

Dan E. L. Patch

Past Finding Out



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Past Finding Out

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By Dan E. L. Patch

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Past Finding Out

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The victim is supposed to be Doris, the attractive daughter of J. Philip Wheaton, for whom Jack has more than passing interest. Questioned by the police, he is missing the next morning, being decoyed by the kidnapers and carried by air plane to their hide-out. Events happen swiftly; mystery, adventure, courage, love and mistaken identity are revealed, ending in a remarkable deliverance.

In this streamlined story, Chief Patch emphasizes the fact that a conviction of sin, with the salvation which follows, is the only solution of the country’s crime problems, since there is no permanent cure for crime apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel puts the cure where it belongs — in the heart.

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Frontleaf Text

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Past Finding Out

By Dan E. L. Patch

CHIEF OF POLICE, HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN. AUTHOR OF "AAMON ALWAYS."

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Dedication

To my beloved daughter

Vera

who with a vision of lost souls in
China dedicated her life to the cause
of Christ in full-time missionary
work under the auspices of the
China Inland Mission, sailing for
China on September 11, 1936.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

Benediction

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

Dan E. L. Patch began his public service as a patrolman in the Police Department of the City of Highland Park. Within fifteen years, personal qualifications brought him through the various ranks to the position of Chief of Police. A quarter of a century of faithful service gave a feeling of joy and explicit confidence to all citizens who respected the law and who liked to see it administered without fear or favor. Professional competence was attested by the honor conferred by the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police when he was made their President for the years 1941-42. In later years he served as Chief of Police of Ypsilanti, Michigan.

By J. McGill Reynar, *Secretary of The Christian Business Men's Committee of Detroit.*

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Foreword

PRACTICALLY A QUARTER OF A CENTURY of police experience has furnished the convincing proof that “he who would observe provincial law must first observe the moral code.” The population of our overcrowded penal institutions is indisputable testimony to this fact.

In surveying the country as a whole, the poisonous venom of the spoils of crime has so inoculated our system of society that individual hearts, hungering for the sustaining substance of moral food, are rapidly dying of spiritual starvation; and for this dreaded disease the law-enforcement agencies of the country have no specific cure. Because of this fact, this volume is presented in the earnest desire that by all means some may be saved from the ravages of crime and from the wages of sin.

It is my firm conviction that there is no other way whereby men can be saved from the consequences of sin and crime and from the wrath to come, other than through the One who died for the sin of the world, arose from the grave, and ascended to the right hand of God—The Man, Christ Jesus—and who will return to earth ere long in personal glory to reign in righteousness and power.

The proof is conclusive. Those who have the attributes of Jesus Christ and claim Him as their personal Saviour are not found entering our prisons, nor are they habitually associating with those who heed the call to crime.

America needs to retrace her steps— “all the way back to God.”

—DAN E. L. PATCH.

1. The Way of All Flesh

DEATH! Silent, mysterious, incomprehensible Death! For the seventh time in as many months this monster had crept into the household of Thrillby and taken its toll from the family tree.

Death! How he hated it! How he had fought to conquer it! Again, he felt its unseen presence and subconsciously realized that the Ruler of that impassable gulf that fixes the destinies of mankind had departed with the soul of Grandmother Thrillby, and he, Jack Thrillby, was alone, helpless in his own thoughts.

Enthusiastically ambitious at twenty-five years of age, he was to graduate in June, having the highest honors of his medical college bestowed upon him. But now, as though mocking him, death again had cast a shadow of defeat over the very purpose of his chosen profession— that of preserving life.

Why were the Fates so unkind to him? Why couldn't he be one to reach beyond the barrier and render a real service to mankind? Why couldn't medical science bridge the gap to that perpetual fountain of life for which mankind by instinct clamors?

How he had boasted of the great things he would do as a physician and surgeon! Only yesterday— Christmas Eve—he and his grandmother had talked about it, and had planned the trip they were to make to the great University where he was to graduate. There a centennial celebration was to be held, honor

ing jointly the state, the college, and Grandmother Thrillby. In another month Grandmother Thrillby would pass her one hundredth birthday, and in June was to have shared honors with him in the State Centennial Graduating class—she on account of her great age, and he by virtue of the cherished diploma that would enable him to step out on his own and show the world that he, Dr. John Withington Thrillby, had to be reckoned with.

But— Death! He knew it by premonition. Death! That silent Robber had crossed his path again.

What new course in his destiny this would bring, he knew not, as he stood holding her old, withered hand, hoping against hope that somehow he might feel the slightest tremor of her pulse by which he could detect life.

Tenderly he stroked her thin, grey hair, and looked into the lifeless, glassy-brown eyes, seeking for life that so recently was, but now was not—and yet is.

No, he would not believe it! Grandmother Thrillby in her simple faith might have believed in life after death, but not John Withington Thrillby, now almost a doctor.

Most assuredly not! Had he not had all the advantages of learning that the great minds of scientific research could supply? Hadn't the higher critics with all the resources or scientific knowledge at their command proved otherwise? Had they not labeled life after death "just an old superstitious whim of the primitive ages," and not one to be reckoned with in the realm of mind and matter as known to the psychology of modern science?

To him death meant but one thing: call the undertaker, a funeral, the gathering of friends and relatives

to pay their last respects to the departed one. A grave, a tombstone with a brief record of dates, age and achievements in life. What else could there be?

He was satisfied. In his own mind there was nothing—absolutely nothing beyond this life. But suppose grandmother were right? The thought flashed across his mind reluctantly. Emphatically no! He would not allow himself to think more about it.

He stepped to the old, box-type telephone and rang central with a vigorous long ring and asked to be connected with the mortuary offices of Upledger & Young.

A businesslike feminine voice answered, "Just a minute, please; the line is busy, I think."

Impatiently tapping the telephone box until it played a tattoo through the receiver at his ear, he waited.

"I am sorry, sir," central informed him; "it's a long distance call—making arrangements for a shipment and a funeral. They may be busy for some time. Perhaps I may be able to help you. May I call you back? I shall be only too glad to render any service I can."

He pondered. “Yes, get them as soon as possible. It’s very important. Grandmother, she—she wouldn’t want anyone else.” And then, half under his breath, he muttered to himself: “Somebody else would have to die, too, just when one needs an undertaker.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, sir,” the operator stammered, getting her cue from his monotone. “Is grandmother, I mean, you—you wish to make a business call? This—this is John Thrillby speaking, isn’t it? I’m so sorry.”

“Yes,” he assured her impatiently. “I would like to get in touch with the undertaker. Grandmother just died suddenly. Try Mr. Upledger, will you, please?”

“Oh, I didn’t know —”

“No,” he volunteered. “She has not been sick. Just dropped asleep sitting in her rocking chair while looking at Christmas cards after dinner, and —”

“Oh, Mr. Thrillby,” she interrupted sympathetic ally; “I didn’t mean to be inquisitive. Excuse me. I’m so sorry. Can I help in any way? Perhaps the doctor — Is anyone with you?”

He replied negatively to all of her questions at once, as the thought ran through his mind that there had been no doctor in attendance. Then, sensing the significance of her thoughtfulness, he anxiously thanked her for her kindly interest.

“I would appreciate your calling Dr. Wescott for me, as I am alone,” he said; “and if you don’t mind, I’ll furnish you with a list of those I wish to have notified later on.”

Encouraged by the voice that she knew to betray his feelings, she ventured the assurance that she would take care of everything for him.

“I have a friend here with me in the office who has a car,” the girl informed him; “she will personally see that the undertaker is notified immediately. I’ll ring Dr. Wescott for you right now. Just a minute, please.”

He waited.

“Yes, Dr. Wescott will be right over,” she assured him.

Hanging up the receiver, he paced the floor, thankful that there was at least one person who was anxious to assist in this time of trouble.

“Poor old grandmother!” He felt condemned in the silence of death. He should have thought of calling the doctor the first thing. Here he was taking things for granted, trying to rush her off to the under taker’s without first having given a thought to possibilities for her physical welfare. He was not

a doctor yet, and as far as he was concerned she died without his even thinking of medical attention.

The cold sweat stood on his brow.

He was not a doctor. And even though his diploma were issued the ethics of the profession would not allow him to sign a death certificate. He was her grandson—a blood relative. Anything he might say now was only theory, professionally. Suppose the question of her death became an issue? Suppose the town gossipers were to whisper the slightest doubt—his being there alone with her—no doctor called!

True, Dr. Wescott was coming, but he had not called for him until after central had suggested it. What would the doctor say? Would he think it necessary to call the coroner? Would a post-mortem be necessary—and perhaps an inquest?

“Murder!” He was horrified. Suppose someone just breathed that word of gossip? Weren’t there plenty of idle brains that would enjoy nothing better? He would be ruined! John Thrillby suspected of murdering his poor old grandmother for—for—yes, the motive would be reasonable.

It was a matter of common knowledge to several that he had tried unsuccessfully to borrow money to finish his schooling. What more logical reason could there be? And now just one little whisper that he had been at the bank yesterday and had drawn three hundred dollars from his grandmother’s account would be enough to set idle tongues wagging.

She had insisted upon it, to be sure; and much against his own wishes he had finally consented to accept it as a loan by giving his note as security. Grandmother had put the paper away somewhere.

Yet, it was in his own handwriting, all of it. They, of course, could say that he just drew the note to throw off suspicion, and how could he prove other wise? What should he do now? Suppose he should try to find the note and tear it up, and put the money back in the bank tomorrow? What could he do? Why couldn’t he think? He felt faint. The room was close and stuffy. He needed air!

2. An Uninvited Guest

RUSHING TO THE FRONT DOOR, he threw it open just as a trim, new roadster rolled into the side drive and came to an abrupt stop. The driver, a chestnut-haired young lady, dressed in a skating costume, bounded out on to the porch and almost into his arms.

“Pardon me, Mr. — . Why, you’re John Thrillby!” she exclaimed.

He made no attempt to hide the look of startled surprise that spread over his features as he measured her from head to foot, taking in every detail, from her chic little cap to the ermine trim on her boots, which matched that of her perfectly fitted costume.

She stood nervously pleading with her eyes until he regained his composure and made a gesture, inviting her to enter.

“I was at the telephone office when you called about Grandmother Thrillby. I drove around by the under takers. Mr. Upledger will be right over. Dr. Wescott is coming, too. I passed him at the gas station a mile back. I want to do everything that I can to help. Where is grandma? May I —? I— I am Miss Wheaton —Dorcas Wheaton. Grandmother and I were real pals. She would want me to come, I know,” she pleaded, out of breath.

Touched by the sincerity of her appeal, he led her to the living room, before the grate, to the rocking chair holding the lifeless form of his grandmother.

With a reverence he had never witnessed before, he watched her stoop over and stroke the white brow, and with the air of a professional pick up one of the motionless hands of her old friend. Feeling the pulse and caressing the tips of the cold blue fingers, she slowly shook her head and turned away, deeply engulfed in thought.

“Poor old soul,” she said; “God has been good to her. No suffering, no pain; just called home to her eternal reward.”

“Yes,” he agreed, congenially.

“I’m glad,” she continued simply, “that grandma knew the way of salvation. She—she is being welcomed to her eternal home now.”

Enthralled, he stood motionless as she dropped to her knees and placed her head in the lap of the lifeless form. Around them, from the gold in her hair, a halo of light was reflected, as the coals in dying embers in the fireplace set them out in silhouette.

“O gracious God,” she prayed aloud in a quiet, even tone, “we bow in the presence of death, subject to the divine providence of Thy will. We thank Thee for the grace that saves, and brings comfort and understanding to our finite hearts. Thy ways, O Lord, are above our ways; and in meekness and humility we thank Thee for this life that Thou hast this day taken home to glory. We thank Thee for her life and her witness to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant, O Lord, that she may continue to live in the memory of this community, honoring Thy precious Name.”

A log in the fireplace settled in the ashes and broke apart, renewing the life in the coals. Little flickers of flame sprang up and cast new shadows about the room, adding a touch of solemnity to the occasion.

Hesitating only momentarily, she continued: “Grant, O Lord, the burden of her prayer for—for John, here,” she prayed. “May her prayers prove a channel of blessing to him, guiding him in the desire of Thine own divine will, glorifying the precious Name of Jesus.”

John Thrillby, frozen to the spot, stood like a statue. For the first time in his life he was not the master of himself. He tried to move. He wanted to get away from that invisible something that held him, but he could not. He knew what the burden of his grandmother’s prayers for him had always been; but how did this mysterious young lady before him know? Was she a mind reader, piercing even beyond the veil of death? He sensed that she and his grandmother might have had something in common when she was alive. But in death —! That baffled him.

He felt chagrined that she had mentioned his name in prayer. He didn’t believe in prayer. He did not need to be prayed for, and he did not want to be prayed for now. Rebellion surged within his heart against her. He was perfectly able to take care of himself. He had always done so. Why should it be any different now? He tried to voice an open protest, but when he opened his mouth to speak, words failed him. Ill at ease, speechless and humiliated, he turned away, not knowing what to do or say.

She arose and walked to the window, and stood looking out into the night, gazing into the far-away heavens as though trying to bridge the insuperable gulf there. A million stars twinkled back into her upturned

face. Her chin rested on the back of her hands as she remained motionless, leaning on her arms which were spread along the top of the lower window sash.

The arrival of the undertaker and Dr. Wescott relieved the tension and aroused them to action, and when they were admitted they stood at the door in a matter-of-fact way to receive them. Ushering them into the living room, John briefly explained to Dr. Wescott the circumstances surrounding his grand mother's death, while Dorcas and Mr. Upledger, as a matter of courtesy, stood at a respectable distance until he had finished.

After a careful diagnosis, the doctor returned with a professional bearing for a conference with John and Mr. Upledger, after which he called the county coroner and advised him of the decease of Grandmother Thrillby. In relating the circumstances, he gave as the cause of her death the natural complication of old age, with the appearance of apoplexy, the evident result of over-exertion in preparing the Christmas dinner. Although John had asked her permission to secure the services of an old friend at the village who would be glad to assist her, she had declined the offer as she had done before on similar occasions. She insisted that she had never felt better in her life, and in reality had exhibited unusual physical capabilities. She long had been known for her stability and that Thrillby independence.

With the further explanation that the grandson and Miss Wheaton, a trained nurse, were there, and that there was nothing apparently irregular in grand mother's demise, the doctor advised that the body be turned over to the mortician without the formality of a post-mortem examination. Then beckoning Mr. Upledger to the phone, he permitted him to make final arrangements with the coroner.

Afterwards, Mr. Upledger returned and without giving John an opportunity to state that Miss Wheaton was not actually present at the time of grandmother's death, he ushered them both from the room. He then proceeded with the arrangements necessary to comply with the grandmother's expressed wish that she should be laid out in her own home, rather than in quarters provided at the mortuary.

Going to the kitchen, which seemed to be the only logical place to go after Dr. Wescott's departure, John greeted Dorcas with the remark, "I did not know you were a trained nurse. I never heard anyone speak of it before. You must be the daughter of J. Philip Wheaton, are you not?" mentioning

the name of a large automobile-parts manufacturing company of which Mr. Wheaton was the president.

“No,” she volunteered, “that is Uncle Philip, my father’s oldest brother. Fortune, you see, smiled more favorably on me. My father is a Baptist minister, having less money but more wealth. He’s the Reverend William J. Wheaton of Albion.”

“I am certainly glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Wheaton,” he assured her. “I have heard grand mother speak of you and your family often. Your father particularly appealed to her as a minister, I believe. And you—we have a picture of you and a twin sister on the piano now, haven’t we?”

“Wrong again,” she replied. “The girl in the picture with me is not a twin. I have no sisters. She is a cousin— Uncle Philip’s oldest daughter— Doris Wheaton. She is three months older than I. We spent our vacation here with grandmother one summer. It’s strange, though, that we never happened to meet here before. Doris attended college at Ann Arbor while I was there. The picture you have was taken then. Since that time she has graduated, while I am in a Bible institute at Chicago.”

“Doris and Dorcas,” he mused. “Sound like twins, look like twins, and are as near alike as two peas in a pod, but —”

“Yes,” she interrupted, “but as different as the lily and the rose,” sorry for the comparison as soon as she had spoken. “Different in nature, you see! Doris likes the bright showy places, while I would prefer the less conspicuous, something more quiet and secluded.”

“Ah, the lily, I see! But still I don’t know,” said John; “I believe I shall have to wait and see you and your cousin together, and really feel the thorns, per haps, before passing an opinion,” little realizing how significant his remark would prove to be in the future.

Dorcas moved over to the kitchen sink, tested the hot-water faucet, and looking up with a slight twinkle in her eyes, she said: “It would be far more profitable for us to wash and dry the dishes than to waste good time in idle chatter, don’t you think?” And, without giving him an opportunity to voice an objection, she produced a dishpan from the cupboard underneath the sink and turned on the hot water. Rolling up her sleeves, she adjusted the faucets until the water was the right temperature to suit her fancy and proceeded to wash the dishes that were on the kitchen table.

John needed no further prompting. As fast as Dorcas washed a rack of dishes, he scalded and dried them, placing each variety in its own particular

stack on the table. Finishing this task, she continued to busy herself about the kitchen, cleaning the stove and putting away the dishes and tidying things up generally.

“Well, I declare,” Mr. Upledger exclaimed from the doorway; “I really thought that you were preparing George and me a midnight lunch,” referring to his assistant who was standing at his side looking over his shoulder.

“Your guess is right, but your watch is wrong,” Dorcas replied chidingly, glancing up at the clock. “Only twenty minutes to exercise patience, though, before your wish will be granted.” Turning to John, she said, “Get me a few apples, please. You have them in the basement, haven’t you? Then you may set the table, if you will.”

John picked up a pan and disappeared down the basement stairs, and immediately returned with it full of rosy-red spies, together with a variety of greenings, baldwins and bellflowers.

“Here you are, Miss Wheaton,” he said gravely, his mind returning to the solemn occasion. “May I peel and garnish them for you?”

“No, thank you,” she replied. “It is best that I assume the role of cook here for the time being. Perhaps Mr. Upledger will want to arrange the details of grandmother’s funeral with you,” she added by way of suggestion.

“Yes,” replied the undertaker, beckoning to John to follow him to the next room; “we may as well make the arrangements now. It will be far more satisfactory than trying to arrange them by telephone, or coming back in the morning. Then, too, if there are any telegrams to be sent I can take them tonight and send night letters. You have relatives some place in the west that you will wish to have notified, have you not?”

Without answering, John followed him through to the side bedroom where he found his grandmother had been laid out in compliance with her wishes. It was understood that she was not to be taken from the home until the time for the services the following Tuesday at two o’clock. Other arrangements for the funeral were soon made. Telegrams were written on blanks furnished by Mr. Upledger, and then it was arranged that John was to come to the funeral home at four o’clock the next day to select the casket.

They were still discussing a few matters that John was to take care of personally, when a call invited them to come to the kitchen and partake of the lunch that Dorcas had prepared. It seemed to John that some hand of

magic must have been helping Dorcas, when he saw the tempting fruit salad and toasted sandwiches neatly arranged at each place. Jellies, relishes and a variety of pickles adorned the table. A percolator of fresh coffee was sending out its appetizing aroma. A can of grandmother's home-preserved peaches had been opened and individual sauce dishes set at each place on the table.

An invitation to eat was unnecessary. John had not realized that he was really hungry, until the sandwiches had been passed around the third time and he saw Dorcas rise to prepare more. Feeling condemned, he apologized to her for the appetite he exhibited, and made a courteous protest when she offered him the third cup of coffee.

"No one need to apologize for his appetite when encouraged with a meal like this," remarked Mr. Upledger. His compliments in thanking Dorcas for her hospitality brought the color of embarrassment to her cheeks. Noticing this, the mortician tactfully changed the subject to the matter of business again, and casually instructed the driver to bring the car to the side door for their return trip to his office.

John and Dorcas, left alone, finished their coffee leisurely, discussing events of the last few hours and the consequences that might develop from them. Dorcas recalled how as a little girl she had met Grand mother Thrillby, and the unusual influence which her life and testimony had had in molding her own. As a child, she had often visited the old homestead, when on vacation trips to her aunt's place in the village, where she was stopping at present.

John summarized his college life generally, stating his hopes and ambitions for the future. Then the conversation drifted to the unusual chain of circumstances that the hand of Fate had seemingly woven about the Thrillby family.

Scarcely seven months had elapsed since the tragedy of death in combined force raided the Thrillby household in the form of an automobile accident, adding three to the approximately 40,000 killed in the United States during the year. A drunken truck driver with Fate riding beside him at the wheel had left John fatherless, when Alfred C. Thrillby, 59, his son Alfred C, Jr., and a daughter, Alice, just past seventeen, John's only sister, were struck in a head-on collision while returning home in their automobile from a high school banquet. This as much as anything else was responsible

for touching off the spark of rebellion in John's heart against anything having a semblance of godliness.

The shock of this unwarranted tragedy proved too much for Martha Thrillby in her state of ill health, and consequently, John was left motherless scarcely two weeks later. But Fate did not stop here, for in June they brought home his oldest brother, James, in a casket draped with the American flag. A veteran of foreign wars, he had been employed in the Government service as a G-man and lost his life at the age of thirty-three in a gun battle with a mob of Chicago gangsters. Six months later his heartbroken wife followed him, a suicide, by jumping off the Belle Isle Bridge into the Detroit River.

Grandmother Thrillby bore it all quietly and courageously, voicing no protest or word of complaint; and when John tried to offer consolation and sympathy by blaming God for the trouble and sorrow that were hers to bear, she did not hesitate to rebuke him for his unbelief.

"God was to blame!" he vehemently declared when grandmother tried to point out that the course of sin in the world was responsible for the sad misfortune that brought sorrow into their home.

Angry, vindictive, and harboring a growing rebel lion against God and man, John returned to college resolved to put into practice the advanced ideas of atheism with which he had become tainted through his studies in "demonology," as grandmother called the many sciences that he referred to in his arguments, trying to provide a basis for his materialistic ideas.

The teaching of biology, geology, paleontology, embryology, anthropology and all the other "scientificologies," seething as they are in their modern application with the ungodly toxin of spiritual death, were all Greek to grandmother; but the after effects of the inauspicious venom was a material fact which, even with her meager education, she did not fail to recognize as deadly to the human soul.

All of his arguments and earnest entreaties in his efforts to win her over to his ideas of "new thought" had no effect whatever upon grandmother in her unchangeable faith, securely founded on the eternal Rock of Ages. Consequently, John had to turn else where for sympathy, and he sought every opportunity to cultivate acquaintances and associates who were in sympathy with his ideas of atheism that would lend strength to the hypothesis that there is no God.

3. There Is No God

EXCEPT FOR THIS CHRISTMAS VACATION, the only time Jack Thrillby had been in the old homestead during the past year was to attend a funeral. And now death had crossed the threshold again to taunt and antagonize him. Why shouldn't he be bitter, he, the only remaining Thrillby? There were no relatives left to see him graduate. In fact, there was no one now who cared if he graduated or not.

He had not meant to complain and unburden his heart to Dorcas. It would have been the last thing he would think of doing under ordinary circumstances. He certainly couldn't, in vindication of his theories, reveal any weakness; but like all human beings his heart was hungry for sympathy, that he did not recognize nor understand. Only in his present state of mind would he ever have admitted it under any condition.

Dorcas listened so attentively that it gave him the impression she was in sympathy with his ideas. Encouraged by the thought, he was carried away by his own egoism and talked at length about achievements just around the corner. It pleased him to talk to anyone with a sympathetic ear. His friends were like him self—cold, hard and bitter against the world. Each lived a law unto himself, guided by his own code of moral ethics, openly defiant of everyone who professed any form of godliness.

He did not recognize that Dorcas' prayer at his grandmother's knee had touched his heart. Neither did he realize that in his subconscious mind he was unconsciously being drawn to her in search of mental comfort. His heart was hungry, yet he did not appreciate it. Dorcas had prepared the food which satisfied his physical hunger, and her personality was supplying the food he needed for his heart and mind.

Could she? Would she rise to the opportunity that was now presented to her?

Her own heart was longing to sympathize with him. Grandmother had been her Christian ideal and a source of great spiritual comfort through fellowship with her in the things of God. She could never forget that and

her heart ached, not because of grandmother's departure—that she understood and accepted as His providence—but because of John's defiance of God; this was now her burden. She knew how grandmother had labored with it and the many, many hours of her life that she had spent on her knees in petition to God for his spiritual and eternal welfare. From outward appearances her efforts had been in support of a lost cause; for judging from all indications, John Thrillby still was in bondage to the devil.

Dorcas felt unequal to the occasion. Anything she might say would possibly add fuel to the fire should she rebuke him for his unbelief. She knew how grandmother had pleaded and argued with him, but all to no avail. The more she protested, the more determined he became, always insisting upon the right to prove his own theories.

Finally, she ventured: "I wonder if there is as much trouble on other planets as on this one? There must be some place in this vast universe where happiness is complete."

John wondered thoughtfully, but before he had an opportunity to reply, she continued: "I saw in the paper the other day that some scientist at the Mt. Wilson Observatory discovered a new star—a little dwarf, far, far out in the recesses of space, and so tiny that it would take the mass of eight of them to make an orbit as big as our earth. Queer, isn't it, how rays from new stars in undiscovered space, millions and millions of light years away, have been traveling all this time to get within the range of our big telescopes!"

"Inconceivable," said John, puzzled over the point she was trying to make.

"Yet the Lord has said, 'There is no new thing under the sun,'" Dorcas quoted. "We only think it's new. Like this little star which is new to us because we have just discovered it. But in God's kingdom it is as old as the sun, I suppose. Anyway, this newspaper item impressed me so much that I clipped it out and now have the article in my Bible."

"I was impressed with its scientific value," replied John. "I believe the article states that this particular star is so unbelievably hot that the atoms of which it is composed lose some of their electrons at 28,000 degrees of heat, and that a pellet of its gas-like substance, the size of a tennis ball, has a gravity pull, according to our earthly measurements, of some one thousand tons."

"The same article!" replied Dorcas. "Scientists marvel at a substance of such density. It's so far beyond the realm of human comprehension. Surely

the mysteries of God exceed the wisdom of men! I suppose that grandmother knows more about it now than we do! This great beyond out there in endless space where heaven begins—isn't it wonderful? The assurance that 'all things are possible with God' is most comforting. And then to think of the unlimited room for possibilities out there, here, everywhere!" She extended her arms to illustrate the scope of her thoughts.

John, spellbound by her philosophy, did not argue. He wanted to think. Her reasoning seemed to appeal to him from a scientific viewpoint. It was hidden manna that his hungry heart unconsciously craved for. He wanted her to continue.

Encouraged, she ventured: "But, as it is written, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.' Don't you see? Grandmother's life was built in and founded on this ninth verse in the second chapter of First Corinthians. That was why she was chosen to represent our great state at the Centennial Exposition to be held next year. Too bad that she could not have lived to symbolize in character what we should represent as a state. But that's not for us to say. 'God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.' His will should be sufficient for us."

"Pardon me, Miss Wheaton," he replied, rising and pacing the floor with his hands shoved into his hip pockets. "I don't mean to be rude, but for the life of me I can't swallow all this—this idea about God being so good, kind and just in the exercise of His will. To my way of thinking it doesn't coincide with facts or common sense. What is there to justify seven deaths this past year in our family? Mother, and my sister Alice, or even grandmother here—all three of whom were true to the principles of Christianity. Belief in God was the very essence of their lives! They lived it, believed it, practiced it; and even in father's and junior's cases, they were not so bad. Why should they have been taken, and not I? I am the only agnostic in the family. If God really wanted to make this a peaceful and happy world, I should have been taken and not they. I am the one who imposes upon God, if there is one. Now I am the only one left. Why didn't I die instead of all the rest of the family? Why? Bah! There is no God!"

"Please don't," she said sweetly. "God has the answer. You will know why in His good time. It is not given for the finite to surpass the infinite. Our wisdom cannot equal the divine mind of God. Other wise we would all

be gods. Let His Word be your assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God.”

The telephone interrupted their conversation. John answered and was informed that friends from the village were coming out to keep him company for the night in his lonely vigil with death.

Resuming the conversation after he turned away from the phone, she said: "The terrible tragedies occurring in your family this past year were minutely few in number compared to those occurring daily throughout the world. The grim reaper of death comes promises with no one. The innocent and the guilty alike pay the penalty of sin. God sums up the cause in this one word— SIN. Death is the result of sin. Sin is the leaven in this world working contrary to God’s purpose and plan. There is no one whom it doesn’t touch. When you analyze it, sin will be found to be the contributing factor in each of the deaths occurring in your family. ’

“You mean —?”

“No, not individual, personal sin particularly, though ‘all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,’” quoted Dorcas in the interruption. “For instance, the driver responsible for the death of your father, your brother and your sister, was unquestionably in the power of sin through excessive drink. In directly this act caused your mother’s death, did it not? Then, regarding the untimely death of your older brother, James, is there any question in your mind that sin was not directing the mob of gangsters that killed him in the battle of right against wrong? And, in the case of the suicide of his wife, wasn’t it sin that directed the hand of violence against her own life? Unless, perhaps, it was caused through a deranged mind, and even then the contributing factor can be traced back to some act of sin, even though vested in our forefathers. Poor old grandmother, her death is but the consequence of sin injected into the human race by the fall of Adam through the deception of Satan in the garden of Eden.”

“But,” said John, “it’s hard for a thinking man to be taken in with such philosophy. I could always forgive grandmother in her antiquated ignorance; but for a young woman of your ability, secured, too, through the facilities of education that you have had the opportunity of enjoying—well, it isn’t feasible, that’s all! How do you arrive at such conclusions? It’s most unreasonable to my mind!”

“That may all be true in your estimation,” replied Dorcas, “but they are not conclusions. You call yourself a thinking man, yet to what source do

you attribute your wisdom? Where does it originate? How do you acquire it? What happens to it? Where does it go when you die? The fact is you are not really doing your own thinking at all. You have no authority for your unbelief. All your philosophy, all your ideas, all your reasonings have been copied from others. Call them scientists, students of philosophy, or what you will, nevertheless you are only taking someone's word for the basis of your theory."

"But —"

"And, the sad part of it is," she continued, interrupting, "they are all humans like ourselves, capable of the same infirmities as we; yet they would super cede God and in their own wisdom set themselves up on a pedestal of self-sufficiency."

"Supersede your philosophy of God, you mean? Where —"

"Yes, yes, I know! The same old questions," she said, interrupting him. "Where is the evidence of God? All you skeptics ask it. Who is God? How do you know there is a God?"

"At least our minds run in the same channel part of the time," he replied, laughing. "Questions well put, for which there seems to be no answer." And with a slight sneer he retorted: "Suppose you answer them! You do your own thinking without copying from others!"

"Honest questions deserve honest answers," smiled Dorcas sweetly, "providing we can agree on one vital point."

"For instance?"

"That theory does not change fact. Are we agreed in this particular?"

"Easily conceded," agreed John, thoughtfully feeling for a cue to her argument. "Theory does not change fact."

"Then," said Dorcas, repeating after him, "if theory does not change fact, God is unchangeable. God is a fact, the fact by which we are, live, and have our being. In the beginning God, and by Him were all things created. When you present the theory that there is no God, you are attempting to override fact; and in substituting theory for fact, fact is destroyed, thereby achieving the impossible."

"But," argued John, "it is my contention that the basis for your assumption that there is a God is only a theory—a theory handed down from the primitive ages, clung to through superstition, fear, and ignorance of the unknown."

“By determining fact you prove your own answer,” declared Dorcas. “Prove God or disprove Him. Don’t ignore Him. Don’t just cling to the theory that there is no God. Prove it! ‘Be not deceived, God is not mocked.’”

It irked him to be crowded into a corner in an argument. To have her sitting before him across the table with no display of malice or individual concern was irritating; and because she was so earnestly calm and self-composed, it made him resentful. As though seeking an opportunity to gain advantage by towering above her, he rose.

Dorcas watched the color leave his face.

“I suppose,” he sarcastically inquired, “you think that it can’t be proved! Voltaire, Paine, Ingersoll—all of them proved that there is no God.”

“Please,” she said, “let’s not argue about it. God’s Word is His own argument. Put it to the test. Let His divine Word prove or disprove the theory of all His critics.”

“There is no God! Voltaire, Paine, Ingersoll, —” he defended hotly.

“And all the rest of the atheists prove beyond question that there is a devil who warps the human mind, sending the souls of men to hell. Plenty of proof of that. His subjects are all about us, robbed of faith, hope, peace, happiness and eternal life,” she remonstrated.

Rising, she went out to her car and returned with a new, leather-bound Scofield Reference Bible; and then asking for the loan of his fountain pen, she reseated herself at the table.

John watched her turn to the flyleaf, and underneath the inscription: “Mother to Dorcas,” write with a firm hand:—

“Re-dedicated to John Withington Thrillby, that he may either definitely prove there is no God, or as definitely discover his lost condition and turn to the God he now rejects.”

Signing her initials, “D. E. W.,” with the Scripture reference of “John 3:30” underneath, she arose and stood before him with bowed head, holding the Bible in her hand.

Looking up, he could see the tears gathered in her eyes and hear her say, as she handed him the Book:— “Plans for the living begin at the bier of the dead. Please take this, and may the living God direct your course into the pathway of a greater and better understanding of the spiritual values of life. Please appropriate this verse of scripture— ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’—to your needs. You will find that through its application it will

provide the very essence of peace, happiness and contentment so essential to the worthwhile life.”

And, then, donning her wraps, as another car pulled into the driveway, she went out alone into the cold, silent, winter night.

4. Anxious Moments

THE DAY BEFORE THE FUNERAL, John Thrillby was of all men the most miserable. God and Death on one side. Death and Atheism on the other. He was in the middle, besieged on the one hand by those whom he claimed as friends to show his true colors. What those colors really were, he himself did not quite know. On the other hand, his conscience rebuked him for not being in accord with what he knew were his grand mother's wishes regarding spiritual matters. In defiance, he muttered to himself: "There is no God!"

When the matter of selecting a pastor to conduct the funeral services was suggested, he tried to crowd out every thought which he knew would meet with his grandmother's expressed desires. Goaded by the revolt in his heart against anything godly, he refused to cater to what he termed the whims of an ignorant old woman. Not that he meant to classify her as being of the ignorant type in matters of general knowledge. Far from it!

In all matters, excepting her religious belief, he was proud of her psychology and wisdom; but since taking up the study of geology as a freshman, he had become a sort of atheistic evolutionist, and refused to tolerate anything pertaining to religion of any sort.

Armed with what he thought to be a new discovery: "Evolution as opposed to supernatural creation," as he termed it, he returned at the end of the first semester on a visit to his grandmother, and ejected a bombshell into the staunch old household of faith by declaring that there is no God.

Grandmother rose to the defense of her faith in a way that astonished him. He was surprised. He had expected her to greet with open arms his new-found philosophy. Grandmother had always been the first one to take advantage of new inventions tending to improve living conditions and make things easier for the human race. Why she did not respond to this new found philosophy he could not understand!

Countless times he could remember as a child how he would climb up on her or grandfather's lap and listen by the hour to stories of pioneer days

—stories of hardship, excitement and adventure. He never for got them. He could hear his grandfather’s hearty laugh still, as he told of the occasion when grand mother, then a girl of fifteen, returned from a neighbor several miles away lugging a cradle used for cut ting wheat. It was the first one she had ever seen. Previously, what little grain her people had raised had been harvested with a sickle or a scythe.

At fifteen, grandmother was a buxom, robust lass, who enjoyed nature’s great outdoors to the fullest extent; and on this particular occasion she had accompanied her mother on a mission of good will to assist a neighbor in the time of need. While her mother was acting as midwife in ushering a new citizen into the world, grandmother was out on the farm watching them cut wheat with this newfangled device which they called a cradle.

The farmer who had always taken a great liking to “Madgie,” as he called grandmother then, was highly pleased with her ability to handle the cradle in her first attempt, and was so overjoyed with the birth of his first son that he consented to lend the cradle to Madgie and her mother to use in harvesting their own crop.

Upon arriving in the field, her father and all of the rest of the family turned out to witness the demonstration. Taking the cradle, a contrivance having a long blade like a scythe, only wider, with a rack of several, long wooden-fingers four inches apart, running at full length above the blade and fastened to a long crooked handle, to which were affixed two short handles, which she held in her hands in order to swing the cradle as she walked into the standing grain to cut it, grandmother ventured boldly forth. The grain fell on the wooden-fingers as it was cut, and then the cradle was turned, leaving the stalks of grain lying on top of the stubble in a swathe, later to be raked up in bundles and bound. But as she proceeded down the edge of the field, explaining the advantages of this new invention as she went, grandmother did not see her favorite puppy run in front of her in the standing grain, until she had cut off its tail.

Years afterwards, when she was married and had a home of her own, a promoter came into the neighbor hood with a new invention called a telephone. Until that night at the country schoolhouse, when they gathered to watch a demonstration of the device, not one in attendance had ever seen such a thing before. While the skeptics stood back, looking askance and voicing their fears of the lightning striking the wires and coming into the home and electrocuting the whole family, grandmother was quick to see the

advantages of the device, and was the first in the community to have one installed in her home, thereby opening the way for the first telephone system among the neighbors.

It was at this same country schoolhouse that she first saw the marvels of the magic lantern presented. She was also as enthusiastic as a child at the first demonstration of the talking machine, and was the first volunteer in the community to own one.

John thought of the two antique sewing machines reposing among the relics in grandmother's attic, representing two different ages in the evolution of sewing machines, both her own purchases prior to the new Singer Electric.

Following the episode of the cradle and the puppy of her childhood days, grandmother just as enthusiastically welcomed a piece of machinery known as the reaper, when it was brought to the Thrillby farm for a demonstration. The whole neighborhood turned out to a harvesting bee to see the machine, and to bind the bundles as they were swept off the apron by the five long-fingered arms. Later, this reaper was followed by an improved type that bound the bundles and kicked them out on a carrier to be dumped into windrows.

Grandmother knew all about the development of these labor-saving devices, appliances and contraptions. She saw them make their advent, discarding milk pans for water or gravity separators, and these for the improved mechanical separators. She saw the candle light under which she was born fade from use in the cosy atmosphere of the coal-oil lamp. The gas lamp came and took out more of the shadows. Then, wonder of wonders, the Edison electric light virtually converted night into day. With electricity, in quick succession, came hundreds of new devices to improve and lighten the burdens of mankind. Grandmother had always been an enthusiast. She was interested in all of these inventions, and in nearly every instance was one of the first to put them into practical use in her community.

John drew a mental picture of all this in thinking of the rebuke he had received from her when he presented his new-found philosophy. He did not know enough about the rudiments of this new theory to defend himself in an argument with grandmother. Her manner of unquestionable authority always left him with the feeling that she had an unfair advantage over him. He had to blame someone. It couldn't be himself. Consequently, he had

returned to college and to his studies humiliated and dejected, more determined than ever to find the missing link between her facts and his theory.

His attitude, instead of being one of seeking knowledge, reached the proportions of revenge. It never for a moment occurred to him that he might be wrong in his own understanding of the subject. His theory had become fact, and with it grew the determination to show Grandmother Thrillby that wisdom, when made to master one's own ideas, became fact, and that she in her narrow-minded ignorance was fossilized in her thinking.

Her most impressive statement, that cut him to the quick every time he tried to combat it in argument, came in response to one of his accusations concerning her ignorance and inability to understand his ideas.

"Why, grandmother," he had said in defense of his theory, "it's just another step with progress."

Her curt reply was: "You can't be in step with progress and be out of step with God."

And now, as her funeral hour approached, her words kept ringing in his ears over and over again:

"You can't be in step with progress and be out of step with God."

It seemed like the echo of his grandmother's voice resounding from distant space. Restless and uneasy, it seemed that he could not think straight. The old bravado which he had assumed around the classroom and in the dormitory was gone. He felt strangely different—as though he were in a new world.

"You can't be in step with progress and be out of step with God," kept ringing in his ears.

Urged, coerced and crowded into a compromising position, he started out to arrange for an atheistic service for his grandmother, in loyalty to his atheistic friends. She was dead. What difference did it make now? Her pastor was not available to conduct such services as he knew would be in accordance with her expressed wish. Why should he go out of his way to please relatives and friends that no longer existed? Why be a hypocrite? Why not be a man true to his own colors? Determined that this was exactly the thing he would do—the right thing to do—he proceeded to make plans accordingly.

But opposition, unchampioned and unsolicited, arose to encounter his progress on every hand. It started the next morning after his grandmother's

death. Neighbors and friends from far and near, many of whom he did not even know existed, dropped in to offer their services in any way that might make his burden lighter.

This irritated him. He did not understand this sort of friendship. Some of the volunteers asked no questions, but went ahead putting their good intentions into acts of kindness without any display or show. They did it as a matter of plain duty. Dorcas and her aunt were among those first to appear and take care of putting the house in order and preparing the meals, just as grandmother had always done on similar occasions. Who furnished the meat loaf, roast beef, chicken, cakes and dessert, John never really knew; but at regular intervals meals appeared, and the old friends who came to sing their praises of grandmother's achievements and to pay her their last respects were welcomed and entertained.

John ate with them, enjoyed their fellowship, and was interested in the many narratives related touching the different phases of his grandmother's life. There were various things peculiar to individual guests which were new even to him. He was surprised at the number of contacts that life reveals. Grandmother had certainly left impressions for good all along her path way.

During the time they were there, he was carried along in the excitement, as lighthearted and care free as anyone could be under the circumstances; but when they left for their homes, that vague feeling of lonesomeness crept in upon his thoughts which carried him back over his own life with reminiscences of the past.

On the evening prior to grandmother's funeral, several of his classmates at the University came over for the third time to show their sympathy with him. In the conversation during the evening they learned that he still had not been able to get in touch with his grandmother's pastor, because of his absence from the city. This was an opportunity. They could not afford to miss it. With the subtlety of unethical minds, each agreed that this was the opportune moment to defend their new-found philosophy by arranging for the atheistic services which they had secretly planned.

The hour had arrived when he would have to make his decision. All along he had unconsciously nursed the secret hope that the Reverend Mr. Gordon would appear and take the responsibility from his shoulders. But Dr. Gordon had not been heard from. There was no alternative but to concede to the wishes of his friends. Why not? He was responsible to no

one. These friends were the only ones left with whom he had anything in common. His mind was made up. He would complete the final arrangements the next day.

5. Conflicting Opinions

LONG BEFORE DAYLIGHT the next morning, he was up busying himself with the fire and other odd chores, in preparation for the ordeal that he wished a thousand times were over. He had not been able to sleep. All night he had rolled and tossed in his bed, fighting a battle with his conscience. He hated his atheistic friends. He hated to think of his godly grandmother. He hated God—the God who is not, and yet the One whom he subconsciously feared. He hated even himself, wishing over and over that his nightmare of misery were buried in the open grave that awaited the form in the adjoining room.

The only bright spot in the picture was the morning meal that Dorcas and her aunt had prepared for him and his friends. His spirits rose as he partook of the delicious waffles and maple syrup. Mentally he was a wreck, but the tempting breakfast that they served invigorated him and supplied the energy lost through lack of sleep, so that physically he was more like himself.

Like a mouse in the toils of the playful cat, John was soon to learn that his conscience still held him captive. One of his classmates at the breakfast table mentioned the plan outlined for the atheistic funeral services in such a boastful way that it gave the impression that they were taking advantage of the opportunity to stage a demonstration to vaunt the ideas of atheism.

John hung his head in humiliation and shame when he saw the expression of horror that covered Dorcas' face, as she glanced from one to the other and finally fixed her gaze inquiringly on him. She did not speak. She did not have to.

He could read the question that he knew her lips would frame: "Surely you can have no part in this?" She didn't have to ask it. He knew!

He arose from the table and went out on the rear porch. He stood there looking out across the distant hills to an open grave in the village cemetery. Men were preparing the grave for his grandmother's entombment.

He never felt more miserable as he attempted to whisper: "There is no God," but the words choked in his throat as he fought with himself.

Finally, he muttered: “Be a man! Don’t be a molly coddle to be swept about by every wind of opposition. Stand on your own two feet. Don’t be a coward. Assert your authority and prove to the world that you are not to be swayed by sentiment and superstition. You will never have a better opportunity. Don’t miss—”

His thoughts were interrupted by a hand on his arm.

He felt himself shudder visibly in startled surprise. Without looking, he knew it was Dorcas.

She shook his arm gently. Still he gazed off into space trying to gather himself together.

She took her hand from his arm.

From the corner of his eye he watched her breast rise and fall, as she labored with her emotions. Her hot breath formed a white cloud, as it froze in contact with the cold winter air.

With bowed head she stood silent, her hands clasped before her.

He knew that she was sending up a silent prayer to the God he had rejected. For fully two minutes he watched her in troubled thought, until she looked up and met his gaze with a sympathetic smile. Holding his attention she continued to study his face, as though she would read his thoughts aright, before trusting herself to speak.

The muscles in his face reacted to the nervous strain he was under, revealing a haunted look in his eyes.

Finally, she said with an effort: “John! You would not do that to grandmother, would you? Please? Tell me it isn’t so! Let me send for father. I know he would gladly come if he knew. Let me call him — please? You will never be sorry that you respected grand mother’s last solemn wish. You know how it would please her.”

He did not answer right away.

“And—and you wouldn’t deny grandmother her God—her Christ—her Saviour—would you, to eulogize your own selfish beliefs?”

“Selfish beliefs,” he muttered.

“Yes,” she said humbly, “grandmother’s faith recognizes others. Your belief acknowledges only self—self clothed in the theory of groundless supposition.”

“Selfish unbeliefs —”

“Please! Don’t argue,” she pleaded. “May I not call father— someone— anyone, but that?”

He watched her upturned face as she stood shivering in the cold. Sorry for her, he said: “Would it really please you that much?”

“It isn’t I who matters,” she said. “I am not thinking of myself. What would grandmother’s friends say?”

He took her back into the house by the open fire place before he spoke.

Solemnly he said: “Miss Wheaton, it’s not that I want to be obstinate. I don’t, and I cannot see wherein I should be considered selfish in holding to my own opinions. It seems as though the hand of Fate has willed it so. Dr. Gordon was not available, and when my friends, the only friends I have left in this world, suggested that they be permitted to secure someone to conduct the services, I naturally half-consented, before giving the matter any consideration. I see now it complicates things—things that you don’t understand, perhaps.”

