

THE SILVER THREAD.*

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SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE Lady Jane, one of the richest silver mines in Arizona, is threatened by an influx of water, which catastrophe the owners endeavor to prevent by sending East for John Standish, a young mining engineer. The latter devotes his energies towards saving the mine, and incidentally learns that the owners of the Silver Thread, a rival mine close by, are digging for a new and rich lode lately discovered in the Lady Jane. He also convinces himself that the first blow of a pick which strikes the vein will flood their mine.

The Silver Thread is ostensibly owned by Mr. Halloran, a man more weak than unscrupulous, who is heavily in debt to a Tombstone banker named Croft. These two possess in common a secret as to the rightful ownership of the Silver Thread—a secret connected in some way with an old uncle of John Standish. Accordingly they view the latter's presence with suspicion.

In Mr. Halloran's daughter, Katherine, Standish recognizes the girl whom he had met and fallen deeply in love with the previous summer in the East. She had promised to marry him, but had suddenly gone away, leaving him no message or clue to her whereabouts. Standish is naturally astonished to meet this Eastern belle in the frontier town of Tombstone, and, not knowing the cause of her strange conduct, he is puzzled as to what his present relations with her should be.

Croft, who is a suitor for Katherine's hand, becomes vaguely jealous of the young engineer. He intercepts a note to Katherine which confirms his suspicions, and turns his jealousy into bitter hatred. He tries to poison Katherine's mind against Standish by telling her that he has come to Tombstone to steal away her father's mine. Katherine's faith in Standish is shaken by Croft's misrepresentations, and she promises to marry the banker—a decision which has been partially influenced by her father, who has intimated that this alone will extricate him from his troubles.

Jack Torrance, the son of the superintendent of the Lady Jane, has become infatuated with the pretty face of Fanny de Vere, a singer in the Pretty-by-Night Saloon in Tombstone. His passion is but augmented by the half veiled opposition it meets with from his parents.

One night, disguised as a miner, Standish goes down into the Silver Thread to verify his suspicions. As he is returning he passes the private office in the Thread hoisting works, where his attention is attracted by the click of a key turning. As he stops a moment, a light is struck which enables Standish to recognize the occupants. They are Croft and Jenny, a dancing girl from the Pretty-by-Night.

When Standish gets back to the Lady Jane, he finds Torrance and tells him what he has learned of the plans of the owners of the Silver Thread.

XV.

AS Standish spoke, Mr. Torrance arose and walked across the room. Then he turned about his large bulk in the

soiled corduroy clothing he had put on again after dinner, and gave a short laugh.

"I suppose an Eastern philanthropist, one of these fellows who cry over the poor Indian, and think that old Geronimo could be broken of his bad habits by the gift of a boiled shirt and a hymn book, would say that it was a crime to let those men go on until they tap our vein—and water—and destruction—but I am not so sure."

Standish waited to see what the elder man would do. He had told the story in as few words as possible. Indeed, it had hardly been necessary to tell it at all. He had gone into the Silver Thread knowing what he would see, as Torrance knew before he asked the service of him. Standish had not been away from Eastern standards long enough to lose his deep respect for human life, but he wondered how it would be with Torrance.

Here was a kind, generous, just man, whom his miners liked and respected. Only the week before, a poor, consumptive watchman had died, requesting that his body might be buried by his wife in Salt Lake City. There was nobody to bear the expense, and no money to the man's credit; indeed, he was in Mr. Torrance's debt—but the poor fellow's body had been laid beside his wife's without anything being said. Mr. Torrance had made a grumbling remark as the matter was discussed, about "this nonsense of carting dead men about the country," and had requested that he might be buried where he died. Only Standish knew that his charity had carried out the dying man's last request. He wondered now if Mr. Torrance would consider that the miners in the Thread were men with families to support—families who would be destitute in a strange, barren country if the provider was killed. They lived a hand to mouth existence, these men, even with five dollars a day. They knew nothing of saving money. They lived in little boarded

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houses and ate canned food, but their money went. Standish thought he could see Torrance giving the women money to get home, "back East," where their relatives could take care of them, after the catastrophe was over. There seemed to be a grim humor in the situation.

"I suppose," he said finally, "that if a general considered the men who were going to be killed in battle, there would be no more wars."

"There's some difference between shooting at a man in a fair, open fight that he has come out to seek as much as you have, and letting a lot of poor devils be drowned in a mine. How near are they to our vein?"

"About two hundred feet, I should judge. They are wavering a little, testing here and there, hunting it. Evidently Croft was not able to take his bearings properly, and he is at sea."

"He'll be at sea soon enough," Torrance said grimly. "It's no affair of mine. The Thread is deeper than we are, and they will drain our mine for us. That pump of yours may lie idle."

They were in the assay office near by the hoisting works of the Lady Jane. There were retorts and mortars and delicate scales under glass cases, all around the room, the air of which had not cooled since the furnaces had been put out. They had come in here because the place was deserted.

