, looked hungry and yearful, secreted gloves and handkerchiefs, and interfered seriously with Caroline's household duties; all borne by her with an equanimity that spoke volumes for her loyalty to the commands under which she had taken this strange gentleman into custody. She was a very dutiful daughter.

But the relations of Craighead to Mr. Waddy became more and more strained. Theodore Carson, long overdue, had not appeared. No great bird came into view by day; no mechanical dragon-fly settled in the yard by night. Mr. Waddy was irascible. The Nitrates Company had already spread its nets over many states, through confidential relations of its agents with the National Federation of Farmers, spinning aerial monopoly as a spider spins its web; but the more promising this grew, the more galled and embittered grew Mr. Waddy at Theodore's delinquency; for the aëronef, after all, was the thing which had appealed to his imagination and enlisted his desires.

"Oh, never fear," Mr. Craighead protested. "He'll be here in time. Delays, delays, Mr. Waddy. Think of the spark plugs, the differentials, and mufflers and things. Why, just imagine—"

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Waddy. "I don't b'lieve you know a thing about it."

"Sir," said Craighead, "this amounts to an imputation upon my pledge that the aëronef is a perfected and certain success—an imputation unworthy of you, sir, until I have had a chance to put the thing to proof, or you have shown its immateriality. This is unjust, sir!"

"All right," said the old gentleman. "We'll go an' find the dumbest thing. Start to-morrow morning."

"Certainly," said Craighead, in no apparent embarrassment. "With all the world, if you like."

"Very well," said Mrs. Graybill, "that includes me."

"Ah, no!" rejoined Craighead, "you include it!"

Mrs. Graybill's glance said that he surely didn't mean it, that it was ridiculous nonsense, that all such things were absurd, from the degenerate, if interesting, Craighead to the relict of the Reverend Mr. Graybill; that she could never look upon Craighead in any such light, but that if he would feel so, she couldn't help it; but her lips said merely that she had much to do to be ready in the morning.

Thus it was that the three were at Palmetto Beach when Captain Harrod with the launch passed through Strong's Bayou with Virginia and Mrs. Stott on the way to the cabin where the first Carson aëronef was preparing for its delayed flight north. People may draw their own conclusions as to the significance of Mr. Craighead's questioning of oracles, daisy-petal-fashion, by the buttons on Mrs. Graybill's incurved back, and of his punishment by that slight box on the ear; but, however he stood with Mrs. Graybill, his relations with Mr. Waddy had worsened. Tickets had been bought to Palmetto Beach on Craighead's statement that Carson was here; and the party had disembarked, in glum silence on Mr. Waddy's part, nervous loquacity on Craighead's, and anxious endeavor on Mrs. Graybill's to smooth things over.

"Ah," said Craighead. "How natural it all looks! I seem never to have left these balmy, if somewhat sandy shades. Dear old Yupon Hedge Inn!"

Mr. Craighead was halted by a liveried attendant.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he. "This is a private club-house. The Inn's over there!"

"Oh, certainly," replied Craighead. "All cement walks look alike to me."

"The one over at the Inn looks like brick," said Mr. Waddy grimly.

"Oh, see the magnolia blooms!" cried Mrs. Graybill. "I wonder if we can get any?"

"Right after dinner," replied Craighead, "I'll go back into the wood—"

"I guess not," said Mr. Waddy, still more grimly. "Find Carson first."

"That, my dear sir," answered Craighead jauntily, "can await the morning. Mrs. Graybill's desire to see the points of interest, and—"

"No, papa," said Mrs. Graybill, with a nervous little laugh, "I shall not stir till I've seen everything."

"Angel!" whispered Craighead, pressing her arm, as he helped her up the steps. "Keep him busy while I take a hike around."

Certain observant guests were interested a little later in seeing a slender man with a voluminous scarf slinking alongshore, anxiously questioning every waterside character he met, and bestowing tips at parting. They were mystified when the short old gentleman, with the wild and turbulent beard, set out on a frenzied hare-and-hounds chase after him. The mystery and interest grew intense, when the cheerful-looking widow, who was clearly the old gentleman's daughter, emerged in unimpeachable walking costume, overtook the young man by a short cut, and was strolling along discussing hermit-crabs with him when the old gentleman hove in sight,

slackened his speed, and overtook them at a leisurely pace quite out of keeping with his heat, perspiration and shortness of breath. The theory was suggested that the young man was off his head, and trying the sea air, while his keepers saw to it that he did not cut his throat with an oyster shell.

"I discover," said Mr. Craighead, as they walked back to the hotel, "that our young conqueror of the upper seas is not here. Confoundedly odd of him to remove to his plantation, now! Mechanical reasons, eh, Mr. Waddy?"

"I guess so," said Mr. Waddy; "an' o' course you 'don't know where the plantation is, an' we'll have to wait some more! Hey?"

"Papa!"

"Don't know?" said Craighead. "*Don't* know? Well, wait till morning. Steamer up Fish River at nine—plantation at noon—long chase over. I fear one thing, only: that he has completed the aëronef, and flown north to keep his tryst on the front lawn. That would amount to something like a complete joke, wouldn't it?"

"Huh!" grunted Waddy. "Don't worry; you bet he ain't flew none."

If Craighead's easy flow of speech was somewhat impeded by his sense of the uncertainties, not to say dangers, of his position, it was worse when they returned from the plantation, having elicited from

the reluctant Chloe the information that Mr. Theodore, his machine, his niece, and his niece's companion, were at Harrod's camp on the beach, which was "off thatterway." They jist went down the river, through a canal, across some land, and then they were thar. She didn't know about no aëro-nef, but Mr. Theodo' was a-projickin' around with some flyin'-machine. She reckoned the canal at Palmetto Beach was the one; but she didn't know. This information, Mr. Craighead declared, made everything clear; but on returning to the Inn, Mr. Waddy hired a local officer to guard Mr. Craighead's room, and began taking thought of having a warrant issued against him for something—Mr. Waddy was not quite clear for what.

Craighead was trapped, lost, betrayed. He sat in his room chewing a cigar, and calculating the distance to the ground. It looked feasible to get down a pillar of the veranda and into the woods. Carson was an impostor, they were guilty of fraud, there was no aëronef, and the Air Products Company would collapse at Mr. Waddy's defection. Life might be sustained on shell-fish alongshore, though the hermit-crabs were not tempting. Lifting the sash softly, he put out a foot, determined to run for it. His bluff had been called, and he had no cards. He had put too much realism into his description of things down here. Nothing was to be

gained by awaiting arrest. The world was wide. The weather was warm. His foot touched the roof, when—

Ting-a-ling-ting-ting-g-g-g!

His telephone rang. Was his good angel on the wire? She was.

"Is this you, Mr. Craighead? You know who this is?"

"Know these tones?" he gushed. "Why, were I in deepest hades, through geological depths of burning marl and lignite, and other carboniferous deposits, I'd know them! What is it, fair one?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I have just learned at the post-office that Mr. Carson is back a few miles, through a canal and a lagoon and winding passages; and the man will get us a guide with a boat to take us through those narrows in the morning. Is that all right—or have I made a mess of it as a woman always does?"

"You are—my God, Caroline, you have saved me from you know not what! I shall love you, love you, love you—"

And the telephone was hung up.

Morning saw Craighead himself again: so much so that he lectured Mr. Waddy on the old kitchen-midden shell banks.

"These piles of shells," said he, "are neither Indian remains, in the ordinary signification of the

term Indian, nor Aztec, in the proper sense of that. I have made a specialty of these things. They are—"

"The boat is waitin', suh," said the man with the launch.

They went through the canal in great style, Craighead descanting on the influence of canals in general, and this one especially. It was Craighead who leaped out, pushed the launch through a tight squeeze in the narrows, and leaped in like a track-meet man, filled Mrs. Graybill's lap with lilies, and tried unsuccessfully to engage her in conversation—she being unusually pensive. He was the life of the party once more. Fate smiled; the cards again ran his way, and all was well—save for the Graybill pensiveness. Perhaps his declaration over the wire—but pshaw! She had saved him, and the logic of their lives was plain.

They skimmed the black waters of Freshwater Lake, and landed at the shelly hummock. While the boatman searched for the path to the Gulf Beach, they sat on the shell mound, fascinated by the strange landscape. The expanse of black pools and reedy marshes between them and the line of surf, which they could hear roaring beyond the dunes, was dotted with clumps of tall pines, and splotched with scrub-oak thickets.

"Those pines," said Mrs. Graybill, "are like palms

on coral islands, so tall, so slender, and—why, what's that?"

Well might she speak thus; for, rising from beyond the dunes, as if from the sea, there soared a great something which moved like a bird. With enormous wings steadily outstretched, it made inland, like a foraging hawk. It swelled like a magic ship as it neared them, sailing low and dominating the sky like a cloud. It came with the most amazing speed, like an eagle in mid-swoop, so swift, so light, so facile that all impression of weight was abolished, and the huge thing filled the mind with the notion of levity—like a humming-bird. It swerved, as it neared the lake, and sheered round as swings a gull to pick up food. The whir of machinery came down to them like the rush of a thousand quail bursting from covert; as, with a wide graceful curve, it departed as suddenly as it had come, leaving them gazing after it, spellbound, almost struck dumb.

"Oh, of course," said Craighead, his hands trembling, his face white, "this man Carson is a fraud! Oh, yes, we knew it all the time! But you see that his *aéronef* has gone through the empty form of eventuating all the same. Flying like a frigate bird! Shayne, charge! Roll over, Silberberg! And don't dare move till I say so! Oh, this is rotten, rotten! I've got to kiss some one! Hooray!"

Mrs. Graybill was running along the path after the guide, who was straining every nerve to attain the beach where the view would be unimpeded. Craighead ran after her, Mr. Waddy puffing along behind, hopelessly unplaced.

"Did you see Carson?" said Craighead. "And there was a girl with him. Some confidence, to risk a lady on board, not?"

"Oh, let us hurry!" said she. "It's the most marvelous thing in the world."

Emerging from the dunes, they saw the air-ship skimming off along the line of beach foam, growing smaller with a rapidity that spoke eloquently of her speed. Down the beach stood Mrs. Stott and Captain Harrod, looking after the air-ship in amazement and delight. It was the day of the first trial. The prophecy of the night before was fulfilled. They "had her in the air."

Perhaps two miles she sped from them, then turning like a frightened heron, she swept seaward about to the line of the outer bar, and came down the wind like an arrow, Virginia waving an American flag over the rail, and Theodore swinging his hat. In all three groups was joy. The wonderful creation of Carson's genius was a-wing, as he had promised, her every movement under perfect control.

Suddenly, as she passed them, with a manœuvre

so astounding for aërial craft that they could scarcely believe their eyes, she stopped. The sharp whirl of the beating wing sections told of the sudden reversal of their stroke, and of the unprecedented phenomenon of the almost instant arrest of such a machine in mid air. It was an unnecessary strain, thought the captain—Theodore ought not to have done it.

He saw the reason, however, a moment later. A black slimy nose—the nose of the *Stickleback*—poked itself above water right ahead of the *Virginia*. A boat that looked stove and sinking, drew away from her, with a struggling, gesticulating figure in it waving a signal of distress. The slimy nose sank; and the apparent castaway was left as if to perish, unless rescued by the *Virginia*.

Accepting the humane task, she reversed with that boiling whirl that had reached the ears of those on land. Lower, lower, lower sank the aëronef, until its car appeared almost to touch the waves. The man in distress seemed to throw something like a lasso over the nacelle of the air-ship; and the great bird rose slightly, as if to be safe from the billows. The *Stickleback* again peeped above the waves, her manhole opened, the castaway of the stove boat went down into the submarine.

It was absolutely beyond the power of any one looking on to guess what was taking place. Why

had the man made the signals for help, if the submarine was standing by? If the coming of the submarine to his rescue was unexpected, why had he not cast off the line from the aëronef? Why—and suddenly they all felt that something sinister, something devilish, was taking place. They heard a shout from Theodore, a scream from Virginia. The submarine had come awash again; and from her open manhole came the crack of a pistol—a pistol aimed at the air-ship. Then she sank again and the air-ship was drawn downward by the line. Struggling toward land, hanging by the fatal thread, like a trapped bird, she strained at her tether, while the grim submarine, like a devil-fish which had thrown a tentacle about a water-fowl, made seaward, out into the Gulf, out into deep water, with a purpose as manifest as it was deadly.

CHAPTER XIII

DEVIL-FISH VS. BIRD

WHEN the aëronef was run out on her ways by the long shed in which she had been built, there was a flutter of expectancy among those so deeply concerned in her flight. Captain Harrod forgot his periodical visits to the hillock to scan the offing for the erect periscope or the fishlike back of the mysterious lurking submarine, which, like a shark awaiting the dropping overboard of man or other morsel, had haunted these waters since the day Wizner had been driven from the camp as a spy. The captain was a moving kit of oil-cans, wrenches, spanners, extra parts, odd cells of battery, plugs, screws and the like, which in his excitement he kept carrying about long after the machine was ready for her flight.

Mrs. Stott excitedly took repeated snapshots at the Psyche, and from time to time noted down her thoughts on this crisis in history with a stylographic pen, with which she made careful carbon copies, the usefulness of which was impaired by their being on

the backs of the originals, on account of Mrs. Stott's having agitatedly reversed her carbon sheets.

Virginia was a close second to the captain in the matter of aiding the inventor, whose conscience was therefore more tender for the sin of having assumed on very small justification the relation of uncle to his Psyche, thrown under his protection by a perverse fate. She called him "uncle" with a frequency that assumed an insistence on the avuncular relationship; in memory maybe of the tumultuous disturbance of atmosphere and heart-beats at the indoor trial of the *aëronef*. She moved levers, tried sparks, and made herself useful about the machine in so many ways that Theodore promoted her to the position of first mate on the spot.

"The first mate always sails with the ship, uncle," she suggested.

"I thought you had had enough of *aëronefs*," said Theodore, "in the wreck of Wizner's helicopter. Please throw in the gyroscope gear. Thank you. Don't they spin beautifully?"

"But that was only what Captain Harrod calls a chickananny thing. This is as stable as the *Roc* herself."

"Would you really go on the trial trip?" he asked.

"Try me," said she; "I want to."

"You'd be worth a dozen of the captain," replied Carson. "He hasn't the faintest idea of the prin-

ciples of the *Virginia*, while you could fly her in a week."

"I could now," asserted Virginia. "The *Virginia* is a simple, manageable little thing, like her namesake."

"If she shows all her namesake's sweet traits—," began Theodore.

"Then I'm to go?"

"Captain," cried Theodore, "here's a girl that wants to ship as first mate."

"Yes, suh?"

"Well," went on Theodore, "she will not be allowed to displace you. Make sail, Captain; we're going!"

"Did—did—did you allow fo' *me*—fo' me to go?" asked the captain.

"Why, certainly," replied Carson. "Didn't you expect to go?"

"No, suh," replied the captain. "Ah neve' allowed to go on any o' these aiah-boats. Of co'se, ef you-all insists, Ah'll go aboa'd ontill Ah fall out, which'll be about fo' fathom high. Ah git dizzy-like, an' can't he'p it. Howseve' hyah goes!"

"Now you *must* let me go!" Virginia pleaded, with her hand on his arm. "If the captain gets dizzy—"

"Blin', staggerin', drunk dizzy, Ah do," interposed Captain Harrod.

"It would be dangerous and foolish to take him, wouldn't it, uncle?"

Theodore hesitated. The weakness of height-sickness and the horrible vertigo of those subject to it seemed to prove the captain's disability, and yet—

"It would be foolhardy," said he. "Well, I can do it alone, if everything goes well. A little help might be important, but I—"

"I'm going, uncle," said Virginia. "There's no danger. I like it. Think of my thousands of miles in the *Roc*."

"I can't consent to it," said Theodore, entering the car. "There's a grave theoretical danger. I should be blamed—"

But Virginia was seated beside him, wearing a dress of soft white wool, a close-fitting little cap on her head, and carrying a jacket over her arm. Evidently she had come out with the full intention of doing this.

"My danger is theoretical," said she. "Yours in going alone is quite real. Now, shall I keep the manometer readings? Oh, you haven't any! Well, then, the altimeter-statoscope?"

"It's self-registering," said Theodore. "Really, there's nothing to do, except in emergencies, and—"

"And there'll be no emergencies," she cried. "Throw in the clutch, Admiral of the Circumambi-

ent Inane! You do the work, and I'll play lady! We're off!"

"Are you willing," said he, turning to her, "to forgive me, for this, and everything I may ever have done, whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens, or doesn't happen, I forgive you," she cried. "Throw in the clutch before the gyroscopes stop, and the *Virginia* gets brain-fag—or shall I—?"

"Just for luck," said Theodore, "you throw it in."

She threw over the lever—rather too far—and the wing-sections started like forty thousand boys' "buzzes." A storm of sand roared back from under the wings, powdering Mrs. Stott's dress, and forcing her to turn her back to the tempest. The deafening howl, as of many winds, lessened as the big bird rose perpendicularly from the ways, and fanned the ground no more. Theodore turned on a little more speed, put the rudders apart to bring her head to the light seaward wind, and, as she mounted higher and higher, he tried her control. He pushed over the lever that determined the thrust of the driving blades, and she shot in over the dunes like a wild thing until he headed her back for the Gulf. Well inside the bar, so that an overturn might not mean a drowning, he circled about in a wide curve, which he gradually narrowed by a more extreme use of the

helm, until she was spinning round and round in an orbit, in which the tips of the inner wings were almost stationary and "treading" air like a pausing swimmer.

"That tests out the balancing device!" shouted Theodore. "How's that?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Virginia. "That do sure test out the balancing device. And if you let her chase her tail like this much longer I'm going to be indisposed. Please whirl her the other way a while, unkie."

All fear, all uneasiness even, had gone from Theodore's mind. He felt the subjection of the machine as a horseman feels the obedience of his steed. He had much to learn of her navigating qualities; but the thing which all *aéronefs* had required—the mastery of balancing—he had not to learn. The gyroscopic brain in the glass globe saved him this. To every perturbation the machine presented the resistance and correction of the automatic differentials of the wings. The powerful eight-cylinder engines purred with an almost perfect freedom from vibration, one to each wing, each at the same normal speed; but to meet the least lowering of any part, the little gyroscopes spun in constant readiness to give to the depressed area the advantage in speed which the operator could not impart if he chose, and to shift the rudders, as a fish its fins.

"Please walk about the deck," commanded Theodore. "See how the rudders pulsate, like a butterfly's wings, as you go back and forth. See it, see it! It looks alive!"

Virginia walked up to her commander and took his hand.

"From the bottom of my heart," said she, "I congratulate you. You are a great man, Theodore Carson."

"Thank you, my dearest," said Theodore, lifting her hand to his lips. "It is all yours, you know, yours!"

Virginia withdrew her hand and walked forward. They were flying higher now, and she could see the pine woods far inland, with their square patches of plowed fields, their white houses behind the great green globes of the china trees. The Freshwater Lakes lay almost under their feet, one beyond the other like a string of beads; and all about them was the immense marsh, the haunt of water-fowl and alligator, mottled with pools picked out in white with lilies. To the west lay the blue waters of the Lagoon, its farther beach a dozen miles away, lost in amethystine haze, its nearer foreshore glimmering with columned villas and hotels, its surface dotted with the sails of yachts and laced with the wakes of popping motor boats. Over the land beyond glimmered the waters of Mobile Bay. The

mooring balloon at Fort Morgan was almost lost in the white haze of spray from the twenty miles of breaking combers, and the Sand Island light split the far western horizon like a spike driven up through from below to hold the Gulf in place. The sun blazed overhead, but the breeze was cool; and the *Virginia* cut through it so swiftly that, except in the protected lee of the wedge-shaped windshields, she was swept from bow to stern by something like half a gale. Far over the northwest soared a great aëronat, silver-white as if covered with tinfoil.

"I wonder if that isn't the *Roc*?" queried Virginia.

Theodore was too busy with his levers and wheels to look.

"If it is," said he, "and she comes about this place, we'll show her what real aviation is. What's that over on the Freshwater Lake? A party?"

"There's a launch," replied Virginia, "and three men and a woman coming across to our beach."

"Excursionists, probably," answered Theodore. "Let's give them something to remember!"

It was now that the *Virginia* made her swift swoop across the isthmus to the lake, hovered over the heads of Craighead and his companions, and bore off to the eastward like a homing pigeon. Those on the ship could not recognize their newly

arrived friends, nor hear Craighead's wild shout of triumph. They were far down toward Perdido Bay, flying like a driven leaf, Virginia gazing at Carson with something like fear in the admiration which now possessed her, as he tried every combination of factors in flight which he could conjure up.

He turned and surprised her look; she bore detection calmly, but with some heightening of color.

"She's as near perfect as a machine can be," said he; "more nearly so than I ever hoped. You see, I've had so much time to work things out while I was waiting for the money. You don't know what this means to me, Psyche."

"I believe I can partly guess," said she. "Money—that's something—"

"But an uncertainty," observed Theodore. "The power of the Shayne people may ruin me, commercially."

"Maybe," said she, "after living with the Shaynes as I did, I can understand that better than you can. But they can't take from you the glory of achieving what the race has been trying so long, and dreaming of so much longer. You're a great man, uncle! That's the real thing."

"It was," said he, "but it isn't now. Can't you understand, mate, that there may be some one living whose approval means more than any fame? I want you to."

Now, there is nothing in the word "mate," applied to the second in command, that need call the blush to the cheek, ordinarily speaking; but when the word is uttered in the most meaning way, and emphasized by a long look into the mate's eyes out of two languishing orbs that speak odes and sonnets and rondeaus, a young person, however experienced in the ways of eyes and voices, may possibly blush. If she does, she may turn her eyes downward; and, if looking over the rail of the air-ship, she may see any extraordinary thing below, and make a diversion by calling attention to it.

"Oh, look, look! said Virginia. "There's some one in the water!"

Below floated the half-collapsed and sinking go-devil of a submarine. Beside it lay a great blotch of darkness, so symmetrical that Theodore was impressed with the sudden idea that it was a submarine rather than a patch of dark sand. A man on the derelict was struggling, shouting, and waving a white cloth as if in distress. If he could not swim, he was doomed. Theodore's eyes flashed. Here was a test of the *Virginia* for which he had laid no plans, and he welcomed it. He reversed the thrust of the wing propellers; and in an instant they were fighting the air with all the power of the mighty engines. The passengers felt their bodies sway forward with the momentum, as the *Virginia* slowed

up, halted, and moved astern; and as accurately as if he had had years of practice, Carson brought her to, over the struggling man, and lowered her slowly, slowly, toward the swells which rose to meet her, until the line thrown over by Carson dabbled in the water by the castaway's side.

"Can you climb up?" cried Theodore. "I don't dare come much lower."

"For Christ's sake," called the man, "bring her down a foot or so! I'm too weak to climb!"

"Cheer up!" called Theodore. "It's risky, but I'll try."

The man, who looked downward from weakness, or as if to conceal his features, was apparently in great distress, and in terror from the fact that his collapsible skiff was half deflated, as if by the bursting of her air-chambers. If he was to be saved there was no time to be lost; so thought Carson as he depressed the *Virginia* more and more, holding her stationary by a slight windward thrust of the wing-blades, like a swimmer who meets the current by a down-stream kick, a feat quite beyond the power of any other air-ship; and speaking to the man in the water, as well as to him in the air, the triumphant success of the new machine. Wizner set his teeth in a fierce determination to put both man and ship out of the field at once. The thing became immense to him, swelling, as the astounding

behavior of the *Virginia* grew upon him. He was the sole custodian of the secret of her construction, save for Carson. If he could drown her, and master the secret of the glass globe, he could rebuild her, make his terms with Shayne, be the greatest in his line.

The lower works of the air-ship descended almost to his head, and Wizner, glancing upward, saw *Virginia* looking down and singing out their aërial "soundings" to Carson. The swell lifted Wizner as the *Virginia* sank to her lowest; and he seized the nacelle with fierce energy, drew himself up into the truss-work, threaded a steel chain through an opening in the structure, and dropped back into the water holding the chain in his hand. It ran around the aluminum beam with a sharp, rasping, startling rattle.

"He's fallen in!" cried *Virginia*. "He climbed up under, and fell off! Oh, he'll drown, he'll drown!"

Theodore looked over the side. A small double chain ran down from the air-ship, its ends moving about in a most mystifying manner in the sea. And as he looked in astonishment, the dark blotch of sand rose to the surface, and defined itself as the rounded top of the *Stickleback*, on the black hull of which sat Wizner blowing brine from his mouth, his head shining with water. The manhole opened, Wizner snapped the chain into a ring, slipped into

the submarine, and reappeared with something small and flat in his hand.

"I'll fix you, you damned whelp!" he yelled. "I'll show you what it means to choke me! Take that!"

He aimed at Carson, fired, and the bullet sang away into the sky. Theodore seized Virginia in his arms, and drew her down into the bottom of the car, where they lay panting in each other's arms, panic-stricken.

"I must put the ship out of range!" cried Carson, leaping to the lever, and throwing on full speed upward and ahead.

She rose like a feather—for just a moment, and then she swung about like a kite with its string fouled, anchored by some devilish contrivance, of the nature of which the bewildered Carson could not guess. He stepped to the side again and looked over. The *Virginia* hung some thirty yards above the water, and straining backward and downward ran the steel chain looped through her works and fastened by both ends to the submarine. The harsh, raucous laugh of Wizner rose with horrid significance from the *Stickleback's* manhole, which was again above water and open.

"Don't be in a hurry!" he shouted. "Stick around with us a while! We're going out where it's deep! Come in, the water's fine! Got your bathing suits? If you hain't you'll have to let us lend you some.

Sorry to incommode the lady, but we're goin' out where that chain won't put you up so high out o' water. When she draws short, telephone down. Don't yell, for there won't no one hear you. There won't no one hear either of you again in this world, except just you two. By-by! See you in Davy Jones'—damn you!"

And with this, as if pulled down from below, the man vanished into the dark interior, the manhole closed, and the chain, like a line taken by some titanic fish, started out to sea. The air-ship had been captured by the submarine! The mechanical devil-fish was not running very deep; her round deck rose awash sometimes; but with the manholes closed, and with no sign, save the erection of her periscope, that she was more than an inert mass of steel, she swam on, remorseless, silent, the evil element in a battle unprecedented and undreamed of.

Still seated where Theodore had placed her, Virginia looked at him in questioning terror. He was white and horrified, but he was managing the *Virginia* with a set determination, which rose with and met the danger, to save her and her freight if possible. At this moment he was depressing her in her flight so as to get all possible slack in the chain, so that by a sudden upward rush he might break the tether. Once, twice, thrice he did this; but the chain held.

"What is it, Theodore? What is it?" said she.

"I don't know," said he; "but I think it's the end!"

