



The Other Woman

By WILLIAM T. NICHOLS

Heading by Reginald Birch

THE horses scrambled up the final pitch of the long ascent and halted, with quivering flanks and heaving nostrils. They were mountain horses, as quick as cats and as lean and hard as nails, but the climb had winded them, and though the riders shivered in the November breeze that swept the summit of the ridge, they gave their mounts a well-won, if brief, breathing-spell. The guide, a stocky fellow, with a led horse at his left, pointed to the valley before them.

"There 's the nest," said he. "Devil's Pocket, they call it. Good name, ain't it, Mr. Holcomb?"

"Good as the place, no doubt." Holcomb spoke crisply, his steady gaze on the valley. His strong face wore a look of determination, which had in it a touch of grimness.

The man riding at Holcomb's elbow leaned forward in his saddle. His glance ranged the steep slopes, the dull green of the scrub-pines, the outcropping rocks, the dismal pond at the bottom of the basin, and the fringe of cleared land beside it.

"Lord! but what a gash in the earth!" he said. "Surely, Holcomb, you don't

expect to find Elston here. The petted darling of academic groves, salutarian of his class, assistant professor at twenty-three—such a man in such a hole! They don't comport, the place and the man."

"The Elston that was, you mean. We 're to deal with the Elston that is."

"Missing fifteen years?"

"It 's seventeen since the doctors sent him into the woods. He 's virtually been missing since the first six months."

"Then there 's chance for change."

"Much chance. You 're here, Mason, to judge how far the change has gone."

The other nodded.

"Ought to be an interesting case. But let 's at it. I 'm freezing here."

A word to the guide, and the party was again in motion, descending a trail that was sometimes path and sometimes ledge and sometimes the bed of a stream. It wound past boulders, dodged fallen trees, and finally, with a sweep about the shoulder of a hill, reached level ground within a stone's throw of a cluster of hovels. They were miserable cabins, rough, unpainted, crowded together. Where a shed had been needed, boards had been laid

upon a pole; when need of the shed had passed, no effort had been made to repair damages if pole broke or board fell. Here and there bare patches of ground told of half-hearted cultivation; but the whole air of the hamlet was that of the poverty that finds in idleness the highest good.

Three or four lank curs caught sight of the intruders, and began to yelp; a gaunt, yellow mongrel hound bayed deeply, and faces appeared at doors and windows. A man emerged from one of the houses and stood watching the new-comers.

Mason, from his post in the rear, watched the scene critically. He saw Holcomb dismount and approach the uncouth figure, and experienced a sudden sense of unreasoning disapproval. The difference between the two was too marked: Holcomb, clean-shaven, well-groomed, tall, broad-shouldered, erect, with the vigor of the athlete who from choice keeps himself in training long after the days of contests are over; the stranger, with tangled hair streaming from under a shapeless hat, and face half hidden by a straggling, unkempt beard, slouching in garments so ragged and patched and dirt-stained as to give little hint of their original foundation. No, the contrast was too violent. One stood for efficiency, the other for sloth and weakness. It was the machine-gun against the matchlock—nay, against bow and arrow. It was like a war of civilization against the lost tribes, with the result foredetermined with precision.

Holcomb was close to the man before he spoke. Then it was a single word, curt and imperative:

"Elston!"

The man pushed the hair from before his eyes, and stared at Holcomb.

"Elston?" he said doubtfully. "Elston? Why, yes—yes, I 'm Elston."

"I want you."

"Why?"

"A man can't escape his fate. Your fate was to be born who you were and what you were. You were held to your lot in life by certain bonds. They 've been rather slack, maybe; they 're tightening now."

The eyes under the tangle of hair grew troubled.

"The bonds are tightening?" the man repeated, and it was like a child striving to master the meaning of a difficult phrase. "I—I think I know what you mean. But why should they tighten—now?"

"That 's fate."

"I—I used to think it would have—to be—some time," Elston said hesitatingly. "But that—that was long ago. Lately I must—yes, I must have forgotten the—the bonds."

"But now you recall them well enough?"

"Yes."

"Then you know why I want you to come with me."

The man cast swift glances right and left. "But—but if I won't go?" he asked. Holcomb laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Elston, yonder is a deputy sheriff with a warrant for your arrest; but he will not serve it unless you force him to do so. Your only choice is to come as free man or prisoner."