“Yes, I think I do. Perfectly —”

“But,” he interrupted, “I am between two fires now. If I turn my friends down, I’m an outcast. A hypocrite in recognizing a God that does not exist. If I hold to my own convictions, I am a prig, a cad, a heretic, a self-centered, despicable wretch, a —”

“Forgive me,” she said simply, interrupting him, “perhaps I have not made myself clear. My remarks do not apply in personal criticism. I could not expect you to accord me respect in such a right; nor do I mean to chastise you personally in any way. The point I wish to make is—is that, it is fundamentally wrong—unethical, in fact. There isn’t one of your new-found friends that has anything in common with grand mother. None of them ever knew her, or any of her friends or relatives, outside of yourself. They are in the wrong church as well as in the wrong pew. Why should they wish to take advantage of this occasion to inject their new-found philosophy, regardless of what it is, into her circle of friends? Don’t you see?”

“Like pouring oil on the fire of peace and contentment of the community,” John volunteered, beginning to see the light.

“Exactly right,” she agreed with a smile. “It isn’t a personal matter at all. It’s—it’s just a matter of ethical diplomacy in respecting grandmother’s old friends and neighbors.”

“I understand all of that, but —”

“There is no ‘but’ to this argument,” she cut in. “There isn’t one in all of grandmother’s circle of friends who does not believe that your theory is

wrong. Atheism originates in selfishness. It denies the very existence of God. It starts with self and can never get beyond that circle. In fact, one never gets beyond the individual; he cannot, there is no place to go. No deity, no supreme being, no one to recognize beyond one's own self. Each believer in himself is the beginning and the end. Such a theory is impossible. Briefly speaking, it is but the infernal license to live a law unto one's self."

"Miss Wheaton," he contradicted, "you and I most emphatically disagree. We are each living in a different world. We can't both be right, that's sure; but as to the possibility of agreeing with you, I find that I cannot, as much as I would like to respect your opinions."

"Never mind my opinion. That is the last thing to be considered. It's not opinions, it's a policy that I am asking that you respect," she said meekly; — "a — a God-given policy."

"Then," he continued, "I will make the same concession to you as I did to my friends. If Dr. Gordon does not arrive and my friends should fail to get someone to conduct the services, your father may conduct them. You may call and invite him under those conditions, if you wish. Otherwise, if no one else shows up, Mr. Upledger has arranged to have a young man, who is studying for the ministry and substituting in Plymouth at the present time, come over and be on hand in case an emergency should arise."

"Oh!" she said, "I see it all now. I might have known. That's what always happens when one fails to trust God. I have been worrying instead of trusting. I have dishonored my Lord. I don't believe I had better call father."

He looked up with an expression of curiosity upon his face that plainly asked the question, "Why?"

"I have been doubting, when I should have been trusting God to work out all things for good," she continued.

"Oh, pshaw! Bosh, all of it!" he exclaimed, as he turned to answer the telephone. "You religious fanatics are all alike." While waiting for a long distance call, he continued sarcastically: "I suppose that all the trouble that has happened in my family in the past year is the providence of your God working out some thing good."

She had no reply, but started humming:

“Trust and obey,
For there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.”

When central finally made the connection, he couldn’t hear. To clarify the call, the operator repeated the message, informing him that the car in which his friends were bringing the exponent of atheism to deliver the funeral address at his grandmother’s funeral had skidded on the icy pavement and turned over in the ditch, and that all were now at Mercy Hospital in a serious condition.

He left the telephone in a daze and went to inform his two friends of the serious nature of the message. Together they returned to the living room, all talking at once and trying to decide what to do. It was essential that they go to their injured friends, and yet they wanted to stay and help John. They could not do both. What to do they did not know, but they hurriedly prepared to depart; and shortly afterward they left without even the courtesy of expressing their regrets.

Dorcas watched the whole procedure without saying a word. When John returned from the porch after seeing his friends depart, she said sympathetically:

“I am so sorry to hear of all this trouble. It’s too bad that anyone is hurt.”

There was no boasting, no attitude of “I told you so,” which he had expected. Instead, she said simply, “We will manage as best we can.”

6. The Funeral

WHEN THE HOUR of the funeral arrived, the house was full of friends who came out early to join the procession to the church. Among them was Dorcas' father and mother, who came in unexpectedly. John and Dorcas rode with them behind the hearse. The only relatives who had been able to come were two distant cousins whom John had never met, as far as he could recall.

Upon arriving at the church, they found the little chapel already filled to overflowing. Outside there were a number of people sitting in their cars. Among them was a large black sedan with a uniformed chauffeur at the wheel. Dorcas noticed the No. 1 Michigan license, and immediately concluded that the Governor of the State must be there. Glancing at the little group around the church door, she recognized him in the crowd, towering above the ladies around him.

They drew up at the church and alighted. The Governor came over and stood with John and Dorcas, and her father and mother, until the casket was carried in. Then he spoke to the Reverend Mr. Wheaton, whom he knew, who in turn introduced him to his wife and daughter and John, explaining the relation ship that existed between him and his grandmother. The Governor acknowledged the introduction, and, after expressing his sympathy, followed them into the church to the mourners' pew where he seated himself with them in an attitude of reverence.

While they were waiting for the congregation to assemble, Mr. Upledger came down the aisle and spoke to the Governor, and then, turning to John, informed him that he had just received word that the Reverend Mr. Gordon was arriving by plane and it might be necessary to delay the services for a few minutes.

John nodded his assent, when advised that it would be only fifteen or twenty minutes at the most. Dorcas breathed a prayer of thankfulness when Mr. Upledger diplomatically made the announcement that put the congregation at ease.

During the time they were waiting, John casually looked around the church, noting the changes that had taken place since he was a small boy and had attended Sunday school there with his grandmother. The old rostrum had been removed and replaced by a much higher platform, upon which the preacher's pulpit rested at the front. At the rear was a large archway over the choir loft. A new pipe organ replaced the old bellows type, moth eaten instrument that he used to watch the organist pedal like a competitor in a bicycle race, when he sat in the front row of his class.

Electric lights were now installed in place of the old kerosene mantle lamps. New curved-back, folding seat chairs replaced the old movable, wooden benches which used to make his back ache as he sat there for an hour during the Sunday school class. He shuddered at the thought of the occasions when he had been forced to sit there for an hour and a half, listening to some long-winded preacher expound the gospel at a church service. This was one of the many reasons he was so rebellious against any kind of church service. Because of it he made the solemn resolution very early in life that when he grew up he would only go to church when forced to. This was one of those occasions. He was back again only through force of necessity.

He let his recollections carry him back over the years. Some of the memories were amusing, some sad, and some distasteful. He seemed to visualize again the old pews that used to be there for the accommodation of members in good standing. They were gone. He tried to picture himself as a child again, seated on one of the wooden benches twenty years before. His grandmother at that time was one of the most loyal and reverent members of the church. Even then, everyone who knew her addressed her as Grandmother Thrillby. She was one of those wise old souls, rich in the experiences of life, whom everyone knew and liked as "Grandmother."

He looked at the inscription over the archway of the choir loft behind the pulpit, and read to himself: "Salvation Is of the Lord." He remembered that grandmother in some way had been instrumental in having it placed there.

On the baptistry above the choir loft behind the arch were five more words: "Dead! Buried! Risen with Christ!" The question framed itself in his mind "Who?" He wondered if the inscription really applied to his grandmother. Though clothed in mystery, hope somehow encouraged him to think that it was so.

The arrival of Dr. Gordon and a young couple, whom he afterward learned was the substitute pastor and his wife from Plymouth, interrupted his thoughts as they passed down the aisle. They proceeded to the piano in one corner of the room, as they opened the services with a song, while Dr. Gordon took a seat on the platform behind the flower-covered casket.

Catching the words as they floated out in the song, "Sometime We'll Understand," he tried to apply them in their significance to the beautiful baskets and sprays of flowers that represented the love and respect of grandmother's friends. They appeared in numberless profusion everywhere about the front of the church. It seemed to him as though everyone in the community had remembered her with a floral offering, and then appeared in person to do homage to her memory. He loved flowers. Never in his life had he witnessed such a beautiful display.

He tried to picture the contrast. Suppose he were the one lying there cold and still in the casket before him, would his friends remember him? He shuddered as he thought that there was no one, actually no one, whose friendship could be depended upon to show him that much respect. Why?

John's thoughts were directed to the quiet surroundings by the even tones of Dr. Gordon's voice, requesting the young pastor from Plymouth, the Reverend James Thurman, to officiate in the opening prayer.

After the prayer, Dr. Gordon rose and addressed the congregation:

"We assemble here as friends to pay our last respects to one who has left us by the death of her body that lies in this casket before me.

"Death! What is death—now and hereafter? I ask that question of each of you in all seriousness. It is a fact that everyone of us must face until Christ's return. Why think of it as a mystery beyond our comprehension or understanding?

"The obituary of the one here before us, whom we mourn today, covers more than the allotted span of three-score years and ten by nearly thirty years.

"She understood God's way of salvation from sin and death, and was ready to meet Him, not by virtue of her years of wisdom or good works, but by faith in her Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom she loved and whom she served.

"She had passed from death into life before death claimed her body, and now she is with her Lord in glory, waiting for the day when this body of

clay shall be transformed into the likeness of His glorious body, when He shall return to this earth.

"What a happy day! For then shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

"Grandmother Thrillby knew this gateway of eternal life, and by it entered into the presence of her Lord. Her life and testimony speak to us today. May they live long in this our beloved state, with which she was simultaneously born.

"On January 26, 1837, Margaret Withington, known to us as the wife of Robert Washington Thrillby, deceased, was born in the township of Greenfield, County of Wayne, State of Michigan. On that same day, by act of Congress, Michigan was admitted to the Union to become the twenty-sixth state in these United States; and by this act of approval, Margaret Withington was destined to become the first citizen born under our new state flag.

"For nearly one hundred years her character has exemplified what we should be as a state. We have had a right to feel proud of her. We have seen in her life the approved standards of Christian character, with loyalty and devotion to the great principles of liberty for which she stood. They were her ideals of good citizenship. A representative growth of the state is exemplified in her life. Her life has been a struggle to press on to that goal of achievement to which we point with pride in our statehood today. We are indebted to grandmother, and by reason of her loyalty to Christ we vouchsafe in saying:

"'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

"As the first citizen of this state, she has been more than faithful to her trust. The moral standard-bearer of true citizenship is her contribution to us to eulogize and respect.

"With deliberate determination, faithful to her God, she has kept in step with progress. Can we do better than take up her time-worn banner and carry it on in honor to her and to our great state, which her life so beautifully represents?

"We are gathered here to mourn her loss, disappointed perhaps because Providence did not spare her life a few months longer. We would have had her fill that position of honor that our statesmen planned to bestow upon her as representative of the character of Michigan. But it was not to be. The

forthcoming centennial celebration next year will be held without her. The honor that was to have been hers is stayed by the hand of death. Catering to the human, we can not understand why this was not to be accorded her. Those of you who have the assurance of faith and the supremacy of the Holy Spirit understand; and having eternal life you now rest in the confidence of God's divine will, and rejoice in the fact that grandmother's reward is in heaven, rather than in the vainglorious eulogies of earth.

"As we turn the pages of her life, reviewed in a lengthy obituary—all of which I shall not take time to read—we marvel at the achievements her citizenship leaves with us; and in reverence to her God we gather to do homage to her memory."

Taking up the Bible and opening it to the Gospel according to John, the minister read from that familiar passage in the fourteenth chapter, so comforting in His promises.

"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."

"Grandmother knew the Way. Her residence is in heaven. The Lord Himself has given her an eternal life lease in the celestial mansions. What a comfort to know that this loved one laid claim to the gift of eternal life by faith, and that she made sure of her eternal inheritance!

"On the contrary, the pathetic picture is that of the soul who hesitates, and owing to a lack of faith is lost."

Looking up from his Bible, over the top of his glasses, he surveyed the congregation. Searching their faces, he said: "I pray God that there are no doubters with us today."

Glancing back at his Bible, he read aloud:

"Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

Surveying the company again, the minister said: "This is the very same question that the world is asking today—those who do not read and believe.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And turning again to the people, he said:

“Grandmother knew the way opened by God; she believed the truth revealed by God, and has now left us to claim the inheritance provided for her through the high calling in Jesus Christ. Her citizenship is in heaven, from whence we also look for the Saviour.”

Rebellion surged within John Thrillby’s heart. Inwardly he rose to the challenge.

“A doubter,” he mumbled under his breath, his face blanching in self-righteous anger. “Why should he be singled out? Doctor Gordon was making a personal issue of it; taking an unfair advantage of him; trying to make it appear that he wavered in his opinion on the question of religion. He wasn’t a doubting Thomas. No, he would not even recognize God in doubt. There is no God anyway!”

“You can’t be in step with progress and be out of step with God,” grandmother’s declaration again challenged him in thought; and Dr. Gordon’s statement—a doubting Thomas—defied him.

“He was no doubting Thomas. He did not doubt what he believed. He knew! And no hard-shelled sky pilot with a one-track mind between heaven and hell was going to change his mind, either. Why couldn’t they leave him alone? He didn’t believe; he wouldn’t believe! Why did they have to keep his conscience at the boiling point all the time in his effort to defend himself? There is no God; there is no hell! There is no—no— . All there is—is—nothing!”

The services went on, but John Thrillby heeded them not. All his thoughts were taken up in defending himself against the spiritual antagonism in his conscience that seared his very soul with the brand of a doubter.

Mr. Upledger’s hand on his arm at the close of the service brought him back to the consciousness of the present occasion.

“Would you care to go up and view grandmother for the last time?” he asked in a quiet, even tone.

He rose with Dorcas and walked behind her to the open casket, followed by her father and mother and his two cousins. There they all stood for a few moments. The others passed on and left him standing in thought— thinking of the pastor’s challenge; thinking of death; thinking of the unknown gulf that, according to his own belief, led nowhere. He came to himself after other friends had passed by and left him with Mr. Upledger, who came forward to close the casket.

“Seven deaths in seven months,” he mused, and like Judas, when Jesus presented him the sop, defiance ruled him in a passion of hate.

“That thou doest, do quickly.” He wanted to get away; to be by himself—to think. He must vindicate himself. He would prove that he was not a doubting Thomas. He could be scientifically righteous without God. He must prove — .

His thoughts trailed off into the vague space of nothingness.

How he managed to go through the rest of the ceremony at the grave and keep his equilibrium, he never quite knew. But, with the services over, he found himself riding back to the old homestead with Dorcas’ father. Where Dorcas and her mother went, with whom, or how they left, he did not know.

Nor little did John Thrillby know that his peculiar attitude had been accepted that day by those in attendance as one of grief-stricken shock, because of his great loss.

Pastor Wheaton drove him to his own door, got out and stood with him at the car for a few minutes.

John thanked him and started to mount the steps without inviting him in. But as he paused a moment, Mr. Wheaton said:

“Son, we understand your insuperable loss. Mere words fail to express our sympathy. But Jesus is our friend in time of need. We shall continue to carry you to Him in prayer.”

Speechless with indignation, John did not reply; but, with his hand on the knob, he stood and looked after the pastor as he drove away. With a sigh of relaxation, as though he would leave his burdens out side, he entered the house and closed the door behind him, with a strong desire to separate himself from the rest of the world.

He wanted to be alone.

7. Solitude

"Again King Winter's on the throne;
In mighty power he holds his own.
The fairies on Dame Nature call,
Ten billion snowflakes, bidden, fall.
And majestically within his hand
A picturesque blanket hides the land,
Transforming old to scenes anew,
In mystery spread before the view;
And we, enchanted, stand and gaze,
In awe and wonder and amaze.

"No sound is heard: the barren trees
Stand forth unmoved by faintest breeze;
Yet inner echoes fill our heart,
Resounding wisdom to impart.
The reason? How, what for, and why
This somber mystery from the sky?
Revealing knowledge undefined,
A graphic message to mankind:
His witness that in silence boasts
That God is King: the Lord of hosts!"

JOHN THRILLBY stood at the window with this poem in his hand. Because of a sleepless night following the funeral, he had risen long before daylight; and, to occupy his time, he had spent the seemingly never ending hours going over and cataloging some of his grandmother's papers and personal effects. Running across this unpublished poem of grandmother's own composition in her own, well-known handwriting, he was particularly attracted to it because of its being dedicated to Dorcas Wheaton. After reading it, however, he had laid it aside, with other copies of grandmother's own compositions in a rather careless, indifferent manner.

But on this morning everything seemed different. A glance out of the window presented him with a vivid picture of the scene so graphically painted by the poem.

He faced a transformed world. A blanket of fresh snow spread out across the countryside as far as the eye could reach, and the taunting thought possessed him that the unseen hand of Providence had silently voiced her reproach in this sinister, auspicious manner. Seized with an uncanny feeling of being unduly chastised, he searched with a guilty conscience for the poem which described the picturesque scene.

Back at the window he took a position where he could look out across the fields to the newly-made mound on the hill. Naturally his thoughts were associated with his dear old grandmother, lying there beneath the blanket of snow in her last earthly home.

Tears of loneliness came to his eyes as he read and re-read the verses, studying each line carefully. He drank in every detail of the perspective, comparing the truths pictured with those of his grandmother's poem.

Silently he stood, thinking, thinking, thinking!

Two little chickadees came out from the mysterious space and perched themselves on a twig of the cherry tree which brushed against the window with its load of snow. They hopped about from bough to bough, scattering the pure white crystals in profusion about them.

"Chick-a-dee-dee, chick-a-dee-dee," they sang out, repeating their peculiar little winter song over and over, chattering to themselves.

"Chick-a-dee-dee," they repeated, looking up at him from about a foot outside the window ledge, cocking their little heads from one side to the other as they repeated the song—as much as to say: "Feed-a-me, feed-a-me, feed-a-me."

He watched them, the mist gathering in his eyes, as they flew to some heads of grass sticking up through the snow in the garden. Unceasingly they labored, scattering the chaff in little black specks on the spotless blanket of snow below, as they hulled the grass seed and ate it.

A flock of sparrows came and chased them away.

A feeling of aloneness, such as he had never experienced before, crept over him. A lump rose in his throat, choking out a college tune that he had tried to hum.

His two little friends, as though they meant to comfort him, flew back to the cherry tree, chattering inquiringly. John's heart was touched by a feeling of lonesomeness which he could not understand. He went to the timeworn bread box and returned to the window with a half loaf of bread in his hand, and with pains taking carefulness he quietly raised the sash, a fraction of an

inch at a time, until there was sufficient room to sprinkle a few crumbs on the window sill. They watched him, still chattering incessantly, as they flew back and forth from branch to branch, trying to satisfy their curiosity before venturing too near.

He stepped back from the window to watch them, first one and then the other, fly down to partake of the bounties scattered on the sill. It was not long before both were there together, chattering their melodious little love-song of thanksgiving as they scratched the snow in a flurry about them.

He watched them until they had their fill and flew away. Then he closed the window and stood looking out over the sea of white.

The night before he had resolved to close the old place as soon as possible, and go back to school where he hoped to bury his unhappy memories in hard work. He wanted to get away from the environment that had weaved the memory of grandmother's life about him. Though he could not explain it, he felt as though he were being drawn into a net. There was something that he wanted to get away from, yet he would not admit that he was running away.

"He wasn't—there was nothing to run away from," he argued with himself, fighting his conscience which rebuked him with the thought that he was running away from God.

"He had settled that question the night before," he continued to argue, impatiently anxious to accomplish something to his own satisfaction. "He must prove it—he would prove it! He—he—."

"What should he do first? That was the first question that he had to answer."

Going back to the window he tried to concentrate on some definite plan of action; but somehow he couldn't bring himself to take hold of the situation in a businesslike way. His thoughts wandered to the inviting picture before him. The call of nature urged him to get out in the snow, the same desire he used to have as a boy with his sled. He wanted to be out there wading around and making tracks in the snow. It was the same call that comes to nearly everyone—something that they don't understand and cannot explain—the quiet, inviting solitude that seems to come with a heavy fall of snow.

John Thrillby did not understand either, but the call was too great to resist. He found an old pair of high-top rubber boots, a lumber jacket and an old, wine-colored stocking cap with a white tassel in a closet off of the

kitchen. Donning these, he soon found himself wandering aimlessly about in the fresh snow. He was a boy again, without purpose, bent on a mission prompted by the spirit of adventure. Trudging about in the yard, he surveyed the snow-laden shrubs and trees, and then circled out aimlessly around to the barn.

The whinny of grandmother's horse greeted him, as he opened the door of the stable to enter. "My horse now," the thought struck him.

He knew that grandmother had insisted on keeping a horse and a cow, together with a few chickens; but for the time being they had been forgotten. A neighbor had always had the responsibility of caring for them. Some such arrangement would have to be made for the future, at least until the estate was settled.

Standing in the open door for a few minutes, he watched the animals moving restlessly in anticipation of being fed. John could not resist giving each a forkful of sun-cured alfalfa. As soon as they were fed they quieted down in contented enjoyment, munching the wisps of sweet hay.

From the barn he went to the corn crib for a few ears of corn, and then to the hen house, where he could hear grandmother's flock of chickens singing away as though the world held no problems worth worrying about.

John noticed Mr. Minor, the neighbor who cared for the stock, wading through the snow as he came across the field with a couple of milk pails on his arm, and waited to exchange a cheery morning greeting.

"Well, well," called Mr. Minor, as he came within hearing. "Seems to me you are out early this morning-

"Up with the snowbirds. Couldn't keep me in on a morning like this, you know," John replied.

"The farmers can be thankful for a snow like this one, with the protection that it gives to the winter crops," said Mr. Minor. "It's the poor man's fertilizer, and means larger food supplies for mankind."

Qualifying himself, he continued: "Just one of God's mysterious ways of gathering nitrogen out of the air and returning it to the soil. Each little snowflake, you know, has a mission of good will for the farmer by helping to preserve the life of the soil."

"I have read about it, but I guess I am not enough of a farmer to understand about its merits." John ventured.

"Many look upon snow as a handicap—at least to the peace and comfort of mankind, but not the farmer. This is wonderful, wonderful! As for me, let

us have lots of snow every winter. It's money in the bank. It really makes one feel like living—this snow. Look at it! Isn't it wonderful, this marvelous new world of white? All the blemishes and eyesores of yesterday covered up. Could anything be more wonderful?"

John's spirits rose to the happy enthusiasm of his new-found friend, as he elaborated on the beauties presented in the ocean of snow.

"You know what?" exclaimed Mr. Minor, enthusiastically; "I would like nothing better than to harness Queen to the sleigh that's up there over the corn crib and go for a sleigh ride. Wish I only had the time to do it! A ride across country behind that bay would seem like old times again. It isn't often that we get a snow like this! But what's the use? A million things to be done," sighed the farmer, looking at his watch.

"That's an idea, anyway," John said, earnestly. "Thanks for the tip. I haven't had a sleigh ride in years. Maybe we can work it out this way: I will help you finish the chores; and then, if you will help get the cutter down, I can drive you around to the house on my way to town. That is, if you can arrange to carry the milk."

"Fine!" said Mr. Minor. "I'll help with the cutter right now and find out if everything is all right; then, after the chores are done, we can hitch up."

They went out to the corn crib together and took the sleigh down from overhead and put in the thills. The cushions, wrapped in burlap sacks, were found hanging from a rafter by a piece of wire.

"That's to keep the dust out and the cushions away from the mice," Mr. Minor explained.

Then leaving John to dust off the cushions and place them in order, he left to do the milking, as enthusiastic as a boy.

"I will be with you in a minute," John called after him. "Better give the horse some grain, hadn't I?"

"Yes! Then when I have shown you a few other things you can go and get ready. Be sure to take three or four blankets along. I think you'll find that your grandmother had several," Mr. Minor advised cheerfully.

John finished the chores, and then went to the house to change his clothes and get a bite of breakfast before he left. Kindling the fire, he soon had a pot of coffee brewing. After setting the table with dough nuts, cookies and a toaster ready to connect, he went out and shoveled a path to the road from the side door, cleaned off the porches and was ready for break fast by the time Mr. Minor brought in the milk.

He invited the farmer to share the morning meal with him, and they sat down for toast and coffee. When they had finished, John piled up the dishes and went to the barn, carrying with him the blankets that Mr. Minor had suggested.

Mr. Minor threw the harness on Queen, backed her out of the stall, and handed the lead to John. Running to the granary, while John led the horse out to the cutter, he returned, hilarious as a big boy, jingling an old-fashioned string of sleigh bells, which he buckled around the horse.

They drove up to the house for one of grand mother's milk cans, into which the milk had previously been strained, and were soon off together, driving around the square to Mr. Minor's home.

Letting him out at his front gate, John drove off through the snow, making new tracks in the sparkling sea of white before him. On and on he drove with a merry jingle, enjoying the rhythm of the sleigh bells, as he watched the changing scenery.

The smoke stacks of the village loomed up before him. Immediately his thoughts turned to Dorcas and her people, and he wondered if they had remained with her aunt or had returned to Albion,. He felt guilty for not having thanked them for all the kindnesses they had shown him. He should have called them on the telephone and thanked them, at least. He realized how ungrateful he must appear, after the way he had been driven home from the cemetery, without saying a word of appreciation, or showing any concern for their welfare.

The nearer he came to the outskirts of the village, the more determined he was to show the manhood of a Thrillby by going to them and making some explanation. At the nearest gas station he made inquiry of the attendant for their address.

Finding that he was going in the wrong direction, he drove to the other side of the city, and finally located the home where the Wheatons were staying. He was surprised to find at the next door an old-fashioned horse block and a hitching post, with the statue of an iron colored man holding a ring in the outstretched hand. There he hitched his horse, threw the autorobe over her, and went to the house where the Wheatons were being entertained.

8. The Sleigh Ride

MR. WHEATON met him at the door with a cordial welcome and invited him in. Straight to the point, John started to explain his mission and apologize for leaving Mrs. Wheaton and Dorcas so abruptly the day before.

Mrs. Wheaton, hearing the remark, stepped up behind her husband.

“What’s this I hear about an apology? Do I understand that Dorcas and I were abandoned at the cemetery yesterday?” she exclaimed.

“Well, it’s nearly as bad as that, I’m sure,” said John seriously. “I rode off with Mr. Wheaton without enough courtesy to find out whether you and your daughter were left to walk back or not. You may have had to hitchhike back, for all I know.”

Mrs. Wheaton smiled.

“After all the consideration that you people accorded me, I should at least have been courteous enough to express my appreciation. Now because of the failure I have come for that very purpose. Will...”

“No explanation necessary! Apologies accepted! But as to whether you are to be received in honor or dishonor, we shall ask Mrs. Wheaton,” said her husband with a dignified air.

“Perhaps to settle such a weighty matter we should hold a conference,” laughed Mrs. Wheaton, calling her daughter.

In response to her mother’s invitation, Dorcas appeared on the stair landing and listened while her mother made a brief explanation.

Coming down the stairs, Dorcas greeted John with the remark: “Why all the riddles? Or am I just naturally dumb? I don’t get the connection at all.”

“I am the dumb Dora,” John replied, elaborating upon previous explanations, and still feeling that he had not observed the proper etiquette.

“Well, well,” said Dorcas, laughing. “Not that I am insinuating that anyone is dumb, but I thought that everyone had a clear understanding yesterday. Don’t you recall when we were in conversation with the Governor that he asked mother to ride back with him?”

John looked puzzled.

“And that mother replied to the effect that she had never refused him as a college student, and that she would certainly not think of turning him down now, just because he was the Governor? They went through college together, you know,” Dorcas added with a sly wink.

“Yes,” said Mr. Wheaton with a quizzical grin, “just see what she missed; might just as well have been the first lady of the state, too, if she had kept right on riding with him, instead of changing to a poor preacher.”

“Dumb is the word—the proper adjective that describes my failings. I’ll have to plead guilty,” John replied. “Therefore, I shall offer my apologies now for...”

“Not at all, not at all! We are all subject to the failures of human nature, sometimes, under such trying circumstances,” said Mrs. Wheaton. “Just forget it and go drive your horse around to the garage; we have no barn.

“Yes, do that,” said Mr. Wheaton, interrupting his wife. “Barns are a luxury the city folks can’t afford now; or horses and sleighs either, for that matter. I haven’t seen a horse hitched to a cutter for such a long time that I thought I was dreaming of my courtship days. Is it the horse your grandmother owned?”

“Yes,” replied John. “I couldn’t resist the temptation to venture forth in this ancient fashion on a morning like this.”

“Oh!” said Dorcas, at the window. “A horse and cutter! How nice! I haven’t ridden in one since I was a little girl.”

“Well,” invited John, “you’ll never have a better opportunity than now. I am at the service of the family this morning, running a sleigh taxi. Doing errands, giving pleasure rides around the square, viewing scenes in the country, or what have you? You have the opportunity of a lifetime to turn back as it were to a page in ancient history, and enjoy the privilege of an old-fashioned sleigh ride with sleigh bells and everything.”

“Sounds very inviting,” said Mrs. Wheaton. “Why don’t you young folks drive out the Blue Beach Road and stop at Mother MacConnell’s and inquire how the folks are there? They were not at the funeral yesterday, and I am wondering why. Run along now; it’s only nine o’clock, and we won’t have dinner until three. You will have plenty of time and the snow on the hills out that way should be like a beautiful picture today.”

“Really, mother, you don’t know how I would love to go. You’re a dear to suggest it, but with auntie away for the day, I can’t run away and leave

you with all the work—you know I promised to help,” said Dorcas, with an earnest air of concern for her mother.

“Yes, yes, child, I know. But just run along now before Air. Thrillby loses his patience. Dinner will be ready when you get back.”

Persuaded by both her father and mother to take advantage of the opportunity for a sleigh ride, Dorcas appeared in the hall a few minutes later, dressed in the same neat ermine-trimmed sport costume that John had so much admired the night that he had first seen her at his grandmother’s.

Bidding goodbye to her folks and making final arrangements for the dinner hour, she accompanied John to the waiting sleigh. He saw that she was comfortably bundled in and handed her the reins while he unhitched the horse. After he was seated beside her, they were off, taking the side streets until they came to the open country.

An old, unimproved road, unaccustomed to the use of automobiles, led to the north through the roughest section of the country.

“This is the Blue Beach Road,” advised Dorcas, when they came to a winding trail that was a picture of beauty at any time of the year.

“Your mother certainly has an eye for picking ideal spots of natural beauty,” John replied with enthusiasm. “Aren’t these hills and dales a picture for eyes to behold this morning?”

“Words cannot describe it,” she replied, matching his appreciation.

Queen seemed to enjoy the occasion, too. At every opportunity when John gave her free rein, she stepped off into a brisk trot, with the sleigh bells ringing out a joyous melody that filled the winter air with harmony and stirred the depths of Dorcas’ soul.

After they had driven several miles, John noticed Dorcas shading her eyes from the bright sunlight that was reflected on the snow.

“Here,” he said, “take these,” producing a pair of amber sunglasses from an inner pocket. “It’s fortunate that I thought to bring them along.”

“Thanks,” she replied, adjusting them in position, and noticing that he put on another pair of green ones. “That sun on the snow is so blinding; I would never have thought it possible.”

“Well, it just happened that I did not forget the disadvantages of sleigh riding in the bright sunlight,” John informed her. “These old goggles have been around grandmother’s place for years. They may be relics of the open touring-car automobile days, judging from their antique construction.”

“They are not streamlined, that’s sure,” Dorcas commented; “but they are a protection, nevertheless. Your foresight has certainly added pleasure to this trip that could not have been fully enjoyed otherwise.”

“Yes,” he replied, “I was beginning to think the same thing, except for the fact that it was more luck than foresight. I was looking through one of the dresser drawers this morning, searching for a pair of gloves, and just happened to run on to them. Therefore, you are indebted to Providence rather than to my own thoughtfulness.”

The farther they drove into the wooded section, the more enthusiastic Dorcas became in the changing scenery. The crystal-covered branches of the snow-laden trees were a picture beyond description. The tree trunks, like fixed guards watching to preserve the beauties of nature, stood as forest sentinels, silhouetted against the white background where quietness reigned supreme.

“Oh!” exclaimed Dorcas in startled surprise, when a long-eared, grey cottontail bounded out into the road in front of the horse and crossed to the other side.

“Well, the hunt is on,” replied John, enjoying the thrill of the chase, as he saw two baying hounds follow the rabbit into the underbrush.

Queen, inspired by the excitement, entered into the spirit of the chase, too. Dashing into a brisk trot, she tried to keep up with the baying dogs, and speeded down the trail with her head up, wondering at the cause of so much commotion. The rabbit ran out into the road again and then dodged back, confused by the noise that vibrated in the air everywhere. Jingle, jingle, jingle, the sleigh bells re-echoed from the distant hollow.

Back into the road bounded the rabbit, almost in front of one of the dogs that had lost the trail. At sight of their prey, both dogs opened up their deep, thundering voices, which added to the confusion and the sound of the sleigh bells.

In the excitement of the chase, John gave Queen a free rein. Down the road, like the wind she flew, breaking a new trail through the fresh snow.

Bang! bang! bang! rang out the rapid reports of a repeating shotgun on the other side of the underbrush, just as they were nearing a sharp bend in the road.

Queen bolted!

John tried to gather up the slack in the reins, but it was too late to keep the sleigh clear of the yawning ravine at a sharp turn in the road. Queen saw

the danger soon enough to avoid the pitfall for herself, but her act of self-preservation in making a sharp plunge to the left threw the right runner of the sleigh over the edge of the deep gully, leaving John practically helpless in his control of the situation.

The cutter went up in the air on one runner. All that saved it from going over entirely was the thills and the harness on the horse. In an unconscious effort to save himself, John hung on to the reins for dear life. It was one of those emergencies in which the law of self-preservation takes preeminence. Dorcas, riding at his left, was thrown up and over him, as he fell in the snow at the edge of the ravine, and by the force of the momentum, rolled over and over into the snow-buried brush thirty feet below.

At the bottom of the ravine, Dorcas came to an abrupt stop at the edge of a winding creek that trickled its way to the river.

By hanging on to the reins, John not only checked his own fall, but forced Queen, who was dragging him through the snow by the bit in her teeth, to come almost to a complete stop before he was forced to release his hold

9. The Devil's Hole

RELEASING HIMSELF from the overhanging brush at the edge of the ravine, Jack scrambled up in time to see one of the hunters step out into the center of the road on the hill beyond and stop the runaway horse.

He surveyed the scene for some trace of Dorcas. Where was she? He did not realize that she, with the blankets, cushions and robes, had been thrown into the ravine behind him. Looking more closely, he recognized some dark objects below as evidently belonging in the cutter. Sliding down over the edge of the ravine, and grabbing the projecting shrubs and brush to keep from falling, as he descended to the bottom, he felt around in the loose snow in search of Dorcas, but found only the cushions and blankets.

“Where was Dorcas?” he asked himself in alarm.

Excitedly, he plunged on down the steep grade to the lower edge, where he found her entangled in a patch of briar-brush.

“Are you hurt?” he called in alarm, fighting his way through the snow to her.

Looking up with one of her rare smiles, she shook her head and answered bravely:

“No, just scratched up a bit and freezing. These briars are like needles. If I could get them loose, I could get out of the water.”

“Get that girl out of there; keep her moving!” called the second hunter, as he came to the edge of the bank.

John tramped the briars down as best he could, until out of breath he stood by her side at the brook.

“Cross over the creek and go around a couple hundred feet. We will meet you as soon as we fish out the blankets and cushions, and get the cutter in order. Hurry now! Keep moving, so she won't get chilled through.”

John realized for the first time the significance of the hunters' warning, and seizing Dorcas in his strong, vice-like arms, he carried her to a stump some hundred feet away.

Dorcas was wet through and so thoroughly chilled that she could scarcely make herself understood. John had never witnessed such a pathetic figure as she presented, with her hair down, and her face and hands scratched and bleeding, shivering there in the cold and trying to explain through chattering teeth what had happened to her.

Get going! We'll meet you down at the next bend in the road there," directed the hunter from above, pointing to an opening in the trees.

Gathering Dorcas in his arms again, so that he could bear the most of her weight on his shoulder, John carried her several hundred feet to the trail that led out to the open highway, where he put her down as he panted for breath.

"I— I guess I can walk now," she said, trying bravely to move on.

Half carrying her, he helped her reach the road ahead.

"Praise the God of life, if there is one, for that music," he murmured, referring to the sleigh bells—grandmother's sleigh bells—that brought fleeting recollections of the dead.

With renewed strength and courage, he picked Dorcas up as though she were a child, and hurried out to the hunters as they drove up to meet them.

Queen gave a knowing little whinny of recollection as they approached, and came to a stop at their side.

Placing his half-frozen burden in the sleigh, John hurriedly bundled her in between himself and one of the hunters, and wrapped her from head to foot in the woolen blanket.

Leaving the other hunter to bring the dogs and the rabbit, which indirectly had resulted in the unfortunate accident at the Devil's Hole, they drove off at a brisk trot to Mother MacConnell's, a quarter of a mile away.

10. Irish Hospitality

WITH ARMS AKIMBO, standing on the edge of the great veranda that surrounded her country home, Mother MacConnell greeted them as they pulled up at the side entrance.

“Wal! Wal! Jerry, me boy, an’ if it ain’t you; an’ me believin’ I was a-hearin’ the music of angels, with them sleigh bells a-ringin’!”

“Yes, yes, mother!” Jerry admonished her. “But this is no time for your joking! These folks had an accident down at the Hole. The young lady here was thrown into the creek and no fooling! She’s wet all over and frozen stiff, I know. Get some boiling vater and some dry clothes for the lady. Quick, now!”

“Faith, an’ I wouldn’t believe it if ye hadn’t told me!” said Mother MacConnell, her face beaming a welcome. “An’ come right in! Me door is open to the young lady, an’ me heart a-shiverin’ for her, too!”

Jerry pushed by her and opened the door.

Picking Dorcas up, blankets and all, John carried her into the house, followed by Mrs. MacConnell, while her son, Tim, drove the horse to the barn.

“An’ here ye’ll be sittin’ her,” said the congenial Irish lady, drawing up an ancient rocker over the furnace register in the living room floor. “An’ now, me boy, if ye’ll be after gettin’ them funny little boots off, Jerry’ll be a-kindlin’ the fire, and getting the hot water bottle, and it will be me that will be after takin’ off her coat an’ hat.”

Dropping down on his knees before Dorcas, John removed her carriage boots, frozen stiff over her shoes. Those off, he removed her shoes also and held each foot in his hands to squeeze the ice water out of the stockings and speed up the circulation.

All this time Mother MacConnell was rattling on in her comical Irish dialect and struggling to get Dorcas’ frozen wraps off.

“Ye poor little darlin’! An’ me a clumsy ol’ woman, knowin’ nothin’ at all ‘bout new fan-dangles, with zip-ups an’ all!” she rambled on,

unfastening a light sweater and holding Dorcas by the arm to assist her to stand.

Dorcas made a brave effort to smile through her chattering teeth. Trying to step forward, she nearly fell. John caught her, and following instructions he took her into the side bedroom that Mrs. MacConnell pointed out and set her on a chair.

The kind old Irish lady then took full charge of the situation by shooing all the men folks from the room with a dozen different sets of instructions. Then she removed the remainder of Dorcas' wet clothes and got her tucked into bed, wearing the fancy kimono that her daughter had sent her for Christmas.

"An' would ye believe it," she chuckled, "that I'd ever be fer wearin' one of them, if I fell in the Devil's Hole meself?"

Meanwhile, Tim and Jerry were filling the water bottle and a number of Mason jars with hot water to be tucked around the patient.

With a mother's touch, Mrs. MacConnell soon had Dorcas steaming like an oven. Then came a bowl of hot ginger tea which she prevailed upon her to drink, although it was much too warm to be enjoyed.

Dorcas murmured her thanks with an effort to smile, as she watched Mother MacConnell's beaming face.

Pleased with the interest her patient displayed, she patted Dorcas first on one cheek and then on the other, mumbling over and over:—

"Me darlin' child, me darlin' child! The saints must be with ye, to be bringing sech a beautiful creature out of the Devil's Hole alive! An' me here after believin' that all the while Gabriel was waitin' to blow his trumpet fer ye!"

Dorcas smiled her interest.

"An' here ye be before me very eyes, faith, if ye ain't, an' without me a-knowin' if ye be an angel excapin' the curse o' the devil! An' never a word do I hear from Jerry an' Timothy MacConnell, tellin' me how ye came after bein' in the Devil's Hole," she continued, without a catch for breath.

"An' they brought ye to me very arms with the sleigh bells a-ringing'; an' me not knowin' who ye be—for the shame of you!" she said, addressing her two stalwart sons rebukingly. "An' you a-knowin' all the time that your poor ol mother would be just a-dyin' to know!"

"I— I beg your pardon, Mrs. MacConnell. I am sorry. I thought you knew—that they had told you," said John by way of introduction. "Your

patient here is Miss Dorcas Wheaton of Albion. She and her people came to attend grandmother's funeral yesterday, and they have been very kind to me."

"And my conservator here," whispered Dorcas, "is Mr. John Thrillby of ___"

"Ah, an' the saints take me! Little Jackie Thrillby! An' shouldn't I have known it?" said Mrs. MacConnell. "His dear ole gran'father over an' over. Jackie Thrillby, all grown up! Wal! Wal!"

"Right you are, Mrs. MacConnell!" said John. "It's been a long time since grandmother and I were here, hasn't it?"

"Indeed, an' it has been that," she answered him sorrowfully. "An' now grandmother has gone on to be with the saints, bless her soul! An' me rer wantin' to be at her funeral, an' couldn't fer the want of a way to get there; an' sorry I be fer it, too!"

"She understands," whispered Dorcas, attempting to speak. "Grandmother always understood those things."

"Ah, an' if it ain't so, the dear soul. An' it's well I remember her, too. An' Jackie here as a boy in knee britches," said Mrs. MacConnell, lapsing into a traditional narrative told to her by grandmother on one of her visits, concerning the history of the Devil's Hole.

"I can see her yet, sittin' in the rocker youder by the window, holdin' us all spellbound with her stories o' the days of the gold rush in Californy in '49. The prairie schooners goin' by to the west after gold," she continued, beaming with enthusiasm. "An' the travelin' priest a-peddlin' his wares o' nicknacks and notions, who used to come every year with his stories. An' the stories he told 'bout gold! An' makin' em believe that gold lay all over, an' all a body had to do was pick it up. An' the pan he showed them, like the one they would be usin' fer to pan the gold from the rivers and creeks."

"And everybody getting rich panning gold," Jerry interrupted.

"Yes, an' the ole priest, how he would look out across these same hills here, and the same ones over there," said Mrs. MacConnell, pointing; "an' waving his pan, he'd say: 'There's gold in 'em air hills,' till everybody talked about gold an' dreamed about gold, too."

"And he went away and came back the next spring, when the farmers were plowing for corn," prompted Timothy, eager as a child to help his mother on with the story.

“Right ye are, me boy,” continued Mrs. MacConnell, going on with the narrative; “an’ that time he had a lot o’ new pans in his kit o’ wares. Wal, everybody, the whole kaboodle of ‘em, went gold-crazy when he talked about gold, an’ showed ‘em rocks and pieces o’ stone set with little parts o’ gold—fools’ gold! An’ some called ‘im the crazy parson, an’ crazy he was, too, taking all the people down to the little creek you fell in,” she illustrated, indicating Dorcas; “an’ them a-callin’ him a saint o’ God, thinking they would all be rich when he took his pans and panned up more gold from the creek. Fools gold, that glistened in the sun, an’ fer all the world looked like real gold! An’ with his shovel he dug in the side o’ the hill, an’ found more rocks which he broke open, an’ showed ‘em little specks an’ flakes o’ this ‘ere fools’ gold.

“Oh, an’ Jerry, me boy, an’ can ye go on with the story that ye have heard your mother tell before? Faith, an’ it will be more interesting without the twist o’ me old Irish tongue,” said Mrs. MacConnell, effusively.

“All right, mother,” laughed Jerry good naturedly; “I’ll continue from where you left the parson and his pans.

“Gold, gold, gold,” he exclaimed, giving some of his mother’s enthusiasm to the story. “The news traveled from mouth to mouth. Everybody bought pans from the crazy circuit-riding priest. Merchants had to order a new supply of shovels. Everybody wanted one. The farmers quit plowing. Golden kernels of corn and the waving fields of ripening wheat were forgotten that summer for the fools’ gold in yonder hills,” he emphasized, waving his arms.

“People came from far and near, digging, digging, digging for gold. The parson sold his pans, went away and came back with more. He showed little nuggets of real gold, to promote sales, which he claimed to have had analyzed. All they needed to do to be rich was to pan the gold and save all the stones with gold in them, and the next spring he would be back with a buyer for them all.

“Many of the farmers stayed in the Hole all summer. They put in no crops and failed to harvest those already planted. The whole summer was spent digging, digging, digging for the precious metal that never existed. One by one the majority became skeptical of the Michigan Gold Mine. The folly of spending the whole summer in a useless effort of searching for gold finally dawned upon some. They realized at last that it would not provide the necessities for the cold winter ahead. They had families at home that

had to be provided for. Reluctantly they went back to their farms when a cave-in occurred, killing one of their number.

"One old man was the only one left to labor on alone, digging deeper, deeper, deeper—hoarding a pyramid of rocks containing the glitter, but not the gold. His family could hardly get him home to his meals. Insistently he labored on, faithful and zealous, searching for the coveted wealth and independence which his deranged mind visualized just within his reach.

"When he did not return one night, a searching party of neighbors carrying torches filed out through the pale moonlit woods, expecting to find him buried beneath another cave-in.

"Long before they reached the edge of the pit, they could hear the old man's shrieking voice, echoing in a shrill cry through the silent night: 'I have found it! I have found it! I—have—found—it!'

"Reaching the edge of the great abyss, by the aid of their torches, they looked down, and there at the very bottom, ghastly, grim, shocking and hideous, stood the old man with features distorted, waving his arms and crying out against the god of reason, and his eyes flashing the betraying fire of a raving maniac.

"The old man was taken to the asylum."

"An' that," said Mother MacConnell, "is the story o' the Devil's Hole as it's since been called. An' during these long years, since your grandmother was a girl, it's been the dumpin' ground for the rubbish o' the whole community."

"Yes," remarked John, "I have heard grandmother speak of it many times. She was only thirteen or four teen when it happened, I believe, more than eighty years ago."

"An' nearer ninety, it was. She was but a wee lass of twelve at the time. An' it's many times I have heard her tell it, too. An' how she used to play with the Indian children when the tribe came through an' settled by her cabin in the woods. An' maybe they'd walk in an' help themselves when they came a-beggin' or tradin' beads an' furs fer somethin' to eat."