He was not looking at her—he was looking upward, like a man seeking for some sort of inspiration. His expression seemed to say that there was work to do; and as long as every tick of the watch might make the difference between death and life, he had no time for her questions. She stood looking out over the great desolate sea, and back to the receding shore on which she saw a group of forms—the forms of their friends. Nothing could seem more helpless. They were chained to their fate—a dark fiend of a machine that was taking them out to sea, to depths profound enough to drown them. It might be an hour—it might be the next moment. The immitigable cruelty of the plan by which they had been snared took away all hope of its abandonment by any softening of the demons who had devised it, down in that black, round hull.

Carson stood over her with a pistol in his hand. She looked up in wonder, thinking of those cases in which men kill the women they love, rather than allow them to fall into the hands of ruffians.

"Virginia, can you shoot?" he asked.

She took the pistol with the air of one who knows how to use it and nodded her head.

"I shall have to ask you to protect me," said he,

"while I try to cut that chain. They can see with their periscope what I'm doing, and when it is necessary they will come up into the open and fire. By pulling out to sea, I can get her at an angle that will force them into the open to shoot. I'll do that. When the manhole opens, shoot into it. Keep them back. If you should hit one of them, don't let it trouble you—you—"

"I shall kill one of them if I can," said she. "Never mind that! Tell me the things to do!"

"I shall take the pliers and a file," said he. "I don't think the pliers will cut it. It will take quite a while to file it. Even if I can hang on that long, I may be too weak to climb back. I don't know that I can do it, anyhow. You must take us back to land if I cut her free."

"I will," said she. "Never fear, I can do it. I know every lever."

"There's another thing," said he. "We came out with only a little gas. If we go much farther, we haven't enough to get ashore with. I shall have to be the judge of that for you. I think I could soar her in with the aëroplane set of the blades, but I don't know. I think we had better fly low going back, and not waste fuel in vertical lift. That takes power. Keep her gliding about a hundred feet from the water; but if you want the aëroplane set, this is the way to fix it."

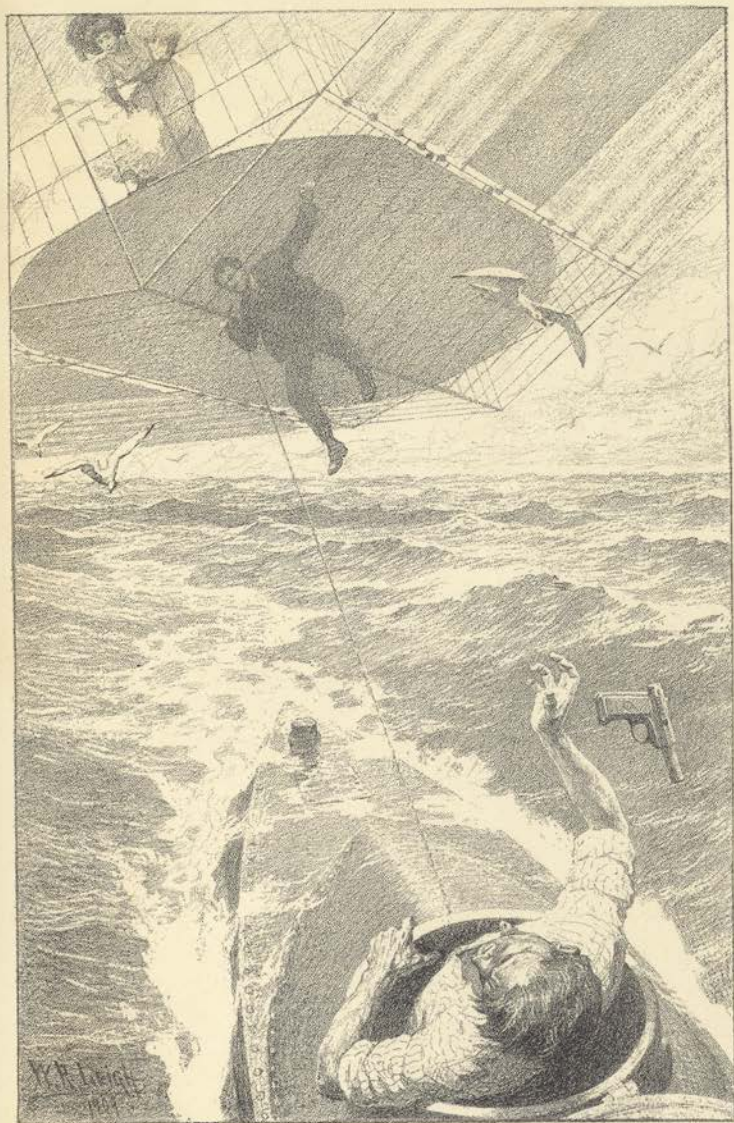
With a swift movement he showed her the way to manage the mechanism. Then he required her to tell him how to turn, how to rise, how to fall, how to vary the speed, how to determine the thrust of the blades. He lashed a pair of pliers about his neck with a lanyard, thrust a couple of files into his pockets, took off his boots, his coat and waistcoat, pulled his little cap's visor far down over his eyes to shelter them from the glare; and stepped to the side.

"You may get ashore," said he, "while I may not. If so, good-by, and God bless you, dearest!"

She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him over and over again—he felt her warm tears on his lips. But he controlled himself sternly, almost fiercely.

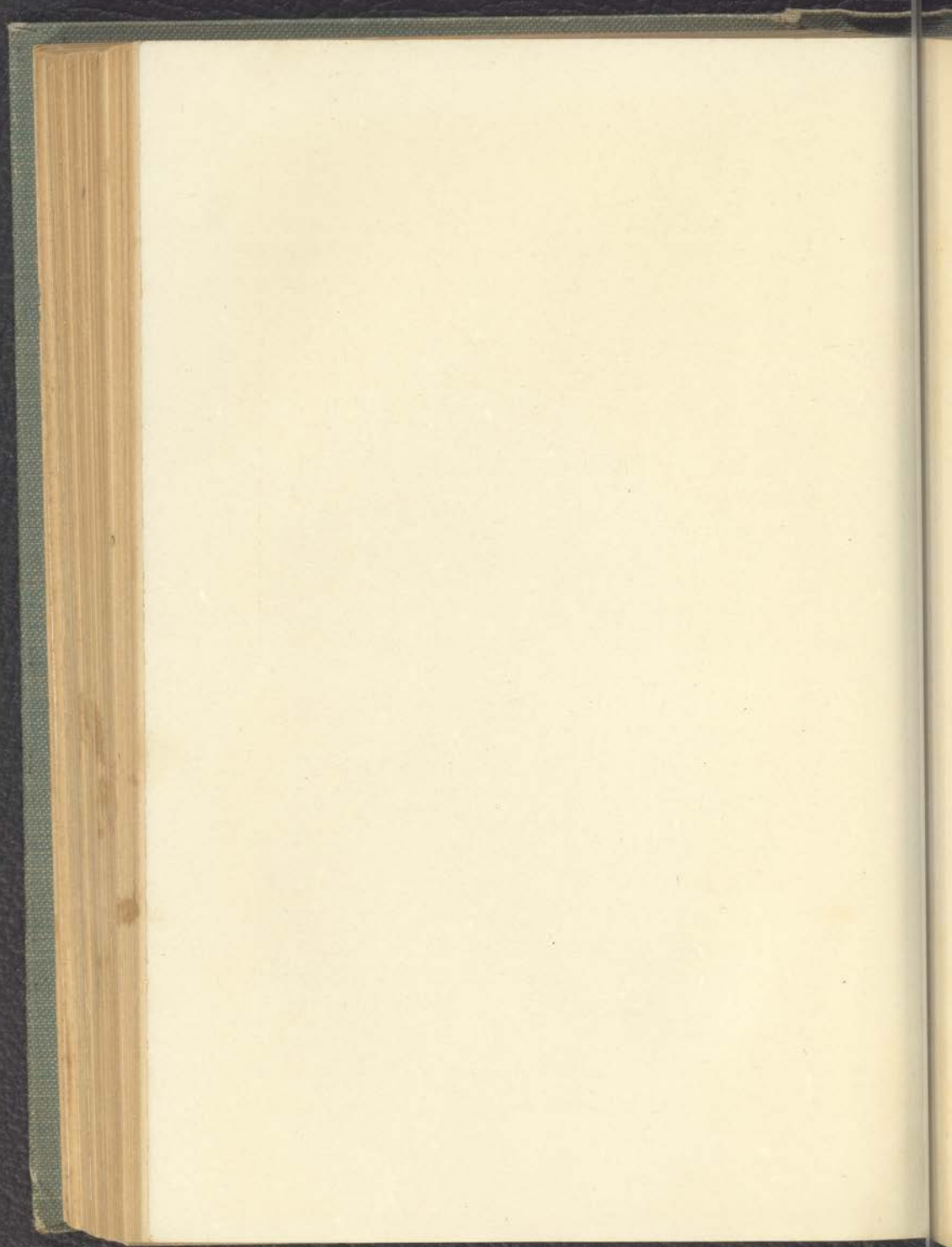
"Don't cry!" said he. "Clear your eyes, and shoot straight! Good-by!"

She stepped to the rail and looked fixedly at the black shadow like a gigantic fish that represented the submarine. Carson had disappeared over the side, in a terrifying hand-under-hand descent, in which he swung over the swelling waves, until he reached the truss-work of the nacelle, where he clung, now, trying his pliers on the chain. The submarine seemed in no way interested, at first; but presently her black shadow grew more distinct, the round deck broke water; and as the manhole opened,



He dropped back into the darkness

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Wizner appeared and aimed at Carson, coolly, as at a target. Too hastily, Virginia fired; the bullet struck the edge of the deck with a vicious spat. Wizner's pistol spoke, his bullet striking metal, flew singing away, and the girl replied with the third shot of this strange duel. She braced herself against the rail, aimed conscientiously at the middle of the mark presented by the villain below, and fired—fired with the curious certitude the marksman feels when he is making a good shot. Wizner had just lifted his arm to fire again; but his hand fell as if struck down by a giant's blow; he dropped back into the darkness like a shot woodchuck, the manhole closed, and the submarine went on toward deep water as grimly as before.

"All right down here!" sang out Carson. "How are you on deck?"

"All right here," said she. "Do you think they'll shoot any more?"

"No," said Theodore. "But watch the manhole just the same. I shall have to file the chain. The pliers won't do!"

The girl waited. It was well for her that she had something to do; otherwise her reason might have given way. She stood by the rail with the pistol in her hand, listening to the "screak, screek" of the file on the chain. Suddenly this sound stopped, and she heard Carson calling.

"They've hove to," said he. "I think they're going to try drowning us here. Don't lose control of yourself—remember, this is a fight, and we aren't whipped yet. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said she. "But it's so awful! So awful! If you were only up here where you could— Tell me what to do! Tell me what to do!"

"Do you see how the chain shortens?" asked Carson. "She's going down. If the water's deep enough she can drown us, unless we can overcome her gravity. Turn the index so as to show a dead-down thrust of the blades—and then full power on the last speed. It will take fuel, but it's the only way! Hurry!"

The air-ship sank, sank, nearer and nearer to the water; but without waiting to learn how the girl was carrying out his orders, Carson again attacked the chain, and the shrill "screak" of the file greeted Virginia's ears again, as she turned the indicator, and threw on the power. As they had never done before, the great engines purred, the wing-blades trod the air with a terrific roar; but with remorseless suction-like force the submarine drew her down closer, closer to the water, and she seemed lost. The sinking was slower, now; but nevertheless more and more of the chain disappeared in the sea every moment. Virginia looked and despaired. The waves were so terrifyingly near; death in their cold

depths seemed so unthinkably horrible . . . she bowed her face in her hands. The "screak, screek, screek" of the file kept on with the regularity of a machine. Carson was at work. He might be drowned; but when he went under, he would go fighting. He was a man! And suddenly Virginia felt herself strengthened and comforted. Death was due every one at some time. Why not now? Why whimper and shrink from what must be some time anyhow?

She stepped to the side, and called to him.

"I think," said she, "that we are doomed. Is there anything I can do?"

"You might advance the spark," said he. "Not much. Just the least trifle . . . Yes, I reckon they've got us."

She sprang to the machinery and did this last thing ordered by her commander—did it with unshaking hands, as a soldier might take up the weapon of his comrade killed at his post. By the faintest trifle she advanced the spark; and went to the side to see the effect. They were lower, now, and the truss-work in which Carson hung must be in or near the crest of the swells; but the "screak" of the file went on—not so strong, perhaps, but steadily still, the pæan of the unconquerable spirit of the man clinging to the truss-work beneath her. It was grand. It was immense. Her spirit rose to

the occasion, rose to the prosaic "screak, screak" of a file in a hand that was dabbled in the waves at every lifting swell of the stolid ocean that rolled on just the same where its prey dangled within the lapping of its tongue, and out yonder where, perhaps, no man had been since creation's morn.

"Theodore!"

The file stopped for a minute.

"Keep her as she is," said he. "We've got the submarine stopped. I've got the chain about filed through—but—I'm a little tired. Keep her as she is—for just a little while!"

Again the file began its work. The immediate danger was over; but both the man below and the girl in the car knew that the terrific consumption of gas in the engines made the seconds too precious for use in conversation. A minute's supply of gas, ten seconds' supply, one second's supply, might save their lives in the home stretch, when the chain should be filed through, and they should take their flight toward land—to make triumphant landing after this deadly peril, or to sink in the waves from which they were now fighting to save themselves. The roar of the machinery filled the air with tempest; the wind from the wing-blades driven down on the water set it boiling like a whirlpool; one moment the straining submarine drew them down by a link or two of the chain; the next the struggling

air-ship lifted the submarine up an inch or so from her dark lair in the depths. At last, at the very height of the fierce struggle, the air-ship shot upward with the jingle of dropping chains, a worn file fell into the foam of a white-capped wave, and the girl leaped to the levers in obedience to the voice of Carson telling her to make haste, for God's sake, and set the wings for a forward flight; to cut the speed down one-third, and to steer straight for shore.

She obeyed. They had risen to a height of perhaps two hundred feet before her inexperienced hands could change the propellers; and Carson told her to keep the height. She asked if she might not use a little higher speed, but he said no, economy in gas was in the moderate speed. "Keep her as she is," said he.

"Can you come up?" she asked. "Have you the strength?"

She asked this two or three times, and got no reply. Suddenly she screamed with the fear that he had fainted, and as if aroused from a stupor he asked her to advance the spark a little, and, when she had done so, to retard it again.

"Are you in danger?" she asked. "Can you hang on?"

"I'm all right," said he, "only my hands. Can you see shore? Is it far?"

The shore was rising fast, she told him. It was not so very far, now, but the gas was almost gone. Could she do anything? Was there nothing to be done to eke it out so as to bring them a little closer before they fell into the sea? Could he do anything if he were in the car?

"Keep her as she is," said he. "When we get close enough so she can glide in, I'll lighten her."

"How lighten her?" she asked.

"It's easy," said he, "from down here. Keep her as she is!"

The dunes lifted white in the sun, shimmering in the heat, swelling as the *Virginia* darted nearer and nearer to shore. The horror-stricken people on the beach saw her coming, like an albatross before a gale. The girl on the deck prayed fervently for the miraculous renewing of the little cruse of oil from which was made the gas that kept them up—and the man underneath hung on grimly, awaiting the cessation of stroke, which would prove that the mixture which was the breath of the life of the great engines was exhausted at last. Once, twice, thrice, came the halting in the machinery that was the death rattle of the motors.

"Virginia!" said he.

"Yes," she replied.

"Fix the gliding mechanism! The gas is done!"

"Yes, Theodore!"

"Turn her nose down a little. With momentum enough, she'll make it from here. And when she gets within those breakers, if she is less than twenty-five feet high, tilt her up again a little. Do you understand?"

"Yes! I'll do it! Anything more, Theodore?"

"No—only remember what you said about forgiving me, if I'd let you come with me. Remember, turn her prow up a little when she nears shore. You'll make it, dear—you'll make it!"

Mrs. Graybill, standing on the shore, noted with the rest the new motion of the air-ship when the engines were stopped, and wondered why it behaved so queerly; and it was her eye alone that detected a man's form clinging to the truss-work under the car. This, she thought, was the person they had tried to rescue. She wondered when she saw the girl managing the machinery, which was so operated as to send the *aéronef* on a long, long, swift swoop down toward the land. In across the line of breakers she came, the very swiftness of her descent making for her peril, as she neared the waves.

And then Mrs. Graybill screamed. She had seen the man under the car deliberately let go his hold and drop into the water. The lightened car, tilted slightly upward now, as Virginia obeyed orders, soared slowly onward, rising a little as her momentum brought the great gliding surfaces against

the air, and then, clearing the foam of the surf, she softly settled on the sand, with her stern rudder, like the tail of a great dead bird, washed by the hungry waves which she had, as by a miracle, escaped. And rowing in from the offing where he had gone in his fishing boat in the wild and improbable belief that he might help his master, came Captain Harrod, with a white-faced young man lying in the bottom of the boat, whose fingers dripped blood from the remorseless work of the file; while from the air-ship they took the senseless form of a girl who had risen above the fear of death, and by sheer pluck had brought the *Virginia* into port.

CHAPTER XIV

A CAPTURE AND AN ESCAPE

"ALLOW me to suggest," observed Craighead, as the gentlemen of the party at Harrod's fishing camp sat in lounging attitudes on various articles used as chairs, mostly jetsam and flotsam of the Gulf, "that in perfecting the first really practicable flying-machine, we have set in motion social and economic reactions that will go on and on far beyond the ken of those who, unlike myself, have not made a specialty of them. As that submarine dragged the *Virginia* out to sea yesterday, we all thought it was the last of Carson, M. A., didn't we?"

"It looked bad to me," said Mr. Waddy.

"Ah sho' thought," observed Captain Harrod, "that Miste' Theodo' an' Miss V'ginny hed gone off togethe' to stay."

Mr. Carson, sitting on a cast-up half barrel, picked at his bandaged fingers, embarrassed.

"I didn't see much hope of escape," said he.

"There wasn't any," replied Craighead. "Your

escape is due to your lack of logic, fair knight. Any one with a lick of sense would have seen and accepted the inevitable. But that's another work of fiction. I am endeavoring to point out, while breakfast for seven gets itself with utensils for two, that the fertile and fecund mind gets hints of connotations rich with wealth and progress from the lowering brow of tragedy herself—the lowering brow of tragedy," repeated Mr. Craighead, as if to give the class a chance to note the phrase in their books.

Captain Harrod, to whom Craighead was an object of superstitious wonder, leaned awry to gaze more fixedly into his face; and sat fascinated, with his fingers crossed, as Craighead went on with his very practical suggestions:

"As to the *Stickleback*," went on Craighead, "if the *Stickleback* it was—"

"It sho' wus," interposed the captain. "She's the on'y sub as has the manhole hatch hinged by—"

"Assuming the fact," resumed Craighead, "to be as stated, the point is, that when she hooked the *Virginia* and started for deep water, an idea came to me which will revolutionize tarpon fishing, as completely as our monopoly—hatched from the egg of a legal maxim found by me, in a borrowed copy of Broom, a maxim on which every law student of the past has stubbed his toe with no idea of its bearing on aviation—will revolutionize aëronautics.

Under present rules, the fisherman goes forth to fish with a launch, a rod, a reel, a hook, and a mullet for bait. When he hooks the tarpon, he has the advantage in weight, the tarpon, in the lightness of the tackle. The tarpon, however, bets his life against the fisherman's time. This is unsportsman-like graft on the fisherman's part. It is like taking toffee from a tad."

Craighead repeated the alliterative phrase for the benefit of the approaching Mrs. Graybill.

"Taking toffee from a tad, copping candy from a kid, filching fudge from a feeble *filius*—"

"Oh, Mr. Craighead!" cried Mrs. Graybill. "That's execrable!"

"So I was endeavoring to show," replied Craighead. "New rules for tarpon fishing shall be promulgated. The foot-pound coefficient of a tarpon-power shall be dynamometrically ascertained; the fisherman must fish from an aëronef, bought of us, by James! which shall have just the power of the tarpon. When he hooks the fish, each party having an equal show, if he has the skill and address, he will get the fish; otherwise, the fish will get him. Accurate records will be kept, and—"

"But excuse me, Miste' Craighead!" said Captain Harrod. "S'pose the man fishin' thataway gits aholt of a fish thet's heaviah than the ev-rige?"

"That," said Mr. Craighead, "would be a risk

of the sport, if the tarpon should have the bad taste to use his advantage. But victory for the fisherman would be worth something recording; and he should be given higher markings; and if the man lost, the tarpon would get no credit at all. This, Captain, is one of those objections offered in the infancy of all great reforms. Do not knock. Boost! That's the radium rule, Captain. Boost!"

"I don't think you could get poor Miss Suarez to go fishing in a flying-machine," said Mrs. Graybill.

"Is she worse?" asked Theodore.

"No," replied Mrs. Graybill. "But she's awfully collapsed. The fearful strain she will never recover from, never!"

"She will," said Craighead. "I shall treat her with my system of mental therapeutics—my specialty—from this moment. She will be well in exactly four hours. Think no more of it, sweet lady!"

"Oh," cried Mrs. Graybill, "can you do such things, Mr. Craighead?"

"Can I?" he repeated. "Look me in the eye. You feel drowsy! You do! You do! In a moment, you will sleep, and you will dream, of him who—"

"Oh, stop!" cried Mrs. Graybill. "I never thought you had such power!"

Mrs. Graybill vanished, throwing back a glance

at Craighead in which archness struggled with terror of his magic. He made hypnotic passes, against which she slammed the door.

"Down in Colombia," went on Craighead, "are some placers running two ounces of gold to the yard. Can't be worked. I took one of 'em from some Creole burglars in Bogota. Took a crew of descendants of the Incas, and went in. Machinery on the backs of mules. Roads like the edge of the sword Mohammedans walk into Paradise on. Got in. Mosquitoes so thick you breathe 'em. *Anaph-eles*, with an occasional *Stegomya* sprunkle in. We had everything but bubonic plague and leprosy in fifteen minutes—which is the local period of incubation of all deadly pestilences. Fled for our lives. Lost paternal patrimony. *Now!*"

With the "Now!" Craighead turned upon Captain Harrod fiercely, and at every statement smashing his fist into his palm, advanced upon him so threateningly that the fisherman gradually gave ground, and finally brought the disquisition to an end by falling off the veranda.

"Now!" ejaculated Craighead. "I shall take that concession again. Mr. Waddy will furnish the money. We carry in machinery and laborers with Carson's aëronef, work the gravels by day, and at night soar to the summit of Chimborazo, where the germs will be congealed and the air so pure,

that our health will get better and better until we can't stand it, and will have to take something to mitigate our robustiousness. Our cargoes of dust will swamp the financial world, place us on a pinnacle of affluence undreamed of, and make gold so cheap that it will be equivalent to a universal bankrupt law, and legislation will be demanded by the distressed creditor class to relieve them of the horrid cruelty of the debtors, who, like Shylocks with the reverse English, will hound them day and night with offers of payment in pure gold. And when we've done this—"

The captain fell off and breakfast was served at the same moment. Mr. Waddy sat by Craighead, asking wary questions about the placers, asserting that he wouldn't put a cent in a mine, if he knew it to run pure gold, two thousand pounds to the ton. Craighead held out hopes that he might find a way to evade his pledges of secrecy, but withheld information.

Mr. Waddy was upon tenter-hooks until the *Virginia* had been explained to him. The young inventor's bandaged hands had no effect upon his enthusiasm to show Mr. Waddy that his "good hard money" was safe, if merit in the aëronef could make it so, and a trip was arranged for Waddy, Craighead and Carson. They would fly down to Fort Morgan, thence to Palmetto Beach, get their

mail, and be back for dinner; for which meal the captain and the guide promised some rail from the swamp. The party must break up as soon as Miss Suarez should feel like traveling—which Craighead took it upon himself to say would not be later than the following morning.

"I can feel the voltage emanating from me," said he. "All I fear is, that I may make her so healthy that it will spoil her beauty!"

Mr. Waddy shied from the sea, and insisted that all castaways seen in it were to be allowed to drown; but once in air he became intoxicated with enthusiasm. If this machine, said he, was so good that the Aërostatic Power people thought it good business to hire Wizner to drown it, its inventor and the young woman who happened to be along—and he could not otherwise explain the horrible affair of yesterday—it was good enough to be backed with all the Waddy money, in all the eight banks. Whatever "the children" said he was in it, win or lose. Caroline wanted an interest, and he'd buy a little stock for her. And he wouldn't mind taking a look at those placers, though he wouldn't put a cent in a mine, if—

The *Virginia* had alighted on the parade-ground at Fort Morgan, softly, like a bird upon her eggs. The bamboo braces fell outward, and she lay on an even keel, the great fortification bursting into an

uproar at her intrusion. The aëronats invariably halted at the mooring-balloon and received passes; but Mr. Waddy's declaration of fealty was so absorbing and the speed of the *Virginia* so unwonted to her pilot, that the fort had been spread beneath him, like a map, before he was aware of it. To alight might mean arrest, inquiry and discharge, after explanations to the commandant, Colonel Krimnitz, of whose severity Carson felt no real fear. But if he tried to go away after running the guard, he might be fired on as a spy making off with complete photographs. Altogether it was safest to alight, thought Carson; and he settled on the parade-ground, greatly to the agitation of an awkward squad drilling under a sergeant, whose bellowed commands were cut short off by the whir of the reversal of the *Virginia's* wing-blades. He turned, saw the huge dragon-fly with its bow rudder pointed at him like a great mandible; and in the same raucous voice of command he shouted, "Well, I'm damned!" and took to his heels, followed enthusiastically by the rookies.

"The courage of the American soldier," said Craighead, "is proverbial. The exception but proves the rule,—just how, may be left for future discussion, while we take up the matter of awaiting our fate, which may be a year in black-hole, or ten days bucked and gagged. Right here is where

Craighead returns to the service, in durance vile, as of old!"

The drill sergeant's expression carried conviction to the sergeant of the guard, where his description of a devil of a big bird-thing that you couldn't see at all till it struck the ground, might not have been credited. The guard turned out and moved on the parade-ground, while the drill sergeant became an orderly to inform the officer of the day. Bearing down on the defenseless air-ship like a whirlwind, the guard encountered a great silver-winged insect with a snug car amidships, her four braces sticking in the Bermuda grass like very short legs. Standing by her were Carson, erect and soldierly, as befitted the surroundings; Waddy, half inclined to crawl under the car; and Craighead, drawn up in an exaggerated setting-up drill, chest thrown out, chin and stomach drawn in, spine incurved in the Grecian bend, eyes set and staring forward like those of a wooden man, his right hand to his cap in a frozen salute.

The guard halted at five paces, and the sergeant advanced, obtaining his first good look at Mr. Craighead, maintaining the attitude of military caricature with a steadiness perfectly statuesque. The sergeant, a little man with a red moustache turned up *à la Kaiser*, looked at him for half a minute, and uttered a mysterious exclamation, the meaning of

which was quite unknown to Mr. Waddy and Carson.

"What the billy h—hotel bill!" said he.

Craighead remained motionless, his hand to his cap. The sergeant amazedly returned the salute. Craighead relaxed his tense muscles, dropped his hand to his side, and winked with the utmost sobriety of expression.