The shaggy creature tried to shrink back, but Holcomb held him fast.

"It 's no use, Elston," he said not unkindly. "Better come peaceably. I ought to tell you: everything may be as it was—everything, mind you."

Elston no longer struggled. Under the coating of tan a faint color was stealing into his face.

"I understand," he said slowly. "And I remember you—you 're a lawyer. Yes, I understand."

"And you 'll come—at least to Pentonville? We 'll talk things over there."

"I won't—resist." There was a pause before the last word, as if the man were searching the recesses of his brain for something exactly to express his meaning.

"Good enough. I suggest that the sooner we start the better."

"Yes," Elston said. With sudden decision he walked to the horse held by the deputy, and climbed to the saddle. Even Holcomb was surprised by the abruptness of the movement.

"If you 've any word, any message, to leave—" he began almost apologetically; but Elston shook his head.

"No; there is nothing to say."

A man or two had appeared, and three or four slatternly women, cowering in a miserable group, set up a shrill lamentation; but there was no sign of resistance. Indeed, there was a hopelessness in the wail that made Mason swear under his breath. It was like the bleating of terrified sheep beholding one of their number seized upon and carried off before their eyes, with *no thought of rescue* and with none of the despairing courage that should spring from what might be a common danger.

"Well, I know now what ululation means," he told himself. "It's a better word than ever I thought it. It gets the—"

There Mason checked himself. A woman as ragged as the others, yet who could not be called a slattern, had darted from a door and run up to Elston. Mason gritted his teeth. This was the sort of thing he had been dreading, and it caught hold upon him. The woman was young, and unbowed by toil or privation; she moved with a swiftness and a grace that was almost feline. She threw herself upon Elston, crying out piteously, clinging to his knee, fawning upon him. The great yellow hound bounded beside her, baying in deep-throated excitement. The deputy, with a glance at the dog, tightened his grasp on the stout club he carried, and rode nearer; but Elston bent down and spoke a word in the woman's ear. None of the others heard the word, but its effect was amazing. The woman's hands dropped, and she fell back a pace, swiftly submissive, and looking up at Elston from great dark eyes in which the tears were welling. The dog, turning from his master, sprang upon her, resting his forepaws on her body, every inch of his ugly length tense with sympathy. Holcomb caught the bridle of Elston's horse.

"Come!" he said sharply. "The quicker we cut this off, the better for all concerned."

The horses trotted briskly across the level stretch, but when the party reached the trail and fell into single file, Mason, the last in the line, looked back. The woman had fallen in a heap on the ground and lay motionless, the hound licking her face.

Up the trail and over the divide Elston rode like a man in a dream, his head bowed on his breast. Half an hour from the valley the cavalcade reached a farmhouse; and here Mason was moved to note the completeness of the arrangements. A big touring-car was awaiting the party, and one of the deputy's helpers came forward to take charge of the horses.

Elston stepped into the tonneau without protest or comment, though it might well have been the first automobile upon which he had ever rested his eyes. The officer sat at his right, and Holcomb at his left, no chance given, Mason observed, for a leap for liberty.

The car felt its way along the rough road from the farm-house, and turned at last into the highway which led to Pentonville. Then there was swifter motion, but Elston displayed no curiosity. He held his silence while the miles fell away behind them, and it was not until the town was in sight and the car swerved into the drive leading to a big white hotel that he opened his lips.

"Not there," he said to Holcomb. "I'm not fit."

The big man spoke reassuringly:

"This is a summer house which has opened a wing for us by special arrangement. There'll be nobody about."

They went in by a side door, which swung as by invisible hands at their approach. Holcomb glanced at his watch.

"We'll dine at seven, Mason," he said. "That will give us two hours."

An hour would have been liberal allowance for the little Mason had to do, and he was the first to enter the private dining-room. Its appearance interested him. Logs blazed cheerfully in the big fireplace, a piano stood in a corner; in the center was a table set for three, and elaborately set; half a dozen electric lamps flooded

the room with light. Mason smiled a bit quizzically when he observed the circumstance. There were to be no friendly shadows to hide the face of the guest of the evening.