11. Times Do Change

THINGS HAVE SURELY CHANGED during the hundred years since Grandma Thrillby was a baby, when the Potawatomes wandered back and forth over the Chicago Turnpike, which used to be the old Indian trail," said Timothy MacConnell.

"Rather U. S. Highway 112, you should say," Jerry corrected him.

"Yes, and all along the trail are Indian landmarks," Tim continued. "Baw Beese Lake in Hillsdale County is named after one of the chiefs of that tribe. Chief Meteau, who was a warrior under Tecumseh, was another chief of the Potawatomes and had his head quarters at Devil's Lake in Lenawee County. I sup pose they are a remnant of the tribes that grandmother used to see as a child. I have heard her tell many times how the big Indian chiefs would send one of the warriors with a catch of fish or a quarter of venison to her father's cabin when she was a little girl. They were exceptionally friendly, and thought a great deal of him as a man whom they could trust."

"Ah, an' me boy, Tim, times have surely changed," said Mrs. MacConnell, "from the days o' Grandma Thrillby's riding in the ox-cart. The yoke o' oxen gave way to the horse, an' the horse to yer automobiles an' tractors."

"To say nothing of the horse and sleigh," laughed John with a mischievous look.

"Yes, poor soul, an' how she loved to tell o' the changes she had seen durin' her time," Mother Mac-Connell continued; "an' me a-sittin' by the hour listenin' to tales she told you boys. Sure, an' ye re member, an' happy days they were, too."

"We all loved to hear grandmother tell of her experiences," said Dorcas, her voice returning for the first time. "I used to enjoy listening to her by the hour myself; but I don't remember hearing that story about the Devil's Hole before."

"An' it was only grandmother that could tell it—spooky-like, with the old crazy man hollerin' in the moonlight."

“But,” smiled Dorcas, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye, “we had to spoil a perfectly wonderful sleigh ride to find out about the Devil’s Hole. Yet, I thank God for His protecting care in this unhappy experience. Too often we fail to count our many blessings and to praise Him for His watchfulness over us, when in reality from the human standpoint we may be as valueless as the cast-off rubbish and fools’ gold you have been telling us about. I can really thank Him today that I am here in safety to enjoy your motherly care and the wonderful hospitality which I am so grateful for,” Dorcas declared solemnly, with tears in her eyes.

“Tut, tut, my child; an’ who is more happy about it than Mother MacConnell?” the old lady replied, nonplussed. “But the saints take me, if I ain’t after believing’ that it’s not fools’ gold that I see in ye! An’ if Jackie here ain’t for seeing the difference, it’s me fer believin’ he’s crazier than the old miner himself.”

It was Dorcas’ turn to be perturbed, and in fidgeting with the bed clothes, she rolled one of the cans of water to the edge of the bed.

John caught it as it was about to fall to the floor, and noticing the embarrassment in Dorcas’ face, he said in a matter-of-fact way: “I am quite sure, Mrs. MacConnell, that your patient is much better.”

“Indeed, an’ I am glad,” she replied. “An’ it’s dinner I’ll be gettin’ right away. The chicken that’s been a-broilin’ will make the broth you’ll be needin’ after nearly freezin’ in the Hole, I’m believin’,” said the motherly old Irish lady, addressing Dorcas.

“Oh, no! I could never let you do that,” replied Dorcas, earnestly. “I am thoroughly thawed out now, and if my clothes are dried out I think we should go back. Mother will be expecting us. It’s nearly two o’clock now and we were to be back by three for dinner.”

“An’ indeed you’ll not be going back! Mother Mac Connell will never be a forgivin’ ye fer a minute, ‘till ye have had yer fill o’ fried chicken, biscuit, an’ a bit o’ chowder fit fer the queen that ye are.”

Turning to John, she said: “An’ it’s only a wee sprint down to the next neighbor, Jackie, me boy, an’ if ye’ll be fer takin’ a run down there ye can phone to her ma, tellin’ her where ye are.”

Dorcas protested.

Ignoring her, Mrs. MacConnell continued, addressing John: “Run along now, me boy, an’ do yer biddin’ an’ no one need be worryin’.”

“All right, mother, you win,” said John. “Your advice is as logical as your hospitality is perfect. By that time Dorcas should be in tip-top shape, and will run no danger by going back with damp clothing. Besides, I have a faint idea that I want some of that chicken myself.”

“Ah, an’ ye’re a boy after me own heart,” said

Mother MacConnell, hurrying back to the big kitchen.

“I suppose that is the sensible thing to do, but it really seems as though we are imposing on good nature,” mused Dorcas with a faraway look.

John turned, looking for his hat and coat.

“If you think it best, you may go and tell mother that we will be back later. I’ll get dressed while you’re gone and help Mrs. MacConnell with the dinner.”

He was off with a bound.

“Don’t tell the folks anything about the accident; mother would worry herself sick,” she called after him.

John had no difficulty in notifying the folks back at the village. Mrs. Wheaton answered when he called and did not ask for any reason, when he notified her that they were staying for dinner at the MacConnell’s. She was glad to hear that Mrs. MacConnell was well, and said that she had not really expected them back, because she knew how insistent Mother MacConnell was when it came to demonstrating her unstinted Irish hospitality.

He was surprised to find that dinner was ready, when he got back to the house. Dorcas was up and dressed, and busily engaged in helping Mother MacConnell arrange the meal on the table. Tim and his brother were just coming in from the barn, where they had fed and watered Queen, and adjusted the cushions in the sleigh in readiness for the return trip to town after dinner.

The next morning after the sleigh ride, John was up bright and early, making arrangements for closing the home for the remainder of the winter. When Mr. Minor came over to do up the chores, he made an agreement with him to take care of Queen and the rest of the stock.

He spent the afternoon banking up the house which was to be left without a fire. Before his departure for college, he was going to help Mr. Minor board up the windows.

In the evening he hitched Queen to the sleigh and drove into town for supper. He had to make the trip, anyway, to take some of grandmother’s

papers to Upledger & Young, who would see that they were filed with the Probate Court in the settling of grandmother's estate.

He owed a debt of gratitude particularly to Dorcas, who had been so considerate of his welfare in the time of his bereavement. And he wanted also to thank each member of the family for the courtesy and consideration they had shown him.

When he arrived at the Wheatons, he found Dorcas preparing to leave the following morning for Chicago. The Automobile Club had advised her that the roads were in good shape on the main highways. She was to drop her people off at Albion on the way.

Reluctantly, he bade them goodbye, because that deep down in his heart he hated to see them go; but when he considered their influence, he was rather glad, particularly because of Dorcas. He was afraid of her personality. She was continually reminding him of his failure and of his responsibility to God. That was the one thing that he held against her. She appealed to him as an ideal young lady, but he thought that she was too narrow, religiously. If she were the type of person whom he could meet on the basis of a common understanding from his own point of view, he would have respected her as his superior.

He thought he knew and tried to make himself believe that there is no God, but his inner conscience accused him when Dorcas was around. She was like his grandmother; his logic and arguments did not have any weight when he attempted to prove his point as convincingly as possible. His biggest obstacle—and he fought against it continuously—was the fact that he had no proof. To admit this weakness rebuked him and sent him back to college to find the proof that he knew was lacking.

His spirits rose in anticipation of the thesis that he hoped to prepare and present to the world, proving the logic of his theory of the non-existence of God.

Grandmother's oft-repeated statement: "Theory does not change fact," mocked him. Goaded by the thought of possible failure, he trembled in fear of what the final outcome might be. He must prove by practical demonstration, beyond the possibility of contradiction, that his belief was based on facts rather than on mere supposition.

"No Thrillby ever failed in any undertaking." The thought encouraged him. He could hardly wait to get back to his old associates and launch out

into the momentous task that confronted him. He needed their moral support. Success was just around the corner, as he thought. He couldn't fail.

Satisfied with his own philosophy, he drove Queen to the barn and put her up for the night.

"Only one day more and then we shall see what the future holds," he mused as he dropped off to sleep under the roof of the old homestead, the last time for many, many months.

12. Fetters Free

NEW YEAR'S DAY, and a definite, determined resolution was made by Jack Thrillby when he awoke that morning.

The ancient family homestead had been closed with the old year. Now, all he had to do was to turn the key in the lock, make a dash for the train and leave the past behind him. He was going away resolved that the future would show returns to his credit. Now it was back to college and friends who were in sympathy with him and his ideas!

As he arose, he was fired with the determination to succeed. The world held many promises, and he meant to cash in on some of them for himself after he left the university. What destiny awaited him after graduation, he knew not; but that did not deter him in the least from mapping out his plans for the future. But of one thing he was certain, he would not be like so many others he knew—an obstacle in his own path way to success.

He was free; ties no longer bound him. He was obligated to no one. He had turned over a new leaf, and was stepping across the threshold into a new future.

His thoughts turned to Dorcas, but he crowded them out of his mind. He tried not to think of her. She was a nice enough girl, in a way, but not his type. He could not afford to hang a millstone around his neck by longer associating with her.

Yes, that was it—a millstone. That was one thing he was going to avoid in the future. She was dangerous—like playing with fire. Dorcas was right out in the open, too straightforward and religious. He could not afford to associate with that kind of folk. Grand mother had always been that way, continually rolling stones in his pathway. Dorcas would be that way, too; interrupting progress and hindering him at every turn in his efforts to achieve success. He was going to forget her. He could choose associates who would boost him up the ladder, rather than those who were continually knocking the props out from under his hopes of proving scientifically the non-existence of God.

He dressed with unusual care. He packed his grip and wardrobe trunk in preparation for the trip to the depot with Mr. Minor. He put his room in order and walked into the parlor.

Thinking had comforted him. It had been so easy to get around obstacles in that way, while surrounded by the environment of his own room; but when he stepped across the threshold into the living room, where everything spoke of grandmother and the past, his thoughts were immediately assailed with a counter attack, chastising him for his eagerness to leave it all behind.

Facing him on the wall was the enlargement of a photograph of his grandmother—so lifelike that it startled him. He glanced around the room at the photo graphs of his grandfather, his father, his mother, his brother and younger sister. All of them were looking at him. He had never noticed before how real and lifelike they were. How intensely each one seemed to gaze at him and follow him with searching eyes as he made preparations to leave! It gave him an uncanny feeling as he passed back and forth, gathering up the things that he wished to take back to the university.

Out in the kitchen there were no pictures, and to get away from the haunted atmosphere that the living room seemed to hold for him, he went there to get his breakfast, but he could not eat.

A peculiar feeling possessed him. It was so quiet. Suddenly he stopped. What was it? Could it be that the departed spirits of loved ones were in the home emptied by death? No, he did not believe that. He glanced through the door into the living room. His sister's gaze, reflected from her photograph on the wall, seemed to reprimand him.

"There—there is no—no—," he uttered aloud, and stopped at the strange sound of his voice.

He had to get away from it all—the atmosphere of the old homestead and its echoes of death. He grabbed his hat and overcoat, and hauled his grip and wardrobe trunk out on the porch. Mr. Minor was leading Queen out to hitch her to the sleigh, in preparation for the trip to the depot.

Jack dashed back to his room for his suitcase, followed by the eyes of his ancestors. He could not resist a fleeting glance at his grandmother's picture as he hurried through the house. Her sympathetic smile seemed to follow him as he closed and locked the last door, and stood on the side porch ready to leave.

“Death,” he muttered, running his fingers through his hair, as he waited for Mr. Minor to drive up. “The curse of it, the curse of it!” he lamented, talking to himself. “Seven deaths in seven months.” There couldn’t be any God, even if he wanted to believe. Even if there were a God, why should all this curse fall on him?

Mr. Minor drove up with a cheery “Good morning,” and helped him load on his baggage. With a despairing sigh, John took the last, lingering look at the old home stead, as Queen broke into a trot, bearing him on his last sleigh ride to the depot.

Arriving at his destination, the feeling of loneliness left him as he took a cab and was driven to his room.

Mrs. Teater, a portly woman who ruled the roost with an iron hand, defying God and man at every opportunity, and meeting opposition of every sort, welcomed him with a smile and directed him to the same room he had occupied the previous year.

For some reason she had taken an exceptionally strong liking to Jack Thrillby, as she insisted in calling him from the first time they met.

“John is too old; I prefer Jack. It fits you better, somehow,” she said; and what she said was law. Partly because of the misfortunes that pursued Jack, her heart went out in sympathy for him. Like Job’s wife, she reviled against adverse circumstances, and offered the malignant consolation “to curse God and die.” For this reason Jack looked upon her with a sort of filial affection; and as time went on he turned to her, in his despairing moods, for comfort and advice.

After a bath and a hasty toilet, he returned to the lower hall, feeling somewhat refreshed, but aware that hunger had superseded the despairing fit of melancholy that had sent him forth from the old home with out any breakfast. Here, at least, he could enjoy the idiosyncrasy of being “Jack Thrillby,” without being branded with the ignominy of deserting ancestral influence.

Stanley Zercoski came in limping, due to the accident he had suffered when on his way to attend grandmother’s funeral, and was the first one to greet him.

“Well, well, if the bad omen hasn’t returned,” Stanley jested. “I suppose Mother Teater will kill the fatted calf for supper. Anyway, little Jackie boy will be welcomed with open arms; aye, buddy?” he grinned sarcastically, letting his eyes rove about, seeking an audience.

“As welcome as the flowers in May,” piped up little Peter Filot, accepting the challenge. “But his gain is our good fortune when it comes to favors at the table, fatted calf or no!”

“And how!” said Maxie Ware, just coming in.

“No quarrel about that; good boarding houses are hard to find. No one would want to sever diplomatic relations with the old girl right now, anyway,” said Cornelius Johnson, whom they had nicknamed “Duke.”

Coxie Hollingsworth and C. Archibald Freeman arrived just then, with a half-dozen grips between them.

Peter rushed over and welcomed them like longlost brothers.

“Well, if it ain’t Coxie, Archibald and Company, Incorporated,” he remarked. “Still solvent, I suppose? Glad to see you. Expected to hear that you were in the hands of receivers—police,” he whispered in a confidential undertone.

Everyone laughed, and the party broke up with each of the new arrivals going to his own room. Dinner was to be served in half an hour, and they would have to get dressed and be ready for the “Homecoming” that they expected Mrs. Teater to give them.

At the supper table the trend of conversation turned to matters concerning the highlights of social activity, and the manner in which the vacation period had been spent by the different ones. The majority of them had not heard of John’s recent loss.

Because of the fact that his grandmother was a centenarian, any effort to appear sympathetic was a cold, meaningless gesture on their part. After all, grand mothers were just worn-out vehicles who, having lost their usefulness in the advancement of the modern age, had nothing to live for anyway. Modern ideas concerned self, and to get the most out of life one must recognize that fact.

The whole dormitory was filled with a group of agnostic upstarts who were groping in the dark, ready to seize any opportunity that might provide them with a leader in whom they could have confidence. They had no organized opinions. Some of them were communistic, some socialistic, some avowedly atheistic. Some were just drifters, blown about by popular opinion like rudderless ships.

As yet they were not criminal at heart, neither would anyone of them have admitted that they were in any way criminally inclined; nevertheless, the leaven of antichristian tendencies was slowly and surely at work,

leavening the whole lump. All that they needed to provide the proper amount of theoretical heat that would generate them into a body of organized social parasites was the apprehension of that yet undiscovered spark of hopeless inferiority which lay subconsciously smoldering in their minds.

When once fully awakened to the fact that the self-centered principle of life which they possessed only forced them into the class of social outcasts, all scruples would immediately be thrown to the wind, leaving them to join the common horde of disgruntled masses that ever seek a hero to lead them into a dictatorship of ungodliness.

All of them were more or less alike. Mentally warped on the theory of evolution, there was no being in God. "I," the all important "I," was the beginning and the end of their circumference in life. As far as existence was concerned, human life was even more limited in scope than the seed of an apple which grows under favorable circumstances. A tree is the result. It has its own individuality, it bears fruit, good, bad or indifferent. It lives its lifetime of service and dies; decomposition sets in, and the elements return to the earth from whence they came.

Why? No one bothered to give enough serious thought to even ask the question.

The scope of their thinking considered that life begins at birth and terminates in a grave. Its only object, self-satisfaction; its only possibility, evolution of purpose; its only achievements, hieroglyphics on the face of time; and its final result, complete extinction.

From whence came the ability to think, to reason, to will, they knew not. They had nothing but suppositions which they hoped, somehow, would materialize into facts—facts that would completely obliterate God. Divine recognition had no place in human life as they saw it. The eternal God had been crowded into the archives of antiquity by their predisposed modernized thought; and now the momentous task lay in trying to find that fantastic missing link outside the omnipotence of the divine.

13. Two Promoters

OUTSIDE of a few verbal skirmishes with Stanley and Maxie Ware, things in general rolled along reasonably well for Jack Thrillby as he approached the date of his graduation. He did object strenuously to James Mudd and the unknown Bruce Holcomb, a young aviator whom they called Keno for short, when Stanley injected them into the inner circle of their college fraternity. Neither of them was attending the university, and outside of that which they revealed about themselves, no one knew much about them.

Stanley had run into them at a house party given by one of the other fraternities and fell for them in a big way, when he found that they were interested in the same principles in life as he and his particular group of friends. They purported to be soldiers of fortune, studying mob psychology for the purpose of gathering material for a book they were writing; and in some inexplicable way they wormed their way into Stanley's confidence, so that he incessantly dragged them about with him on all occasions, much to Jack's disgust.

Mudd was from the upper Bronx, New York, and had, so he claimed, the unlimited backing of a number of business and social organizations prominent in activities of an atheistic nature. Holcomb was from the West, the son of a wealthy promoter in Los Angeles who dealt in movie contracts, race horses, stock brokerage, oil leases and anything else connected with big money. Included as a side issue, outside the pale of the law, was a select gambling retreat in Mexico, where he took his wealthy friends and other associates who were looking for a good time and easy money at big odds and long chances.

In competition with free aeroplane rides, a club party and dinner dance coupled with a lavish expenditure of money, Jack's arguments against taking everything for granted fell on deaf ears. Stanley ridiculed his over-cautiousness at every turn, pointing out that the road to success lay only in the ability to make money. Without it none of them could hope to

accomplish recognition of their efforts in life, no matter what field of endeavor they chose.

“They may be a couple of ex-convicts—who knows?” Jack persistently argued. “We don’t know the first thing about them. I don’t mind telling you that I am skeptical of all this easy money. It doesn’t look good to me. We have our own careers to look out for. We should know more about them before we place confidence in them.”

In answer to Jack’s argument, Stanley was instrumental in having Mudd and Holcomb placed on a committee to raise funds for the publication of a Historical Year Book of the University. “It will give them an opportunity to prove conclusively that they are all they claim to be,” Stanley declared with pride. “In the meantime, they can be investigated thoroughly.”

Consequently Holcomb and Mudd were given a free hand in soliciting advertising from all the merchants and business men of the city. No one was slighted; corporations, manufacturers and all forms of business enterprises were contacted and induced, out of loyalty to their own college town, to make a substantial donation for the benefit of the university.

Practically everyone approached became a contributor to “the racket,” as Peter Pilot called it. “It’s nothing but another case of someone parting with something for nothing,” he stated in ridicule.

Jack, too, agreed with Little Peter, still voicing his objections, and fearing the after effects of such high pressure sales methods. “Advertising like this offers nothing in the way of a return for money invested,” he pointed out. “It’s bad policy for any college to be placed under such obligations as a lot of worthless ads in a historical year book that leaves everyone feeling as though they had been shaken down on a sucker list,” Jack protested with emphasis.

“The most that possibly could be said for it is that it is a contribution of good will,” Coxie Hollingsworth ventured.

“It’s pretty expensive good will,” Peter Pilot commented, when he found out that they had nearly \$2000.00 in the treasury over and above the total cost of publication.

“If anyone knows of a place where there is any difficulty in selling snowballs to the Eskimos, Holcomb and Mudd should get the contract on a commission basis,” the Duke suggested with good-natured satire at the supper table one night, after expressing his opinion that it was a good racket well worked.

Both of the promoters beamed with pride, accepting the quip as a commendation of their sales ability, but Jack looked upon them as a couple of confidence operators working within the law to put over their own popularity with a lot of gullible members, who did not have the foresight to realize that they were being obligated to someone of whom they knew very little, if anything.

Stanley, however, continued to sing their praises in glowing terms, and when he laid before the group the plan of placing the \$2000.00 in a special fund to be used by the alumni of their fraternity for the advancement of atheism, Jack was whipped and like the rest fell in line with the program.

They would all graduate soon, excepting, of course, Mudd and Holcomb. There were unlimited possibilities for a group of lawyers, doctors, engineers and students of other professions, including astronomy and chemistry, to be united in one common purpose of proving that God is a mere ghost of superstition.

The pending graduation to which all were looking forward with anticipation was not only an all-important milestone in life, but it meant the separation of friends and associates. It meant another yoke of responsibility to chafe under, as they took on the new load. Up to this point they had merely been learning to live—extracting and absorbing from others that which had been gained by experience. This was to be sold now for personal experience in the hard knocks of life. They must cease receiving and begin to give that personal endeavor for which civilization would remunerate them. Before the door of opportunity was a maze of invitations from which they were to choose their courses. The diplomas that they would receive were mere tickets of admittance. They were now to compete in the Olympics of life for such recognition as the world could offer. These and similar thoughts caused moments of serious reflections for Jack.

True, he meant to continue in an internship at the University hospital, but even that would separate him from his friends who would soon scatter to the four corners of the earth and leave him only the satisfaction of hard work. However, he welcomed this; it was the only ray of hope left for him. His whole life had been a nightmare of disappointments, which had cast a shadow of fear and uncertainty over his future. Just now he was a man of many moods, unfitted for any given purpose. He was a lone wolf. He must struggle on without companionship, buffeted about by the con tending issues of life, dreaming his own dreams, thinking his own thoughts, fighting

his own fight for existence, and gleaning such rewards as might be his by right of conquest.

In his present uncertainty of mind, Jack was subject to new moods upon every changing thought. Motivated by the rebellion which he harbored against God and the insane idea of trying to crowd into oblivion that which he secretly feared, like all atheists, the false note of uncertainty broke up the assurance and self-confidence which he desired. He was fighting a battle with an unseen power that kept his soul in constant confusion, and because of it he reviled God and the spiritual influences which the memory of his grandmother and his family had over him.

“Seven deaths in seven months,” he lamented in revolt.

14. The Eyes Deceive

JACK THRILLBY stood thunderstruck in the doorway of the hotel grill-room, wondering if he could believe his own eyes. The room was well lighted. His vision was perfect. He never drank and therefore could not by any chance be intoxicated.

Why, then, the mental delusion? He did not know, nor could he find a reason for it.

But there before him, in the center of his gaze, sat Dorcas Wheaton smoking a cigarette and casually sipping a cocktail with a party of friends whom he knew intimately.

“Whew,” the thought struck him, “if grandmother could only see us now! Dorcas Wheaton! Joined in the cocktail parade! How could he believe it? She of all people!”

A spasm of disappointment surged within him. She was the last person in the world, he believed, who would do it.

He leaned against the doorway and gazed, weakened by the shock of disappointment that was written all over his bewildered features.

“Dorcas Wheaton smoking cigarettes and drinking liquor as unconcernedly as though she were attending a church bazaar!” A look of scorn spread over his face.

There she sat, nonchalant as anyone in the room! Her gaze drifted to the doorway where he was standing, and in an ordinary matter-of-fact way she bowed in his general direction with a pleasant smile of greeting.

Jack, dumbfounded, stood like a statue, staring in bewilderment and occupying the whole doorway.

Dick Harper crowded past him and went in, and sat down at the table beside Dorcas and the other girls, after an exchange of greetings, which gave the impression that he had been expected.

What possessed him, or why he did it, he never really knew; but faint and sick at heart, Jack found himself at a table behind a large spreading

fern, ordering a steak which he did not want, because he had eaten scarcely an hour before.

He heard Dick address Miss Wheaton and concluded that he must be an old acquaintance. Why this should be any concern of his, he did not know! Dorcas Wheaton meant nothing to him. She could not mean anything to him as long as she held to her straight laced religious views.

A hypocrite! The word startled him. If there was anything he hated in any individual, that was it. And Dorcas Wheaton, of all people, whom he in secret had been forced to admire, even though he thought her to be wrong!

Never were his spirits at a lower ebb. He felt as though he had been publicly and personally disgraced. His wounded pride, reacting in mental anguish, left him hopeless to explain the situation. He did not even try to. It was there: the bold, evident fact, obliterating all the faith he had possessed in human nature.

Although an unbeliever himself, he still subconsciously had respected and admired Dorcas until to night. This was the last straw. A Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type of Christianity. His soul rebelled with violent indignation which left him hopelessly confused.

What's the use of living? The question revolved in his mind. The whole world was becoming so unprincipled that decency and respectability were nearly lost arts.

What would poor old grandmother think if she were here surveying the picture before him? For the first time he was actually glad that she was dead.

A waiter served his dinner and arranged it on the table before him. Unconsciously, he picked away at his plate, watching the group on the other side through the fern. He studied Dorcas' features. They were a bit older, he thought, due no doubt to dissipation in the "cocktail parade" at night parties. Reaction from a newly-formed cigarette habit might have something to do with it, too, he assured himself. Certainly she did not look at her best.

Watching through the branches of the fern, he saw the party break up as soon as their waiter returned with change for the dinner check. They stood in conversation for a few minutes and then started to leave by the side entrance. This brought them past the table where he was sitting.

Jack hung his head, hoping that they would pass him unnoticed. But Dick, catching sight of him and an untouched cocktail that he had

unwittingly ordered, rushed over to his table and picked up the glass, and holding it before him so that the light would shine through, he addressed the girls:

“Here’s to a buddy who for friendship’s sake, Orders a drink that he doesn’t take; And so for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, I’ll drink this toast to a friend of mine.”

Turning to Jack, he bowed, and after setting the empty glass on the table, he introduced the only stranger in the group: Miss Wheaton, a friend from Detroit, who was in the city as one of the alumnae at tending the forthcoming graduation exercises.

Jack rose, plainly puzzled, and ventured the remark: “I believe I have had the honor of a previous acquaintance.” Turning to her he said: “It’s a surprise to see you over here from Chicago.”

“Chicago!” she echoed; “I haven’t been in Chicago since the Century of Progress. Why do you say that? I think you must be mistaken.”

“Why,” exclaimed Jack, “you’re surely Dorcas Wheaton, are you not?”

“Oh no, not Dorcas,” she laughed; “I am Doris. We are cousins. Dorcas is still in Chicago. You evidently know her quite well to make this mistake? Tell me about it. I am just dying to know.”

Jack blushed profusely, trying to frame words to express himself.

“It’s quite all right,” said Doris Wheaton, laughing merrily. “It’s not the first time that we have been mis taken for each other. It happens very often, but not always under such delightful circumstances.”

“Evidently the mistake was not made always by one of such distinguished personage as Jack Thrillby,” Dick declared, emphatically.

It was Doris’ turn to blush.

“Nevertheless, Mr. Thrillby, it’s a pleasure, even under these unusual circumstances, to make your acquaintance,” she replied, simply.

Regaining his composure, Jack felt as though a load had been lifted from his shoulders; and with his face fighting up with one of his manly smiles, he said: “Well, the joke is certainly on me. I can appreciate the value of the proverbial plugged-nickel. Perhaps I can redeem myself by tickets for the opera? I will consider that I am back on a monetary basis, approaching the gold standard of self-respect, if you accept the offer,” he insisted.

“Sounds like the real McCoy to me. Under the circumstances, I think it quite appropriate that we call your hand,” Dick replied enthusiastically. “What do you say, girls?”

“Bound to be agreeable, if you’re in the party,” the charming little Helen Oprich replied, catching Dick’s arm.

“Me, too, always,” added Pauline Stewart. “Did you ever know me to turn down an opportunity?” she inquired, casting an inviting look at Jack.

“Well, well,” Miss Wheaton asked coquettishly, “should I be the one to object, when I’m just dying to know the circumstances that brought Cousin Dorcas and Doctor Thrillby together?”

“Good enough,” smiled Jack; “when do we start? Or perhaps we had better agree on the place first?”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Dick, “here comes Hollingsworth and Little Peter. They may be interested in joining the party, providing the girls are willing.”

Pauline, with clouded face, watched Helen nod her approval, and then, rather reluctantly, added her consent by way of being agreeable.

“And you, Miss Wheaton?” inquired Dick, turning to her for an answer.

“It’s immaterial to me; I’ve got my man,” she answered coyly, stepping up to Jack’s side. “All that is necessary now is a confession of family secrets.”

Dick called the other two boys over and introduced them to Doris, and then explained the proposed plans.

Coxie and Little Peter readily agreed, pleased with the opportunity of spending the evening in such congenial company. Without further ceremony, the group filed out to a waiting cab. Coxie knew the driver, who operated a new, privately-owned streamlined cab of his own, which was large enough to accommodate the whole party. Motioning him over, they all piled in and were whisked away to the brilliantly-lighted theater ten blocks distant.

Coxie insisted on paying for the cab, while Jack and Dick secured the box-seat tickets for the evening performance. The play was one presented by a cast of university students—an annual pre-graduation event at which the whole citizenry of the town turned out in loyalty to the university.

Jack and Doris, for the sake of convenience and a better opportunity for conversation, took the seats at the rear. Then, too, Jack had seen several rehearsals, and knew what the play was to be. Doris expected to stay for a week and would have other opportunities to see it, if she cared to. Her keenest desire for the moment was to find out the extent of Jack’s acquaintance with her cousin. Not that she was jealous of Dorcas—life was

too short for that. It merely was a matter of feminine curiosity to discover, if she could, how serious the affair might be between her country cousin and the charming young doctor that she had just met.

She prided herself as a student of human nature, with an ability to carry on an innocent flirtation as a pastime with those of the opposite sex in whom she chose to become interested. She was, of course, always

to be the sole judge of how, when and where an adventure should be staged. The fact that she had met Jack under unique circumstances was reason enough to give just the right setting for another of those experiences, which she meant to capitalize upon.

She had already sized Jack up, reasoning that he was not the type to be attracted to one of Dorcas' temperament. She thought she knew Dorcas like a book. In fact she was sure of it, and wondered what attraction Jack could possibly hold for her. It was a conundrum which she meant to solve.

Jack's anti-religious trend stood out like a sore thumb. His general conversation advertised it; but the air of reverence in which he seemed to hold Dorcas puzzled her, and kindled a desire to get at the bottom of the secret.

Jack, on the other hand, was in a sort of a dilemma himself. He could not explain the sense of relief he had felt in the discovery that he had not been mistaken in his estimation of Dorcas' character. The fact that she had been vindicated, so to speak, thrilled him with a feeling of secret pride that he did not understand. He was glad that it had been only a mental delusion, caused by mistaken identity.

The fact that her cousin Doris was, in his estimation, guilty of a breach of moral etiquette in drinking cocktails and smoking cigarettes did not bother him. While he did not approve of it, he nevertheless considered it a matter in which he was not to be concerned. Truth fully, he felt vindicated in his ability to analyze other people.

With reckless enthusiasm, he felt himself being drawn to Doris for companionship. He felt obligated to her in some way, and hilariously happy because— well, because—. He did not know why, but probably because of a feeling of well-being that possessed him and made him want to please others.

Conversation was an easy matter. He talked of his college life and his hopes and ambitions in the future as a doctor of medicine. Doris, feeling her

ground by carefully-framed questions, led him to talk of his past which naturally brought up the subject of Grand mother Thrillby's death.

Doris had heard of it, but as she happened to be in Florida at the time she had never learned any of the particulars. Having known grandmother as a school girl, and having visited in her home occasionally, she was naturally interested in what Jack told her about her death, and particularly that part which concerned Dorcas at that time. The story of the sleigh ride and the misfortune encountered on the visit to Mother MacConnell's place held her spellbound. Obviously, that experience accounted for the attraction that apparently existed between her twin-like cousin and the handsome young doctor at her side.

The play was a secondary consideration to both of them. The pleasure of mutual association was of more importance than the changing performances. Their stage was set with scenes of actual experiences in life. Both were captivated by the pleasure of each other's company.

Having previously viewed the rehearsals, Jack followed through the different acts with little effort, thus enabling him to give practically all of his attention to Doris. To his way of thinking, this proved a most enjoyable way of spending the evening.

15. A Question of Morals

DORIS MET JACK by appointment the following evening in front of the hospital when he got off duty. He had asked her for a dinner date on the way home from the play, after learning that she was free for the evening, because Pauline, with whom she was staying for the week, had an appointment with her dress maker.

Both Pauline and Helen were to graduate, and as this was the night for the final fitting of their graduation costumes, Doris was left on her own. This circumstance had prompted Jack to ask her to grant him the favor of her company for the evening.

She had readily consented, glad of the opportunity to spend her leisure time with such a congenial companion. On the way down, she left the girls to keep their appointment; and now she was waiting for Jack at exactly one minute and a half before the chimes in the great cathedral across the corner were to ring out the hour of seven.

She sat at the wheel of her straight-eight roadster and watched Jack as he came down the front walk.

“An ideal personality for a doctor,” she thought; “so manly and distinguished in his bearing.”

He took the wheel at her request and drove out to the Rotunda, where the hotel which catered to summer-resort trade, and famous for chicken and frogs-leg dinners was located on one of Michigan’s picturesque lakes.

Driving around to the side where parking accommodations were provided, Jack parked the car and went in with Doris on his arm. They were met by a motherly-looking hostess with grey hair, who escorted them to a neatly decorated table, previously reserved by Jack, in an alcove overlooking the lake.

“How delightfully wonderful the lake is tonight!” exclaimed Doris from the window seat. “I never saw it more beautiful.”

“A serene setting that the gods could not duplicate for beauty,” Jack replied, as he took a seat by her side.

Scattered about the shore of the lake were a number of boats, occupied by lazy fishermen. Numerous others were idly rowing or paddling about through the placid waters. A number of bathers lounged on the beach, watching those who were wading or swimming along the shore. Some who had ventured out for their evening dip, or had lain in the yellow sand for a sun bath, were gathering up their wraps and strolling to the various cottages around the lake.

During the course of the dinner, Doris called Jack's attention to the birds calling to their mates and singing a lullaby of love in an evening song.

"A harmony of lullabies singing the world to sleep for the night," Jack remarked thoughtfully.

Soaring to and fro, and skipping along just above the water in quest of their evening meal, a great number of swallows could be seen through the approaching twilight.

Doris pointed to the descending sun as its rays spread out across the lake, which reflected the shadows of the trees along the shore on the opposite side.

"A perfect picture of the world upside down," Jack mused.

"Yes," replied Doris; "how beautiful and quiet it is, too. Look! See how those shadows on the lake creep towards us as the sun descends."

Jack was lost in thought.

"I often wonder what it is all about, such scenes as these that seem to draw one out in quest of the great unknown?" Doris inquired moodily.

"A question that I have often wondered about also," said Jack, earnestly. "One that makes you want to learn more about the philosophy of it."

"It's too bad that life is not as peaceful and quiet as the lake, isn't it?" inquired Doris. "And to think that the world is in a turmoil of strife, greed, crime and suffering."

"In which we are all more or less contributing factors," added Jack.

"In what way do you mean?"

"Our moral code of living, disregard for the rights of others—sort of living a law unto ourselves—gambling on the stock market, drinking liquor, smoking cigarettes and catering to the thrill of the night life," he answered.

"Oh, I see!" said Doris. "Not by any chance preaching me a sermon, are you? Just telling what you learned in cousin Dorcas' kindergarten of morals, I suppose," she added, with an attempt at repartee.

“I haven’t been trained in anybody’s school of morals! Neither am I preaching any sermon,” Jack retaliated, indignantly. “And I sincerely object to the insinuation that I am holding myself up as a standard of moral perfection. What I said applies generally. One does not have to be a Sunday school prodigy to respect morals.”

Doris smiled inwardly at her ability to draw him out and measure her man, as it were, and so replied in good-natured mockery: “I take it then that the cock tail you ordered last night was an affront to your own code of ethics!”

“Exactly!” Jack replied; “that cocktail was a mistake.”

“Or a camouflage in the search of popular opinion, perhaps?” she interrogated.

“Intimating that I am a hypocrite!” he retorted, hotly.

“No, no!” said Doris with an inquisitive, aggravating smile. “Just wondering! One has that right, hasn’t she?”

“Well,” said Jack, regaining his composure, “I suppose one does. But that drink was ordered by mistake, don’t drink, and the reason for it is not a question of morals either. I am convinced from the standpoint of medical science that liquor is a detriment to the system. Aside from that, it is a contributing factor in breeding crime and invariably is a trouble maker, creating hard ships not only for the participant but also for any parties directly concerned in his or her welfare.”

“I heartily agree with you in practically every thing,” she replied; “but you know everyone nowadays who strives for social prominence indulges occasionally.”

“That’s the mischief of it,” Jack replied; “the advent of the beer garden opened the door for the use of liquor as ethical according to present-day standards. Polite society accepted it and another moral bar was let down, particularly for the women who now drink openly. A new era of social evils has developed. I can’t see how we can hope for any possible good to come from such pernicious traffic.”

“There isn’t any good in it. Personally, I don’t like it. I never did indulge until it was legalized after the repeal of prohibition. The sole reason now for my taking a sociable glass is for the sake of prestige and popularity—just to be a good fellow with the crowd,” she confessed, meekly.

“Exactly the point; just another one of the common herd,” he replied, sympathetically. “But all I can say is that I pity the next generation now

being founded on courtships in beer gardens. There are virtually millions of our youth today too fickle to say 'No,' who are doing that very thing. Can you find any hope for them?"

"I am not trying to; there isn't any," said Doris. "That's a problem for the New Deal."

"The Devil's Deal; that's what grandmother would call it," Jack replied.

"And one that never will be forgotten, except in the price paid for such a tainted source of revenue which will be forever buried in a revelry of moral corruption that is engulfing us," she wisely added.

"A sad, sad story yet untold," Jack prophesied.

"Thou almost persuadest me," quoted Doris, "never to take another drink."

"No one could do his friend a better turn," Jack replied, earnestly.

"I know," she said, solemnly; "but what would my friends say if I cut them out cold without even the formality of a New Year's resolution?"

"Those who have sense enough would secretly respect you; the remainder could not be considered as worthy of your friendship."

"How noble!" she smiled.

Jack, studying the seriousness of her facial expression, did not try to press the matter further.

Changing the subject, he called her attention to the last rays of the descending sun and suggested a boat ride before dark.

Relieved by the opportunity of forgetting perplexing problems for the moment, she readily consented; and a few minutes later she was seated in a canoe with Jack, silently gliding through the still water out across the lake.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Nature in her solitude held their interest and seemed to draw them together in a mutual understanding. When they drew up to the shore at dusk, both felt happy in the experiences of the evening. Life somehow seemed to have a brighter outlook; there was more to it than self-satisfaction in passing pleasures and a good time.

In the few hours that they had been together, they had come to a better understanding, and were agreed, in principle at least, on the psychology of life.

However, they were still living for the present, interested only in the benefits that life had to offer, and purposing to make the world a better place in which to live. It was necessary, they knew, to assume the responsibilities of life, whether they wanted to or not.

16. The Sheepskin

THE FEW DAYS REMAINING before graduation were far too short for Jack and Doris. Every possible minute of time that he was not busy at the hospital, or tied up in a class room, he managed in some way to spend with her. There were just enough contrast and difference of opinion to make them attractive to each other. Their first meeting had been that of just curious interest, originating from a spirit of adventure; but now the more they saw of each other the greater that attraction became.

At the initial ceremony when he received his sheep skin along with other graduates, Doris was the only one present outside of his classmates who showed a friendly interest in him. The main reason for that was that he had not sent out any graduation invitations. Because of hardness of heart, he did not want old friends or any of his remaining distant relatives to attend the exercises and waste their sympathy on him and his troubles.

When all the others in his class were entertaining their parents, sisters, brothers or other loved ones, he found himself alone. In spite of himself, a feeling of homesickness overcame him at the thought of not having anyone vitally interested in his welfare.

Doris was the only one who gave him enough courage to keep him from showing his feelings. She very amiably stepped into the gap, enabling him to face the issue courageously.

Out of hundreds of presents distributed among the other students, Jack received but two: a very expensive wrist watch from Doris, and a special monogrammed ring from his fraternity. Bruce Holcomb had been responsible for this. He made arrangements for all the graduates who were particularly friendly to Stanley Zercoski to receive one of the rings with his compliments.

Jack prized both gifts very highly. The watch was of a certain make that he had never hoped to possess, at least for years to come. The ring depicted the principles embodied in their new order, or which he was so proud, and therefore was greatly cherished.

When Doris was forced to return home the next day after his graduation, Jack did not hesitate to voice his reluctance at her leaving so soon. He tried to prevail upon her to remain another day or two, but when his efforts proved fruitless, he exacted a promise from her to allow him the pleasure of her company for some week-end in the near future. They were to keep each other informed by correspondence of their plans and when it would be possible to visit her in Detroit.

Moods are often hard to explain.

When Jack returned to the hospital, after bidding Doris goodbye, he was in a perplexed state of mind. He had stood and watched her car weaving in and out through the congested traffic, until she disappeared from his view. And now he stood, as it were, at the crossroads, wondering what course to take. The events of the past two weeks were tumbling over themselves in his mind, and he found it hard to gather up the loose ends in constructive thought.

How to chart plans for the future, was the question that confronted him.

Hopefully, he studied the gold numerals on his new watch, as the minute hand crept with precision to the hour of seven. He would be on call for duty then. With a sigh, he turned and walked down the hall, anxious to have something to do to keep his mind occupied through the long hours ahead.

The days that followed were busy ones for Jack. He was to be found on duty at all hours of the day and night. Work seemed to agree with him. Even during the hours he was supposed to have off he worked. Some of the other internes were always wanting extra time off, and they found in Jack a willing substitute to fall back on. He never refused; he was always cheerful and willing to fill in—glad of the opportunity to be kept occupied.

He fought many battles with himself after Doris left, trying to figure out his own feelings. He had never been in love—never kept company with any girl, for the reason that he never had time. He had always been too busy trying to get an education. It was not that he did not like the company of the opposite sex; he did and was always the center of attraction when in their presence. He took well and was a good mixer; but the thought of an individual selection had never entered his mind. He supposed that he would marry sometime, but neither the right time nor the right girl had yet appeared.

Girls to him were all alike: a necessary asset, the effulgence of the social world; but their place was in the home for man to watch over and protect,

and he was not ready yet to assume that obligation. But now, for the first time in his life, he had allowed himself to be carried away in his attentions to a particular individual. He had obligated himself to carry on a correspondence with Doris and his word must be kept. Already he was wearing a present received under circumstances that seemed to bind him to that obligation.

“Where am I being led?” he wondered. “What is apt to be the natural consequence?” He could not afford even to think of marriage—if that were it.

But it wasn't a question of being in love that confronted him. In the first place, he wasn't in love. In the second place, he knew that he could not afford the association of Doris' company. She was the daughter of a multimillionaire. It was rank folly even to think of it. He had no money himself, nor could he afford to jeopardize the opportunities that the future held for his profession. His success meant hard, consistent, nerve-racking, laborious work.

He couldn't continue to crowd his attentions upon Doris. What was he ever thinking of when he asked to see her in her Detroit home! He did not know. It virtually meant tying himself to her apron strings for but one purpose—money! The word stood out, rebuking him.

At least, that was what everyone would accuse him of, and he knew it. A money-grabber! A common, fortune-hunting leech! The thought stunned him.

He was anything but that. As badly as he needed money, he would never consent to such a scheme to gain his own private ends, financially or otherwise. He was too much of a man for that kind of a self-centered method.

With Jack Thrillby, pride and principle went hand in hand. Everything he did was analyzed from that viewpoint. Consequently he was in a quandary as to what course to pursue. As it stood now, he felt obligated to Doris. Then, too, he had been prompted to coach her as a missionary of good will, expecting her to adopt a more substantial platform of moral standards in reference to drinking and smoking.

What a fool he had made of himself! Of all prize saps, he was without question the last word. He couldn't help but wonder what she was thinking about him. What right had he on the night of the canoe ride to reprimand

her for taking a drink or smoking a cigarette if she wanted to? He felt like kicking himself, it seemed so ridiculous now.

She was his protege, so to speak. Hadn't he seen her take the package of "coffin-nails" that he had condemned and throw it in the lake, with the resolution that she was through smoking? Hadn't he on several occasions afterwards seen her refuse tobacco and also a drink of liquor? This was another obligation for which he felt himself to be responsible. Why did he consent to take an interest in her code of moral standards?

He was a fool, and no amount of reasoning seemed to get him away from that viewpoint. But the fact remained that his respect for her was growing stronger with every thought.

"Could it be true?" He wondered if he were really falling in love.

17. An Atrocious Crime

KIDNAPPING EXTRA! Millionaire's daughter kidnapped!"

The shrill cry of a newsboy filled the air, Boated through the open windows and echoed down the corridors of the hospital. Doctor Thrillby, busily engaged in performing a serious operation on a child, badly injured in an automobile accident, paused momentarily as the cry reached his ears in the operating room.

For a moment his attention was drawn away from the emergency that confronted him; but as the news boy continued on down the street shouting his papers, he carefully and painstakingly finished the operation for which later he was to receive praise and commendation, due to his skill in handling an emergency case in the absence of a specialized surgeon.

Another boy took up the cry.

“Kidnapping! Auto magnate’s daughter kidnapped!”

Curiosity urged Jack to hurry a little more than usual in disrobing and arranging the necessary details following the operation. After doing so, he went back to find his patient comfortably resting in a private ward; and after leaving instructions with the nurse, he hurried out the side door to the street.

Hailing the nearest newsboy, he hurriedly bought a paper and went across to the park where he found an empty bench. He knew that Doris had a sister about fifteen years of age, and thought that she might be the possible victim. It could not be Doris, for the previous week end he had been in Detroit and met the family, and he knew that Doris was leaving the next day for a six weeks vacation-trip through the wilds of northern Canada in company with three of her girl companions. Their plans were to circle the Great Lakes and go as far north as Winnipeg, returning via Chicago if the unchartered roads of the north were found to be in any kind of shape.

“It couldn’t possibly be Doris,” he reasoned. “There must be some mistake! Perhaps it was her sister, Thelma. The blazing headlines must be lying.”

"MAGNATE'S DAUGHTER KIDNAPPED

Doris Wheaton Held for \$200,000 Ransom

Police Organize Nation-Wide Man Hunt

J. Philip Wheaton Family Prostrated"

Jack read the article hastily.

No explanation was given in the newspaper account of where the kidnapping had occurred.