"Podner," said he, "have yeh got any eatin' to-backer?"

"I'll trouble you gentlemen for your passes," returned the sergeant.

"Unfortunately," replied Mr. Craighead, "we omitted to obtain passes. The fact is that the posts were so far apart in the stratum in which we entered that we missed the sentries and accidentally ran the guard. We may have overestimated the height of the American soldier, and passed over the heads of our audience. We will, however, make good now, and take out all necessary credentials. Say no more, Mr. Sergeant. We see your position, and you may trust our discretion. We are all soldiers. This is Gennle Theodo' Cahson, M. A., and this Mr. Waddy, who served in his youth in the typhoid uprising at Chickamauga in the Spanish-American war. Show your button, Mr. Waddy, as an S. A. W. V. You see, Sergeant, that you are quite safe against our capturing Fort Morgan. Am I right

in my assumption that the building yonder from which the officer is emerging so incontinently is the headquarters?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant.

"Then," said Mr. Craighead, "will you not present us to the commandant? You may leave a guard for the aéronef. Your arm, sir!"

"It won't be necessary," said the sergeant. "Here's Captain Bolger now."

Captain Bolger was a choleric gentleman, with whiskers like General Sherman's, much thinned by the increase in the area of the face since the establishment of the foliage. The beard was black; but the red shone through vividly in a color scheme that made the Bolger face an Indian summer sun just above the horizon, with its lower limb in dark haze. He advanced rapidly, with a hippety-hopping gait, as if catching step with an imaginary companion very careless of the march.

"What's this, Sergeant?" he sputtered. "What's this? This is quite irregular, Sergeant—entirely irregular. The parade-ground! A damned thing with wings and V-type engines—two of them—two of them! What do you mean by it, Sergeant? And no passes? Some one will sweat for this—highly irregular!"

He pulled up suddenly and panted violently. The perspiration beginning to drip down from

under his service hat he took the hat off, turned his back as if concealing some very private matter, wiped his head and face elaborately with a silk handkerchief, then turned to the sergeant suddenly, his heels clicking, his posture intensely military, as if to close the incident of the handkerchief, and put it into the dead past for ever.

"The parade-ground!" he repeated in an outraged tone, as if it would have been vastly better if it had been the glacis, or the covered way, or the counter-scarp.

"Pardon me," said Theodore. "My name is Carson. I miscalculated my speed and came in before I was aware of it. I know Colonel Krimnitz, and if—"

"Colonel Krimnitz, sir," said Captain Bolger, "is temporarily on leave. I am the officer of the day, sir. You will produce a pass for your confounded aëronef or I shall order you—"

"I feel sure," said Mr. Carson, "that Colonel Krimnitz—"

"Colonel Krimnitz be hanged!" retorted Captain Bolger, whose wife had recently been snubbed by Mrs. Colonel Krimnitz, and to whom the name of Krimnitz had been made an irritant by Mrs. Bolger. "Colonel Krimnitz be damned, in fact. You can't come the Krimnitz game, sir, while he is, as I have had the honor of informing you, on leave."

"We didn't mean no harm," ventured Mr. Waddy, "and it seems to me—"

"No harm!" snorted Captain Bolger. "What do you mean, sir? Running the guard, sir, in a confounded flying-machine with four eight-cylinder engines—sir!" as if the gravamen of the crime lay in the number of the engines, or the cylinders—"and sticking her infernal legs into the lawn, and—Sergeant!"

"Captain!" said the sergeant, saluting.

"See what that thing is in the fellow's hand," pointing to Mr. Waddy's camera. "Take it, and if it's a bomb, explode it at sea. If it's a camera, turn it over to me instantly; and confine these men. My compliments to Major Flathers; and say to him that I have confined three men who ran the guard in an air-ship, with bombs or cameras, as the case may be, that I have the air-ship under guard, and await his instructions at headquarters."

And Captain Bolger hippety-hopped to headquarters, followed by a soldier with a camera. The three interlopers went into the guard-house, while Captain Bolger's message went to Major Flathers, commandant in the absence of Colonel Krimnitz.

The guard-house was clean and quite agreeably cool, with wide north and south windows guarded by steel basketry built into the concrete walls. A

soldier with a black patch over his eye and a wet cloth on his head was their sole fellow-offender. There seemed little need of the sentry before the door, everything was so secure and tight-fitting. Mr. Craighead rolled and lighted a cigarette, offered the patched man the paper and the tobacco, and smoked. Carson began unavailing efforts to enlist the sentry in a project for an interview with the commandant. Mr. Waddy stood where the guard had left him for perhaps ten minutes, and then began hopping up and down.

"I won't stand it!" he shouted. "I want to wire John H. Gunn! I want to wire Washington, I tell you—John H. Gunn, Speaker of the House! He'll make somebody chew hay for this! Why, I could buy and sell all these understrappers an' martin-gales! Cyrus Waddy put in jail by that red-faced Suffolk! Wire Gunn at Washington!"

"The mills of the gods," said Craighead, "grind slowly. Ever notice that?"

The soldier with the patch and bandage replied that he hadn't paid much attention to 'em; but it seemed reasonable.

"And how fast," pursued Craighead, "do your red-tape mills operate here? When shall we be brought before the supreme being that ranks Bolger?"

"If old Flathers," responded the battered de-

fender of his country, "is good-natured, you may be hauled up by the time he's finished his round of golf. But if it's close, and the doctor stumps him, he'll bet two bits and play another. He'll have his bath, an' his lunch, an' his nap—oh, I reckon you go against him some time to-day. What's the odds?"

"No odds," replied Craighead, "except that the explosion of Mr. Waddy might wreck government property. I never feel so calm as when in hock. But he is different. He can telegraph to Mr. Gunn, who will send a page to the Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, who will appeal to the Secretary of War—and off comes Captain Bolger's head."

"In a horn," remarked the soldier. "Give us another o' them coffin nails!"

Mr. Craighead began humming *It's Twenty Miles to Vassar*, evidently a West Point ditty, paced the guard-house, turning corners with military precision, or stood accurately with certain fingers on certain seams of his trousers as precise as a tin soldier. The atmosphere had permeated his system; and when a corporal's guard called for them, his stride might have been offered as a model.

Access to Major Flathers' desk was opened for them by orderlies described by Mr. Waddy as state's-prison-looking fellows, armed to the teeth.

The major was thin, solemn, bilious-looking, as if he had a bad liver from service in the tropics; haughty, as if the liver had overflowed his temper. Their hearts sank as they looked into his eyes of yellowish brown, with whites of smoky yellow; and noted the funereal droop of his long black mustache, cut down the middle by the greater droop of the nose enormously high, surpassingly hooked, incredibly sharp and thin; he looked so unapproachable and jaundiced and like an immensely exalted potentate contemplating candidates for the Asylum for the Irretrievably Worthless who had been found below grade. His voice was the deepest of basses, rumbling softly out as if protesting that, really, it had no room to turn itself. Craighead started at the sound; and began a close scrutiny of Major Flathers, making notes in a book.

"Who are you?" said Major Flathers.

He looked at Mr. Waddy, his tone of well-modulated distant thunder seeming to say that they were really nobody.

"Who are we?" cried Mr. Waddy. "Who are we? American citizens, sir! Citizens and taxpayers before you was ever born, sir! Wire John H. Gunn, at Washington, that Cyrus Waddy's shut up in jail, an' you'll find out! You'll—"

"It would seem an economy of time, Mr. Waddy," said the major, after quelling him with a yellow

glower, "not to trouble Mr. Gunn nor the president, who might find it inconvenient to attend for purposes of identification. It would be quite as easy for this young gentleman to be the Crown Prince of Germany, and the other the First Lord of the Admiralty as for you to be Mr. Waddy—illustrious though he may be, and no doubt is. You must prove yourselves good citizens by authorities nearer than Washington. What can you say, sir?"

This query was directed at Craighead, who had ceased to take notes and was looking at the imposing major in the manner of one who knows his man.

"Most high and illustrious one," said he, "the world is wide, its population some sixteen hundred millions. Of this considerable force, we are but three. You ask us, O Serenity, to set ourselves apart from the others by brands and marks. Wert thou present when the obstetrician scheduled our strawberry-marks, or the midwife recorded the notches in our ears? Then how can the thing be proven? It is a hard saying. And yet, didst ever see that serrated nose? Give me a pen, and let me mark it 'Exhibit A'!"

The major rose with pronounced absence of haste, adjusted a pair of rimless glasses to his precipitous beak by a clasp of special construction; examined Craighead's nose critically and imperson-

ally, as if looking at a specimen in a case, slowly removed the glasses, and deliberately reseated himself.

"I have observed such a nose in but one case," said he; "but its introduction in evidence does not establish its identity with the only snout of similar asymmetry recorded. 'Exhibit A' will be considered for what it is worth—as evidence. Proceed."

"The memory," went on Craighead, "is more intimately personal and individual than is the organ of olfaction. I will now render a song, which I beg this honorable body to receive as 'Exhibit B'."

Though this declaration made a distinct sensation among the officers and orderlies; and though the sergeant, who was shorthand reporter, broke three pencils in his agitation, Major Flathers never let down by even one degree the saturnine dignity of his presence. Craighead sang with a fine independence of tune, but with an air and style of tone emission which reminded all hearers of a *basso profundo* laboring in the trough of the heaviest vocal sea. That it reminded his friends of the major himself was shown by smiles hidden behind hands, by significant glances, and a final titter as Craighead finished with a sub-cellar cadenza so low that it could not be sung, but only indicated by the drawing down of the chin with a hoarse whisper on the word "morning."

"Oh, it's twenty miles to Vassar, and the Hudson
for to cross;

There's regulations to be broke at both ends of the
route;

But Belinda's eyes are like the sky, Belinda's hair
is floss;

And Jim is black and plagued with love, and
doesn't care a hoot!

Oh, it's twenty miles to Vassar!

But it's fifty smiles at Vassar!

And it's other lovey-dovey things in hosts beyond
compare!

Oh, the love of dear Belinder burns his heart into
a cinder—

And Jim will be at Vassar ere the
morning."

A slight redness crept up under the tan of Major
Flathers' cheek, a slight quiver of the thin nostril
betrayed the fact that Craighead's song had touched
some spot that thrilled—but whether to laughter or
anger no one could tell. Mr. Craighead asked if it
would be necessary to adduce more proof of his
identity.

"Will the proof consist in further vocalization?"
asked the major judicially.

"Oh, wise and upright judge," replied Craighead,
"it will consist of ten other stanzas once sacred to a
select circle at West Point. If an accompanist—"

"In view of this," said the major, with unabated
dignity, "I shall hear the case in private."

The major rose, and passed out without a glance at the intruders. The squad took them to his quarters, where he received them in frozen stiffness; and stood aside to let them into a library rather well furnished with books.

The major sat like a graven image until the receding footsteps were lost to the ear. Then he rushed at Craighead, shook him until his teeth chattered, laughing, slapping him on the back, shaking his hands, and otherwise showing such a reversal of form from his official staidness that Mr. Waddy and Carson came independently to the conclusion that he had suddenly gone mad.

"Craig! Craig!" said he. "You confounded old scapegrace! I've an infernal good mind to throw you in for ten years! And that Belinda song you made up about me! Blast you, the regulations won't permit adequate punishment! And sober, too! Tell me all about yourself, confound you, and introduce your friends!"

"With Mr. Waddy's name," said Craighead, "you are familiar. He is the billionaire owner of Speaker Gunn."

"Confoundedly sorry," said the major. "But if this reprobate," indicating Craighead, "had hinted that he was our West Point disgrace—I should have issued passes, and—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Waddy. "Don't say no more about it, Major."

"And this," said Craighead, "is the inventor and builder of our air-ship, General Theodore Carson, M. A."

"Glad to meet you, General," said the major. "Not in our army?"

"Not in any," said Carson. "It's a pleasantry of Mr. Craighead's."

"Quite so!" replied the major, shaking hands again. "But it was confoundedly irregular to run the guard, you know!"

"We didn't intend—"

"Not a word!" said the major. "You must dine with me—Mrs. Flathers will waive ceremony. She isn't Belinder, Craig,—you disreputable old dog,—disguised as a sober man! Could be hanged as a spy! *Twenty Miles to Vassar*, in headquarters! Nobody but Craig—let's write a letter to Bill Alexander—in Guam!"

The major was as complaisant now as he had been unyielding. He and Craighead talked out the Belinda episode, the expulsion of Craighead, the slowness of promotions, the aëronef company, and then the aëronef itself as it lay on the parade-ground—on which occasion Major Flathers was particularly fierce in commanding a search for

down-looking photographic mechanism, and for explosives. The examination, the dinner, the view of the Flathers baby, and Mrs. Flathers' confidential conversation with Carson, who was always strong in his appeal to the ladies, delayed their departure until the sun was sinking beyond Fort Gaines, and Mr. Waddy was startled into a trembling fit by the sunset gun as they crossed the rifle range, taking it for an artillery attack on the *Virginia*. The darkness crept under them across the peninsula as they flew; and it was starlight when they alighted, each filled with his own anticipations—Mr. Waddy, of supper; Mr. Craighead, of the company of Mrs. Graybill; and Carson, to whom the terrible experience of the day before had made her doubly dear, of admission to the presence of Virginia. Mrs. Graybill met them, with a letter in her hand for Mr. Carson, and a troubled look on her face. Carson turned white as he tore it open.

"I am going away," it ran, "with my aunt, who has kindly found me and told me of your deception in allowing me to live with you, thinking you my uncle. There are many things I might say, many I should like to say; but I might use expressions for which I should be sorry. As for the compromising of myself, of which my aunt has spoken, I care nothing, other things count for so much more. I want our parting to be without bitterness;

so, with the assurance that I shall watch over you and pray for your success, and with thanks for the many, many good and kind things you have done for me, I bid you good-by for ever. We can never forget each other—the things we have known together forbid that; but we can never meet again.—Virginia Suarez."

Craighead caught Theodore as he staggered.

"When did they go?" said he.

"About noon," replied Mrs. Graybill.

Carson groaned, thinking bitterly of the hours wasted at Fort Morgan; and asked for Mrs. Stott. She had gone home on the *Roc*.

"They went north, then," said Carson.

"So must we," rejoined Craighead.

"Yes," said Mr. Waddy, who seemed to consider the Virginia incident closed, "I'll go home an' push the work in the West; you boys to New York, to start the injunctions an' things."

"Very well," said Carson. "Craighead, we'll start for New York in the *Virginia* in the morning!"

That night Carson wandered to the spot on the beach where he had drawn Virginia down out of the sky in the runaway helicopter. The heavens were overcast, the east winds moaned through the pines, great gray waves broke thunderously on the beach, and from the marshes came the croak of night-herons. He sat pondering on his misery, on

the temptation to which he had succumbed, on the hopelessness of his love. They—he and she—had approached each other like two stars, and flown off into space, never to meet, in predestined orbits. And after all they had enjoyed and lived and suffered together! The hand on his shoulder felt for the moment like hers, but it was Mrs. Graybill who had come through the soft sand, silent as a ghost, to his side.

"Mr. Carson," said she, "this isn't the last. Don't give up. I couldn't speak to her; I was only a stranger. But I kept the fragments of the letters she tore up. Put them together. They will cheer you up. What a woman wants to say, and doesn't dare, means much, much more than what she says. Mr. Carson, don't despair!"

And she ran away as silently as she had come.

CHAPTER XV

A RETREAT FROM BABYLON

THE date when the *Virginia* left the dunes of the Alabama coast for her first long voyage is now historic. It placed man, as a flying animal, on an equality with the birds and bats and insects. It relegated the makeshifts with which the world had attempted the conquest of the air, with the flail, the coracle, the galley, the galleon, the distaff and the sling, to the limbo of abandoned things. The gas-bag of the aërostat, and the aëro-nefs of the first decade of the century, went the way of the tentative and imperfect with the steam-engine of Hero, and the war-gins of Archimedes, Callimachus and Demetrius. The new era is one of great flying engines beside which the *Virginia* was as a humming-bird to a hawk; but which are, every one, built on the *Virginia's* principles—the direct thrust of the blades, and the balancing by the automatic distribution of power by means of light gyroscopes. The new hero was the miserable young

man who looked like one with his death-wound, and manœvered the new machine like a veteran—Theodore Carson. Every school-boy knows these things.

But every one does not know of her difficulty in getting off. She cleared from her nest and struck out like a homing pigeon, and suddenly, as if by an elastic return-ball cord, she returned to the launch of Mr. Waddy and Mrs. Graybill on Freshwater Lake.

"What's wrong?" inquired Mr. Waddy anxiously.

"My mental cargo shifted," replied Craighead, from above. "The *Virginia* was leaky and unseaworthy! Had to put back!"

"Shifting cargo" symbolized the fact that Mr. Craighead had something to say—in which he passed from a forced business conversation to an exchange of farewells with Mrs. Graybill, cut short by Carson's resumption of flight.

The wharves and verandas of the hotels and villas were filled now with observers of the new inhabitant of the sky. They saw her take her second flight northward; but again, with a sweep that filled them with admiration, she fled back once more to a position a few yards above the launch.

"The crew mutinied," said Craighead. "Salt horse wormy! And we ought to work out this Broom idea a little more, Mr. Waddy."

"There ain't no use in your comin' back for that," said Mr. Waddy. "I know my business as well as the next one. I'm handlin' the West. You let me alone."

"Assuredly, Michael," assented Craighead. "Good-by, Mrs. Graybill. The hard part of going to sea is good-by."

Again they flew northward; and again, within five minutes of losing the launch, Craighead demanded that Carson put back.

"I would have converse with Sir Cyrus Waddy," said he. "This time I must. My statistical bureau has dug up the real item that I wanted to show him. Return, Sir Thedo' Cahson, Lord Mayor of Every-whar! Return to the launch!"

"No!" said Theodore; "we have vacillated enough; too much. I shall not return."

"But, I say, old chap," urged Craighead, "this is the lahst, you know. Seriously now, Mr. Waddy doesn't know the first thing about my scheme for controlling Middle West space through titles to highways. I've got to talk with him. Come now. Go back, or I'll jolly well hop into the bay and swim. I will go back. I'll scuttle the ship. I shall not sleep a wink. I'll be worthless unless I'm taken back. Back, villain, unhand me! I'll buy a starling in the first poultry market, and teach the infernal fowl to hollo in thine ear, 'Back! Take me back!'

I'm in earnest. The farther we go, the more things I think of to go back for. Take me—"

"For the last time?" Carson stipulated. "Do you promise?"

"Yes, good my lord, this is the amen trip! I swear it!"

The *Virginia*, darting like a meteor up the bay, swerved so sharply over the Middle Bay light that Craighead well-nigh went overboard, and steered once more into the beautiful blue semicircle of Bon Secour Bay, Craighead peering forward under the pintles of the bow rudder for the launch, as a globe-circling sailor might scan the shore for his waiting wife. They went hurtling back over the Palmetto Beach hotels at a height of five hundred feet; and thence to the easterly end of the Little Lagoon. The galleries were alive with people, scanning the tremendously powerful flier with glasses. What was this thing harrowing the sky in this seemingly aimless fashion, so alive, so vigorous, so forceful in her swift swoop?

Craighead, with the binoculars, saw in the black circle of Freshwater Lake no launch.

"They're not on the lake, Carson," he cried in panic. "What can have happened? Is it possible they've sunk?"

"Don't faint!" said Carson. "They're in the narrows, hidden by the cane. We'll find them."

"I cal'late you've guessed it, Cap'n," replied Craighead, with a sigh of relief. "There they are now."

The *Virginia* followed the tortuous channel as a kestrel in quest of finches might trace the windings of a rail fence. In the sheltered pond, which Carson called Virginia's lily-bed, Mrs. Graybill was gathering waxen blossoms, and piling them in the pilot's oilskins. When the low-flying aëronef came up astern, she grew crimson, and laughed.

"Well," said Mr. Waddy; "I'll be darned!"

"We returned to say—" began Mr. Craighead.

"It was Craighead's desire," broke in Carson.

"Exactly," assented Craighead. "I desired a word with you, sir, on the western highways—"

"No use o' that," cut in Mr. Waddy. "You give Filley the idee?"

"I communicated the conception," said Craighead. "Yes."

"An' I paid him f'r an opinion on it?"

"You became obligated for it," said Craighead. "Equivalent to payment, in your case, but, legally, quite distinguishable."

"It's the same thing," cried Mr. Waddy. "An' the fellers we hire know more than a quarter-section of folks that don't know their own minds. Don't you come back again; it bothers me like muskeeters. Go on!"

"Presently, most puissant sir. There's a matter we haven't mentioned. How shall we yawp forth the grand hailing sign of distress, when I am far away?"

"They're still runnin' the mails and telegraphs, ain't they?" queried Mr. Waddy testily.

"Would you," queried Craighead, "place a world in pawn on the faith of a mail clerk; or the fidelity of a telegraph system controlled by our loathsome enemies? As triumvir to triumvir, answer, in the name of our patron saints, Sir Henry Morgan and Jesse James!"

"We agreed on a cipher," snapped Mr. Waddy. "Go on an' use it."

"Cipher!" scoffed Craighead, who had devised it himself. "Not with the hounds of Shayne on Carson's traces. Why, any cipher can be deciphered. Go back to the time of Bacon—"

"Well, if yeh stay much longer," cried Mr. Waddy irritably, "we may as well go back to the time of Ham as Bacon! What you drivin' at, anyhow?"

"Your pungent play on words," said Craighead, "gives me joy. It proves my power to corrupt. Last springtide you'd have been incapable of it. I'm driving at the necessity of a trusty messenger who will die rather than disclose, will swallow blue-prints to keep them from the enemy, will explode

a magazine before admitting a traitor even unto its table of contents. I know one such."

"Who?" asked the puzzled Waddy.

"Your beauteous daughter! Give her a running schedule per ten-hour train between Chicago and New York, bringing your messages and returning with ours until victory is won. Eh?"

Mrs. Graybill leaned back and laughed until she was crimson of face and teary of eye.

"It won't do," she said. "I never could eat blueprints. Any one can deceive me—"

"Then I've some hope," said Craighead. "That's worth coming back for."

"Use the mails, you absurd fellow!" she went on. "Good-by. Take him away, Mr. Carson; and return with your shield, or on it, Mr. Craighead. Oh, you—ha, ha, ha, ha-a-a!"

"This rippling ha-ha, fair one," said Craighead severely, "would be unseemly from a less seemly pharynx. But I swear—"

The oath was cut in two by an upward and forward flight, at the last speed, that pulled the speech in twain and left the launch alone in the great marsh, with Mrs. Graybill, her color high, her mouth occasionally curving into a smile—sometimes culminating audibly—practising Japanese flower arrangements, while her father combed his beard with his fingers and said nothing.

Passing over the bay with a wide westerly detour, the *Virginia* came in over Spring Hill, and alighted softly at the aëronef landing at Mobile. From a hundred sally ports—streets, alleys and wharves—poured a throng of people, attracted by the strange craft that had made port, the negroes, first forming about the car a black ring starred with white eyes. Caucasians then assumed advantageous positions, rather abashed at the steady gaze of Carson, and the evident amusement of Craighead.

"Howdy, folks?" said the latter. "Take a good look. For even when ye wist not, we vanish. Out of the great deep we come, into the great deep we go. The Elementals who send us are the pow'fulest spirits what there is. But a brief space have we, to warn Mobile. Repent! Repent! Yet a few mo' days, an' Mobile shall be done destroyed!"

"Stop, Craighead," cried Carson. "Don't pay any attention to what he says—"

"They won't," replied Craighead. "They'll sin just the same the minute we're gone. Even an angel from Heaven, which far be it from me to claim—"

"Dan Thomas," said Carson, to an old negro, with a whip in his hand, "come here!"

"Yes, Mistah Cahson," responded the negro.

"Fetch me at once one Number Two can of A-quality methanose—and get me a list of the aëronat clearings for the last two days."

"Yes, suh."

Thomas darted away; and Carson began testing his machinery for another flight.

"Pardon me," said a man, who had a withered arm drawn up to his side in such a way as to give one the impression that he was holding his breath; "but, are you going far, so short-handed?"

"Not far—in time," replied Theodore.

"Only to Alaska," added Craighead. "We meet a Russian admiral in St. Michael's at three. If that nigger doesn't hurry we shall be late, General—and what will Admiral Phlaskovodka say then?"

The man lifted his sailor hat, bowed politely, and stepped back, unveiling a face behind him which Carson knew—the foxy, suspicious face of Wizner, the inventor of the lost helicopter. Carson stooped as if for some casual purpose, laid hold on a spanner, and spoke to Craighead, low, distinctly, intensely.

"I'm going to get a man in the crowd," said Carson. "Guard the aëronef!"

"All right," said Craighead, who had no idea of his full meaning; "but hurry back. Remember the admiral."

With the spanner in his hand, Carson rose; and with a light leap he stood in the midst of the crowd, his face so fierce that the throng flowed away like water, leaving him in an open space, like a lion

in a ring of foes. Wizner had fled; but through the thinned crowd Theodore saw his wiry figure, with the arm that Virginia's bullet had reached hanging in a sling, darting behind a building as if running from death itself. With his hand on his hip, Carson gave chase. Some one cried, "Stop him!" and an officer, seeing in Carson the only fugitive in sight, stopped him.

"Let me go," cried Carson, struggling. "Come with me and arrest a man for attempt to murder."

"That cock won't fight," answered the policeman. "Good dodge, but won't go with me. What's he done?" he inquired, bringing Theodore back.

Nobody seemed to have any definite complaint to make.

"He jumped out of his air-ship," said one, "and acted like he was going to brain some one."

"Did he brain any one?" asked the policeman.

"No," replied the Mobilian, "but he might."

"If he had met any one with brains," said Craighead, "to act as the *corpus delicti*. A braining requires a brainee—a term connoting brains. *Advocatus Diabolus*, thy case is weak!"

"Well," laughed the policeman. "He had a right to jump lookin' as cross as he pleased."

"But he ran off," persisted the *Advocatus Diabolus*, "as if pursuing some one—"

"Or trying to get somewhere," supplied Craig-

head. "Aren't people here allowed to hurry? Have you ordinances against haste, O Guardian of the Realm? What's the speed limit for pedestrians in Mobile, anyhow?"

A boy in a messenger cap interrupted the colloquy by calling "Mr. Cahson, Mr. Cahson!" as if "paging" a man in a hotel.

"I'm Carson," said Theodore. "What do you want?"

"Somebody on the wire for you at the telephone booth in the hotel," replied the messenger. "Wants you at once."

"May I go?" asked Theodore of the policeman.

"For all me," replied the officer. "I don't want you."

Wondering who in Mobile might desire speech with him, Carson said, "Who's this?" into the transmitter.

"Your old friend Wizner," said the receiver. "Crazy as ever. Never mind where I am; I'll tell that after I've talked, if you want me to—you pup!"

Carson glared into the receiver with crimson face, and lips drawn back unhandsomely; then hastily returned it to his ear, and caught the middle of a sentence about smuggling.

"I didn't get that," said Carson.

