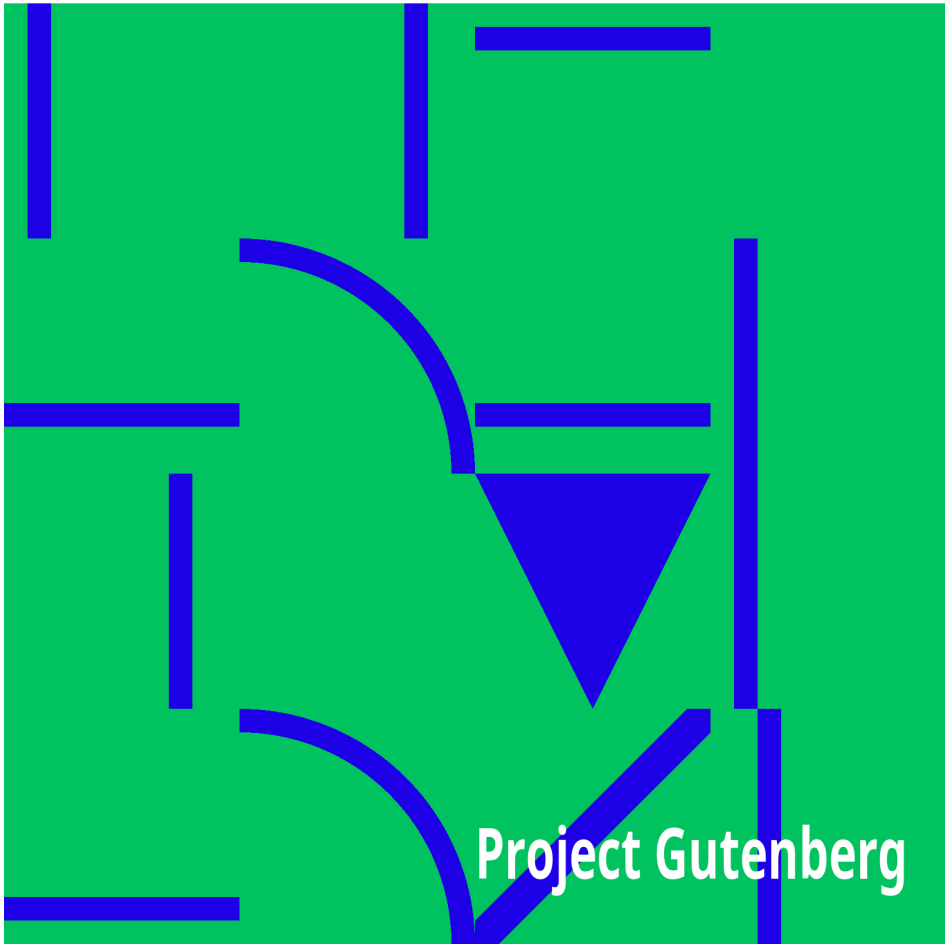
The Fifth String

John Philip Sousa



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By

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The Conspirators

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The Conspirators

I

The coming of Diotti to America had awakened more than usual interest in the man and his work. His marvelous success as violinist in the leading capitals of Europe, together with many brilliant contributions to the literature of his instrument, had long been favorably commented on by the critics of the old world. Many stories of his struggles and his triumphs had found their way across the ocean and had been read and re-read with interest.

Therefore, when Mr. Henry Perkins, the well-known impresario, announced with an air of conscious pride and pardonable enthusiasm that he had secured Diotti for a "limited" number of concerts, Perkins' friends assured that wide-awake gentleman that his foresight amounted to positive genius, and they predicted an unparalleled success for his star. On account of his wonderful ability as player, Diotti was a favorite at half the courts of Europe, and the astute Perkins enlarged upon this fact without regard for the feelings of the courts or the violinist.

On the night preceding Diotti's debut in New York, he was the center of attraction at a reception given by Mrs. Llewellyn, a social leader, and a devoted patron of the arts. The violinist made a deep impression on those fortunate enough to be near him during the evening. He won the respect of the men by his observations on matters of international interest, and the admiration of the gentler sex by his chivalric estimate of woman's influence in the world's progress, on which subject he talked with rarest good humor and delicately implied gallantry.

During one of those sudden and unexplainable lulls that always occur in general drawing-room conversations, Diotti turned to Mrs. Llewellyn and whispered: "Who is the charming young woman just entering?"

"The beauty in white?"

"Yes, the beauty in white," softly echoing Mrs. Llewellyn's query. He leaned forward and with eager eyes gazed in admiration at the new-comer. He seemed hypnotized by the vision, which moved slowly from between the blue-tinted portieres and stood for the instant, a perfect embodiment of radiant womanhood, silhouetted against the silken drapery.

"That is Miss Wallace, Miss Mildred Wallace, only child of one of New York's prominent bankers."

"She is beautiful—a queen by divine right," cried he, and then with a mingling of impetuosity and importunity, entreated his hostess to present him.

And thus they met.

Mrs. Llewellyn's entertainments were celebrated, and justly so. At her receptions one always heard the best singers and players of the season, and Epicurus' soul could rest in peace, for her chef had an international reputation. Oh, remember, you music-fed ascetic, many, aye, very many,

regard the transition from Tschaikowsky to terrapin, from Beethoven to burgundy with hearts aflame with anticipatory joy—and Mrs. Llewellyn's dining-room was crowded.

Miss Wallace and Diotti had wandered into the conservatory.

"A desire for happiness is our common heritage," he was saying in his richly melodious voice.

"But to define what constitutes happiness is very difficult," she replied.

"Not necessarily," he went on; "if the motive is clearly within our grasp, the attainment is possible."

"For example?" she asked.

"The miser is happy when he hoards his gold; the philanthropist when he distributes his. The attainment is identical, but the motives are antipodal."

"Then one possessing sufficient motives could be happy without end?" she suggested doubtingly.

"That is my theory. The Niobe of old had happiness within her power."

"The gods thought not," said she; "in their very pity they changed her into stone, and with streaming eyes she ever tells the story of her sorrow."

"But are her children weeping?" he asked. "I think not. Happiness can bloom from the seeds of deepest woe," and in a tone almost reverential, he continued: "I remember a picture in one of our Italian galleries that always impressed me as the ideal image of maternal happiness. It is a painting of the Christ-mother standing by the body of the Crucified. Beauty was still hers, and the dress of grayish hue, nun-like in its

simplicity, seemed more than royal robe. Her face, illumined as with a light from heaven, seemed inspired with this thought: 'They have killed Him—they have killed my son! Oh, God, I thank Thee that His suffering is at an end!' And as I gazed at the holy face, another light seemed to change it by degrees from saddened motherhood to triumphant woman! Then came: 'He is not dead, He but sleeps; He will rise again, for He is the best beloved of the Father!'"

"Still, fate can rob us of our patrimony," she replied, after a pause.

"Not while life is here and eternity beyond," he said, reassuringly.

"What if a soul lies dormant and will not arouse?" she asked.

"There are souls that have no motive low enough for earth, but only high enough for heaven," he said, with evident intention, looking almost directly at her.

"Then one must come who speaks in nature's tongue," she continued.

"And the soul will then awake," he added earnestly.

"But is there such a one?" she asked.

"Perhaps," he almost whispered, his thought father to the wish.

"I am afraid not," she sighed. "I studied drawing, worked diligently and, I hope, intelligently, and yet I was quickly convinced that a counterfeit presentment of nature was puny and insignificant. I painted Niagara. My friends praised my effort. I saw Niagara again—I destroyed the picture."

"But you must be prepared to accept the limitations of man and his work," said the philosophical violinist.

"Annihilation of one's own identity in the moment is possible in nature's domain—never in man's. The resistless, never-ending rush of the waters, madly churning, pitilessly dashing against the rocks below; the mighty roar of the loosened giant; that was Niagara. My picture seemed but a smear of paint."

"Still, man has won the admiration of man by his achievements," he said.

"Alas, for me," she sighed, "I have not felt it."

"Surely you have been stirred by the wonders man has accomplished in music's realm?" Diotti ventured.

"I never have been." She spoke sadly and reflectively.

"But does not the passion-laden theme of a master, or the marvelous feeling of a player awaken your emotions?" persisted he.

She stood leaning lightly against a pillar by the fountain. "I never hear a pianist, however great and famous, but I see the little cream-colored hammers within the piano bobbing up and down like acrobatic brownies. I never hear the plaudits of the crowd for the artist and watch him return to bow his thanks, but I mentally demand that these little acrobats, each resting on an individual pedestal, and weary from his efforts, shall appear to receive a share of the applause.

"When I listen to a great singer," continued this world-defying skeptic, "trilling like a thrush, scampering over the scales, I see a clumsy lot of ah, ah, ahs, awkwardly, uncertainly ambling up the gamut, saying, 'were it not for us she could not sing thus—give us our meed of praise.'"

Slowly he replied: "Masters have written in wondrous language and masters have played with wondrous power."

"And I so long to hear," she said, almost plaintively. "I marvel at the invention of the composer and the skill of the player, but there I cease."

He looked at her intently. She was standing before him, not a block of chiseled ice, but a beautiful, breathing woman. He offered her his arm and together they made their way to the drawing-room.

"Perhaps, some day, one will come who can sing a song of perfect love in perfect tones, and your soul will be attuned to his melody."

"Perhaps—and good-night," she softly said, leaving his arm and joining her friends, who accompanied her to the carriage.

II

The intangible something that places the stamp of popular approval on one musical enterprise, while another equally artistic and as cleverly managed languishes in a condition of unendorsed greatness, remains one of the unsolved mysteries.

When a worker in the vineyard of music or the drama offers his choicest tokay to the public, that fickle coquette may turn to the more ordinary and less succulent concord. And the worker and the public itself know not why.

It is true, Diotti's fame had preceded him, but fame has preceded others and has not always been proof against financial disaster. All this preliminary,—and it is but necessary to recall that on the evening of December the twelfth Diotti made his initial bow in New York, to an audience that completely filled every available space in the Academy of Music—a representative audience, distinguished alike for beauty, wealth and discernment.

When the violinist appeared for his solo, he quietly acknowledged the cordial reception of the audience, and immediately proceeded with the business of the evening. At a slight nod from him the conductor rapped attention, then launched the orchestra into the introduction of the concerto, Diotti's favorite, selected for the first number. As the violinist turned to the conductor he faced slightly to the left and in a direct line with the second proscenium box. His poise was admirable. He was handsome, with the olive-tinted warmth of his southern home—fairly tall, straight-limbed and lithe—a picture of poetic grace. His was the face of a man who trusted without reserve, the manner of one who believed implicitly, feeling that good was universal and evil accidental.

As the music grew louder and the orchestra approached the peroration of the preface of the coming solo, the violinist raised his head slowly. Suddenly his eyes met the gaze of the solitary occupant of the second proscenium box. His face flushed. He looked inquiringly, almost appealingly, at her. She sat immovable and serene, a lace-framed vision in white.

It was she who, since he had met her, only the night before, held his very soul in thraldom.

He lifted his bow, tenderly placing it on the strings. Faintly came the first measures of the theme. The melody, noble, limpid and beautiful, floated in dreamy sway over the vast auditorium, and seemed to cast a mystic glamour over the player. As the final note of the first movement was dying away, the audience, awakening from its delicious trance, broke forth into spontaneous bravos.

Mildred Wallace, scrutinizing the program, merely drew her wrap closer about her shoulders and sat more erect. At the end of the concerto the applause was generous enough to satisfy the most exacting virtuoso. Diotti unquestionably had scored the greatest triumph of his career. But the lady in the box had remained silent and unaffected throughout.

The poor fellow had seen only her during the time he played, and the mighty cheers that came from floor and galleries struck upon his ear like the echoes of mocking demons. Leaving the stage he hurried to his dressing-room and sank into a chair. He had persuaded himself she should not be insensible to his genius, but the dying ashes of his hopes, his dreams, were smouldering, and in his despair came the thought: "I am not great enough for her. I am but a man; her consort should be a god. Her soul, untouched by human passion or human skill, demands the power of god-like genius to arouse it."

Music lovers crowded into his dressing-room, enthusiastic in their praises. Cards conveying delicate compliments written in delicate chirography poured in upon him, but in vain he looked for some sign, some word from her.

Quickly he left the theater and sought his hotel.

A menacing cloud obscured the wintry moon. A clock sounded the midnight hour.

He threw himself upon the bed and almost sobbed his thoughts, and their burden was:

"I am not great enough for her. I am but a man. I am but a man!"

III

Perkins called in the morning. Perkins was happy—Perkins was positively joyous, and Perkins was self-satisfied. The violinist had made a great hit. But Perkins, confiding in the white-coated dispenser who concocted his matin Martini, very dry, an hour before, said he regarded the success due as much to the management as to the artist. And Perkins

believed it. Perkins usually took all the credit for a success, and with charming consistency placed all responsibility for failure on the shoulders of the hapless artist.