Some former assayer had found time hanging heavy on his hands, and had taken to stuffing rattlesnakes and Gila monsters and sticking them about the walls. He had probably been a young fellow who had come out from Columbia College, or perhaps the school of mines in Freiburg, full of high ambition, thinking he was going to become an "expert," one of those men who can find mines, and whose written opinions stand high in the market when a mine is being sold to an English syndicate. Then he had discovered—in a time which bore an inverse proportion to the natural intelligence that he brought with him—that a deft fingered boy could be brought in from the mine, or the school, and could learn practical assaying in two hours. He had probably seen that he was the laughing stock of the old miners, and good humoredly tolerated by the superintendent and foreman. They looked upon him as being exactly what he was—another friend or relation that the stockholders back East wanted to provide for.

Dozens of these ambitious young fellows came out to the West with high hopes and dreams. Sometimes they left sweethearts

behind that they were soon going back to marry. And sometimes they were "learning the business," expecting to be put in charge next year. They did learn a little of life, in places where a man is a man, and his relations in New York are absolutely unknown and uncared about; and if they had any good material, they got along somewhere. If they were worthless, the good for nothingness exhibited itself a little earlier here than it would have done at home. In any case, they passed on and left the assay office to the men who ground the ore, and did the weighing.

Torrance took one of the Gila monsters in his hand. It was a queer looking lizard about a foot long, which bore every appearance of having been made out of harmless black and white beads.

"I always have a sort of sympathy for these things," he said. "A child may play with one for years, and it is a sociable and agreeable companion. It will allow itself to be dragged about by a string, tied up like a dog, and generally ill treated; but if a man treats it to any indignity, it sets its teeth in his finger, and there is another tragedy in the camp!"

"I may as well tell you, Mr. Torrance," Standish said, "that I mean to warn the men of what will happen when they approach the Lady Jane vein. I am going to tell them they will bring the water on their heads with the last blow of their picks. If they will not believe it otherwise, I am going to ask their shift boss to go into the mine."

Torrance laughed. "Croft oughtn't to make any mistakes. I am sure he has the liberty of looking at this handsome map whenever he chooses." He shook out an elaborate piece of ornamented parchment which hung against the wall of the assay office. "It was made by young Mr. Yates, who was educated in Paris as a mining engineer."

Mr. Torrance had left the map on the wall of the assay office. He had one in his own desk which he had made himself, with the help of the timberman in charge.

"I cannot see men sacrificed," Standish said simply.

Torrance sat down on an upturned candle box. "Your warning will corroborate what is getting to be generally believed through the camp—that you are trying to prove yourself the owner of the Silver Thread. A man would naturally want to preserve his own property."

"Where did that story originate?" Standish asked quietly.

"It has come to be generally talked among the men that you are the owner of the Thread. It seems to have originated with Jenny, the dancing girl at the Pretty-by-Night. I heard it from Gooley, Croft's Chinaman."

Standish looked at the man before him with an astonishment which Torrance did not seem to see.

"Gooley came up here with some black-mailing letters he wanted to sell to me," Torrance went on. "I told him I would kick him down the hill if he didn't go, but he managed to throw out that bit of information as a taunt before he left. It is no business of mine whether it is true or not, only it might be well to know exactly how you stand in relation to the Thread."

"The Silver Thread mine is absolutely nothing to me," Standish said, "but I will not see these men sacrificed by bringing the water on their heads. What is the talk of a mining town to me?"

"Nothing, I suppose, nor the talk of any other place. A locomotive might as well worry over the trash it carries along the track. But I am glad that the Silver Thread is nothing to you. It is a mine dug to ill luck. My wife says Halloran told her yesterday that Katherine would marry Croft."

Standish looked out of the open doorway. He could see the distant Dragoon mountains, and a row of beer bottles on a board that the boys had set up to shoot at. In some way they typified to him the largeness and the smallness of life.

Katherine was going to marry Croft, and Croft was now—*now*—keeping an appointment with Jacoby's sweetheart, Jenny, the dancing girl. It all made him a little sick. And then he realized that he was a man. He would go to Katherine, whether she would write to him or not, and he would lay his claims, his affection, before her, and he would take her away from that contemptible Croft. He would not humiliate her by telling her that Croft was faithless. He would conquer by the might of his own affection.

He could hardly wait for morning to come that he might go to her. He arose and walked up and down the little wooden building, the loose floor jarring under his feet in their heavy miner's boots. In his heart was the sense of possession, the sense that his own was being taken from him. Standish felt again in himself the elements that had come to the surface in that morning fight with the Indians. He was a man, and he wanted to combat for his own. He

was ready to fight, and was ready to pit himself against Croft. There may be men with that nice sense which makes them scorn to go into the field with another man, but the air of Arizona is not conducive to such refinements.

"Of course," Torrance went on, "it is all on account of Croft's hold on Halloran, according to my wife. But I don't know. There is no accounting for a woman's taste, as I said the other day. He is a scoundrel, but I suppose the young woman is accustomed to them. Her father is one—and a weak one at that. You can't pick figs from thistles."