"Well, you'll get it," said Wizner, "if you ain't

careful. You can have me pinched—but I can prove an alibi. And while I'm proving things, I'll fix you fellows for smuggling; and put Harrod where the dogs won't bite him; and you, too!"

"I don't know anything about smuggling," protested Theodore.

"Well," went on Wizner, "if you dig into the big sand hill with the steel buoy on it, you will. You'll find what'll put you in a better trade than putting me in prison for a frolic with your aëronef. Oh, don't talk so innocent! How did you finance your air-ship, except by free trade?"

Carson had nothing to say. He remembered Captain Harrod's expression when Wizner had called him an old smuggling fool. He remembered a thousand mysterious things, now made plain by the hypothesis of Harrod's having yielded to the coast-wise temptation of smuggling. That the old man he loved should be guilty of a felony was bad; but to be in Wizner's power was worse. Thus, thought Carson, while Wizner waited for his reply, uttering into the instrument a sly, sinister, exasperating chuckle.

"Lost your tongue?" he taunted. "Well, arrest me. Any one can tell you where I am; but will the girl leave Silberberg to come and testify? The courtship's just getting good, now; too bad to disturb 'em!"

Carson hurled the receiver away and strode back to the *Virginia*, looking even more forbidding than when he had leaped over her side. As he shoved through the crowd, he found Thomas, the negro, with two men, hoisting the can of methanose aboard.

"What about those aëronat clearings?" he asked.

"Hyah's a papah they give me," said Thomas. "I reckon it's in that."

The sailings were not many. The *Tern* for Memphis, the *Long Tom* for St. Andrews Bay, the *Phyllis Y* for Montgomery; and, yes, the *Roc* departing the morning before "for northern points." Carson threw the paper away, and Craighead picked it up.

"We can overhaul the *Tern*," said he, with a judicial air, "at, say, Jackson; and take on our friends for Alaska. I do hope the president can join us at Omaha! Gentlemen," addressing the crowd, "here you see a new aëronef invented by me. By reaching Alaska before nightfall we win a million dollars. This is a sure thing, as the sun will not set there for three months—the bet is with a Brazilian who forgot about the days coming quarterly at Nome. But we shall be honorable, and pay him the million on the nail if we fail to make it before sunset in Rio, the real *locus*. To-morrow, we shall win five hundred thousand from Rothschild, by leaving Greenwich Observatory at sunrise going west, and

returning at sunrise next day from the east—circling the world in twenty-four hours of continual sunrise. Wish us well, gentlemen! At the bar of the Cawthon we have made arrangements for you—all to be treated to champagne, if you insist on it, or to mineral water, if you are wise. I have made a specialty of this champagne game, and I know. Shun intoxicants, but drink heartily to the triumph of the *Virginia*. Good-by, honest peasantry, your country's pride, good-by!"

The majestic rise of the *Virginia*, with no preliminary run—or Mr. Craighead's parting promise of vinous cheer—drew a round of applause. Craighead waved his cap; but Carson, paying no attention, laid the *Virginia* dead for New York.

Carson's manner, or the parting in the narrows, depressed Mr. Craighead's mercurial spirits; and they were far up the Alabama delta before he spoke—and was rebuffed by Carson's refusal to explain his effort to "get" the man in the crowd. They flew high; and the constant picking up and dropping of railway trains and steamers, and the swift succession of villages and towns spoke of the fierceness with which the *Virginia* was hurled against the leagues between Mobile and New York. They left Montgomery to port and Atlanta to starboard. Carson had assigned himself and Craighead their du-

ties, and both were busy, Craighead at the tiller with his eye on the compass, Carson looking at every working part, oiling, feeling for hot bearings, watching for the slightest quiver or jar, greedy of every mile. He was cracking on too hard for new machinery—he knew that; but he never hesitated. And it was only after they had won through to the mountains, and were speeding along over the great National Appalachian Forest that he relieved Craighead.

That gentleman stood up, heaved a sigh of relief, and waved his hand to the north and west, where fleecy cumulus clouds buttressed the horizon with mother-of-pearl.

"Another hour of that," said he, "would have made the points of the compass a subjective vision for ever. I can see 'E.N.E.' and 'N.E. by N.' on every pinnacle of yon clouds! And now, sir, an' it please thee, I'll get luncheon—if luncheon it can properly be called that costs less than fifty cents per jack-knife. *Allons!*"

In the little locker were found the elements from which Craighead prepared the luncheon of bacon, eggs and coffee, cooked on the methanose stove. Carson listened to the engines, as a physician to heart-throbs, glancing from the compass to the mountain domes of clouds in the north and west.

"We shall get into upper Atlantic regions," said he, "just in time to hit the area of local storms tonight."

"Tornadoes?" queried Craighead, pouring out the amber coffee.

"Maybe," smiled Carson. "Severe local storms always mean possible twisters."

"Well," replied Craighead, "what do we care? I've got me umbrella, ye kneow."

"That makes us safe," replied Carson. "The worst we need look for is a good hard thunder shower; but I'd rather make my first landing in Manhattan in fair weather."

"It's squally there with me as soon as I blow in," answered Craighead. "Come to grub."

Carson looked from the tiller to the compass, and hesitated. He had never tried letting the *Virginia* follow her nose with the tiller lashed.

"Of course," said he, "she'll fall off—but if she turns, I can put her back on her course. I believe I'll try her."

"Do," urged Craighead. "With this fairway, she oughtn't to run into danger unless she's steerable by heart-throbs and subjective yearnings. She'd go back, if she was!"

"She'd go straight on," replied Carson; "I wouldn't need to lash the tiller."

"The galling slavery of the crew," said Craig-

head, "doesn't allow his telekinesis to buck the subliminal brawn of the captain.

"I go away this blessed day,
To sail across the state, Matilda;
My air-ship starts for various parts,
At twenty after eight, Matilda;
I do not know where we may go,
Or whether near or far, Matilda;
For Captain Carson, don't make a parson,
Of any foremost tar, Matilda;
That mystic man beneath my ban,
Shall suffer, *coûte qu'il coûte*, Matilda;
What right has he to keep from me
The airy, scary route, Matilda?
Although, in sooth, I am a youth,
Of common sailor lot, Matilda,
Am I a man on human plan
Devised, or am I not, Matilda?"

And echo, if there were any place to echo from, would answer, 'Not Matilda!' Have some of the milk, while the *Virginia* chases her tail above Mr. Pinchot's forest."

"She doesn't chase her tail much," replied Carson. "So far, at least."

She did not. The gyroscopes held her on an even keel, and the altimeter-statoscope delivered

the verdict that the *Virginia* was following a course as level as a battleship's. The compass trembled about the point where Carson set it, as the air-ship made minute deviations with changes in the air currents, or momentarily lost coördination of the engines—at once corrected by the synchronizer. She was holding far closer to her course (away up there in the blue) than a schooner with lashed helm would have done in the steadiest of breezes. Carson ate, watched the triumphant test, and forgot to frown.

Save for wisps of cirrus clouds miles above them, the sky was clear. Peak after peak, range after range, village after village—and occasionally a big, smokeless town about the national power plants of the Leighton reservoirs—came hurrying toward them from the northeast, passed beneath like visions, and fell behind into the wake of vanished things. The great features of the landscape, the lake-like reservoirs in which were stored the waters that in former years had desolated the valleys with floods, but now were stored to immunize the rivers from low water and to turn the laboring wheels of busy cities; the bright green areas of young trees where the old washed-off mountain sides had been reforested, the far-off farming lands, brown in the unweathered spring, or green with the emerald of winter wheat; the valleys, ranges, and plateaus, which lay as distinct as on a relief-map—all these impressed

themselves on the voyagers as the streets of a village on the mind of a stranger.

"I used to think it quite a trick," said Craighead, "for the birds to find their way north in spring; but, pshaw! I can do it in the night. A continent is as simple as a quarter-section. The goose isn't as much wiser than I as I always thought. If Mr. Bryant had come with us, he'd never have written *To a Water-fowl*. There'd have been no mystery in the goose's 'certain flight' up here where he can see things."

"See that big stratus cloud?" asked Carson. "Shall we go over or under it?"

"Personally," replied Craighead. "I've been under a cloud long enough."

The stratus was an immense vapor sheet half a mile above the earth. Underneath were the gloom and dullness of cloudy weather; but above it the sun shone with a brightness augmented by the brilliancy reflected from the upper surface of the cloud as from a great glittering plain of snow. The sun was past the meridian, and shining warm; but on the wing, over that great expanse of pearl, the air felt—not cold, but "caller," and they put on their top-coats. Fields of cirro-cumulus clouds five miles above the vaporous plain were duplicated on it by their own mottled shadows, like great clusters of foliage silhouetted on an illimitable ground of wool.

The shadow of the *Virginia* ran with her across the cloud, like a black bat, haloed in the unspeakable glory of a triple rainbow which ringed the scudding shadow about in concentric circles, so bright, so refulgent in dye, so glorious in their mingling lines, that the voyagers, glancing from radiance to radiance, lowered their voices to the thrill of a beauty too intense for speech.

The immense engines were moving more regularly than clockwork, keeping the pledge of their makers that, if supplied with fuel and oil, they would run without a single stop until worn out—the perfection of the internal combustion engine, once so untrustworthy. Craighead, past the first surprise of the beauty of the cloudscape, looked down at the three rainbows which trailed behind them now like rings of lambent fire, and criticized the outlook.

"This is, to coin a phrase," said he, "rotten, rotten! Where are those right angles that make up the peculiar allurements of the American landscape? Where are the straight lines that constitute real beauty? And not a patent medicine or breakfast food sign as far as we can see—rotten! When we own these lanes, we must have improvements. Instead of those disgusting rings of color, we must lay everything off in rectangular blocks, and put up signs advertising nice, airy lots—magnificent view—in Stratus Addition to Nimbusville. We must

establish the Strato-Cumulus Club-House at the Sign of the Hail-Fellow-Well-Met—devoted to high jinks—for the accommodation of exalted personages, including, of course, the Air-Apparent of the Raining Dynasty. We must open the Alto-Stratus Opera House—there being, I believe, no Soprano clouds—and the Cumulo-Nimbus Electric Company's Thunder Plant; hey, Gin'ral?"

"I'm glad," said Carson, "to get above profits. Thank Heaven, clouds can't be commercialized."

"Can't, eh?" sneered Craighead. "You have made good with this machine, I'll have to admit; but you lack financial resourcefulness. I've got to dig out the by-products of the company myself. One of them has just occurred to me. We'll lease sites for captive balloons all along our lanes of licensed air navigation, and sell the right to throw ads for Johnson's Gum Drops and Mother Hubbard's Obesity Regulator on the shining levels of the cloud floor. It can be done by a simple mechanism—if it isn't invented, I'll invent it in an odd moment. And we'll sell exclusive rights to throw colored pictures of Killarney and Senator Clark's house, and moving pictures of the great Sage-Brush Hen-House Robbery on the thunder clouds in alternation with praises of Peterson's Planetary Paint and Bugworth's Insecticide. Why, hang you, witless youth, let me out, while I work these things up, right now!"

"I'll go down, and show you where you'll drop," said Carson; "but I can't stop."

"Going down? Floor below?" asked Craighead. "Wherefore, O brave skipper?"

"I want to see where we are," said Carson. "This is like an open ocean. I want to compare the map with the landscape."

Obedient to the tilted rudders, the *Virginia* pointed her prow downward; her propeller blades hurled her swiftly forward and toward the earth, and she plunged into the cold steam of the stratus cloud, into mist and white scarfs of lacy fog, and the snowy obscurity of an aërial blizzard. Craighead gasped at the chill and the blindness.

"Ring for a guide," said he. "I'm lost."

He was not lost for long; for the *Virginia* clove the fleecy hoodwink, and emerged through its lower levels into the clear shadows of the nether air. They could feel the warmth radiated from the ground, balmy with earthy scents. The landscape was utterly changed. Far off to the west was the blue line of the highlands, its peaks lost in haze. Below were farms planted in corn and wheat and tobacco, from which came up the lowing of cattle, the crowing of cocks, and, most distinct of all, the barking of dogs. Far to the northeast lay a shining river, widening at the limit of vision into a broad estuary; and just within sight could be discerned the

clustered spires and towers of a city. Carson looked the landscape over and studied his map.

"I wonder if it's possible," said he, "that that's Richmond?"

"If so," answered Craighead, "let me adopt Mr. Greeley's war-cry, 'On to Richmond!' But, to coin an expression, what's the matter with its being Philadelphia? It's so peaceful under its atmosphere of Quaker drab. But if not the City of Brotherly Graft, let's have it Richmond."

"But it must be the James," cried Carson. "Craighead, we've made Richmond three hours quicker than I thought it possible! A stork, or a Canada goose, couldn't have covered the distance—and they sometimes go two hundred miles an hour! Why—"

"Let us exult over yon insufferable plutes," cried Craighead. "Let's fly rings around 'em! Let's sail circles around the snobs!"

Craighead, scanning the southeast with his field-glasses, had discovered at a distance of six or seven miles, a huge silver aëronat steering northward and to its passengers he referred with many gestures. Carson trained his binoculars on her and grew tense as a greyhound at sight of a distant wolf. The aëronat was of the Condor type and of the largest size, with bow rudders, and along her side ran the line of a vestigial aëroplane. Still at

the same unheard-of speed, Theodore threw over the tiller and made for the air-ship. Craighead looked at him in wonder.

"Why so obedient, O Knight of the Congealed Countenance—all so suddenly?"

"That ship looks," said Carson, advancing the spark and crowding the engines until the wind of flight swept the *aëronef* like a gale, "like the *Roc*!"

After a few moments on a straight course to intersect that of the *aëronat*, Carson threw the *Virginia* up into the cloud. As the earth was blotted from sight he compared the direction of the *aëronat* with the points of the compass, making a mental calculation as to the distance and the speed of the two ships, and in another moment they emerged on the shining upper levels of the cloud, which, like a shimmering screen between the *Virginia* and the other craft, hid their approach to each other. One below the curtain and one above it, the air-ship of the future and the air-ship of the past flew on converging courses. Carson held his watch as it ticked off the time for the five or six miles of distance, set the rudders for a downward dip, plunged through the cloud for the third time, and darted downward out of the vapor like a swift into a chimney.

They looked about—and saw nothing. The *aëronat* was invisible. And yet, above the purring of the machinery, came to their ears the tremor from

powerful engines, the whirring of screws close at hand. Could the Condor have ascended into the cloud as they descended from it? It was possible, but the sounds were approaching, not receding; and voices now mingled with the sounds of machinery—voices coming closer and closer.

"My God, Carson!" shouted Craighead. "You're going foul of her. Look down!"

Just in time Carson looked. From the clear depths of air below, the great bubble of silver rose, swelling in her swift approach. A collision meant ruin for the *aëronat*, and probably destruction to the *Virginia*. The propelling blades of the *aëronef* would cut the envelop of the gas-holder like paper; and the two ships, in a huge mass of tangled wreckage, would fall to the earth in death and ruin; or the escaping gas from the *aëronat*, ignited from the exhaust of the *Virginia's* engines, might explode, hurling the fragments of both vessels far and wide—and Carson saw in the ruin the fair form of *Virginia Suarez* hurled to earth and crushed to formlessness below.

There was no time to check their downward career; salvation lay solely in a swift dart to evade the rising peril. Quick as lightning Carson threw on full speed forward. The *Virginia* obeyed her machinery—and as she swooped to the *aëronat's* starboard, the latter rose swiftly; the *Virginia's*

stern rudder grazed the gas-bag and was all but carried away; a cord of the suspension system of the air-ship snapped with a detonation that set the huge fabric in a tremble; there rose a cry from the deck of the hitherto unconscious monster, as her people realized the fearful fact that here in these dizzy heights they were in collision with something; and as the *Virginia* came in sight past the immense bilge, they saw white visages turned upward to them, as might appear the doomed traveler's face when assailed by the roc of Arab fable; and as they sheered off, a man came running out of the cabin with a gun in his hand, as if with some wild notion of giving battle to the invisible destroyer which had swept down upon them from the fleecy heights of the cloud.

The *Virginia* was half a mile from the air-ship before the crew of the latter had time to assure themselves of her safety. The great aëronat had not changed her course, but was still cracking on at the height of her speed toward Richmond—like a whale at which a swordfish had made a vicious slash and missed. The *Virginia* went astern as well as athwart the course of the other craft, and as she sheered to starboard, the aëronef and the aëronat sped from each other at the sum of their two speeds—perhaps four miles a minute. The people on the latter must have thought the other gone for ever,

when an astounding thing happened. The *aëronef* wheeled about and gave chase—nay, she gave chase so swiftly that she swelled visibly in her swift overhauling of the *aëronat*. In a time so short that it seemed like a breath, the *Virginia*, on a level now with the other's deck, came in close astern, then sheered off and deliberately ran around the big *Condor* as she stood on her course at full speed. As a falcon might describe circles about the head of the hawk, the *Virginia* went about the *Condor*. As she crossed the bows a cry went out from the great ship's engine-room—a cry of mingled fear and astonishment—astonishment that any *aërial* craft dared lay herself across a speeding *Condor*'s bows, fear of a collision, and the dread which comes to those who see themselves in the power of another. Why did this new craft so course about them? It was some new engine of aviation—that was sure. And with such incredible speed and such unheard-of mobility, what more profitable trade could open to her than the *aërial* hunt and spoiling of the "dirigibles," with their passenger lists of millionaires?

So as Carson came up on his second circumnavigation of the *Condor*, there stood at the rail of the big air-ship two or three men with guns, who made threatening gestures and shouted to him to stand off or they would shoot.

"What ship is that?" cried Carson.

"None of your damn business!" was the reply. "You stand off or we'll shoot!"

"Shoot, if you dare!" cried Carson. "Don't you see that I can go above where you can't shoot and rip your gas-bag in perfect safety? Come now, answer my question. Why, confound it, if I wanted to do you any harm, don't you see you're in my power? Don't be silly."

Something in the boy's tone reassured the aëronat.

"This is the *Dædalus* of Spokane," was the reply. "What devilish thing is that?"

"The *Virginia* of—of Carson's Landing in Alabama," replied Theodore.

"You will pardon us for our abrupt descent to your level," said Craighead suavely. "Ordinarily, the *Virginia* prefers a higher plane. We were strictly *in nubibus* a moment ago, and on materializing we found ourselves descending on you like a duck on a June-bug. We busted one of your suspension cords—for which we are sorry; but the gods bump into things when they come down from Olympus."

"Whose aëronef is that?" asked the man who seemed in command.

"It's mine," said Theodore; "I built her."

"Well," said the man on the other deck, "you've

got the world by the tail; and if you need money to swing it, just apply to Calvin J. Fry of Spokane—if you've got clear title to the mechanism."

"Thank you," said Theodore. "I thought you might be an acquaintance. I think we'll leave you, now."

"But wait," said Mr. Fry. "Let me handle your foreign rights. I can get next. I know the Japanese foreign minister; and China's looking for something like that. Hold on—Hatton, will you let a mechanical devil's-darning-needle like that leave the *Dædalus* behind as if anchored? Hold on, please—"

But the *Virginia*, gently increasing her speed, left the hustling Calvin J. Fry gesticulating far out of hearing.

"That, to originate a locution," said Craighead, "ought to hold them for a brief period. Looks as if they were back-pedaling."

"I will find them," said Carson, evidently meaning something else, "if they have hidden her in the farthest cave of that thunder cloud."

"Highly improbable, deown't ye kneow," suggested Craighead, "that they should select such a demnition insanitary place for the young person. Doubtless we'll run across 'em in New York. By the way—dinner! I have the honor to report that the ship is without grub, and is starving!"

"I shall not stop," said Theodore, "this side of New York."

"Very well, sir," said Craighead, "I still have my boot heels. Doubtless I shall do very well with them. I suppose you see that we are butting into weather, dead ahead and on both bows?"

"Certainly. It's the area of local storms."

Past Richmond, they left the domed capitol at Washington far to port, passed between Baltimore and Dover, and directly over Philadelphia, where Carson made a wide circle above the vast aërial harbor, scanning the berths for a huge silver aëronat of the Condor type—but finding none. It was growing dusk, and the west and northwest were ramparted with towering thunder-heads, quivering with lightning, toward which Carson hurled the *Virginia* like a bullet. The town-studded suburban region of New Jersey swept under them as if drawn by swift mechanism; and the harbor of New York lay beneath, alive with shipping. The lights were already burning, and the far-spread Babylon of the modern world hung like a fairy dream from the foreground to the farther rim of the concave cup of the earth. The castellated marge of the city stood, incredibly lofty, clear to the water's edge, reared so high in air as to challenge the air-ship itself in altitude. Carson was amazed and stunned. He had never seen New York, and his ideas were all

inadequate to the actualities before him. The streets flashed into sight as the *Virginia* passed into positions permitting a view of the bottom of one metropolitan cañon after another—flashed into view as long lines of arc-lights and gorgeous electric signs—a perfectly unimaginable tangle and jungle of lights of all colors; and then the soaring craft would pass on, the streets would be snuffed out by the tall buildings—the illuminated roofs and towering cliffs of lighted windows becoming a great plain of glimmering constellations. The boy was afraid—the huge city, roaring up at them like a ravening beast struck him with terror. It was so unreal, so sinister, so like a gorgeous nightmare of feverish human achievement, that it seemed unthinkable that it could hold for him aught but danger and struggle, and, perhaps, defeat.

"Why dost circle about like a sand-hill crane?" said Craighead. "Why don't you 'light?"

"Like the sand-hill crane," replied Carson, "I'm afraid. Where can we alight?"

"Gad!" said Craighead, "I never thought of that! New York has always reached out for me so lovingly, that the idea of there being any difficulty in getting into her embrace never entered my brain. We *are* a little shy of knowledge of how to get in from above, aren't we?"

"What are the harbor rules?" asked Carson.

"Hanged if I know," replied Craighead. "The ground has always seemed adequate as a way in before. Can't you follow the crowd?"

"There's not an air-ship to be seen," said Carson. "They've been driven in by the night and the weather. Is it safe to drop into any harbor we may happen to find?"

"What else are we to do?" cried Craighead. "It's coming on to storm; and I'm hungry; and there's the Great White Way beckoning! We must land."

"No," replied Carson, "I'm afraid. And I think it better by all means to go out to the country, and come into New York by day. And that's what I'm going to do."

It was quite dark now, save for the moon, which, nearly full, was climbing the eastern sky, still clear. The land to the south and east would escape the storm for hours. To the northwest towered the pearly clouds palpitant with lightning. Craighead, complainingly assenting to his companion's plan of retreat from Manhattan until day, expected Theodore to turn the *Virginia* from foul weather to some far New Jersey village; and was astonished when he entered upon a swift flight up the Hudson, which lay shining in the moonlight, laced with the wakes of boats. Far ahead, on both sides, quivered the lightning of the storm; and from afar came the rumbling of thunder. Carson seemed to be seeking

night in the heart of a thunder-storm. Craighead seized his arm and tried to glean something of his mood from a scrutiny of his face.

"I know how impolite it is to ask about such aberrations," said he, "from experience. But may I inquire why you seem determined to enter upon an unseemly frolic with the Storm King? No, by James, you've passed the Storm King, and you've headed for the Catskills—the confoundedest place for thunder and lightning in these parts. What about you?"

"I'm going to the Catskills," said Theodore. "Before I sleep, I'm going to find Shayne's Hold!"

CHAPTER XVI

SHAYNE'S HOLD

WITH a complaining, mutinous crew, and a captain sullenly silent, the *Virginia* fared north along the Hudson with her cargo of dreams and fears. Theodore, at the tiller, between glances at the compass and the chart, watched the silver ribbon of the river broadening into the placid lake of Tappan Zee, contracting to a thread between Peekskill and West Point, and lost altogether in a sheet of rain that roared down across Poughkeepsie.

"I never supposed," remarked Craighead, as they passed far east of West Point to escape the thunderstorm, "that I'd ever be able to look so scornfully down on this cradle of our nation's heroism and flubdub, which lost its chiefest jewel when it expelled me. Proud nest of warriors with indrawn stomachs, I scorn ye! If I knew where ye were, within a league or so, I'd shake off the dust of my feet against ye. I laugh in your upturned face—ha ha!"

Carson was still silent, as he avoided the local shower that drenched the decks of the night boats, gained its rear, crossed the Hudson in a slow drizzle at Kingston and stood northwest toward heavy dense masses of towering clouds, vivid with incessant lightning, screening the high peaks of the Catskills—and Shayne's Hold.

"I'm distinctly for this trip now!" cried Craig-head. "Talk about excitement! Why, when before did man that is born of woman make a night flight into the whither, dodging thunder-storms by the way? What is more elevating than to cast contempt into the teeth of the elements by dancing up into the very front of a cloud-burst, and getting away by superior foot-work? The watery kingdom whose ambitious head spits in the face of Heaven—why it's modest and retiring compared with us! The armies of the tempest encamp against us, they compass us about, they vaunt their strength even as a gladiator, they speak in thunder across the leagues, saying, 'Let the left wing advance yonder, and the right wing hold the hills, while the center rushes in with the trampling charge of its wind and down-pour—and we shall get these mortals, good and plenty!' And then we outflank them on the east and give them the contumelious ha-ha, and hang on their rear threatening their communications with Medicine Hat and Kamloops, by James! And if they do

surround us, we'll rise into the inane—as has frequently been my habit anyhow—and we'll soar over the topmost domes of their encampment of destruction and dampness and statical electricity, and we'll drop down outside the lines—dry within and without. This is sport for a king or a hippogriff. On, on, say I, and yet again, on!"

"That's all right as pure fancy," replied Carson, "but if we ever get hemmed in among these storms, we'll not get out by going over them."

"Why not?" asked Craighead. "I'll not hear that there are limits to the achievements of this flying exclamation-point, for the prospecti upon which I am mentally engaged must speak of the pleasures of tornado-baiting, and the following of the spoor of the typhoon and the sirocco. Why not hurdle the tempest, caitiff?"

"Those highest towers," replied Carson, pointing to the thunder-heads now again snowy in the moonlight, "are thirty, forty, fifty thousand feet high."

"Well, what do we care?" protested Craighead. "It wouldn't hurt any more to fall that far, than from where we are. Come, better logic, sirrah!"

"The upper strata," said Carson, "are snow and ice and frost."

"Better to feel a frost," said Craighead, "than to be one, Sir Dagonet. Come, thou'rt unhorsed!"

"And the atmosphere up there," went on Carson,

"is too rare for the *Virginia's* foothold; or for breath. Before we got above those domes, the engines would be put to it to keep her at a standstill."

"Then, sir," said Craighead, "you have enlisted the great, safe, sane and conservative Craighead in a wildcat promotion of a machine in which, in surmounting an ordinary thunder-head, we shall be successively stalled, frozen to death, and suffocated! Am I right, Colonel Carson?"

Carson was questioning the altimeter-statoscope as to whether or not their altitude would carry them over the peaks which must now be fast rising beneath them. Far to the north glowed the lights of some great hotel like a swarm of stationary fireflies. Beneath was darkness and mystery, though once he heard a dog's bark—the last sound lost in aerial traveling. Craighead waited as if for a reply.