When Perkins entered Diotti's room he found the violinist heavy-eyed and dejected. "My dear Signor," he began, showing a large envelope bulging with newspaper clippings, "I have brought the notices. They are quite the limit, I assure you. Nothing like them ever heard before—all tuned in the same key, as you musical fellows would say," and Perkins cocked his eye.

Perkins enjoyed a glorious reputation with himself for bright sayings, which he always accompanied with a cock of the eye. The musician not showing any visible appreciation of the manager's metaphor, Perkins immediately proceeded to uncock his eye.

"Passed the box-office coming up," continued this voluble enlightener; "nothing left but a few seats in the top gallery. We'll stand them on their heads to-morrow night—see if we don't." Then he handed the bursting envelope of notices to Diotti, who listlessly put them on the table at his side.

"Too tired to read, eh?" said Perkins, and then with the advance-agent instinct strong within him he selected a clipping, and touching the violinist on the shoulder: "Let me read this one to you. It is by Herr Totenkellar. He is a hard nut to crack, but he did himself proud this time. Great critic when he wants to be."

Perkins cleared his throat and began: "Diotti combines tremendous feeling with equally tremendous technique. The entire audience was under the witchery of his art." Diotti slowly negatived that statement with bowed head. "His tone is full, round and clear; his interpretation lends a story-telling charm to the music; for, while we drank deep at the

fountain of exquisite melody, we saw sparkling within the waters the lights of Paradise. New York never has heard his equal. He stands alone, pre-eminent, an artistic giant."

"Now, that's what I call great," said the impresario, dramatically; "when you hit Totenkellar that way you are good for all kinds of money."

Perkins took his hat and cane and moved toward the door. The violinist arose and extended his hand wearily. "Good-day" came simultaneously; then "I'm off. We'll turn 'em away to-morrow; see if we don't!" Whereupon Perkins left Diotti alone in his misery.

IV

It was the evening of the fourteenth, In front of the Academy a strong-lunged and insistent tribe of gentry, known as ticket speculators, were reaping a rich harvest. They represented a beacon light of hope to many tardy patrons of the evening's entertainment, especially to the man who had forgotten his wife's injunction "to be sure to buy the tickets on the way down town, dear, and get them in the family circle, not too far back." This man's intentions were sincere, but his newspaper was unusually interesting that morning. He was deeply engrossed in an article on the causes leading to matrimonial infelicities when his 'bus passed the Academy box-office.

He was six blocks farther down town when he finished the article, only to find that it was a carefully worded advertisement for a new patent medicine, and of course he had not time to return. "Oh, well," said he, "I'll get them when I go up town to-night."

But he did not. So with fear in his heart and a red-faced woman on his arm he approached the box-office. "Not a seat left," sounded to his hen-pecked ears like the concluding words of the black-robed judge: "and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul." But a reprieve came, for one of the aforesaid beacon lights of hope rushed forward, saying: "I have two good seats, not far back, and only ten apiece." And the gentleman with fear in his heart and the red-faced woman on his arm passed in.

They saw the largest crowd in the history of the Academy. Every seat was occupied, every foot of standing room taken. Chairs were placed in the side aisles. The programs announced that it was the second appearance in America of Angelo Diotti, the renowned Tuscan violinist.

The orchestra had perfunctorily ground out the overture to "Der Freischuetz," the baritone had stentorianly emitted "Dio Possente," the soprano was working her way through the closing measures of the mad scene from "Lucia," and Diotti was number four on the program. The conductor stood beside his platform, ready to ascend as Diotti appeared.

The audience, ever ready to act when those on the stage cease that occupation, gave a splendid imitation of the historic last scene at the Tower of Babel. Having accomplished this to its evident satisfaction, the audience proceeded, like the closing phrase of the "Goetterdaemmerung" Dead March, to become exceedingly quiet—then expectant.

This expectancy lasted fully three minutes. Then there were some impatient handclappings. A few persons whispered: "Why is he late?" "Why doesn't he come?" "I wonder where Diotti is," and then came unmistakable signs of impatience. At its height Perkins appeared, hesitatingly. Nervous and jerky he walked to the center of the stage, and raised his hand begging silence. The audience was stilled.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he falteringly said, "Signor Diotti left his hotel at seven o'clock and was driven to the Academy. The call-boy rapped at his dressing-room, and not receiving a reply, opened the door to find the room empty. We have despatched searchers in every direction and have sent out a police alarm. We fear some accident has befallen the Signor. We ask your indulgence for the keen disappointment, and beg to say that your money will be refunded at the box-office."

Diotti had disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed him.

V

My Dearest Sister: You doubtless were exceedingly mystified and troubled over the report that was flashed to Europe regarding my sudden disappearance on the eve of my second concert in New York.

Fearing, sweet Francesca, that you might mourn me as dead, I sent the cablegram you received some weeks since, telling you to be of good heart and await my letter. To make my action thoroughly understood I must give you a record of what happened to me from the first day I arrived in America. I found a great interest manifested in my premiere, and socially everything was done to make me happy.

Mrs. James Llewellyn, whom, you no doubt remember, we met in Florence the winter of 18—, immediately after I reached New York arranged a reception for me, which was elegant in the extreme. But from that night dates my misery.

You ask her name?—Mildred Wallace. Tell me what she is like, I hear you say. Of graceful height, willowy and exquisitely molded, not over twenty-four, with the face of a Madonna; wondrous eyes of darkest blue,

hair indescribable in its maze of tawny color—in a word, the perfection of womanhood. In half an hour I was her abject slave, and proud in my serfdom. When I returned to the hotel that evening I could not sleep. Her image ever was before me, elusive and shadowy. And yet we seemed to grow farther and farther apart—she nearer heaven, I nearer earth.

The next evening I gave my first and what I fear may prove my last concert in America. The vision of my dreams was there, radiant in rarest beauty. Singularly enough, she was in the direct line of my vision while I played. I saw only her, played but for her, and cast my soul at her feet. She sat indifferent and silent. "Cold?" you say. No! No! Francesca, not cold; superior to my poor efforts. I realized my limitations. I questioned my genius. When I returned to bow my acknowledgments for the most generous applause I have ever received, there was no sign on her part that I had interested her, either through my talent or by appeal to her curiosity. I hoped against hope that some word might come from her, but I was doomed to disappointment. The critics were fulsome in their praise and the public was lavish with its plaudits, but I was abjectly miserable. Another sleepless night and I was determined to see her. She received me most graciously, although I fear she thought my visit one of vanity—wounded vanity—and me petulant because of her lack of appreciation.

Oh, sister mine, I knew better. I knew my heart craved one word, however matter-of-fact, that would rekindle the hope that was dying within me.

Hesitatingly, and like a clumsy yokel, I blurted: "I have been wondering whether you cared for the performance I gave?"

"It certainly ought to make little difference to you," she replied; "the public was enthusiastic enough in its endorsement."

"But I want your opinion," I pleaded.

"My opinion would not at all affect the almost unanimous verdict," she replied calmly.

"And," I urged desperately, "you were not affected in the least?"

Very coldly she answered, "Not in the least;" and then fearlessly, like a princess in the Palace of Truth: "If ever a man comes who can awaken my heart, frankly and honestly I will confess it."

"Perhaps such a one lives," I said, "but has yet to reach the height to win you—your—"

"Speak it," she said, "to win my love!"

"Yes," I cried, startled at her candor, "to win your love." Hope slowly rekindled within my breast, and then with half-closed eyes, and wooingly, she said:

"No drooping Clytie could be more constant than I to him who strikes the chord that is responsive in my soul."

Her emotion must have surprised her, but immediately she regained her placidity and reverted no more to the subject.

I went out into the gathering gloom. Her words haunted me. A strange feeling came over me. A voice within me cried: "Do not play to-night. Study! study! Perhaps in the full fruition of your genius your music, like the warm western wind to the harp, may bring life to her soul."

I fled, and I am here. I am delving deeper and deeper into the mysteries of my art, and I pray God each hour that He may place within my grasp the wondrous music His blessed angels sing, for the soul of her I love is attuned to the harmonies of heaven.

Your affectionate brother,

ANGELO.

ISLAND OF BAHAMA, January 2.

VI

When Diotti left New York so precipitately he took passage on a coast line steamer sailing for the Bahama Islands. Once there, he leased a small cay, one of a group off the main land, and lived alone and unattended, save for the weekly visits of an old fisherman and his son, who brought supplies of provisions from the town miles away. His dwelling-place, surrounded with palmetto trees, was little more than a rough shelter. Diotti arose at daylight, and after a simple repast, betook himself to practise. Hour after hour he would let his muse run riot with his fingers. Lovingly he wooed the strings with plaintive song, then conquering and triumphant would be his theme. But neither satisfied him. The vague dream of a melody more beautiful than ever man had heard dwelt hauntingly on the borders of his imagination, but was no nearer realization than when he began. As the day's work closed, he wearily placed the violin within its case, murmuring, "Not yet, not yet; I have not found it."

Days passed, weeks crept slowly on; still he worked, but always with the same result. One day, feverish and excited, he played on in monotone almost listless. His tired, over-wrought brain denied a further thought. His arm and fingers refused response to his will. With an uncontrollable outburst of grief and anger he dashed the violin to the floor, where it lay a hopeless wreck. Extending his arms he cried, in the agony of despair: "It is of no use! If the God of heaven will not aid me, I ask the prince of darkness to come."

A tall, rather spare, but well-made and handsome man appeared at the door of the hut. His manner was that of one evidently conversant with the usages of good society.

"I beg pardon," said the musician, surprised and visibly nettled at the intrusion, and then with forced politeness he asked: "To whom am I indebted for this unexpected visit?"

"Allow me," said the stranger taking a card from his case and handing it to the musician, who read: "Satan," and, in the lower left-hand corner "Prince of Darkness."

"I am the Prince," said the stranger, bowing low.

There was no hint of the pavement-made ruler in the information he gave, but rather of the desire of one gentleman to set another right at the beginning. The musician assumed a position of open-mouthed wonder, gazing steadily at the visitor.

"Satan?" he whispered hoarsely.

"You need help and advice," said the visitor, his voice sounding like that of a disciple of the healing art, and implying that he had thoroughly diagnosed the case.

"No, no," cried the shuddering violinist; "go away. I do not need you."

"I regret I can not accept that statement as gospel truth," said Satan, sarcastically, "for if ever a man needed help, you are that man."

"But not from you," replied Diotti.

"That statement is discredited also by your outburst of a few moments ago when you called upon me."

"I do not need you," reiterated the musician. "I will have none of you!" and he waved his arm toward the door, as if he desired the interview to end.

"I came at your behest, actuated entirely by kindness of heart," said Satan.

Diotti laughed derisively, and Satan, showing just the slightest feeling at Diotti's behavior, said reprovingly: "If you will listen a moment, and not be so rude to an utter stranger, we may reach some conclusion to your benefit."

"Get thee behind—"

"I know exactly what you were about to say. Have no fears on that score. I have no demands to make and no impossible compacts to insist upon."

"I have heard of you before," knowingly spoke the violinist nodding his head sadly.

"No doubt you have," smilingly. "My reputation, which has suffered at the hands of irresponsible people, is not of the best, and places me at times in awkward positions. But I am beginning to live it down." The stranger looked contrition itself. "To prove my sincerity I desire to help you win her love," emphasizing her.

"How can you help me?"

"Very easily. You have been wasting time, energy and health in a wild desire to play better. The trouble lies not with you."

"Not with me?" interrupted the violinist, now thoroughly interested.

"The trouble lies not with you," repeated the visitor, "but with the miserable violin you have been using and have just destroyed," and he pointed to the shattered instrument.

Tears welled from the poor violinist's eyes as he gazed on the fragments of his beloved violin, the pieces lying scattered about as the result of his unfortunate anger.

"It was a Stradivarius," said Diotti, sadly.

"Had it been a Stradivarius, an Amati or a Guarnerius, or a host of others rolled into one, you would not have found in it the melody to win the heart of the woman you love. Get a better and more suitable instrument."

"Where is one?" earnestly interrogated Diotti, vaguely realizing that Satan knew.

"In my possession," Satan replied.

"She would hate me if she knew I had recourse to the powers of darkness to gain her love," bitterly interposed Diotti.

Satan, wincing at this uncomplimentary allusion to himself, replied rather warmly: "My dear sir, were it not for the fact that I feel in particularly good spirits this morning, I should resent your ill-timed remarks and leave you to end your miserable existence with rope or pistol," and Satan pantomimed both suicidal contingencies.

"Do you want the violin or not?"

"I might look at it," said Diotti, resolving mentally that he could go so far without harm.

"Very well," said Satan. He gave a long whistle.