"Miss May—Miss Halloran is a very——"

Standish hardly knew what he was going to say, except that it was to be something in Katherine's defense. Torrance finished it out for him:

"Handsome woman! She is an attractive woman, too. But even by Eastern standards Croft is a man well worth a poor girl's marrying, considered from the side on which people consider good matches. He isn't so much worse than other men. I despise his sneaking ways, but that is a matter of temperament. Perhaps if I were constituted as Croft is, I wouldn't be any worse than I am. I fight with different weapons, but I fight when the time comes. I suppose I ought to tell Croft that Gooley is following his lead, sneaking his secrets and selling them for what he can get; but I don't care."

Torrance was in, what was for him, a disturbed mood. The dust and dirt of mining camps had begrimed a naturally fine, sympathetic, generous nature. He had seen mine and thine become simply a matter of stronger wit and stronger arm for so many years that the fineness of other standards than those of expediency was lost to him. He pretended to himself that it would be a fine moment when the water came through the rocks in a mighty flood, tearing, rending, ruining the Silver Thread forever!

Croft had seen the new vein before the water had been allowed to go in over it; and not three men in the mine knew that that part of the drift was not clear. It had been boarded up, work was stopped there, and they thought no more about it. Most of them went to their daily toil like animals, perfectly unconscious of the location of the part of the mine they happened to be in.

Standish had continued to look out at the door. Once or twice he thought he had heard a burro moving through the weeds and dusty stones that lay outside. There

were dozens of them loose about the town, and he had paid no attention to the sound. Again it came—a noise as of a foot that slipped. Torrance put his head out of the window, striking a wax match as he did so. Standish walked out of the door, just in time to see a man scurrying away, half bent.

Torrance sent an oath and a pistol shot after him, as he disappeared in the blackness below the dump.

"The Thread's secret is a secret no longer," he said grimly.

XVI.

MRS. TORRANCE had been sitting miserably alone for days. Her husband was "busy." It seemed to her that he was busier than he had ever been since she had known him.

Every morning he started away in the little, light black buggy which was comfortably filled by his own size, to visit the group of silver mines of which the Lady Jane was only one.

Mrs. Torrance asked no questions, even when he put on his mining clothes after dinner and left her while he went back to the works. Jack she had not seen to talk to, for days. She could take no interest in botany. She had taken a dislike to it on that day when she had found Jack and Miss de Vere together. It seemed that the humble weeds that she had carried home were in some way connected with the disaster, and she had flung them down the hill, among the riotous, self seeding zinnias, those brilliant, flaunting, papery things that will grow anywhere, and that were industriously trying to brighten the dump.

There was no pleasure in taking her low pony phaeton and driving through the town. There had been a time when she had found that interesting. The medley of Chinamen, Scandinavians, Mexicans, and Jews who made up the daytime street population, had looked picturesque. But now, the shop windows with their cheap finery made her ill. The de Vere wore none of the gaudy things they displayed, but in Mrs. Torrance's eyes she belonged to the class that did, and they struck her with a sense of personal disgrace.

Her Jack!

"Perhaps," poor Mrs. Torrance said to herself as she sat on the deserted veranda, her hands folded in her lap with an air of placidity that deceived everybody, "perhaps I have not been careful enough to provide him with healthy amusement. Perhaps I should have—but *Jack!* I should

as soon have thought of providing amusement to keep myself out of mischief!"

All at once it came over her that she must do something. Inaction was killing her. She went down to the gate through the alfalfa—grown at a cost of eight dollars a day for work and water, and covering a space of fifty feet square—and putting her hands to her lips like a school boy, called for "Lou," the red faced keeper of the corral. In ten minutes she was driving the phaeton over the way to the Thread. She could easily have walked around the hill, sparing herself two miles of dusty drive, but that would have necessitated passing Nelly's, with the possibility of seeing that horrible woman—and, worst of all, Jack with her. Mrs. Torrance, like some other commendable people, had made up her mind to turn Jack into new ways, and she was already beginning to pretend that she had forgotten the old ones. Optimism had been the sunshine of her life.

She was driving by a house very much like her own, half way down the hill, when she heard the sound of a call, a laughing call, and saw the waving of a white chiffon parasol. To Mrs. Torrance's own surprise, there entered into her heart a sense of relief.

The owner of the parasol was rather inclined to be stout, but she had made up her mind to conceal the fact as long as possible—from herself. The white skirt of muslin that Mrs. Savage was holding over her arm, out of the dust, was ruffles and embroidery and lace, and the petticoat under it was silk. Silk skirts had scarcely made their way into the camp as yet. The waist was silk too, blue, with little tags of ribbon and steel buckles. Mrs. Savage had on a "morning dress." She had had it made in Denver from designs in a Paris fashion magazine. She had just got back to Tombstone, and had seen nobody.

"I know exactly where you are going," she called out—"to see Miss Halloran. I haven't heard anything but Miss Halloran. All the boys here"—she waved her hand toward three or four who sat about the veranda, mostly young fellows from the East who were thinking of Mrs. Savage when they wrote letters home and said that some of the married ladies in the camp were "fun"—"all the boys here talk of nothing else. How's Jack?"