"By your silence," said he, "you confess. Let me out. I am hurt to the heart. To have fooled away so much time on such a dinky thing! Let me out! I would fain walk back to Sherry's."

The simile of an advancing army quite obviously described the approaching storm. Like a vast arch the clouds marched on, covering the mountains far to right and left, the black nimbus on which they were based sweeping the earth with a trailing veil of rain. By abandoning the Catskills, the aëronef might have evaded the struggle, but her commander

seemed to have no notion of retreat. Though terrified by the lights and towers and multitudinous life of New York, he drove his craft unshrinkingly into the teeth of thunder and lightning and wind and rain.

"Put on your oilskins," said he to Craighead.

"It's humiliating," said Craighead, "but I reckon I must."

"There's an opening yonder in the rain," said Carson. "If it doesn't close up, we may slip through to the back of the storm again!"

As if the wings of the advancing army had extended its lines until they pulled apart in the center, the rain opened where Carson pointed. At that moment the whole heaven was black, save where the moon, now riding high, touched the cloud-summits with silver; but in an instant a sudden discharge of looped and linked lightning lit up the whole northwest, and Craighead saw through to the rear of the rain as through a window, the base of which was the hills, its upper limit a straight horizontal line of black nimbus, its sides misty and indefinite with encroaching downpour.

"We must go lower," said Carson, "and pass under. The rain is closing in; but I reckon we can slip through, pretty dry."

The on-coming black arch—lighted to whiteness when the lightning blazed—swelled fearfully as

they approached, its rainless gap narrowing momentarily. It was a race with the elements. The penalty, if they lost, was, to be sure, nothing more than a drenching; but it was none the less exciting for that. The curtains of water, drawn aside as if to let the travelers through, swung together as they approached. The edges of the cloud curled under, rolled by the contending currents, the lightning became almost incessant.

"Whoop!" cried Craighead. "The *Virginia* wins! I guess I'll stay in this deal for a while after all! Chief Hole-in-the-Cloud, I renew my fealty!"

As he spoke they passed under the rain cloud, and the wind turned and swept the *Virginia's* decks in a gale. To left and right the blinding flashes revealed hills lashed by the torrential downpour, and forests bowing in the storm blast, while a deep, rushing roar rose from the earth, like the sound of Niagara. There was a moment of the sharp dashing of huge drops with strokes like hailstones; and the *Virginia* slipped through the thinned phalanx of the rain and winged her way on—only to find herself face to face with a stronger army following the first. Towering so high as to overhang the interspace between showers, came another storm, its front solid and heavy and uncompromising.

"Surrounded!" cried Craighead. "Now must we surrender at discretion, or sell our lives dearly! Me

for surrender—if we can find an inn. Some would be a live coward rather than a dead hero, but I'd rather be a live tumble-bug than a dead anything. Come, brave Southron, surrender! Let's to an 'otel."

Carson laughed—thinking of Shayne's Hold, and conjecturing as to its whereabouts. If he read his chart correctly, the lights seen afar to the northeast indicated that they had left the Kaaterskill behind, and were nearing Black Head Mountains—though he confessed to himself that the crags revealed by the lightning might be the Hunter Peaks, or even the summits of Slide Mountain. All he really knew was that he was above the Catskills, and that unless he could out-manœuver the elements, they faced an encounter with rain, wind and great possibilities in the way of lightning. The domes of thunder-cloud a few miles to their right seemed almost low enough to be overpassed; so he set the levers for an ascent; and the *Virginia* rose like an osprey chased by an eagle.

"Which way does that shoot us," queried Craighead, "—if a foremast tar may inquire?"

"Forty-five degrees up," answered Carson.

"Afraid of contamination by low associations, or what?"

"I'm trying your suggestion," answered Carson.

"I'm scaling the front of that shower."

"Thank you," said Craighead. "A dash into a blizzard may give me an appetite. Oh, for a hard-boiled hailstone! . . . But man, man, the audacity of it!"

Even Craighead's voice was hushed in awe. Like the fairy domes of some city of oriental fable, rose the cloud-castles, their summits white in the moonlight, their folds dark like a dove's wing. Suddenly the lightning blazed out in the heart of the black base on which the city of enchantment was reared; and instantly the whole vast fabric grew white and palpitant and terrible, while the blue sky beyond and above it turned black velvet by contrast. The lightning ceased; and there hung the billowy cloud, silver-white and drab on a base of darkness as before; and climbing toward the pearly summit like a black insect winging its way over a mountain-top, soared the audacious air-ship, seen of no eye but that of the Infinity of the infinite spaces whose arcana it dared invade; while, as if to turn back the intruders, the lofty ramparts were momentarily reared higher and higher, new towers surmounting those of a few moments before, old domes curving toward the zenith as if boiled up from beneath—as they were. He who will watch the ascension and inflation of the thunder-clouds of an increasing storm will see the impossibility against which the *Virginia* was pitted by her presumptuous builder.

For it was an impossibility. The air had grown chill as with frost, and still the clouds were far above them. The bite of the propellers on the air seemed to fail; for the cloud masses no longer appeared to fall, as when the aëronef was rising.

"We can't make it," said Carson.

"Don't try!" exclaimed Craighead. "It's efronterty!"

Changing a lever or so, Carson drove straight toward the pearly bosom of the cloud. He was far above that level line from which the spectator of a storm sees falling the fringe of rain, and among the rounded masses of the lower cumulus. The *Virginia* again seemed to make speed; for the clouds swooped down on the aëronef visibly, as if to destroy her; over them went the murky pinions of the squall, and then came darkness and cold in which they swam through blinding and beating sheets of rain and huge vortices of chill mist. Sudden darkness wrapped them, torn through with still more sudden light, so blinding, so prismatic that it smote the eyeballs like a whip, as a tremendous discharge of flame cut through the cloud like an archangel's sword—its slashing blow barely missing the speck of man-made mechanism which blindly felt its way through the lair of the lightning, like a shallop in the home of the Midgard Snake. The thunder pealed out in a swift, tearing crash, sudden as a gunshot. The metallic points of the *Virginia* blazed

with white flame. The electric lights winked out like closed eyes, and then shone forth again. The men felt tinglings in their fingers and toes, their hair stood out stiff as if frozen while wet—and then came back the darkness, the cold, the rain and mist, and the beating of the wind.

Carson sat with his hand on his levers, pale as if dead; Craighead clutched a hand-rail, his eyes turned aloft as if in invocation. A more remote flash, and darkness returned, but not so densely; the space before them grew softly light; and in a moment they swam into the moonlight above great masses of woolpack, nacreous like the inside of a shell and etched with the shadow of the *Virginia*, surrounded by a glorious lunar bow.

All about towered the higher clouds like those through which they had come. Ahead was a great cavern, miles in height, into which they winged their way like a bat into its cave. But this grotto was neither dark nor noisome, but whitely shadowy, with huge stalactites dangling from a roof so high that one almost expected to see imprisoned stars under it. Rising from the abysmal hollows of the cavern floor towered immense stalagmites, thousands of feet high; and under the diffused light of the moon, reflected into the cave mouth from the alabaster fields astern, and multiplied in the colorless spaces of the enormous chamber, the stalactites and stalagmites changed, melted away, reformed, and

detaching themselves, floated away in broken masses.

In all this memorable voyage nothing else was so incomprehensibly immense, so beautiful as this; but it lasted for a few moments only. Through the immeasurable chamber of cloud darted the aëronef, into a second smother of rain and mist, and out on a lower level, into the calm space behind the storm; where, under a sheet of low-lying vapor from which dropped the last of the rain, lay the peaks of the mountains, high, craggy, jostling the lower clouds. From this region of shadow they emerged into the moonlight again, and began their search for signs of human habitation—a quest seemingly hopeless, not from any lack of houses, but from the unlikelihood of finding the one place sought. Even by day it might not have been easy. Yet the *Virginia*, systematically scouting, no longer pursued her flight like a migrating bird, but flew here and there as if for prey. At every lightning flash, Carson peered about for white walls, open pools, or other signs of so rich a dwelling. Wherever the scarped mountain side simulated masonry, they hovered and made sure it was not a wall. Finally, just as Theodore was at the point of retreat, both at once saw what neither doubted was Shayne's Hold.

The Hold was on the triple peak of one of the

ruggedest and highest masses of the Catskills, rising steep as a wall, hundreds of feet in the air, to three summits, in the midst of which stood the mansion. Soil from below had been placed in the hollow between the peaks, and gardens planted in it. The huge buildings had been built; the animals had been introduced; the last luxury had been supplied—and Shayne's Hold had been sealed up. Down from the mountain flowed three streams, up which had run the precipitous roads to the top; and when the time came for closing the Hold to those who had no way of navigating the air, Mr. Shayne had built across them immense dams, using materials blasted from the mountain sides at such places as to render quite unscalable every place where ascent might have been possible before. The steepened precipices thus carried across the ravines in masonry made a lofty wall entirely around the mountain. The water filled up the abysses behind the dams; and thus, where roads had been, were now deep lakes, stocked with fish, and cruised over by every craft which sail or oar or motor might fit for ministry to luxury and pleasure.

The dams furnished electricity to light and heat the Hold, and to propel its vehicles. Every effect that could be produced by lights, white and colored, the electrician-artists had worked out for the illumination of this enchanted palace hung on cliffs.

Overlooking the region, as its owner overlorded his fellows, the Hold was a place of mystery, holding no neighborship with the people below, who sometimes heard bursts of sweet music, a voice lifted high in song, or the pealing of a great organ, descending as from Olympus. Foresters and woodmen, tramps and campers, rich and poor, were shut out from this terrestrial paradise, fenced from the world like Eden of old by mountain walls, and by masonry as firm as the hills. The huge *aëronats* came in swarms, sometimes, like fabulous birds congregating for some mysterious purpose not understood by those who looked with upturned faces, and with hating hearts—for the man below always resents the flaunting and domination of him above. For this, however, Mr. Shayne and his guests, in the high altitudes of coolness and health, with everything that wealth could furnish, isolated in a world of their own, cared nothing. The sailing of the seas of air had made this place possible; and by no other means could it be reached. It was a real Laputa—an island in the air; and those only could reach it who could fly.

Seen from above, it seemed a precipitation in stone of the vision of a Beckford. The cliffs formed a circle so artificialized as to impart the impression that the mountain itself had been built by man.

Dammed in the old ravines, glimmered three triangular lakes, swarming with pleasure craft, and ornate with boat-houses and pergolas. Skirting the cliff ran a line of arc-light clusters, patrolled by a guard against intruders from below—their long vigil as yet unrewarded by a single trespass. The lights—a fiery wreath for the brow of a mountain-Bacchus—made twilight in the hollow where stood the beautiful house, so built as to seem already enwrapped in the ivy, and drab with the weathering of age. About the peak ran a labyrinth of bridle-paths and carriage roads, all outlined from above by winding lines of lights, like the route of an army of bewildered glow-worms. Hidden by a spur of cliff, was the immense air-ship garage, the most commodious in the world, save those of the king of England and the president of the Russian Republic. There were summer-houses and conservatories; cellarage for a Lucullus; stables and kennels; courts, alleys, and halls for games; libraries; galleries; observatories—an *alter orbis*, immune to the airs, diseases, noises, tumults, and unchosen companionships of the lower earth—and, indeed, to a great degree immune to its laws; for Shayne's Hold was by special act a unit of civil government, with magistrate and constables chosen by form of law from its own servants. Thus the Hold drew up its rocky

skirts and spurned the contamination of the neighborhood and the trammels of local law.

The lightning had disabled its lighting system for the most part, and the Hold had gone dark. Carson had made two or three reconnaissances over the very spot, but had not suspected its presence, for the sky was clouded and the luster of the pools too feeble to reach his eyes; so that the sudden out-flash of the myriad lights, when the currents were restored, came to both men with astonishing unexpectedness. Craighead was clamoring for an abandonment of their search.

"I ask not for human grub," said he, "but turn me loose to dig roots, or mayhap snare a toad or exhume a worm. I would not live alway, but how would you bury me up here, old scout? Think!"

"I have been thinking," replied Carson, "and I must admit that you are correct—look there!"

The Hold had blossomed suddenly in fire. The lakes edged with lights glimmered like mirrors; the clustered arc-lights delimited the high *mesa* like a map; the winding labyrinth of incandescents netted the peaks like glowing Lilliputian threads about the recumbent Gulliver; and in the midst stood a great, roomy, columned mansion, its wings in shade, its central court a gleam, the radiant heart of an elaborate splendor. Carson drew in his breath sharply.

"My God!" said he. "Who could ever think of such a thing?"

Craighead was silent, until Carson unhesitatingly turned the prow of the *Virginia* directly toward the Hold.

"What would you do now?" he asked. "Play we're kids going after tigers—and finding them?"

Now that he had found the Hold, Carson was too much at a loss to reply. He would not ask admission—and he had no idea that he would be admitted if he did. But he must see Virginia. Utterly estranged as they were, this night voyage had a reason—the hope of seeing her, of asking her forgiveness, of bringing her to see that when she dropped from the sky to his feet, he had loved her, that when she had come to live with that uncle of whom she had heard so little, and had found the last Carson in him, the temptation was so masked in duty that it was too strong for him. And had he ever once in that delicious, perilous time of acting "Uncle Theodore," inexcusably presumed on the relationship, or failed in goodness? True, he had let her stay as his niece; but had not his father always thought himself of the same blood? Virginia must allow some weight to this tradition. She must see that, while too remotely related to be objectionable in a nearer, dearer way, he was too probably of kin to have turned her away. And,

surely, when once he could look in her eyes, all the dear, disguised avowals and acceptances in the mistaken past must make him something better than a stranger. He would land in Shayne's Hold, if it were the last act of his life.

With the ancient instinct of the surreptitious lover, he made for the angle between two dark wings of the great house. Glimmers of light from two windows were their sole sign of occupancy; the center of human concourse being about that core of light in the court. The wings seemed like low adjuncts for conservatories or billiard-rooms; and the angle between, with its light mottlings, looked like a flower-sprinkled lawn, on which Carson felt confident of placing the *Virginia* gently, and with no disturbance. Beyond this he had been too much engrossed in the management of the aëronef to make plans. With a slow soaring motion she came into the angle like a steamer into her slip—and found, instead of a lawn, a graveled roof cluttered with tables and chairs as if for the serving of refreshments. Among these the *Virginia* nosed in, dumped some chairs, a table and two potted palms into the court, and settled down amid crackling furniture and crashing pottery—a beautiful landing, in a rather unsuitable spot.

Craighead leaped out on the roof.

"Let's run!" said he, in a stage whisper. "They

must have heard that, and if they catch us, we're in for it!"

"Stay here," said Carson, in a low tone. "If we must, we can fly in the *Virginia*. I'll see if anything's broken!"

The *Roc* had reached Shayne's Hold just in time to escape the storm, and the wearied Virginia had retired, sick of the harping of her aunt upon the disgrace of her sojourn with "Uncle Theodore;" weary of telling how innocent it had been, how gentle and considerate he was, how idyllic their life would always seem—all in spite of her anger at Mr. Carson. She had taken dinner on the roof, watching the march of the storm, wondering where that air-ship was, in which she and some one had so nearly met their death. She was angry, and she despised Theodore, but she hoped he was safe, that his campaign for the control of the air against her uncle might succeed—though that seemed the wildest of presumption. While her maid prepared her for bed, she thought how much happier she had been at Carson's Landing, with no attention save an ewer of hot water brought up by old Chloe.

Her uncle had spoken of a wireless message from Wizner at Mobile, relating no doubt to Theodore and the *Virginia*; and she was horrified to think that he could keep up communication with the man who

had tried to murder both her and Theodore. With a book close to the light, she was composing her mind to sleep, when into the dreamy quietude came a purring that was so unmistakably the voice of the aëronef that Virginia rose, with her hand to her heart, in an amazement not all unpleasant, wondering where her namesake might alight, and what Shayne's hired constabulary might do with Theodore—when from the roof came a scraping as if all the furniture were being moved at once; chairs and tables went over the parapet with a crash—and the voices of Craighead and Carson came in at the window, low, hurried and agitated.

There was a hustling in the lower hall, as people ran to the windows that gave on the court, and rushed out to see what had fallen. Virginia turned out the dim light—I wonder why?

"Well," said she, in answer to her maid's tap, "what is it, Fanny?"

"I 'eared an awful noise," said Fanny. "It seemed to come from 'ere, Miss."

"Some things fell into the court," replied Virginia. "Please tell the servants; and say that things must not be piled upon the parapet. That's all, Fanny."

"Are you quite sure, Miss—"

"Yes, yes! Run at once and tell them. I am quite in earnest, Fanny!"

Fanny's footsteps went out of hearing; and Virginia walked to the window. There lay the dear little air-ship, that she and Theodore had planned campaigns for, and conquered the world with. This wing, which had poked so nearly through her window, was the very one upon which she had hung, to test the balancing—and she reached out and patted it with her hand. Theodore was passing the other way, now, moving chairs and tables, peering into every bearing and gearing for signs of damage. Craighead was skirting the parapet as if looking for a staircase.

"It's a miracle," said Theodore, at last, "but she's all right and ready to rise at a touch!"

"Thank God!" said Virginia.

"Did you find a way down?" asked Carson, all unconscious of the nearness of what he sought.

"Only the old way by which I came off the back stoop of the emporium," replied Craighead. "It's a matter of specific gravity. As to getting back, unless you brought your specific levity with you, I really don't see, old chap, how it's going to be managed."

"Once down I can force my way up," said Theodore, raising his voice in his intensity. "Do you think I'll go back without seeing her? No! You stay here, and—"

"Mr. Craighead!"

The voice came from the darkness of the house, cool, calm, self-possessed.

"Present!" answered Craighead. "But don't shoot! I'm a starving man, in charge of a maniac—"

"Please come here, Mr. Craighead!" said the soft voice.

"Virginia!" cried Carson.

"Please tell your friend," said the voice, "that if he presumes to address any person except yourself, this window will be closed!"

"Got that?" asked Craighead. "Or will you have the message repeated at your expense, to avoid possible errors?"

Craighead approached the glimmer of white drapery, and Virginia gave him her hand, which he gallantly kissed.

"You may tell your friend," said Miss Suarez, "that his coming here is a foolhardy thing, and quite uncalled for. No one here either can see him, or would if she could."

"You hear, old man?" queried Craighead. "The imprisoned damosel saith it's all a mistake. She don't want no knight! This balcony business lacks appeal, being hackneyed and overworked. It's no go, Colonel—except for you. Do I correctly interpret the speech from the throne—and to the thrown?"

"You may tell him," went on Virginia, "that his movements have been reported, and the Aërostatic Power Company is about taking legal steps—I don't know what—to contest with him—I don't know what!"

"That's in my department," replied Craighead. "I don't allow my friend to mingle with it. And tell *your* friend—to coin an expression—that we shall be with him in the courts. The great Craig speaketh of his specialty."

"And now go!" said Virginia. "Your coming here at all is perfectly shameless!"

A murmur of voices arose from the court, and lights flashed out, illuminating the roof and the girl's form and face, as she stood at the window in flowing white robes like an angel.

"I can't go!" said Carson. "I must speak! I was wrong not to tell you of your mistake; but I loved you from the moment I picked you up from the sand and carried you into the cabin! I couldn't say you had no place to go! I wanted you! And I didn't think of anything that—that could remind me of—of—of your reputation—"

"Mr. Craighead!"

"*Adsum!*" responded Craighead. "But not prepared to recite. Let's not relay this talk any more. Speak to the villain direct. The current is burning

out the wire. Let him talk to you or install a transformer. Help! Help!"

"Tell your friend," went on Virginia,—and her voice now faltered—"that I shall consider what he says—"

"I believe," cried Carson, "that I *am* the last of the Carson family! My father always taught me—"

"—and that I shall cease to be angry by ceasing to remember him. And now, go! You are imperiling your precious interests and risking arrest."

"Of that," said Theodore, "we are not at all afraid!"

"Speak for yourself," quavered Craighead, as the cries below redoubled. "I'm scared stiff!"

"We are here for no bad purpose," said Theodore firmly, "and we shall not fly—"

"Foolish boy!" cried Virginia. "They will confine you during pleasure, through officers that can act legally, and study the air-ship, and steal your creation! Go, I beg of you, go!"

There was a knocking at the door, and loud voices demanding admission. Virginia extended her hands imploringly as she spoke; and Theodore seized them.

"I will go," said he, "when you tell me when I may seek you and make my explanations! I have the right, Virginia!"

"Oh, oh," she cried. "You are cruel! You are putting the blame of your ruin on me! Go, Go!"

"When may I see you again?"

"When you have won your fight for the *Virginia*," answered she. "When the fruits of your genius are saved to you—if you will go at once! Or when you are completely ruined—maybe!"

"Hurry, old man!" cried Craighead. "They're putting up ladders. Hurry! I'll go bail you see her again some time. When you're ruined, will be the soonest—if you don't come. Fly with me! Fly!"

Shayne's voice was heard outside the door, giving orders that it be broken in, and some person hurled himself against it unavailingly. A flat cap appeared above the roof; and as the man under it mounted the ladder, carrying a pistol, Craighead seized an overturned chair, and screwing its legs into the breast and face of the scaler, dumped him neatly into the arms of three or four servants in the court—after which he examined the chair leg, shouted, "No meat on it; I shall starve!" and threw the chair down after the man. Leaping into the car he shouted to Carson to come, or he would have to walk.

Theodore clung to Virginia's hands. His fighting blood was up, and he hated to miss seeing the dear faces of his foes. The discharge of the pistol,

however, admonished him of the seriousness of his situation, and emphasized Virginia's pleading. He clasped her in his arms; she feebly pushed him off, but yielded to overpowering force.

"Within a few weeks," said he, "I shall be ruined, or successful. And I shall come—for your love!"

"I promise nothing," she whispered, "except to consid— Oh, Theodore, go, go! Please, for my sake, go!"

Her face was upturned in pleading, and he kissed her mouth—once, twice; and as her door crashed in, he gently released her, leaped into the car, and threw on the clutches. The aëronef, rising, soared above the great house, and sped off into the night, amid the whizzing of bullets and the crackling of fire-arms. The attack on Shayne's Hold was repulsed—but its leader was jubilant.

CHAPTER XVII

AMATEUR DAY IN COURT

“**W**HAT is the business, Mr. Craighead, of the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company?”

Mr. Craighead, looking down into Broadway from the window of his office, ceased his mysterious counting and tallying, snapped a stop watch and turned to the group of reporters. His look was reproachful.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “you are crass Roman soldiery. I am Archimedes making calculations; and, instead of allowing him to equate his equations, you javelin him with questions. Tell the journalistic Marcelli who sent you that Ark won’t be disturbed!”

“Tell us about these abtruse studies of middle Broadway,” said a young man with a snub nose.

“I am determining,” said Mr. Craighead, “the ratio of out-of-town visitors to cliff-dwellers, by observing the number who try to see the cornices.

The Carson-Craighead Company must know this. Then my plan for aiding the Society for the Prevention of Noise—by the way, there's a story in that!"

"What is it?" asked a tall, young man who wore a bored look and glasses.

"A law," said Mr. Craighead, "to compel cabmen to take out licenses—"

"They have to now!" snapped a young woman in a sailor hat. "You're stalling us off!"

"It hurts me," said he, "to be accused of deceit, by one so fair, in terms which make it a cinch that she's wise to all the flash patter along the pike of slang!"

"But about this noise story," said the snub-nose.

"My bill," resumed Mr. Craighead, "will compel cabmen to be so trained in good vocal schools, that their cry, or bay, or yowl will resound through the streets melodiously, surpassing the double-tonguing of hounds, when the horn of the hunter is heard on the hill. Each will be given a pitch for his 'Keb! Keb!' Minor effects may be introduced through accidentals or accidents. Full choruses will swell to the blue dome in blockades. This raw material for music far more vital than Wagner's or Strauss' will be written down by the tonic sol-fa system, and Music, gentle maid, will be young again. At the ferries and stations serried columns of cabmen will

compete in antiphonal chant, deep, musical, elevating like the Greek chorus. Art, in that day—"

"This reform, Mr. Craighead," said the slangy young lady, "will come with your plan of teaching burglary and housebreaking in the public schools?"

"Do not sneer," protested Mr. Craighead. "Until we do that, the yeggmen have us faded. And sneering distorts the features. Belay sneering!"

"But about the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company," said a fat man with perpetually poised pencil, "and its connection with the aëronef company?"

"Merely fortuitous," replied Craighead. "The aëronef company is an ephemeral agency for profit—and I scorn it!"

"But you are a director?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" replied Craighead. "But the greater things had not occurred to me when I went into it. I was ill. I was under a claim. I was chemicalizing in that reaction which results in the product known as tungstate of alcoholism, or magalo-conversation. A natural monopolist, General Theodo' Cahson, M. A., took advantage of my weakness and got me into it. Honor rooted in dishonor stands, and faith unfaithful keeps me falsely true; and I stay with him in his fight with Aërostatic Power. Then I shall give my whole attention to the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company,

which is to the Carson-Craighead Aëronef as the rings of Saturn to those of Tammany Hall. And, to originate a phrase, that's going some!"

"You're really good, Mr. Craighead," said she of the sailor hat, "and if the tungstate of your alcoholic days was worse than this, you ought to have taken something for it—"

"I tried to," confessed Craighead, "but Doctor Witherspoon expelled me!"

"But here's the situation as we get it. If we're wrong, we'll stay wrong, unless you set us right—"

"'O cursed spite!' " recited Craighead.

"No more tungstate, if you please," said the young woman. "The Air Products Company was a wild-cat-looking West Virginia formation to"—here she read from a clipping—"to extract free nitrogen from the air by the Craighead method or otherwise, for the purpose of obtaining fertilizers to thereby increase the capacity of the earth for supporting population'—"

"Is that," cried he frantically, "in our articles? Then all is lost! Let me take it!"

His tragic expression seemed so indicative of something sensational that she gave him the paper. With shaking hand he took down the telephone and asked for Mr. Filley.

"This you, Filley?" he queried. "Here's something that ruins us. . . . A split infinitive in

the articles. . . . Won't hurt anything?
 Won't have to be done over? . . . And we
 call ourselves civilized! . . ."

Craighead handed the paper back.

"You have shocked me," said he. "But never mind, dearie! I know not whether to rejoice for the Air Products Company, or weep for institutions that allow such a solecism to be legal as 'to thereby increase.' Really now, wouldn't it cork a purist like myself—"

"Well," said the reporter, "it goes on to say 'and for securing all rights in the atmosphere necessary for its complete reduction to possession for the production of nitrates, ozones and all other atmospheric derivatives; and for the securing of exclusive rights in the air over lands for all purposes whatsoever.' Now that," said she, "'for all purposes whatsoever': isn't that pretty broad?"

"A broad intellect composed it," said Craighead. "I done wrote that, mahse'f, honey!"

"And under this clause," said the girl, "you have acquired from landowners over the continent, all their rights in the air over their lands, subject to their use for tillage and building?"