A clock on the mantel struck the hour, and a door opened. Holcomb entered, his arm through that of a man who bore small resemblance to the tattered figure from the valley. The tangled mass of hair had fallen before a barber's shears; the beard was close-cropped and pointed. The dinner-coat, though not of recent cut, was freshly pressed. The black bow above the expanse of shirt-front was very small. It was one of the three things to which Mason gave special heed: in the old days Elston had had rather a fad for tiny bows. The second of the things was the man's shoes. Holcomb, the thorough, had argued that the foot which was often unshod would increase in dimensions, and the shoes he had provided were two sizes larger than those Elston wore in his period of civilization. And the shoes fitted! So much could not be said for the coat, and this was the third of Mason's mental notes. The new Elston was thicker in the shoulder and thinner about the waist and hips than the Elston of old. He carried himself less erectly, and his walk had the spring that turf gives and smooth pavement takes away.

Holcomb chose to present the others as if they were meeting for the first time that day.

"Elston, this is Doctor Mason," he said. "You probably remember him as 'Tolly' Mason of the class after yours."

"I think—I think I know him," Elston said slowly. He diffidently extended a hand. Mason, gripping it hard, found it lying limp in his grasp.

"I recall you perfectly, Elston," he said heartily. To himself he was adding that there was more change in the face than was to be accounted for by the mere passage of the years. It seemed broader; the cheek-bones were higher; the eyes shifted, not with fear, but with uncertainty. "You've dropped the glasses, though, I see," he added aloud. "I congratulate you."

Elston glanced at Holcomb.

"I—I lost them years ago. I have n't—needed them."

Holcomb nodded carelessly.

"Mason's right; it's a lucky man who finds his sight improved. And now let's to dinner. I'm hungry as a wolf. If you'll take that chair, Elston—"

The door opened again, and a silent-footed waiter entered. Elston obediently seated himself. To Mason's notion he studied the array of forks and spoons before him half curiously, half apprehensively, and furtively glanced at his companions. Well, a man seventeen years in the wilds might grow rusty on the order of precedence of table silver. The doctor decided to give a friendly cue.

"I'm as hungry as a whole pack of wolves," he said, picking up a spoon, as the waiter placed his soup before him. "This mountain air is the best appetizer in the world."

"But you won't miss it, Elston," Holcomb said sharply. "There are other airs as invigorating, other skies as clear."

Elston started. He dropped his eyes in embarrassment, and seemed for the first time to be aware of the food before him. And then, of a sudden stirred by the pangs of hunger, he caught up the plate in both hands, and drained it as one might drink from a cup. Holcomb turned to Mason.

"Ought to be great fishing hereabouts," he said. "Some day we must get Elston to tell us all about it."

"Fine!" cried the doctor, enthusiastically. "Everybody'll be delighted to hear his stories."

Elston set down his plate.

"Holcomb, you see," he said, "I—I forgot."

"What you'll pick up in an hour. The tricks of the trade come back soon enough."

"The tricks of the trade!" Elston spoke with a bitterness which lacked little of being despair.

"Exactly. These things are mere matters of habit. They're like small talk; they're part of the lubrication of the machinery of civilization."

"Lubrication—machinery of civilization—small talk?" Elston repeated as a boy might repeat a lesson.

"Why, yes; oil for the machine, you know."

"I—I understand," Elston said hesitatingly, "but I have to—to—"

"Grope?" Mason suggested.

"Yes, grope; that is the word I wanted."

"But when you grope, you find," Holcomb pointed out.

"It may be so," Elston said with dreary acquiescence. "But you spoke of small talk. Small talk? You tell me it is seventeen years since I—I dropped out. Those years I've been with people who use—how many words do you suppose? Not more than three hundred."

"You mean they have a vocabulary of three hundred words?" Mason asked.

Elston turned to him gratefully. "That is what I wanted to say. Yes, a vocabulary of three hundred words. And it is enough. Food and drink, heat and cold, joy and sorrow, even life and death—that is enough. Why more?"

"You made the compilation, you counted the words?"

"Yes, years ago, when I was first with them. I—I have n't thought much about it lately."

"No reason why you should," Holcomb interposed. "And there's no reason why you should dwell upon it now." He leaned across the table and patted Elston's arm. "All that's a closed chapter—over and done with."

It appeared to Mason that Elston shrank under Holcomb's touch, yet was heartened by it.