An old man, bearing a violin case, came within the room. He bowed to the wondering Diotti, and proceeded to open the case. Taking the instrument out the old man fondled it with loving and tender solicitude, pointing out its many beauties—the exquisite blending of the curves, the evenness of the grain, the peculiar coloring, the lovely contour of the

neck, the graceful outlines of the body, the scroll, rivaling the creations of the ancient sculptors, the solidity of the bridge and its elegantly carved heart, and, waxing exceedingly enthusiastic, holding up the instrument and looking at it as one does at a cluster of gems, he added, "the adjustment of the strings."

"That will do," interrupted Satan, taking the violin from the little man, who bowed low and ceremoniously took his departure. Then the devil, pointing to the instrument, asked: "Isn't it a beauty?"

The musician, eying it keenly, replied: "Yes, it is, but not the kind of violin I play on."

"Oh, I see," carelessly observed the other, "you refer to that extra string."

"Yes," answered the puzzled violinist, examining it closely.

"Allow me to explain the peculiar characteristics of this magnificent instrument," said his satanic majesty. "This string," pointing to the G, "is the string of pity; this one," referring to the third, "is the string of hope; this," plunking the A, "is attuned to love, while this one, the E string, gives forth sounds of joy.

"You will observe," went on the visitor, noting the intense interest displayed by the violinist, "that the position of the strings is the same as on any other violin, and therefore will require no additional study on your part."

"But that extra string?" interrupted Diotti, designating the middle one on the violin, a vague foreboding rising within him.

"That," said Mephistopheles, solemnly, and with no pretense of sophistry, "is the string of death, and he who plays upon it dies at once."

"The—string—of—death!" repeated the violinist almost inaudibly.

"Yes, the string of death," Satan repeated, "and he who plays upon it dies at once. But," he added cheerfully, "that need not worry you. I noticed a marvelous facility in your arm work. Your staccato and spiccato are wonderful. Every form of bowing appears child's play to you. It will be easy for you to avoid touching the string."

"Why avoid it? Can it not be cut off?"

"Ah, that's the rub. If you examine the violin closely you will find that the string of death is made up of the extra lengths of the other four strings. To cut it off would destroy the others, and then pity, hope, love and joy would cease to exist in the soul of the violin."

"How like life itself," Diotti reflected, "pity, hope, love, joy end in death, and through death they are born again."

"That's the idea, precisely," said Satan, evidently relieved by Diotti's logic and quick perception.

The violinist examined the instrument with the practised eye of an expert, and turning to Satan said: "The four strings are beautifully white and transparent, but this one is black and odd looking.

"What is it wrapped with?" eagerly inquired Diotti, examining the death string with microscopic care.

"The fifth string was added after an unfortunate episode in the Garden of Eden, in which I was somewhat concerned," said Satan, soberly. "It is wrapped with strands of hair from the first mother of man." Impressively then he offered the violin to Diotti.

"I dare not take it," said the perplexed musician; "it's from—"

"Yes, it is directly from there, but I brought it from heaven when I—I left," said the fallen angel, with remorse in his voice. "It was my constant companion there. But no one in my domain—not I, myself—can play

upon it now, for it will respond neither to our longing for pity, hope, love, joy, nor even death," and sadly and retrospectively Satan gazed into vacancy; then, after a long pause: "Try the instrument!"

Diotti placed the violin in position and drew the bow across the string of joy, improvising on it. Almost instantly the birds of the forest darted hither and thither, caroling forth in gladsome strains. The devil alone was sad, and with emotion said:

"It is many, many years since I have heard that string."

Next the artist changed to the string of pity, and thoughts of the world's sorrows came over him like a pall.

"Wonderful, most wonderful!" said the mystified violinist; "with this instrument I can conquer the world!"

"Aye, more to you than the world," said the tempter, "a woman's love."

A woman's love—to the despairing suitor there was one and only one in this wide, wide world, and her words, burning their way into his heart, had made this temptation possible: "No drooping Clytie could be more constant than I to him who strikes the chord that is responsive in my soul."

Holding the violin aloft, he cried exultingly: "Henceforth thou art mine, though death and oblivion lurk ever near thee!"

VII

Perkins, seated in his office, threw the morning paper aside. "It's no use," he said, turning to the office boy, "I don't believe they ever will find him, dead or alive. Whoever put up the job on Diotti was a past grand master at that sort of thing. The silent assassin that lurks in the shadow of the midnight moon is an explosion of dynamite compared to the party that made way with Diotti. You ask, why should they kill him? My boy, you don't know the world. They were jealous of his enormous hit, of our dazzling success. Jealousy did it."

The "they" of Perkins comprised rival managers, rival artists, newspaper critics and everybody at large who would not concede that the attractions managed by Perkins were the "greatest on earth."

"We'll never see his like again—come in!" this last in answer to a knock.

Diotti appeared at the open door. Perkins jumped like one shot from a catapult, and rushing toward the silent figure in the doorway exclaimed: "Bless my soul, are you a ghost?"

"A substantial one," said Diotti with a smile.

"Are you really here?" continued the astonished impresario, using Diotti's arm as a pump handle and pinching him at the same time.

When they were seated Perkins plied Diotti with all manner of questions; "How did it happen?" "How did you escape?" and the like, all of which Diotti parried with monosyllabic replies, finally saying: "I was dissatisfied with my playing and went away to study."

"Do you know that the failure to fulfill your contract has cost me at least ten thousand dollars?" said the shrewd manager, the commercial side of his nature asserting itself.

"All of which I will pay," quietly replied the artist. "Besides I am ready to play now, and you can announce a concert within a week if you like."

"If I like?" cried the hustling Perkins. "Here, James," calling his office boy, "run down to the printer's and give him this," making a note of the various sizes of "paper" he desired, "and tell Mr. Tompkins that Diotti is back and will give a concert next Tuesday. Tell Smith to prepare the newspaper 'ads' and notices immediately."

In an hour Perkins had the entire machinery of his office in motion. Within twenty-four hours New York had several versions of the disappearance and return, all leading to one common point—that Diotti would give a concert the coming Tuesday evening.

The announcement of the reappearance of the Tuscan contained a line to the effect that the violinist would play for the first time his new suite—a meditation on the emotions.

He had not seen Mildred.

As he came upon the stage that night the lights were turned low, and naught but the shadowy outlines of player and violin were seen. His reception by the audience was not enthusiastic. They evidently remembered the disappointment caused by his unexpected disappearance, but this unfriendly attitude soon gave way to evidences of kindlier feelings.

Mildred was there, more beautiful than ever, and to gain her love Diotti would have bartered his soul that moment.

The first movement of the suite was entitled "Pity," and the music flowed like melodious tears. A subdued sob rose and fell with the sadness of the theme.

Mildred's eyes were moistened as she fixed them on the lone figure of the player.

Now the theme of pity changed to hope, and hearts grew brighter under the spell. The next movement depicted joy. As the virtuoso's fingers darted here and there, his music seemed the very laughter of fairy voices, the earth looked roses and sunshine, and Mildred, relaxing her position and leaning forward in the box, with lips slightly parted, was the picture of eager happiness.

The final movement came. Its subject was love. The introduction depicted the Arcadian beauty of the trysting place, love-lit eyes sought each other intuitively and a great peace brooded over the hearts of all. Then followed the song of the Passionate Pilgrim:

"If music and sweet poetry agree,
As they must needs, the sister and the brother,
When must the love be great 'twixt thee and me
Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.

* * *

Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
That Phoebus' lute (the queen of music) makes;
And I in deep delight, am chiefly drown'd
When as himself to singing he betakes.
One god is god of both, as poets
One knight loves both, and both in thee remain."

Grander and grander the melody rose, voicing love's triumph with wondrous sweetness and palpitating rhythm. Mildred, her face flushed with excitement, a heavenly fire in her eyes and in an attitude of supplication, reveled in the glory of a new found emotion.

As the violinist concluded his performance an oppressive silence pervaded the house, then the audience, wild with excitement, burst into thunders of applause. In his dressing-room Diotti was besieged by hosts of people, congratulating him in extravagant terms.

Mildred Wallace came, extending her hands. He took them almost reverently. She looked into his eyes, and he knew he had struck the chord responsive in her soul.

VIII

The sun was high in the heavens when the violinist awoke. A great weight had been lifted from his heart; he had passed from darkness into dawn.

A messenger brought him this note:

My Dear Signor Diotti—I am at home this afternoon, and shall be delighted to see you and return my thanks for the exquisite pleasure you gave me last evening. Music, such as yours, is indeed the voice of heaven. Sincerely,

Mildred Wallace.

The messenger returned with this reply:

My Dear Miss Wallace—I will call at three to-day.

Gratefully,
Angelo Diotti.

He watched the hour drag from eleven to twelve, then counted the minutes to one, and from that time until he left the hotel each second was tabulated in his mind. Arriving at her residence, he was ushered into the drawing-room. It was fragrant with the perfume of violets, and he stood gazing at her portrait expectant of her coming.

Dressed in simple white, entrancing in her youthful freshness, she entered, her face glowing with happiness, her eyes languorous and expressive. She hastened to him, offering both hands. He held them in a loving, tender grasp, and for a moment neither spoke. Then she, gazing clearly and fearlessly into his eyes, said: "My heart has found its melody!"

He, kneeling like Sir Gareth of old: "The song and the singer are yours forever."

She, bidding him arise: "And I forever yours." And wondering at her boldness, she added, "I know and feel that you love me—your eyes confirmed your love before you spoke." Then, convincingly and ingenuously, "I knew you loved me the moment we first met. Then I did not understand what that meant to you, now I do."

He drew her gently to him, and the motive of their happiness was defined in sweet confessions: "My love, my life—My life, my love."

The magic of his music had changed her very being, the breath of love was in her soul, the vision of love was dancing in her eyes. The child of marble, like the statue of old, had come to life:

> "And not long since
> I was a cold, dull stone! I recollect
> That by some means I knew that I was stone;
> That was the first dull gleam of consciousness;
> I became conscious of a chilly self,
> A cold, immovable identity.
> I knew that I was stone, and knew no more!
> Then, by an imperceptible advance,

Came the dim evidence of outer things,
Seen—darkly and imperfectly—yet seen
The walls surrounding me, and I, alone.
That pedestal—that curtain—then a voice
That called on Galatea! At that word,
Which seemed to shake my marble to the core,
That which was dim before, came evident.
Sounds, that had hummed around me, indistinct,
Vague, meaningless—seemed to resolve themselves
Into a language I could understand;
I felt my frame pervaded by a glow
That seemed to thaw my marble into flesh;
Its cold, hard substance throbbed with active life,
My limbs grew supple, and I moved—I lived!
Lived in the ecstasy of a new-born life!
Lived in the love of him that fashioned me!
Lived in a thousand tangled thoughts of hope."

Day after day he came; they told their love, their hopes, their ambitions. She assumed absolute proprietorship in him. She gloried in her possession.

He was born into the world, nurtured in infancy, trained in childhood and matured into manhood, for one express purpose—to be hers alone. Her ownership ranged from absolute despotism to humble slavery, and he was happy through it all.

One day she said: "Angelo, is it your purpose to follow your profession always?"

"Necessarily, it is my livelihood," he replied.

"But do you not think that after we stand at the altar, we never should be separated?"

"We will be together always," said he, holding her face between his palms, and looking with tender expression into her inquiring eyes.

"But I notice that women cluster around you after your concerts—and shake your hand longer than they should—and talk to you longer than they should—and go away looking self-satisfied!" she replied brokenly, much as a little girl tells of the theft of her doll.

"Nonsense," he said, smiling, "that is all part of my profession; it is not me they care for, it is the music I give that makes them happy. If, in my playing, I achieve results out of the common, they admire me!" and he kissed away the unwelcome tears.

"I know," she continued, "but lately, since we have loved each other, I can not bear to see a woman near you. In my dreams again and again an indefinable shadow mockingly comes; and cries to me, 'he is not to be yours, he is to be mine.'"

Diotti flushed and drew her to him "Darling," his voice carrying conviction, "I am yours, you are mine, all in all, in life here and beyond!" And as she sat dreaming after he had gone, she murmured petulantly, "I wish there were no other women in the world."

Her father was expected from Europe on the succeeding day's steamer. Mr. Wallace was a busy man. The various gigantic enterprises he served as president or director occupied most of his time. He had been absent in Europe for several months, and Mildred was anxiously awaiting his return to tell him of her love.

When Mr. Wallace came to his residence the next morning, his daughter met him with a fond display of filial affection; they walked into the drawing-room, hand in hand; he saw a picture of the violinist on the piano. "Who's the handsome young fellow?" he asked, looking at the portrait with the satisfaction a man feels when he sees a splendid type of his own sex.

"That is Angelo Diotti, the famous violinist," she said, but she could not add another word.

As they strolled through the rooms he noticed no less than three likenesses of the Tuscan. And as they passed her room he saw still another on the chiffonnier.