"Oh, do not exaggerate!" cried Craighead. "A symmetrical character requires moderation of statement. We've got these rights from *some* landowners. We hope—"

"But," pursued the reporter remorselessly, "these rights happen—merely happen—to gridiron every state in squares marked by grants and leases to the Air Products Company?"

"My child," said Craighead, "do you understand the Craighead method of extracting nitrates from the atmosphere by spontaneous discharges of statical electricity from electrodes suspended over the earth's surface?"

"No," she said, "do you?"

"It is one of my specialties," said he. "If I might have you all to myself for an evening—"

"Nothing easier," said she, "if I can get this story; but I am losing faith in you. Why not tell us now the secret of your checker-board overlying America?"

"I will try," said he soberly. "Have you studied the formation of crystals; or the causes of the mathematically accurate distribution of snowdrifts on the surfaces of smoothly frozen lakes; or the reason for the disposition of the clouds in the ill-understood 'mackerel sky'? Have you mastered the science of wave motion, of cycles, of periodicity? I assume you have, and—"

"Well, you may assume again," said she. "I don't believe there is such a science!"

"Then," said Craighead, "it will be impossible to explain why my extraction of nitrates from the

air requires a mathematical distribution of its mechanism. Don't *you* get a glimmer of it?"

Craighead appealed to the fat man as to the one rare soul capable of understanding.

"I guess so," said the fat man. "But it's a mighty dim glimmer!"

"Any glimmer at all," said Craighead, "and I hail in you a kindred spirit! I thank you! And now that'll be about all for to-day! By-by!"

Mr. Craighead took much pleasure in his position as press representative of the Carson-Craighead Aëronef Company. The *Virginia*, her builder, and the contest with Aërostatic Power were matters on which the great dailies had men at work night and day. This much was known: she had been built on the Alabama coast, she had flown with incredible speed to the Catskills and thence to New York. This visit to the neighborhood of Shayne's Hold, the summer place of the man who ruled Aërostatic Power, was a tantalizing mystery. The mountain inn, where the *Virginia* had been laid up for repairs, had been visited by reporters, and the impossibility of surface communication between it and Shayne's Hold pointed out. The mysterious Craighead had leased, for the Aëronef Corporation, the vacant aërodrome on the roof of this very building, gone back to the inn, whence the *Virginia* had sailed to their leased roof within an hour—and not

by Shayne's Hold. After which Craighead was the news center from which emanated the most astounding medley of scientific, psychologic, mystical and mystifying news ever heard. Craighead was always at liberty, ready to see the representatives of the press, always laden with a story. But the stories never threw anything but darkness over the struggle of Aërostatic Power with the wonderful new aëronef from the South.

Theodore Carson, engineering genius, with his southern accent and retiring manners, was usually with Mr. Filley, the personal representative of Mr. Cyrus Waddy, a midland capitalist who was financing the Carson project. He avoided reporters, was greedy of time, and met secret emissaries from all the world. The New York, of which he had been so afraid, opened its arms to him, but looked on him as upon a man with his head in the lion's mouth. That an Illinois banker, an Alabama engineer, and a wild, weird freak like Craighead could escape Shayne in his Wall Street jungle seemed very unlikely.

They even said that Aërostatic Power had acquired inventions identical in principle with the *Virginia*, but antedating that aërial marvel by many years; and they smiled and said, "The old game!" and "I told you so!" The newspapers published Carson's picture as that of a man who was to be robbed of the greatest invention of the ages. A

Mobile despatch spoke of a certain Wizner as the real inventor of the *Virginia*;—the machine which made the air a manœuvring place for the destruction of navies and cities, and a medium for the swiftest transportation yet known.

Then some one discovered that on the day the Carson-Craighead Company had been formed, the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company was born, with directors and stock-holders identical with those of the Aëronef Company, and that they had spent a great campaign fund in getting leases and grants for the extraction from the atmosphere of nitrates and the like, in lines like those of Scots plaid all over the continent. The air over almost every highway had been granted away by the owners of the fee—the very streets of New York being covered so far as to cut the city into nearly a hundred irregular blocks. The other great cities were similarly gridironed. The space over the smaller rivers and streams was mostly sold to the Air Products Company. The mystery in this so stimulated curiosity that it caused more excitement than the *Virginia* herself. For these seemingly worthless rights over farms, streams, roads and streets were like a huge spider's web spun as a net over the world—Europe and Asia, as well as America. Some one with great resources was up to something big. Something was to be caught in the net—but what?

And in answer, Craighead emitted daily statements of dreams wilder than the visions of opium. Mr. Craighead seemed crazy—but was he? Mr. Craighead seemed shallow: but was he not really deep? Mr. Craighead had organized both these companies on the same day, officered them by the same men—one a wild scheme that made the world laugh, the other based on an invention that must change the course of history. Endless discussion ensued; and the question never answered was this: what can these grants of nitrate-rights to this opium-dream company have to do with the navigation of the air?

Craighead and Carson dined that day with Mr. Filley, a little man with a great, scantily-thatched head and no body, who ate lobster and green-turtle soup, and drank port, and grew paler every day.

"When shall we know?" asked Theodore.

"Soon," replied Filley. "We'll cover the whole country with injunctions this afternoon and get a hearing here in a few days. In a very few weeks we shall win the greatest legal triumph of recent times; or—snuffed out!"

"And I—" said Carson.

"And you, fair youth," said Craighead, "will be eligible one way or the other to repair again to the Sibyl of the Mountain Top. Waiter, a magnum of choice unfermented grape juice sparkling with car-

bonic acid from the soda fountain. Perish the thought that Filley of the Sapient Phiz shall fail in establishing a legal principle clear as day, and approved by me! Drink with me, gentlemen! To triumph!"

That night began the series of sensations that made so memorable the war for the use of the air. In the courts of every federal district and the state courts of West Virginia, Mr. Filley filed his injunction suits against the owner of every known air-ship, and, by the clause used in labor disputes, bound all persons, whether named or not, who might, with the defendants or, independently, design trespass against the plaintiff's rights.

The bill in New York recited that the plaintiff was the owner of all rights of navigation in the air in certain described belts or bands surrounding the City of New York, dividing it into portions, and grid-ironing the continent; that the defendants had in the past habitually trespassed on these by flying over them in air-ships; that the passage to or from the City of New York over the sea, the river, or other route was impossible save by such trespass; and therefore injunction was asked prohibiting the defendants, their servants and all other persons from departing from or coming to the said City of New York through the air owned by the plaintiff, or from navigating any aërial craft across, over or through

the real property of the plaintiff wheresoever situated.

Finley Shayne's name led the list of defendants, followed by that of the Aërostatic Power Company—and page after page of names of people owning aërial craft; and air-ships everywhere were hemmed in by the "real property" of the plaintiff, like whalers frozen in the ice. The "real property" was that wonderful spider's net of grants; and the plaintiff was the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company! Craighead's opium dream was explained. The relation between the twin companies was disclosed. Two perfectly well-known legal principles were here united in an audacious attempt to monopolize the air: the rights attaching to ownership of land, and that of injunction to prevent trespass or nuisance.

Public and press were struck with amazement. The unthinking laughed at the unheard-of and preposterous claim to private control of the atmosphere. Craighead, himself a joke, reduced to a joke anything he touched; but this man Filley had never been a jest to his opponents. An undercurrent of seriousness toward the "air-ship case" grew more noticeable from day to day while the world waited for the hearing on the issuance of the temporary injunction. The Aërostatic Power Company was known to be feverishly active in the preparation of

its case—even while filling the press with ridicule of "Craigheadism." Some journals in the Shayne interest advocated laws to make it impossible for a crank like Craighead to annoy people by absurd lawsuits. It was laughable; but it was, for all that, an outrage. Laughter, too, was out of place, when people of substance in the community must appear and answer the crazy allegations of a lunatic in that phase of paranoëa producing the delusions of dealing with great affairs, owning the earth, being president or Messiah. To all of which Mr. Craighead replied in a grave discussion as to the distinction, if any, between sanity in the editorial sense, and imbecility. Lawyers began poring over cases dealing with rights in and over land, with growing dubiety as to the outcome of "*The Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company vs. Shayne, et al.*"

When the case came on to be heard the laugh had disappeared, the very army of lawyers appearing for the defendant rendering it a serious matter. The justices seemed to ooze gravity from the bench; the attorneys at the tables just outside the rail rustled their briefs, sent messengers hither and yon, and conferred in whispers. Craighead sat with Filley, his hair rumped, his crooked nose high, in a suit of legal black, drawing more attention than did Carson—whose face, bleached of the Gulf beach tan, had assumed the pallor of the scholar, while

vast responsibilities had been imparting to him an atmosphere of distinction. He sat scanning the people of the defense—Shayne, Silberberg, and other great financial figures. He caught Silberberg's eye, and that gentleman's neck grew red with rage; but Shayne was suave, debonair, and apparently at ease, carefully ignoring Carson. The personal relations of the three was the one great news story that the press representatives missed—but that came afterward.

The young woman in the sailor hat who handled the case for the *Tribune* sought for the sounding phrase which would pierce. As the justice called out "*Universal Nitrates, etc., vs. Shayne et al!*" she found it. "This call to arms," she wrote, "in defense of the right to an open road, sounded the charge in a contest to determine whether or not the phrase 'free as air' shall be henceforth nonsense; whether or not man's mastering of flight shall give him the bird's freedom, or leave him still the payer of tribute to those who own the earth; whether or not the word of promise of freedom will be kept to the ear only, and broken to the hope. And it was one of life's ironies, that the man who stood for freedom, was he who had done most to make freedom of aërial travel impossible,—Finley Shayne; and that those who stood for monopoly and thralldom of the heavens to the earth, were a group of adventurers

who were suddenly become a portent. And the cry to carnage was in the voice of Justice McFadden droning forth the words: '*Universal Nitrates, etc., vs. Shayne et al!*' "

While the pleadings and affidavits were read, Craighead sketched the bailiffs, shuffled his feet, and drummed on the table until the court tapped for silence.

"We will hear from the plaintiff," said Justice McFadden. "And as the facts seem practically undisputed—"

"But, your Honor!" protested the counsel for the defendants, "we certainly do not admit—"

"For present purposes," replied the justice, "the showing seems ample that plaintiff owns certain rights in lands so distributed that the defendants must pass over them in going from place to place; that the defendants have habitually done so; and that the situation constitutes a threat that this will be repeated. The defendants, by claiming the right to pass these lines, confess this for present purposes. We will therefore hear from plaintiff's counsel on the law."

Mr. Filley gathered up his papers; but with a professional-sounding "May it please the court" that dumfounded Filley and drew from the justice a request for the gentleman's name, Craighead rose.

"Craighead," said he in response to the court's

query. "I will offer a few remarks on the law, and then yield to my learned colleague, who will lay before your honors the feeble attempts of the courts to crystallize it in precedents. The law is fully as plain as the nose on the face of the most Roman of your honors. As to its righteousness, it is as moral as landownership. That it has not heretofore been applied has been owing to the stupidity of the legal profession, to the asininity of landowners, and to the fact that the law is so plain; for that which is all around ever remains undetected, like the pressure of the atmosphere, or the picture with trees and clouds representing faces or animals. And as when once the cat in the landscape is seen, the landscape fades and one can see nothing but the cat—so in this case, when the law is once made plain, your honors will be able to see nothing else. We are taking the liberty of unsealing the blind eye of the courts."

Mr. Filley was outraged at the effrontery of this unlicensed actor in thus taking the scene; but to make a disturbance now would be worse than to let him go on; and Mr. Filley sat down frowning, and hoping that Craighead's offense might escape discovery.

"*'Cujus ad solum, ejus est usque ad coelum,'*" went on Craighead, "is the maxim on which we stand, the meaning of which has been decided in

hundreds of cases—and, strange to say, is still clear—‘He who owns land, owns to the sky.’ He has as much moral right to the sky as to the surface. The man with a deed to a square mile of the surface of this planet, under this law, owns a great pyramid, apexing at the earth’s center, and extending out into space, in diverging lines, infinitely; so that if he can show that these lines of boundary take in Mars and her canals, he would have a perfect case against the Martians for rent of fields and tolls over waterways, if he could get service and bring the defendants into court.

“Land! land! The mystic word that rules the world! The woman who ejaculates ‘Good land!’ conjures by a thing more potent than all the gods of Olympus. Three names are intimately related in the widely-separated fields of the coal combine and the law of real property—Coke, Blackstone and Littleton—and it is Lord Coke in his commentaries on Littleton who says: ‘Land is a *nomen generalissimum* and includes everything fixed to the ground, and everything above or below it’—and when I speak, or still more when I spell those wonderful words, ‘*nomen generalissimum*,’ I believe it! These words from him who may have begun as Cole, but by losing everything in him volatile or juicy was turned to Coke, to the distress of the law student for ages,—these words are quoted in *Brocket*

vs. State, 14 *Pennsylvania State*—and they are the law.

"The air above our land is a part of it. You know it. Why else have you recognized *Reimer's Appeal*, 100 *Pennsylvania State*, as good law? What was that case? A bay-window many feet above the sidewalk was declared a nuisance because it jutted out into the air that was a part of the street. And see, also, *Bybee vs. The State*, 94 *Indiana*. You hang your cornice or string a wire in my air, and I will hale you into court. Don't presume to fly a kite over my land except by my consent; you have no right. And remember that the city of Cleveland was mulcted in the sum of fifty thousand dollars for swinging a bridge a few times a day a hundred feet above an inch strip of land.

"How much more am I damnified by the air-ship, which may drop a monkey-wrench, a spanner, a gob of ballast, or a casual remark into my privacy? Like other highways, the air will be infested by accidents and collisions. Aëronefs will fall into the rural silo, drag-ropes will rip up barbed wire; and Pyramus and Thisbe, in their Arcadian wooing, may be smothered under falling gas-bags, or torn asunder by dragging anchors inserted in their pancreases! I shudder, your Honors, at what may happen when the air is populous with flying-jiggers, pop-popping about, raining ballast, and wine-bottles,

and bacon rinds, and stale bananas, and hot coffee, and soft-boiled eggs, and lobster *à la* Newburg on a lost and undone republic—and when *I* shudder, persons of ordinary sensitiveness fly into fragments with the shivers. For I am no light and habitual shudderer.

“I have spoken in my weak way of what might make a landholder unwilling to have his air used as a highway; but he doesn't have to give a reason—he can show his deed, and tell the whole world to go to—to the captain's office and settle. Your Hon-ors, I adjure you to cling to your unbroken precedents, and uphold property, on which society is based. To say that we do not own these strips of land, but only rights in the air, is foolishness of the dampest sort. The landowner may sell the surface and keep the minerals; or sell the mineral rights down to China, and keep the surface. Our grantors owned and sold these rights to us. It is slanderous to say that we have hornswoggled—to coin a phrase—the farmers by promising cheap nitrates by the Craighead method. It is my intention to take a few moments some day to perfect the Craighead method, and begin to extract nitrogen—but that is another narrative. The point is that we've got those rights. We have what nobody ever had before—the proof that defendants pass over our lands, because they have to. Nobody else ever had lands

hemming in everybody. We have. This makes our proof simply pie; and we call upon you to protect us, in the name of the law of landownership, on which every government in all the world is founded.

"They say we seek to enslave travelers. This absurdity applies as forcibly to surface rights or mines. If the traveler can't pay our scale, let him go by public highways, or by boat or rail—or stay at home; just as the man who wants to use land and has none, may pay rent or get off the earth. We may do as we will with our own space: allow it to be used, or hold it for speculation. We anticipate that rights to air-navigation will become more and more valuable. We expect to charge whatever the situation makes possible. This is as moral as increasing rent for lands. We shall grant licenses or not, as we please. We may demand title to all patents on air-ship inventions before allowing them to be used, thus applying the rules you and your predecessors have so wisely laid down, 'He who owns land, owns to the sky!' How beautiful the principle! What a stimulus to enterprise it offers—in cornering space! How it serves the beneficent designs of Providence and the common law, that those in whose hands this planet has been placed by Omniscience, may build up those aristocracies of intellect and morals and power, that the possession of lands always fosters! A decision

against us would subject all of you to impeachment. By getting hold of these rights first, we have proved that we are of the elect. And the children and the children's children of the rest of mankind will have the priceless privilege of navigating the air granted to them by our children and our children's children—on proper terms, your Honors, on proper terms, to be fixed by the owner. Our getting of these rights may be a horse on Mr. Shayne; but the rules of the game—and what a game it is, your Honors!—give us the pot. The costs constitute the kitty. Those who are on the inside, but not of us elect, are the boosters. The policeman and public officer is the lookout. And whenever any one starts to beat the owners of the layout—the land—you'd better copper his bet and play him to lose. I have made a specialty of these things—”

Justice McFadden tapped on the desk, and Craighead paused.

“Your language, Mr. Craighead,” said he, “is unusual—though your points seem well taken.”

“You're on!” ejaculated Craighead, “you're on! In fact, to speak grammarianly, ‘You're on, your Honor, you're honest!’”

A bailiff interrupted by handing a note to the astonished court.

“Mr. Craighead,” said Justice McFadden, “it is suggested that you are not a licensed practitioner

at this bar; or at any other. This extraordinary address of yours leads the court to doubt. What is the fact?"

"Your Honor," said Craighead, "I have cast before this court some pearls of forensic art in full faith that you are not of those who will turn and rend. I am an almost-practitioner, a near-lawyer. My uncanny cogency of reasoning is owing to my being unspoiled by actual practice. I—"

"Sir!" said Justice McFadden, "I thought I recognized you as a member of this bar! Have we not met?"

"Your Honor," said Craighead, "studied language under me."

"Language!" roared the justice. "When?"

"I was your teacher in English and drawing," replied Craighead, "in Schlosser's billiard-parlors—English and drawing, with incidental instruction in the use of the globes; also dry-nursing, the *massé* and the follow!"

"Remove him from the bar, Mr. Bailiff!" thundered the court. "Take him to jail!"

"Stung—in the same old aching spot!" cried Craighead. "Still the Great Uncalled! But know ye, proud Judges, I have been expelled from worse places than this! What harm have I done ye? Filley, get me out of this!"

The bailiff, a tottering old functionary with a

white mustache of Bismarckian fierceness, warily laid a raptorial claw on Craighead's sleeve.

"Amateur day in court!" he hissed in the bailiff's ear. "The hook! The hook! I go; but my logic sticks! Stone walls do not—"

Mr. Filley here interposed to such effect that Craighead was fined, expelled and set free. Mr. Filley's masterly address was based on the law laid down by Craighead; reference to which finally evoked a smile from the justices. In a week an injunction was issued as prayed; the air-ships of the whole nation were tied up; the Universal Nitrates and Air Products Company made the Carson-Craighead Aëronef Company its sole licensee; the Carson aëronefs were the only flying-machines which could be used; the law of real property was vindicated; Aërostatic Power dropped to nominal prices; Craighead was suddenly recognized as the most overshadowing genius legal strategy had ever known; Carson stood high in finance and diplomacy; the factories for manufacturing flying-machines were offered to him at his own terms, payable in Carson-Craighead stocks; thousands of men were put to work on the Carson aëronefs; the Waddy family began to occupy space in newspapers and magazines; the world of finance whirled about and readjusted itself to the explosion—all of which took time.

And in the midst of the first excitement, the following item appeared in a newspaper:

"A bizarre result of the McFadden decision, is the marooning of Mr. Finley Shayne, erstwhile Prince of the Powers of the Air, at Shayne's Hold, where the *Roc* was enjoined. There is no egress from the Hold, save by air-ship. The Carson crowd has the air rights surrounding the mountain, and Mr. Shayne and his family have no means of getting away except by violating the injunctions.

"There is already a panic among the servants. No craft save the Carson aëronef, the *Virginia*, can go to them—or anywhere—and Mr. Shayne will starve rather than allow her to land. This sounds like a joke; but Mr. Shayne takes it seriously. The castaways are Mr. and Mrs. Shayne, Miss Suarez, and Mr. Max Silberberg. Our representative will ascend the cliffs of the Hold if possible; and our readers may look for an account of the 'Castaways in a Palace' to-morrow."

Carson approached Craighead with this paper, his finger pointing to the item. Craighead read it with much glee.

"When Shayne has eaten the last poisoned rat," said he, "and worn his knees raw snaring rattlesnakes off the cliff for food, I'll go to him, and say,

'Proud ex-plute, if on your bandaged knees you beg my kingly clemency I'll give you this sandwich and bottle of beer. Otherwise, s-s-s-s-tarve! and be 'anged to you! Either that; or wire him permission to depart in the *Roc*. Which sayest thou?"

"I have wired him offer of the license," said Carson, "and he declined insultingly. Then I offered to come for them in the *Virginia*."

"And he answered?"

"That he would shoot me or any man in my employ that dared invade his air over Shayne's Hold!"

"Advised of his legal rights, evidently," said Craighead. "Well, as to the fair Virginia—what's to be done to save the blessed damosel?"

"I'm going," replied Carson, "danger or no danger. And you are the only man in the world to go with me!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FLIGHT OF THE ROC

MR. CARSON, baffled in heaping coals of fire on Shayne's head, brooded over the fact that the very writ of injunction that made him master of the air, confined the girl for whom he had striven, in a *petit trianon* on a mountain top, with Max Silberberg! It was a thing to ponder over in solitude, and to make one absent-minded in public; to destroy one's appetite, and make sleep a tradition. But if the victor felt such ferment of spirits, what of Mr. Shayne, and the castaways in a palace?

None of them knew at first that the prison was a prison. Then Silberberg received the news heroically, seeing in it a Virginia-opportunity, and asked permission to break the news to her himself. She was in a skiff on the western lake, watching the sunset, and surrounded by lotus blooms, but rowed in at his call.

"I was just coming in," she said. "Let's go to the house."

"But I have something to say to you," he said.
"Let's sit down."

Virginia took a seat too small for two, leaving him another too large for one—not the desired arrangement at all.

"What is it, Mr. Silberberg?" she asked.

"Virginia," said he impressively, "did you ever read of a man and a girl wrecked on a lonely island— isn't there such a story?"

"Dozens of them," replied Virginia. "It's quite the vogue—in fiction."

"If it were you and I, it would be—"

"Awfully stupid," replied Virginia. "Unless you could make a Stock Exchange of me, or manipulate the water of the sea into securities. I wouldn't stay!"

"Not with me?"

Virginia shook her head. "Not with any one," said she.

"But I should be the most useful and obedient fellow!" urged Max, now quite set upon the project. "I would build you a hut of—of seaweed—or copra—don't they use those things?"

Virginia laughed.

"Better build it of *bêche-de-mer*!" she suggested.

"Virginia," said Max, oblivious of the irony, "we are prisoners together!"

Virginia looked about her. Sunset had faded

into twilight. Night-hawks screamed in the gloom of the lower levels. From remote cottages lights twinkled; yet in that high place it was day. A breeze from the west swept her hair, cool, free, uncontaminated by any touch of earth—truly, the breeze of heaven. A prisoner! Freedom herself seemed to dwell there. Virginia glanced questioningly at Silberberg.

"*This imprisonment!*" she cried.

"Yes," said Silberberg, "we are shut in; and by that fellow Carson, that—"

Of the temporary unclehood of Theodore to Virginia, or the *Virginia's* night visit to the Hold, Mrs. Shayne had not thought it necessary to tell him; therefore, Mr. Silberberg was ill-informed as to Virginia's real feelings toward Carson. But he remembered the night on the *Roc*, when she had taken his part—and hesitated. Virginia looked away.

"Yes?" said she. "And what has Mr. Carson done?"

"Done!" replied Max, feeling sure that she could care nothing for the man of whom she spoke in so slighting a tone. "He, a pauper, and his crazy friend, have got injunctions against travel by airship, and even against me, the head of Federated Metals! Our courts have sunk pretty low! It is an outrage!"

She rose, and almost ran down to the boat; slowly strolled back, and seated herself on the bench. Did Craighead's mysterious utterances about "surrounding" New York and "gridironing" the country mean this? Had Theodore found a way to defeat Shayne, and the bitter, cruel Wizner?

"We are alone," said Silberberg, "on an island in the air. Are you sorry?"

Virginia did not smile; she was thinking of the victory of Carson. He had been great in working out his creation, and in that deadly duel with the *Stick-leback*; and now, he had made war on her Uncle Finley, the tiger of the Stock Exchange, in his very den—and won! She was ready to throw up her hat and hurrah. But yet, this last victory was not like the first. *This* was the old story of finding how to exploit the world by monopoly; *that* was doing, creating. Must success be so often only victorious restraint of beneficent human effort? Yet, she was glad to see Theodore victor rather than vanquished in any fight in which—but this was folly! He had mortally offended her in that matter of being her uncle; all was over between them! Yet she finally answered Silberberg inconsistently.

"No," said she, "I am not very sorry. But I shall need my hand, now, to hold my dress out of the dew!"

Max was delighted at her complaisance and at his

ability to become excited over it. He was not so *blasé* after all. He was actually trembling—a splendid symptom.

"Tell me once more that you are not sorry—please!" said he.

"I am not," she reassured him. "In fact, I—I am rather glad, Mr. Silberberg!"

"Max!" said he unctuously. "Let it be Max, your fellow prisoner!"

"Well, *Max*, then!"

It is hard to be obliged to say that she said this snappishly, abruptly, unlovingly, and much as one might toss a crust to a drooling dog, and tell him to get out. And Mr. Silberberg took the crust and was satisfied.

Poor Shayne! He straitly laid the vow of secrecy upon all not to tell their awful state to Mrs. Shayne.

"She's so—her nervous state, you know—I have no idea what she might do if she found out! She'd go wild. She hasn't had 'no' said to her in twenty years! She might fall dead, with that heart of hers!"

Virginia systematically hid from Silberberg, dinners and forced interviews bringing no advancement to his courtship. He began to wonder if the Suarez temperament were not rather difficult, and sometimes felt that this long absence from stage entrances and all-night cafés hardly paid. To

leave so many willing beauties for an obdurate one, who, by greenroom standards was no beauty after all, seemed—to use his own self-revelatory phrase—“bad business.” And the longer they dwelt in their little nest the more these cage-birds of the law failed to agree. Mrs. Shayne wanted to be taken to the millionaire’s colony in Lake Temagami, where they had an island, or to have La Salvinella and her company to sing, with a house party afterward. Shayne was convinced that the devil himself must suggest these plans, every one of which involved contempt of court.

One blowy day it culminated. Virginia, from a summer-house opening toward New York, braved the moist gusts, and swept the sky with her field-glasses for—well, for something. Silberberg followed her, swearing inwardly at the perversity of the girl; and as he found her, things began to happen. Far over to the southeast and driving fast before the gale, came the only flying-machine in America free of the McFadden interdict. Unfortunate Silberberg!

At the same hour Mrs. Shayne burst into Shayne’s den, where he was exchanging acrimonious wireless messages with his bedeviled lawyers, her breath short, her face flushed, her attire and coiffure disarranged. Shayne knew the symptoms, and sprang to her side.

After several attempts she spoke with great distinctness.