She asked the question in the lightest and easiest way, but Mrs. Torrance winced, because she knew that "Jack" had been the first topic discussed. It is all very well to talk about young men being loyal to each other, and keeping each other's secrets.

Young men are much like young women. Mrs. Savage had announced that she was confidante for the camp, and that they were to tell her all the mischief they had been in since she left; and if they couldn't remember any of their own shortcomings, they were to tell her those of other people. So they had little by little told her of Jack Torrance's open infatuation for the Pretty-by-Night singer.

There was, too, quite a fascination in being allowed to tell such a story to a lady. It was a brand new experience. The ladies they knew at home—well, the boys had no idea what they would have done had any young man poured such a story into their ears. But it seemed all right to tell Mrs. Savage anything. She asked the frankest questions.

"Jack Torrance? Well!" she said with genuine surprise. "Well, he is cutting his eye teeth! That child! How does mama take it?"

And at that instant "mama" had come along the road, and Mrs. Savage had gone to meet her.

"Hasn't Jack been over?" Mrs. Torrance asked. "When did you come back?"

"This morning. I am a widdy lady. Mr. Savage expected to meet me here, but he sent me a telegram that he would be detained in Mexico a week longer, and for me to go over to the Fort; but there seems to be more life here. Where are you going?"

"Over to see Miss Halloran."

"Just as I supposed. I'd make you come in here, but I believe I will go with you. I want to see her. They say—the boys here say—that she is more reckless than I am; that she got you all in the worst sort of a mess, and nearly broke up the Broadway mill, fighting Indians over there. I am going over to call upon her. Wait a minute."

The young men on the veranda made no question of being left alone. They would stay there and drink lime juice and soda and play cards, if they liked, until they were tired. When Mrs. Savage came out again with a hat the equal of the rest of her costume, one young fellow, whose canvas garments were decorated with candle grease in relief, and who had a tennis racket under his arm, came down to assist his hostess into the phaeton, making some remarks about "Denver manners," which apparently permitted guests to be treated in such fashion; but neither of the ladies paid any attention to him whatever.

Mrs. Torrance drove her horse at a lively pace over the smooth, park-like road.

"They tell me the girl is going to marry Croft," were the first words her companion uttered.

"Mr. Halloran told me so the other day, but I didn't know that it was announced."

"Announced!" Mrs. Savage said scornfully. "Do you suppose that Halloran is going to wait for conventional announcements, or anything else, when he has Croft's credit to back him? I am anxious to make Miss Halloran's acquaintance. She must be deep. To get the miners calling her a saint and a "lady," the boys all saying that she is up to anything, and knows how to hold her own—and to catch Croft! Well, I call that genius. I will go over and learn her tricks."

Croft had always been peculiarly offensive to Mrs. Savage, and she could afford to be good natured to the girl who was going to marry him. They went down through the town and on out to the Thread house.

Katherine and Croft were sitting on the veranda, he with a note book in his hand and the air of having come on business. He had not fretted Katherine with love making. He had been quite courteous, and he had not pressed her for any haste in marrying him. He had taken up her father's burdens already, and Halloran's recuperated spirit had taken on almost an air of renewed youth. He never went near the mine. With his other burdens, he had cast his conscience upon Croft, who seemed to be quite able to bear the load.

As the heavy phaeton which Mrs. Torrance drove came under the porte cochère, Croft and Katherine rose and stepped forward. Mrs. Torrance introduced her companion as they alighted.

"You need not have the horses taken away. We have only come for a moment. Mrs. Savage wanted to see you—you are on exhibition, Miss Halloran—but I came over to ask a question. Isn't this camp too dull?"

"There is a prospect of its being livelier, I believe," Croft said. To Katherine's ears his words carried a hint of the strike which he had told her was in the air; but as he looked at Mrs. Savage she smiled her thanks for his appreciation of her arrival. "It is as dull as possible, and I have been wondering why we can't have a dance in Schefflin Hall. Ned Schefflin will let us have it, for I will ask him."

"It's a good thing I came back, Miss Halloran," Mrs. Savage said, "and I am grateful to you for being here. The last dance we had there were seventy five men, and eight of us who danced. I threatened

to send for the girl from the Pretty-by-Night to finish out my card." Mrs. Savage mentioned the well known saloon as though it had been the best and most favorably known resort on the continent.

Katherine had never before heard the name of Tombstone's gathering place, but she understood that the allusion was for some reason not in good taste. Mrs. Torrance stooped down and patted the head of one of the greyhounds that lay beside her.

"Isn't Gringo a beauty?" Katherine said, at once turning the talk to the dog, while Mrs. Savage enjoyed the effect of her remark.

Croft's eyebrows had come together.

"Ah, ha, my friend," Mrs. Savage was saying to herself. "Are we so careful of our new sweetheart that we cannot let her hear about spades even when we call them agricultural implements?"

"Have you ever seen that pretty dancing girl, Miss Halloran?" she went on. "In New York they are sending out to the variety theaters and bringing in the dancers to entertain evening parties. I heard of a young man the other day who was given a 'farewell to the gay world' banquet the night before he was married, and with the cigars an enormous mound of flowers was brought in. At the right moment a dancer arose from its center and spun around on the table. I have never seen Jenny dance, but from what the boys tell me, I imagine she could do that."