"Seems to me the house is running wild with photographs of that fiddler," he said.

For the first time in her life she was self-conscious: "I will wait for a more opportune time to tell him," she thought.

In the scheme of Diotti's appearance in New York there were to be two more concerts. One was to be given that evening. Mildred coaxed her father to accompany her to hear the violinist. Mr. Wallace was not fond of music; "it had been knocked out of him on the farm up in Vermont, when he was a boy," he would apologetically explain, and besides he had the old puritanical abhorrence of stage people—putting them all in one class—as puppets who danced for played or talked for an idle and unthinking public.

So it was with the thought of a wasted evening that he accompanied Mildred to the concert.

The entertainment was a repetition of the others Diotti had given, and at its end, Mildred said to her father: "Come, I want to congratulate Signor Diotti in person."

"That is entirely unnecessary," he replied.

"It is my desire," and the girl led the unwilling parent back of the scenes and into Diotti's dressing-room.

Mildred introduced Diotti to her father, who after a few commonplaces lapsed into silence. The daughter's enthusiastic interest in Diotti's performance and her tender solicitude for his weariness after

the efforts of the evening, quickly attracted the attention of Mr. Wallace and irritated him exceedingly.

When father and daughter were seated in their carriage and were hurriedly driving home, he said: "Mildred, I prefer that you have as little to say to that man as possible."

"What do you object to in him?" she asked.

"Everything. Of what use is a man who dawdles away his time on a fiddle; of what benefit is he to mankind? Do fiddlers build cities? Do they delve into the earth for precious metals? Do they sow the seed and harvest the grain? No, no; they are drones—the barnacles of society."

"Father, how can you advance such an argument? Music's votaries offer no apologies for their art. The husbandman places the grain within the breast of Mother Earth for man's material welfare; God places music in the heart of man for his spiritual development. In man's spring time, his bridal day, music means joy. In man's winter time, his burial day, music means comfort. The heaven-born muse has added to the happiness of the world. Diotti is a great genius. His art brings rest and tranquillity to the wearied and despairing," and she did not speak again until they had reached the house.

The lights were turned low when father and daughter went into the drawing-room. Mr. Wallace felt that he had failed to convince Mildred of the utter worthlessness of fiddlers, big or little, and as one dissatisfied with the outcome of a contest, re-entered the lists.

"He has visited you?"

"Yes, father."

"Often?"

"Yes, father," spoken calmly.

"Often?" louder and more imperiously repeated the father, as if there must be some mistake.

"Quite often," and she sat down, knowing the catechizing would be likely to continue for some minutes.

"How many times, do you think?"

She rose, walked into the hallway; took the card basket from the table, returned and seated herself beside her father, emptying its contents into her lap. She picked up a card. It read "Angelo Diotti," and she called the name aloud. She took up another and again her lips voiced the beloved name. "Angelo Diotti," she continued, repeating at intervals for a minute. Then looking at her father: "He has called thirty-two times; there are thirty-one cards here and on one occasion he forgot his card-case."

"Thirty-two!" said the father, rising angrily and pacing the floor.

"Yes, thirty-two. I remember all of them distinctly."

Her father came over to her, half coaxingly, half seriously. "Mildred, I wish his visits to cease; people will imagine there is a romantic attachment between you."

"There is, father," out it came, "he loves me and I love him."

"What!" shouted Mr. Wallace, and then severely, "this must cease immediately."

She rose quietly and led her father over to the mantel. Placing a hand on each of his shoulders she said:

"Father, I will obey you implicitly if you can name a reasonable objection to the man I love. But you can not. I love him with my whole soul. I love him for the nobility of his character, and because there is none other in the world for him, nor for me."

IX

Old Sanders as boy and man had been in the employ of the banking and brokerage firm of Wallace Brothers for two generations. The firm gradually had advanced his position until now he was confidential adviser and general manager, besides having an interest in the profits of the business.

He enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Wallace, and had been a constant visitor at his house from the first days of that gentleman's married life. He himself was alone in the world, a confirmed bachelor. He had seen Mildred creep from babyhood into childhood, and bud from girlhood to womanhood. To Mildred he was one of that numerous army of brevet relations known as "gran-pop," "pop," or "uncle." To her he was Uncle Sanders.

If the old man had one touch of human nature in him it was a solicitude for Mildred's future—an authority arrogated to himself—to see that she married the right man; but even that was directed to her material gain in this world's goods, and not to any sentimental consideration for her happiness. He flattered himself that by timely suggestion he had "stumped" at least half a dozen would-be candidates for Mildred's hand. He pooh-poohed love as a necessity for marital felicity, and would enforce his argument by quoting from the bard:

"All lovers swear more performance than they are able, and yet reserve an ability that they never perform; vowing more than the perfection of ten, and discharging less than the tenth part of one."

"You can get at a man's income," he would say, "but not at his heart. Love without money won't travel as far as money without love," and many married people whose bills were overdue wondered if the old fellow was not right.

He was cold-blooded and generally disliked by the men under him. The more evil-minded gossips in the bank said he was in league with "Old Nick." That, of course, was absurd, for it does not necessarily follow, because a man suggests a means looking to an end, disreputable though it be, that he has Mephistopheles for a silent partner. The conservative element among the employees would not openly venture so far, but rather thought if his satanic majesty and old Sanders ran a race, the former would come in a bad second, if he were not distanced altogether.

The old man always reached the office at nine. Mr. Wallace usually arrived a half hour later, seldom earlier, which was so well understood by Sanders that he was greatly surprised when he walked into the president's office, the morning after that gentleman had attended Diotti's concert, to find the head of the firm already there and apparently waiting for him.

"Sanders," said the banker, "I want your advice on a matter of great importance and concern to me."

Sanders came across the room and stood beside the desk.

"Briefly as possible, I am much exercised about my daughter."

The old man moved up a chair and buried himself in it. Pressing his elbows tightly against his sides, he drew his neck in, and with the tips of his right hand fingers consorted and coquetted with their like on the opposite hand; then he simply asked, "Who is the man?"

"He is the violinist who has created such a sensation here, Angelo Diotti."

"Yes, I've seen the name in print," returned the old man.

"He has bewitched Mildred. I never have seen her show the least interest in a man before. She never has appeared to me as an impressionable girl or one that could easily be won."

"That is very true," ejaculated Sanders; "she always seemed tractable and open to reason in all questions of love and courting. I can recall several instances where I have set her right by my estimation of men, and invariably she has accepted my views."

"And mine until now," said the father, and then he recounted his experience of the night before. "I had hoped she would not fall in love, but be a prop and comfort to me now that I am alone. I am dismayed at the prospect before me."

Then the old man mused: "In the chrysalis state of girlhood, a parent arranges all the details of his daughter's future; when and whom she shall marry. 'I shall not allow her to fall in love until she is twenty-three,' says the fond parent. 'I shall not allow her to marry until she is twenty-six,' says the fond parent. 'The man she marries will be the one I approve of, and then she will live happy ever after,' concludes the fond parent."

Deluded parent! false prophet! The anarchist, Love, steps in and disdains all laws, rules and regulations. When finally the father confronts the defying daughter, she calmly says, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" And then tears, forgiveness, complete capitulation, and, sometimes, she and her husband live happily ever afterwards.

"We must find some means to end this attachment. A union between a musician and my daughter would be most mortifying to me. Some plan must be devised to separate them, but she must not know of it, for she is impatient of restraint and will not brook opposition."

"Are you confident she really loves this violinist?"

"She confessed as much to me," said the perturbed banker.

Old Sanders tapped with both hands on his shining cranium and asked, "Are you confident he loves her?"

"No. Even if he does not, he no doubt makes the pretense, and she believes him. A man who fiddles for money is not likely to ignore an opportunity to angle for the same commodity," and the banker, with a look of scorn on his face, threw himself back into the chair.

"Does she know that you do not approve of this man?"

"I told her that I desired the musician's visits to cease."

"And her answer?"

"She said she would obey me if I could name one reasonable objection to the man, and then, with an air of absolute confidence in the impossibility of such a contingency, added, 'But you can not.'"

"Yes, but you must," said Sanders. "Mildred is strangely constituted. If she loves this man, her love can be more deadly to the choice of her heart than her hate to one she abhors. The impatience of restraint you speak of and her very inability to brook opposition can be turned to good account now." And old Sanders again tapped in the rhythm of a dirge on his parchment-bound cranium.

"Your plan?" eagerly asked the father, whose confidence in his secretary was absolute.

"I would like to study them together. Your position will be stronger with Mildred if you show no open opposition to the man or his aspirations; bring us together at your house some evening, and if I can not enter a wedge of discontent, then they are not as others."

Mildred was delighted when her father told her on his return in the evening that he was anxious to meet Signor Diotti, and suggested a dinner party within a few days. He said he would invite Mr. Sanders, as that gentleman, no doubt, would consider it a great privilege to meet the famous musician. Mildred immediately sent an invitation to Diotti, adding a request that he bring his violin and play for Uncle Sanders, as the latter had found it impossible to attend his concerts during the season, yet was fond of music, especially violin music.

X

The little dinner party passed off pleasantly, and as old Sanders lighted his cigar he confided to Diotti, with a braggart's assurance, that when he was a youngster he was the best fiddler for twenty miles around. "I tell you there is nothing like a fiddler to catch a petticoat," he said, with a sharp nudge of his elbow into Diotti's ribs. "When I played the Devil's Dream there wasn't a girl in the country could keep from dancing, and 'Rosalie, the Prairie Flower,' brought them on their knees to me every time;" then after a pause, "I don't believe people fiddle as well nowadays as they did in the good old times," and he actually sighed in remembrance.

Mildred smiled and whispered to Diotti. He took his violin from the case and began playing. It seemed to her as if from above showers of silvery merriment were falling to earth. The old man watched intently, and as the player changed from joy to pity, from love back to happiness, Sanders never withdrew his gaze. His bead-like eyes followed the artist; he saw each individual finger rise and fall, and the bow bound over the finger-board, always avoiding, never coming in contact with the middle string. Suddenly the old man beat a tattoo on his cranium and closed his eyes, apparently deep in thought.

As Diotti ceased playing, Sanders applauded vociferously, and moving toward the violinist, said: "Magnificent! I never have heard better playing! What is the make of your violin?"

Diotti, startled at this question, hurriedly put the instrument in its case; "Oh, it is a famous make," he drawled.

"Will you let me examine it?" said the elder, placing his hand on the case.

"I never allow any one to touch my violin," replied Diotti, closing the cover quickly.

"Why; is there a magic charm about it, that you fear other hands may discover?" queried the old man.

"I prefer that no one handle it," said the virtuoso commandingly.

"Very well," sighed the old man resignedly, "there are violins and violins, and no doubt yours comes within that category," this half sneeringly.

"Uncle," interposed Mildred tactfully, "you must not be so persistent. Signor Diotti prizes his violin highly and will not allow any one to play upon it but himself," and the look of relief on Diotti's face amply repaid her.

Mr. Wallace came in at that moment, and with perfunctory interest in his guest, invited him to examine the splendid collection of revolutionary relics in his study.

"I value them highly," said the banker, "both for patriotic and ancestral reasons. The Wallaces fought and died for their country, and helped to make this land what it is."

The father and the violinist went to the study, leaving the daughter and old Sanders in the drawing-room. The old man, seating himself in a large armchair, said: "Mildred, my dear, I do not wonder at the enormous success of this Diotti."

"He is a wonderful artist," replied Mildred; "critics and public alike place him among the greatest of his profession."

"He is a good-looking young fellow, too," said the old man.

"I think he is the handsomest man I ever have seen," replied the girl.

"Where does he come from?" continued Sanders.

"St. Casciano, a small town in Tuscany."

"Has he a family?"

"Only a sister, whom he loves dearly," good-naturedly answered the girl.

"And no one else?" continued the seemingly garrulous old man.

"None that I have heard him speak of. No, certainly not," rather impetuously replied Mildred.

"How old is he?" continued the old man.

"Twenty-eight next month; why do you wish to know?" she quizzically asked.

"Simply idle curiosity," old Sanders carelessly replied. "I wonder if he is in love with any one in Tuscany?"

"Of course not; how could he be?" quickly rejoined the girl.

"And why not?" added old Sanders.

"Why? Because, because—he is in love with some one in America."

"Ah, with you, I see," said the old man, as if it were the greatest discovery of his life; "are you sure he has not some beautiful sweetheart in Tuscany as well as here?"

"What a foolish question," she replied. "Men like Angelo Diotti do not fall in love as soldiers fall in line. Love to a man of his nobility is too serious to be treated so lightly."

"Very true, and that's what has excited my curiosity!" whereupon the old man smoked away in silence.

"Excited your curiosity!" said Mildred. "What do you mean?"

"It may be something; it may be nothing; but my speculative instinct has been aroused by a strange peculiarity in his playing."