"Evidently it happened soon after she left on her vacation," Jack thought. "Perhaps it will turn out to be a joke." He certainly hoped so! There was nothing said about the other three girls supposed to have been with Doris. There was something queer about it all that he couldn't understand.

Jack bought the second "Extra," which carried an account of an insured parcel-post package which Mr. Wheaton had received through the mail. Among the articles it contained were the keys to Doris' car, her driver's license and other personal effects known to have been in her possession.

Attached to the parcel was a ransom note demanding two hundred thousand dollars.

"That's strange," thought Jack, when he discovered that there was nothing in it to indicate how, when, or where the payment of the ransom was to be made.

Seriously, he studied the facsimile of the note inserted underneath Doris' picture. Still puzzled, he read and re-read the typewritten message:

"Holding Your Daughter Doris For Cash Consideration Of \$200,000.

"payment must be made promptly and in the manner provided.

"while it is understood that a certain amount of police investigation may be necessary, it's not wise to set any traps. take a fool's advice. don't try it.

"don't make the same mistake that others have been sorry for. don't lose a life trying to save it.

"prove yourself trustworthy and give the assurance that you can be dealt with in confidence, and an opportunity will be presented to make the contact.

"you can hold yourself responsible for the consequences if demand is not met, as you are herein and hereafter instructed.

"two hundred thousand means your daughter's safety.

"her release depends on you.

"you better believe it.

"\$200,000."THE BOLD ONE"

While he was still reading the account in the paper, a state police officer stepped up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Are you Dr. Thrillby?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Jack. "What is it you wish?"

"Well, I should like you to accompany me to the post. I was detailed by our captain to locate you and arrange for an interview at his office as soon as possible," the trooper explained, casually.

Jack rose and stood beside the officer.

"Being informed that you are an acquaintance of Miss Wheaton's, the captain instructed me to solicit your assistance. I am sure that he will appreciate any assistance you may be able to render."

"Gladly," said Jack. "Shall I come now?"

"The sooner, the better. Immediate action is needed in a case of this kind. Seeing that you were reading the account in the paper, I judge that you're interested."

"Yes, vitally so," was Jack's reply.

"Then," said the trooper, "if you will step over to the cruiser, I will run you down to the office right now. Captain Nelson is waiting."

"All right," Jack replied, accompanying him to the waiting car.

Arriving at the post, he was escorted directly to the captain's quarters for an interview, being questioned as to his acquaintance with Doris, the length of time he had known her, and his knowledge of her latest movements.

Jack answered the captain's questions freely, glad of the opportunity to be of any assistance he could, however slight. But when the investigation seemed to question the reliability of some of his answers, he became somewhat curious and wondered why he should be under suspicion.

"Do I understand that I am considered a suspect—possibly implicated with this crime?" he finally asked.

"I don't know as I would exactly consider it in that light," replied the captain. "The fact is that someone is responsible for an atrocious kidnapping. Naturally, you could not expect us to leave any stone unturned in an honest effort to solve this crime and bring the guilty parties to justice. But, of course, if you don't wish to cooperate with us," he added seriously, playing for a psychological advantage, "you cannot be forced, you know."

"No, not that; you misunderstand me," Jack interrupted. "It's not that I don't want to cooperate. I am only too glad to help in any way that I can; but I hope you don't think that—that I would be a party to such a high-handed act? Why, Doris means every thing—I—I mean she is a particular friend. She—she—well, you know how it is. I met her and I admire her greatly. And she—she— . Well, surely you don't think I did it?" stammered Jack, confused in trying to give a satisfactory explanation of his real interest in Doris.

"Oh, I see, I see," mused the captain, trying to fathom Jack's mental attitude. "You have known Miss Wheaton how long? Two months would you say?"

"I first met her at the time I graduated in June. I saw her on two different occasions—two different periods of time, I mean. I met her about a week before my graduation, and during that week I saw her practically every day. Before she went back to Detroit after my graduation, I saw her two or three times. Then last week I saw her again when I was in Detroit. But—but—"

"I understand," interrupted the captain with a smile. "But would you mind answering a personal question—one that you might consider none of my business?"

"Not at all," said Jack, mystified, "if it will throw any light on the problem."

"There's always that possibility, although it is not our policy to pry into people's private affairs, except on occasions like this when it appears logical," he smiled.

"Yes."

“The question,” continued the captain, “concerns the angle of marriage. Are you interested in Miss Wheaton from that standpoint?”

Jack was thunderstruck.

Throwing his head in his hands with his elbows on the table, he mumbled:

“So that’s it. They think I’m a gold digger—after her money—a crook and a kidnapper.”

“I am not saying that we think that; but it’s not what we think, or what anybody thinks, for that matter,” said the captain, seriously. “We’re interested in the facts—facts that will lead to a reasonable solution of this crime.”

“I know that,” replied Jack with emphasis. “But why imply that I would harbor such a thought as to be interested in Miss Wheaton on account of her money? The suggestion is infamous! I won’t let any body say that, or even insinuate it! I—I—.”

“Come, come, calm yourself, young man,” admonished the captain, good-naturedly. “Just be reasonable and hold your head. Maybe you can be a little help instead of an hindrance in solving this case.”

“My God! I—I hope so!” Jack blurted out before he thought. Then, realizing that he had unwittingly called upon God, he tried to correct himself by saying:

“Metaphysically speaking, I am sure that if we approach this matter from a scientific point of view and in the light of cold facts, we will discover a theory pointing to the real clue in this case.”

“With your help, I am sure that it can be done quite successfully,” replied the captain, not altogether sure that the real clue might not be found to involve Jack himself, judging from the answer in riddles that he had just given.

“I am at your service in any way possible, you may be assured of that,” ventured Jack with eagerness. “I think that I should go down and assure Mr. Wheaton, personally. Don’t you think that such a move would be the right thing to do?”

“That, of course, depends on how you feel about it,” said the captain, thinking that if Jack did have any thing to do with the kidnapping he might open the door and walk into his own trap.

“That’s exactly what I will do then, if you’re through with me,” said Jack with determination. “I’ll go over to my room and pack, and then go to

the hospital and see if I can arrange to get away not later than tomorrow morning.”

“Very well,” was the reply, “you are at liberty to make your own plans. I might suggest, however, that you keep us advised of any new developments in the case.”

“You can depend on me, Captain Nelson. I will call you from Detroit and let you know how things are, if necessary,” Jack replied, rising to go.

“Best of luck to you, young man,” said Captain Nelson, presenting his card and taking Jack by the hand in a friendly grip. “The united cooperation of all the police organizations in the country is back of you in an effort to solve this outrageous crime.”

Then turning to one of the waiting troopers, he gave instructions to take Jack back to his room.

Learning that the latest edition of the Daily News was on sale at the corner news stand, Jack suggested that his escort leave him off at the drug store, instead of taking him on home as originally planned. Leaving the officer at that point, he tossed the newsboy a dime and picked up the latest kidnapping extra. He then hurried on to his room, a half-block distant.

The definite information he hoped to find in the newspaper was lacking. Apparently the authorities were as much in the dark as ever. The police were besieged with clues, but when they were all traced down, it was found that they were either running around in circles on a “cold” trail, or spending valuable time checking anonymous information that got them no place at all. Many public-spirited, honest, conscientious citizens who wanted to be of assistance were unwittingly rolling stones in the pathway of the police. But regardless of lost effort, every theory or clue advanced was run down and checked as a cherished possibility.

The news story presented the theory that all four girls were kidnapped. None of those who were in the party with Doris when she left had been heard from. A description of the car and each of its occupants had been broadcast from coast to coast. Side by side across the front page were the photos of four daughters belonging to as many multimillionaire families. At any minute a new demand for a million dollars could be expected.

Jack studied the picture of Doris, the first of the group, and tried to make himself believe that he was reading a fairy tale.

What was believed to be a fictitious telegram, stating that the girls were all right and enjoying a good time, was being checked by the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police in the wilds of the North. The telegram had been telephoned in from a wayside community and sent collect to a discontinued telephone number of one of the girl's parents; but due to the kidnaping publicity it was being given much consideration.

Definite information had been secured, showing that Doris and her three companions had crossed the border into Canada, via the Ambassador Bridge. The license number of Doris' car showed this as the port of entry, with four people in the car. It was also found that the car was returned to the States at Sault Ste. Marie, with only two people in it. Another mystery was the fact that three hundred dollars in traveler's checks had been cashed at the Soo by one of the two girls.

"Why all the mystery?" Jack wondered to himself, searching the newspaper for some explanation for this expenditure. Was it a part of the ransom demanded, which the police were keeping secret?

According to the press, this promised to be one of the most baffling kidnapings since the Lindbergh case. There seemed to be an epidemic of this particular kind of crime. Evidently, there was an organized kid napping-ring in operation. This was a momentous mystery that still confronted the police, and all the law-enforcement agencies throughout the country were at their wits ends in trying to run down some clue that would locate and identify the operators.

There were at least seven unsolved kidnapings which had occurred during the past six weeks; and because there had been no arrests made or a solution found that would clear up any of them, the public in many quarters was becoming kidnap panic-stricken.

A financial consideration, of course, was the motive in each case. In nearly every instance the method of operation was similar, yet there was an air of peculiar mystery involved in each case which the police had never before confronted. From all indications, this kidnaping ring had taken lessons from the experiences of others, and were meeting every obstacle by a superintelligence in crime heretofore unknown. Every clue seemed to lead to a dead-end which the combined effort of all the law-enforcement agencies could not go beyond.

For the second time that evening, Jack sat with his head in his hands, trying to get his wondering thoughts together. He wanted to work out some plan of operation. Sitting still and doing nothing made him nervous. "What could he do? He must do something," he repeated over and over to himself.

Yet, on the other hand, he wondered if any effort he might make would not be considered as a front to get in the good graces of the Wheaton family.

Why was he so anxious? He knew what they would say. Money! There was no reason to consider it from any other angle.

“Yes,” he soliloquized, “even Captain Nelson had inferred that much when he asked me concerning any interest I might have in Doris looking forward to marriage. Why can’t people be sane and reasonable? Why can’t they mind their own business for a change?”

All through the night, his thoughts—a million of them—kept tumbling through his mind. “What shall I do? Shall I go to Detroit and offer my meager services to Mr. Wheaton? Would it be good policy to do it? What excuse could I give for such a suggestion? What would Mr. Wheaton say? How would I be received?”

Poor Jack! Of all men he was the most miserable. Still fully clothed, and lying prone across the bed, he covered up his head with the pillow and tried to sleep. He counted sheep—whole flocks of them. With his eyes closed, he tried to visualize them jumping over the old stone fence, as he had seen them on grand mother’s farm; but, try as he would, he could not sleep.

The sheep faded from view in his mental vision and left instead a picture of Doris writhing in agony, trying to free herself from the toils of her vicious captors. Worn out and exhausted, he dozed off for a time, but soon found himself fully awake and on his feet by the side of his bunk. He thought he had heard her cry for help. His whole body was at a nervous tension. He must do something. Action was the only thing that would quiet his over-wrought nerves.

He walked out to the edge of the town and stood looking at the midnight stars and a world peacefully asleep. Oh, so quiet! Yet, out there somewhere was Doris. She needed him. But where? There was no answer. At every turn the same uncanny stillness of the summer night greeted him.

Like an old man, shuffling along in his dotage, he retraced his steps to his room, despondent, heartsick, and hopeless.

18. A Skulking Figure

AT HIS OWN DOOR, a skulking figure crept from the shadows and confronted him, as he stood fumbling his keys, trying to locate the right one to fit the lock.

“Is that you, Jack?” a barely audible voice whispered from the railing at one side of the porch.

Startled, Jack looked into a pencil-like flashlight. He knew that voice. “Is that you, Stan?” he said.

“It’s me, all right,” whispered Stanley Zercoski, as he gave the secret sign of their fraternal society. “I came a while ago and found you out. I still have a key to the place, but I did not want to wait inside or wake anybody.”

“Come on up,” Jack invited.

“No, I would rather not. Step back here in the shadow a minute. I think I can give you some interesting news.”

“Why all the secrecy, Stan?” Jack urged.

“You wouldn’t by any chance be interested in doing some work in connection with Miss Wheaton’s kidnapping, would you?”

“Would I?” exclaimed Jack, bounding over the rail as nimbly as a cat. “What is it, Stan? Have you any clue? Where is she?”

“Come back here then, and keep quiet, and I will tell you,” Stanley commanded. “But it’s got to be on the solemn promise of the—the atheistic oath, adopted for—for the fraternity. Will you do it?”

“What have you got?” inquired Jack, impatiently.

“First give the promise by the grip of the secret oath,” Stanley urged cautiously. “Do you swear on the oath of your life?”

“Yes, a thousand of them, if there is anything we can do to locate Doris,” Jack cried, betraying his emotion.

“I felt sure I could depend on you,” boasted Stanley. “I am glad now that I came. We have information—been working on this case and have come to the point where we have got to have help if we are to succeed. We need you

and need you badly. Keno is with me, and we feel sure that we can take you to a place where Miss Wheaton can be found.”

“Let’s go, then —”

“Not so fast, Jack; it’s got to be strictly secret. We can’t work with the newspapers. The police and everybody else are on our trail. You know that with out me telling you. The first whisper would mean failure. We can’t risk it. Are you game enough to come with us secretly without giving the thing away?” Stanley cautiously inquired.

“Sure,” Jack replied, eager to find out Doris’ whereabouts. “There’s nothing I would rather do, only I want to know the particulars.”

“Well, I’m telling you, ain’t I?”

“But I still don’t know what it’s all about.”

“Ain’t that too bad!”

“But, Stanley —”

“Listen, Jack, we have no time to lose. Do you want to help Doris or don’t you? Keno is waiting with his plane, and we’re all set to go. We came back this way on purpose and registered at the hotel, so we would have an alibi. We don’t want anyone to know we’re working on the case. See? They might suspect us of trying to aid the kidnappers. A perfect alibi always comes in handy, even though it does take several hours longer, as in our case. Looks like wasted time, I know, but we’ve got to be on our own; can’t run the risk of a radio broadcast or a newspaper tip-off.”

Stanley mumbled on with breathless impatience: “I’m telling you, Jack, we’ve got the low-down, the inside dope on this kidnapping; and because you are dependable and an old friend, we thought that you might want to help Doris. But if you are too thin skinned”— Stanley paused for effect— “and don’t want to help her, there is always somebody else —”

“Stanley, you’re not fair!” exclaimed Jack, interrupting with a show of temper. “You know I want to help! It’s not a case of being afraid of anything, if that’s what you’re thinking of. There’s nothing— why I would be willing to go through fire to help her, and you know it.”

“Come on then, let’s be moving; get your medical kit, chloroform, ether—everything necessary for an operation on a fractured skull and a broken leg. Come, be quick about it. Minutes count.”

“Do you mean that Doris is?”

“Never mind what I mean. Now’s your chance, if you really want to help. There’ll be time for questions later. Hurry now!” Stanley urged,

impatiently.

“All right, I’ll be right out,” said Jack, as he disappeared up the stairway.

“Don’t tell a soul of our plans,” cautioned Stanley in an undertone. “This is our one chance in a million to be heroes.”

Five minutes passed, which seemed an hour to Stanley, as he paced back and forth in the shadows, waiting for Jack to appear.

“All ready?” whispered Stanley, meeting Jack at the sidewalk in front of the dormitory.

“Yes!”

“Doctor’s kit and everything?”

“Everything I own.”

“Come then, let’s hurry! We can do our talking on the way,” said Stanley as he urged Jack in a dog trot down a side street that led to the edge of the city.

In the distance, along the railroad tracks that separated the city from the open country, an airway beacon flashed with tireless precision and identified the air route traveled by the transcontinental mail and passenger planes. As they descended to the grade crossing, the evening mail plane flew over them on schedule, causing Jack to wonder if they, too, were to traverse a like course to some distant point where Doris could be located. He hoped so, and tried to gain a pace alongside of Stanley, so he could talk to him; but all his efforts only served to hurry him along that much faster, until they reached an open space between the two hills from which the Twin Hills Golf Course got its name. Suddenly, they came upon a new twin motor plane of the latest type and construction, looming up in the semi-darkness, as they rounded the foot of the nearest hill. Stanley signaled with a small flashlight and was answered by a tiny beam of light from beneath the wing of the great plane. Keno, dressed in a new pilot’s uniform, greeted them as they approached, and with an extended hand he drew Jack into the cabin.

Quietly, for a ship of its size, the big plane rose and headed into the wind, rising higher and higher until the city diminished to a tiny speck behind them, and finally was completely lost to their view.

“Where? Where are we going?” panted Jack, as soon as he was able to get his breath.

“You’ll be surprised when you find that we are able to take you to a place where Miss Wheaton is concealed,” replied Stanley.

“How do you know?” inquired Jack, trying to hide his emotion.

“If you have any doubt, look at this,” came the answer, as Stanley fished one of Jack’s personal calling cards from a place of concealment in the upholstery.

Jack recognized it as a card he had given Doris the week before when he bade her goodbye at Detroit. There was no doubt of it! On the reverse side was a note in his own handwriting, giving his address, so she could write to him. He had seen her place it in her purse at the time, and she had promised to drop him a line occasionally from the interesting places visited.

“Where?”

“Now, now,” interrupted Stanley, before Jack could frame the words of his inquiry. “Don’t start asking a lot of foolish questions that I’m unable to answer.”

Jack studied Stanley with a puzzled expression of curiosity and surprise.

“You wrote that?” Stanley mockingly inquired, reaching for the card.

“Yes!”

“And you gave it to Miss Wheaton?”

“Yes!”

“At Detroit when you saw her last?”

“Yes!”

“There’s no doubt of that?”

“No!”

“No doubt about her being missing either, is there?”

“I only wish there were, but”

“Well, we are just as positive that she had this note in her purse after she was kidnapped—that it came from there,” Stanley interrupted. “And we have reason to believe also that she is seriously injured. But we believe that we can take you to her, although it may be dangerous. It is a chance we thought you would be willing to take.”

“Oh, if you only could! The danger means nothing,” moaned Jack.

“It’s an opportunity to help her. We couldn’t take a chance on someone we did not know. Publicity would mean certain death!” affirmed Stanley with apparent sincerity.

“Take me to her, I’m ready. I don’t care if the kidnappers do kill me. At least it will be an attempt to help her,” Jack replied with clinched fists.

“We believe that is possible—all of it; but we are going to take the chance. Can you keep cool and obey orders? You will need to depend on us, you know,” Stanley responded with a show of determination. “We are going through with this thing or die in the attempt.”

“And I’ll be with you, too, till the last drop of blood is shed,” Jack hissed through his teeth. “All I want is one chance to get my hands on the villains that have taken her.”

“A fine lot of help you’ll be, walking into the lion’s den with that kind of a temper,” cautioned Stanley. “In dealing with a gang of kidnapers you have got to be sensible and diplomatic,” he advised, mysteriously, with a knowing wink. “My suggestion would be to help Miss Wheaton, if she needs medical attention, and leave the job of apprehending the culprits to the police.”

“But I don’t understand! We are going to try to rescue her are we not?” protested Jack.

“We have reason to believe Miss Wheaton is badly injured—a broken leg and possibly a fractured skull. Our object is to get you in contact with her abductors as a doctor. You are not to let it be known that you know her. The matter of her rescue and return to her people is another consideration. In the meantime you are just a dumb doctor—see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing! Do you get me?”

“That’s all right, Stan; I see the point all right,” Jack replied. “But how is it going to be done? Getting the contact, I mean?”

“We’ll leave that to Keno. He knows the country. We’ve got to depend on him. He has a plan that he’s sure will work. I’m putting confidence in him. You can do no better than do the same. At the very worst it is a much better gamble than sitting around twiddling your thumbs and wishing you were Sherlock Holmes,” Stanley remarked, sarcastically.

“I suppose that I am unreasonable and impatient,” was Jack’s reply.

“Altogether too much so for your own good,” continued Stanley. “What you need is a good rest and some sleep. Sleep will probably be out of the question after we arrive. If you are going to be of any help you’ve got to be at your best. It will soon be noon. We’ll get a bite to eat and then turn in. What do you say?”

“All right,” said Jack. “I did not realize it was so late. How much farther is it, do you think?”

“Far enough so we can get a good rest, I would say,” replied Stanley with a yawn.

Jack looked out the window on to a mass of clouds below, wondering where they were bound. He had no idea which way they were traveling, how fast they were going, or anything about it. “What a mysterious chain of circumstances,” he thought. Looking up, he found Stanley gone.

He sat in meditation, watching the clouds. The events of the past twenty-four hours seemed to him like a dream. His brain was tired from thinking. Watching the clouds made him sleepy. Yawning, he rubbed his eyes and fought to keep awake.

Stanley’s return with some steaming hot chocolate and a tray of toast reminded him that he had not eaten since the afternoon before. The refreshments disappeared like magic, leaving Jack refreshed but still sleepy. Stanley took the tray away and came back ten minutes later to show him the Pullman berth that had been prepared for him.

Jack hardly had time to lie down and adjust himself to the surroundings before he was asleep. All through the long afternoon he slept. The hum of the two powerful motors was soothing music to his ears. When finally aroused, he found that it was dark, except for the canopy of stars above which gave the appearance of twilight. They were in an unknown world. Below was a sea of dense blackness. Not a light could be seen anywhere. Stanley, who had been waiting, heard him stirring and came in to ask him how he felt.

“Oh, I feel fine, except I am still hungry and thirsty.”

“That’s to be expected on a plane ride like this,” Stanley said. “Just wait and I’ll bring you something hot to drink, and you’ll feel better. We’ll be ready to land in a little while, but before we do we had better get such things as eating out of the way. We may not have another chance for a week, who knows?” remarked Stanley, as he left for the buffet.

Why he should feel so tired and exhausted bewildered Jack. He could not understand the all-in feeling that he had; and when Stanley came back he asked about it, thinking perhaps that it might be caused from the carbon-monoxide drifting back into the ship from the motor.

Stanley laughed the matter off good-naturedly, as he placed another hot drink and a plate of cookies before Jack.

“That’s all right, Jack,” he said; “you’ll be feeling fine as soon as we land and have had an opportunity to get a little exercise.”

Jack ate his second lunch, as he watched Stanley who sat across from him with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

“I’ll relieve Keno while he eats,” Stanley remarked, as he casually picked up the tray. “By that time we will be about ready to get our bearings for the landing, I should judge.”

Jack tried to think.

“You may as well rest a while longer. When it’s time to get up I will call you,” Stanley said over his shoulder as he left.

“No, I think I’ll get up now,” said Jack, swinging his feet to the side of the bunk.

“Better save your strength for what’s ahead, Jack,” came the advice down the aisle.

Jack thought over the events of the day, while he studied the stars. They seemed to be going away from him in to the dim distance. Unconsciously, he slumped back on his bed and again was sound asleep.

“Jack, my boy,” Stanley mused, “if you but knew the half of this adventure and its inevitable consequences, you would tremble in horror. But we shall press on—on to our own little place in the sun. Time is the only factor now between our goal and success. It won’t be long either before that is accomplished. Too bad you are not trustworthy and dependable, but circumstances alter cases,” he grinned diabolically.

Gloating over his victim, Stanley watched Jack slumber on, a helpless subject of the opiate that he had put in the cup of hot chocolate. They would not reach their destination for several hours yet, and this was one way to avoid answering a lot of unnecessary and embarrassing questions. Then it was not to be Jack’s privilege to know when or where they took on gas or made other stops. With a smile of satisfaction he studied the effects of the drug on its victim.

“Too bad, Jack,” he muttered. “If you were only one who could be accepted in confidence.”

Still grinning ogreishly, Stanley turned on his heel and walked away.

19. A Delicate Operation

DAYLIGHT BROKE over a strange country. Jack, ignorant of his surroundings, regained consciousness by being thrown from his bunk. Fully dressed, Stanley stood in the passageway of the plane watching him. The landing gear was bumping over a rough surface as the big ship taxied up under an overhanging cliff, leaving the sun to disappear from view as it came to an abrupt stop in the deep shadows.

“Here we are,” Stanley called out good-naturedly, coming towards him. “Get on your glad rags and make it snappy. I’ll take your luggage. You can follow me.”

James Mudd, wearing a mischievous grin, came forward to lend a hand.

“What’s the verdict, Mudd?” Stanley asked.

“Still the same,” he replied.

“Otherwise, OK?”

“Yes, apparently.”

“That’s fine! Here, take Jack’s grip and give it to Pansy. We’ll get busy right away,” said Stanley, handing over the bag.

Jack, weaving around in an effort to get his bearings, came to the cabin door of the plane half dressed. The fresh mountain air seemed to revive him somewhat.

“Better put on your tuxedo,” Mudd greeted him.

Jack’s face was a study of amazement, as he tried to comprehend Mudd’s connection with the set up.

“Where are we? What are you doing here?” he managed to ask.

“Oh, you’ll be surprised,” Mudd grinned, watching Jack struggle with his mental equilibrium.

Stanley impatiently crowded Mudd to one side and took Jack back to his cabin to find the missing articles of clothing, which he helped him don.

“Where is Doris?” Jack asked.

Stanley only shrugged his shoulders and crowded him towards the door.

“What’s this all about?” Jack demanded, coming to himself.

Again Stanley ignored the question on a pretense of being unable to hear, due to the noise that Keno was making in getting the luggage out.

“I want to know more about this!” Jack emphasized, impatiently, bracing himself in the doorway. “Where is Miss Wheaton? You claim to know so much about her whereabouts.”

“Go on in, Jack; don’t stand here and argue. You’ll get the low-down soon enough, once you’re inside.”

Jack, now fully clothed, followed Stanley from the ship and was ushered into a long, narrow passageway leading to a higher elevation. Keno stayed at the plane, unloading numerous packages of all kinds, sizes and descriptions. At the end of the incline they came to an old iron-covered door which opened as they approached.

Once inside, Jack found they were in a rudely-constructed, cave-like building, electrically lighted with the current being generated direct. Walking down the tunnel, they were shown to a rock-like room by a woman, unseemly and coarse in appearance.

“Pansy,” said Stanley, addressing her, “this is Doctor Thrillby—hereafter to be known to you only as Jack. He is a qualified surgeon, capable of all our medical needs— I hope. While he is getting his things together, you are to prepare the patient to receive him.”

She disappeared mechanically, while Jack, dumb founded, tried to frame a question suitable to the occasion.

“Collect yourself, Jack. You’re among friends. Miss Wheaton is here also, but—but injured severely. You’ll be taken to her as soon as you gain your normal composure. I realize that this has been a severe shock to you, but there was no other way it could be done and consider everybody’s safety. I’m going to leave you now, locked in this room. When you are sure that you are master of yourself and have the confidence that it will be safe to trust Miss Wheaton’s life to your medical skill, you may call me. A rap at the door will be sufficient.”

“Please, let me” Jack pleaded, when Stanley interrupted.

“No, Jack,” he said, quietly; “no questions now. You need to be alone for a while to collect your thoughts. You must assure yourself that we are to be trusted, and that you can trust yourself in Miss Wheaton’s presence.”

Silently, he stepped out and closed the door, leaving Jack alone, a prisoner with his own thoughts. Back and forth he paced, analyzing the strange turn of events. Although he had heard the key click, he could not

resist the temptation to step over and try the door. It was locked. Looking about the place he saw that there were no windows, but the light, such as it was, came through a crevice in the rocks above him. He could hear a conversation carried on in the outer passageway, but otherwise he was alone. Trembling with anxiety, he walked over to an old mirror and stood thinking. Before him stood Dr. John Thrillby—a lifelike reflection.

“Thinking of himself,” he said under his breath; “a doctor thinking of his own welfare when some where nearby was—was one needing his services. Injured, dying perhaps Doris!”

He repeated her name as though looking beyond the mirror. He saw himself no longer. His thoughts were on her immediate welfare. His mind was visualizing the one for whom he came to sacrifice his life, if need be. Pictured in his mind, he saw her lying on the cold rocks in agony. He must believe Stanley; she was some place near. Unquestionably, it was a fact—altogether too true.

With firm steps he walked over to the door where he had entered and knocked.

A voice responded from the other side.

“This way, Jack.” It was Keno who called.

“Where’s Stanley?” Jack asked.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, if you are the one to take me to Miss Wheaton.”

“All right, doctor; this way then,” Keno invited, stepping aside to let him pass, as he opened the door.

Jack stepped through, and meekly followed Keno as he led him down a passageway to a large, cave-like room, dimly lighted. On a crude table was his own surgical kit, placed alongside of a new case of assorted instruments and medical supplies, such as any doctor might feel proud to own.

Jack scrutinized them skeptically with a feeling that they might have been stolen.

Pointing to the other end of the room which was screened off, Keno advised him that his patient could be found there.

“Her life is now in your hands,” he cautioned. “Stanley insisted that you be brought here, and here you are. The rest is up to you. Unfortunate circumstances, all of them. She fell from the plane as we were landing—a fractured skull—a broken leg—a bad, bad mess all round,” Keno lamented.

“If you can do any thing to save her, for God’s sake do it. You’ll never know just how much it means.”

With a professional air, showing that he was now completely the master of himself, Jack stepped around the screen and approached the cot where Doris lay. He did not hear Keno call after him that if there was anything that he wanted, Pansy would get it for him. His one thought was his patient and her needs.

As he approached the cot on which his patient was lying, Pansy rose without the formality of a greeting, and adjusted the lights so that he could see more clearly.

One look was all that was necessary to tell him that the wealth of golden-brown hair on the pillow be longed to the kidnapped victim for whom frantic search was being made.

Yes, it was Doris, recognizable through scratched, bruised and distorted features. He would know that head of hair anywhere. His heart swelled with pity as he surveyed her scratched hands and face, and the great welts of surface bruises, evidently resulting from a recent fall.

Throwing off his coat, he bared his arms to the elbow and set to work examining every injury in detail.

“Unconscious from a fractured skull,” he mumbled, as he completed his diagnosis, shaking his head in doubt.

“Do I understand that there is a broken limb also?” he inquired of Pansy.

“Yes, the right one at the ankle. I set it myself and bound it the best I could,” she informed him, throwing back the cover to expose the injured foot.

A careful examination disclosed that the break had been a clean one. Fortunately, the fibula was the only bone broken at a point four inches above the ankle joint. Thanks to Pansy’s amateur skill, the injured limb was not swollen as badly as one would naturally expect.

With little effort Jack broke the bone over again and reset it, so the foot would be straight. He was given a note of encouragement by the low moans of pain that escaped the patient’s lips. The skull fracture was evidently not so bad as to render her unconscious to pain. With a few splints that he had with him and those which he had Reno fashion from an orange crate, he dressed and rebound the injured limb.

Pansy seemed to sense the responsibility on Jack’s shoulders. Without any special orders, she made ready a kettle of boiling water to sterilize the

instruments that would be required in the delicate operation that was to follow.

After carefully washing his hands and preparing himself for the ordeal which confronted him, he donned his white apron and rubber gloves, and after thoroughly sterilizing his own razor, he skillfully shaved the silken strands of golden-brown hair from the left side of Doris' head. Fortunately, he found the injury was well above the base of the brain. Apparently, the indentation had been caused by violent contact with a piece of sharp rock which caused the skull to press against the brain, thus causing unconsciousness. It encouraged him to find that there was no bleeding at the nose or ears, such as would indicate a cerebral hemorrhage, although that could not be definitely determined until an operation had been performed.

Unquestionably, Doris was in an extremely dangerous condition—no question about that. An operation was a vital necessity. So vital, in fact, that Jack did not feel that he was by actual experience equal to it. If he only had her in a hospital under the care of trained specialists, he might feel confident of her recovery.

Jack realized that he faced a grave situation. He had been told that the patient was entirely in his hands as far as responsibility for her care was concerned, but he did not feel that he should proceed without consulting Stanley and Keno, and advising them of the seriousness of the situation. At a summons from Pansy he met them at the far corner of the cavern, along with James Mudd and a stranger whom he had never seen before. Without mincing any words, he told them of the grave condition he believed Doris to be in, and advised taking her to some regularly equipped hospital for the operation.

“Do you know any other funny ones?” snapped the unidentified stranger, addressing Jack.

Indignation rose within, but Jack tried to keep his temper.

“This is not a matter to be joked about,” he said quietly; “this is serious. A competent surgeon should perform this operation. It is a case of life or death. It should be done immediately. I don't feel that I am equal to the responsibility. This young lady is entitled to the best professional services that we can secure.”

“Get this and get it straight,” said the unknown one, with a sarcastic sneer; “ye're a doctor, ain't yer? And yer know if an operation is necessary, don't yer?”

“Yes, I am advising an immediate operation,” said Jack, controlling himself and ignoring the slur.

“And we’re tellin’ yer that if the young lady needs an op’ration, ye’re the one that’s got to do it.”

“But”

“Yer ev’dently didn’t get me, did yer? Well, we’re calling no other doctor—fer ye or anybody else; an’ yer can get that straight. Ye’re a doctor of rep’tation. Yer came here vol’ntary fer the purpose of doct’ring this young lady, didn’t yer? Well, take our advice, an’ get busy,” said the evil-eyed stranger with a knowing gesture.

A million thoughts ran through Jack’s mind. He wanted to protest, but did not dare for fear of offense. He was helpless—a victim of circumstances, over which he had no control. Quite evidently he was a captive in the lair of the kidnap ring. Stanley and Keno and Mudd—it was easy to see the connection now. They were all on friendly terms with the unknown stranger, who from appearances had the authority of a leader.

“All of them kidnappers,” Jack reasoned, searching the faces of the group.

The mysterious connections that his atheistic friends had in such a vicious racket, he could not understand; nor did he attempt to at the time. He realized that diplomacy was his only recourse. To protest now was sheer folly. He would have to take time to think through a course of action. In the meantime he must be tactful.

As to the immediate duty confronting him, Doris’ welfare was the first thing to be considered. Her life was in the balance. It was not a time for selfish consideration of himself. Saving her life was the para mount object of his efforts. He must act immediately with all the skill that his limited capacity of surgical wisdom would permit.

Feeling that he was in sufficient control of himself to think and act with judgment, he turned to Stanley and quietly assured him that he was ready to proceed with the operation, providing he might rely on Pansy as an assistant.

“That’s the sensible way to approach this un pleasant matter, Jack,” said Stanley, sympathetically. “Circumstances alter cases sometimes, and this is one of them.”

“I am not holding any ill will; I realize the position this accident has put everyone in,” said Jack, referring to Doris and the complications in which

her accident had involved them.

Stanley's face reflected the feeling of approval he experienced at having Jack show the attitude he did. He fully understood the complications that might develop, and when he saw that Jack was offering no opposition, he was inwardly pleased and did not hesitate to show his gratitude.

"Anything that can be done to help in any way, Pansy and I will do," he said. "You can depend on that. This operation has got to be a success. You have got to save her life. We—we can't let anything like that happen. We would —"

"Be guilty of murder," Jack could not help whispering. "I understand perfectly, but there are other things to think about just now."

Stanley, white as a ghost, stood about biting his nails and shifting from one foot to the other, until Jack ordered him to arrange for more light. He disappeared at the word and in a few moments was back with an extension cord, a triple socket and three large bulbs.

"How will these do?" he inquired, making a connection some place outside the cave, and explaining as he did so that on account of the current being generated direct it might give some trouble."

"We will manage that all right," Jack informed him, at the same time ordering Keno and Stanley to carry the cot on which Doris lay out under the light. Then, as far as possible, he saw that every detail was taken care of. It was a terrible handicap to operate under such conditions, but it had to be done.

For a moment his heart beat with a feeling of tender pathos which heretofore he had not known. What a complicated state of affairs, he thought, as he stood looking down upon the pain-racked features of the one for whom practically the whole world was searching! Once again the impulse to cry to God for divine power to guide his hand through the ordeal overcame him; but he still contended that there is no God—no supreme power on which to rely—no source of power beyond—beyond himself; no one to depend upon for wisdom and guidance.

The thought of the tremendous responsibility that was upon him brought tears of hopelessness to his eyes —tears such as are mistaken often for sympathy. He was at the threshold of prayer with a hungry heart, yet he would not look up for comfort and divine strength. Faith must be applied only from within himself, he thought, and because he had no place to turn, his nerves were taut with a fear that he could not understand.

Jack was facing a new experience. He wondered if he was going to break and fail. He fought to master his emotions. He sought to hide behind the cloak of hypocrisy that he often employed under ordinary circumstances. But Doris! The pitiful sight humbled him.

“Death bidding for time,” he mumbled in fear. The curse that was ever mocking him—waiting to strike and remove the one he—. He could not bring himself to finish the thought. He was not worthy. His duty was to act—not think.

“Now if everyone but you two will leave, we will proceed,” he heard himself saying. “Pansy can help in giving the anesthetic and in sterilizing the necessary instruments. Stanley can just be around handy in case he is needed. Both of you can get washed up. Don’t be afraid to use plenty of antiseptic.”

With painstaking care he scrubbed and re-scrubbed his hands, as he continued with his instructions to Pansy and pointed out the instruments to be used. Then when everything was in order, he broke the cellophane on a new white apron and donned it, along with his rubber gloves, and after sterilizing them thoroughly, he made ready to proceed.

Like an automaton, he administered the anesthetic and performed the delicate operation of lifting the pressure of the fractured skull from the brain. Cool, mechanical, skillful, he worked, the perspiration running down his face which had to be wiped off continually by Pansy. With painstaking care he removed each broken piece of skull, until the exposed brain could be seen throbbing with the pulse or life.

It was evident that a silver plate was necessary at once. As though by television, the picture of a Columbia half-dollar that Grandmother Thrillby had given him flashed in his mind:

“Take it, my boy; part with it only in time of direst need,” his grandmother’s voice reminded him. “Trust in God and His goodness will never forsake thee.”

Jack hesitated only for a moment, as he told Stanley to secure the worn pocket piece from his coin purse and to thoroughly sterilize it. “This would surely meet with grandmother’s approval,” he thought, as he carefully cut away the edges of the skull to permit the seating of the coin.

With nervous impatience, Pansy and Stanley watched Jack polish, shape and fit the silver piece in the opening. Several times during the operation Doris gave evidence of returning to consciousness, but each time Jack

patiently administered additional anesthetic and re-sterilized the coin, and then continued the operation with great care.

At last, with the stars peeping through a crevice which answered for a window, Jack looked up into the heavens with a sigh of relief: the operation was completed. Trembling and exhausted, Jack stood at the head of the cot with evident satisfaction that his work was apparently successful. He checked every detail, even to the splints on Doris' broken ankle, and was happy in the thought that he had performed his duty to the best of his ability. His heart swelled with pride, and he was thankful, too; but he had no one to thank, for he still said: "There is no God."

20. Convalescence

FOR A WEEK following the operation, Jack scarcely left the bedside of his patient. Between Pansy and himself there was not a minute that one of them was not present, answering to Doris' needs. He worked, ate and slept with his boots on, so to speak. The little sleep he did get came only through the actual force of necessity, while sitting in a chair beside her cot or reclining on a couch at the far corner of the cavern, during which time Pansy assumed the role of nurse.

Jack could not help but notice that the medicines he prescribed came from drug stores located in different sections of the country. He studied the labels and addresses in Los Angeles, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and a small town in Arizona that he had never heard of before, in the hope that he could figure out where they were being held by the kidnapers.

That at least one aeroplane was making transcontinental trips to and from their home base was evident. Very few days passed that Jack did not hear a plane come and go. Sometimes he thought that there was more than one plane, but he could not be sure. He was thoroughly satisfied, though, that there was some sort of radio connection with the outside world, because some of his prescriptions were brought on an incoming plane that could not have possibly made the round trip in the short time that elapsed after they were ordered.

Information, however, as to their activities was sadly lacking. None of them talked about their plans in his presence. When he tried to question Pansy, she inoffensively advised him to be content and not to ask too many questions.

"What you don't know can't hurt you here, and it may be a whole lot of benefit to others," she informed him quietly, when he asked her outright what she knew about Doris' being kidnapped. Jack was chagrined but kept the disappointment to himself.

"I make it a point to do as I'm told and not to ask questions," she volunteered in an effort to appease him. "That would be my advice to you,

and not to look for trouble.”

After that Jack held his peace. He did not try to pry information from any of them. He sensed the logic of Pansy’s reasoning and set about trying to figure out, in his own way, something about the mysterious place where they were confined. He did not try to talk to Doris, or ask her any questions; for though she was conscious at times, yet she was not in any condition to stand excitement. As a safeguard against this, he felt it advisable to keep her under opiates for a few days. Her condition was extremely dangerous and any mental anguish or worry might defeat all possibilities of recovery.

He considered the situation from every point of view. He could not leave without Doris; that was evident. Absolute quiet was extremely essential to her welfare. It would be weeks and possibly months before she could be removed. To worry about their captivity was a useless waste of energy. Therefore he fought against any anxiety as much as possible. He reasoned that every opportunity to secure information which would enable them to escape must be employed with all the resources that he could safely command.

He was well aware that he was dealing with no ordinary bunch of racketeers. All of them were students of philosophy, and to match wits with them was no easy matter. It would take diplomacy and tact to keep himself above suspicion, even under the most congenial circumstances. Nevertheless, it was a gamble worth trying. It might work out more simply after Doris had recovered to the extent that he could take her into his confidence.

For the time being he would make the most of it. This was a new experience, and one that left him without the remotest idea of what the consequences would be. He analyzed it from every angle, but the more he thought about it the greater the enigma became. He had been betrayed by his closest friends, a fact that was still a conundrum and filled his whole being with indignation.

When his thoughts turned to Doris, he was moved with compassion. If it had to be, he was glad of the opportunity to minister to her in this time of need. But had it been possible, he would have much preferred to trust her welfare to a more skillful surgeon.

He had done the best he could, but somehow there seemed to be something lacking. Everything had depended and still depended on his own skill and judgment. The confidence that the normal soul receives through

faith in God was lacking. There was no comfort in a hope that did not exist; everything was material. There was no sense of the eternal God to direct his hand and mind into the channel of success. Faith, hope and divine guidance were meaningless words to his scientific philosophy.

To pacify his anxiety he had taken the liberty of roaming about the various runways, until cautioned by Pansy that for his own good he had better be more careful. He accepted his status— virtually that of a prisoner in a hideout among friends. Some of them were his former atheistic friends. But now he wondered!

On numerous occasions, when he heard the plane warming up to leave for a trip, he employed a lookout where he could check somewhat the activities of the outlaws. From the back of a chair he could view the surrounding territory through a large crevice at the end of the cavern; when he thought there was no danger of being discovered, he watched the arrival and departure of the plane. Still, that did not help much, for he could not figure out where they were located.

One moonlight evening, in the second week after the operation, he was standing on the chair watching for a ship to depart. Stanley, Keno and Mudd were making frequent trips to the plane in preparation for its departure, about which there seemed to be an air of mystery that he somehow could not quite figure out. As he looked, he was horrified to see Stanley and a man whom he had seen occasionally carry a seven or eight year-old boy out to the plane. He was bound and gagged, and apparently was taken from another cavern entrance, which up to that time he knew nothing about. When loaded, Keno and Mudd took charge of the plane and its human cargo, and disappeared into the night.

“Another kidnapped victim,” Jack groaned, gritting his teeth. “A regular, commercial racket, dealing in human cargo for a price upon each head!”

Between caring for Doris and watching the movements of her abductors, Jack was occupied much of the time. Plan after plan for effecting an escape surged through his mind; but try as he would none could be found that suited him, or even gave him the courage to hope for deliverance. He tried to convince himself that grandmother’s old adage: “Patience is a virtue that hath its reward” would afford some possibility, but he found no comfort in it. It was the first time in his life that he was actually at the mercy of others — the one time when he was in a position where he could not help himself.

While in one of his deepest moods of despondency, he was aroused from his thoughts by Pansy's tap at the door. He had not slept all night; he could not bring himself to surrender to sleep. Doris was not getting along as well as he thought she ought. Grave doubts, prompted by fear and worry, kept his mind in a whirl, very nerve was at a tension, approaching the breaking point, for lack of exercise and something to keep his mind off his troubles.

"What is it, Pansy?" he asked, opening the door.

"Come with me and keep still," she pleaded under her breath. "They would kill me if they knew, but—but I can't help it; I can't see her die."

Jack followed, trying to crowd past as they approached Doris' door.

"No, no! Not there," Pansy panted. "She's all right. This way; follow me."

Leading him through a winding passageway to a portion of the cave-like structure which he had not seen before, she stopped at a door where a light shone through the crudely constructed masonry.

Jack hesitated, fearing that it was a ruse to get him away from Doris, which would leave her to the evil and unscrupulous devices of her heartless abductors.

"It's all right," Pansy said, sensing the doubt in his mind; "she needs a doctor." Opening the door with one of the many keys she carried, she motioned him to enter.

Still Jack hesitated, as he heard the exhausted sobs of a small child from within.

Pansy went in and knelt down on the floor beside a cot.

"Go away! I want my mamma! Mamma! Mamma!" wailed the child in her misery and fear.

Convinced that it was not another plot to trap him, Jack followed Pansy to the bedside of the little girl, who was sobbing in convulsions of grief as though her heart would break.

"What is it, sweetheart?" Jack asked tenderly, kneeling at her side and stroking her golden curls.

At the sound of a strange voice, the little girl raised her head from the pillow, wet with tears. Grief, misery and fear were written in lines of distress on her features. Jack was touched to the quick. For a moment she studied his face, watching the tears in his eyes which Jack could not suppress. Somehow there was a mutual understanding between them. Her

childish instinct told her that she had found a new friend. Shyly she crept over and threw her arms around his neck and sobbed anew.

Pansy turned away, with her face in her apron, shaking with emotion that she was not able to control.

“T—t—take m—me to my m—mamma!” the child cried piteously.

Like a big brother, Jack wept with the child, so that his voice broke in trying to comfort her. His betrayal of feeling was a ray of hope for the child. She sensed in it a friend to be trusted. Weak and exhausted, she clung to him, sobbing out the pitiful story of being snatched from play and taken from those whom she knew and loved.

Realizing that it was not good to let the child dwell on her troubles, Jack turned and addressed Pansy.

“This little lady looks undernourished. Hasn’t she been eating well?” he asked.

“That’s what is worrying me. I brought you here because we haven’t been able to get her to eat. She has scarcely touched anything for a week. I thought you might prescribe something for her appetite. It gets on my nerves to see her pining away. I— I just couldn’t stand by and watch her die,” Pansy blurted out, looking about to see if anyone was listening.