"I know, I know," he said; and when Holcomb's hand was withdrawn, he straightened his shoulders and sat more erect in his chair. There were no more laches in his conduct as the dinner progressed, no more breaches of the code of civilized man at meat. Holcomb assumed the burden of the conversation, and through his talk, which touched upon many themes, ran the thread of one dominating thought—the completeness of the

severance of the ties which might have bound Elston to the wild life, and the foreordained certainty of his return to civilization. The idea was held before Elston, repeated again and again, and impressed upon him by sheer force of reiteration. It was mingled with the news of friends whom he was to see again; it was part of all the gossip of that world of which he was *once more to be a part*. Yet Holcomb's talk was no lecture, no monologue; it was contrived with exceeding art to draw Elston out, to lead him to speak of the old scenes and the old interests. It betrayed an amazingly intimate knowledge of what had been his likes and his dislikes—a knowledge so complete and so unflinching that Mason began to suspect the source of the splendid coaching Holcomb must have received.

Somebody had worked hard, and success was crowning the work. Elston, assailed at many points, was yielding to the attack. He began to speak more freely; subtle suggestions waked long-sleeping memories; words for years unused were again upon his lips—nouns and verbs first, then the broadly qualifying adjectives and adverbs, then a few expressing more delicate shades of meaning, ventured upon cautiously, but with no mistakes. So Elston was helped to make his way back from the land where three hundred words sufficed for the simple life.

It was Mason's business to study Elston, but it was with more than merely professional concern that he watched the man struggling back, guided by the capable hand of Holcomb, helped over the rough places, avoiding stumbling-blocks and pitfalls, and accepting more and more unquestioningly the decision as to his future. A strong man was leading a weak man, but every step of the path they followed had been surveyed and mapped. It was a triumph of calculation, cold, deliberate calculation, in which human sympathy figured as only an incidental factor in the problem. The perfection of the preparations jarred Mason's sense of justice. The weak man had no chance. His side of the case, if such a side there were, was

totally disregarded. The clothes he wore had been put upon him to remind him of what he had been—and what he was to be again. His hair and beard had been cut in the fashion in which he had worn them years before. The service of the dinner, which evidently had been ordered with painstaking care, was of a sort to recall the pleasant luxuries of the old existence. No detail, however trifling, had been overlooked. The very cigars which the deft waiter brought in with the coffee were of the brand Elston had affected. Mason saw his eyes light as he took one from the box, and in pure fellowship of the Brotherhood of the Weed proffered him a match. But Holcomb stayed the little civility. For an instant Elston hesitated. Then his hand strayed to a pocket of his waistcoat, and he drew a match-safe from what had been its accustomed place. Another chord of memory had been touched.

Elston inhaled a great volume of smoke, and expelled it slowly. He moved his chair back from the table, and glanced at his companions with a change of manner.

"It has been five years since I smoked a cigar," he said, "but I find the old taste lingers."

"You 'll find other tastes survive as well," Holcomb hastened to assure him.

Elston smiled enigmatically.

"You mean that I may—may gratify them?" There was hesitation in picking the word, but the pause was barely perceptible. "Well, I admit their—their lure. You must not think I gave up the old life because I did not like it. I merely found I liked the new better."

"Oh, the charm of novelty."

Holcomb's phrase was ill chosen. Elston's face darkened.

"Not that," said he. "It was stronger; it grew. It took a hold—no, a grip—on me. Yet I am going to give it up. That should go far, Doctor"—he turned to Mason—"it should go far to help you believe I may be sane."

"My dear fellow!" Mason began; but Elston interrupted him.

"Holcomb was right. I did what he

could not understand. So he brought a doctor to—to observe the suspect. That is as it should be. Now, I tell you both the plain truth: I dropped out by choice. I am going back because—because circumstances are too strong for me to—to resist. On that statement you must judge my sanity. I won't try to explain why I chose one life above the other; you could n't understand, either of you. Perhaps you are no nearer understanding why I go back now; but I think my going will aid you in acquitting me of madness."

Holcomb rose. His face was very grave.

"Elston," he said—"Elston, I am going to treat you as a man thoroughly in possession of his faculties. I have told you some things to show how completely your old place is waiting for you. Now it seems to me the moment has come for you to receive the same message from another, whose words must carry far greater weight than mine."