"His playing is wonderful!" replied Mildred proudly.

"Aye, more than wonderful! I watched him intently," said the old man; "I noted with what marvelous facility he went from one string to the other. But however rapid, however difficult the composition, he steadily avoided one string; in fact, that string remained untouched during the entire hour he played for us."

"Perhaps the composition did not call for its use," suggested Mildred, unconscious of any other meaning in the old man's observation, save praise for her lover.

"Perhaps so, but the oddity impressed me; it was a new string to me. I have never seen one like it on a violin before."

"That can scarcely be, for I do not remember of Signor Diotti telling me there was anything unusual about his violin."

"I am sure it has a fifth string."

"And I am equally sure the string can be of no importance or Angelo would have told me of it," Mildred quickly rejoined.

"I recall a strange story of Paganini," continued the old man, apparently not noticing her interruption; "he became infatuated with a lady of high rank, who was insensible of the admiration he had for her beauty.

"He composed a love scene for two strings, the 'E' and 'G,' the first was to personate the lady, the second himself. It commenced with a species of dialogue, intending to represent her indifference and his passion; now sportive, now sad; laughter on her part and tears from him, ending in an apotheosis of loving reconciliation. It affected the lady to that degree that ever after she loved the violinist."

"And no doubt they were happy?" Mildred suggested smilingly.

"Yes," said the old man, with assumed sentiment, "even when his profession called him far away, for she had made him promise her he never would play upon the two strings whose music had won her heart, so those strings were mute, except for her."

The old man puffed away in silence for a moment, then with logical directness continued: "Perhaps the string that's mute upon Diotti's violin is mute for some such reason."

"Nonsense," said the girl, half impatiently.

"The string is black and glossy as the tresses that fall in tangled skeins on the shoulders of the dreamy beauties of Tuscany. It may be an idle fancy, but if that string is not a woven strand from some woman's crowning glory, then I have no discernment."

"You are jesting, uncle," she replied, but her heart was heavy already.

"Ask him to play on that string; I'll wager he'll refuse," said the old man, contemptuously.

"He will not refuse when I ask him, but I will not to-night," answered the unhappy girl, with forced determination. Then, taking the old man's hands, she said: "Good-night, I am going to my room; please make my excuses to Signor Diotti and father," and wearily she ascended the stairs.

Mr. Wallace and the violinist soon after joined old Sanders, fresh cigars were lighted and regrets most earnestly expressed by the violinist for Mildred's "sick headache."

"No need to worry; she will be all right in the morning," said Sanders, and he and the violinist buttoned their coats tightly about them, for the night was bitter cold, and together they left the house.

In her bed-chamber Mildred stood looking at the portrait of her lover. She studied his face long and intently, then crossing the room she mechanically took a volume from the shelf, and as she opened it her eyes fell on these lines:

"How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the Morning!"

Old Sanders builded better than he knew.

XI

When Diotti and old Sanders left the house they walked rapidly down Fifth Avenue. It was after eleven, and the streets were bare of pedestrians, but blinking-eyed cabs came up the avenue, looking at a distance like a trail of Megatheriums, gliding through the darkness. The piercing wind made the men hasten their steps, the old man by a semi-rotary motion keeping up with the longer strides and measured tread of the younger.

When they reached Fourteenth Street, the elder said, "I live but a block from here," pointing eastward; "what do you say to a hot toddy? It will warm the cockles of your heart; come over to my house and I'll mix you the best drink in New York."

The younger thought the suggestion a good one and they turned toward the house of old Sanders.

It was a neat, red brick, two-story house, well in from the street, off the line of the more pretentious buildings on either side. As the old man opened the iron gate, the police officer on the beat passed; he peered into the faces of the men, and recognizing Sanders, said, "tough night, sir."

"Very," replied the addressed.

"All good old gentlemen should be in bed at this hour," said the officer, lifting one foot after the other in an effort to keep warm, and in so doing showing little terpsichorean grace.

"It's only the shank of the evening, officer," rejoined the old man, as he fumbled with the latch key and finally opened the door. The two men entered and the officer passed on.

Every man has a fad. One will tell you he sees nothing in billiards or pool or golf or tennis, but will grow enthusiastic over the scientific possibilities of mumble-peg; you agree with him, only you substitute "skittles" for "mumble-peg."

Old Sanders' fad was mixing toddies and punches.

"The nectar of the gods pales into nothingness when compared with a toddy such as I make," said he. "Ambrosia may have been all right for the degenerates of the old Grecian and Roman days, but an American

gentleman demands a toddy—a hot toddy." And then he proceeded with circumspection and dignity to demonstrate the process of decocting that mysterious beverage.

The two men took off their overcoats and went into the sitting-room. A pile of logs burned brightly in the fire-place. The old man threw another on the burning heap, filled the kettle with water and hung it over the fire. Next he went to the sideboard and brought forth the various ingredients for the toddy.

"How do you like America?" said the elder, with commonplace indifference, as he crunched a lump of sugar in the bottom of the glass, dissolving the particles with a few drops of water.

"Very much, indeed," said the Tuscan, with the air of a man who had answered the question before.

"Great country for girls!" said Sanders, pouring a liberal quantity of Old Tom gin in the glass and placing it where it gradually would get warm.

"And for men!" responded Diotti, enthusiastically.

"Men don't amount to much here, women run everything," retorted the elder, while he repeated the process of preparing the sugar and gin in the second glass. The kettle began to sing.

"That's music for you," chuckled the old man, raising the lid to see if the water had boiled sufficiently. "Do you know I think a dinner horn and a singing kettle beat a symphony all hollow for real down-right melody," and he lifted the kettle from the fire-place.

Diotti smiled.

With mathematical accuracy the old man filled the two tumblers with boiling water.

"Try that," handing a glass of the toddy to Diotti; "you will find it all right," and the old man drew an armchair toward the fire-place, smacking his lips in anticipation.

The violinist placed his chair closer to the fire and sipped the drink.

"Your country is noted for its beautiful women?"

"We have exquisite types of femininity in Tuscany," said the young man, with patriotic ardor.

"Any as fine looking as—as—as—well, say the young lady we dined with to-night?"

"Miss Wallace?" queried the Tuscan.

"Yes, Miss Wallace," this rather impatiently.

"She is very beautiful," said Diotti, with solemn admiration.

"Have you ever seen any one prettier?" questioned the old man, after a second prolonged sip.

"I have no desire to see any one more beautiful," said the violinist, feeling that the other was trying to draw him out, and determined not to yield.

"You will pardon the inquisitiveness of an old man, but are not you musicians a most impressionable lot?"

"We are human," answered the violinist.

"I imagined you were like sailors and had a sweetheart in every port."

"That would be a delightful prospect to one having polygamous aspirations, but for myself, one sweetheart is enough," laughingly said the musician.

"Only one! Well, here's to her! With this nectar fit for the gods and goddesses of Olympus, let us drink to her," said old Sanders, with convivial dignity, his glass raised on high. "Here's wishing health and happiness to the dreamy-eyed Tuscan beauty, whom you love and who loves you."

"Stop!" said Diotti; "we will drink to the first part of that toast," and holding his glass against that of his bibulous host, continued: "To the dreamy-eyed women of my country, exacting of their lovers; obedient to their parents and loyal to their husbands," and his voice rose in sonorous rhythm with the words.

"Now for the rest of the toast, to the one you love and who loves you," came from Sanders.

"To the one I love and who loves me, God bless her!" fervently cried the guest.

"Is she a Tuscan?" asked old Sanders slyly.

"She is an angel!" impetuously answered the violinist.

"Then she is an American!" said the old man gallantly.

"She is an American," repeated Diotti, forgetting himself for the instant.

"Let me see if I can guess her name," said old Sanders. "It's—it's Mildred Wallace!" and his manner suggested a child solving a riddle.

The violinist, about to speak, checked himself and remained silent.

"I sincerely pity Mildred if ever she falls in love," abstractedly continued the host while filling another glass.

"Pray why?" was anxiously asked.

The old man shifted his position and assumed a confidential tone and attitude: "Signor Diotti, jealousy is a more universal passion than love itself. Environment may develop our character, influence our tastes and even soften our features, but heredity determines the intensity of the two leading passions, love and jealousy. Mildred's mother was a beautiful woman, but consumed with an overpowering jealousy of her husband. It was because she loved him. The body-guard of jealousy—envy, malice and hatred—were not in her composition. When Mildred was a child of twelve I have seen her mother suffer the keenest anguish because Mr. Wallace fondled the child. She thought the child had robbed her of her husband's love."

"Such a woman as Miss Wallace would command the entire love and admiration of her husband at all times," said the artist.

"If she should marry a man she simply likes, her chances for happiness would be normal."

"In what manner?" asked the lover.

"Because she would be little concerned about him or his actions."

"Then you believe," said the musician, "that the man who loves her and whom she loves should give her up because her chances of happiness would be greater away from him than with him?"

"That would be an unselfish love," said the elder.

"Suppose they have declared their passion?" asked Diotti.

"A parting before doubt and jealousy had entered her mind would let the image of her sacrificing lover live within her soul as a tender and lasting memory; he always would be her ideal," and the accent old Sanders placed on ALWAYS left no doubt of his belief.

"Why should doubt and jealousy enter her life?" said the violinist, falling into the personal character of the discussion despite himself.

"My dear sir, from what I observed to-night, she loves you. You are a dangerous man for a jealous woman to love. You are not a cloistered monk, you are a man before the public; you win the admiration of many; some women do not hesitate to show you their preference. To a woman like Mildred that would be torture; she could not and would not separate the professional artist from the lover or husband."

And Diotti, remembering Mildred's words, could not refute the old man's statements.

"If you had known her mother as I did," continued the old man, realizing his argument was making an impression on the violinist, "you would see the agony in store for the daughter if she married a man such as you, a public servant, a public favorite."

"I would live my life not to excite her suspicions or jealousy," said the artist, with boyish enthusiasm and simplicity.

"Foolish fellow," retorted Sanders, skeptically; "women imagine, they don't reason. A scented note unopened on the dressing table can cause more unhappiness to your wife than the loss of his country to a king. My advice to you is: do not marry; but if you must, choose one who is more interested in your gastronomic felicity than in your marital constancy."

Diotti was silent. He was pondering the words of his host. Instead of seeing in Mildred a possibly jealous woman, causing mental misery, she appeared a vision of single-hearted devotion. He felt: "To be loved by such a one is bliss beyond the dreams of this world."

XII

A tipsy man is never interesting, and Sanders in that condition was no exception. The old man arose with some effort, walked toward the window and, shading his eyes, looked out. The snow was drifting, swept hither and thither by the cutting wind that came through the streets in great gusts. Turning to the violinist, he said, "It's an awful night; better remain here until morning. You'll not find a cab; in fact, I will not let you go while this storm continues," and the old man raised the window, thrusting his head out for an instant. As he did so the icy blast that came in settled any doubt in the young man's mind and he concluded to stop over night.

It was nearly two o'clock; Sanders showed him to his room and then returned down stairs to see that everything was snug and secure. After changing his heavy shoes for a pair of old slippers and wrapping a dressing gown around him, the old man stretched his legs toward the fire and sipped his toddy.

"He isn't a bad sort for a violinist," mused the old man; "if he were worth a million, I believe I'd advise Wallace to let him marry her. A fiddler! A million! Sounds funny," and he laughed shrilly.

He turned his head and his eyes caught sight of Diotti's violin case resting on the center table. He staggered from the chair and went toward it; opening the lid softly, he lifted the silken coverlet placed over the instrument and examined the strings intently. "I am right," he said; "it is wrapped with hair, and no doubt from a woman's head. Eureka!" and the old man, happy in the discovery that his surmises were correct, returned to his chair and his toddy.

He sat looking into the fire. The violin had brought back memories of the past and its dead. He mumbled, as if to the fire, "she loved me; she loved my violin. I was a devil; my violin was a devil," and the shadows on the wall swayed like accusing spirits. He buried his face in his hands and

cried piteously, "I was so young; too young to know." He spoke as if he would conciliate the ghastly shades that moved restlessly up and down, when suddenly—"Sanders, don't be a fool!"

He ambled toward the table again. "I wonder who made the violin? He would not tell me when I asked him to-night; thank you for your pains, but I will find out myself," and he took the violin from the case. Holding it with the light slanting over it, he peered inside, but found no inscription. "No maker's name—strange," he said. He tiptoed to the foot of the stairs and listened intently; "he must be asleep; he won't hear me," and noiselessly he closed the door. "I guess if I play a tune on it he won't know."

He took the bow from its place in the case and tightened it. He listened again. "He is fast asleep," he whispered. "I'll play the song I always played for her—until," and the old man repeated the words of the refrain:

> "Fair as a lily, joyous and free,
> Light of the prairie home was she;
> Every one who knew her felt the gentle power
> Of Rosalie, the Prairie Flower."