"Oh, tell me it isn't true!" she cried. "Tell me that I am not humiliated, actually *controlled*, by that bandit from the Alabama forest!"

Mr. Shayne begged her to calm herself, which made the case worse. Mrs. Shayne drummed on the Persian rug with her heels, and yelped short yelps of distress—or temper.

"If Madeline's been talking to you," asserted Shayne, "I'll discharge her!"

"I hire and discharge my own maids, Finley Shayne!" said she, much more normal now. "Then it's true! My God! I'm a prisoner!"

"It's only an injunction," urged Mr. Shayne. "We can't use the *Roc* because the court forbids it—"

"At that man Carson's request!" ejaculated Mrs. Shayne. "Imprisoned by him who insulted me, ruined my niece, struck you, would have murdered Mr. Silberberg, and now by the venal decision of a purchased court, he makes prisoners of us all! I tell you, Finley Shayne, it is a trick of the proletariat to immure us here and come at their leisure and kill us!"

"My dear, my dear!" urged Mr. Shayne. "That is quite impossible! We could go in the *Roc* rather than be murdered. It is absurd to suppose—"

"Then I am an imbecile!" wailed Mrs. Shayne. "You imprison me, and then insult me. Coward! If going in the *Roc* is so easy, why don't we go? I thought I was married to a man!"

Shayne sprang to his feet, so completely subdued that he became violent. He would go to jail; he would violate every injunction ever issued since the days of the Star Chamber, before he would be so lashed and excoriated.

"Marie," said he, "the *Roc* will be ready in half an hour! I'll show you I'm no coward! Get ready! Call Virginia and Silberberg! Hurry!"

Mrs. Shayne knew better than to try stopping him. He yelled messages and orders into telephones. He issued hurry calls for valets and maids. The forcefulness that had made him what he was came uppermost. The great summer home woke up and hummed. About the air-ship garage the mechanics began testing the machinery; the pilot and the engineers appeared, grumbling at Mr. Shayne's defiance of the courts rather than be called a poltroon by the wife of his bosom. Physicists should not neglect in the summation of forces the "E. M. F." and the "H. P." of woman's tears.

Suddenly into Shayne's den burst Silberberg, *his* face red, *his* whole being simmering hot. Shayne faced him and asked fairly what the devil the matter was.

"I'm done with you!" spluttered Silberberg. "Get me away from here, if you're a gentleman!"

"If I wasn't I'd have you kicked off!" said Shayne. "You can't jump on me, if you are my guest! I'll—"

"There are other women in the world!" cried Silberberg. "I—"

"She's refused you, then?"

"In a way I can't stand," protested Silberberg, with hands upflung. "She said I was disgusting! I can't stay!"

"Well," answered Shayne, "the *Roc* sails at once."

"It's risky, in the face of the injunction—"

"Damn the injunction!" shouted Shayne. "If you're afraid, stay with the servants!"

The rest were at the garage before Silberberg; Mrs. Shayne in the cabin, Virginia and Shayne in animated debate on the platform.

"Well," Shayne was saying to her, "stay, then, like a simpleton! But how are you to get away? I don't know how long the courts will keep this up—and our running the injunction won't make it any shorter!"

"It's blowing awfully!" said Silberberg.

Nobody noticed him but the pilot.

"I know it, sir," said he. "It's foolhardy to take this gas-bag out. It's as apt to mean the Atlantic as anything. There's a nor'west gale at Sackett's

Harbor, and no chance to make Temagami. I don't like it, if you ask me!"

"Shayne," said Silberberg, "the pilot says it's not fit to go out!"

"Then stay!" answered Shayne. "You're welcome to the house."

"But, Shayne," cried Silberberg, "it may mean getting whirled out to sea or—"

"Out to sea!" sneered Shayne. "And the wind southeast! Stay if you're afraid! Virginia, Mr. Silberberg's going to stay with you!"

"I'm not a fool," protested Silberberg, "and I shan't go in this weather—for any man!"

Virginia walked aboard, with a look of disdain—the bitterest cut of all. The winches drew back the leaves of the great roof to let out the *Roc*, and the surge of the outer air filled the garage with windy tumults. Silberberg, suddenly resolving to go, leaped to the gang-plank; but the ship rocked, and the wind howled so alarmingly, and the pessimistic forecast of the pilot returned so to freeze his heart that he retreated to the platform, whining, threatening Shayne with the wrath of Federated Metals on 'Change, whimpering like a whipped school-boy.

Shayne, engrossed in the clearance of the ship, paid him no attention. The drawbridge roof dropped down; the *Roc*, huge, steely and majestic,

went out of her vast nest, careening sharply against the wall as she sailed out; and under splendid management fell off before the weather, the sense of windiness ceasing as she caught step with the current. Her master felt free, and went in to exult with Mrs. Shayne. He was an exemplary husband.

The clouds consisted of an upper high stratum of plain, semi-transparent gray, apparently motionless, and a flying scud of broken masses, which swept the higher hills, and drove north directly into the face of a rising body of rounded masses advancing in the face of the wind. Shayne knew what these indications meant; but he sullenly gave orders to lay a course dead for Temagami in spite of the northwesterly wind back of those clouds. By waiting for the turn of the wind, they might have made New York; but every mile of northing took them farther from the central "low," and into a larger circle of the huge whirl of the gale. The pilot knew that Temagami was out of the question, though the wind blew dead toward it—nay, because of that fact: for a high wind never blows straight, but always in a circle about the "low!" So Shayne, violating the rules of weather outside to make sunshine within, was not surprised when told that they were approaching the line of reversal—the turn of the wind.

"Head against it," ordered Shayne, "and cross Lake Ontario before dark if you can."

"It looks more than we can face," said the pilot. "If it is, shall we run before it, and try for a Pennsylvania port?"

"Use your best judgment," said Shayne.

"Yes, sir," said the pilot, whose best judgment had been to stay housed. "And you may want to know, sir, there's some sort of craft astern, and overhauling us."

"The devil!" ejaculated Shayne. "I'll take a look at her."

The binoculars revealed an aëronef perhaps five miles astern, with wide wings, in which he could see the shimmer of blades in rapid revolution. The exclusive rights of the *Virginia*, the singular swiftness and power of the flight of this aëronef, and the shimmer in her wings assured Shayne that he was pursued by the machine which had wrecked his monopoly and established a new and more impregnable one, founded on the old and time-tried basic title to rulership, landlordism. Shayne gripped the glass and set his teeth. The hounds had been watching, then, to see him break their doubly-accursed injunction! They wanted to put him in jail. The shame of it! He, Finley Shayne, a fugitive—for sailing God's free air, in his own ship! And the

danger of it, too; for Canada and safety now looked utterly unattainable.

The mountains slipped from under them, and the farms and villages took their places on the moving concave of the earth, as the big ship made speed toward the Mohawk. The south wind fell, the houses and villages passed more leisurely, and the roar in the trees ceased. Entirely against his judgment, noting that the speed already made seemed to mean Toronto by sunset, Shayne's hope returned of success in this mad voyage against command and advice. If he could leave that sleuth-hound *aëronef* behind, or reach a foreign jurisdiction, he would be satisfied with ever so small and temporary a triumph. Thus mused Shayne; and even as he so thought, the *Roc* was struck by the opposing gale; a sudden hurricane smote her decks as her momentum drove her through the north wind; she turned before it; the great concave panorama below slowly reversed, and began paying off to the north as the vast *aëronat* drifted like a bubble to the south, before the fiercest blow she had ever dared encounter. Canada was out of the question. The *Roc* was caught in the full sweep of a real gale. If it kept blowing south, she could ride it out; but they all knew that these winds pivot "counter-clockwise;" that the shift would be from northerly to westerly, and that the Atlantic's lee shore cut across

their course. Anger and pique decreased; the sense of danger waxed—and he paced the steady deck, looked at the racing towns and rivers and hills, listened to the crescendo roar in the trees, and grew pale.

"If we reach an aerial harbor," said he, through the speaking-tube, "what do you think of trying a landing?"

"She'd rip to strings," said the pilot. "We'd be killed. I'd sooner try the rip-cord in a plowed field: some of us might get off with broken bones—that way."

"Oh, well," said Shayne, "we haven't come to that; and we're going along very comfortably."

"As yet we are, sir," said the pilot.

During luncheon Mrs. Shayne ventured a series of remarks on the tyranny of the courts.

"When they supported property and the established order," said Mrs. Shayne, "they were entitled to respect. But now they destroy our property! They have dragged their ermine in the mire. They prostitute the law to adventurers and criminals—"

"Theodore Carson," said Virginia, "is neither an adventurer nor a criminal! I will not hear him slandered! And this is no more unjust than what Uncle Finley did to get his money!"

"Infatuated girl!" said Aunt Marie.

"I won't hear that, either!" cried Virginia. "I

shall never speak to him again! But he is a hero! He almost drowned to save me! He worked to save me, with the sea lapping for him. And he never faltered, even when the f-file t-tore his p-poor fingers to shreds. He's worth all of you! All of you! There! And I hate him! So there!"

With strife in the cabin, and the Atlantic under the lee, there was trouble enough. And still that infernal *Virginia* hung about at five miles or so astern, like a wolf stalking a deer—under her old captain, and her old crew, again complaining and almost mutinous; for Mr. Craighead had suddenly resolved to return to the Waddy home, and, as he stated it, "add to an unique collection of leather medals the finishing touch of the booby prize in the wooing handicap."

Carson shanghaied him by will power however; and now the two celebrities of the new monopoly followed the huge aëronat across the states, anxious at Shayne's frenzied breaking of bounds in this tempest, as they saw the *Roc* caught in the north wind, and borne before it with the speed of its tremendously increased energy. For the *Roc* seemed doomed to the aërostat shipwreck—a shattering fall in landing, or watery extinction in the open sea. And Virginia! Agonizing for her, Carson followed, watching like a wrecker when a full-rigged ship drives on a reef.

And yet, even after her turn, all seemed well with the *Roc*. The sea lay south and east. Northing was impossible; but edging into the gale with all the power of her screws she worked stanchly off into the west. Yet, Carson knew it was a losing fight; and Shayne walked the deck in agony as she gave ground at last before the wind, which howled in across the Pennsylvania mountains and beat the great hunted creature to the Delaware at Philadelphia. He had risen high for a gentler wind, or a counter drift; but, frightened at his wild flight, had gone down again to profit by the earth's friction on the air. And still she fled seaward, her best-advised people stressful with fear. Mrs. Shayne was asleep; but Virginia came on deck and listened to the roar from beneath with awe in her face; for she knew that the gale forbade landing, and that their only hope lay in keeping above the continent, and riding it out.

"Where are we, uncle?" said she. "And which way are we going?"

"Oh," replied Shayne, "we're all right. On our course!"

Time enough for the trouble when the crisis came. For shipwreck in aerial voyaging has no tossing before the cyclone ere the final plunge, no wrestle with the waves, no tiring at the pumps, no roaring of white surf scabbarding the teeth of the

reef. All is steady and comfortable—until underneath yawns destruction. Though every moment inevitably marked a loss of gas in the balloon, once out at sea, they must keep up to win the far African coast or to bear around the whirl to Nova Scotia or Labrador—and in that quadrant was rain. Before that could be done the huge gas-holder would grow wrinkled, flabby, weak; the car would drag her down; the stronger ones would cut everything away to lighten the ship; the weaker would drop into the brine with no hope save in the prayer-time accorded by the life-preservers; and finally, the last man clinging to the fragments of the nacelle would see the huge mass of flapping silk and gum and tin-foil drop into the waves, himself utterly lost in the utter desolation of hopeless solitude—food for the fishes.

Shayne knew this as he sent Virginia away; and so did Carson. For while the Delaware yet flowed below, far to the east there appeared on the skirt of the landscape a hem of blue—the Atlantic. With her prow to the blast, fighting for every inch, losing ground like a swimmer in a spate, the *Roc* delayed her fate. Running with this wind, the crossing of New Jersey would be a matter of minutes; but she made of it an agony of hours. Dinner was served, Shayne trying to smile, and discussing with these dear women the time of reaching Temagami. Mrs. Shayne was quite at ease; but Virginia felt the

anxiety in Shayne's pale face, and in the drawn features of the pilot and engineers as they struggled, struggled, struggled to hold the immense hull against the remorseless gale. And still the hem of blue toward which they drifted, stern on, crept farther and farther down the hollowed earth. Occasionally, in the lulls of the wind, the *Roc*, stanchest of her kind, sank low to try for a landing, only to find that, after all, she still drove on so swiftly as to make it madness.

Virginia stood gazing ahead, not knowing that their actual flight was astern. She thought she was looking toward her destination. She had lost sight of the *Virginia*, and she was not sorry, nor displeased to have Carson give chase, unsuccessfully. She was very angry with him. She repeated that to herself, even though distracted by the evident distress of her uncle, of the men, and of the *Roc* herself; for Virginia could feel in the shiverings and tremblings of the ship the anguish of hard and unrelenting struggle. And yet, the landscape ahead was one devoid of danger.

Suddenly she looked astern, and was amazed that such a body of water had been passed without her knowing it; as one journeying over a prairie might feel, to look behind and see an ocean. The subtle expression of the tossing waves told her that this was the open sea. Inshore its calm was undisturbed, save by the churning of dead swells from the tumult

outside; but beyond, it was terrible. For miles and miles she saw great waves bursting in immense explosions of spindrift and spray, swept clean of shipping, the glassy rear of the racing billows throwing back to her eyes sinister glints from the rare gleams of the westering sun; and out into this fierce fight of the elements the *Roc* was drifting, stern on, in spite of the frenzied thrust of her great screws into the suck of the gale. Virginia neither screamed nor fainted, though she knew at once what it all meant. The hand on the rail gripped it more tightly, and the other trembled as she drew it across her blanching lips.

Should she tell her aunt? It would do no good. There were hours yet in which things might be done,—hours of supreme suffering. She must avoid troubling the men, too. She realized the struggle which she had hitherto only felt, and she felt tender toward her uncle—toward them all. They were fighting like men against odds.

"Uncle," said she, pointing to the on-coming shore, "I see! It's the ocean!"

"Yes!" said he. "God forgive me, Virginia, for murdering you and your aunt! Go to her!"

"Not now," replied Virginia. "I can't keep her—from feeling—how frightened I am. Give me something to do, uncle!"

Shayne threw up his hands, empty, as might a

swordsman who had lost his blade—a gesture eloquent of powerlessness. They stood on the deck clinging to each other, closer than they had ever been, watching the water creep nearer and nearer.

"If it weren't for one thing," said Shayne, "I'd drop her into the shallow water and take chances. But the drift would be outward. And if we stay up as long as we can, we may run around the whirl and make Newfoundland or Nova Scotia. It's a chance. And then, there's the possibility of dropping her into the path of a liner. Good God—the chance! And this morning we were at the Hold, safe, and a hundred miles inland! Fool!"

Virginia pressed his arm. "Uncle—" said she. "On board the ship!"

The call sounded in their very ears. Within thirty yards hung the *Virginia*, headed into the wind, and drifting easily with the *Roc*.

"What do you propose to do?"

It was Carson's voice through the trumpet; but it sounded sweet to Shayne. He had no idea of any manner in which the *Virginia* would aid him, but the sickening speed with which he was driving out to sea made anything welcome as a modification of his despair.

"Do you understand?" shouted Carson. "You are lost if you drift on. Drop your painter, and I'll give you a tow!"

The thing was absurd on its face. The wind had grown to a hurricane. Such a thing as this little machine's towing the *Roc* against it was unthinkable. And yet—swallowing his pride, Shayne ordered the painter dropped; and as it hung from the *Roc's* nose, the *Virginia*, running easily into the wind, dropped back, took the line, and with a word of cheer she walked up into the blast, pulled the painter taut—and like a tug with a freighter, threw herself against the pressure of the immense gas-bag; and for the first time the people on the aëronat's deck clung fast and turned their faces from the wind as they felt its stroke.

"Hurrah!" came the cry from the engine-room. "She's holding us!"

For a moment she did; and then she dropped the painter, and the abandoned *Roc* fell off before the storm again. The aëronef, having shown her power, had quitted its exercise. The *Virginia*, released from the pull, had darted away, and was now a quarter of a mile off. Shayne flamed hot with anger at this cruel mocking. The men in the engine-room grew sick with despair; and when the *Virginia*, with a swift circling swoop, came alongside again, they begged Carson, for God's sake, not to let all of them drown just because he hated Shayne.

"Stand off, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Shayne.

"Stand off, or I'll shoot you! You are the cause of all this; and I'll kill you, if you don't stand off!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" called Carson. "I want you to go lower."

"Why?"

"And put on your life-preservers," went on Carson.

"Why?" insisted Shayne.

"I'm going to put you in the water," said Carson.

"No, you'll not!" said Shayne. "Willett, keep her up and run before it. We'll circle the whirl and make shore."

"Mr. Willett," said Carson, "do as I say, or as there is a God in Heaven, I'll go above, rip your envelop and let you drop from wherever you happen to be!"

"You obey orders!" cried Shayne.

"If Mr. Shayne interferes," said Carson, "confine him; and take orders from me—or drop from here! Will you do as I say?"

The second engineer went forward to Mr. Shayne. The answer of the others was to set the depressor-screws going; and the doomed *Roc*, now quite over the sea, dropped nearer and nearer to the waves.

"Now," said Carson, "I'll tell you why I turned you adrift. Your envelop won't stand the strain. It had started to cave in at the bow, and in another moment it would have ripped open and dropped you."

But I'm going to give it the test. If the *Roc* can stand the strain, I believe I can tow her and land you. If she doesn't I shall drop you into the Atlantic, you'll collapse, and I can tow you in the water easily. Put on your life-preservers! Hurry!"

Again the *Virginia* took the painter aboard, and surged against the gale; but this time drifting with the wind while the life-preservers were adjusted. Carson was confronted with a fearful alternative. If he let the *Roc* go out to sea, she had a bare chance—though no such escape was recorded. On the other hand, dropping her in the water was an expedient full of danger. The collapsed envelop might blanket the passengers and drown them; some might be hit by breaking beams, or stunned by concussion with the water from a badly-judged height. And Virginia!—Yet, weighing the chances, he did not hesitate.

"All ready?" he shouted.

"No!" cried Shayne. "Come back here!"

"All ready, Willett?" asked Carson.

"Yes!" cried Willett. "Go ahead!"

Slowly crowding on power, the *Virginia* fought forward into the storm. The painter strained taut as a steel bar, and Carson wondered if it would hold. The ship slowed up in their drift, stopped; and a wild cheer went up from the crews, the passengers, and from the people gathered on shore, as

they made head against the wind: when suddenly a rainy gust bore down on them in fury, the envelop of the *Roc* crushed in at the bow, like a collapsible tube, with an awful ripping sound, and the huge steely bubble—longer than a city block, higher than a four-story building—went out like a pricked bubble, became a ragged cloud of tattered fragments, and with all on board fell into the Atlantic, and floated in a shapeless mass of wreckage, on the churning dead swells in the quieter waters near the shore. Carson looked down to see whether the form he loved was smothered under the torn fabric or floating free, but never halted for the drowning or the living. He let out fifty yards of line he had made fast to the painter to give slack for the *Roc's* fall; and then with frenzied eagerness, he dragged the whole huge mass ashore and, as the *Virginia* alighted on the beach, her skipper leaping out began a fierce onslaught on the wreckage, seeking in its chaotic mass for her whose drenched form he dreaded to see.

CHAPTER XIX

FINALE

THE unities doubtless require that Theodore Carson be given the credit of diving under the wreck of the *Roc* and rescuing his lady-love. The facts are that he met at the water's edge a huge Swede in overalls carrying Virginia and towing Mr. Shayne by a line, much to the discomfiture of that gentleman, who had a tendency to turn over with his nose in the sand. Craighead, seeing a glint of red in the water, rescued a red mantilla, while Mrs. Shayne was floated ashore by Willett. The first engineer swam in with some automatic instrument from the engine-room in his teeth, swearing at the second engineer for dropping its mate. The gathering was one of pale, trembling, uninjured people. The *Roc* had been nursed down close to the water by Carson, and as she collapsed, her envelop blew aside and turned over, swinging her people clear—a marvelous escape.

Theodore carried Virginia to a seaside cottage just in process of being put in order for its owners.

"Tell me, dearest," he kept whispering, "that you are safe—safe!"

Virginia, wet, draggled, her strong little form resembling a rough-cast statue of some one quite irresistibly shapely, silently hung about his neck, limp, weak in the knees from excitement, but really not much more so than Theodore. It did not occur to her, however, to ask him to let her walk; and somehow she had forgotten how angry she was. Life had suddenly expanded to a long vista of scenes in which, whenever there was danger, he was present to succor and to comfort. She closed her eyes and clung about his neck, sprinkling the way with brine from her dress, and restraining an impulse to hug him spasmodically; and once in the comfortable room, she did allow her arms to tighten a bit as he laid her down.

He kissed her softly, gently, lingeringly, and as of right; and was astounded that she remained quite quiescent under the outrage. A lady can not always have presence of mind; so he took a mean advantage of his position, and instead of getting back into her good graces gradually, he made his appearance all at once in the citadel, as he had done on the parade-ground of the fort, with no pass in either case. He asked no hackneyed questions.

"You love me!" said he. "I'm not going to let you leave me again! Darling!"

With no rub-down to stimulate reaction after her plunge, and lying there in her wet clothes, Virginia glowed crimson; but she held her anger in check. In fact, as the servant came in with dry clothing, she squeezed his hand in gratitude, and forgot to balance her books by frowning. Carson went out radiant, meeting Craighead with the red mantilla on his arm.

"You all do know this mantle," said he, "but not the soul of paltry in things great. Ethically, this is a lost damosel snatched from a watery grave as she went down in the penultimate descent. I put my confounded life in pawn, for what? For a mere trumpery kick-shaw of silk with no more woman in it than a rabbit. Rotten! Rotten! This 'ere rescue ain't up to sample!"

"Craighead," said Carson, "I want you to run an errand, and be serious."

"That will be a distinct rise in spirits," answered Craighead. "At present I'm tragic—I may get even gay! What errand wouldest thou? Deliver: I'll put a gurgle round the block in forty minutes."

"Run for a doctor," said Carson. "Craighead, I believe she loves me."

"Past all doctoring," said Craighead. "Don't you want any one else?"

"No," answered Carson, "I can think of no one. But run!"

"If I think of any one else—"

"Do whatever you'd want done for yourself in my place!" cried Carson impatiently. "But hurry!"

Pacing up and down the veranda, Carson was in a delicious disturbance of spirits. He forgot Shayne and his wife, but ran down to see to the *Virginia* and found in charge the village constable, who marched round and round her, brandishing a policeman's club, and hitching forward occasionally a broad belt in which was slung an archaic revolver.

"I know the rules of these cases," said he to Carson. "When you give this to the papers say something about the way the police end of it was handled!"

"Thank you!" said Carson, having made sure that the *Virginia* was intact. "I shan't see any reporters."

"Sure you will," said the thoughtful constable. "I've sent f'r them!"

The doctor, a nervous little man with no voice, whispered to Carson that his wife, meaning *Virginia*, was uninjured, and urging him to go in and quiet her by his presence.

"Neurology my specialty," said he slyly, in Carson's ear. "Left big practice in Philadelphia on account of nervous prostration. Acute neuropathic symptoms in your very beautiful young wife, sir—but *accident!* Nothing to it!"

Carson explained, with some neuropathic symptoms of his own, that the young lady was not his wife.

"Excuse me!" whispered the doctor, on tiptoe. "As to whose the mistake is, yours or mine, omission or commission, can't say; but pardon me, just the same. Must go now. Other patients, you know. My card!"

And slipping his card to Theodore with the air of a man seeking to establish a connection in the castaway trade, he whispered himself out, being replaced almost immediately by two local representatives of the metropolitan press, to whom Theodore resolutely refused to say a word beyond the statement that the *Roc* was wrecked and that the passengers were saved. This, however, did not prevent them from sending in highly-colored accounts of the wreck and of the sensational assistance accorded her by the *Virginia* aëronef—which were expanded in the city offices into the sensation of the day. Shayne, of Aërostatic Power, had violated the Craighead injunction in the *Roc*! Craighead, Carson, and the Shaynes were together in a New Jersey village! Rumors and canards on 'Change and the curb! Extras and red type on yellow first pages! But the real sensation was not known until afterward.

Craighead was a long time gone, returning with a perspiring man carrying a notary's seal in one

hand, a huge volume under one arm, and a flat book like an exaggerated check-book under the other. Following them were a tall, angular, serious-looking gentleman in wading boots, his eyes covered with immense blue goggles—a French chauffeur, if one might judge by certain strong proofs in garments and feature; a life-saving crew from up the coast who had just arrived after a long-distance view of the wreck; and several water-side characters belonging in a New Jersey way to the Captain Harrod class. The man with the books seemed tired with his burden, and was using occasional strong words.

"Set down, set down your honorable load," said Craighead, "if honor may be harried with a curse. Fellow-citizens, we are delighted with what we have seen of your little city. The climate is lovely, the air fresh, and the water warm. We like it. What do you call it?"

Carson drew Craighead aside, and suggested dry clothes.

"Be silent, sirrah," cried Craighead, "and do as you are bid! Friends, the performance in the big tent is about to open. This, Mr. Van Brunt, is one of the principals."

"Of age, I see," said Mr. Van Brunt, looking at Carson. "I guess it's all right. An' where's the other party?"

A maid who had devoted herself to Virginia replied that Miss Suarez was quite able to see people.

"Come, Mr. Van Brunt," said Craighead, "and view the precious remains."

Craighead entered at Virginia's "Come in," but Mr. Van Brunt went no farther than to insert half his body and all his head in the room and look searchingly at Miss Suarez.

"Of course," said he, "you're over eighteen?"

"Considerably," said Virginia. "But—"

Mr. Van Brunt had vanished. Craighead gazed solemnly at Virginia, and spoke sepulchrally.

"These," said he, "are some of the local forms of the initiation. Be obedient, and thou shalt prosper. Don't do nothin' that you ain't told to—see?"

"What does this foolery mean?" asked Carson as Craighead emerged into the parlor, where Mr. Van Brunt was engaged in filling up blanks and tearing them out of the big check-book.

"Foolery?" said Craighead. "Profane not the sacred mysteries of Eleusis! Don't get cynical nor funny. You are not a very important person here. Friends, fellow-citizens, Jerseymen, lend me your ears! We have met for certain reasons connected with the vital statistics of our common country—to originate an epithet. Two problems look the American people in the face and gnash their problematical

teeth and snort. What are they? My friend the doctor, who has returned with healing in his fins, and our reverend friend in the waders, can bear witness from their reduced perquisites that I speak sooth when I say that these portentous national dangers lie in celibacy and race-suicide. I have made a specialty of them."

"Hooray!" shouted the captain of the life-saving crew.