“I can appreciate just how you feel,” Jack replied, sympathetically. “Something has got to be done. This child is so weak she can hardly stand. It’s an outrage! No one would treat a dumb animal in this way. I—, well, leave it to me; we’ll see about her eating from now on.”

“I couldn’t stand it,” said Pansy, hesitatingly. “They—they told me to let her alone and she would eat when she got hungry enough. But— but they don’t know how bad she is.”

“That’s all right, Pansy; don’t worry about them. The child is sick, deathly sick. You can’t be blamed for calling me when you discovered her condition. It was the right thing to do. You realized that she needed medical attention and did not have time to explain,” Jack volunteered, coaching Pansy with an excuse. “It’s mighty lucky you called me when you did— more urgent than you think.”

“Oh!”

“I’ll take her back to Doris’ room and prepare some thing for her right away. We can’t let her go into convulsions; it might be too late, then,” said Jack, wrap ping a blanket around the child who was quietly resting on his shoulder.

Wringing her hands in despair, Pansy followed Jack, as he boldly carried the girl to the room where Doris lay.

“We’ll have a regular hospital here if this keeps up,” said Jack, picking up a spoon to give the girl some medicine that he had prepared.

“Oh, but I wish they — ,” said Pansy, stopping abruptly without expressing the thought that troubled her.

“Now, now, Pansy, don’t cross any bridges before you come to them,” said Jack, forcing a smile. “You can’t be in any worse predicament than the other three of us here,” indicating Doris and her unfortunate, newly-acquired friend, now nearly asleep on his shoulder.

“Oh, if you only knew!—they will kill me if —”

“Nonsense,” Jack cut in with an air of bravery; “don’t think about it. None of us is dead yet. We are worth more alive than dead at any time—in this kind of a racket, anyway. Why worry?”

Pansy was forced to smile at his humorous philosophy in spite of her fear.

“Just run along and get this child some bread and milk, and everything will work out fine,” he instructed her.

“I want my mamma,” said the child, talking in her sleep.

“You dear little sweetheart,” cooed Jack, petting her gently. “If I could only put you in your mamma’s arms tonight, it would be the joy of my life. Poor girl! How can they be so cruel? Heartless— Keno, Stanley—all of you,” he mumbled under his breath.

Pansy came back soon, bringing a tray of milk, bread, bowls and spoons.

“I thought that maybe if you ate with her she might be more apt to take some nourishment,” she suggested.

“Not a bad idea at all. I’ll pretend that I’m a boy again, back on grandmother’s farm,” Jack remarked by way of keeping up interest. “Now for some good old-fashioned bread and milk, little sister. What do you say?”

Pansy poured the milk, and arranged the bowls selected from an antique pottery assortment, kept for general purposes, and placed them on a tray which she used in serving Doris.

Jack seated himself on a bench, and with a smile of satisfaction at the success of his venture, he started to feed the half-starved victim. The little girl eagerly consumed the first bowl full and reached for more. By pretending that he was hungry, too, Jack gobbled an occasional spoonful

away from the famished child, and soon had her laughing in childish glee, forgetting that she had any troubles at all.

With her face wreathed in smiles, Pansy watched a wonderful change take place—a change which by her methods of persuasion she had been unable to accomplish. In the midst of the second bowl full, the child stopped abruptly and fixed her gaze on the cot in the corner where Doris was lying.

Attracted by her evident interest, Jack and Pansy looked in that direction to find that Doris had returned to consciousness. The effect of the opiates had worn off, and she was apparently normal. With an expression of wonder on her face, she was leaning upon one elbow, watching the unusual performance before her.

Jack sprang to his feet and hurried over to her bed side, carrying the child with him.

“You must not exert yourself; you will have to be very quiet,” he said to her, earnestly.

“Why? What has happened? I— I don’t understand. Where am I? How did I get here?” Doris asked in a puzzled tone.

“Now, now, just keep real quiet; you should not try to talk,” Jack counseled with a smile. “You were seriously hurt, a delicate operation was necessary, and it might prove dangerous if you exert yourself too much. Your speedy recovery is the most important thing now, so it is necessary that you keep extremely quiet.”

“Oh,” she said, “I remember now.”

“Yes,” said Jack, assuming a professional air; “no doubt there are a lot of questions you would like to ask, but they would only excite you and interfere with your recovery. That cannot be permitted for some time yet—talking, you know. I don’t want to have to keep you under opiates, if it is not absolutely necessary. It’s up to you to be a good young lady and obey the doctor’s orders.”

“I will do my very best,” she agreed, meekly.

“And if you will do that, I’m sure that everything will work out fine in a few days,” he said, seriously. “Then when I find that you have been real good and there is no longer danger of relapse, I’ll explain things from time to time as your strength permits. In the meantime you will have to be patient in the belief that everything will be all right. Do you think that you can be trusted to do that?”

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusted in thee,” she quoted, radiating a smile. “I will trust and not be afraid.”

“Then everything will be fine, I’m sure,” Jack replied; “I shall depend on it.”

“Except for one question,” she interrupted, tenderly eying the child in his arms; “I am wondering about the little girl. She is so sweet, I cannot help but ask who she is and how she comes to be here?”

“And would you tell the sick lady that you love her, and hope to see her well and strong soon,” Jack whispered, prompting the child.

“I love you,” said the little five-year-old, showing the evidence of mutual understanding.

“And I know that I’m going to love you, too,” smiled Doris. “Won’t you put her over here beside me?” she asked; “she’ll be quiet, I’m sure.”

“For just a few minutes,” Jack consented, placing the child on the cot by her side. “No questions, though; you will both have to be very, very quiet.”

Questions were not necessary. The child was hungry for attention and seemed to know by instinct that she had found another friend. Drawing the little girl to her, Doris kissed her tenderly and was rewarded with a return of affection that brought tears of joy to the two looking on.

“Shirley loves you,” the little girl prattled. “Poor sick lady— like grandma—so sick. Shirley’s so sorry.”

“What a pretty name,” said Doris. “I always liked the name Shirley for a little golden-haired girl.”

“Shirley and Doris are both pretty names. You two are going to be great friends, I’m sure,” Jack prophesied.

“I like Dorrie, too. My Auntie’s name is Dorrie. You’ll be my Auntie Dorrie. I love Auntie Dorrie,” chattered Shirley, with childish enthusiasm.

“Now, now,” said Jack, shaking his finger, “you and Auntie Dorrie must be good or Doctor Jack will have to separate you. Auntie Dorrie is so very sick. She can’t have much excitement—too much talking, you know.”

“Shirley’ll be good; Shirley won’t talk any more to Auntie Dorrie now,” and she quickly cuddled down beside Doris and lay still.

“That’s right,” said Jack. “I will dim the light, and if I find that you are a good little girl maybe I can let you sleep with Auntie Dorrie; but you will have to be awful, awful quiet.”

Doris reached over and gently patted the head of curls, humming a childish lullaby, as Jack and Pansy withdrew. In the course of half an hour both were asleep.

In anticipation of what might occur when Stanley and Keno discovered what had happened, Jack advised Pansy to go back to Shirley's quarters and tell them of the child's need of medical attention.

Pansy got up and went as far as the door, but stood reluctant to enter; evidently trying to formulate a plan of some kind to meet the avalanche of abuse that she felt was sure to follow.

"Never mind, Pansy; it'll be all right," Jack consoled, noticing her perplexity. "Just call me when Keno and Stanley get up. I'll take all the responsibility."

A look of determination showed itself in Pansy's face as she disappeared.

"I wonder what will happen next?" muttered Jack.

21. Master for a Moment

WHEN STANLEY DISCOVERED that one of the kidnap victims had been removed from assigned quarters without his permission, his rage knew no bounds. Jack heard the commotion and rushed down the corridor to protect Pansy. He knew that Shirley's removal from her quarters was responsible for the trouble.

"Go ahead, kill me if you want to!" Pansy's shrill voice echoed down the hallway. "Kill me! Kill every body here! Go ahead! Kill everybody but yourself, and then maybe you'll be happy. Go ahead! You can be a real dictator then. You cowardly communist!"

"Shut up!" Stanley thundered, his eyes bloodshot with rage, as he made a vicious lunge at Pansy's throat, backing her into the corner.

Pansy kicked and fought with all the ferocity of a wild animal at bay, trying to free herself from the demon-possessed outlaw who was clawing at her throat in an ungovernable rage.

"L— L— Let me go!" Pansy gasped.

Jack's first impulse was to hit Stanley with some thing. But surveying the cavern he realized there was nothing there that would answer for a weapon. Still he drew nearer to the scene of the conflict.

"Oh!" gurgled Pansy, kicking frantically.

Without further thought of his own physical welfare or the consequences that might develop, Jack grabbed Stanley with a hammer-lock grip around the neck, choking him down. Stanley fell on his knees, throwing Jack over his shoulder and breaking his hold. In the mad scramble that followed Pansy dodged out of the corner, leaving Jack in her place. Stanley, with a grip of iron, pinioned Jack's arms to his sides and backed him against the rocky wall. He glared with rage at his helpless prey.

"Stanley, you villain! Why give way to such temper?" Jack demanded, holding his gaze.

"What!" the mad man exclaimed, enraged the more to think that Jack dare question his authority.

“Stanley, you’re crazy! Only a fool would let his passion govern him under such circumstances. What will Mudd and Hawkeye think of one who gives way to such a weakness?”

“What?” Stanley repeated, shaking with rage.

“Yes, I mean it! What will they think of their bold and daring kidnapper, unfaithful to the other members of the gang because of an ungovernable temper—a temper so vicious that it even renders its owner incapable of being trusted with responsibility.”

“Why you—you —!” Stanley gasped between his clenched teeth, releasing his hold on Jack’s arm to make a mad lunge at his throat.

Waiting for Stanley to give him such an opening, Jack was ready to turn the tables in a muscle-breaking hold of jujitsu.

“Now I want to talk to you!” Jack demanded, as he held Stanley helplessly teetering on his tiptoes. “You are at my mercy now and there are a lot of things that I want to talk to you about,” Jack continued. “Are you ready to listen to reason? If so, all you have to do is to stand still and you won’t get hurt.”

Stanley realized that he was in Jack’s power and settled back with his feet on the ground, as Jack eased up his hold. His fit of temper had left him. His thoughts now were centered upon his own physical comfort.

“To begin with, Pansy is not to blame for Shirley being taken from her room. I’ll take that responsibility,” Jack quietly informed him. “I did it to keep someone from being charged with murder. I have been inveigled into this kidnapping ring through my poor judgment, but if I should stand back and watch one of our victims starve to death, then I would be as much to blame as any member of the gang. If I am to take the responsibility of being classed as a member of this lawless outfit, I am going to exercise some common sense in order to keep from facing a murder charge.”

Stanley, completely subdued, grunted an agreement.

“Now you can go,” Jack said, releasing his hold. “I can’t stand here forever and regulate your temper by jujitsu. If you insist on making a fool of yourself, there is no way that I know of to keep you from doing it. I know I’ll be at your mercy as soon as you join the other members of your gang; so go now and get your revenge, if you think that you can sell them on your idea of bullying your way through in a fit of temper.”

“Maybe I was a bit hasty, but she disobeyed orders,” Stanley mumbled.

“Don’t blame Pansy for what I did to save your neck. She is not to blame for anything. I’ll take the responsibility for trying to keep you from becoming another Hauptmann,” Jack stated clearly.

Stanley winced visibly.

“Perhaps we had better have an understanding with Hawkeye, Keno and the rest of the gang,” suggested Jack. “Let’s have it over with. I’m perfectly willing to go and meet them now for a showdown. Keno will be particularly interested in learning how delicately you man-handled his wife, Pansy. Even a hard-boiled husband can become concerned sometimes under such circumstances.”

“No, no, no!” whimpered Stanley, becoming concerned; “anything but that.”

“What about Mrs. Holcomb, then?” ventured Jack, emphasizing Pansy’s connection with the outlaws.

“Stop her! Don’t let her talk. Tell her not to say anything. She won’t, if you ask her,” he pleaded; “I know she won’t.”

“Maybe, under one condition!”

“What’s that?”

“That we have an understanding with Keno, Mudd and Hawkeye about this kidnapping racket,” Jack demanded. “No need to mention what happened just now between you and Pansy, if you would prefer to keep that secret.”

“I don’t understand —”

“Yes, you do! You know very well what led to the trouble just now. You know, too, that conditions can’t go on as they are here, or all of us will be dodging a murder charge. There’s got to be an understanding somehow,” Jack explained seriously.

“Suits me then, if Pansy’ll agree. You can do the talking. I’m not looking for any more trouble,” Stanley informed him, sheepishly.

“All I want is to be left alone. I’m not looking for trouble, either. Keep your hands off and I’ll keep quiet; that’s all I ask,” said Pansy, who up to this moment had been a silent listener.

“All right then, Mrs. Holcomb,” said Jack; “sup pose you go back and take care of the patients, while Stanley and I brave the lions in their den.”

Without waiting for a reply, the two men went down the runway to another cave-like room which Stanley pointed out. Jack knocked as

instructed and the door opened mechanically, bringing them face to face with a wizened Japanese cook.

“Tell Keno that we would like to see him at head quarters right away,” Stanley instructed.

The Jap grunted and motioned them to follow him, as he inserted a key in another door and conducted them one at a time through a small, mine-like tunnel to a larger opening, where they were told to wait until he returned. Jack barely had time to look the place over before the Jap reappeared at another entrance in the far side of the room and beckoned for them to enter. Here they were confronted by another door which admitted them to the most conspicuous quarters that Jack had yet seen in the dark, dingy, unsanitary, mined-out cave.

Seated around the table, idly whiling away their time, sat Keno, Hawkeye and James Mudd in a game of Black Jack. Dirty dishes left from breakfast, reminding Jack that he had not eaten yet that morning, were piled on a tray on one of the other tables.

Keno got up and came over as they entered.

“What’s the matter now?” he inquired, addressing Stanley.

“The brat’s sick; Jack’ll explain,” was the surly reply.

Hawkeye and Mudd got up and joined them, but before they had an opportunity to ask any questions, Jack emphasized so many reasons for the need of better care and medical attention for both his patients that none of the three seemed to question his logic.

Jack drew such a vivid picture of the child slowly starving to death that they actually, much to his surprise, expressed themselves in tones of sympathy as being in accord with a change of conditions.

“What do you advise, within the possibility of its being granted?” Keno inquired.

“Plenty of sunshine and fresh air,” Jack replied with professional seriousness.

“Huh!” grunted Hawkeye.

Ignoring him, Jack briefly outlined a program emphasizing the need of better sanitary conditions and much needed exercise for each of his patients. He suggested further that the child should be left in Doris’ company until she was out of danger. A recital of how he had induced the child to eat and the value of a carefully prepared diet for her seemed to impress them that he

was not trying to exaggerate her condition in order to gain some ulterior advantage.

The fact that Jack had not asked that the child be released immediately to her people created a favorable impression on all of them. Even Hawkeye had an expression of interest in his heartless eyes.

In a play for their confidence and good will, Jack ventured indifferently. "It's strictly up to you. You know best how it can be done. I'll let you work it out in your own way. I can do no more than present the facts. For that reason I took the liberty of asking Stanley to bring me down here, so there would be no misunderstanding."

"That depends, of course, upon circumstances; they will determine the possibilities," Keno was careful to emphasize.

"You're right there," Stanley agreed.

"Yer bet ye're right, and yer sure got me fer 'bout believin' that the Doc is all right, too. I'm fer takin' 'em to the roof garden," said Hawkeye with a chuckle.

"Cut out the comedy," Mudd ordered impatiently.

"One place here is as safe as another. I don't see why they can't be given more liberty, just as Doc here recommends," Keno agreed with a knowing grin.

"I don't see any objections either," Mudd cut in, "but I want a businesslike understanding on it."

"Then if it is all right for me to make the arrangements, I will go ahead now and get breakfast, and then take care of the transfer afterwards," replied Jack.

"Yer go ahead, Doc. It's all right," Hawkeye made the decision. "I'll go on up to the turret and relieve the Weasel."

Stanley and Jack got up to leave.

"Don't be in a hurry; just wait," said Keno. "I'll call the cook. You can have your breakfast here. I want another cup of coffee, anyway; and while you are eating we may as well go over the plan of establishing Jack's connection with us as a permanent member. Sit down!"

"Jack would appreciate an understanding I know. For one I am satisfied that he can be trusted. I've been thinking about it for a long time," he continued. "You know we're in the kidnapping racket. You also know that you are as deep in the mire as we are. If you don't, you certainly should."

“I have been aware of that for a long time,” Jack replied in a businesslike way. “I know that if the law was to swoop down on us right now I would have a hard time explaining how I happened to be here among old friends.”

“And why you disappeared so mysteriously,” laughed Stanley. “Captain Nelson is wondering about that yet, I suppose.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders to keep from showing his emotion.

Ill at ease, the outlaws looked around uncomfortably, leaving Mudd to break the silence.

“That’s just it,” he said; “Stanley here has insisted all along that you could be depended upon. But Hawkeye, because he did not know you, was—well, shall I say, naturally doubtful. I am glad, though, that today he has shown a disposition to trust you. We told him that you could not get away with anything with out putting your neck in the noose.. Now he is satisfied, I guess.”

“Mudd has the right idea. It’s a case where we may as well hang together as separately,” Keno said, jocularly.

“Or continue to stick together and not hang at all,” Mudd commented.

“It’s a case of having a perfect understanding and that’s all there is to it. As long as we stick to original plans there isn’t a chance of hitting the hot spot,” continued Keno, referring to the electric chair.

“Jack will have a better appreciation of that fact when he gets up on the cliff,” Hawkeye commented.

“But still you are to consider yourself as a prisoner,” Stanley explained. “A sort of trusty under orders, until you prove that you are to be trusted implicitly to the satisfaction of everyone concerned,” he added with emphasis.

During breakfast a general understanding was agreed upon. The only concession Jack realized, however, was a little more liberty. As to future plans concerning the activities of the kidnapping ring, he was as much in the dark as ever. He did not know any more about them than when he first came. Frankly, he was in more of a dilemma than ever; but he dared not ask too many questions. To do so would be suicide. Hawkeye’s cold, steel-grey eyes told him that.

Seething with impatience, Jack rose and suggested that they find out how the patients were faring.

“Show him the way,” said Keno, addressing Mudd. “Stanley and I will go up on the cliff and make the necessary arrangements; then we’ll meet you back here when things are ready.”

Pansy was waiting for them at the entrance when Jack and his guide arrived in front of Doris’ cave. Her face wreathed in smiles, she welcomed them in, and wanted to know if it were really true that they were to be moved to a pleasanter place right away. When informed that such were the plans, she could hardly constrain herself, her joy was so great.

For a time that morning things took on a brighter aspect. Jack’s heart was lighter—almost happy—but for the dismal surroundings. He decided to make the best of the unpleasant situation.

He removed the three days’ growth of beard that he had not had the heart to shave off, because of the hopeless situation. He had visualized himself as a caged animal, and more than ever he could sympathize with those under similar circumstances.

“Liberty is a prize that’s not appreciated until taken away,” he now realized. “Whether animal, prisoner or kidnap victim, liberty was the most coveted and precious state capable of being conceived.”

22. New Quarters

THE REMOVAL OF THE KIDNAPPED PATIENTS to the upper quarters was made without any difficulty. Jack had been worried as to how Doris was to be moved; but when Pansy told him that she was to be transferred on her cot just as she was, he was quite relieved. He scarcely had time to drop an encouraging word to Shirley and Doris before they were moving down the mine tunnel to a makeshift elevator, the existence of which was unknown to him. It was one evidently used in mining operations, or for the transportation of freight, and was large enough to accommodate the cot on which Doris rested without any difficulty.

The compartment on the top of the cliff, assigned to the two patients, was formed by making a wall of broken pieces of lava, so as to enclose a court about fifteen feet square. Though crudely constructed, the place was much more pleasant than the dingy, dark quarters which they had occupied. The top of the court itself was covered with a dense growth of vines running over a lattice work through which the sun light shimmered, casting a pattern of changing shadows on the floor beneath.

Concealed at one end was a peculiar porthole window, from which a strange mountain scene was visible. From a study of the surroundings, Jack came to the conclusion that they were in a stone enclosure on the top of some cliff.

The afternoon was spent in getting the new quarters in order and taking care of the needs of the two patients. Doris was exceptionally cheerful in spite of her lack of information concerning the events that had happened at the time she was taken prisoner. Jack was aware of the nervous strain she was under, and so voluntarily told her briefly how she happened to be there. Just where they really were he did not know and could not explain.

What puzzled him most was the fact that she was so patient. When he explained in detail the seriousness of the operation she had undergone and the very remarkable recovery that was so evident, she simply murmured a prayer of thanksgiving, expressing her appreciation. The questions he

naturally expected her to ask were not mentioned and this troubled him. He did not understand how she could endure the suspense. He had never treated a patient that followed instructions as explicitly as Doris did, but he was worried about her mental condition; and yet he dared not bring up any subject that would test her memory. For her to forget was a blessing.

Shirley, too, was a problem. Her welfare had to be considered. Her mind had to be kept off of herself as much as possible. Everyone tried to entertain her, in order to keep her from homesickness; nevertheless, her care was a responsibility that was trying. Jack's heart melted with sincere pity every time he saw her little lips quiver at some recollection of the dear ones from whom she had been so cruelly snatched. Every tear that blanched her cheek cut him to the quick. How it was possible for Doris to recuperate under such conditions was a marvel to him.

Jack was just finishing his dinner when Keno called him.

"What new trouble is brewing now?" he wondered, as he joined him in the runway.

"Come with me," insisted Keno. "I've just been talking with Hawkeye and the Weasel about your qualifications. Weasel wants to meet you and see how you measure up to required standards for our little game here."

"All right, let's go then," said Jack, glad of an opportunity to look the place over.

Ascending a winding pathway of steps at the end of the passage, they came out on a small plateau scarcely large enough to accommodate the small turret assembled there. Taking Jack to the top platform, Keno introduced him to the mysterious fifth male member of the gang, whom he had heard about but had never met.

"Well named," was Jack's unexpressed version, meeting the repulsive gaze of a pair of weasel eyes that he would never forget.

Little jet-black orbs that stood out like buttons on an ermine robe identified the Weasel. The lack of eyebrows or lashes gave him the appearance of being a visitor from some strange planet. Jack was certain he had never met a person who was so repulsive.

Jack regained his composure, however, following the introduction by enthusiastically gazing at the scenery. Apologizing for his weakness for mountain scenery he took the jelly-like hand which the Weasel extended.

"I never tire of such sights," said Jack, evasively, studying the scenery. "A great place to accomplish things."

“Right after my own heart,” squeaked the Weasel in a high-pitched, conceited voice.

“Wonderful view from here,” mused Jack.

“The right spot for our purposes. None better! And I’m sure glad to meet you, Doctor, and talk things over. This is a great base of operation. The things in life that you would like to see accomplished should be easy here.”

“It looks like the land of opportunity, all right,” said Jack, leading him on.

“Look!” said the outlaw, waving his arms wildly in a half circle about him. “Look at that! Could there be anything better? No, it’s the best in creation—unapproachable from any angle, except the air. The air, understand! The air! We are safe here, man! Safe! When the fact really sinks in, you will agree that this spot can’t be beat,” he rambled, striking his chest.

Jack’s gaze fell upon the inside crater of a volcano, long since extinct, which was some quarter of a mile in width and half a mile long. For the first time it was exposed to his full view. Things were now becoming plainer. He realized that they were inside an old volcano cone—two of them in fact—for apparently there was a canyon running crosswise which divided the crater, while the shell otherwise formed a natural barrier several hundred feet high all the way around. Descending from the crater floor, the canyon resembled a huge crack all of a hundred feet deep extending from one crater wall to the former pass. In the places where he could see the bottom there appeared to be water. That puzzled him. Jack did not take time to try to figure out the natural phenomena. That was a mystery which would have to wait.

He was more interested in a window in a wall that faced up the entrance to one of the caves. This spoke of human ingenuity. He could understand how the queerly constructed cave-like tunnels became possible. An old prospector in digging out the volcanic structures in search of gold was responsible for their existence, and by using the waste material that he dug out to face up each entrance, the tunnels he created became numerous cave-like rooms extending back into the outer cone shell. The window that Jack saw was in one of them.

Aside from the material evidence of the old prospector’s work, the crumbling remains of the last abode of an extinct family of cliff dwellers were still distinguishable on a ledge of rock above. Scattered promiscuously

along and backed up against the outer cone wall, many of them were in a fair state of preservation. There must have been quite a colony living there, Jack thought, as he turned his attention to the crater floor, where down through the center a reasonably smooth flat surface of volcanic rock answered for a runway on which the plane landed.

“We are in a huge twin bowl with perpendicular sides and a deep canyon reaching across the bottom like a dividing line,” Jack mumbled audibly, trying to frame a suitable description to the place. “I wonder what it is like beyond the canyon in the other half of the bowl!”

“Well, well, what do you think of it now that you have had a chance to get the perspective?” enthusiastically inquired the Weasel, rubbing his hands and watching Jack’s facial expression. “What do you think of it? What do you think of it?”

“Looks like a regular fortification, but what I don’t understand is how the cliff dwellers got in and out of here, since you say the only approach is by air,”

Jack replied doubtfully, leading for information.

“That’s it; there’s no way of escape except by air, if that’s what you are thinking of,” the Weasel grinned, nervously rubbing his hands in apparent satisfaction. “Do you see that pile of rock over there in the outer cone wall, at the right of the canyon? There are hundreds of tons of blasted rock which fills the only accessible passageway that once led to the world outside. An earthquake may have caused the opening in the first place, but the eccentric old prospector put an end to the exit, in one of his fits of insanity, by closing it entirely.”

“That was all right in the days of the cliff dwellers, but we’re living in a different age now. Even with the pass filled up it doesn’t look like the perfect place for the perfect crime,” said Jack, doubtfully.

“That’s it; you don’t know the half of it, I tell you. Why, just look!” enthusiastically boasted the Weasel, falling prey to those human weaknesses that always go with vanity and boasting.

Jack purposely refrained from commenting, anxious that the outlaw might reveal some valuable information.

“This is the place of all places!” he raved. “We live in a world of our own here. Let the G-men—curse them—let the bloodhounds send out their stool pigeons. Let them ply their crafty wits. Let them build their scientific laboratories to catch the dumb criminals. They should be caught, I say! Jail

is none too good for them, if they are that dumb. Where there is no evidence, there is no crime. Without it, the G-men are as dumb as the dumbest of the dumb. So, why get caught?"

Jack purposely let his face beam with enthusiasm, goading the Weasel to continue; and like all criminals the outlaw could not go beyond the veil of human nature.

All have their weaknesses, and he was no exception. He was bound by the chains of evil propensities, and like a leopard could not change his spots.

As painful as it was to endure, Jack steeled himself to listen to the Weasel in his egoism boast of the things that they would accomplish. At the end of an hour he was better informed about the kidnapers and their schemes. The principal thing was the fact that Doris, due to her accident, had proven to be a serious problem. They did not want to keep her, but in face of the complications in the case, they did not dare to drop her.

As time went on the situation grew more and more acute, until a division of opinion on what should be done virtually threw disorder into the outlaw camp. How to collect the ransom and not expose themselves to arrest was a matter for serious thought. Some of them would have welcomed a fatality in the accident. The body could then have been disposed of and the matter forgotten.

The most of them shied at murder, but even that was discussed as a cold-blooded solution and the best way out as far as their own safety was concerned. As a matter of fact, Doris owed her life to this division of opinion and the professional aid that Jack had been able to render as a doctor and surgeon. But it never occurred to him, even for a moment, that the restraining hand of God had intervened in Doris' behalf. No, he still maintained that there is no God.

There were things of minor importance which Jack learned concerning the history of the volcano cone and

its discovery by Keno's father. By right of discovery, Keno's father had attempted to convert the isolated place into a gambling rendezvous; but the expenses of transporting patrons there by plane proved unsuccessful and the venture was abandoned.

Secretly pleased the Weasel turned and addressed Jack.

"Doctor, right now I don't mind telling you that I like your general make up. You may have a lot to learn before you prove your worth; but I like you

just the same. I believe you'll make good as soon as you have strengthened your confidence in yourself. You may as well have your million along with the rest of us. It's waiting for you. All you have to do is to stick to the game. In fact, old man Wheaton ought to give you a million extra for saving his daughter's life."

Feeling like a traitor, Jack held the extended hand that the outlaw offered in a grip of iron.

"I'm leaving everything for you to work out," he added, reluctantly. "In this kind of a racket your experience is worth more than mine at anytime. I can do no more than trust my luck to your judgment."

The Weasel's beady eyes beamed with pride.

"I'm with you, Doc," he said. "From now on we're pals. We'll sink or swim together; but if you'll leave it to me, we'll ride the crest of the waves with money in every pocket. No one can touch us here. Keno, Stanley and Mudd will take the outside chances and make the right contacts. You're the doctor; I'm the engineer. Hawkeye is the electrician and radio expert, and Pansy is the nurse. What's wrong with making a turnover of a million dollars clear profit a month? I tell you it can be done with the setup we have here!"

"Money, money, money!" ran through Jack's mind.

How he wished that there was no such thing as money. He loathed it! Because of the trouble it brought, he hated it! "Oh, the curse of the love of money," he muttered; "and this curse has caused all of my present trouble."

The Weasel's small eyes rolled like orbs in their sockets, as he watched Jack's face.

"Just think of it," he gloated, rubbing his hands in a state of ecstasy, "millions for all of us! The greatest racket in all the world. Why, Doc, it's the next thing to being within the law—the way we handle it."

"As crazy as the old prospector," Jack said to himself.

"Look!" the Weasel raved, waving his arms and fumbling with a locked drawer. "Just another way of being absolutely sure of no telltale evidence falling into unreliable hands," he said gleefully, withdrawing a bundle of newspapers from the compartment.

"MILLIONAIRE OFFERS TO MEET KIDNAPPERS' TERMS" was the headline that caught Jack's eye, tempting him to snatch the papers from the outlaw's hands.

Unconcerned, the Weasel folded the papers under his arm and gave Jack a demonstration of how the drawer worked.

“Another one of my ideas,” he boasted, rubbing his hands like a pleased child. “Safety first, that’s my motto all the time; always safe—never sorry!”

Jack, painfully disgusted, listened to the Weasel’s contemptible cackle, as he gloated over his achievements and boasted of what could be expected of his ability. “It’s a wise policy to agree with everything he has to say,” Jack assured himself, watching the outlaw in his enthusiasm take the papers from under his arm and wave them about in a tantalizing manner. His nerves fairly tingled in his desire to learn what information was contained in the half-dozen dailies that the Weasel had, yet he dared not ask for them.

To avoid betraying his feelings, he turned and looked out through a small telescope mounted by the side of the tower, next to a little battery-operated telephone.

“Never mind the scenery,” said the Weasel, directing his attention to a trapdoor in the corner of the tower. “Look at this; the scenery’ll keep,” he chuckled, as he dropped the papers into the mouth of a pipe that projected up from the floor. “Another way to fool the inquisitive. Just drop them down to the control room to be burned.”

Jack’s spirits dropped, too, as he heard the papers rustling down the pipe. His mind was centered on the events which the newspapers at the bottom of the pipe recorded.

“The story of the kidnapping—one part of it any way,” he mused; “and what they knew he wanted to know; and what he knew, they were frantic to find out. Oh, but for the chance to reverse that information!”

A thousand thoughts ran through his mind. What was Mr. Wheaton doing? What were the officers doing? How much information did they really have? What was to be the outcome? What ray of hope could he see? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! His spirits were cast down at the thought. He had no place to turn. He was only being played with—as helpless as a mouse in the paw of the malicious cat, gloating over the kill.

23. The Fountain of Mystery

FOLLOWING THE TRIP that Jack made to the tower, he was allowed more privileges. He gradually came to be considered as a full-fledged member of the gang of outlaws. Due primarily to his policy of being a good listener, the Weasel had taken a great liking to him, and at every available opportunity arranged to share his company. On one occasion he took him on a tour of inspection, examining the inside of the crater, and took great delight in pointing out to Jack the impossibility of escape.

On returning to his quarters, Jack's hopes of rescuing Doris and Shirley were lower than ever before. He was satisfied that the only possible means of ingress and egress was by aeroplane, except for the remote possibility of escape through the fountain of mystery. That, at least, was an idea that would bear investigation.

"Apparently an underground river," Jack soliloquized, as he stood on the brink of the great chasm two days later, watching the surging waters a hundred feet below.

He was alone, being permitted to roam about the rocky grounds within the crater walls for the first time. Awe-stricken, he looked at the tons and tons of water as they boiled from the unknown recesses at one end of the fissure. He followed the winding course of the river, if one could call it that, to a point a quarter of a mile distant, where it disappeared in the depths of the earth beneath the rock that the old prospector had blasted into the canyon to block the passageway.

To amuse himself, Jack picked up a few small pieces of rock and tossed them into the mad waters below. He knew that the Weasel was watching him through a spyglass from the observation platform in the tower. From the time he left the dungeon within the crater wall at the other end of the canyon, he had had an uncanny feeling that he could not explain—a sort of sub conscious warning that unseen eyes were upon him. But he did not care: freedom in the open air was better than being cooped up in a dingy old cavern.

The ascending crater walls of rock was a study in themselves. They rose on every side, except that in the other half of the circle beyond the canyon they did not appear to be quite so prominent. Time had permitted nature to adjust herself to conditions. Mountain shrubbery and various types of vines typical of the country were growing at will along the outer wall where the wind or some bird had dropped the seed.

Selecting small flat, disk-shaped pieces of rock, Jack easily sailed them across to the other side of the canyon, but try as he would, he found that he did not have sufficient strength to throw them the several hundred feet necessary to clear the crater wall.

Tiring of this form of exercise, he followed the brink of the canyon back to the main cave entrance and for the first time noticed, irregularly sculptured in the rock above the door, two very striking words— “Mystic Rendezvous.” That caption spoke volumes to him, as he studied the amateur attempt at artistry, distinguishing the underground gallery of caverns and runways.

“What a story they would tell, if all the secrets ascribed to them were revealed! What a revelation it would be, if all the activities of the present nest of human rats were exposed to the light of the whole world!” he whispered, half aloud.

Entering the main runway, Jack went directly to Doris’ and Shirley’s quarters on the cliff. He wanted to talk to someone. He wished that they could have been out there with him to enjoy the mountain sunshine to the full. But as yet he did not dare to suggest it. Doris was not strong enough to stand the trip. Only the day before he had removed the weight from her broken limb, and any attempt she might make to use it would probably prove disastrous.

As for Shirley, that was different, except for the possibility of separating her and Doris, even for a stroll about the grounds. That was something that would have to be talked over later. All he could do now was to tell them about it, and let them share in a small degree the pleasure that had been his, even in this limited amount of liberty that he had just enjoyed.

Upon reaching the elevation where their room was located, he was surprised to find the door ajar. Spell bound, he gazed upon the picture before him. There they were at the window, both Shirley and Doris, kneeling on the bed with their backs toward him, feeding a flock of little birds on the window ledge.

As they threw out the bread crumbs to the mountain sparrows and other strange birds, Doris was telling Shirley a story of God's wonderful love in caring for their little feathered friends; how He kept them and watched over them and provided food for them over the whole earth. No matter where they were, some how, by God's wonderful providence, they were protected and fed.

The picture took him back to his grandmother's knee, listening to the same old story from Matthew's Gospel that he loved to hear as a boy. He watched Shirley's face light up with enthusiasm, as Doris proceeded with the old, old story, ever new, ever true.

"Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows," Doris quoted, finishing the story.

"The same passage that grandmother used to quote," Jack breathed, forming a mental picture of her in years gone by, as she sat with her knitting, entertaining her grandchildren with stories that held them spellbound with the marvelous evidences of God's goodness and greatness.

"Does God love us just like He does the little birds?" Shirley asked through a mist of tears, her face beaming with inquisitive wonder.

"With a love that passeth all understanding," came the earnest reply. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Bah, nothing but hypocrisy!" muttered Jack under his breath.

Again a mental vision of Grandmother Thrillby seemed to rise, as though in conflict with his thoughts. Again he heard her repeat the same verse that Doris was quoting to Shirley—the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of John's Gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son — ."

Jack shouted his disapproval angrily.

Startled by his presence, Doris and Shirley turned toward him.

"Plain, unadulterated, ignorant rot!" barked Stanley, who had slipped in unheard and had taken a position behind Jack. "Hypocrisy is a good word and right to the point," he thundered. "For one, I am getting sick of all this tommy rot about the wonderful things God can do. Why fool the little brat into believing all that nonsense, when we know there is no God?"

Jack attempted to interrupt him, knowing that he was responsible for the avalanche of trouble that he could see was descending upon the two innocent, kidnapped victims.

The birds in a panic of fright fluttered away from the scene of human bedlam to a point of safety.

“Bah! God! Nonsense! Rot! raved Stanley, working himself into an uncontrollable temper.” “Why doesn’t God do something for you then, if there is a God? Why doesn’t He rescue you? Why doesn’t He make mind-readers of the G-men? Why don’t they come and get you, and take you home to the old man who thinks more of his millions than he does of you?”

“Why aren’t we in jail?” he continued, shaking his finger. “I’ll tell you why! There is no God!”

“My confidence is in Him who is able” replied Doris, but she was interrupted.

“Why, you defiant little hussy!” bellowed the mad outlaw, shaking his finger at the heavens. “Where is your God? Show Him to us!”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” roared the Weasel, joining the party. “Don’t tease the little lady. She means well. Maybe she’ll call on her God to take her out of here. Why not let her try it anyway? She’ll find out where her confidence really is soon enough,” he chuckled mockingly, rubbing his hands together in a state of malicious exaltation.

Stanley tried to gain an audience without another interruption, but failed.

“Ha, ha! GOD RESCUES KIDNAP VICTIM! What a headline for the newspapers!” roared the Weasel in loud, hilarious guffaws. “Why not? Why don’t you really test your confidence? Find out where your God is? Just try it once!” he scoffed.

“It is not my prerogative to define the possibilities of God; but I know in whom I have believed, and am content to abide in His will,” Doris defended herself with a show of irony.

“Getting impatient, though, for results!” he taunted, trying to goad her on in a religious argument.

“Please,” she smiled, trying to keep her temper. “You know that it is useless for us to discuss the merits of Christianity. If I were to ask you in all sincerity: ‘Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?’ your only answer would be ridicule. When I beg you to arrange for my release and the safe return to my people, you ignore my request and scoff at the inability of my God to come to my rescue. If I try to defend my belief, I am a religious bigot. Yet, you would keep me here as a mouse in the paw of a lion to tantalize and play with—trying to convert me to atheism, I suppose.”

“No, just waiting for God to rescue you,” Weasel grinned with diabolical cunning, “unless you should lose faith in waiting. But don’t let me discourage you in that, for there’s really nothing like courage to wait—and so much time, too.” He winked over her shoulder at Stanley.

“Yes, waiting is a great game! Your father likes to play at it, too. But when he sees fit to call the hounds of the law away from barking up the wrong tree and makes arrangements for the ransom payment, maybe things will be different,” Stanley grumbled.

“But I told you before I was hurt that it would be impossible for my father to meet such a payment, and naturally you can’t expect Uncle Phil to jeopardize his business —”

“Ho! still harping on the fairy tale of no money, eh?” Stanley interrupted. “We went over that before. We know all about your father’s ability to pay.”

“Probably just waiting for God to make enough money,” the Weasel wisecracked, scornfully.

“How can you commit such sacrilege?” Doris replied.

“What’s the difference? It’s as easy to make money as it is to lift you out of here soul and body—easier in fact. You seem to think that God can do anything. Why quibble about a little thing like money? That would be talking our language.” The old outlaw rubbed his hands in gleeful satisfaction.

“Seeing that I am at your mercy, I shall wait with patience, trusting in the goodness of the Lord for such arrangements as are in accordance with His will; He does all things well.”

“Ump!”

“Perhaps,” Doris said somewhat jokingly, “I may take the notion to do the Houdini act and disappear some night.”

“No danger!”

“No?”

“No, none at all!”

“But you can’t hold me forever, surely,” she said with all seriousness.

“That all depends.”

“On the money, I suppose?”

“Yes, money talks! Your old man ought to be making some kind of a noise pretty soon,” Stanley cut in.

“But I have told you how impossible that is,” Doris sighed; “and that means I will depend upon God alone.”

“Fool!” the Weasel rebuked her, shaking his finger furiously in anger. “That settles it, then! You will never leave here until God releases you in the natural elements of death.”

She made no reply, but found comfort in the scripture: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.”

“Remember, now, you are charting your own course. It’s going to be up to you to suffer the consequences of your own foolishness,” the Weasel warned.

“Yes, and she’ll suffer the folly of her wisdom, too,” yelled Stanley, trembling with rage. “All this tommy rot about God has got to stop right here. We don’t believe it, and we don’t mean to be continually reminded of it either, understand? And that’s that, straight from the shoulder; d’ye hear?”

Doris ignored him, making no reply, but directed her attention to Shirley who was sobbing her little heart out.

The Weasel and Stanley cursed alternately in their attempt to provoke Doris to anger.

But she spoke not a word, and her meekness cut them to the quick. They were rebuked far more by her silence than by any amount of words she could have uttered.

Sally after sally they thrust at her, until her very soul trembled at their ungodly defiance of the Supreme.

“O God, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” she prayed.

Struck by the devoted attention that the two had for each other, Stanley suddenly decided to wreak vengeance on them in keeping with his passion for revenge.

“Take the brat away from her and leave her to the fate of her God!” snarled Stanley, his eyes snapping fire. “We’ll soon see where her confidence is. Let her realize that consideration comes from our hands only, and she’ll come begging for favors soon enough. Separate them!”

“Don’t be a fool!” Jack said to him, sharply. “Why punish an innocent child in order to vent your spite on Doris? Why recognize her God by trying to dodge Him? We are agreed that there is no God. Why fear something that does not exist? Why appear as though there is a God?”

“Doc is right! There is no sense in misusing the little tot just to get revenge on a religious fanatic,” agreed the Weasel, sorry for his outburst of

anger.

“I beg your pardon,” Doris said quietly; “my faith in God is not fanaticism. He is real to me—a part of my very life. I am confident that all things are possible with God,” she added with assurance.

“Ha! ha! All things possible, eh? What about your escape from here?” gloated the Weasel, mockingly. “Well, we shall see; we shall see! So you are patiently waiting upon your God to perform a miracle at the Rendezvous?” he asked with a heinous laugh.

“Arguing is not a credit to religion,” said Jack, unconsciously quoting a statement that he had heard his grandmother make many times for his benefit.

While he used the quotation, he did not believe it. Like all agnostics, he enjoyed nothing better than to defend his views by argument, but according to Grand mother Thrillby’s philosophy there was no counter argument to fact. Her faith was backed by the word of her Lord, and He cannot lie. His conscience troubled him, and he felt disturbed because he had repeated one of grandmother’s statements.

Disgusted with himself, Jack pulled Stanley and the Weasel from the room. He could not stay there and defend Doris in her religious views; neither could he permit them to taunt her into making statements that would excite them in their diabolic desire to heap fire upon her head.

Inwardly, his heart bled for her and Shirley. Outwardly, he dared not show it. He was on the fence, as it were, trying to touch ground on both sides. His greatest anxiety was the fear that he would not be able to maintain the mental balance necessary to play a double role.

24. A New Discovery

EVERYTHING, SEEMINGLY, worked at a disadvantage to Jack. The whole thing from a practical standpoint was a huge nightmare. Nothing appeared to be natural. Life was a sore disappointment; and from every conceivable angle that he could think of, it seemed to be out of harmony with the rules governing human existence. The disappointment that Stanley, Keno and Mudd brought so forcibly home to him almost wrecked his faith in human nature, they were so different from what he had thought or believed possible two months before.

As for Doris, he sometimes wondered if she was mentally all right. Somehow she, too, did not appear to be the same. She had that religious quirk, so strikingly different from the happy-go-lucky girl he had met at his graduation. She did not ask the questions that he naturally expected, and the more he thought of it the more peculiar it seemed. In fact, she had not even mentioned the kidnapping since the day he had advised her not to discuss the past. The only direct request she had made of him was for an old Bible which he had discovered in the hideout. Through its pages she found her comfort, and was apparently the happiest and most contented one of the whole group. He could only account for it on the assumption that she was losing her mental equilibrium.

He debated with himself: "Perhaps I am going crazy, too."

He held his head in his hands and wondered. He was searching for—for some kind of a solution to the problem that would quench the fire of infernal misery that surged within his soul—an unbearable burden which he could not account for.

A few minutes before he had wanted someone to talk to; now he wanted to be left alone. Certainly he was not accountable even to himself. He was beginning to doubt if he really knew what he did want. He watched the Weasel and Stanley sauntering along in front of him as nonchalantly as though nothing had happened. Apparently they did not have a care in the world. Jack was so perturbed that instead of turning in with them, when

they reached the door leading to their headquarters, he abruptly excused himself, stating that he would much prefer to stroll around, than to sit still and kill time.

“Ah, come on and join us in a game of cards,” Stanley insisted; “that’ll help kill time.”

“No, thanks,” pleaded Jack. “I need physical action—anything but the monotony of wasting time at cards.”

“Come on, Stan; Doc’s time is valuable. Let him go and commune with the gods. Maybe he will grow wings and fly out of here,” mocked the Weasel with another one of his heinous laughs.

Hurt, humiliated and dejected, Jack turned down the dark runway, searching for consolation that he could not find.

“Might just as well let him get it out of his system,” he heard the Weasel’s voice echoing after him. “The quicker he finds out that he is only making a fool of himself by trying to get out of this place, the quicker he will settle down and be satisfied. He’ll never be dependable until he finds out that this place is escape proof.”

Loud guffaws rang in Jack’s ears as he hurried to the far end of the runway, where he found an elevator used in carrying goods to a storage room below. He opened the door and stepped on the platform. By manipulating the pulley which controlled the elevator in much the same manner as a dumb-waiter is used in hotels, he worked himself to the bottom, some distance below. There Jack found himself on the solid floor of a cavern extending back from the river into the honeycombed rock.

A survey of the cavern revealed a small, cave-like room, built from rough pieces of rock placed around a recess in the wall. A small dynamo in this room was run by power furnished by the mysterious river that rose and ended in the canyon. Great walls of rock extended on each side of the river to the surface of the crater floor above. Still towering above that he could see portions of the huge cone that surrounded the long-dormant volcano. Almost directly above him was a corner of the rock-hut that he had just left.

Jack’s first impulse was to rush up the path which was worn with use, and see if he could find some way to reach the upper row of the decomposed ruins of the cliff dwellers next to the cone. But he could not leave Doris and Shirley to the mercy of the out laws. It would be a cowardly act to desert them.