He sat again in the arm-chair and placed the violin under his chin. Tremulously he drew the bow across the middle string, his bloodless fingers moving slowly up and down.

The theme he played was the melody to the verse he had just repeated, but the expression was remorse.

Diotti sat upright in bed. "I am positive I heard a violin!" he said, holding one hand toward his head in an attitude of listening. He was wide awake. The drifting snow beat against the window panes and the wind without shrieked like a thousand demons of the night. He could

sleep no more. He arose and hastily dressed. The room was bitterly cold; he was shivering. He thought of the crackling logs in the fire-place below. He groped his way along the darkened staircase. As he opened the door leading into the sitting-room the fitful gleam of the dying embers cast a ghastly light over the face of a corpse.

Diotti stood a moment, his eyes transfixed with horror. The violin and bow still in the hands of the dead man told him plainer than words what had happened. He went toward the chair, took the instrument from old Sanders' hands and laid it on the table. Then he knelt beside the body, and placing his ear close over the heart, listened for some sign of life, but the old man was beyond human aid.

He wheeled the chair to the side of the room and moved the body to the sofa. Gently he covered it with a robe. The awfulness of the situation forced itself upon him, and bitterly he blamed himself. The terrible power of the instrument dawned upon him in all its force. Often he had played on the strings telling of pity, hope, love and joy, but now, for the first time, he realized what that fifth string meant.

"I must give it back to its owner."

"If you do you can never regain it," whispered a voice within.

"I do not need it," said the violinist, almost audibly.

"Perhaps not," said the voice, "but if her love should wane how would you rekindle it? Without the violin you would be helpless."

"Is it not possible that, in this old man's death, all its fatal power has been expended?"

He went to the table and took the instrument from its place. "You won her for me; you have brought happiness and sunshine into my life. No! No! I can not, will not give you up," then placing the violin and bow in its case he locked it.

The day was breaking. In an hour the baker's boy came. Diotti went to the door, gave him a note addressed to Mr. Wallace and asked him to deliver it at once. The boy consented and drove rapidly away.

Within an hour Mr. Wallace arrived; Diotti told the story of the night. After the undertaker had taken charge of the body he found on the dead man's neck, just to the left of the chin, a dullish, black bruise which might have been caused by the pressing of some blunt instrument, or by a man's thumb. Considering it of much importance, he notified the coroner, who ordered an inquest.

At six o'clock that evening a jury was impaneled, and two hours later its verdict was reported.

XIII

On leaving the house of the dead man Diotti walked wearily to his hotel. In flaring type at every street corner he saw the announcement for Thursday evening, March thirty-first, of Angelo Diotti's last appearance: "To-night I play for the last time," he murmured in a voice filled with deepest regret.

The feeling of exultation so common to artists who finally reach the goal of their ambition was wanting in Diotti this morning. He could not rid himself of the memory of Sanders' tragic death. The figure of the old man clutching the violin and staring with glassy eyes into the dying fire would not away.

When he reached the hotel he tried to rest, but his excited brain banished every thought of slumber. Restlessly he moved about the room, and finally dressing, he left the hotel for his daily call on Mildred. It was

after five o'clock when he arrived. She received him coldly and without any mark of affection.

She had heard of Mr. Sanders' death; her father had sent word. "It shocked me greatly," she said; "but perhaps the old man is happier in a world far from strife and care. When we realize all the misery there is in this world we often wonder why we should care to live." Her tone was despondent, her face was drawn and blanched, and her eyes gave evidence of weeping.

Diotti divined that something beyond sympathy for old Sanders' sudden death racked her soul. He went toward her and lovingly taking her hands, bent low and pressed his lips to them; they were cold as marble.

"Darling," he said; "something has made you unhappy. What is it?"

"Tell me, Angelo, and truly; is your violin like other violins?"

This unexpected question came so suddenly he could not control his agitation.

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"You must answer me directly!"

"No, Mildred; my violin is different from any other I have ever seen," this hesitatingly and with great effort at composure.

"In what way is it different?" she almost demanded.

"It is peculiarly constructed; it has an extra string. But why this sudden interest in the violin? Let us talk of you, of me, of both, of our future," said he with enforced cheerfulness.

"No, we will talk of the violin. Of what use is the extra string?"

"None whatever," was the quick reply.

"Then why not cut it off?"

"No, no, Mildred; you do not understand," he cried; "I can not do that."

"You can not do it when I ask it?" she exclaimed.

"Oh Mildred, do not ask me; I can not, can not do it," and the face of the affrighted musician told plainer than words of the turmoil raging in his soul.

"You made me believe that I was the only one you loved," passionately she cried; "the only one; that your happiness was incomplete without me. You led me into the region of light only to make the darkness greater when I descended to earth again. I ask you to do a simple thing and you refuse; you refuse because another has commanded you."

"Mildred, Mildred; if you love me do not speak thus!"

And she, with imagination greater than reasoning power, at once saw a Tuscan beauty and Diotti mutually pledging their love with their lives.

"Go," she said, pointing to the door, "go to the one who owns you, body and soul; then say that a foolish woman threw her heart at your feet and that you scorned it!" She sank to the sofa.

He went toward the door, and in a voice that sounded like the echo of despair, protested: "Mildred, I love you; love you a thousand times more than I do my life. If I should destroy the string, as you ask, love and hope would leave me forevermore. Death would not be robbed of its terror!" and with bowed head he went forth into the twilight.

She ran to the window and watched his retreating figure as he vanished. "Uncle Sanders was right; he loves another woman, and that string binds them together. He belongs to her!" Long and silently she stood by the window, gazing at the shadowing curtain of the coming night. At last her face softened. "Perhaps he does not love her now, but

fears her vengeance. No, no; he is not a coward! I should have approached him differently; he is proud, and maybe he resented my imperative manner," and a thousand reasons why he should or should not have removed that string flashed through her mind.

"I will go early to the concert to-night and see him before he plays. Uncle Sanders said he did not touch that string when he played. Of course he will play on it for me, even if he will not cut it off, and then if he says he loves me, and only me, I will believe him. I want to believe him; I want to believe him," all this in a semi-hysterical way addressed to the violinist's portrait on the piano.

When she entered her carriage an hour later, telling the coachman to drive direct to the stage-door of the Academy, she appeared more fascinating than ever before.

She was sitting in his dressing-room waiting for him when he arrived. He had aged years in a day. His step was uncertain, his eyes were sunken and his hand trembled. His face brightened as she arose, and Mildred met him in the center of the room. He lifted her hand and pressed a kiss upon it.

"Angelo, dear," she said in repentant tone; "I am sorry I pained you this afternoon; but I am jealous, so jealous of you."

"Jealous?" he said smilingly; "there is no need of jealousy in our lives; we love each other truly and only."

"That is just what I think, we will never doubt each other again, will we?"

"Never!" he said solemnly.

He had placed his violin case on the table in the room. She went to it and tapped the top playfully; then suddenly said: "I am going to look at your violin, Angelo," and before he could interfere, she had taken the

silken coverlet off and was examining the instrument closely. "Sure enough, it has five strings; the middle one stands higher than the rest and is of glossy blackness. Uncle Sanders was right; it is a woman's hair!

"Why is that string made of hair?" she asked, controlling her emotion.

"Only a fancy," he said, feigning indifference.

"Though you would not remove it at my wish this afternoon, Angelo; I know you will not refuse to play on it for me now."

He raised his hands in supplication. "Mildred! Mildred! Stop! do not ask it!"

"You refuse after I have come repentant, and confessing my doubts and fears? Uncle Sanders said you would not play upon it for me; he told me it was wrapped with a woman's hair, the hair of the woman you love."

"I swear to you, Mildred, that I love but you!"

"Love me? Bah! And another woman's tresses sacred to you? Another woman's pledge sacred to you? I asked you to remove the string; you refused. I ask you now to play upon it; you refuse," and she paced the room like a caged tigress.

"I will watch to-night when you play," she flashed. "If you do not use that string we part forever."

He stood before her and attempted to take her hand; she repulsed him savagely.

Sadly then he asked: "And if I do play upon it?"

"I am yours forever—yours through life—through eternity," she cried passionately.

The call-boy announced Diotti's turn; the violinist led Mildred to a seat at the entrance of the stage. His appearance was the signal for prolonged and enthusiastic greeting from the enormous audience present. He clearly was the idol of the metropolis.

The lights were lowered, a single calcium playing with its soft and silvery rays upon his face and shoulders. The expectant audience scarcely breathed as he began his theme. It was pity—pity molded into a concord of beautiful sounds, and when he began the second movement it was but a continuation of the first; his fingers sought but one string, that of pity. Again he played, and once more pity stole from the violin.

When he left the stage Mildred rushed So him. "You did not touch that string; you refuse my wish?" and the sounds of mighty applause without drowned his pleading voice.

"I told you if you refused me I was lost to you forever! Do you understand?"

Diotti returned slowly to the center of the stage and remained motionless until the audience subsided. Facing Mildred, whose color was heightened by the intensity of her emotion, he began softly to play. His fingers sought the string of Death. The audience listened with breathless interest. The composition was weirdly and strangely fascinating.

The player told with wondrous power of despair,—of hope, of faith; sunshine crept into the hearts of all as he pictured the promise of an eternal day; higher and higher, softer and softer grew the theme until it echoed as if it were afar in the realms of light and floating o'er the waves of a golden sea.

Suddenly the audience was startled by the snapping of a string; the violin and bow dropped from the nerveless hands of the player. He fell helpless to the stage.

Mildred rushed to him, crying, "Angelo, Angelo, what is it? What has happened?" Bending over him she gently raised his head and showered unrestrained kisses upon his lips, oblivious of all save her lover.

"Speak! Speak!" she implored.

A faint smile illumined his face; he gazed with ineffable tenderness into her weeping eyes, then slowly closed his own as if in slumber.

The Conspirators

Arriving opposite the Franklin house, Tom Foley took position in a near-by alley, where he could keep close watch on the front gate. After hours of nervous waiting, little Lillian Franklin came out, and Tom's heart gave a jump. She was alone, and began to roll a hoop, which her friend Sandy had given her that morning. Down the street she tripped, all smiles and happiness.

Tom watched her until she had turned a corner, then he rushed up the alley to intercept her. When he emerged into the street, he saw her resting on a rustic bench, and hastened to join her. As he came up, he was greeted with:

"Why, Tom, I thought you went fishing with Gil, and papa, and Sandy, and the rest."

"No, Lily. I felt so bad 'bout my dad being arrested yest'day I couldn't git up no courage to go," answered the boy with simulated contrition. "What d'yer say? let's s'prise Gil, and go down to the landin' an' meet him when he comes in from fishin'," suggested Foley, knowing the intense love she had for her brother.

"That'll be lovely, won't it? And Gil will be so glad if I come."

Lillian whipped the hoop rapidly, and Tom kept pace with her.

"Gil will be surprised, sure enough, when he sees me coming, won't he?"

"Yes, he'll be s'prised, you bet!" said the boy, taking a firmer hold of her hand.

The night was fast approaching and Foley was leading the child through unfrequented alleys and streets.

"But maybe Gil won't come back this way, and it's getting awful dark."

"Oh, he'll come back this way, all right."

They were now on the shore of the river, dark and desolate in its winter dress. The restless splash of the water sent icy sprays over the child, and, clinging still closer to her treacherous companion, she stopped him for a second and begged him to return.

"Don't be afear'd, nuthin's goin' ter happen to yer," he said, jerking her savagely, and almost breaking into a run at the same time.

"Oh, Tom, please let's go back," supplicated the child.

They were now at the old wharf. He gave a low whistle, and, without waiting for an answer, pulled the helpless child through the entrance. Then, groping his way over the slimy stones and through the oozing mud, he dragged the affrighted little one after him, to the mouth of the cave, and called:

"Dad, I'm here."

"Come right in," answered a voice.

"I've got her, an' I got her easy as dirt," said the son, pushing the terrified child into the cave, and then roughly into the arms of his father.

"Don't yell, yer brat!" said the older, clasping his hand over mouth, and drawing her brutally toward him. "Shut up, or I'll kill yer."

Foley now called Hildey, who was, asleep in the corner, and said, "Cul, we've got to git out er this place jest as quick as possible. It's too near the city, an' if we're tracked here we'll stand no more chance than a snowball on Beelzebub's gridiron."

"What's yer lay, Dennis?" questioned Hildey.

"Move up the river," was the reply. "I knows jest the place where we wouldn't be found in a thousand years."

"When d'yer want to start?" asked Tom.

In ten minutes the abductors, with the stolen child, were slowly winding their way along the deserted beach.

It was now very dark. No stars were shining, and it had become bitterly cold. Suddenly voices were heard, and the abductors stopped to listen. They were in a ravine near the magazine landing, not more than fifty feet from the spot where the Lillian was launched. Foley, Tom, and Hildey crouched low, and drew the little girl closer.