Elston sprang to his feet; but if he meant to detain Holcomb, he was too late. The other had stepped to the door and thrown it open. And again Mason was left to marvel at the precision of the arrangements. In the doorway stood a woman, a tall, graceful figure, in a clinging gown of white. Mason knew Mrs. Elston slightly. He often had heard her called a handsome woman and rarely a charming woman; but now he could have denied her neither beauty nor charm, and he was keenly alive to the tact with which she dealt with a difficult situation. She moved toward Elston, a welcoming smile on her face, her arms outstretched. She laid her hands upon his shoulders, and the man, his face grown very white, put an arm about her and kissed her forehead. No tears, no reproaches, no passionate outburst—a seemly meeting of husband and wife after a brief separation and in the presence of witnesses, unavoidable, if friendly. Mason had a sensation of watching a scene, very pretty, very artistic, very unreal. It fitted smoothly, all too smoothly, into the program. Elston was to come back to his own; there were to be

no complaints, no heartburnings; there was to be no talk of forgiveness, because the things which might be forgiven were to be ignored. It was the best course, no doubt, and the wisest; but Mason, confirmed bachelor and specialist in ailments of the mind, had stubborn doubts of its efficacy in the more obscure and complicated troubles of the heart. Yet it was well done, marvelously well done.

"She 's a wonder, Holcomb," he said presently to his friend when, with all decent despatch, they had left the restored couple to themselves. Holcomb nodded.

"She 's managed this case most skilfully," he said. "You have n't heard of any Elston scandal, have you? No, indeed. She saw to it there should n't be any. All you knew, all anybody knew, was that Elston had to go away for his health. That was true; but I can't say as much for the impression that got abroad that he was n't any better, and so could n't come back. In six months she lost track of him. She had n't anything to go on but an intuitive belief that he was still alive when she sent a note to the college faculty, in his name, resigning his job on the ground that the probable time of his recovery was too uncertain to warrant him in holding the place longer. Their closest friends have supposed she spent much time with him,—she 's traveled a lot, as you may know,—but the fact is that for a dozen years she did n't know whether he was on the earth or under it. Finally, she got a clue—a mighty blind clue. It took me three years to run it down for her and find the man."

"Then she really wished him found?"

"Yes, she did," Holcomb said deliberately. "There were reasons, sufficient reasons, without taking up any sentimental considerations. For one thing, she was tired of being a grass-widow, to put it bluntly. Even the cleverest of women can't drape that situation so that it will always be satisfying to public curiosity; and when a woman 's as attractive as Mrs. Elston, the complications increase. Then there was a trust fund that was about ripe for a division, and that meant

she 'd have to make some sort of showing about this husband of hers, who was one of the beneficiaries. Yes, viewing the case in all its aspects, it was clear the tangle would have to be straightened one way or the other."

"The other?"

"Divorce, if he would n't come back. But she 'd rather have the man."

"I dare say she still loves him."

Holcomb grunted.

"I have n't been talking mere affection," he said. "They married young, but I don't know that it was a *Romeo and Juliet* affair at that. Then, too, there was a chance for her to make allowances. This wild-man business is in Elston's blood, so to speak; uncle of his did much the same trick. I suppose they gave the boy a hot-house bringing-up—never let him have a taste of the open. So, when he got one, he was the worse smitten. You see what happened: he reverted to barbarism."

"And the poor devil had about as much chance against you as a barbarian would have against the German army," Mason said, with a touch of impatience. "There's a deadly completeness about your campaign that gets on the nerves. Shoes figured out to fit him, his old brand of cigars, the match-box in its regular pocket, to say nothing of the deputy and the warrant to be served, if necessary—"

"For non-support of his wife," Holcomb explained.

"And food he liked," Mason went on, "a wing of this hotel specially chartered, a medical man along to guess at his degree of sanity, and then at the last the wife showing up at the psychological moment. I tell you, Holcomb, it 's too one-sided."

"That 's usually the condition when a barbarian gets on civilization's right of way," Holcomb commented. "Well, I admit the plans were complete. I will admit also that they were designed to provide against every contingency."

"It looks that way," Mason agreed almost gloomily. "I dare say that 's what civilization's plans ought to do. But I can't help feeling a bit sorry for that girl

—the one we left in the valley, you know. Still, she does n't count. Very likely she 's hardly what you 'd call civilized."

"Civilized or not, she 'll be provided for adequately," Holcomb said curtly.

"And the wife? Does she know?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"She 's practical. She understands the likelihood of there having been some such entanglement. I told you there was n't much of the *Romeo* and *Juliet* element. You saw all the rags and tatters in the affair this morning. We don't tear anything to tatters—even passion."