She looked at him meaningly, intending to give him to understand that his engagement was an open secret, even though he had not seen fit to tell his friends. Then, with that luck which some people, especially those with a talent for blague, seem to have of stumbling upon conversational home thrusts, Mrs. Savage went on:

"They say that the point of the story lay in the fact that the dancer was an old sweetheart of the retiring young bachelor."

Croft's face grew as white as Arizona sun and natural swarth would allow. He arose with his customary deliberation, and asked that he might be excused, as he had some business to attend to with Mr. Halloran. He went down the veranda and through the corridors with a slow, echoing step; but every footfall held a determination to make Mrs. Savage and her husband suffer for this insult.

In his heart was black rage and fury against Jenny. It could only have been her tongue that had carried the story. He might have known that such a woman could not keep a secret. Why should she?

He was a conquest of which she was proud. And he—he—he had promised to marry her, or she had talked of some such nonsense. And all the time she was making him the laughing stock of the camp. He cursed the girl's pretty face, and the appealing air, the feminine helplessness, which had touched something in his heart which he had not known was there. He never meant to marry Jenny, but—he shut his eyes to the future. He meant to marry Katherine, and hold his head up among men; but he cared enough for Jenny not to let her know it yet.

Croft was furious and afraid. He forced himself to go back to Katherine after he saw the phaeton drive away. She was sitting where he had left her, her hands idle over a book. She greeted him with a friendly smile that held in it some comradeship. It was as though she had in a measure appealed to his good humored criticism of her late guest.

Reassured by her expression, he would not soften. He did not sit down, but stood for an instant, his well made but too heavily ringed hand against one of the dull square pillars.

"I know you will pardon me, and understand me, when I say that Mrs. Savage is hardly——"

Katherine's lip curled.

"It is hardly necessary to tell me that. I may not see anything wrong with Nelly, but Mrs. Savage——"

"She has been about mining camps, and with her husband's friends, until she has lost the bloom. She has no fine sense of what she is talking about. She does not even know wherein her offense lies." Croft spoke with tender, gentlemanly gravity. "She had no right to speak to you of such persons."

"They came to ask me to help them with a dance." There was a question in her tone.

"Do so by all means," Croft said. "I believe it was Mrs. Torrance's idea. Mrs. Torrance is not Mrs. Savage. She is greatly worried just now over her son, and I suppose wants to take him into a new atmosphere, to interest him in new people." There was almost a tone of fatherliness in Croft's voice. "Jack Torrance is a young fool, but they are good people in a way."

XVII.

IN those days they had in Tombstone an association known as "The Missionaries." It was supposed to bring into the lives of

socially stranded young men some of the pleasures of civilization as it is known in centers where the saloon is not the chief gathering place. Mrs. Torrance was known as the "high priestess," because all the entertainments depended upon her talent for organization. This one was held in Schefflin Hall. All the chairs had been taken away, and there had been spotty efforts to wax the floor. It was not a well matched floor, and one of the young Canadians said that dancing on it reminded him of jumping holes in spring ice.

It was the first of the dances that Standish had attended, and he dressed for it with trembling eagerness. He saw before him an opportunity to see Katherine. She would probably dance with him if he came early enough. As he tied his necktie he hummed over the silly little refrain of "My Queen," to which he had danced with her back there at the Pier last summer. His pulse ran along with the notes, and so did his memories. She had been engaged to him then, and she had given his little finger the least little squeeze in the dance. He looked at it now, almost in doubt as to its being the same finger. Were they the same people? The change had been so entire, so abrupt. He had been a boy then, he was a man now. He said he was a man, with a determination to act a man's part, to claim his own out of the world.

He went up to Mrs. Torrance's house to go down to the hall with her, as he had promised. Jack would go too, but Mrs. Torrance wanted Standish's advice, she said. She pitied herself a little because she had to ask a stranger to come to break the ice that was forming between her and Jack. She had never had any experiences like this. She was so frank and open, unaccustomed to having any feelings which she must conceal, that her efforts were pitiful to Standish, and altogether exasperating to Jack.

The hall was empty when they arrived, except for the musicians, who had been selected from the Fourth Cavalry band at Fort Huachuca. The bandsmen were tuning up their instruments on the stage. There was a gallery on the opposite side of the room that had been draped with flags, and set about with a row of huge century plants, striped green and white, in lieu of palms.

"We want *some* sort of a cozy nook to—well, to button our gloves in," Mrs. Savage had said. She had brought down two or three Japanese screens and set them about among the straw chairs. The gallery was

approached by a steep inclosed staircase, down which the procession must go in single file.

Standish and Jack were all over the place in a moment, admiring everything.

"I haven't been to a dance for a long time," Standish said. "I wonder if I may select one of the waltzes;" and he went over and made himself gracious to the band master, and asked that the fourth waltz might be "My Queen."