“The path will have to wait,” he said to himself, as he turned back along the river wall to the whirl pool, where the water came in with such force that a miniature water wheel turned a shaft leading to a combination of gears in the power unit.

“Easily enough energy here to operate utilities for a city of cliff dwellers,” ran through Jack’s mind, as he watched the operation of the power plant.

Going around to a window where he could get a better view of the dynamo, he watched its untiring efforts to produce the electric current which was utilized in the quarters above. Then he went to the other side where he could get a better view of the interior.

Hurriedly, Jack scanned the inside of the room for an occupant, but no one was to be seen. As his eyes roved from object to object, he saw a whisky bottle and two glasses standing among a number of old, dilapidated magazines, strewn on the top of a table. On a shelf were some old books, and underneath, standing on the floor, was an old pair of shoes which gave silent testimony that someone might be about. Beyond the table, hanging on the wall, was an old coat with a hat above it, which showed many months of service. As mute evidence of human occupancy, a tray of dirty dishes was resting on a chair. Carefully, he studied the interior of the cabin in search for an occupant, but no one could be found. He cupped his hands around his eyes and gazed in with his face against the window pane.

“There’s nobody here now,” he thought. “Certainly no harm in looking around.”

Just as he took his hands from his eyes, a reflection of light caused him to glance down directly beneath the window. An exclamation of surprise crowded his lips, which he could scarcely refrain from uttering. There on a bench, close up against the wall, lay a man with his upturned face, partly covered by the brim of an old slouch hat. For a moment Jack scarcely breathed, the nervous tension was so great. He was afraid to move, fearing that he might disturb the sleeper. It was no one whom he knew or had ever seen before, he was sure of that.

In the shadow beneath the bench where the sleeping man lay was a white object. “A newspaper!” Jack gasped in excitement. “News from the outside world! What a prize to be desired! News from his home state. News from friends interested in a clue which might reveal the whereabouts of the kidnapers. News of the police and their progress in the case. News of

Doris' and Shirley's parents. News! News! News!" ran through Jack's mind; and this only threw him the more into a turmoil of suspense and excitement.

There, almost within his grasp, was the coveted information that his heart desired—just a pane of glass or a door between. He never realized before how hungry he was for news. An uncontrollable longing to get hold of that newspaper lying on the floor underneath the sleeping form seized him. He would try the door. Stealthy as an Indian stalking an enemy, Jack crept up and lifted the latch.

The sleeping form stirred slightly as the door swung open and Jack, like a statue, stood glued to the spot, not daring to move. It seemed hours to him before natural respiration was renewed, indicating deep sleep. Satisfying himself that it was possible to proceed with safety once more, Jack again stole forward. When almost within an arm's reach of the paper the victim moved uneasily, annoyed by body-parasites.

"Oh, God!" Jack breathed, catching himself—his conscience rebuking him because of his unbelief in any form of a supreme being. There was no divine power—he couldn't pray for supernatural assistance. Weak as a dishrag and with all hope lost, he sank to his knees, helpless and distressed.

Before him rose the vision of Grandmother Thrillby with her Puritan principles flashed on his heart. He could hear her say: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

What a bolster for courage! The recollection of her voice again rebuked him for his rebellion. It was the passage of Scripture he had so often heard. He thought of the many tunes that grandmother had quoted it to him, and how he was wont to scoff and pass it by; but now it confronted him with a convincing power, and somehow gave him new hope. "Thank God for the faith of our forefathers," he muttered, by way of reverence for the dead.

With this new-found courage, he reached out and drew the paper towards him. Another which lay behind it was secured in the same way; and still two more came into his possession. Then as cautiously as he had entered, he withdrew with a sense of security that all was well.

Reaching the doorway he rose to his feet, carefully closed the door and left. Once outside he gave a great sigh of relief and thankfully made his way towards the mine shaft and the waiting elevator.

25. Outside News

BACK IN HIS OWN ROOM undiscovered! What a sensation of relief Jack Thrillby felt at having accomplished the feat in safety! The trying experience was one not soon to be forgotten.

Safely wrapped around his body underneath his shirt were the four newspapers he had secured from the quarters of the unknown, sleeping giant. Jack thought of what a difference it might have made if he had been discovered, and he shuddered at the possible consequences. As far as he knew, he had run the gauntlet undiscovered, and that was a consoling thought. As it was, the only telltale feature of the adventure was the pain in his tender fingers and lacerated shins, which he had received in an unsuccessful attempt to climb the rocky ledge.

It had been a trying experience and one that taught him that caution was a watchword that he would have to observe, if he hoped to escape. He realized how easily he could have broken a limb through his recklessness, and the thought thoroughly frightened him. It was bad enough to have Doris an invalid on his hands; but if he were crippled, too, that would be a serious disaster indeed.

That he had a right to feel grateful, he did not question. If anyone had discovered that the elevator had been used, any explanation he might give for being away would be doubted. It was fortunate that no one had attempted to use the conveyor during his absence.

Perhaps they had! The fear gripped him. They might be lying in wait for him now, for all he knew. "Oh, the curse of worry that undermines the human soul!"

Jack could not get away from it. He had no way of knowing what had transpired among the outlaws during the time he had been absent from them. They might have discovered that he was missing, and were only craftily biding their time to confront him with his disloyalty.

He had no God to comfort him, and the sense of security he felt after he locked himself in his room was only temporary.

But for a time at least he was safe, and in a frenzy of excitement he withdrew one of the papers from its place of concealment. Greedily he devoured its contents. It was a Chicago paper, nearly two weeks old, which gave him no particular news about the Wheaton kidnapping case, other than that it was still as much a mystery as ever, even though it had been crowded off the front page by similar kidnappings more recent and equally as sensational. The Shirley Dean case, which originated near Baltimore, was one of them. Then there was the Darrel Dexter case. That must have been the boy he had seen Keno and Stanley carry out to the plane, he reflected.

Practically everything in the paper pertained to some kind of a kidnapping. The authorities were as much baffled in each instance as they were in the Wheaton case. According to newspaper accounts the G-men were at their wit's end, searching for a clue that apparently did not exist, and without clues there was no tangible evidence to work upon.

The next paper he examined was a Detroit daily nearly a month old. It contained more details concerning the events surrounding the Wheaton case. For the first time Jack learned where the kidnapping had actually taken place.

The newspaper account gave a resume of the case from the time Doris left on her vacation up to the time she was taken captive in northern Michigan. It also outlined the several attempts made by the kidnapers to contact Mr. Wheaton. But it gave no reason why Doris had separated from the others in her party, and crossed back into Michigan at Sault Ste. Marie. That was still a mystery to everyone. As far as the authorities were able to learn, Doris had returned from Canada at that point with one of the girls of her party. The car never went back to Canada; but both girls did, according to the reports.

Jack asked himself a number of questions, as he studied the article and tried to decipher the enigma. He couldn't understand why Doris should have returned to Canada, and how her car was turned over in the river at a bridge abutment in Michigan, as the article stated. Why would Doris leave in the car some of her personal effects and an unmailed letter addressed to her mother? Evidently the authorities were wondering, too, because the river had been dragged and the surrounding territory searched for evidence of the missing girls.

The only clues found thus far were the car itself, the articles it contained, and an empty, water-soaked purse taken from the river. There was no

question about the identity of the car. It was Doris' own personal property, licensed in her own name. These, together with the articles mailed to Mr. Wheaton with the first ransom note, left little room for doubt as to how, where and for what reasons Doris had been kidnapped.

The feature of the story most interesting to Jack had to do with the activities of the police in running down clues, and trying to locate all the places where the girls had been seen. The date of the paper revealed the fact that the news therein covered the same week that he had been inveigled into taking the plane ride to administer professional services on behalf of Doris.

Where all the girls had gone and how they had disappeared so completely was still a mystery.

The authorities had re-enacted the crime as best they could, starting from Sault Ste. Marie, where they found tangible evidence that Doris had left there alone in her car; but when they arrived at the river where the car was found, they could pursue the trail no further.

The only thing that Jack could find which gave him an idea was a brief paragraph on the last page of a Milwaukee daily, which quoted Captain Nelson in a statement that stunned him:

“Locate Dr. John Thrillby and you will have solved the Wheaton kidnapping case.”

The sentence stood out like an engraving. Jack could see the accusing finger of Captain Nelson pointing directly at him from the page he held.

He was branded as a kidnapper. The whole world knew it. His reputation was gone—shot through and through with the statement. Jack was in despair. He had the facts—the key that unlocked all secrets; but no way of presenting them to enlighten others.

“Work out your own salvation.”

These words came into his mind. The very words he invariably spoke in an attempt to defend his belief. How they rang in his ears and stung him to his heart's core! Grandmother's God seemed to be mocking him, holding him in the clutches of a fate that he thought could never exist. He was a prisoner, spiritually and physically; moreover he was a prisoner entangled in the cobwebs of sophistry, only to be released in death or Christian re-birth.

“Work out your own salvation.”

God or no God, he would do it! He would defy man, God and the devil in working out his salvation according to the dictates of his own conscience.

Nothing was going to prevent him from accomplishing his purpose. The biggest thing that confronted him was other men's opinions. He would prove to the world that his ideas were right. He would vindicate himself. The hereditary determination of a Thrillby would never acknowledge defeat.

“As sure as there is—no God!” He corrected his thought with emphasis. He would accomplish the impossible. Tomorrow he would meet the challenge of the Weasel, effect his escape and defy the world. He was not going to be branded as a criminal!

26. The Goal of Crime

“THE NEXT DAY!” Jack could hardly await its arrival, for he was determined to outwit the wary band of outlaws. He gathered up the newspapers, for it would never do to leave such telltale evidence where it might be discovered. No, he couldn’t take such a chance. The unscrupulous gang with whom he was unwontedly associated would stop at nothing to gain their own ends. He must keep his own counsel and patiently wait the outcome on the morrow. Readjusting the papers for the second time underneath his shirt, so they would pass unnoticed, he glanced at his wrist watch.

Almost supper time! His spirits fell. He had been gone all afternoon. Suppose he had been missed? What would they say?

There was no time now to reason the matter out. He threw on his coat and walked boldly down the passageway and out into the evening air. Assuming the pretense of a hurried stroll before the evening meal, he walked around the grounds in search of a cache where he could safely secrete his artfully-gained possessions.

At the far end of the ground he selected a dense growth of vines as a repository. After safely depositing the papers, he crept up to a small window in one of the cave-like tunnels and looked in upon a table piled high with great stacks of greenbacks. The whole gang of outlaws were seated around the table, busily engaged in counting the bills. Five, ten, twenty and fifty-dollar notes were being sorted and placed in piles.

“Evidently dividing the spoils of another ransom payment,” thought Jack, as he counted the different allotments of bills.

One for each outlaw and an extra one for — . He studied the gangsters. One face was missing— Mudd. No doubt he was up in the tower. That was one place that was never left unguarded.

“Money! Money! Mountains of it. What a curse!” Jack loathed the sickening sight that held his gaze, as he watched the expressions of ogreish greed that lighted up each miserly face, as the men fondled the greenbacks.

“The goal of crime,” Jack mumbled to himself, as he turned away from the scene in contemptuous disgust. “Let them have their blood money. He wanted none of it! Let them gloat over the spoils of crime. He loathed it!”

Hurriedly, he retraced his steps and went back to the first entrance, and on through to that part of the cave where the cooking was done. There he found Pansy and the Jap, busily preparing the supper.

“Did someone break the dinner bell?” he asked unassumingly.

Pansy laughed, shaking her head.

“Oh, not that bad, I hope. Stanley and Keno got in late this afternoon, so supper will be a little late. Doris and Shirley ate an hour ago. You should have been around then.”

Jack purposely did not reply.

“Maybe a little more patience will earn you a supper, though,” she grinned, giving the potatoes another turn.

“If it doesn’t, I know I’ll be famished,” laughed Jack in reply, glad that he was above suspicion on account of his absence.

“Here take this,” said Pansy handing him an apron. “You may as well earn your supper. You can help out the cook while I prepare a tray for the rest of the gang. They’re going to eat in the front quarters tonight.”

Jack took the apron and adjusted it to his waist line, and with his thumbs under the shoulder straps he watched Pansy arrange the tray he was expected to carry out.

Suddenly the telephone rang. Pansy motioned him to answer.

“Hello!”

“Hello yourself,” came Mudd’s voice. “What about the eats?”

Jack turned teasingly to Pansy, but still talking into the phone as he addressed her:

“Another hungry man checking up on the cook. Mudd wants to know how soon he can starve to death with the rest of us.”

“Tell him to jump off the roof and get out of his misery,” was the provoked reply.

“Hello, Muddie, my boy; have patience! This is Doc. Pansy’s burnt up her disposition. Supper is scorched—everything’s red hot,” he said, jokingly. “But fifteen minutes of patience might—understand, I said ‘might’—work wonders with your appetite, you know.”

“Cut out the comedy and get something up here to eat, or send someone to relieve me,” Mudd snapped in the phone, as he slammed up the receiver.

“Another appetite ruined—by a poor cook,” Jack taunted, setting the telephone back in place.

“You should know better than to joke like that here. Do you want to antagonize him? People have been killed for a lot less than that.”

“Whew! You don’t say! My platform’s the same as Patrick Henry’s:—‘Give me liberty or give me death!’”

He could not resist the remark, or the grotesque act of strutting about the kitchen with a saucepan on his head like a circus clown.

Pansy tried her best to maintain an attitude of dignity but utterly failed, and burst into laughter in spite of herself.

She had a great amount of admiration for Jack. He had defended her when she interceded for Shirley, and his skill in treating Doris and bringing her safely through such a serious operation was nothing short of a miracle in her sight. Because of this she had taken a personal liking to him, and never failed to show her appreciation whenever the opportunity afforded.

Jack knew this and just how far he could safely go in joking with her. He had measured her mental equilibrium, and at every opportunity played upon her good will to cultivate favor for himself. He had not neglected to show his appreciation for every little favor she rendered and was encouraged to think that sometime a chance might come when he could use her friendship in some particular way on behalf of Doris, Shirley and himself.

When the meal was finally served, Jack took particular pains to praise her for her culinary an. As was often the case, he ate in the kitchen with her and the Jap. After the meal he assisted with the kitchen work by washing the dishes. He would much rather have gone to his own quarters and spent the time reviewing the events of the day, but the good will of Pansy and of the Jap were of greater importance; so he purposely stayed and helped out.

The afternoon had been rather strenuous. His shins were still causing considerable discomfort. The only attention he had given them was to paint them hurriedly with iodine before he left his room. His finger tips were painfully sensitive to the hot water, too; yet he was very careful not to betray any evidence of his true feelings. Work helped to pass the time away, and kept his mind off of his troubles. Then, too, his assistance around the kitchen was so greatly appreciated that it afforded him the opportunity of keeping in their good graces.

The outlaws never did anything that they could get out of doing. Consequently, it fell on the shoulders of Pansy and the Jap to keep things in

order. There were times when he knew that Pansy was completely exhausted. He could not help but feel sorry for her. She was a victim of circumstances like himself, caught in the net, from which there seemed to be no possible escape.

What would the morrow bring forth? That was the ever-present question with him—one that he ate with, slept with, and lived with. But each day he was as far from its solution as he had been the first hour he came.

Weary and exhausted, he went to his room, not to sleep, but to think, think, think!

What a terrible thing to face! Trying to think a way out of such complicated difficulties! He let his mind travel back over the few years of his life—a quarter of a century—during which Grandmother Thrillby had fought the battles of progress with him.

“Twenty-five years,” Jack soliloquized. “More than grandmother’s hundred when it comes to real trouble. He did not want any more like them, if his life had to be lived that way.”

But he had to go on; life was not merely a matter of choice. He couldn’t stop living; nor could he stop thinking. He was a reminiscent of misery, with a load of trouble that was hard to bear. What could he hope to accomplish now in the face of what had occurred? A prisoner in a den of thieves, unmistakably branded as one of their number. Certainly the outlook was outrageously dark. His character and professional career, as well as his general reputation were ruined. The name of Thrillby was disgraced forever.

27. Haunting Memories

NO MATTER HOW BADLY TORN by anxiety, worry and despair the soul may be, the body must have sleep and the mind rest.

Jack Thrillby fought within himself for hours before he finally dozed off. Again he counted sheep by the score—yes, hundreds of them leaped over the old stone fence on grandmother’s farm, before he became insensible to their number.

It was an unusually trying ordeal for Jack, one of those nights that seemed never to end and permit the first ray of light to creep over the crater wall. Nights were long, anyway, because of their being cupped within the circumference of the old volcano, and this particular one was like Joshua’s day when the sun stood still upon Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon.

But poor Jack was not a Joshua! He was unable to avenge himself upon his enemies. He was in the valley of Ajalon in the darkness of despair and God was not with him. He had elected to fight his battles alone. The “peace that passeth all understanding,” which seemed to encompass Doris under the same circumstances, was not his to enjoy. He was, as it were, a stranger in a foreign land, searching for a port of egress through his own self-righteousness.

“What a house of horrors!” he exclaimed aloud, as he awoke in the early forenoon.

High above him the sun was shining through a cloud of mist, reflecting a rainbow from the far side of the crater cone. Standing on the back of a chair, Jack watched the view through the crevice that answered for a window, until he was interrupted by the beautiful harmony of music, floating through the quietness of the morning air.

The first notes of song coming from Doris’ quarters were soothing to his ears, but when this was followed by a favorite hymn of grandmother’s it aroused the rebellious animosity in his soul for everything spiritual.

“What’s going to happen around this place next?” he grumbled in disapproval, trying to influence his mind from drinking in the words, as she sang:

“Earthly friends may prove untrue, Doubts and fears assail; One still loves and cares for you: Jesus never fails.”

With a bound he was at the door, and much to his surprise he found it unlocked. Throwing it open, he rushed madly down the passageway to an exit. He must get away! Those words were a direct challenge, pricking his conscience to the very core. They were a challenge to his ability to effect an escape. Oh, to get away, to do something! He couldn’t stay there and listen to the mockery of that song.

Out across the grounds in a frenzy of haste, he bolted to the farther circle of the cone wall, so as to get away from the Rendezvous of horror. There a mass of vines were growing skyward, clinging to the rocky wall. Without any thought of the consequences, he clawed his way upward through the mass of foliage, stopping only when out of breath. He surveyed the structure of rock above him.

Another outburst of song from Doris’ room floated toward him, and urged him on to a small ledge, where the vine was so weak that it could not support his weight. Still his mad, reckless spirit urged him to make the attempt to reach the top. With a final tug he reached the ledge, only to have the tender vines, loosened by the morning rain, give way on the rocky wall above and fall in a mass about him. Down he rolled in a bundle of tangled vine, with an avalanche of small pieces of rock, foliage and debris.

Exhausted but unhurt to any great extent, Jack lay at the bottom in the tangled mass.

“Jesus never fails.” The chorus to the last stanza floated out to him as he struggled with the elements in which he was engulfed.

Jack, like a spoiled child, put his hands to his ears, trying to shut out the song, but the effort was of no avail. He was exhausted and wet to the skin. Another failure in human effort faced him, yet he was unconquered and refused to give ear to the voice of God. He was still an atheist by choice, undaunted in his effort to work out his own salvation in defiance of divine grace.

“Jesus never fails.” The very irony of it! Jack mimicked the dying strains of music with a cynical laugh. “He ought to take a look at me now. Every thing is a failure!” His face broadened at the humor of it. With the aid of a

heavy surgical knife which he carried, he cut himself free, and sheepishly emerged to view the havoc he had wrought.

The knife gave him an idea. With it he fashioned a crude bow, and strung it with the buckskin thong from one of his hunting boots. He also made a number of arrows. Then he attempted to shoot them over the crater wall, but all of them fell short of the mark. He was again defeated in his purpose to shoot a message to the outside world.

Still unconquered, he cut the thong into two equal parts, which he tied to opposite corners of his hand kerchief, so as to form a sling. Selecting a number of smooth, round stones of various weights, he placed them one after another in the crudely constructed sling and attempted the feat of throwing them beyond the enclosure. Hopefully, he watched each missile on its journey heavenward, only to reap the disappointment of having them bound back from the wall.

Had he been successful, he meant to tie notes around other stones and throw them over the wall, hopeful that someone on the outside would pick them up and read them. It was a gambler's chance, but the missiles, like the arrows, only mocked him.

"Jesus never fails," seemed to ridicule him, as he made his way back to the unhappy environment from whence he came.

28. The Weight of Time

NEARLY TWO MONTHS had passed since the sad news of the Wheaton kidnapping had been broadcast over the country by radio, and appeared in glaring head lines on the front page of every large newspaper. Two months of anxiety and hopeless waiting for the Wheaton family, their relatives and friends. Two months of diligent search and tireless effort on the part of every law-enforcement agency in the country. And to Jack and Doris it seemed like years of mental and physical anguish.

To Jack it was a period of unreckoned time, in which he had dropped from sight as a respectable physician into the recesses of obscurity as a heartless criminal, and in league with a gang of desperadoes who were preying upon society for the one and only purpose of ransom money.

Oh, the burden of the weight of time! The agonizing depths of misery that distressed him! His conscience allowed him no peace. Every fiber of his being was tense in rebellion.

He sought for consolation but found none. His oft repeated statement that there is no God was his one and only defense. But this brought no peace to his troubled mind, for he had no facts with which to slay that enemy of doubt which kept creeping into his soul to antagonize him.

He was in the depth of despair on one of these occasions, not realizing where he was going, when he unconsciously drifted into Doris' congenial company.

She stood in the doorway leaning on a crutch as he approached, and welcomed him with a pleasant smile.

What happiness she radiated in comparison with his morbid state of despondency! That she could even smile rebuked him, and it was only with the greatest effort that he refrained from an outburst of temper that would reveal the true nature of his feelings.

"A penny for your thoughts," she called out, cheerily.

"Better save your money for something more important," he grumbled.

"Oh!"

“I am sorry,” he said, begging her pardon for his sarcasm.

She did not reply, but smiled.

“I did not mean to be rude; I’m doubly sorry,” he apologized. “I don’t want to make your burdens any harder to bear. Masking your misery in a wreath of smiles unnerved me, I guess.”

“No need to guess. It’s not because I’m entirely happy. Far from that! How could I be?”

Watching the strained lines caused by the effort for self-control as they gathered in her face, Jack interrupted her. His whole soul melted with concern, as he studied her heroic attempts to be brave.

“Don’t!” he exclaimed.

She hesitated at his sharp command—her face a study.

His heart filled with pity. The impulse to gather her in his arms possessed him. He wanted to promise her his protection. To tell her —

Doris regained her composure, her face lighting up with one of her fascinating smiles.

“I wanted to remind you about overtaxing yourself,” he said, hiding behind a forced professional air. “You have been on your feet too long, I think. It would not be wise for you to overdo when you’re getting along so nicely. You may need your strength later, you know,” he rambled on without apparent consideration.

“That’s something I want to talk to you about,” she replied. “Keno was in today talking it over with Pansy. They think that I might possibly be taken out on the grounds.”

“They did?”

“Yes! They promised to make arrangements with you.”

Jack gave a long whistle of surprise.

“And you’re going to tell me that I can’t go out?” she smiled, inquiringly.

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” Jack exclaimed. “The very thing you need. Keno should be commended for his thoughtfulness.”

“But the sad part of it is that they won’t let Shirley go, too,” she continued. “They’re afraid she might be seen from an aeroplane, I guess.”

“What about you, then? You would be a lot more conspicuous than Shirley,” he ventured.

Doris laughed.

“I’m to be Pansy, you see, when I am out on the grounds. Only one of us is to be there at a time,” she explained. “I’m to wear one of Pansy’s dresses and a sunbonnet.”

“A sunbonnet?”

“Yes, a sunbonnet. It’s really Pansy’s own idea, so no one can recognize me from the air. Isn’t it kind of her?”

“More than kind; benevolent, in fact!” Jack smiled for the first time in days.

Consequently, the following week, Doris was allowed the privilege of exercising about the grounds in the sunshine during the time that Shirley took her daily nap.

This arrangement was very unsatisfactory to Stanley and Mudd, because they had not been consulted until the plans were practically approved. They had understood from the first that the Weasel objected, and now because he had given his approval without their consent they made an open protest.

“Escape from here is impossible, and that’s the only thing we have to worry about,” the Weasel advised them with his usual chuckle of indifference.

Jack sensed the situation and in secret nursed a new worry of his own. The outlaws were getting on each others nerves, a sure evidence of brewing trouble.

“Another case in which familiarity breeds contempt,” Jack thought to himself. “Such growing contention among the outlaws will in all probability result in future hardships for Doris, Shirley and me.”

A change in the outlaws’ plans was obvious and Jack was troubled. He was suspicious of everything. What had happened to the ransom demanded of Doris’ father? Had it been paid? If so, why were they keeping her? She had practically recovered—to such an extent anyway that she was able to get about on crutches. There was no reason why she could not be returned to her people, unless the outlaws had muffed the contact with Mr. Wheaton and were afraid of the consequences.

A sickening thought struck him. The more or less joking threat that he had heard mentioned by the outlaws must be true. She was not to be released; that appeared to be quite evident. Otherwise she would not be allowed the privileges that they were granting her. It seemed as plain as the nose on your face; neither Doris nor he were to be released.

The possibility stunned him.

“Yes, that was it! Why didn’t I see it before?” he mumbled, as the crushing thought recorded itself in his already dizzy brain. There was no use trying to hope for a release. It was preposterous even to think about it.

The cold sweat rose in beads on his brow.

No kidnapping gang would ever take such a chance! They could not afford to! No, not with the information that the G-men must have already accumulated. Undoubtedly, every law-enforcement agency in the country had been turned loose on the hot trail that would lead to the door of the Rendezvous. The old volcano crater did not mean anything, as soon as they discovered it was a hide-out for these kidnappers.

Jack visualized the air full of airplanes, circling around like buzzards of prey, waiting for the kill. One well directed bomb and it would all be over. Secrecy was the only thing that kept them from being annihilated. As Mudd coldly analyzed it, the vultures of the law were only waiting to swoop down to recover their dead bodies and carry them off as a triumph in law-enforcement. Public enemies, one, two, three, four and five would be listed in the archives as for gotten members of undesirable society.

Dr. John Withington Thrillby. How that name stood out on the black list!

Still dizzy, unable to bear the strain that the possible consequences pictured, Jack turned and wandered aimlessly back to the brink of the river canyon.

Doris was sitting where he had left her an hour before, basking in the sunshine and whiling away the time by tossing little pieces of rock into the surging waters below.

She greeted him with one of her rare smiles.

“Have I got to go in so soon?” she asked, pleadingly.

“Half an hour yet,” he replied, finding room beside her.

“I have been wondering —”

“And I have been doing nothing but wonder since I’ve been here,” interrupted Jack, impatiently. “It’s driving me crazy. Wondering, wondering, wondering how to escape from this port of lost hope, swallowed up as we are in this old volcano!”

“Oh, is it as bad as that?” she asked, trying to be consoling.

“Worse!”

“Really?”

Jack failed to notice the look of surprise on her face. He was concerned with his own thoughts.

Fearlessly, the whole story came out. Words tumbled over each other in his effort to explain.

His whole soul was laid bare, his plans, his fears, his ideas, his hopes and suppositions. Everything that he had harbored up since being taken captive were told. As though crowded by some mysterious, hidden force to release the weight on a troubled conscience, he fought for words to express himself.

“Oh, Jack!” she exclaimed, watching him labor with his emotions.

Detail after detail rolled from his lips, until in a state of despair he fell back exhausted, unable to say more.

His tongue was parched; his eyes strained and blood shot; his nervous energy at the breaking point, trying to visualize the possibilities for the future.

“Jack!” she said, with her hand on his arm, “don’t take it so hard. God always provides opportunities. The only thing we can do is to be ready for them.”

“Bah! harping on that again —”

“No, Jack,” she interrupted; “I’m not harping on anything. You have analyzed your troubles. Why shouldn’t I analyze mine? We may have something in common, after all.”

“Impossible!”

“But we were both kidnapped. You can’t get away from that fact,” she smiled back at him.

“Only wish that I could,” he growled. “Some kidnappers I know would find themselves in jail.”

’But wishing doesn’t help. If it did we would both be out of here — ”

“You want to bring God into the picture all the time,” he cut in.

“Did I bring it up just now?” she asked, pleasantly.

“No, but —”

“No matter what I do, Jack, it’s still wrong in your sight, because you are constantly fighting with yourself. Now, if I were at home,” she continued, earnestly, “I might go and come, and my Christian attitude would be unquestioned. But here I must jump through a hoop and even bend over backwards to keep from even mentioning the matter; all because your conscience rebukes you. That’s why you bring the subject up so often.”

“I don’t either! I want to forget—if I can —”

“Why should we fight about it, Jack? Why not be reasonable? You know you can’t forget. We have nothing else to do here but to be reasonable about all things,” she pleaded.

“But don’t talk to me about God. I’m an atheist!” Jack flared. “I won’t listen!”

“You mean you just think you’re an atheist,” Doris chided.

“Don’t talk to me about God!” he rebuked her, scornfully. “There is no God! Why are we here? No just God would permit it. All the misery, anguish, grief and sorrow that your people suffer, that Shirley’s people are suffering, that you have been caused to bear—the doubt, fear and suspense of loved ones, right now, this minute—all of us! Don’t talk to me about God!”

“All right; as you will. God needs no one to defend Him. Even nature is His witness. Those who fail to recognize Him in this infinitesimal short space of time, called ‘Life,’ will have eternities to regret it,” she quietly informed him.

“One of grandmother’s statements over again,” he answered, thoughtfully. “Why was it that he was continually being reminded of grandmother?” he wondered, growing deeper in thought.

“Won’t you listen to His voice? Why reject His many evidences?” Doris asked, softly.

“Because there are none,” he snarled in disagreement.

Unperturbed, she smilingly replied: “Yes, there are; they’re all about us, even in this remote old volcano! I never have been in a place where the evidences were so pronounced.”

“Ha! I wish I could believe it! Show me—some thing—anything!”

“Look,” Doris exclaimed in her enthusiasm, “look at this mountain vine struggling for existence here at our very side in the crevices of the rock!”

Jack looked, doubtfully.

“Examine every tendril.”

Pulling the vine roughly from the branches of the dwarf pine that supported it, he asked sarcastically, “What’s so wonderfully different about this, I’d like to know?”

Doris selected several of the twining coils and held them in her hand.

“Look closely,” she said, pointing. “Every tendril, every spiral, every curl grows from left to right.”

He took the samples from her hand and interestingly compared them with others on the vine.

She watched him in silence as he rose to his feet, and with shaded eyes traced the branches of the vine as it wound its way up through the pines.

Returning to his seat with a number of specimens he had gathered for his own inspection, he sat for a time in serious thought.

“Isn’t it remarkable?” she ventured.

“There’s no mistake; they do grow in order,” he mused, as though reasoning with himself.

“Yes, in God’s order,” she earnestly replied; “and the other vine over there is just as remarkable—the one by the Rendezvous entrance. You will find that it grows from right to left, just the opposite of this one. Two different kinds of vines—one left-handed, the other right-handed—both growing in God’s order. I learned that lesson in Grandmother Thrillby’s garden. Her pole beans grew from left to right, while the hop vines at her rear porch grew from right to left.”

Jack studied her face with puzzled surprise.

“Grandmother Thrillby’s garden?” he repeated.

“The very same! You might take a look some time,” she smiled.

“Oh, I see,” said Jack, not catching the humor in her remark at the impossibility of looking in any body’s garden. “Grandmother had a picture of you and—a Miss Dorcas Wheaton, I believe. Your cousin, is she not?”

“I was very much in the picture, all right,” she laughed; “but that is not as important as beans. They grow left-handed while I am right-handed. God’s law in nature governs both, you see.”

“All right, then, you little pantheist; for the sake of avoiding argument you win,” he replied.

“But that only opens the argument. I’m not a pan theist. My belief reaches out beyond pantheism to God Himself; to the person of God, through whom we have life and our very being—to a personal God, the Creator of all things.”

Jack studied her face with puzzled interest, analyzing her expressions with each word she uttered.

“God’s law not only governs here in this vine, but in this canyon river also. It is one of His marvelous mysteries, created in the course of time through the application of His power and wisdom. I have been wondering

about it a lot since I have been here—wondering if it might not be possible to use it as a means of rescue.”

She was interrupted by Jack shaking his head vigorously in doubt.

“The river flows underground and certainly must come out somewhere,” she continued. “I was wondering —”

“But no one could live in that stream an hour,” he interrupted again. “It’s like ice water, let alone the possibility of drowning in the underground passage. It can’t be done!”

“You’re talking about an escape; I’m talking about a rescue. There’s a vast difference, you know,” she replied with earnestness. “My plan is to use the river to convey a message to the outside world. Put a message in a bottle or something—anything that will float—which can act as a convoy to carry a letter through the underground exit to an open river or lake somewhere, that it might be picked up and read.”

“And the police notified and sent to our rescue,” Jack finished, enthusiastically.

“Exactly!”

“Good! What a blockhead I am! Why didn’t I think of that weeks ago?” he exclaimed, pounding his forehead with his knuckles.

Springing to his feet and reaching down, he drew her up beside him, his face aglow with new hope and enthusiasm.

“We will write that letter this very night. Tomorrow it will be on its way—two or three of them. Every bottle I can find will leave here as our messenger, carrying a plea for help,” he exclaimed.

“And pray to God to direct the course of each one,” she enthusiastically exclaimed; “and that somehow, someday, someone may be directed miraculously to our rescue.”

Jack grew uneasy in the presence of such childlike faith.

“Come on,” he said, glancing at his watch; “the gang will be furious. We should have been back for supper half an hour ago.”

29. Demon Possessed

THE SCENE IN SHIRLEY'S QUARTERS was one of confusion and chaos when Jack and Doris arrived late for supper.

Shirley was in tears. Exhausted, great sobs shook her little body when she tried to talk. Before her was the table set for the evening meal. A knife, a fork and a spoon were near the empty plate. A glass of water had been tipped over and the water was finding its way across the otherwise bare table.

Trembling with rage, Stanley stood over her, whip in hand.

“Go ahead! Ask God again for something to eat! Maybe He did not hear you! Go on with your prayers and wait for God to bring you something! Pray to your God, you little fool, and see how long you will live off His crumbs!” sneered the enraged outlaw. “But when you get hungry enough to ask me for a glass of milk and something to eat, maybe you’ll get something. I tell you God doesn’t answer prayer! Do your praying to me for something to eat, and see how quickly your prayers are answered!”

Frightened almost into hysterics, little Shirley sobbed in spasms of fear.

When Doris did not return at the usual hour, she played about the room until tired and hungry. At the approach of the supper hour she set about, with the diligence of the good little housekeeper that she was, to arrange the table for Auntie Doris, and at the same time make provision for herself.

But when Auntie Dome, as she had learned to call Doris, did not return, she got tired of waiting. Over come with homesickness and alarm, a torrent of tears burst forth. Sobbing in convulsions, she climbed up in her place at the table and tried to console herself by asking the blessing that Auntie Dorrie had taught her.

Stanley came upon the scene just as she was earnestly lost in a pathetic prayer, asking God to send her papa and her mamma to take her home, and thanking Him in her closing petition for the good things she was to eat, she waited in confidence that God would not fail her.

Stanley set the supper tray down in the runway and listened to her childish plea, until she closed. Her reverent little prayer, asking God to bless all the outlaws, so they would return her to her father and mother, was pathetic, but her pitiful appeal to God to help her daddy find the bad men provoked Stanley to anger. Possessed with an uncontrollable rage, which was so noticeable at times, he rushed in, swept Doris' plate and silverware to the floor, and began to brow beat the innocent child for her simple faith in God.

When Jack and Doris reached the room they found the door ajar and the tray with Shirley's dinner on the floor in the outer runway. Realizing that some thing unusual was taking place, they cautiously looked in upon the pitiful scene. At the first glance they could not understand the reason or object for the demonstration of passion coming from the enraged outlaw, until the pathetic cry of the frightened child brought them to the realization that Shirley was in danger.

Jack's first impulse was to rush in and seize the demon-possessed madman in a strangle hold, as he had done previously when Pansy had been the victim of his fit of temper.

Speechless, Doris seized Jack's arm in fear, preventing him from carrying out his purpose.

The crack of a whip above Shirley's head forced her to cower still further under the table, as she slid from her chair.

"Ooo-oh!" shrieked Doris above the din and commotion, as she held onto Jack's arm.

Jack made a lunge for the door, dragging her after him, only to have Stanley turn like a shot, close and lock the door.

"Open up that door and leave that child alone!" Jack demanded, ferociously kicking at the bottom.

No answer.

Jack made another attempt to engage Stanley in conversation but without any response. He was in no mood to talk with anyone. Shirley, however, stopped crying when she recognized Jack's voice. That, at least, was encouraging. But for him to break down the heavy oak door was impossible. When Pansy came down the runway to announce supper, she found Jack and Doris looking at each other in their helplessness.

Doris rushed up to her and as briefly as possible told what had just transpired, and pleaded that Pansy do something on Shirley's behalf.

Emotion registered in every muscle of Pansy's face, as she stood spellbound with changing expressions of astonishment, anger and grief, only to indicate the hopelessness of despair.

"Why am I around here? What can I do?" she said. "He will kill that child yet. But—but I am not even so much as a dog around this place. I can neither bark nor bite."

"Please do something," pleaded Doris. "Do some thing, anything— call him to supper—anything to get him away from that child!"

Pansy faced her in a helpless stare.

"Pansy, please! Call him! Do something to let him know you're here. Please!" Doris continued her plea.

"Whoo-hoo, Stanley! Are you there?" she called, tapping on the door with a spoon. "Supper is ready and waiting."

No answer.

"Stanley! Oh, Stanley!" she called again, vigorously pounding on the door. "Come down to supper! The gang want to eat!"

"All right," a mumbled response came through the door; "I'll be right down. Don't wait."

"I've got to wait to take down the dishes. Besides, Keno wants you right away," she lied.

"All right, then, go on; I'll bring the dishes. Tell Keno I'll be right down," Stanley impatiently ordered.

Jack took Doris by the arm and motioned down the runway.

"No use protesting; it will only prolong the scene. It will be better if we get away from here for a few minutes."

"But I can't leave Shirley like this!"

"I know, but it's a case of 'have-to' just now. There's no use arguing with a crazy man. You can't reason with him in such a fit of temper. We'll come back later."

"No, you won't!" Stanley snapped in the doorway.

Pansy picked up the tray with Shirley's supper and attempted to pass, in hope of avoiding trouble.

"No, you don't!" He stopped her.

"But her supper —"

"Get going!" he thundered. "When she forgets her God and realizes that we are the ones she must pray to for something to eat, she can have it; but not until then!"

“Please, Stanley, be reasonable. The child —”

“The brat, you mean! You folks make me sick, pampering her. She needs a lesson and she’s going to get it!”

The fire of authority flashed from Stanley’s eyes.

“And you, too!” he bellowed. “The quicker you learn to keep your nose out of other people’s business the better it will be. Now get going!” he yelled in Pansy’s ear, swinging his arms in an uncontrollable rage.

Pansy held her ground, until she was rudely shoved down the runway by the enraged outlaw.

“Get going, I tell you!” he bellowed like a mad bull, giving her a shove towards the stone steps where Jack and Doris were standing.

“Come on, Pansy,” Jack advised. “It’s useless to reason with him now. Wait until he has had a chance to realize how ridiculous he has been; then I’ll try to talk to him.”

“No, you won’t!” Stanley flared back. “From now on, I’m going to see that everyone is kept locked in their own quarters.”

“What’s keeping you folks?” the Weasel’s rasping voice called from below. “The gang down here are tired of waiting. Send Pansy down to serve supper! Everybody is half starved. What’s keeping you any way?”

Stanley took extra pains to see that the double lock was on the door, so as to guard against the possibility of anyone entering during the night against his wishes.

He turned away and strutted down the passageway. Shirley could cry herself to sleep, fighting the pangs of hunger, fear and homesickness, for all he cared. It would teach the little brat a lesson!

“How can anyone be so cruel?” muttered Jack, matching the expression of pity on Doris’ face.

“The demon of ungodliness can only account for it,” she sighed.

Jack did not reply. Under the circumstances he could not contradict Doris’ statement. Silence was much better. Everyone’s mind was on the heartbroken little girl, suffering alone in the quarters above. No one felt like talking. Pansy tried to bury her feelings in the work of the kitchen. Doris found comfort in communion with God in her room. Jack had a battle with his own thoughts in his quarters.

Consequently, the notes which he and Doris thought of releasing were left unpenned. Their minds some how would not function. The overwhelming pity that surged in their hearts for little Shirley held them cap

tive, and governed their every thought and action. Doris prayed to her God, the Author of consolation and hope to the soul that fully trusts Him.

Jack was groping hopelessly in the dark for a reason that would explain such cruelty to an innocent and harmless child. His pet theories were being weighed in the balance and found wanting. Evidence out weighed his theory of no God, no devil, no good, no evil. All the facts pointed an accusing finger at him.

30. Thwarted Efforts

WHILE JACK ROLLED and tossed throughout the night, trying to reason it all out, the outlaws slept. Even Stanley had no remorse for his acts. He felt justified,—blinded to any sense of moral decency or justice. Inspired by his selfish desire to accomplish whatever fitted his own purposes, nothing else mattered.

Long before daylight Jack had mapped out a plan of action. There were any number of old bottles in the rear of one of the caves, accumulations from the old gambling days. All that he needed to do was to pen the notes, place them in bottles and start them on their way through the underground channel.

He selected several bottles of various sizes and shapes which still had their corks intact. They were to have but one errand—a missionary journey to bring about their hoped-for rescue in the near future. It was a chance that promised returns. He could not bear the thought of Shirley's remaining there any longer, let alone Doris and himself.

Jack stood on the brink of the canyon, watching a dozen or more of them bobbing along on their mission of hope in the early dawn. Some of the notes carried but a brief description of the lost canyon; others described the volcano and its occupants. Still others gave a brief outline of the kidnapping, and where the culprits were to be found.

The last note was finally written and placed in a conspicuous, odd-shaped bottle, with a screw-top cover over the cork. Every detail that Jack could think of had been included in this last message.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” The unmistakable voice of the Weasel sounded out behind Jack and re-echoed across the canyon in the still morning air.

The telltale evidence left Jack's hand like a shot and landed far out in the center of the river below. He watched it reappear from the black depths and float off towards its mysterious exit.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” roared the Weasel like a demon possessed lunatic.

Jack recovered from his surprise, and stood watching the outlaw rub his hands and double up in convulsions of laughter.

“He must be crazy,” Jack thought, moving away from the brink of the canyon.

“Doc, my boy,” the Weasel finally said, regaining his composure, “I’ve been waiting for this for a long time. Why didn’t you think of this long ago?”

Jack was on his guard. “The old fox is trying to lead me into a trap,” he thought. “It would be better not to talk.”

“I’ve been watching you since daylight through the telescope in the tower. Rather a unique way to take your morning exercise, I would say. You should do it every morning and start the day right,” grinned the Weasel in triumph.

“Thanks for the tip,” Jack replied, unable to decide what he was driving at.

“Come with me,” chuckled the Weasel, leading the way.

Not knowing what else to do, Jack followed him around to a cave entrance seldom used, and ascended the stair leading to the tower.

“Take a look at this,” said the Weasel, taking from the drawer where Jack had seen the newspapers a small, black-covered book, and handing him.

“Not a bad inducement, eh? Imagine there’s a lot of folks that would not sneeze at a little reward like one of these which we offered for a note picked up in one of our bottles,” the outlaw gloated, with one of his detestable grins.

Jack could see that the book contained a list of rewards previously offered for information.

“Ha! Ha!” the crafty outlaw grinned, hideously; “you thought it was possible to float a message out of this place, and that we had not checked that little possibility. I’m surprised that you really considered that the Weasel was so dumb!”

Jack eyed the outlaw inquiringly.

“Got all that information, too, without spending a dime more than the price of a few ads we run in the papers. None of the notes were ever picked up, and the rewards have been standing for months. Do you know of a more clever idea to get something for nothing?”

“Well, maybe you’ll have a chance of paying out some of that reward money yet, for the notes I wrote this morning,” Jack said hopelessly.

“Not a chance! Not a chance! I’m really surprised that you would even harbor such a thought.”

“After what happened yesterday, one would not be human if he did not want to get away from it all. When Stanley pulled one of his mad fits last night, and took out his spite on little, innocent Shirley, that was the last straw! This kidnapping racket doesn’t appeal to me at all, and I don’t care who knows it. If there is any possible means of getting away from this—this Godforsaken hole, I mean to do it,” Jack blurted out in despair, not knowing any other way to express himself.

“Can’t help but admire your spunk,” said the Weasel, slapping Jack on the back. “I don’t mind matching wits with someone that is conscientious in their opinion, even though he is wrong. I have consistently told you that you can’t get away from here, but go to it, boy; we’ll have to get you halter-broken before you’ll be any good as a member of this outfit. You may as well get your education early.”

Mystery was written all over Jack’s face. He did not know how to reply.

“Give the calf more rope, is my motto, always. You’ll either hang yourself or be converted into a trustworthy member who can be depended upon,” the Weasel declared with confidence.

“Then I take it that I’m not to be thrown into the dungeon for attempting to communicate with friends?” Jack inquired.

“Friends, did you say? Why be so modest when arranging for your bosom companions to sit with you in the electric chair? Your friends could so conveniently arrange it, too,” mimicked the outlaw with an insane outburst of laughter.

“I don’t see anything about this whole affair that is so funny,” Jack blurted out hotly.

“Funny only to you and me; nobody else knows about it. Run along now and mix your mud pies before someone gets suspicious and starts inquiring why you aren’t out at play,” he laughed, sarcastically.

“Thanks,” Jack replied meekly, not knowing how to combat the Weasel’s sarcasm.

“Don’t thank me, Doc; I may need you—a favor sometime. In the meantime well keep secrets between ourselves,” he grinned. “Only be more careful next time. Don’t get caught. Not that it makes any difference about

the number of notes you write. You can float them out in jugs, barrels or buckets, it will do you no good. They'll never reach their destination. But Hawkeye and some of the rest of the gang might not look so favorably upon your ambition as I do, you know. So don't get caught in any more foolish tricks."

"But how can I reconcile myself to this place here, after such a vicious demonstration as occurred yesterday? How can I, claiming to have a spark of human decency, sit idly by and see an innocent child deprived of her liberty, chastised and starved? It goes against the grain. How can I —?"