"But does she know?" Mason said.

"She asks no unnecessary questions. But what 's your opinion of his mental condition?"

"Oh, he 's sane—sane enough," Mason said. "You 've given him a tremendous mental jar, Holcomb. You 've tried to unmake in an evening what 's been years in the making. He 's stood the test. He has been able 'to come back,' as our sporting friends say. In an hour or two you 've made him prove the survival of the civilized man in him. You 've shown him the way, and he has followed it. He has picked up the old speech, the old habits. It 's a far cry, Holcomb, from gulping soup from a plate to sipping a *demi-tasse*, but—well, you saw what you saw and you heard what you heard. He told you the truth. He 's giving up what he likes best—not what you may like best or what I may like best, mind you, but what *he* likes best, because he recognizes the cold logic of facts. He is n't happy, but he 'll do it. The odds are too great; it is n't a fair fight. I feel like one of the two villains in the old story, but I 'm glad I 'm the villain of milder mood. I 'll do the little I can for him. I 'll give you a parallel case. Picture a man with a hereditary weakness for alcohol who, carefully guarded through his youth, as a young man plunges into dissipation. In middle life he 's corralled by his friends. They impress upon him the advantages of sobriety. He sees the advantages; he admits them. He says frankly he likes rum, but understands it does n't pay, and he 'll quit

it. Elston's conduct has n't been that of the average man; but, if you 'll pardon the comparison, his wife's management of the affair has n't been that of the average woman."

Holcomb glanced at his watch.

"We 'll give her an even hour with him," he said. "Then we 'll see if she has completed the cure."

When the two men went back to the dining-room it was to come upon a pretty scene of domestic accord. Elston and his wife sat side by side before the fire, and, unless Mason's eyes tricked him, the woman was withdrawing her hand from her husband's clasp as they entered. She looked up, smiling brightly.

"Louis and I have been very busy making plans," she said. "And we agree perfectly. He assures me that his health is absolutely restored, but it has occurred to both of us that he might be the better for a winter in southern France."

"I think that would be very wise," Holcomb said.

"It seems the best course," Elston said. He added, "I think—yes, I 'm sure—I cannot do better than place myself in the hands of my friends."

"Indeed, you cannot," his wife said quickly. "You may trust Mr. Holcomb and Doctor Mason implicitly."

"And you—yes, you most of all, Elaine!" Elston cried. He caught her hand and held it till she gently freed it and rose to her feet. There was a new touch of color in her cheeks as she moved across the room. Elston, too, had risen, and though he did not follow her, his eyes rested upon her with a sort of fascination. Beside the piano Mrs. Elston paused.

"Of course you men have things to discuss," she said, "and therefore I leave you to your own devices—for a little. But late hours are forbidden."

"We can very quickly dispose of such matters as we have in hand, Mrs. Elston," Holcomb said gravely.

"Yes, very quickly, Elaine," Elston said, his gaze still upon her. Her fingers softly touched the keys of the piano. It was only a fragment that she played, a

few bars of an air Mason did not recognize; but he noted the start her husband gave, and from some corner of his brain came a memory that once he had heard Elston was singularly impressionable to music. And so this was only another proof of the elaborateness of the plans made by a clever man and a cleverer woman to win back a wanderer! Poor barbarian! Not a chance in a hundred had he. Mason glanced from the man to the woman. Mrs. Elston had moved to the door, and was standing there, a charming figure, an alluring figure, one tapering arm raised slightly, and the hand resting upon the edge of the door, her eyes bright, the delicate flush still upon her cheeks.

"I bid you good night, gentlemen," she said. "And, Louis—you will not be long?"

Elston glanced at the clock.

"In five minutes, Elaine," he said. His face was pale, but his voice was steady.

As the door closed, Holcomb said:

"Old man, you 've made the right choice. And having made it, you can go abroad with an easy mind. There 's no need to discuss details. I 'll attend to all arrangements. You understand?"

"I understand," Elston told him. "Yes, I understand. Money will do—what money can do. You 're a fair man. The matter can be in no better hands."

"Thank you," Holcomb answered; and for a moment there was silence in the room. The three men could hear a dash of rain upon the long windows; there was a sound of rising wind in the branches of the trees; then came the bark of a dog, a deep, melancholy baying. Mason, watching Elston, saw him start. Holcomb, the practical, neither heeded nor, indeed, saw.