He had even forgotten that Jack Torrance would hardly speak to him, in his boyish excitement. He ignored anything so trivial as a personal quarrel. He forgot that there might be any feeling about his possible claims to the Thread; everything was lost in the fact that she was "coming, my queen, my queen"—and presently he would be turning about to the sound of the strings, vibrating with his heart, "my queen, my queen!" She must remember. The battle would be won!

The hall filled before he knew it. They seemed to come in all together, with a rush. The number of gowns was ridiculously small, but they were very smart gowns—the wearer of one of them put an advertisement in the *Tombstone Epitaph* the next day, offering fifty dollars reward for a button lost from her bodice—and the voices that accompanied them covered a good deal of territory. And why should it not be a gay company, when every lady, married or single, could have four times as many partners as she wanted? The wall flowers were all black coated.

Katherine did not come. The first dance went by, and found Standish leaning against the wall. The second passed, the third, and even the fourth—the waltz he had dreamed of began its well marked beating.

Mrs. Savage, gorgeous in a white satin with silver trimming, this hot night, her embonpoint just a trifle too conspicuous about the tops of her shoulder blades, stopped before him.

"I see," she said laughing, "that you are a modest youth, and that if I am—" and then she stopped, for she saw that Standish was not heeding her in the least, that his eyes were on Katherine Halloran coming in at the door.

"Well, upon my word!" Mrs. Savage said. "Another one!" And she turned about to find something upon which to salve her wounded vanity.

Mrs. Savage had a born love of mischief. She was like Iago—she loved evil for evil's sake. If she could find a smooth place she

loved to try her hand at ruffling it. She liked to feel her own power, and there had been a hurt in her own life once, which she felt could never be sufficiently smoothed down until it was expiated by a thousand pains given to other people.

Jack Torrance, moody, wondering how soon he could get away, was right beside her, and she put on all of her smiles for him. Jack had liked her jolly ways. In his heart he didn't think she was quite a lady. When he married Fanny de Vere, he certainly wouldn't like to see her intimate with Mrs. Savage; but she was like an oasis in a desert tonight.

"Jack," she said, putting a familiar hand upon his arm, "come and get me a big goblet of champagne frappé with a spoon in it, and bring it up stairs, and let me relax myself for about ten minutes."

After she was settled, she crossed her feet on a hassock and drew in the champagne with a solemn joy.

"They tell me, Jack," she said between her sips, "that this sort of inane respectability is beginning to pall on your young soul."

"Whoever told you that was mistaken," Jack returned, from the other side of his own glass. "I haven't left off champagne for whisky yet."

Mrs. Savage laughed as though this were wit.

"I meant this whole joyous occasion—all of us," waving her hand toward the crowd below. They were over in a corner by a window, quite out of hearing, and screened from view. "It is very unkind of you, too, because this whole affair is upon your account."

"My account?" Jack set down his glass.

"Yes, all about you. You're the prodigal we are snaring back into the fold of respectability. Those drums are beating for thee! That wail of stringed things is a call to your heart. Say, Jack, it puts me in mind of hiving bees by beating on a tin pan."

"Will you please tell me, Mrs. Savage, what you mean?"

"Just as though you didn't know! Now, seriously, I am a student of human nature, a close student. I want you, as an old friend, to give me some information. Does the sight of Tombstone frolicking about to the sound of the army band, and the fun of sitting behind a screen with an old friend, wean you from the Pretty-by-Night and the fair de Vere?"

Mrs. Savage looked into a face that frightened her. She had expected to em-

barrass Jack, and put him into a bad humor with his people for "babying" him. She had never contemplated arousing what she beheld in the slender, dark face. She seemed to see nothing but two eyes blazing. She gave an easy little laugh. She thought that perhaps the champagne had gone to her head, and she was seeing things queerly. She had had that experience before.

Jack stood up.

"Thank you, Mrs. Savage, for your observation. Is there any one you would like to have me send to you? Or would you like to go down stairs? No? Good night! I have an engagement to take Miss de Vere home, and I fear I am already a little late."

XVIII.

CROFT had not come to the dance. He had called and given Katherine his excuses, and asked her if she thought them sufficient. He always treated her opinion with studied deference in these days, never by any chance doing anything—of which she knew or was likely to know—without giving her a full statement of the case. His reasons had been sufficient, and she had finally carried her father off with her to the dance.

It seemed hours to Standish before he was able to reach her, but it was only through one dance and dozens of greetings. At last he was able to get near enough to ask her for a dance—a waltz—and after she had allowed him to put his name down on the very much gilded program which had emanated from the *Epitaph* printing office, he went back and begged that "My Queen" might be played again.

The band master was cold, scornful, but yielding.

"These Westerners don't know anything about the new music," he said to his first violin. "They will be asking me to play 'Pinafore' tunes next."

It had been a concession that she saw no way of getting out of for Katherine to let John Standish put his name down upon her card, but when she realized that it was there she made up her mind that she would not dance with him. It was insolence in him to expect it. She would forget it. But try as she would, the dances before were but an introduction to it. Through every note, every step, she felt herself coming toward that moment when Standish would come to claim her. As the dance before ended she took her partner's arm and started toward the steep stairs. Standish watched her go, and when she was settled in the corner

where Jack and Mrs. Savage had been but a moment before, he followed them.