The steady dip of oars was heard up stream, and the voices grew plainer. Out of the mingled sounds was heard, "I agrees with Sandy, he's the dirtiest coward as ever went unhung."

Lillian started, for she recognized the voice of the Jedge, who with Colonel Franklin, Sandy, Dink, Leander and Gilbert, were returning from a sail up the river.

Foley became frightened, and bending over, hissed into the child's ear:

"Remember what I tol' yer: if yer utter a sound, I'll kill yer."

The sailing party meantime had reached the landing and stepped ashore. Sandy and the other three boys lowered the sail, rolled and carried it into the boat-house. The whole party then, marching three abreast, with steady step, went up the graveled walk of the old magazine road, singing in unison:

"Hep—Hep—
Shoot that ni**er if he don't keep step.
Hep—Hep—
Shoot that ni**er if he don't keep step."

While its cadence was continued by Colonel Franklin and the Jedge, the four boys, in marching rhythm, sang out cheerily into the crisp cold night:

"When other lips and other hearts,
    Their tales of love shall tell,
In accents whose excess imparts
    The power they feel so well.
There may, perhaps, in such a scene,
    Some recollection be,
Of days that have as happy been,
    And you'll remember me."

The three scoundrels listened, as the voices rose and fell on the air. The child, with the fear of death before her, and in the clutches of her horrible captor, gave one convulsive sob and sank swooning at his feet.

Foley picked her up and, walking quickly, placed her in the very boat her father and friends had left but a moment before. He wrapped her in a ragged coat, loosened the hasp of the door on the boat-house, and took out the oars.

Quickly the captors pushed the craft into deep water, and with muffled stroke moved through the inky waves, a somber specter sneaking along the banks of the sleeping marches.

When they neared the upper bridge, Foley ran the boat ashore and abandoned it. Picking up the exhausted and benumbed child, he led his two companions along the causeway and over the road leading to the bridge.

The wind came out of the north, howling through the leafless boughs of the mighty monarchs of the forest. The last flickering light of the town was left far behind, and darkness, like a great shroud, enveloped river, valley and woods.

In due time Colonel Franklin and his party reached home, hungry after their fine sail on the river, and all in high spirits.

"Jedge, you and the boys sit right down, and we'll have supper in a jiffy."

The guests thoroughly enjoyed the evening meal. The repast was about concluded when Edith, who had just returned from the parsonage, came in, and called cheerily:

"Hurry up, Lily, it's time to go to the festival. They're going to light up thet tree at half-past eight, and it's nearly that now."

"Why, chil', Lily ain't here. She's wif yo' folks," exclaimed Delia.

"With us? She hasn't been with us at all," responded Edith.

"It's likely she's at one of the neighbors," ventured the Colonel.

"I'll fin' her, Muster Franklin, an' I'se gwine to scol' her good an' hard fo' worryin' her ol' mammy. At this she put a shawl over her head and shoulderst and started in search of the absent one.

"Suppose I go too," suggested Gilbert, rising.

"I don't think that's necessary," interposed the Colonel.

"It'll only take me a minute," assured the son, as he began to put on his overcoat.

"Go if you like then," consented the Colonel.

"An' if yer don't mind, Miss Deed," volunteered Sandy, "I'll go up to church with yer, an' then come back an' fetch Lily and Gil."

"That's a good idea," answered Edith, "bring her right over to the church, and I'll be waiting for you there."

"I guess I'll go up to my house an' look. Mebbe Lily is playin' with Zorah, an' if she is, I'll come right back an' tell yer," put in Dink.

Edith, Delia and the three boys departed, leaving the Colonel and the Jedge alone, smoking their pipes and discussing the sensational events of the week, in which Dennis Foley was the central figure.

The conversation was stopped by the appearance of Delia and Gilbert, who declared that not one of the neighbors had seen Lillian that afternoon.

"It seems almost incredible that she could be lost," said the father, "she must be somewhere about here. Perhaps she went to the church, and fell asleep in one of the pews."

The searching party set out once more, this time accompanied by the Colonel himself, and by the Jedge. At the church they heard from Sandy and Dink that no trace of the child had been found, so the father requested the minister to inquire of the congregation if the missing one had been seen anywhere. There was no response from those present, and the family and friends began to show grave concern.

Another effort at finding her was immediately made. The police sergeant was notified, and he sent out a general alarm.

All night long, and all the next day the hunt was continued. Wells were explored, basements, cellars and out-of-the-way places were ransacked, lumber yards and coal yards were gone through most carefully. In fact, not a foot of the town was left unsearched, but all to no avail, and the once happy home of the Franklins was steeped in sorrow and despair.

The morning after Lillian's disappearance, Mrs. Foley inquired of the boys in the neighborhood if they had seen anything of her son Tom, who, she declared, had been gone since the previous morning.

From Sandy she learned that Tom had taken dinner at Gilbert's the day before, but that when the party had started for the river he had dropped out, claiming he was too down-hearted to join in the pleasure.

"That's the way he acted at home," said the widow, "and it seemed to me it was almost unnacheral for him to talk against his father, as he did. However, I'm not bothered about him, for he comes and goes just as he pleases, and when he gets good and ready he'll turn up, like a bad penny. I've stopped worryin' about him years an' years ago."

"If I see Tom," volunteered the boy, "I'll tell him yer want him,"—and he hurried away.

The next morning Sandy left home earlier than usual, and on his own account began a search for Lillian. A new theory had taken possession of him, and he started at once for the river. At the magazine gate he chatted with the sentry about the mysterious disappearance, and passed on. When he reached the shore half a mile beyond, he was surprised to find that the padlock on the door of the shed had been pried off, and that his boat was missing.

Opening the door he saw that his oars and blankets were gone, and he began to feel that his theory might lead him to important discoveries. For fully five minutes he stood motionless, and gazed into the river, buried deep in his own thoughts. Then he soliloquized: "I wonder if Lily's been stolen? S'pose, while we've been searchin' fer her high an' low, Foley an' the galoot what whacked me jest took the little girl an' carried her off in my boat? That 'ere story 'bout Dennis Foley buyin' a ticket for Philadelphy struck me as fishy when I fust heerd it, an' now I don't believe it a t'all. They couldn't git through the magazine gate 'thout the guards seein' them, an' whoever took my boat either came up the shore or down the shore. 'Tain't likely they came from up shore, 'cause they could 'a' found a hundred boats 'tween here an' the upper bridge."

Turning around, Sandy started down the beach toward the cemetery. He was studying carefully the ground beyond the point of high tide, and in a few moments reached the ravine where, two nights before, the three abductors had stopped, upon hearing Colonel Franklin and his sailing party approach.

"Well, I'll be durned," he exclaimed, for in the sand before his very eyes was the impress of four pairs of shoes. Two were evidently those of men, one small enough to be that of a boy, and one so tiny as to convince him it was that of a child.

"This is the way they come," he continued, "and there wuz three of 'em in the gang besides the little one, an' I'm sure er that."

He followed the footprints until he reached the old wharf. Peering through the rotten timbers, he said:

"That's a rum ol' hole. I don't believe Satan hisself would go in there, but I'm goin', an' see what I kin see."

Sandy had no difficulty in entering the cave, which he found strewn with whisky bottles, pieces of bread and newly-picked bones, evidence enough that some one had been there but a short time before.

Penetrating deeper in his search, he made a find of the utmost importance. Lying at one side, and near a bed of rags, was an envelop addressed to Dennis Foley, and, on a peg which had been driven into the wall, was hanging an old hat, which he had often seen on Hildey's head.

Elated at the results of his quest, he began to retrace his steps, and in eager haste he left the cave. Picking his way along the slimy stones under the wharf, he soon neared the outlet and there was startled by the most significant of all his discoveries. Right before him lay the identical hoop which he had given the lost child only Christmas Day, and which bore the inscription, "From Sandy Coggles to Lillian Franklin."

Every suspicion now was confirmed, and he was sure he knew the culprits. Taking the hoop, he returned to his boathouse with all possible speed, and leaping into his skiff, paddled up the river, his eyes scanning the marsh lines on either bank of the channel. Arriving at the bridge, he learned by inquiry from the tender stationed there that he had not seen the Lillian coming up stream within the past three days.

"But," explained the bridge-tender, "I'm only on from six to six during daylight, and of course if anything comes through at night I wouldn't know about it. I'm pretty sure, though, there's been nothing up this way for a month of Sundays, 'cept Buck Wesley, who creeped up 'bout two hours ago, following a gang of ducks that uses right over there above Mayhew's Meadows. And the way Buck's been shooting for the last hour, he must be having a time and no mistake."

"Well, so long," called Sandy. "I guess I'll go up the river a little further and have a look." And once more he took up his paddles. As he came abreast of the Meadows he saw Buck Wesley coming out of the creek in his gunning skiff.

"Is that you, Sandy?" shouted the gunner.

"That's me," was the boy's answer.

"Come over here, I want to talk to you," requested Buck.

When Sandy got alongside the hunter's boat, he asked:

"Well, Buck, what's the trouble?"

"No trouble, Sandy, but when I come up the river this mornin'—I ain't been up for three weeks, it's been such pore weather for ducks—I seen a bunch of widgeon go down right over here, an' as I skims up by the collard patch t'other side of the bridge, I noticed a boat lyin' in the mud, and when I gits near to her, I knows by the cut of her jib that she's yer Lillian."

"My Lillian? Wher'd yer say yer seen her?" asked Sandy excitedly.

"Why, by the collard patch, not fifty yards from the Causeway. She looked like she'd drifted on the marsh. I calc'lated when I got through shootin' that I'd pick her up an' take her down to yer landin'. The oars wuz in, an' I guess she must 'a' strayed from the shore, through somebody fergettin' to tie her up."

"I'm much 'bliged, Buck," thanked Sandy, "but yer needn't bother. I'll bring her down, an' the next galoot that takes her an' lets her git away from him, is goin' to hear from me."

Sandy retraced the course he had come, and after turning on the other side of the bridge, had no trouble in finding his boat. She was lying on a sand-bar, but he soon succeeded in floating her and bringing her ashore.

Safely securing the skiff and the boat, he began another search along the beach, and almost immediately was rewarded by finding a knot of blue ribbon, such as he had often seen Lillian wear in her hair. Farther along, he discovered tracks in the sand. These he followed, Indian

fashion, up the embankment, lost trace of them for a moment on the hardened surface of the carriage way, but speedily picked them up again in the soft soil that ran downward on the other side.

Then, it was easy to pursue them along a pathway that led to a graveled beach where a dozen or more skiffs had been drawn up and tied to stakes for the winter. From here on, all further traces were obliterated.

Thoroughly familiar with all the river craft belonging there, even to the individual ownership, Sandy noticed at once that one of the boats was missing, and that its painter had only recently been cut.

"Why, it's Willie Bagner's boat they've got," he said to himself as he recognized which boat was missing, "an' I'll bet my life the scalawags are hidin' somewhere up the river."

Hurrying back, he rowed to the landing and started in haste for his home, with a plan of rescue fully developed in his mind. He sought out Leander, Dink and Gilbert, and asked them to call at his house without delay.

While Sandy's investigation had convinced him that Lillian was stolen, Colonel Franklin had been made to realize the same terrible fact in another and more brutal way. When he reached his office on the same afternoon, he found on his desk a letter that read as follows:

dere sur—if U meen bizness i can put U on to whar your dorter is but its goin to kost U sum muney if U evr want to see her agin theres a big gang got her hid where U woodnt find hur in a 100 yerze but if U will plank down 10000 dolers sheze yourze if U dont you'll nevr see hur no moar if sheze wurth thet much to U U can git her by not blabin to nobudy that yer got this leter an plankin down the rino taint no use fer U to try an git the police on our trax fer one uv the gang is alwayz with the

kid an we have sworn to kill her if enny of us is jugged if U meen bizness an will leeve a noat under the big stone in front of the ded tree by oyster shell landin up the river we will git it an rite U where to meet us to bring the muney and git the child member we dont stand fer no trechery an if U squeel we ll no it and we ll take it out on the kid mums the word if yer want ter see the kid again c o d and fare deelin is our moto a word to the wize is sufishent

yourze trooley a frend

The Colonel was completely unnerved by the horrible knowledge that his little daughter was in the hands of desperate criminals. Without delay he wrote a note offering to pay the money demanded, agreeing to deliver it at any spot they might name, and vowing to share his secret with no one.

Sealing the missive, he placed it carefully in his pocket, and drove out along the river turnpike to a point about a quarter of a mile from the place designated by the anonymous writer. Tying his horse to a tree, he walked through the woods, and hid the note under the stone mentioned in the letter. It was after nightfall when he reached home, where he was met with the heartrending and oft-repeated question,

"Have you heard anything from Lily?"