"Easy, Doc, easy; don't take it so hard. Every thing will come out all right," said the Weasel in defense of his partners in crime. "Stanley may be a little severe on account of his temper: I'll admit that. His one and only fault, though, is a bad temper. Tomorrow he will be sorry."

"Being sorry is no excuse for cruelty—downright, inhuman, vicious cruelty. If I only knew Shirley —"

"That's enough, Doc. Don't let passion run away with your judgment. Be sensible and forget it. The kid's all right. Go on down to breakfast now and things will look different."

Jack considered the outlaw's advice. He realized that he was fighting a losing cause. It was useless to protest further. Under the circumstances the best thing to do was to obey.

Ascending the runway to Doris' quarters, he called on her and learned that she, too, had been up since daylight. Unable to sleep, she had spent a restless night. As briefly as possible he explained what had transpired during the morning, giving the details of his fruitless attempt to float a message out through the underground channel.

Doris was plainly disappointed; but like the brave soldier that she had proved to be, she accepted the disheartening news with a smile. There was some consolation in the fact that the Weasel had given a half-hearted promise to intercede in Shirley's behalf.

He studied her face with professional instinct and felt sorry for her. The strain of her recent operation, the uncertainty of what might happen, the cruel treatment of Shirley, and now this new disappointment in being unable to float out a message to her friends, could not help but work disastrously, he thought. It all had its telling effect upon her nerves. Her physical condition could stand but little more.

Jack arranged for Pansy to bring Doris a cup of coffee and some steaming hot-milk toast, and urged her to eat. Nature's call to rebuild worn tissues and over wrought nerves could not be ignored. Although Jack found it difficult to carry on a conversation, he tried not to appear as though he thought that all hope had vanished. His main object was to keep Doris' mind off Shirley, and some new plan of escape seemed to be the only subject that approached a semblance of interest for each of them.

31. Facing Another Defeat

JACK THRILLBY'S MIND constantly strived to overcome the obstacles that continually beset him. Day in and day out he was occupied with this one effort. Why was fate so unkind to him? He appreciated now what it meant to others who were victims of kidnappers. He realized their distress of thought. But how could he escape? That question was becoming monotonous. Suddenly he seized Doris by the hand and drew her almost rudely to her feet.

“Come on, we're going out on the grounds! It's useless to sit here and procrastinate. We're going out there and work out a plan that will bring us deliverance.”

They were both hungry for each other's sympathy and encouragement; hungry for the counsel of a God that rules the destinies of men. There was no other place to turn, but Jack did not know this.

He studied the face of his companion. Although there were lines of unmistakable concern, he saw kindness, patience, love, virtue and character written in her face. Doris was decidedly different, somehow, from the average girl of his acquaintance. But she had one fault: she was too much like Grandmother Thrillby in religious matters.

Together they strolled out to the edge of the canyon and stood looking at the depths below. She gave him a smile of encouragement.

“If only she didn't remind him so constantly of her Cousin Dorcas and his grandmother, and talk like them, they might have something in common,” he thought. “Why was she that way? She was not that way when he met her last summer at his graduation. But now she was as bad as his grandmother and Dorcas —cracked on the theory of religion; warped mentally on the subject of an ever-existing God. Could tribulation and trouble have been the cause?” he wondered.

They stood for a long time in silence, their thoughts carried away on the ripple of the waves, as they watched the river below.

Jack was the first to break the silence.

“It is hard to believe that such natural possibilities should prove a failure,” he mused, talking to himself.

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, ... the things which God hath prepared for them that waiteth for Him,” she said quietly. “Your confidence is limited by what the Weasel has told you. Possibilities are with God, not with men.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

“Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor?”

“Meaning, I suppose, that we should sit here and idly wait upon the Lord to perform some sort of a miracle to release us?” he replied, sarcastically.

“Stranger things have occurred. And there are still many things which are possible with God, which do not necessarily approach the so-called supernatural,” she said with reverence.

“Such as an earthquake, I suppose?” he retorted.

“No, that would be phenomenal—a marvelous revelation of the power of God, if our escape should be made possible by that means.”

Jack uttered a long, low whistle of surprise.

“Rather technical philosophy, I would say, for a layman. Just show me one of your miracles though, and I will be a willing convert—ready and willing to listen to anything.”

“That’s within the province of God,” Doris advised, trying to show him his weakness.

“But I’m from Missouri, looking for a way out of this place, be it by miracle, providence, plain luck, or by masterful achievement.”

““There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,”” she quoted reverently.

“Aw, you’re nuts! Too sanctimonious for rhyme, right or reason!” Jack blustered in a burst of profanity.

“I am not!”

“You are! You’re religiously mad. Blind to the ordinary commonplace things of life. As different from your former self as day is from night!”

“Oh!” She smiled mysteriously.

“Yes! I can’t understand it!”

“Jack,” she interrupted, “you are the one that’s blind—mentally, physically and spiritually. Otherwise you would realize the value of depending upon God, and understand the reason behind the religious

devotion with which you label me. When once you discover the motive,”—she smiled to herself again— “you will wonder how you could possibly have been so blind.”

“Well, it would take a lot poorer eyesight than mine to miss seeing that sophisticated cloak of sanctimony with which you are clothed,” Jack stormed in reply.

“Not sanctimony,” she corrected; “I refuse to be classified under that label. I might plead guilty to respectable pietism. That has been my protection around here—the only shield of defense in this ungodly den of human vultures.”

“Pietism!”

“Yes, Jack, it’s my only hope, and the one thing that is provoking you to think about your soul’s salvation.”

“Aw, rot! It’s driving me mad, you mean! It’s so ridiculous, so impossible, so childish,” he muttered in defense.

“No, Jack, you have the wrong interpretation. ‘Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god.’ That’s what you have determined to do, and there’s where all your trouble lies.”

“I don’t believe it! What about yourself then?”

“‘The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.’”

“Doris, you’re impossible! Here we are both kidnapped, both held in the same place, both have practically the same trouble—alike in every respect, except you believe in God and I don’t.”

“Listen, Jack, God is able to use even the strategy of Satan to fulfill His purposes and show us the way of life.”

“But I don’t believe —”

“Still, that doesn’t change the fact. All things are possible —”

Don’t ever mention that again,” he thundered. “It’s always been a question of helping one’s self. Come on, let’s get out of here. We’ll look this place over more thoroughly. All this idle chatter about what God can do and will do is useless. Let’s go over to that overhanging rock. Beyond it lies freedom!”

Further argument was useless—as much so as efforts to escape were fruitless.

In a state of hopeless misery they made their way back to their quarters. Jack was miserable because his conscience kept accusing him. “If it is

really true! If it is really true!” He could not get his mind off of Doris’ statement: “God is our only hope.”

Doris was miserable, because she realized Jack’s false note of atheism and that he was hiding behind a cloak of hypocrisy. She was fearful that the defeat which Jack faced would leave him incarcerated spiritually. Apparently there was no physical escape. Death held the only alternative for them. But for Jack to die without God and without hope was a burden on her soul.

32. A Queer Proposition

FOR TWO DAYS Jack and Doris had the whole place pretty much to themselves. All of the outlaws but the Weasel were apparently missing. Since Shirley had been kept locked in her cave, Pansy spent most of her time between the kitchen and her quarters.

About all that Jack could find out was that the “little brat,” as Stanley always took the pains to call her, was to be kept away from everybody but Pansy. Because Pansy evaded his questions and refused to talk about her, Jack drew the conclusion that a con tact was being made to collect the reward and possibly to release Shirley to her people. The only reason he believed that she was still in the lair of the kidnap pers was due to the fact that meals suitable to a child’s diet were prepared in the cook’s quarters and carried out on Pansy’s orders.

On the evening of the second day, Stanley brought in three of the latest issues of The Post. Jack and Doris were out on the grounds when the plane arrived, but they purposely paid no attention to the four out laws when they alighted. Stanley, however, called Doris to one side, so he could talk to her in private.

Although it went against Jack’s grain, he was in no position to offer any protest; and when Keno motioned him to the plane to help carry in some of the luggage, he had no other alternative but to obey the summons. The plane was loaded with provisions which took three of them nearly an hour to carry to the storage quarters, unpack and place in order there. It seemed to Jack that he was purposely being detained, so that Stanley might have an opportunity to carry on a conversation with Doris. This was the first time that any such thing had occurred, and be cause of it Jack was as uneasy as an old “batch” in a tuxedo.

He could hardly wait for the supper hour to arrive, when he might have a chance to speak to Doris. She came in late, carrying two copies of the latest edition of The Post with her, and much to his surprise came directly over to

the bench where they usually sat, and seated herself in the place provided for her.

“What’s it all about?” his eyes enquired.

She frowned in deep thought, as though weighing her words before she answered.

“Stanley has asked me to do the strangest thing, and I wish I could bring myself to believe that he is truthful in his request,” she said, slowly. “It doesn’t seem reasonable, though.”

“What’s his proposition?”

“Writing a message home on the pages of these magazines,” she replied, repeating the same general outline that Stanley had covered, when he broached his scheme to her.

Jack listened attentively until she had finished. This was the first he had heard of it, and his mind would not work fast enough to reason out why the outlaws wanted Doris to write a message across the pages of a magazine.

“What do you think I should do about it?” she asked after she had given him ample time to think the matter over.

“I don’t know,” Jack said thoughtfully. “Yet I can’t see that it would do any harm, if you were permitted to send a letter home to your people in this way. Certainly such a message written in your own hand writing across the pages of a magazine, published two months after you were kidnapped, will prove that you are still alive, that’s sure. I believe I would do it if I were you. You have nothing to lose by it that I can see. Try it anyway!”

“I really don’t know. This whole affair is such a puzzle to me that I can’t figure it out. There is no one here in whom I can place any confidence. I shall have to settle it by prayer tonight. I want to do the thing that God would have me to do,” Doris answered, seriously.

“Whew!” Jack whistled, raising his eyebrows. “No confidence, eh? I like that as a testimony to my profession.”

“That comes under a different classification. Confidence and appreciation are two different things. I do appreciate all that you’ve done for me here. I have a lot more to be thankful for than you perhaps even suspect. I am very, very grateful for it all. But none of it came as the result of confidence in anyone here; and if you’re honest in your judgment, you’ll have to agree with me,” she said with an earnestness at which he could take no offense.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he hedged.

“But you do know,” she interrupted. “You certainly know that we have nothing in common. Your opinions are exactly opposite my own in—in many respects—the vital points at least. You have no confidence in my ideas, judgments or opinions when it comes to the important fundamental issues of life, and you do not pretend to make any bones about it. To be strictly honest about it all, you harbor the secret thought that because I don’t agree with your ideas I am—well—mentally affected.”

“But Doris, you —”

“Just a minute, please,” she continued again, interrupting him. “It’s not a matter at which I am offended. I have reasoned that all out. I appreciate that you are honest in your judgment; that you are not malicious in any way. Oh,” she exclaimed, earnestly, “if, if I could explain it all to you—all that you don’t know. The things about my being kidnapped that you don’t even surmise—all that this gang of outlaws don’t—won’t believe. If you could only see God’s hand in it,” she exclaimed, seriously. “But it’s no use! You would not believe me. You’d only think more than ever that I’m crazy.”

“Please don’t exert yourself over such trifling matters,” Jack said, sympathetically, trying to change the subject.

“Oh, I know that you think I’m crazy, and that’s the reason I have not tried to explain. I heard you and Keno talking over my case before you thought I had regained consciousness. I know you were doubtful of my sanity then, and I know that right now you are still doubtful about it. Time is the only thing that will ever convince you otherwise. No crazy person ever convinced anyone of his or her sanity by arguing the question. You never saw a crazy person yet who thought he was crazy. It’s always the other fellow. So I’m not arguing the question from any angle what soever. You can draw your own conclusions.”

“Let’s not talk about it any more now. It does not make any difference what has happened in the past; we can’t remedy that,” Jack sympathized. “There’ll be an opportunity to escape from this place one of these days. That’s the main thing for us to think about,” he assured her, satisfied in his own mind that the nervous breakdown which he had feared was now a real problem on his hands.

“Jack,” she said, her lips quivering as she tried to control her emotions, “I’m sorry I have caused you so much trouble. I wish you could only understand. I only wish I could show you why God has permitted all this trouble to come to us. But it is not for us to understand God’s eternal

purpose for our lives. We can only trust in His wisdom and rejoice in His goodness, knowing that someday we shall understand.”

“Come on,” he pleaded, trying to get her mind directed into other channels; “let’s go out on the grounds and watch the flowing of the canyon river as the sun is setting.”

“Please make me one promise before we go”

“Yes, yes; what is it? ” he agreed, feeling that the timeworn game of complying with the wishes of a crazy person afforded the best way to handle her.

“It’s a very, very simple request,” she continued. “All that I ask is that you try to remember this conversation—try to believe in the possibility of God adjusting circumstances for our benefit, simply because of our faith in Him and His Word.”

“Not my faith?”

“Yes, Jack, your faith!”

He hesitated, waiting for her to continue.

“May I have your promise before God as our witness?”

“My promise?”

“Yes, that’s all!”

“All?”

“Yes, all!” she pleaded earnestly. “I have faith in God that we are dealing with a matter predestined of God to become the vehicle of a marvelous revelation of His omnipotence.”

“That is too deep for me to make any promises on,” he asserted.

“When once you understand that God permits circumstances to enter the lives of His children to enable them to determine the destiny of their lives, by either rejecting or accepting Him, you have overcome spiritual blindness. Won’t you promise me to look with the eye of faith to the greater possibilities with God?”

That inward urge to deny the existence of God again possessed him, but somehow Jack could not bring himself to speak. He was in a quandary. Doris’ request did not seem like the plea of one temporarily unbalanced. On the other hand it provoked thought; and, regardless of making any promises, he would never forget it.

Together they went out to the brink of the canyon and stood in the shadows of the sudden twilight. Darkness seemed to arise from the depths to engulf them, producing a sort of weird sensation which filled the solitude

with mysteries of hidden power. Unconsciously they drew together, watching the last ray of light creep closer and closer to the crest of the volcanic cone. They knew what it meant. Many were the times that they had watched the scene.

Soon an impenetrable blackness would hold them in its grip; but somewhere the sun would keep on shining. They were lost to those outside, but under the sovereign protection of a Father's care.

33. From Bad to Worse

A BEDLAM OF COMMOTION broke loose one morning. Keno, followed by Stanley, rushed into the room and interrupted Jack and Doris just as they were finishing breakfast. Both of the outlaws were laboring under great excitement.

“Get all your things together and come with me,” Keno commanded. “Come on, make it snappy!”

“Yes, get all of your belongings—every stitch; don’t leave anything for someone to find later,” Stanley yelled from the doorway.

“Moving day?” Jack asked casually.

“Get a move on! Don’t waste time with silly questions!” the outlaw thundered.

Keno ushered them out into the main runway.

“Where do we go from here?” Jack inquired, forcing a smile to keep from losing his temper.

“On down ahead to the right,” Keno advised, pointing in the general direction and escorting them to a rickety door opening into a small enclosure evidently used as a storeroom.

“You will have to wait here until we check your things,” Stanley grumbled, closing the door and locking it.

Jack and Doris, alone on the inside, surveyed the scene. Scattered about the floor was an assortment of parcels and packages which had the appearance of having been dumped there hastily. Some of the things were their own personal belongings. They recognized others as a part of the hospital equipment and medical supplies.

A key turned in the lock.

“Auntie Dorrie!” Shirley cried in a greeting of delight, as Pansy crowded through the door, lugging the child on her shoulder.

Doris, as equally delighted, gathered the surprised and frightened girl in her arms, while Shirley wrapped her arms around Doris’ neck in a vise-like

grip and sobbed for joy. Jack turned away, too much overcome for words, while Pansy hurried back for the things remaining in Shirley's room.

"What's it all about, Pansy?" Jack asked when she returned.

She replied with a shrug of the shoulders, turned and again disappeared.

Jack went over and spoke to Shirley, who clung tighter to Doris as though afraid of another separation. He patted her on the shoulder and tried to persuade her to talk, in order to find out, if he could, just how much she knew about what had occurred. She looked at him shyly and tried to smile, but shook her head, showing that she was in the dark as much as they were about what was going on.

A chorus of gruff voices in the passageway outside drove the fear back into Shirley's eyes. Jack could see her little arms cling tighter around Doris' neck.

"The brutes!" he mumbled under his breath.

The door swung open and the Weasel with a facetious grin motioned them to follow him on down a dark passageway. "Why is this?" Jack asked himself. "Can it be that there is a hidden tunnel by which we can leave the volcano cone? Surely there must be an underground passage that I missed when I made a secret inspection of the place!" His spirits rose at the possibility. He wanted to ask the Weasel about it, but did not dare to be too inquisitive.

Suddenly they arrived at the mine shaft that led to the control room below. Jack barely had time to notice the different approach to the shaft, when they were crowded into the elevator and the door closed. About halfway down, the Weasel locked the cable in the slot at the side of the cab, which brought them to an abrupt stop. "Why is this?" Jack wondered, searching for the motive. The wall of rock that they were facing puzzled him. He had been down this same shaft before and saw nothing but a wall of rock all the way to the opening at the bottom of the shaft that led to the control room. He was perplexed, yet said nothing.

The Weasel rubbed his hands and grinned in ecstasy upon reading the surprise that was registered in Jack's face.

"Behold the mystery!" he said, mischievously, using a short screwdriver to remove four screws which held a back panel. Then, taking a long, nail-like key from his pocket, the Weasel released a spring lock and opened a door on the back side of the elevator which the panel had concealed. Facing

them was a long, dark cavern which extended back into the rock. All was darkness.

“This way out,” the outlaw invited.

Unaware of anything better to do, all of the passengers filed out into the cavern and stood waiting for the Weasel to set the panel back in place and close the door behind it.

Only a flicker of light from the elevator shaft remained. Turning on a row of lights, the Weasel led them to three large caves which were equipped for living quarters. Here he directed them to make them selves at home until Stanley and Keno brought down their things in the elevator.

“What’s the big idea?” Jack asked, when it finally dawned upon him that this was the end of their journey for the time being.

“That’s a fair question which deserves a fair answer,” said the Weasel, as his beady eyes popped with amusement. “It’s a long story, but the young lady here,” pointing to Doris, “needs a place of quietness and refinement so she can write an appropriate letter home; and as a matter of courtesy it might be very diplomatic for you in your leisure time to render such assistance to her as may be found profitable.”

Doris shuddered at the Weasel’s heartless laugh.

“You—you despicable cur!” Jack snapped through his teeth, his eyes flashing fire.

“Now, now, Doc, calm yourself. It’s not that bad! I may bark but I won’t bite,” the Weasel said, jocularly. “Just sit down here on this bench and I will explain everything.”

Jack dropped hopelessly on the bench, making room for Doris to sit beside him and hold Shirley on her lap.

“To explain briefly,” the Weasel began, "you were brought down here for the purpose of permitting us to hold a party in the quarters above. Things on the outside are getting hot—too hot for comfort, in fact. Suspicion has casually been directed towards the Rendezvous and, of course, to those affiliated with it, not excluding yourself. So, in order to throw off suspicion, the gang proposes to stage one of the old time gambling blow-outs by inviting a representative group of big shots from Los Angeles, San Diego and some other border cities to attend, and the thing will go over with a bang.

“Neither are we going to forget the Department of Justice. A group of their number, police executives and operatives, will be here to make a tour

of inspection, covering the whole place from the tower above to the power house below, except, of course, this quiet little corner here. Otherwise, the place will be an open house to the police. When they have seen everything above us and below us, obviously the suspicion that has been directed toward 'Yours Truly' and his friends will be without apparent foundation. See! With Doris, Shirley and you down here, together with all your things, there will be no clues on the surface to cause suspicion, and the G-men, bless their inquisitive little hearts, will return to Washington satisfied that everything is all right. The Rendezvous will be an open book, showing a clean bill of health. Could anything be more simple?" he grinned in self satisfaction.

Neither Jack nor Doris spoke, while Shirley cringed noticeably and clung to Doris, in fear of the rasping, mechanical laugh of the Weasel.

"Now we come to the second phase of the plan," the wiry, little outlaw continued, "and both of you should be interested in this. It's so suitable to the needs of the present situation. You know, of course, that due to certain circumstances beyond our control, it is now impossible to release you.' The Weasel paused, gloating over the effect his statement would have on his victims."You would not expect us to tie a noose around our necks, would you? You are both here to stay unless — "

"Unless what?" Jack interrupted.

"Unless you concede to my plan. I have told Stanley and the gang all along that there is no other way out."

"Yes, yes," Jack eagerly replied, hoping for a favorable turn of events.

"Common sense will show you that there is no other sensible way, so don't jump at conclusions until you have analyzed my proposition," he suggested, fishing for a way to begin. "If you two think you can agree to my plan, I can just as well explain now as at any time."

"Go ahead," Jack urged; "I've had so many disappointments in the past two months that another shock will not even scratch the surface. Go ahead! I am immune to everything sensational or shocking! Any thing you suggest will be all right with me."

"This ought to rejuvenate your spirits then," said the Weasel, winking at Doris.

"Well then, let's have it," Jack barked, losing his patience.

"Did you ever think of marrying?" he asked with a diabolical grin.

"Marrying what?" Jack exclaimed.

“This young lady here.”

“Doris?”

“Nobody else but,” the Weasel boldly suggested.

“You mean Miss Wheaton here?” Jack echoed, thunderstruck.

“Do you know of anyone more charming?” the Weasel grinned coyly.

“You’re crazy!”

“And I’ll say you’ll be crazier if you don’t,” the would-be matchmaker declared.

“Perhaps the young lady might have something to say herself about this marrying business, let alone what my personal views might be,” Jack replied, feeling keenly the embarrassment.

“That’s a matter to be settled between yourselves; but whether you agree or not, it’s got to be done. Yes, and done for your own good, too. I’ve told you repeatedly that the Weasel was one friend that you could trust,” he declared solemnly, again in control of himself. “I’m telling you both and telling you as a friend that a legitimate marriage is the only hope for you—the only hope you two have of facing the future. Otherwise, you will never leave here alive, or any other way for that matter. You can make up your mind to that.”

Doris, for the first time, made an effort to speak, but was cowed into silence by the Weasel.

“Don’t make any hasty decision,” he advised. “This is the situation in a nutshell: A wife cannot testify against her husband only under extenuating circumstances. A husband of a kidnapped bride is no longer a kidnapper when it turns out to be an elopement. There’s your cue. Suppose you were to wire tonight,” he paused and turned to Jack, “advising the old folks that you were married and that you had only been playing a joke on them while enjoying an extended honeymoon! What would happen? Why, you would be welcomed home into anxiously waiting arms and you know it. The old folks would forgive and forget, and you could return peaceably and five happy ever afterwards,” he concluded eloquently, with an out burst of hilarious laughter.

“Well, that’s something—something to consider,” Jack agreed, squeezing Doris’ hand to convey the understanding that they would have to play a game of strategy. “But you will, of course, allow us the privilege of talking over such a serious matter privately.”

“Certainly! Certainly! Go ahead, now you’re talking sense,” the outlaw replied, his bead-like eyes roving back and forth from Jack to Doris.

Jack squeezed Doris’ hand again. Leaning over, he whispered in her ear: “Tell him that it’s too sudden; that you will have to take time to consider.”

Doris got the cue and replied, “That’s a matter of grave concern to every woman. Even when she marries a man of her own choice, it needs thought and consideration.”

“Miss Wheaton certainly is entitled to the privilege of weighing the matter carefully and confidentially,” Jack suggested, coming to her rescue. “We will have to let you know the decision later.”

“Perfectly all right. No immediate hurry. When the party above is over, it will be time enough; then we can clear the deck for the wedding and arrange the details,” the outlaw replied craftily, rubbing his hands in an unusual display of felicity, his eyes roving, full of self-admiration.

The sudden arrival of the mine-shaft conveyance turned their attention to another phase of the matter.

“Bringing in the wedding presents, I suppose,” Jack exclaimed with irony, referring to the waiting cab in the mine shaft. “But I think we’ll have to wait for the preacher before making any plans for setting up house keeping.”

“Exactly, exactly,” gloated the Weasel, ignoring Jack’s sarcasm. “Things certainly are shaping up fine. Everything will be ready for the wedding march in short order.”

Jack’s and Doris’ eyes met and turned away.

34. The End of the Trail of Hope

JACK PACED BACK and forth in the tunnel, going a little farther in the darkness at each turn. Finally, at a bend in the passageway, he discovered a ray of light between the rocks ahead of him. Feeling his way along, he came to an opening barely large enough for him to squeeze through. This led to a ledge under neath a canopy of overhanging rock which extended out over the canyon river.

Beyond this ledge and the river, he could see a patch of blue sky. Over him soared an eagle as though fixed in the sky. Beneath him the surging waters of the canyon river ceaselessly roared, as though churned by some mysterious power. In front of him was a crude iron railing to protect the entrance. Jack was at the end of the trail of hope, leaving him weak and exhausted as he clung to the rail for support. Beyond was death by suicide. Behind him was the despairing conglomeration of circumstances that human reason could not fathom.

How could he return and impose himself upon Doris in her helplessness? He was too honorable to even consider the proposition that the Weasel had made them, and yet he had stipulated that there was no alternative.

“So easy to end all your troubles,” whispered a voice. “One leap, a short struggle, and all’s over.”

“My God shall supply all your need,” his grand mother’s voice seemed to whisper.

But he repelled the thought by repeating, rebelliously, “There is no God.”

Weak as the proverbial dishrag, Jack clung to the iron rail in an effort to keep from falling. He could not go forward as a “felo-de-se”—a suicide. Yet how could he return and face Doris in view of the hopeless situation that confronted them?

Regardless of law or reason, he found himself with no other recourse but to return. He was obligated by the law of common decency to protect Doris and Shirley. Come what may, he would not desert them now.

The passageway to the mine shaft where they had entered was filled with articles of every kind and description. Everything with which they had been in any way associated had been moved down to their new quarters. They were in the cave at hope's end, literally buried alive.

When he left them, the Weasel had locked the iron gate across the passageway to keep the prisoners from approaching the mine shaft within a distance of some fifty feet.

"The intolerable cur returns," Jack said to Doris as he found her arranging a place for Shirley to lie down.

She looked up but did not answer, as she continued her effort to make the child comfortable, humming a favorite, old-time gospel chorus.

"I feel like a cur," he repeated, trying to gain an audience.

"Jack," she rebuked him, her lips quivering, "God first expects you to be a man."

"Doris, you don't understand me," he replied, evidently quite hurt. "I could not be as vile as the Weasel would have me. I could not impose upon you like that. I—I couldn't marry you that way. I—"

"And I admire you for that, Jack. If you were only as honorable with God, I would be happy—perfectly happy," she replied, embarrassed.

"Well, it's something to have at least one moral qualification," he smiled, more like himself again.

"No, Jack, I haven't given up hope—but—but it does look dark for the future. The Weasel can't force us to—to—; God will not permit it. Something must happen. I could never marry you in your unbelief anyway. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? God has commanded: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' Oh, if I could only make you see, then you—you would understand," she whispered, as her voice died away.

"Meaning that if it wasn't for God, I might have a chance," Jack made an effort to ridicule her. "Too bad the Weasel has us in his power. We're not dealing with God. We are at the mercy of a desperate band of unscrupulous outlaws. I don't see that God has done anything about it," Jack sarcastically replied, his voice trailing off into a hopeless tone.

"You need faith in God," she said, trying to be brave.

"Trust the devil and all his angels! Makes no difference. Why be so provoking?" Jack snapped, losing his temper. "One would think to hear you

talk that God Almighty was coming down here tonight to take you away, body and soul, and drop you safe and sound on your own door step.”

“Jack! Please don’t! Oh, if you could only understand. If you only knew the peace that passeth all understanding. If, if you would only pray. If you only realized that you can’t do more than pray, until you have prayed. You—you would have help”

“What?”

“Jack, we’re at the end of our own strength. You have tried every way possible to escape from this place. You can do no more than pray.”

“But I don’t believe — . It would do no good. Why be so ridiculous? Why should I —?”

“Jack Thrillby, stop! I forbid you to be so sacrilegious,” she commanded vehemently.

“Well, we won’t quarrel about it any more. There’re too many things to be done to get this place in a livable condition. Seeing we have got to make the best of it, we may as well set our house in order,” he replied, trying to change the subject.

“Please, Jack, don’t make light of our situation. As terrible as it is we still have much to be thankful for.”

“Thankful?”

“Yes, thankful! I can say with the Apostle Paul: ‘I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.’ I can truthfully thank God for so many, many, many things. Thankful that He has kept me faithful through all the trials and tribulations we have been called upon to endure. Thankful for the return to normal health, mental and physical. I thank Him for you, too,” she smiled; “for your honor; for the preservation of my virtue. I—I can’t help but be thankful that you in your unbelief can be trusted morally in our present situation. But above all,” she said with a note of affection in her voice, “I thank Him for that tiny spark of faith that He will one day save your soul.”

“Save my soul?” Jack gasped in a whisper. “Save my soul!” He was stunned.

Forgetting her own troubles, her own danger, her safety, her virtue and her desire to escape from it all, his soul’s salvation came first in her thoughts! His heart was melted in gratitude at the thought of her unselfish concern for him.

Together they set about arranging the three rooms in the cave, one for Shirley and Doris, one as a sort of kitchen where they were to prepare their meals and eat, and a smaller one farther down the corridor for his own sleeping quarters. There was plenty to keep them comfortable in each of the rooms. With the electric heating and cooking equipment that they found installed, they could get along very well for several days, if necessary, with the supplies that were already on hand. The electric current, like that in other parts of the old mine, was supplied directly from the dynamos in the control room below; and barring an accident of an unusual nature, there was little danger that they would be without heat, light and an ample water supply.

Time hung heavily on their hands. Time! that one factor in life by which existence is measured. That abundance of something which when you have it you don't want it, and when you don't have it then you want it—a factor in their life for which there seemed to be no adequate measurement. The oppression of time was simply unbearable, and when it came to work of any kind, both welcomed the opportunity of participating in it.

Doris found comfort in praying and reading the Bible that Jack had brought to her room while she was convalescing, following her operation. And to entertain Shirley, she never tired of telling Bible stories of Christ and His disciples, together with the great truths outlined in the historical stories of the Old Testament, from the creation of man to the events in the lives of the prophets.

When these stories were being told, Shirley was all attention and eager to hear more, while Jack either listened with an indifferent ear, or crept away to devour the contents of some old dust-covered magazines which he found in a recess of the cave.

But after two days had passed, as nearly as Jack could figure, the humdrum life became so monotonous that he occupied himself by picking away the porous formation in one of the smaller cave-like rooms. He knew it would take months, with the crude tools he could find, to make an excavation large enough for him to escape, but it furnished the exercise he needed to keep his mind off of himself, and he did not know what he might discover.

35. A Messenger From God

ONE MORNING, as Jack was engaged on his purposeless excavation, Doris and Shirley interrupted him. In childish glee, Shirley tried to interest him in a new found playmate that God had sent to her.

When Doris had gone to the tunnel entrance near the river that morning to empty the garbage, she had taken Shirley with her. Torrents of rain were falling outside, and the wind was blowing a mist into the mouth of the tunnel. As Doris attempted to throw the table leavings into the river, a few grains of rice and some bread crumbs were blown back into the entrance.

From out of the broad skies, a heavy gust of wind had carried a dove into the cave, as it tried to wing its way through the storm. For a moment Doris was too startled to realize what had happened. She did not know whether the dove had been injured, or had attempted to fly down for the crumbs, or whether it had sought a place of safety from the storm.

The heavy wind had carried the dove back into the entrance, until it gained its footing and had begun to pick up the grains of rice. Apparently with no fear, the dove allowed Doris to pick it up.

“A messenger from God,” she breathed, so excited she could hardly retain her composure, for she realized that the dove was a carrier pigeon.

Shirley stroked the dove with affection, while Doris cautioned her not to hurt it. Then wrapping the bird in the apron she wore, she allowed Shirley to carry it back to show Jack, under her careful supervision.

“Yes, yes,” Jack replied when Doris tried to get his attention. “I have just broken through a large crack that seems to get wider and wider; it may lead to some place,” he declared enthusiastically, struggling with a large piece of broken rock.

“See my little birdie!” Shirley cried gleefully.

“It’s a dove, Jack; it’s a dove! We found it at the entrance of the cave. It’s a carrier pigeon. A regular little messenger—tube—note and all. Come and help me write another note. We’ll let God’s messenger deliver it to someone,” she panted. “Please leave that old rock alone. God has

undertaken our deliverance. Come, oh, come! Our possibilities are with God, for He has said: ‘And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

“Doris,” he snapped, “what’s the matter with you? Cut out that miserable sanctimony! You’ll either shut up raving about God, or I— I— I’ll —!”

“Please, Jack, listen! Just this once, do listen!”

“I won’t listen! Not to any more of your foolish ness anyway. You’re going crazy. Shut up, or I’ll —!”

“Jack, please, please; just this once! I won’t try to explain now, but please write me a note that you think will bring us help when delivered to someone on the outside. I know it will, and I don’t want to trust in my own judgment. I want your assistance now. Please, just this once.”

Jack spoke the truth: “I don’t know what it’s all about, but get me the pencil and paper, and I’ll write the note—just one. You can copy it, duplicate it, or do anything you like with it, as long as you don’t bother me any more with your foolishness,” he emphasized, impatiently.

Doris took Shirley and went for the writing materials.

“A pitiful case of insanity,” Jack mumbled to himself. “It’s no wonder, though; I suppose I should humor her and put up with her unreasonableness. She can’t help it. I should be more patient with her.”

True to nature, Jack was interested only in material things. He was so out of patience with Doris that he had paid little attention to what she had said. The hole in the volcanic structure which he had just opened was more important to him. It had great possibilities, he thought; it might lead to another series of caves. Anything might develop—another exit—some way of escape—if no more than back to the volcano grounds again.

“Once there?” he trembled to think of the opportunity he might have to contact someone at the big gambling party, supposed to be in progress. Consequently, he turned a deaf ear to anything Doris was saying.

He had only a faint idea of what she was talking about, and, moreover, he was not interested in finding out. He considered her crazy on the subject of religion, and the mere mention of the word “God” made his whole soul surge in rebellion. He was still in the material world, he wanted to stay there, and to be interrupted by some of Doris’ “fool” ideas about God, just when he was breaking through into new opportunities, only provoked him to the point of losing his temper.

By the time Doris returned, however, he had cooled off considerably, so that he sat down under the light of an extension lamp that he was using, and without saying a word he took the pen and paper and the old magazine she had brought him, and began to write. He thought it was a waste of time, but with the magazine on his knee, he penned a note similar to those he had written for his own use, when he tried to float a message out through the exit of the canyon river by the use of bottles. Satisfied that he had modified it to fit the needs of their present situation, he handed it back to her.

“This should answer your purpose,” he said sheepishly. “Hope you have a lot better luck than I had.”

Matching his smile with one of sincere appreciation, Doris took the note and turned to go.

“Thank you so much, Jack,” she said over her shoulder. “I’ll be back to bother you just once more. I want your final approval on the note when I copy it.”

“All right! I’ll try to be more accommodating next time,” he called after her.

In the course of half an hour she returned with a small piece of paper which she had torn from the fly leaf of her Bible, and on which she had copied the note that he had written. With an air of indifference he read the finely printed lines.

“Just room enough for you to sign your name below mine,” she smiled, offering him the pen again.

Jack wrote his name across the bottom of the note as she suggested, and handed it back without comment.

“All things are possible to him that believeth,” she quoted with one of her rare smiles such as he had not witnessed for days.

“Maybe grandmother’s simple philosophy of life is best; it certainly works wonders in providing satisfaction and happiness,” he soliloquized, trying to associate Doris’ present mental makeup with the virtues that he reluctantly ascribed to Grandmother Thrillby.

Tiring of his task of accomplishing nothing by endeavoring to tunnel beyond the limits of their present quarters, Jack gave up in disgust. He found that his efforts only brought him back to his own sleeping quarters.

“Just going around in circles ever since I’ve been here!” he lamented. “Nothing comes out right. Everything is wrong—dead wrong! What does life amount to anyway?”

He was too disappointed to say anything. Aimlessly he wandered back into the corridor and out to the opening overlooking the river.

While Jack was exploring the underground cavern for a new exit, Doris was busily preparing her note, and also persuading Shirley to part with her newly acquired pet. The dove was kept under an old vegetable crate, where it could get rested. Doris gave it every advantage possible, in preparation for its continued journey after the storm would subside. She was very careful that Shirley did not over-feed it, or unnecessarily disturb it.

Her hands had trembled when she removed the message-tube which she found concealed under the left leg of the pigeon, for she was certain that it had been directed by the hand of her heavenly Father to find shelter at her feet. There was no other way to account for it. No other member of the dove family would have chosen the entrance to a cave, concealed as it was underneath the overhanging canopy of rock, for a refuge. There were many other places more suitable for that purpose than a cave within the crater walls of an extinct volcano.

Yes, the hand of God had adjusted the circumstances to their particular needs! The storm, the dove, the opportune time—all were in harmony with the plans of the heavenly Father to answer prayer for their deliverance. The inexplicable peace in Doris' soul assured her that God had undertaken for them, and all the conniving and cunning plans of the master minds of crime could not prevail against Him.

An inspection of the messenger tube disclosed that it contained a short code message, which Doris did not understand; but she felt that if she included her message with it, the chances were far greater that it would be received and read, than if she destroyed it and sent her note alone. With her heart throbbing in ecstasy at the possibilities that awaited her, she placed her own note in the tube beside the original message, and then with care she lifted the dove from underneath the crate and replaced the tube securely under its left leg as she had found it.

A welcome ray of sunshine greeted her as she and Shirley approached the opening into which the pigeon had so mysteriously entered. With a prayer of thanks giving upon their lips and their hearts overflowing with gratitude, they knelt at the iron rail to petition God for the safety of their heaven-sent messenger, which they were about to release. Both turned in fearful anticipation when they heard Jack's footsteps approach from within

the depths of the cave, thinking that perhaps the Weasel had returned, and was now coming to search them out.

Jack did not see Doris' eyes light up in faith, as she hastily held the dove for Shirley to caress, and then in turn shower it with endearing kisses of affection before she released it. In fact, he had been so indifferent to Doris' plea for the note and her explanation about the dove that his comprehension of what it was all about was very meager; he was not concerned.

Like a flash of lightning, the bird shot into the sky from Doris' extended hands, carrying with it the cherished "pigeongram" that was to bring deliverance for those hidden from the outside world. Never had a dove flown so swiftly, Doris thought, as she watched it circle above the crater cone of the old volcano. Only an instant hesitation, and then, true to its God-given instinct, it winged its way to an anxious and waiting public.

"Give ear to my prayer, O God," was her parting petition as the dove disappeared from view.

"Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee," the subconscious answer assured her.

"For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor for sake thee," she quoted aloud. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God?"

Jack could not understand the radiant glow of assurance that was reflected in Doris' features as he approached her.

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest," she exclaimed in her enthusiasm.

"And leave the rest of us in our present distress," he chided.

"Auntie Dorrie made the birdie go away and tell mamma where Shirley is," the little kidnapped victim said soberly, pointing her plump little hand skyward.

"She did?" Jack questioned, uncertain what she meant.

"Whoo-hoo!" the voice of the Weasel echoed down the corridor.

"What about the note?" Jack inquired.

"That's what Shirley referred to," Doris whispered. "It's gone!" And drawing the child to her, she cautioned her to say no more about the dove. Jack went to meet the outlaw.

"Well, well; I see you have set up housekeeping in earnest," the Weasel declared. "Just thought I'd come down; brought a crate of oranges for the

kid. Meat and a week's supply of provisions are in the other boxes. Better take care of them!"

"What's the latest news?" Jack asked mechanically.

"Oh, just so-so," was the outlaw's indifferent answer. "Party over—everything but the headache; Stanley's still in a grouch."

"Anyone there I know?" Jack queried, fishing for information.

"Come to think of it, yes; a fellow named Coxy. Asked a lot of questions; wondering about you, too."

"He did? Coxie Hollingsworth, I bet. Tall, good looking, brown eyes, dimple in one cheek?" Jack asked, as he described his college friend.

"Yes, that's the one. Stanley knew him well. He's all right! Doing some kind of work on the outside; but what made Stanley sore, he had to drag a fellow called Little Peter along to ask more questions. He knows both you and Doris," the outlaw volunteered. "Everybody on the outside is still wondering, I guess, how the earth swallowed you up," he laughed hilariously.

"The party went over big, so now they can go back and keep on wondering. Little Peter's not so hot, though; must be working for the Government—in the treasury department—the way he scrutinized the bills on the gambling tables. But that's all right. He did not see anything. It was open house for the law. They came, they saw, they went away satisfied—G-men and all! They are still wondering, though, I suppose, why Dr. Thrillby kidnapped Miss Wheaton and where they are," he roared again, doubling up in convulsions of laughter.

Shirley with her head on Doris' breast cringed in fear. "Never mind now, darling," Doris whispered, her lips against the child's ear. "God will take care of you."

"Stanley wants to know how the young lady is coming on with her letter writing. He's getting anxious about the wedding, too, you know." The outlaw grinned, inquiringly.

Jack watched his small, evil eyes roll in their sockets.

"What about the wedding date of our Romeo and Juliet? That's something we're all interested in," he tantalized.

"The matter is still under consideration without any definite assurance as to the outcome," Jack answered, evading the question.

"Well, all I can say is, don't leave it to us to change your minds for you. That's the best advice I can give. It also applies to the young lady, too.

Trouble only multiplies, you know, when my friendly advice is ignored. It's quite possible that you might receive an unfavorable reception should I be forced to officiate as a Shakespearian character in this match," he grinned. "Better persuade the young lady that it will be much better and to her advantage if Cupid changes her mind for her."

"We'll put the question up to Shakespeare," Jack quibbled, marveling at the Weasel's knowledge of the bard.

"All right, then; we'll depend on the one and only answer. When the next party upstairs is over, we'll take care of the details and dispose of this little matter of a legal wedding—the rest will depend on you. You still have three or four days to make up your mind before we make it up for you," the experienced disciple of crime said with a chuckle. And his warnings, apparently, were not to be ignored.

Though only temporary, his departure was a relief to Jack and Doris.

36. Rather an Informal Invitation

THE HOURS OF WAITING became an ordeal for Doris; and though she was wont to pride herself as living up to the old adage: "Patience is a virtue that hath its reward," she nevertheless became nervously impatient, and failed to exercise diligence.

By faith she accepted the miraculous appearance of the dove, and in faith she had cheerfully released it on its God-given mission. But patience to continue in faith was limited by her human propensities. Little thoughts of doubt and moments of anxiety kept creeping in upon her conscience, until she fled to the Word of God in search of comfort for her troubled soul.

"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry," she read. "What a com fort!" she thought. "Oh, if He would only come today!"

"But suppose the dove does not return to interested friends? Suppose the note is taken as a practical joke of some sort and ignored? Suppose it is never found? Suppose the bird belongs in a foreign country, like Mexico, for instance?" The Tempter aggravated her with such doubtful thoughts, and befogged her mind with many suppositions.

"Have faith in God," came the encouraging thought.

"What is faith?" she questioned.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," came the comforting assurance.

Just then an unusual commotion in the mine shaft brought Jack to Doris' side.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

Doris did not reply. Her own anxiety was too great to trust herself to speak. Were her prayers about to be answered? Inwardly she had the assurance that the commotion meant their good fortune.

They heard strange voices coming from the cab as it ran up and down the shaft. Doris was convinced they came from men who were trying to locate them. Finally, the elevator was lowered again very slowly, with one

of the men riding on top, gripping the cable in order to make the proper stop.

“We are Government men,” he called out, when he got opposite the level where Jack was standing.

“Looking for victims of kidnappers?” Jack asked in a whisper.

“Yes! Are you Jack Thrillby?”

“Yes! Doris Wheaton and Shirley Dean are here, too.”

“Are they all right?”

“Right here behind me,” Jack called cautiously, as the conveyor descended from view.

In a moment they reappeared.

“We’re trying to locate the right contact, so we can stop this contraption in front of your entrance, according to instructions in your note,” said the man on top of the cage.

“Praise God for His little messenger that brought about our deliverance,” Doris prayed at Jack’s side.

“The Weasel has the keys to the back panel next to the entrance; get them and take out the screws, and you will have no difficulty in getting in. You can make a landing here by locking the cable in the slot on the inside of the cab where it runs through. But be careful and follow instructions. You will likely find the Weasel in the tower,” Jack hurriedly explained in his excitement, as they worked their way past, rising to the surface.

Half an hour passed before they again made their appearance, during which time Jack, Doris and Shirley were beside themselves with anxiety and nervous excitement. Impatiently, they walked to and fro in front of the iron gate that prevented them from approaching the mine shaft.

When the conveyor appeared again with the back panel out, it carried half a dozen strange men and the Weasel handcuffed between them. Jack was so nervous and weak he could scarcely stand. The moment had arrived, he feared, when he would be placed in irons along with the Weasel, and charged with the kidnapping. He was speechless when the cage stopped at the entrance to their cave and the Weasel, followed by four men, was shoved out to face him.

“Which key fits this lock?” one of the men demanded, dangling the Weasel’s long string of keys in front of him.

The outlaw shrugged his shoulders and avoided Jack’s gaze.

“So you won’t talk, eh?” one of the officers queried, poking him in the side with an automatic.

“Well,” said the one, handling the keys, “your talkative friend Keno upstairs said this one fitted this lock, didn’t he?”

“No, that was the one Stanley said fitted the control room lock down below,” the third officer advised.

“What about this one, then?” he asked, selecting another key.

“No, no! Not that one, that’s the one Hawkeye said belonged to the tower and must be carefully used because of the explosives. Here, tie this tag on it right away; do it now, so we won’t forget,” said one of the others, watching the Weasel’s facial reactions.

“That’s the right key there,” said the fourth man, stepping up. “Mudd was particular in explaining about its peculiar shape, don’t you remember?”

“Sure, that’s right,” the first officer assented, inserting the key in the lock and opening the gate.

The Weasel’s beady eyes flashed fire, not knowing that he was being decoyed into believing that his fellow outlaws had furnished the information.

The criminal instinct to throttle them possessed him. He clinched his fist, nursing his hate and a desire for revenge against his companions in crime, as the statements registered in his suspicious mind. Of course, he had no way of knowing that the officers had previously searched out the information for themselves, and from this knowledge were employing a clever game of strategy to make it appear that the other members of the gang had furnished the information after their arrest. Neither had he any way of knowing that the little drama he had just witnessed had been purposely staged for his particular benefit, and in this way enable the officer with the keys to select the right one.