"I think, Miss Halloran," he said politely, "that this is our dance."

The young man with her was very young and rather shy. He arose at once, and with one or two stiff sentences backed himself out, while Standish, with an ease which belied the beating of his heart, took his seat. It was at that instant that the band swung into the opening bars of the popular old waltz. They looked into each other's eyes and he saw that she remembered.

"Katherine," he said, "what is this coolness between us?"

"Coolness?" she replied, in a tone that matched the word.

"Misunderstanding, then. You went away last summer as my promised wife. You gave me your promise. It is one from which I never released you."

Katherine kept perfect control of her voice. "You released me from that promise in the hour when I asked you to forgive me, and you refused."

"Will you not tell me why you treated me as you did?"

"I—I heard—I——"

"Heard what?"

"I heard that you—" To save her life she could not tell him that she had thought herself a great heiress, and had heard that he boasted of being the prospective owner of the Silver Thread mine. She hated herself for her folly and blindness in the light of later developments.

"I saw you in the Thread," she whispered finally.

Standish would have laughed had it not all been so serious to him. He did not even remind her that her desertion of him had been last summer, and her discovery of him in the Thread the week before.

"Why should I not go into the Thread? You and your people visit the Lady Jane whenever you choose."

"I asked you to forgive me in the face of death, and you refused."

"No, I did not refuse. I had hardly taken in the fact, the incredible fact, that it was you. The girl that had deserted me owed me something of an explanation. I did not want her to offer me forgiveness for I knew not what crime. I must have done something. But since that night I have realized that I care for nothing but for you to come back to me. I am willing to trust you. I believe that you loved me then. I believe that you love me now." Standish grew bolder with memories and with Katherine's weak fencing.

"How can I love a man who has come here to rob my father?"

"By what channel has that story reached you?" Standish asked after a pause. "Let me tell you that I have no possible or prospective interest in the Silver Thread. When I came out here I was interested in the mine, knowing it was a rich mine, and that my old uncle had some claim to it. At that time I no more connected you with it than I connected you with the Lady Jane mine. You were Miss May to me. Since I have been here I have discovered that it is an utterly worthless piece of property. If it belonged to me, I should abandon it. I have so written to my uncle. Why should the question of money—or anything—come between us, Katherine? You are mine!"

"No! No!" she said, as he put his brown hand, ungloved, upon hers. "You must not. I have promised to marry Mr. Croft."

"That you had no right to do. You had promised to marry me, and I shall hold you to it. I shall say as much to Croft."

"No! You must not. You shall not. He has my word."

"Katherine," Standish said, "what is your word to another man—the word you had no right to give—weighed in the balance against your love for me? I cannot go away from you. I shall come back again and again. You are my own, by your own word, my own. I love you, and I will not give you up to a scoundrel like Croft!"

Katherine arose.

"It is unmanly of you to speak so of a man who has never injured you," she said, and her voice trembled.

"But he has injured *you*."

"I will not listen."

"You were ready enough to listen to something against me."

"Perhaps I have given you the right to think me faithless, but I find myself justified in my belief in your character. Promises do not hold with a dishonorable man"—she corrected herself hastily—"with a man who does not accept your overtures when they are made. You let me go. It is no defense to revile another man—my best friend."

"I do not know why you call me dishonorable," Standish said. "I have never known why you deserted me in the first place. I did not intend to bring Mr. Croft's name into the discussion. If he is really dear to you, I have nothing more to say. You have a right to marry whom you choose—the man you love. Here is Captain Coleman. I will leave you."

Katherine talked to Coleman with a feverish lightness, while underneath she was saying over and over, "Why did he wait so long? Why does he come at me like that? Why is Croft a scoundrel?"

Going down the stairs Standish was calling himself a fool for his haste, for his passion, for his lack of self control. He almost determined that he would go then and there to Croft and tell him that he knew the story of Jenny, and that Miss Halloran's father should know it unless the engagement was given up. All sorts of mad ideas came into his head, all of which he was too sensible to carry out. He had thought himself too sensible to do what he had done. His storming had failed, and he found himself more in love with her than ever.

Up stairs, Coleman was finding Miss Halloran puzzling. He said afterward that "she talked like a girl in a book." She asked him what he thought of renunciation, and if duty was after all of more value than love. It encouraged him in the suit he had been pressing ever since he first met her. He had come into the town late on his way to a distant "water hole," and had come to the dance in his field uniform, intending to stay an hour and ride after his troop. He forgot everything now, and sat down and listened and answered, and then asked Katherine Halloran to marry him—only to be looked at with indignant astonishment and refused with bare civility.

Standish met Mr. Torrance at the foot of the stairs, evidently looking for him.

"Come out here," the superintendent said, taking Standish by the arm. "Here is the very devil to pay. Come up here somewhere out of sight and sound of this kicking crowd. Where's Jack?"

"Here somewhere."