"My honorable and gallant friend," said Craighead, indicating the captain, "hath a Smith college pin on his service shirt. It is not to thee, O potential benedict, that I speak. We are here to call, not the inoculated, but the hitherto immune to repentance. Fellow reformers, at the request of my friend Mr. Carson—General Theodo' Cahson, M. A.—I sent a motor-car for Mr. Van Brunt, and the county-seat of this county, so far as the marriage records are concerned, is here. The Reverend Mr. Coryell has kindly agreed to perform the ceremony. I will assume the chair, if there are no objections. I will entertain a motion ordering the nuptials to proceed. I assume a motion for the regular order. Reading of the minutes dispensed with. All in favor of the marriage of Theodore Carson and Virginia Suarez, say 'Aye!'"

There was a swelling roar of "Ayes" that startled

Virginia into a belief that a political convention was in session in the parlor. Craighead called for the "Nays," with no response.

"It is a vote," said he. "Unanimously! I congratulate you in this harmony! It augers well for a successful campaign and a triumphant election. Will some one volunteer to play the wedding march? Thank you, sir! May your own landing be as free from the gaff!"

This to the captain of the life savers, who seated himself on a piano-stool and ran his hands over the keys.

"And now, General," said Craighead to Carson, "all is ready. The statutes in such case made and provided are all fulfilled. Bring out the bride, and let the rapture culminate!"

"Craighead," said Carson, "come outside, and I'll break every bone in your body!"

No one heard this but Craighead, and he received the announcement with the suavest of bows, and a withdrawal with Carson on his arm.

"Just a little delay," said he to Mr. Coryell, "you know how it is—last kisses of bridesmaids—veil askew—rubbish—but we must wait."

Mr. Coryell, with Craighead's money in his pocket, sufficient in amount to pay the entire expenses of his vacation study of Atlantic gasteropods, waited smilingly, rubbing his hands. Mr. Van Brunt

lighted a cigar and looked officially grave. Carson seized Craighead by the throat in the privacy of the kitchen.

"What do you mean!" he snarled. "What insane thing is this?"

"Explanations," said Craighead, extricating his throat, "are uncalled for, it seemeth to me; but if given, require the use of the trachea. Ah've done did what you done tole me, boss!"

"What do you mean?"

Carson stood before Craighead with clenched fists, furious at Craighead's scandalous use of Virginia's name in public.

"Strike, in due time," said Craighead, "but hear! You told me to do for you what I'd want done in your place. You said Virginia loved you—"

"I said I believed it!" answered Carson, groaning. "Oh, Craighead, Craighead! You've ruined me!"

"Ruined your granny—that is, of course, I disagree with you entirely. Faint heart never won the money. I tell you the wedding-bells are now ringing. Go to, sirrah—go to *her*. Give her the rush. Lay it on me. Throw a fit on the rug; rip and tear; snort; weep; fight; fast; tear thyself; drink up eisel; eat a crocodile; take her in your arms; and incidentally mention the fact that the thing's a matter of record, and will be in all the papers. It'll work. Why, blast your picture, it's got to work. If it

doesn't, I'm stuck for seventy-five dollars for fees and corruption money!"

Carson walked back and forth, torn with rage, embarrassment and anxiety for the result with Virginia, thrilled with a growing realization of what it might mean to him.

"I'm going in to tell her," said he. "And if I fail, I shall come out and kill you, Craighead!"

"I shall make no will," said Craighead. "Why, if she were Caroline, and I you—"

Carson walked into the apartment of Virginia. The serving-girl withdrew and left them alone.

"Virginia," said he, "I'm going to take you with me!"

She flushed rosily, but woman-like refused to take his meaning.

"I can't go back, unkie," said she. "You failed in your exams. You are marked away, away down as an uncle! But I've forgiven you."

"Don't let's talk of that," said he. "I shan't even apologize. I'm glad I deceived you! *Glad*, do you hear? And now, you're going back—Psyche—as my wife. Don't struggle and try to escape. Don't you love me? Don't you love me? Don't you *love* me?"

She was past the struggle, now, and in the new print gown of the servant maid, she lay in his arms, quite surrendered. Outside, the voice of Mr. Craighead rose and fell in eloquence uninterrupted, save by rounds of applause. Like the orator who amuses

the throng until the great pageant approaches, Craighead was doing his best. Within, Carson, holding Virginia tight, repeated over and over the question, of which both knew the answer, but the answering of which made her his for ever. And at last, she buried her face in his breast, and voicelessly nodded her head—at which he, with the lover's joy in his bride's blushes, lifted her face and took his reward for waiting. The time passed much more rapidly for them than for Mr. Craighead. His voice grew hoarse, the rococo periods grew shorter, and at last, he rapped on the door and called "Time!"

The audience had entered upon the phase of impatience characterized by stamping in unison.

"What do they want?" asked Virginia.

"Us," said Carson. "Let us go out!"

"Out?" queried Virginia. "Out there?"

"Virginia," said Carson, "did I not say I was taking you away with me? Now?"

"Oh!" gasped Virginia, shrinking back. "You don't mean for me to understand—"

"The minister is outside—to marry us—darling! Come!"

"Oh, Theodore," she gasped, "you awful, awful boy! Oh, I can't! Not to-day! I—I am not prepared! Oh, you presumptuous—"

Something smothered this reproach, which went on inarticulately, as if uttered into a waistcoat pocket. Virginia was being hurried in minutes along

the enchanted stream down which, in ordinary affairs, the bark of courtship drifts enchantingly for months. To go with Theodore—that was something immense, unspeakable—sometime; but to go now? No, she said, with her face buried in his coat, she could not! Did she love him? Yes, oh, yes! She had got past denial of that! Did she trust him? How could he ask that! He knew she trusted him! He was the dearest, steadiest, most dependable, most trustworthy— Then why not now? Which brought the argument back to the stage of she-couldn't. Why couldn't she? Oh, she couldn't, she *couldn't*. The door opened. Craighead's voice came through in inquiry.

"All ready?" he asked loudly. "Then let the cortège move! Dispensing with the shawms, the timbrels, the rebecs, the psalt and psaltery, the trump and trumpery, and the instrument of ten strings, let the piano's martial blast rouse the echoes of the past. To this is our orchestra reduced. After these nuptials, we shall have the full music of the grand sweet song. Like Prince Agib of Gilbertian story,

" 'We will diligently play
On the zoëtrope all day,
And blow the loud pantehnicon all night!'

Forward! *March!*"

The wedding march from *Lohengrin* tinkled feelingly forth from the piano. The minister stood in the narrow cirque left open by the crowd. Craighead, like a new-ducked usher, bowed grandly at the door to let them through. Theodore took Virginia's plump, print-covered arm, and whispered in her ear promises which instinct told him would break down the last resistance. All things went roseate and purple and golden and pink before Virginia's eyes; her feet mechanically paced the short way, and she stood before the man in waders, the most divinely shamefast bride ever led to the altar. The short service went on, as remembered by the priest.

"Who gives this woman away?"

And who but Finley Shayne, broke through the press, to take her by the hand and respond heartily: "I do!"

And when the ring was called for, who but the captain of the life-saving crew, true to the traditions of the service, came forward, and took it from his chain, and saved them?

And when the minister asked, "Do you, Virginia, take this man to be your wedded husband?" and the dear old remainder of it, who but Theodore Carson turned dizzy at the bride's pause before answering, and who but Virginia said sweetly and clearly, "I do?"

And there was a whirl of congratulations, in which Mrs. Shayne joined, weeping most properly; and Carson hugged Craighead purple again; and the world revolved back to the old halcyon days, when no storms blew, and there were bowery joys—the joys, thank Heaven, that are open to the young and good, no matter what their station in life! And even Craighead's statement that the minister's waders were ominous of the deep water into which the happy pair was getting, failed of effect save to make the wedding dinner—at which the Shaynes sat down—more foolishly hilarious.

The scuppernongs were ripening in the arbor at Carson's Landing; the carpenter-bees were still at their carpentry; the myrtle was fragrant; the oleander was in full bloom; the Satsuma oranges glowed golden from the trees; and the woodpeckers still wove their festoons of fire from tree to tree. Captain Harrod, removed for life from the solitude and temptations of the dunes, was busy mending fences. Aunt Chloe was scuffling about as of old; when a whistle blew in the river, and a vessel put off at the landing Mr. Theodore and Miss Virginia. The captain and Aunt Chloe stood in wonder—for a change had come over the two they most loved. Virginia was clinging to Theodore's arm with both

hands; and as they passed up under the cedars, they saw Theodore make occasional halts to kiss her. When they came to the door, Theodore paused, and picking Virginia up in his arms, carried her up the steps and over the threshold. And then Aunt Chloe knew.

"Mah sweet chile!" she cried. "Mah deah honey! Ah knew 'twould come. Ah knew it!"

"Aunt Chloe," said Virginia, "I'm not to blame! He abducted me!"

"Ah'm powerful glad," said Captain Harrod. "You two sho belong togethe'. Ah wush you much joy."

"We're having that now!" cried Virginia. "And we're down here, Aunt Chloe, not to make you any trouble, but to live! To live a thousand years in a month, that won't seem but a minute! To be alone!"

"We don't want any one to know we're here," said Theodore. "This little girl is enough for me, and I for her. The rest of the world—it's lost!"

"But some one knows a'ready, suh," said the captain. "We've done got a heap of telegrams fo' you."

"Craighead, darling!" said Theodore.

"Open them, dearest," said Virginia. "I hope the dear fellow—oh, Mrs. Graybill likes him, I know. But open the telegrams!"

In their order, the messages were opened. The

first was dated New York, and was sent on the eve of Craighead's departure to learn his fate.

"As Cæsar," said he, "consulted the oracles and diviners before going to battle, so do I, who am the Cæsar of the legal world, since the temporary injunction is made permanent, and Shayne's given up. I prefer the art of the haruspex: but this is a legal holiday, and the live stock market's closed. So I revert to the daisy-petal divination. The halting-places on the road that takes me to my Caroline are the petals on the flower of my fate, and to them I appeal. More anon . . . They end with 'She loves me' or Craighead's obsequies may be arranged."

"I can't understand him," said Theodore, "any better than when I found him in the garden."

"Oh, it's perfectly plain, sweetheart!" cried Virginia. "Open the rest! Open the rest!"

The next was from Peekskill, and consisted of the three words "She loves me." The next, "She loves me not," was from Poughkeepsie. Theodore, with Virginia sitting on his knee, read one after another, to the growing excitement of both. Of course it was foolish, but Craighead was not to be judged by ordinary standards. He might have worked himself up to a whimsical faith in this old-new divination. They were cast down at the "She loves me not" from Albany, and cheered by "She loves me" from

Schenectady. Not a word came in addition except "Hurrah!" added to the "She loves me" at Chicago.

"Hurrah!" cried Virginia.

"But wait," said Theodore, pulling her back to the perch from which she had sprung. "There are several stops before he gets to Mr. Waddy's—wait!"

"Heaven have mercy!" the next ran. "I thought it was all right. Again the fall-guy of destiny, I must go on a local train! All in the air again! Oh, that this too, too solid flesh might melt!"

On they went with the reading, and from one little Illinois town after another came the "She loves me" and "She loves me not" of the despairing Craighead. At last, there came from the town of the Slattery Institute a wail of defeat.

"She loves me not! The gods have done me dirt! Back to Chicago on the next train—and then the Rat Mort. I am still

"THE GREAT UNCALLED."

"Oh, the crazy fellow," Virginia cried, her eyes full of tears. "Can't we *do* something? That telegram came this morning. There must be time! Oh, he'll destroy his life—for a whim!"

"They's anothah done come sence den," said Chloe. "The boy jest done gone when you come. Hyah it is!"

They were enormously wrought up in opening it.

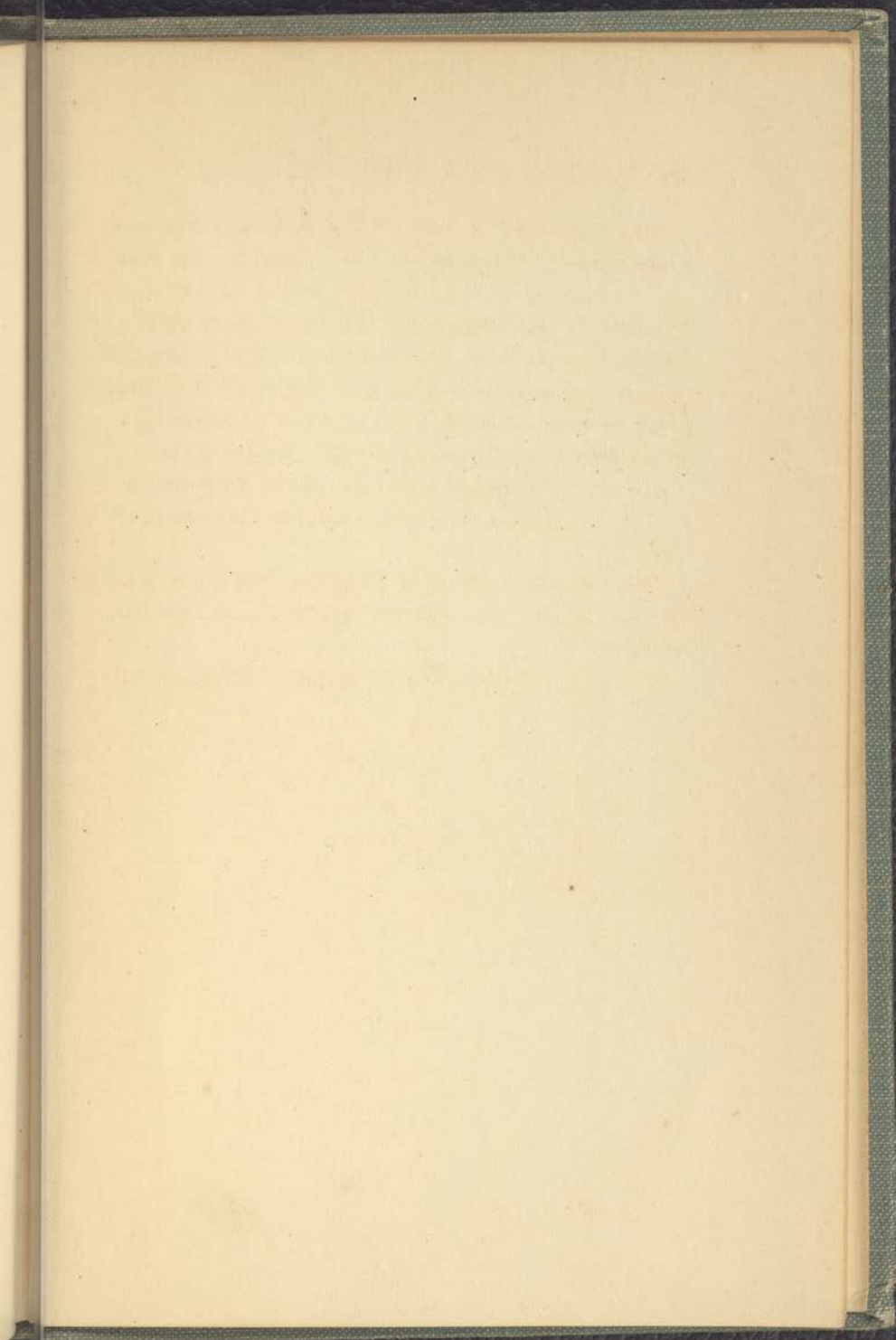
"She loves me," it read. "One of those petals was a water-tank. Caroline says so. Blest be the man who first invented tanks. Cards later. I have scored. The simple life henceforth. Come to the wedding. Did you notice how I grasped the skirts of happy chance and grappled with me evil star? Oh, the game is easy when you learn it! From this day, let no man be so dippy as to fail. She loves me!

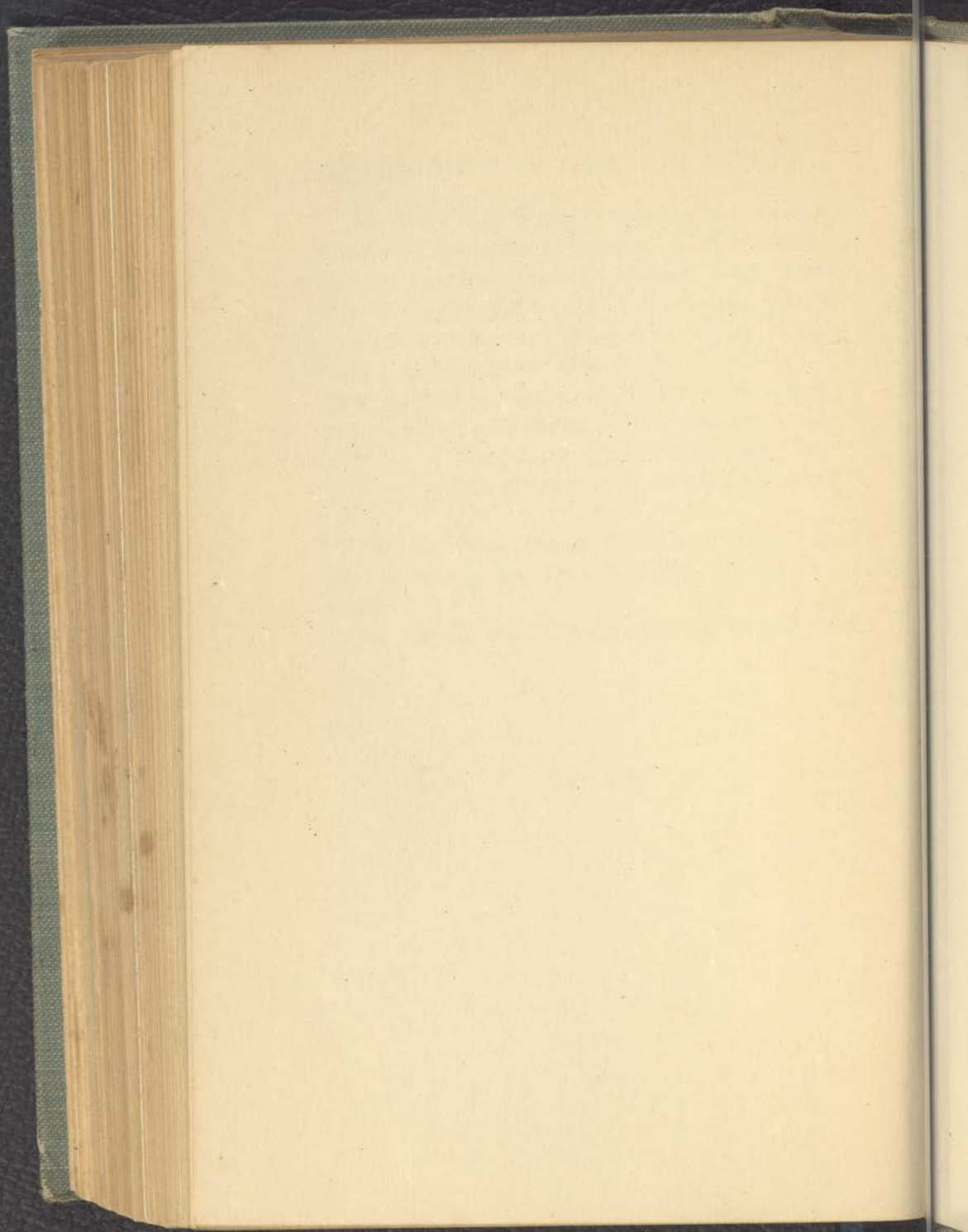
"THE GREAT CRAIGHEAD, SOON TO BE
REORGANIZED AS GREATER CRAIGHEAD."

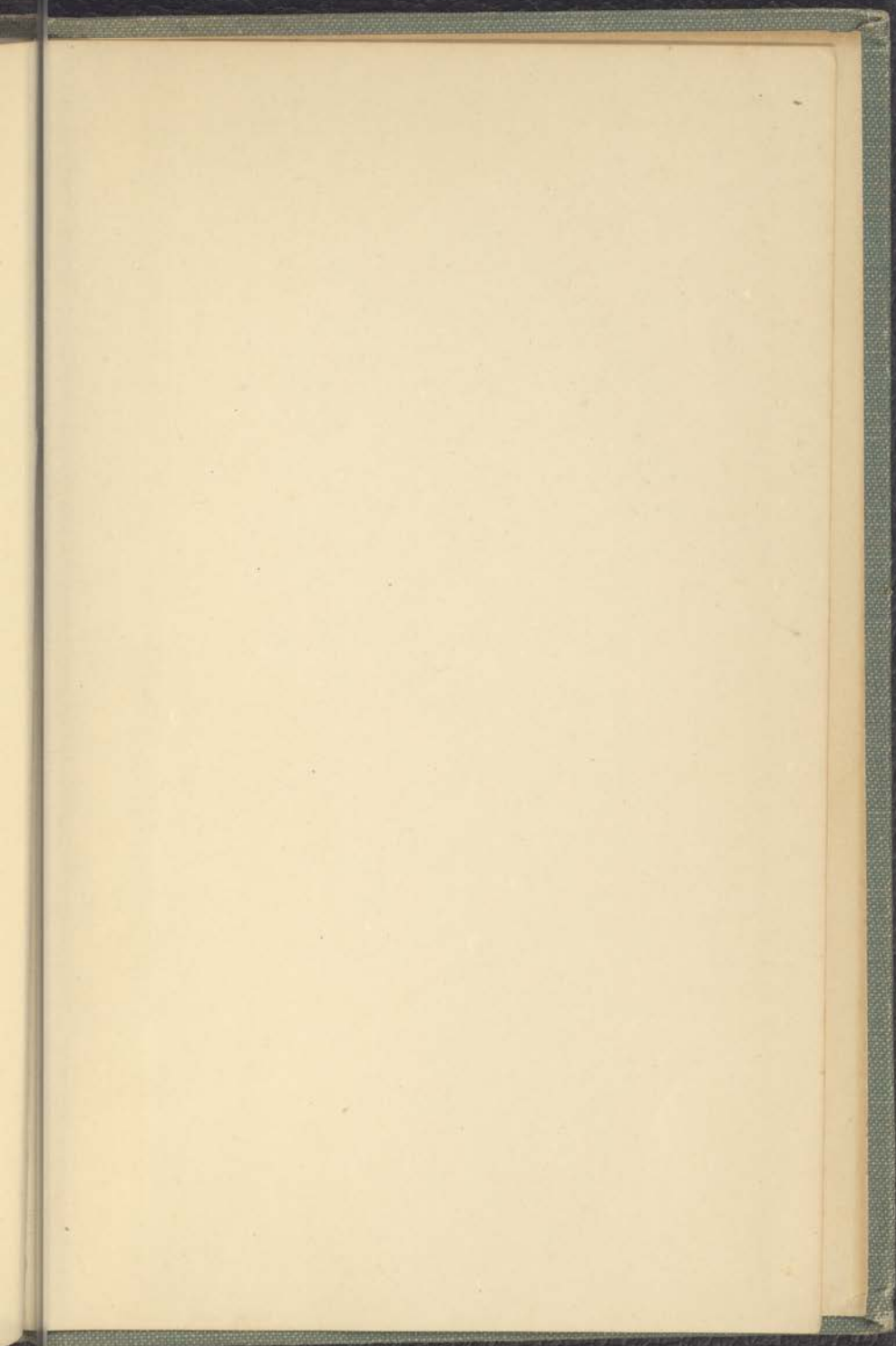
"Oh, oh, oh—o," cried Virginia. "What a load off our minds, sweetheart! Isn't—it—a—good—world!"

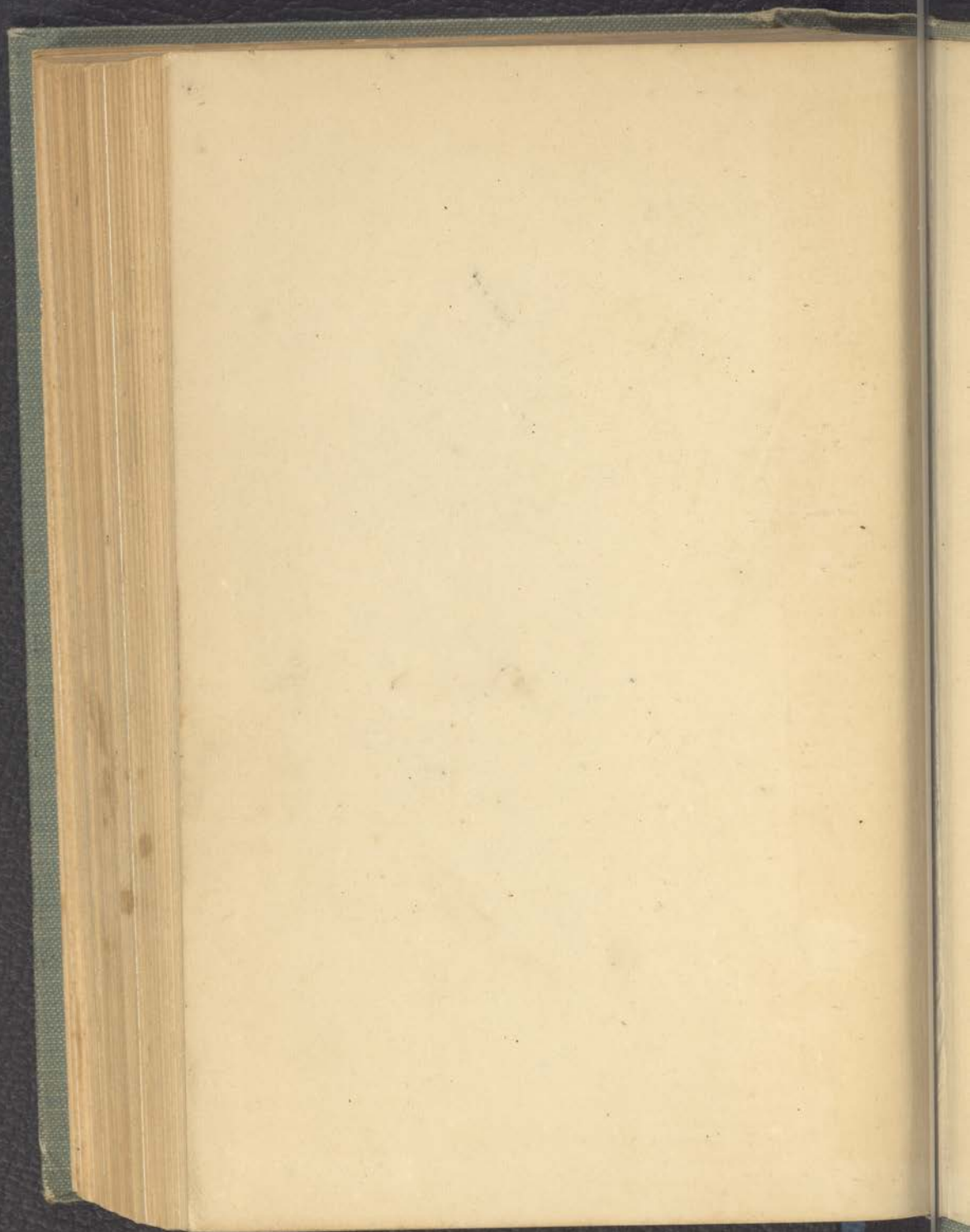
You may fill up the blanks yourself. Virginia did.

THE END









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