The Weasel took the bait, hook, line and sinker. His bravado, egoism and superiority complex faded into the one purpose to look out for himself. He knew that he could not be connected with the actual kidnappings. There was no evidence of his being actually affiliated with the kidnap ring on the outside. He would keep his own counsel, and if he found that the other members of the gang were trying to save their own skins by placing the blame on him, he would rely on his own craftiness to beat them at their own game.

But he was no longer his own master. The leaven of unrighteousness had so warped his soul that he was no longer capable of exercising judgment. Doubt, fear and uncertainty were multiplying in the Weasel's superstitious heart. His cloak of egoism had been rent, leaving him to cower beneath the fear of defeat.

"So you're the preacher's daughter that caused all this trouble?" smiled the captain of the detail, after he had called them to one side to find out how they had fared during their captivity.

"The preacher's daughter?" Jack echoed in bewilderment.

"I would be, if anyone here would believe me," she smiled in return. "But I am either crazy or a base prevaricator, when I attempt to be anybody but Uncle Philip's millionaire daughter from Detroit. Even Jack here has not discovered the difference yet," she laughed heartily.

Jack was dumbfounded in his inability to figure it all out. He stood helplessly studying her face, while the officer tried to analyze the situation from Jack's angle.

"It will take another sleigh ride to really acquaint him with the fact that he is still associating with the unsophisticated daughter of a humble Baptist minister," she announced with a twinkle in her eyes, as the truth began to dawn on Jack's mind.

"You mean that you are Dorcas Wheaton and not Doris?" Jack exclaimed in amazement. "Do you mean that Doris was not kidnapped? You mean the Weasel here doesn't know? You mean that you have been fooling the whole lot of us all along? You mean —?"

"I mean that you have been fooling yourself by believing that you were too smart to be fooled," she interrupted, still laughing. "The foolish things of the world have been chosen by God to confound the wisdom of men."

"And they show the inevitable consequences of a career of crime," the captain remarked. "This is the natural climax for the Weasel and his wisdom, I would say, judging from his popularity as a prophet around this place."

All eyes were upon the Weasel.

"He should have something to say for himself," jeered the captain. "Or is it another case of the prophet not being without honor, save in his own country?"

Helplessly facing the consequences of his own acts, the Weasel looked daggers, and like all criminals at bay, was struggling with the thought of

how best to shift responsibility.

“I didn’t invite you here,” he flared recklessly, his eyes flashing fire. “If Stanley and the rest of them had listened to me, this would never have happened! They invited themselves into jail; let them take the consequences.”

“But what about this very unique and timely invitation?” taunted one of the G-men, as he withdrew an enlarged photostatic copy of Doris’ compact and finely-printed note from his inner coat pocket. He hesitated for effect, and then read aloud:

"Confidential message from three kidnapped victims: Deliver only to G-men or J. Philip Wheaton. Act! Make investigation regardless belief or opinion: Follow plane XG 6X66 owned by Atheistic Research Union to ‘Rendezvous’ located in volcano cone. Check camouflage party staged here (?) last week to throw off suspicion of G-men. Disregard those proofs and arrest all parties. Make careful and thorough search. We are here. Take mine shaft conveyor, remove the back panel. (The Weasel has keys.) Look for secret cave in bowels of earth, half way down mine shaft, you will find Shirley Dean, Dorcas Wheaton and Dr. J. Thrillby waiting rescue. We’re in the mountains, maybe Mexico. Check extinct volcanoes. Hurry! Come! Act immediately.

“LITTLE FIVE-YEAR-OLD SHIRLEY;
”DORCAS (BOOTS) WHEATON;
“DR. JOHN THRILLBY.”

The Weasel’s eyes roved like an ogre from Dorcas to Jack in fiendish hate. Still flashing fire they roved back to the serious face of the representative of the law who addressed him.

“Rather an informal invitation, I would say,” the officer smiled.

“We did not need a second invitation, either, after the carrier pigeon delivered that message to the coast guard station so faithfully,” the captain said.

“It certainly came within the providence of God, Miss Wheaton,” said the first officer, producing an other photostat taken of the code message and the note Dorcas had written on the reverse side. “You are to be congratulated for your foresight in taking advantage of the opportunity.”

“I would have been unfaithful to God if I had failed to recognize His answer to prayer,” she replied reverently.

The officer was amused as he studied the expressions

registered on the faces of Jack and the Weasel, as he read the inscription that Dorcas had written:

"Pigeon found refuge here in storm; respect request of kidnapped victims; information authentic.

“DORCAS WHEATON.”

"Caution: Outlaws always on watch in tower on cliff. Come disguised as gamblers.

“D. M. W.”

“Well, here we are clothed in all the authority of the law to give you a royal and official welcome back to channels of civilization,” the captain said courteously. “A very imperative public is anxiously and impatiently waiting your reception there, I can assure you.”

Two of the officers who had been making a thorough search of the underground quarters returned with the information that their investigation was complete and now only awaited the order of their superior to proceed to the floors above and prepare for their exit.

“Dorcas Wheaton!” Jack murmured vaguely, coming out of the trance of uncertainty that had held him speechless.

“None other than the very ambiguous and deceptive young lady in person,” Dorcas playfully informed him, coming over and placing her hand on his arm. “I am sorry, Jack,” she said, “that it had to be that way; but you know, when confidence is not received, confidence cannot be given.”

Jack sheepishly evaded her gaze. He knew that there was no one to blame but himself for the position he was in. He did not want to talk about it now. Frankly, there were too many strange ears around them for him to even attempt an explanation. He was chagrined with the painful humiliation of wounded pride, and therefore the least said was by far the best policy for him to pursue.

“Dorcas Wheaton!” His reason must be playing a trick on him. He could not believe that it was she! Oh, that he could only get away and hide himself.

Yes, it was Dorcas Wheaton. Would that it were otherwise! She was the one girl in all the universe whom the gods of fate persisted in casting across

his path.

“Why?” he asked himself.

Dorcas was like his grandmother—clothed with that mysterious, invisible essence of power which can be attributed only to God. A cloak of protection which ever seemed to hold him and the gang of kidnappers aloof by an unexplainable, unwritten law: “Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.”

He was blind! Why hadn't he seen it before?

37. “Be Not Deceived; God Is Not Mocked”

THE THRILLING ACCOUNT of the strategic capture of the Wheaton kidnapers by the G-men was even more sensational than the first news of the crime. The news papers throughout the country had printed columns about the activities of the notorious, brazen, master minded criminals who engaged in the business of wholesale kidnapping of prominent people. Then, too, a detailed account of each individual was given which covered their past and the part they had to play in connection with the bold adventure in crime.

Needless to say, Dorcas and Jack were the principal ones with whom these narratives had to deal. The details of the exploits of this gang of criminals, and their activities in connection with the various crimes for which they were responsible, could best be learned by following the accounts of their lawlessness as recorded in the daily press. The principles of crime never change. The never-ending job of organized law enforcement is to keep abreast of the new technique employed by the criminal element.

But Jack and Dorcas were interested in neither. After they had been hurriedly transported by plane from the crater of the extinct volcano in Mexico, they were forced into seclusion to keep away from curiosity seekers, autograph hunters, commercializing interests, and the moving-picture industry.

Because of some sensational developments growing out of the Weasel's plot to force them into secret marriage, each of them wanted to be alone and enjoy the privilege of being away from the constant gaze of a curious public. The newspapers, however, made much of this phase of the story, to the embarrassment of both Jack and Dorcas. This was news, and the hungry press persisted in hounding them for details of the story.

Jack had always taken an arrogant attitude towards the affairs of life, but now he was willing to admit that he had made a fool of himself. In spite of

his boasted professional wisdom, he had jumped at the conclusion that his patient was suffering from some mental delusion. The fact that he had not discovered Dorcas' name on the note when he signed it humiliated him.

He could not get away from the mortifying sense of making a second uncalled-for blunder in mistaking Dorcas for Doris. He realized that he was reaping the harvest of his self-righteous conceit—a fault which had caused him to deny his old grandmother the right to her opinions about God. Also he had rejected the best thoughts of Christians for the opinions of his atheistic friends. He had denied his patient the right to reveal her identity by refusing to take her into his confidence. He had even denied her the opportunity to make any explanation concerning the carrier pigeon and the note she had asked him to write. It was all plain now. He could see where his stubborn persistence in attempting to prove that there is no God had led him to his own downfall. He was now reaping that which he had sown.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked,” Grand mother Thrillby's voice whispered in his heart.

For the first time in his life the old argument that he had been wont to use failed him—failed him because he could no longer deny the fact of a Supreme Power which overruled the finite wisdom of man. Practically every newspaper in the country had carried the convincing proof of that fact. The picture of the meek, inoffensive carrier pigeon which adorned their front pages was an immutable testimony that he could not deny. It was far more than a dove of peace which had become the bearer of the note that solved the Wheaton kidnapping case. He could now see in it the hand of the infinite God!

Jack read the lengthy editorial in the local press concerning human failure, and man's need of God; and then he turned again to the front page where he saw a reproduction of the note he had helped to pen. How it goaded him! His signature below that of Dorcas Wheaton's was evidence of his stupidity that he could not deny. What a rebuke to his own conceited opinions! The picture of the coast guard who had received the note and forwarded it to the proper authorities was additional evidence of the hand of God in making possible his liberty; otherwise he would still be a captive in the Rendezvous of the kidnappers, with Dorcas and Shirley, and the very thought seemed to freeze the blood in his veins.

He was silent in painful meditation.

The God whom he had mocked in his unbelief had become his Deliverer. This fact condemned him. Grandmother Thrillby's Saviour had undertaken for him. There was no escape from this convicting truth. His sins had found him out.

Oh, if he could only live the past few months over again! What a vastly different picture his life would present! What a different attitude he would assume! He would not be such a fool. He would have more respect for a God-fearing public. Now he had but one wish: the desire to have the court proceedings over with, so that he could go somewhere and hide from the condemning eyes of the world.

The suspense of waiting to be called as a witness in the trial of the outlaws was nearly as nerve-racking as the weeks of anxiety he had spent in the volcano hideout. But justice is blind to the whims, desires and temperaments of those involved, and consequently neither he nor Dorcas could be excused from the ordeal of appearing in public on the day of the trial.

It was the first time that he had met her since they had been taken from the underground cave beneath the Rendezvous. They had chosen, at the request of the G-men, to remain in seclusion. Consequently, as soon as it was announced that they were to appear in public, an army of newspaper reporters and photographers, together with an endless throng of curiosity seekers, were found swarming about the County Building like flies at a sorghum mill.

At Dorcas' request, they were ushered into a waiting room reserved for witnesses, to be called when it was necessary for them to appear before the court. For a while one of the G-men remained with them, but in a few minutes after the case was called it became necessary for him to consult with the attorneys on the question of certain evidence to be presented.

It was a tense moment, the first few minutes they were alone. Neither of them spoke. The wrangle of the attorneys on the question of jurisprudence that floated in over the open transom was the only thing that broke the deathlike silence.

"I am the prize fool of the kingdom," Jack finally blurted out.

"I am sorry. I never realized what a queer mess could develop from such circumstances," she answered meekly.

"I don't blame you in the least; there is no one to blame but myself. I should have permitted you to take me into your confidence. But I was so

cock-sure of myself. I— I can't blame you for not wanting to trust me. I did not deserve your confidence. All I can do now is to offer my humble apology," he candidly confessed.

"It was after many long hours of prayer that I was able to commit the matter to the Lord, and now I can see His guiding hand in it all. He is faithful. I am sorry that you could not place your trust in Him," she said, consolingly, "for then the tribulation which we endured could have been shared together; and it would have been so much easier for both of us."

"Please don't," Jack said; "I don't deserve any sympathy. It was all my fault. Grandmother's prophesy has come true. I have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Now I can only try to redeem the time and forget —"

"God does not want you to forget," she interrupted. "Gold refined in the furnace of experience is purified by the process."

"My welfare is not worth worrying about. I'll have to leave the past behind and go to some other place where I'm not known and there start life anew," he lamented, taking the attitude of pitying himself.

"I am starting right where I left off in Sault Ste. Marie," she smiled encouragingly—her gay, sweet self again.

"I wish I could do the same," he murmured huskily.

"You can, if only you will —"

"It's no use now. No one would trust me. Why impose on people begging for good will?" he complained, disheartened. "Let's forget it! We'll talk about some of your experiences instead—they are more important."

She made an effort to change the subject.

"Some of the news items don't seem to be plausible; but, of course, I could not be expected to understand," he lamented.

"Not in that mood," she said sweetly. "Maybe, though, if you gave me a pointer, I might try to explain. What is it you don't understand?"

"Just how you were picked up and mistaken for your cousin, Doris; and how the matter remained undiscovered so long by the police and the gang of outlaws."

She laughed pleasantly, and then, noticing Jack's troubled brow, she replied seriously: "It's a long story. The newspapers garbled it somewhat to make it sound a little more sensational, I guess. What is the first thing you wish to know?"

“How you happened to be in Sault Ste. Marie, and how you could be mistaken for Doris?”

“Doris and her friends were in Canada, as you know,” Dorcas replied. “A bearing burned out in the motor of her car. She came across to the American side to get repairs. I happened to be spending a week’s vacation there and we met accidentally. When she found that her car had to be overhauled, Doris and her party conceived the idea of buying a new car, and practically a new demonstrator was found. They bought it, and her old car was turned over to me to drive back to Chicago, after it was repaired. They thought of coming back that way, if they found it possible to circle the lakes north of Lake Superior.

Otherwise, I was to bring Doris’ car back to Detroit as soon as I had an opportunity to come home.”

“What about her driver’s license and the other identifications you carried? Also her purse that was pictured in the paper? I could never understand that.”

“That’s what caused all the trouble, I guess. Any way, because they were in my possession, I was unable to convince Keno and Mudd, when they rolled the log across the road and stopped me, that I was Dorcas instead of Doris Wheaton. Doris, you see, had renewed her driver’s license. Her old one, which would expire in a few days, was in her key-case, along with the identification of her car. My operator’s license was in Chicago. Naturally, I used her old one—a violation of the law for which I have paid dearly.” She smiled knowingly:— “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

“But that was only an innocent violation,” Jack ventured. “Hundreds of people—most anyone would have done the same thing.”

“Yes, I know; but that’s no excuse, and when trouble comes, as it eventually does, you either have to try to lie your way out, or confess your sins and take your punishment. By trying to pass myself off as Doris with her driver’s license, I unconsciously lied myself into trouble. When I found that the truth would answer my purpose far better and tried to explain, I was branded as a liar anyway.”

She frowned under conscientious conviction.

“Regardless of what I said to the contrary, the car identification and the driver’s license identified me as Doris Wheaton. Later, when I found out that Keno and Mudd had seen Doris at Ann Arbor, I could readily understand how hard it was to convince them otherwise. Explanations were

useless. Cousins could not possibly look so much alike, as they thought.” She smiled knowingly.

“How well I know!” Jack agreed with a good natured expression.

“When they found Doris’ old purse that she purposely left in the car, with a letter in it to her mother which I was supposed to mail as soon as I could drop a line to Aunt Flo, there was nothing that I could say. No amount of explaining would convince them of the truth of my statements. They had followed her north purposely to kidnap her, and when they found me, they were certain they had found her. I had her car, her identification, and her looks; and I was Doris Wheaton even to the point of positive identification. Even crooks make honest mistakes, you see,” her eyes smiling with a mischievous twinkle.

“All right, rub it in!” Jack smiled back.

“No one ever got into more trouble than I did at that moment when I handed them Doris’ driver’s license for my identification,” she said, continuing her story. “I thought they were conservation officers or fire marshals, when I saw the log across the road. I did not think of such a thing as being kidnapped. But it happened and I was helpless. They drove me down the road, took me out of the car and tipped it over into the river. Stanley must have been waiting in his car. Anyway, after I was blindfolded a car drove up and I was taken to a waiting aeroplane somewhere and—well, I guess you know the rest,” she finished, hesitatingly.

“No, I don’t. You never told me the details about that plane trip. Were you blindfolded all the time?” Jack inquired.

“No, not all the time. After they had put me in a compartment on the plane and reached an elevation above the clouds the blindfold was removed. Mudd kept guard over me. There’s really not much more that I know about how the trip was made. We were either in the clouds or so high up that it was hard to tell what the country looked like. They wanted me to drink some chocolate, but I was afraid of being drugged, so when we took on gas that night after dark, one of them left the plane and returned with four pints of ice cream from which I would choose one. Then the next day, just before we landed in the volcano, the first news broadcast about the kidnapping came through on the plane radio —”

“That was the first you knew about Doris Wheaton being kidnapped?” Jack interrupted with a smile.

“Yes! Up to that time I continually insisted that they had the wrong party. That I was Dorcas Wheaton instead of the daughter of Uncle Phil in Detroit, as they thought. I could not understand why the authorities had not found out the difference. But when I heard Uncle Phil’s voice on the air, pleading for the kidnappers to return his own little girl, Boots, I felt more confident. That was always his nickname for me. Then when they chided me for trying to bluff them into believing I was not his daughter, Doris Wheaton, I said no more. Somehow, from then on I felt that God would intervene on my behalf in some way. And the more I thought about the strange chain of circumstances, it seemed as though the hand of fate had outlined the plans which were destined to involve me,” she explained breathlessly, watching the door for the court officer to return.

“It does seem that way, when you realize that that was the real beginning of all your troubles. It makes one wonder why, all right,” Jack said thoughtfully, “particularly when you connect it up with the carrier pigeon and the other things that happened.”

“Yes, it does! When I think of my injury and the miraculous recovery, thanks to you, Dr. Thrillby,” she smiled in sincere appreciation, “I can’t help but believe that God had a particular purpose in it for your benefit.”

“My benefit! In what way?”

“Answering grandmother’s prayers for your soul’s salvation,” she earnestly replied.

Jack was thoughtful. His old attitude of defiance and rebellion was gone. It was a question now for which he had no answer. Certainly a strange chain of circumstances had encompassed him and involved him in a way that he could not understand, nor find any explanation. His brutal and vicious desire to prove that there is no God had been forcefully and effectively put to naught by a meek little dove that was at the right place at the right time. The evidence that God was there could not be denied, for there was no other way to explain all that occurred. The God whom he refused to recognize had written His inscription, certifying the evidence in a way that no one could honestly fail to recognize.

38. The Dregs of Unhappiness

DEATH, the omen of ill-fortune that persistently dogged Jack's footsteps, was creeping nearer and nearer to eradicate the ties that associated him with five of his former atheistic friends and colleagues.

The third of June, nearly a year after he had graduated with high ambitions of making his mark in the world, was to be the eventful day on which the execution was to take place. Society was to be rid of the vultures who preyed upon their fellow men by exacting a ransom for the return of some dear one. Keno, Mudd, Stanley, Hawkeye and the Weasel were to pay the extreme penalty in the electric chair. Pansy and the Jap and the burly character who manned the control room in the Rendezvous were sentenced to spend the remainder of their natural lives in a Federal penitentiary.

A fair and impartial trial had been accorded each of the malefactors, and they were to assume full responsibility for their own malicious acts.

As the fatal day approached, Jack, among all men, was perhaps the most miserable. Not from the angle that justice must be rendered to this lawless band of public enemies, but because of his close association with them as an atheist, and the former ties of friendship that had bound him to them. He was a lone out cast now. Even though exonerated from actual participation in their criminal activities, yet he felt himself socially rejected and unfit to mingle with those who belonged to what was considered respectable society.

On the morning of Decoration Day, the week before the execution, he found himself on his way back to the old homestead, wandering across vacant lots in order to avoid meeting those whom he might know. He wanted to be alone. The decree of death was causing him to find solace and consolation in recalling his reliable friends of the past.

When he climbed the fence to the pasture lot next to the barn, Queen whinnied a greeting of welcome and came trotting up to meet him. Jack put his arm around the neck of his faithful horse and patted her on the shoulder.

She could not understand his endearing words and demonstration of affection.

Emotion overcame him as he clung to the horse's neck, unable to prevent the tears of homesickness from filling his eyes. Queen was the only friend he had left. No one else was at the old homestead to greet him. He glanced across the field to the cemetery lot on the hill, and watched the people placing flowers on the graves of their loved ones. Several were standing at the headstone of his grandmother's grave, engaged in conversation. A pang of mental anguish seized him. Somehow he felt that he was the central topic in that unheard conversation. His conscience was prodding him with the thoughts of misspent days. He could feel that his name was a byword on the lips of everyone in the community who knew and honored his grand mother.

Queen became impatient as the grip tightened around her neck and the usual lump of sugar, which she expected, was not forthcoming. She nosed around his pockets in search of the expected treat and then trotted away.

Even Queen wanted to shun him, he thought. She had never acted that way before, and he could not understand her peculiar attitude of trotting around him just beyond his reach. But when she ran on ahead, and left him to follow to the brink of the hill along side of the next pasture lot, he discovered the motive for her actions.

On the other side of the fence at the foot of the hill was a small colt of which Queen was the proud mother. She became separated from her offspring by coming through the gate at the far end of the field, leaving the colt to follow along on the other side of the fence. This accounted for Queen being alone when Jack arrived upon the scene. Walking over to the fence, he waited until she came within an arm's reach, and then caressed her colt on the other side of the fence. Then taking her by the forelock, he led her along the fence to the gate in order that they might be reunited.

This happy surprise took Jack's mind away from his troubles for the time being. He had no previous knowledge of the increase in the family of live stock, and so he looked upon Queen's colt as a prized possession.

With a look at the hill where the people were still milling around in the cemetery, he went to the house and fished the key to the front door from underneath the eaves on the porch. He had concealed it there when he closed the place to return to college over a year before. Unlocking the door,

he walked through the house, throwing the windows and doors open as he went, so as to let in the fresh air and rid the premises of a musty smell.

Everything was in the same state as previously, except for an accumulation of dust that had settled evenly on every piece of furniture. Dead flies, millers and various types of insect life hung in cobwebs around the windows, where they had spent their last feeble efforts to gain freedom to the outside world.

The only signs of life to be found were in the kitchen, where a family of deer-mice had taken up their abode. Two of them scampered from the woodbox beside the stove to a hole in the baseboard at the other end of the room. Several places around the cupboard doors showed evidence of their malicious destruction, as they tried to feed on the greasy fats that the woodwork had absorbed over the period of years that Grandmother Thrillby had prepared many delicious meals.

Jack found the solitude of the place unbearable. In order to get rid of the haunted atmosphere that seemed to possess the place, he went outside and re moved the coverings from the windows. This gave the old homestead a little more of the old homey appearance which it once possessed. He had to stay somewhere, and he knew of no other place that he could go; so the only thing for him to do was to make the best of conditions as he found them.

His homecoming was of necessity rather than of choice. It afforded some relief but no joy. The relief was due to the fact that he could hide from the cruel taunts of an unkind world—a world in which he was socially out of step; a world hungry for publicity of which he was the unwilling subject; a world of lost opportunity where he had at every turn met defeat. He was an outcast with no place to go but home—an environment that spoke of grandmother—which a few short months before he thought he could not face.

Going back through the front room, Jack ran the gauntlet of those ancestral pictures on the wall which had so upset him on the morning that he deserted the old home to return to college. The feeling of antipathy that possessed him then was gone. In fact, the pictures now were one of attraction. With pains taking care he took a cloth and removed the cobwebs and dust from each one, and with a satisfied air stepped back to view the results of his labors.

Grandmother's smile of welcome was one of satisfaction to him now.

Going back to his own room, he carried out some of the bedding and hung it over the wire clothesline, that had reached from the black cherry tree to the stately old locust since he was a boy. All afternoon he busied himself with the task of getting the place in order for occupancy. He forgot all about eating, and as the hours wore on bodily fatigue overcame that sense of homesickness that he felt when he returned. The question of something to eat finally became a matter of importance.

In the basement was row upon row of canned fruit, placed there with grandmother's painstaking care, the only edibles that could be found on the premises. A late breakfast on the train had been his last meal, and in his anxiety to get away from the station without being seen, he had entirely forgotten the necessity of buying provisions. Selecting a can of strawberries that his grandmother had prepared the summer before her death, he carried it to the kitchen and made a meal of its contents. He would wait until after dark before going to the village for supplies, he mused, as he sat in solitude after finishing his strange meal.

As it drew towards the close of the day, Jack brought in the bedding that he left out for a sun bath. When he was taking the last piece off the line, he glanced across to the cemetery, and there he saw the last two people slowly wending their way towards their waiting car at the gate. Jack leaned his arms on the wire line and stood there with his chin resting on the back of his hands. For a long time he remained in thought, watching the sun creep nearer to the horizon and noticing the quietness of the evening hour.

A gentle waft of wind, carrying with it the fragrance from grandmother's cherished lilac bushes at the far end of the garden, awakened him to action. The placing of purple and white bouquets from these prolific shrubs had been grandmother's loyal duty every Decoration Day. He felt the same call now! He owed that much to her memory; and so carried along by this impulse, he went to the rear of the ice house, gathered an armful of the choicest blossoms and returned to the house. He placed them in a number of fruit cans, as he had often seen his grandmother do, preparatory to taking them to the cemetery.

When the flowers were ready, he glanced at the clock, only to discover that it had stopped. Looking at his watch, he decided that it was too early to go to the graveyard. The sun was still visible in the sky, and he did not want to run the risk of meeting some latecomers when he arranged the flowers at the graves.

He searched on top of the tall sideboard for the key to the big grandfather clock. Almost the first thing he came across was the Bible which Dorcas had given him. He remembered how he had carelessly, with resentful indifference, thrown it up there the night of grandmother's death. He recalled also that Dorcas had written a Scripture verse on the flyleaf before presenting him with the Book. What it was he did not know, because at the time he purposely ignored it and had forgotten the instance.

Shoving the Bible to one side, he took the key, wound the clock and adjusted the time to correspond with the wrist watch that Doris had given him on the occasion of his graduation.

"What a strange set of circumstances had developed through his acquaintance with these two cousins!" he meditated. "Why had they come into his life?" he asked himself, as he replaced the key and recalled the secret message that was between the covers of Dorcas' Bible. Unable to withstand the temptation, he took the Book and dusted it off, and attempted to replace it without opening it; but the thought of the flowers he was to place on his grandmother's grave and the reverence he knew she had for the Word of God rebuked him.

For a few moments he stood there battling with his emotions, and then with trembling fingers he turned the cover and was confronted with the message that was to confound the rebellion that he nurtured in his soul:

"Re-dedicated to John Withington Thrillby, that he may either definitely prove there is no God, or as definitely discover his lost condition and turn to the God he now rejects."

He had no answer to the challenge. Every attempt he had made to prove the first provision of this demand had resulted in disgrace and failure. Now, because of his efforts, he was a social outcast, branded with the stain of undesirable citizenship—a man whose social standing was measured by the company he had chosen to keep; a friend of convicted kidnapers, who were to be executed as a menace to society. All the resources of his own strength and the financial support of his fellow colleagues had met with defeat at every turn, and now he was confronted with the challenge of finding the answer to the question in God's own Word.

"Why not? If there is no God, there can be no harm in proving it by the Bible," he thought, as he turned to the verse in the third chapter of John which Dorcas referred to when she signed her initials below the inscription she has written on the flyleaf:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Jack was struck with his lack of humility for the first time in his life. His efforts to increase above the infinite knowledge of God had been the cause of all his troubles. His association with those who cared not for God proved this. He had reaped the harvest of his own sowing and had come to the point where he must decrease in his estimate of his own superiority.

With the first ray of comfort to ease his troubled soul, Jack picked up the Bible which Dorcas had given him and the basket of flowers that he had prepared for grandmother’s grave, and made his way across the fields towards the cemetery which lay between him and the sinking sun.

39. At Grandmother Thrillby's Grave

IN ANOTHER HOUR it would be dark. As Jack made his way across the field to the cemetery, the meadow larks flew up in front of him and soared to some distant point, uttering their evening call as they went. A lone robin, perched at the top of a stately elm, was singing a song of happy enthusiasm, expressing to the world the supreme joy of living. Other songsters responded to the spirit of the approaching twilight, as the sun began its descent to mark the close of an other day.

No one was there to disturb Jack in his quiet mission of loyalty to grandmother's memory. He could not explain the feeling of peaceful devotion in his soul, as he placed the vases of flowers on the graves of those members of his family who had passed on to their great reward. The usual rebellion against the hand of Providence that had taken his father, mother, sister and brother, and then the last remaining tie, his beloved grandmother, no longer existed. There was a peace in his heart that he had never experienced before. Mingled with the grief at the loss of his loved ones was a new longing to understand the things of God. His self-will had been conquered, and he was ready to submit.

"Lord, not my will, but Thine, be done," he whispered in prayer, as he clung to the headstone before his grandmother's grave. It was the first prayer he had uttered since he was a boy, but it brought a sense of peace to his soul. It was a time in Jack's life when the minutes were not counted. He did not know how long he remained kneeling at his grandmother's headstone confessing his sins, and asking God to forgive him; but he still questioned if Christ was able and willing to save him from his guilt and shame. His sins seemed so great, and he felt so unworthy. Would God really forgive him?

The lone cry of a whippoorwill awoke him to the consciousness of his surroundings, and a step on the gravel path disturbed him. He rose to his

feet and was face to face with little Shirley. Upon recognizing him, she bounded into his arms with a cry of welcome.

It was hard for Dorcas to decide who was the happier of the two, as she stood with her basket of flowers that she had brought to place upon grandmother's grave, and watched Jack and Shirley embrace each other in a demonstration of happy surprise and affection.

"Auntie Dorrie is here, too," beamed the child, as soon as she got over her astonishment at meeting Jack so suddenly.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "what a pleasant reunion! How does it happen, Shirley, that you come to be here? How do you —?" he finished abruptly in perplexity.

Dorcas was nonplussed to find herself in such an awkward situation, but managed to regain her composure before she spoke:

"Shirley has been visiting the family for a few days, and so we drove out from the village together, thinking no one would be here at this hour. I wanted to remember grandmother without meeting a lot of curiosity seekers, so we purposely came late to place these flowers on her grave."

"And found me here for the same reason," Jack replied, reaching for the basket she carried with his free hand, while with the other he held Shirley, who still clung to him.

For a moment Dorcas held on to the basket in her embarrassment, until Shirley reached out with her free hand and drew her over to them.

"Auntie Dorrie loves Dr. Jack, don't she?" she exclaimed most innocently, drawing the two together with her arms around their necks, and forcing them so close that Jack's hot breath fell upon Dorcas' cheek. Turning, she let go of the basket in her effort to free herself from Shirley's arm.

"Dr. Jack loves Auntie Dorrie, too," continued the child, trying to prevent them from escaping her embrace.

"Listen to the little matchmaker," said Jack, reaching out and catching Dorcas by the hand before she got beyond his reach.

"Dorcas, believe me," he said, drawing her to him, and taking the Bible she had given him from his side coat pocket.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked, turning back the cover and exposing the flyleaf on which she had written the Scripture verse dedicated to him.

"Yes, Jack," she smiled in a quandary, still doubtful of his sincerity.

“Dorcas, you must believe me! Don’t punish me with that look of doubt in your eyes. I have come to a sense of my sinfulness and my lost condition. I know I am a guilty, condemned sinner, except for the grace of God. Please believe me,” Jack pleaded, falling on his knees, “I need your Saviour—your God—to save me. I have been desperately wicked in rejecting the Son of God. If I could in some way undo the past and atone for my heartless rejection of Him! If only I could have the peace of mind and soul that grandmother had and—and that you have! I am so unworthy—so exceedingly sinful—so unreasonable in my unbelief, that all hope now seems lost. I— I—need you, Dorcas; but I cannot ask you to plead my cause; am past forgiveness. I— I cannot redeem myself.”

“No, Jack, you cannot redeem yourself, but the Lord Jesus died for all your sins in order to redeem you. You are not past forgiveness, for by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. Our sins are forgiven for His name’s sake. He rose from the dead and is able and willing to save all who call upon Him.”

“I know I need Him, Dorcas; if—if only I could do something — .”

“Can’t you see, Jack? Without faith it is impossible to please God. Salvation is a free gift. God wants you to accept it as a gift, and not try to merit it by any good works that you might do.”

“He must increase, but I must decrease,” he quoted again, as he studied the verse on the flyleaf of his Bible.

“Yes, Jack, you must let God increase in your life until you decrease to the point of believing that through the blood of Christ shed on Calvary He saves you from your guilt and sin.”

“But, Dorcas, I have never even tried to believe before, and now when I find that I am in need of a pardon, I don’t know how to justify myself with God in the face of all my sinful past. If only I could do something—anything to earn forgiveness,” Jack cried in despair.

“You must believe His promise and receive His pardon, Jack. You cannot save yourself. One does not work for his salvation, but he can work out his salvation, after he has received it as the free gift of God. ‘With the heart man believeth unto righteousness,’” Dorcas repeated earnestly.

Shirley, feeling that she had been forgotten, slipped down from the headstone to busy herself with arranging the basket of flowers which were overturned at Jack’s feet.

“Dorcas,” said Jack huskily, his voice trembling with emotion, “I could not blame you if you refused to speak to me again. I do not deserve your good will. I have been so cruel to you and your God in my miserable unbelief, that even now, although I do desire to turn to Him, you have a right to doubt my sincerity. Oh, if I were only worthy of you, and had your faith in the infallible Word of God! I know I have failed miserably, and that I have sinned in not claiming Him as my Saviour. But I do want Him, and I ask that you pray earnestly for me that I truly may be saved and kept by Him. I am sick and tired of my old life and desire something entirely different.”

“I am so happy that you have come to this cross road of life, and now desire God’s salvation,” replied Dorcas, earnestly. “You owe no apology to me for your mistakes in the past. That is a matter between you and your God. Instead of harboring animosity, I have always pitied you in your blindness and unbelief. I certainly rejoice in your determination to seek Him, and I do trust that you will accept Him now as your Lord and Saviour. Will you do it? All that is necessary on your part is to turn to God with all your heart and believe on Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour. In this new confession of faith you can show to the world that your trust is in the same eternal God that Grandmother Thrillby loved, obeyed and worshipped.”

“God helping me, I will do it now,” Jack exclaimed with humility. “Henceforth, I shall tell others that I have taken off the old garments of unbelief and have put on the shield of faith and the whole armor of God.”

“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth,” Dorcas quoted reverently.

They stood there silently by the grandmother’s grave with bowed heads, while tears dropped from their eyes and Dorcas lifted her heart to God in thanks giving. Finally, Jack exclaimed, “I do believe; I believe that Jesus saves me now!”

Shirley climbed back on the headstone and tugged impatiently for them to recognize her labors in arranging the flowers on the grave.

“You’re a little sweetheart,” Jack said, picking her up and kissing her again. “Doctor Jack is going to love you for ever and ever for bringing Auntie Dorrie out here today. Now I will carry you back to the car before it gets dark and the folks in town start worrying about you,” he whispered in her ear.

“You go back with me, too, and see daddy. Auntie Dorrie don’t care, and daddy wants to see you, be cause I told him about the medicine, the bad men, and everything,” the child insisted.

Dorcas put her finger to her lips to warn Jack not to talk about the kidnapping in Shirley’s presence. Then she said, “Sure, Dr. Jack is going back with us to meet daddy and mamma. He will have to stay for supper, too, so he can tell them how you fixed the flowers on grandmother’s grave, won’t he?”

Shirley, bubbling over with happiness, nodded her head in agreement with Dorcas’ invitation, and chattered insistently all the way back to the car, which Dorcas had parked on the roadside facing the entrance to the cemetery.

The evening spent at the home of Dorcas’ aunt, whom he had met at the time of his grandmother’s funeral, and also on the occasion when he took Dorcas on the eventful sleigh ride out to Mother MacConnell’s place on the Blue Beach Road, was one of particular pleasure to Jack. Mr. and Mrs. Dean came over from the hotel, where they were staying for a few days to enable Shirley to be with Dorcas for a short visit, while they toured the state and visited points of interest. They were going to the Soo in a few days to see the famous locks, and to view the place where Dorcas was kidnapped. Later, they were to pay a visit to the birthplace of the quintuplets at Callander on their way through Canada.

Mr. Dean had the latest maps of Michigan and the Province of Ontario, and so after dinner the whole group, with the exception of Shirley, gathered around the table and reviewed the trip taken by Dorcas’ cousin and her party of friends on their way to see the five famous sisters, when they went north through North Bay and around to the Canadian Soo, where they had met Dorcas.

The part most interesting to Jack was the information Mr. Dean had learned from the G-men, and how they had located Doris Wheaton and her party in the wilds of northern Canada, but had purposely concealed the fact from the public.

The game of strategy which the officers had played in keeping this information to themselves was solely for the purpose of protecting Dorcas, for they feared that once the outlaws learned that they were holding the daughter of a poor preacher for ransom instead of the daughter of a

millionaire, they would immediately kill their victim, dispose of her body and leave the world in ignorance of what had happened.

All these circumstances revealed to Jack the goodness and wisdom of God. On the other hand, he could now see how God had allowed him to dig pitfalls in his own pathway, so that he might see the folly of his own acts.

“But why had Dorcas in her loyalty to Christ been forced to suffer with him?” was the question he could not refrain from asking.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God,” was the verse that grandmother and Dorcas often repeated and supplied the needed answer.

“Then were all the circumstances surrounding Dorcas’ life permitted by God? Yes, grandmother would have explained it that way,” he soliloquized. “Chance does not exist in the life of a saint.”

He began to realize how little he knew of God and His ways, but more and more he was impressed with the greatness of God and the wonder of His works. “How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways Past Finding Out!”

40. God Determines the Conclusion

THE LIGHT BEHIND THE CLOUD OF TROUBLE that had hung over Jack's life for so many months began to shine through in spots. A new hope sprang up in his heart. Life had a different outlook altogether. His old desire to dominate others with his own opinions was gone. Humility was a part of his new nature. The cold, egotistical Jack Thrillby was being mellowed. Like Paul, he abhorred himself for the sins of his past life, especially for his defiant attitude towards God. His great consolation was found now in the reading of the Bible that Dorcas had given him. It was a new experience. Verily, the Word of God became a lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path.

He was too active physically and mentally to be confined. Not to be occupied by some form of activity was like being in jail. But in order to keep away from the hounds of the press and the business promoters who tried to prevail upon him to appear in moving pictures in a re-enactment of the Wheaton kidnapping case, he chose to remain in obscurity, at least until after the execution of his former companions.

On the fatal day, their last on earth, his heart was heavy with remorse. To wait helplessly for their lives to be snuffed out and then to pass into eternity in unbelief was agony to his soul. He prayed that they might be given a stay of execution, long enough for them to get right with God. If only he had the opportunity that once he had to testify to the saving power of the risen Christ whom he had come to know! But that opportunity had passed. He was helpless in his anguish, convicted of the sin of neglect; and hopelessly waited for the hour to strike when eternity would claim five more ungodly souls.

To get away from it all, Jack walked to the village to secure some necessary supplies. His intentions were to stop for a visit with grandmother's old pastor on his way back from the store, but as he approached the parsonage on his way into town, he found Dr. Gordon and

the sexton out on the front lawn, transplanting some flowers. As he approached, the pastor came out to meet him, and throwing his arm about Jack's shoulders like a father, he led him across to the church steps where they sat for some time in earnest conversation.

While they were thus engaged, Dorcas and her father drove up.

"Oh, Dr. Gordon!" Dorcas exclaimed in her happy enthusiasm; "this is a real surprise to find you and Dr. Thrillby together. It's an unexpected pleasure, I assure you."

"The Lord's attractions are great and better than those of the world," Dr. Gordon replied, his face reflecting a cordial welcome. "Come on in and join us in a song of praise."

The four of them filed into the church. Down at the front Dr. Gordon opened the piano, while Mr. Wheaton assisted his daughter to adjust herself on the piano bench.

"What will it be tonight, pray?" Dorcas asked sweetly.

"Let's give Jack the honor of selecting a home coming number," Dr. Gordon replied.

Dorcas looked at Jack expectantly.

"Jesus Never Fails," Jack suggested huskily, touched with emotion.

"Oh, Jack, do you really believe it?" Dorcas exclaimed happily, her eyes filling with tears.

They sang the hymn through to the last stanza—all except Jack, who recalled God's goodness in delivering him from evil.

"Earthly friends may prove untrue," Dr. Gordon repeated, sympathizing with Jack; "and sometimes one has to go through many trials in order to fully realize the truth of these words."

Pastor Wheaton suggested another song.

"Oh, no, father," Dorcas interrupted; "let's not obscure this message by another of less importance," thinking of the effort it had cost Jack to sing it.

"Well, then, daughter, suppose you drive Dr. Thrillby into town for his groceries, while Dr. Gordon and I retire to his study and arrange the schedule for his special meetings," Mr. Wheaton suggested.

"A fine idea," the older pastor agreed. "By the time you do your shopping and take the doctor out to the old homestead, we will have all the necessary arrangements made."

The young folks zealously adopted the idea. Dorcas suggested that Jack should do the driving, but he protested, making the excuse that his long

captivity had unfitted him for handling the wheel.

Still she insisted.

In order to come to an agreeable understanding, he took a penny from his pocket, tossed it on the running board of the car and lost.

Jack accepted the keys that Dorcas proffered and, after assisting her in at the curb, he took the wheel and drove into town where he made his purchases. On the way back to the farm, they discussed the offers they had received to go before the public on exhibition. There were many points to be considered. The sums of money offered by the moving-picture industry were very inviting, but somehow they made no appeal to either of them. The stage was even less attractive, and the matter of entertaining even the thought of selling their endorsements, advertising various types of merchandise, was just out of the question. They had had enough publicity. They much preferred now to keep out of the limelight.

“It is too much like commercializing one’s soul for the greed of gold,” Dorcas emphasized seriously. “Well not do it!”

No, their experiences were not for sale. In most instances it meant the endorsement of a lie. They had higher ideals. They did not need money that much, “For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

“Unquestionably against good Christian principles,” Jack commented. “As far as I am concerned any endorsement made in the future must honor the Gospel of Christ. I am going to respect grandmother’s tried and true advice: ‘Shun the dollar of questionable character.’”

“No, one cannot honor God and endorse an article that he does not even use,” Dorcas replied, referring to a contract offered by a leading tobacco company.

“Honoring God is a matter of serious concern these days,” Jack confessed. “I never realized just how careful one has to be in making decisions.”

“There is one thing, though, that is honorable, that we could do,” she prompted.

“And what would that be, pray?”

“Assisting father and Dr. Gordon in the evangelistic meetings at grandmother’s church,” Dorcas replied. “If the public is so anxious to see what a couple of kidnapped victims look like, we can give them that opportunity at a church service,” she added, her face aglow with

enthusiasm. “I could play the piano and sing, and your part would be to tell your life’s story. You could tell what God has done for you, and then contrast it with the sad end of the atheist. This would show the people what it really means to be a Christian, and how hopeless life is without the assurance of salvation. Why, you have so much to tell that father would hardly have time to preach at all.”

“If I only thought I could do it —”

“You don’t have to think! All you need to do is to tell the simple story of your life,” she exclaimed enthusiastically. “Nothing would please father more and Dr. Gordon would welcome it, I know. It would be a direct answer to grandmother’s prayer. And,” she hesitated, “it would make me happy, too, if you were in the service of the King.”

Jack sat in thought for some time as they drove up to the front gate.

“Do you know,” he said seriously, “this is the first opportunity for service that I have had. I believe it must be God’s will for me.”

Dorcas nodded her approval.

“I always ignored your advice before; grand mother’s advice was ignored, too; and in every instance I reaped the consequences of repeated mistakes in life,” Jack confessed sorrowfully.

“Now if your father and Dr. Gordon really think that I can serve the Lord effectively, I shall be only too glad to contribute the little talent I may have to the cause of Christ in this way. I want to serve Him now, and proclaim to the world the fact that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that He rose again from the dead; and that He is able to save and keep all those who accept and confess Him as Lord. I want to praise Him for this new experience that brings the joy and peace of salvation to my soul. Oh, if I only can in some way undo the folly of denying the existence of God, and bring to others a realization of their need of salvation, then I would be happy.”

“And great shall be thy reward,” she said seriously.

“Then my happiness is assured, excepting —”

“There are no exceptions in God’s plan,” she interrupted; “not when one is in the center of His will, claiming all things in the light of His promises.”

“Even to claiming that which I already have, yet have it not?” he inquired with a wistful smile.

She was puzzled.

“I am only claiming my Columbia half dollar, with accumulated interest,” he whispered affectionately, taking her in his arms and kissing her tenderly.

“What about the law governing usury?” she smiled mischievously. “Only a miser would claim such an exorbitant rate of interest.”

“I am a miser, claiming your whole heart—the gold with the silver,” he breathed in her ear, kissing her again on the golden tresses which covered the scalp where the silver piece had lain since the day he had performed the delicate operation which saved her life.

“There might be some mistake in choosing the right girl,” she teased, with her head on his shoulder.

“I have made my last mistake, sweetheart,” he whispered; “the identification is complete.”

The same whippoorwill that warned them of the approach of the evening hour on that afternoon they had met at grandmother’s grave, again added a note of joy to this happy occasion.

“I love you, Dorcas,” he said simply, embracing her affectionately.

“God is the author of true love, Jack.”

“Yes, sweetheart; His stamp of approval has been placed on my affection for you. Can you reconsider your rejection of me at the cave?” he asked, referring to the Weasel’s match-making episode.

“Jack,” she confessed, “it was not you whom I rejected. I could not allow myself to love you then as you were and still be true to the God who has ordained that believers shall not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

“But, sweetheart,” he quickly replied, “the shackles are broken. All things are now equal. We are of one faith. Our hope is in God’s eternal salvation. Happiness in His service can be assured now.”

“God has honored my love for you. My prayer has been answered,” she whispered.

“Your love for me, sweetheart?”

“Yes, Jack! Since the day of our first sleigh ride, when you were so manly, so kind and lovable, I loved you with pain in my heart—praying grandmother’s prayer for your soul’s salvation. And oh, to think that God has answered my prayers and made it possible to accept your love in return! Truly He has honored His promises.”

“And in the joy of finding Him as my Saviour, He has rewarded me with your love. The impossible becomes possible,” he exclaimed in ecstatic reverence, embracing her again.

“Yes, Jack, with God’s approval, all things become possible! ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways Past Finding Out.’”

With arms interlocked at the front gate of the old homestead, Jack and Dorcas watched the glowing sun as it sank from view back of grandmother’s grave.

The End

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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