"Is he? Well, I can't find him anywhere. I want to send him out to the outlying mines to warn the foremen. The men are going to strike for higher wages in the morning—my men and all—damn 'em! Some spy heard our talk about the men in the Thread, and they have gone out from fear. My men have left me because after my contemplated plan of letting Croft tap the Jane's vein of water as well as ore, I am a murderer."

Torrance laughed. He had diamond buttons in the broad expanse of his white shirt, and they sparkled gaily. People probably thought he was telling Standish one of his famous stories.

"Croft is calling the informer a liar, and ordering his men back to work," he went

on. "I believe he has been standing in the hoisting works making a speech. I'll bet a twenty it was a grammatical speech, too, telling them that I had made up that lie about the probable tapping of the Lady Jane, because he was paying the men living wages. Where is Jack? I must have a force in the hoisting works by morning, and we must get the guns over there."

"Who told you this?"

"Nelly. She said that that singing girl heard it all, and came home and told her—which I call uncommonly clever of her." Mr. Torrance had entirely forgotten, in the stress of the past few days, that Jack was in disgrace on account of the singing girl. "I'll give her something when this trouble's over. Don't mention this to my wife," he added hastily, as Mrs. Torrance came towards them.

"Where is Jack?" she asked Standish, looking from one to the other.

"He is about somewhere," his father said. "I am looking for him. I'll have to take him away for a little while. There's a man at the hotel he must see."

"Well, the way you have taken to seeing men on business at all hours of the night is simply ridiculous. There is just as much time here as there is anywhere." She stood chatting, never noticing that as a man came by and spoke to her he was beckoned to by her husband, and that several of them had already slipped out into the night.

Nothing was said to Coleman. They did not mean to bring in soldiers. It gave a bad name to the camp, and it probably would not be necessary. Torrance meant to bring in new men from Bisbee. Copper mining was not very flourishing just now, and he knew there were plenty of non union men over there who would work for less wages with the chances of a fight on their hands.

He scribbled a note to Jack on one of the dancing programs, and sent it out by a messenger, telling him to go everywhere and bring back Jack at once. Mrs. Torrance had a jealous fear at her heart that her plan had failed after all, and that Jack had gone off with the singer, even from the dance that was to amuse him.

The messenger was not gone long. He brought the same program doubled again. Mr. Torrance had moved away and Mrs. Torrance in her eagerness opened it. It was a curt request that Jack's clothing might be sent to the hotel. He might not be at home for some days.

(To be continued.)

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING IN THE ALPS.

The most adventurous and exhilarating of athletic sports, and its rapid advance in popularity—The perils and the attractions of ascents to the realm of everlasting snow and ice in the mountaineer's Swiss playground.

By William S. Bridgman.

MOUNTAIN climbing, as a sport, is one of the modern inventions. Thirty or forty years ago, when the dwellers of the Alpine valleys first saw tourists attempting to scale the huge icy heaps of rocks above them, they inquired what form of acute mania it could be that drove these misguided strangers to risk their lives in so utterly useless an undertaking. Today, these same natives may still fail to perceive just where the pleasure of the thing comes in; but they no longer look upon the mountain climber as a curiosity. He comes in regiments nowadays, he penetrates everywhere, and he hails from all the civilized countries; and catering to his needs has become one of the chief industries of Switzerland.

Human nature is full of contradictions. Never were there so many appliances of luxury, never was so much attention paid to bodily comforts, as today; and yet this is the age that has seen the wonderful development of athleticism, of the spirit that undertakes hard physical toil for the sheer love of it. "Labor and pleasure, in their natures opposite, are yet linked together in a kind of necessary connection," said Livy nineteen centuries ago; and never was the principle so strikingly illustrated as in these latter days upon the steep slopes of Matterhorn or Dent Blanche.

The Alps have been so thoroughly explored, mapped, and climbed in the last few decades that the more adventurous mountaineers, sighing for new worlds to conquer, have gone to the loftiest peaks of other regions. The Russian

Caucasus and the Rockies of our own West have attracted some of them. There have been expeditions to Kilimanjaro and to Mt. St. Elias. Whymper, one of the most famous of pioneer climbers, has scaled the Cordilleras of South America; Conway has reached still greater heights in the Himalayas of Cashmere.

A great, snow clad, ice girt peak is the most magnificent object of nature, and the prospect from its summit can never lose its impressive grandeur. But to the true mountain climber scenery is a secondary consideration. He loves his toilsome sport purely for its own sake. To him a tall peak is a kingdom to be won. Its difficulties are a challenge. When Whymper made one of his first ascents, that of Mont Pelvoux, which had been reputed the highest of the French Alps, he saw from its top that behind it, shut off by a tremendous gorge, was another summit, unmistakably a little higher. "I was troubled in spirit about that mountain," he said afterwards, "and my thoughts often reverted to the great wall sided peak." Nor could he find peace of mind until he made a special expedition to Dauphiné to attack and conquer it.

Such an enthusiast will not allow nature to have inaccessible spots. His crowning glory is to reach some height where the foot of man never trod before. The known pathway, the ascent that has already been proved possible, lose their charm for him. He complains that the Alps have become the familiar playground of the Cockney tourist, that there are beaten tracks to the mountain