"Elston," he said, "I ought to tell you frankly you 've taken this thing well, mighty well. You 'll go back to the place in the world that belongs to you, and you 'll find your path has been made clear."

"Yes," Elston answered.

He was gazing spellbound at one of the windows. Mason, glancing in the same direction, had a glimpse of a face pressed against the pane—of big, black

eyes, pleading eyes, eyes that were full of wretchedness and grief. Then there came a cry, not loud, but thrilling in its appeal.

"What 's that?" Holcomb exclaimed, and wheeled toward the window. Mason took a step forward, with extended arm, but was too late. Elston had answered the call. A bound had carried him half across the room, and then he had plunged through glass and sash, and was gone.

They ran to the window, but civilized man sometimes hesitates to follow where barbarian has led. The jagged panes barred their way. Holcomb, with an oath, was struggling with the lock of the window when he became aware that Mrs. Elston was at his shoulder, peering out with them into the gloom of the night. At the entrance to the hotel grounds an arc-light burned; its beams suddenly fell upon three figures, a man and a woman, hand in hand, running through the storm, and a great dog bounding beside them.

Mrs. Elston was first of those in the room to regain self-mastery. She held herself proudly when Holcomb turned to face her, and her voice was cold and even.

"It is now the other alternative," she said. "You will be so good as to file the papers in the action for divorce at once."

She swept out of the room like a princess, leaving two men who eyed each other.

"Holcomb," Mason said at last, "I 'm sorry for you. I won't touch on the merits of the case itself, but I bear tribute to the completeness of your plans. It was civilization against barbarism, as you said, and by all the rules of the game you should have won. Who 'd have reckoned on even a girl savage making a thirty-mile pursuit on foot? She was the one factor you disregarded, and—"

"Eh? What 's that?" said the lawyer.

"Why, the woman! Barbarian or civilized, she 's the one uncertain quantity."

Holcomb shook his head.

"Mason, you 're wrong," he said, with a mirthless smile. "There have been two women here to-night. One may have been uncertain enough, but the other, I tell you, was as deadly certain as the civilization of the centuries could make her."

CURRENT COMMENT

Why Matisse?

NEARLY two years ago we were treated to a remarkable exhibition of the work of the Post-Impressionist and other "modernist" schools. Perhaps there was more of amazement than admiration aroused in the crowds that visited the show. At least it was proved that "freak art" *pays*. And there was this good service done: your radical never takes the crowd with him *all the way*; but if the piper of art has piped a tune that has lured us even a little way out of our placid acceptance of traditional art, the thing has been worth while. To think for ourselves rather than to accept blindly is what Matisse and the others are teaching us to do.

Now another "extreme" show is offered to the public, a one-man affair this time, and that man is Henri Matisse who repelled even those who accepted other painters. There still lingers in the minds of some of us the dark suspicion that Matisse is not the great man his admirers proclaim him. We know that his early conventional work brought him neither fame nor fortune, whereas his later tilting at classicism and his present extraordinary canvases have somehow piqued the fickle jade into smiling upon him; and we still wonder whether the revolt of Matisse represents genius unfettered or the shrewd play of commonplace talent.

We asked Walter Pach, the man who has induced Matisse to exhibit here, and one of his most ardent supporters, to wipe away our skepticism if he could. Mr. Pach's essay on Matisse we share with our readers. It follows:

ON almost the same day that this number of THE CENTURY appears, the New York public will once more have an exhibition of the work of Henri Matisse. It will be composed of fourteen paintings, eleven sculptures, and a large number of etchings, lithographs, and wood-engravings, and the question naturally arises as to the reason for so considerable a showing of a contemporary artist whose work is still the subject of lively discussion. Is the invitation to exhibit which was extended to Matisse merely the result of the admiration and opposition he brought forth at the International Exhibition of 1913, or does his selection among the many participants in the now famous "Armory Show" involve a definite art principle? It is emphatically because there is a quality, or group of qualities, in Matisse's work so significant that for the American artists who invited him to exhibit here this year the event has the importance that attaches to the expressing of a conviction.



The Young Sailor by Henri Matisse

To say that the principle involved in bringing over Matisse's work is the principle of art itself, the insistence on the essential phases of painting and the com-