Fearing to betray himself, even to his family, and thus perhaps endanger the life of his child, he was compelled to answer, "No, not a thing." With a heavy heart, he passed into his study. Supper was announced shortly afterward, and as the family gathered about the table, the father noticed that his son was not present.

"Where is Gilbert?" he inquired nervously.

"Sandy was here and asked Gilbert to come over and spend the night with him," answered Mrs. Franklin. "I hadn't the heart to refuse him, for I don't believe any one has worked harder to find our lost darling than Sandy, and he seems to be the only one that can give Gilbert any consolation."

"I think it's better that the boys stop searching," said the father. "They might get themselves into trouble; it's too dangerous."

"I don't believe you could stop those boys from hunting for Lillian, if they had to go into the very jaws of death," interposed the grandmother.

"Oh, well," spoke the father; "they must not wear themselves out, and to-morrow, I will tell Gilbert and Sandy to leave the investigation to the police."

"They'll never do it," objected the grandmother, "they love Lillian too much. You mark my words."

At this very moment, Sandy, Leander, Gilbert and Dink were together, in Sandy's little garret room. Sandy closed the door carefully, locked it, and called his companions about him in the middle of the room.

"Boys," he whispered, "afore I sez anythin', I wants yer to gimme yer word, honor bright, an' cross yer heart three times, that yer won't spout a syllable of what I tells yer to a soul."

All were agreed, and the boy began:

"Now, it's this 'ere way. My boat wuz stolen an' left, right below the upper bridge, an' I foun' footprints an' this 'ere piece of ribbon, which Gil knows b'longed to his sister, for she wore it round her hair. Willie Bagner's skiff's bin stolen, an' I believe the party that took it hez got little

Lily, because I foun' the hoop I give her, an' this envellup in the same place, an' it seems to me the galoot whose name's on it is hid somewhere up the river, an' I'm goin' after him if I has to go alone."

"But you won't go alone, while I'm alive," insisted Leander, intensely excited.

"An' I'm goin', too, even if I never come back," added Dink, taking it for granted that he was needed.

"And you must take me," said Gilbert imploringly.

The four boys grasped one another's hands, and Sandy declared in a solemn tone:

"We'll stick together to the bitter end."

"What's your plan?" asked Leander, with great interest.

"Without breathin' a word to a soul, to-night about nine o'clock we wants to leave the boat-house, you an' Dink in one skiff, an' me an' Gil in t'other, an' sneak up the river, an' try so nobody won't see us. When we gits to the upper bridge, paddle in as close to the Causeway on the right, as we kin, huggin' the marsh all the way. Jest before we git to Beaver Dam, there's a deep gut that runs 'longside of it fer a hundred yards or more. Foller me in there, Leander, an' stay hid till I sez move. Don't speak a word, from the time we push off till I sez so. Beaver Dam is the lonesomest creek in the world, an' mebbe Gil's little sister is kept in one of them ol' shacks what muskrat hunters live in, in the spring an' summer. If them galoots is in there, they're mighty apt ter come out late at night, when they don't expec' nobody's roun'. Of course, nacherelly they have some plan about gettin' paid fer little Lily, an' they ain't a-goin' to stay in hidin' without tryin' to find out the lay er the land, an' jest how hot the police is on their trail. My idee is to go an' lay in ambush fer 'em all night. If they don't come out, we'll explore in the mornin', an' if we don't find 'em hidin' roun' Beaver Dam, then we'll lay low all day, an'

push up the river to-morrow night. But somehow, I think that's the place they would pick out to hide in. 'Tain't one person out er a million that would know how to git through Beaver Dam without gittin' lost, an' I'm a recollectin' I took Tom Foley through there onct an' that's why I'm goin' there to-night. I knows it so well, I could go through with my eyes shet.

"Each of us wants his pistol loaded fer keeps, a knife, an' about three yards er rope he can tie round his waist. Let's have a bite o' supper right here in my house, an' then we'll start fer the river, but each feller goin' alone, an' in a different way. Now, remember, no talkin' to nobody, an' let's all say honor bright, an' cross our hearts three times ag'in."

Sandy was the first to arrive at the boat-house. Securing the paddles, he put them into the skiffs and watched for his companions. He had not long to wait. Gilbert came in a few moments, then Leander, and shortly afterward, Dink. Not a word was spoken. Sandy motioned Gilbert to sit in the center seat of the Dolly, while he took his accustomed place at the stern. Noiselessly they pushed into the stream, followed by Leander and Dink.

The tide was going out, and had, perhaps, two hours to ebb. The boys hugged the channel bank on the right, passed under the bridge unnoticed, and kept on their silent and anxious way, mile after mile. Finally, Sandy steered into a creek and glided softly against the mud bank, holding his skiff firmly by driving a paddle into the soft soil. Leander and Dink followed suit. That they might be screened from any one coming out of Beaver Dam, which was separated by a narrow strip of marsh-land, they lay flat on the bottom of their boats.

The night was not especially dark, for the moon was looking through a mist of hazy clouds. It was bitingly cold, and though the boys became numb from the many minutes of inactivity, not one of them moved. For

fully an hour they had remained motionless, when faintly over the water was heard the splash, splash, splash, of paddles, far away.

The searching party were all alert in an instant, and with raised heads, peered cautiously over the top of the marsh line in the direction of the sounds. Hardly a minute had passed, when out of the shadows that hid the entrance to Beaver Dam, there came slowly a skiff into the clear water. It approached to within fifteen feet of the hidden boys, when they recognized a voice, distinctly saying:

"I hope that guy Franklin's ben up to the landin' an' left the note where I tol' him to, an' don't try no shenanigan."

"He ain't goin' to try no flapdoodles with us," was the quick answer.

"Well, if he knows when he's well off," the first voice resumed, "he'll come round with the rhino mighty quick, an' give us no more trouble."

"I kin see us livin' like gent'men, a'ready."

"Gent'men born an'—" the other began, but the last of his sentence was lost as the boat turned up the river, and the cadence of the paddles died in the distance.

Sandy waited until the rascals had disappeared around the bend, then shoving his skiff quickly alongside Leander's, he whispered into the latter's ear:

"Me an' Gil is goin' in to Beaver Dam. Yer knows them two fellers, an' so do I. One of 'em is the feller what whacked me, an' the t'other is that bum Hildey. If they gits here afore I come back, you an' Dink'll have to do somethin' desp'ret."

"All right," said Leander, clutching his pistol, "you can trust me."

Sandy rounded the point that divided the two creeks, and in a short time had paddled past the trees and vines that hung over and partly covered the entrance to Beaver Dam. The boat was managed with consummate skill, now left, now right, through the sinuous waterway, and the two boys had gone fully half a mile, when, without warning, they were rudely jolted as the skiff grated harshly on a bar. Ordinarily, such an incident would have been without effect upon them, but now their nerves were so highly strung, that the noise of the boat rubbing against the gravel seemed as loud as the report of a cannon.

Using all possible force, Sandy and Gilbert succeeded in shoving their craft back into the water. Then they pressed forward into the shadow of an embankment on the left, and not a moment too soon did they reach Gover, for the door of a hut was thrown open, and the voice of Tom Foley was heard, asking:

"Is that you, dad?"

An instant later Foley was seen standing in the dim light of the doorway, shading his eyes and peering into the darkness.

"I say, dad, is that you?" came again. "I'll be doggoned if I didn't think I heerd somebody comin'. I guess 'tain't nuthin',"—looking anxiously to the right and left. "I cert'nly does git scared out er my boots aroun' here, though, when I'm left alone. I'm goin' to wake up the brat an' make her keep me comp'ny,"—and the door closed with a bang.

He had hardly gone inside when the piteous cry of a child was heard, "Please don't beat me, Tom."

"I ain't beatin' yer; go ahead, dance fer me."

Sandy and Gilbert were fairly crazed, and in their anger rushed up toward the hut.

Again came the cry, "Please don't hit me, Tom."

"Dance, I say,"—and the sharp swish of a whip was heard.

It took but a second for Sandy to bound into the room. Surprised and terrified, Foley made a dart for the door, but was met by Gilbert, who, pistol in hand, held him stock still. In desperation Foley reached for a club and ran back of the frightened child in the hope that she might serve as guard against his assailant. Like a flash, Sandy followed, and knocked the cowardly brute senseless with the barrel of his pistol.

Gilbert ran to his sister, and, taking her up, showered loving kisses upon her. With her arms clasped about his neck and her head nestling on his shoulder, she cried:

"Oh, Gil, I'm so glad you've come. I've been waiting all this time for you. I knew Sandy would come, because he ain't afraid of robbers, or anybody else, even if he had his hands tied behind him. I've been praying for you every minute, and here you are." Again Gilbert pressed his sister to his heart, and kissed her.

Young Foley was still lying unconscious, as the result of the blow he had received, and Sandy was clutching him tightly by the throat.

"Take yer sister, little codger," said Sandy, "wrap her up, git in the skiff, an' I'll be with yer as soon as I tie this chuckle-headed idiot fast and tight."

Gilbert left the hut with Lillian, while the other boy remained long enough to loosen the rope around his waist, and bind the young ruffian securely. Then he placed him in a corner of the room. Locking the door behind him, Sandy joined Gilbert in the skiff, and together they paddled furiously out of the creek into the river.

The moon was up in all her splendor, and objects on the water were plainly visible for some distance. Lillian was seated in the bow, facing the two boys at the paddles. Leander and Dink fell in the wake of Sandy's skiff, about ten yards in the rear.

As the party reached the middle of the channel, a skiff came into view from the bend, a short way above, and steered directly toward them. With a cry, Lillian stood up:

"Oh, Gil, here come those two bad men that took me away."

The boys turned, and they, too, recognized Dennis Foley and Hildey as the occupants of the approaching boat.

"Lie flat, little one," whispered Sandy, "an' don't move till I tells yer."

The child obeyed, but already Foley and his partner had espied her, and it was evident they were using all their efforts to catch up. Leander now called:

"It's the same gang, Sandy, that came out of the creek. What shall we do?"

"Paddle fer all ye're worth," was shouted back.

"Hold up, or we'll shoot," yelled Dennis Foley.

With that a pistol-shot was heard coming from the direction of the pursuers, but the bullet went wide of its mark, and the boys sped on.

"Don't waste yer load unless yer have to," cautioned Sandy, "'cause yer won't have time to put in 'nother, an' I don't want er draw their fire, fer fear they might hit Lily."

The race had become one of life and death. The boys strained to the utmost their strong young muscles, and, with paddles bent almost double, drove their little craft like the wind before them. Down past Turtle Creek they flew; Licking Banks were soon left behind, and shortly, they were alongside the Sycamores. Dink looked back over his shoulder, and whispered:

"We ain't gained on 'em a bit, an' they seem to be goin' strong."

When the Meadows were reached, Dink said again:

"They're comin' like everythin'."

"Don't weaken," urged Leander; "as long as we're between them and Sandy's skiff, they'll have to kill us before they can get to Lillian."

The moon was casting its light on the waters like a great silvery path, and the splashing of the paddles was the only sound that awakened the echoes. Again came the sharp report of a pistol, and Dink dodged, as if by instinct. He wheeled in his seat and shot point-blank at Foley, but the ball imbedded itself in the side of the skiff behind and did no further damage.

"That's tit for tat," said Dink, "but it wuz a mighty close call fer me. When the bullet whizzed past my ear I thought I was plugged, sure."

There were now not more than fifteen yards between the boys and their pursuers. Turning about, Leander saw Hildey raise his pistol and take careful aim at him. Quick as thought, the boy fired first, and Hildey uttered a sharp cry of pain, as his right arm fell helpless, and his pistol dropped into the water.

"Curse the luck!" muttered Foley. "Don't give up, pard; we'll ketch 'em afore they git much further."

Though Hildey's right arm was useless, he plied the paddle with his left, and the men continued to gain. As the boys passed through under the bridge, Leander's boat was abreast of Sandy, who whispered:

"I'll take the swash on the right that goes through the big marsh and comes out at the Devil's Elbow. You hug the channel bank, an' mebbe we'll fool 'em."

Sandy knew that, after the river left the bridge, it went almost southerly for half a mile, then made an abrupt turn at right angles, pursued its way westward for another quarter of a mile, and then met

the swash channel, which cut diagonally through the big marsh. At this junction of the two streams a whirlpool called the Devil's Elbow had been formed, a treacherous spot for small craft, and requiring rare skill to pass in safety.

When Sandy told Leander to take the main channel, it was with a desperate hope that Foley and Hildey would be in doubt, for the moment, which skiff to follow as they came out under the bridge. Within himself, he reasoned that this hesitation, on their part, would consume sufficient time to permit the boys to gain a lead and reach in safety the landing, two miles below.

"The chances are jest even-Stephen," he said to Gilbert, "though it separates us from Leander, till we reach the Devil's Elbow."

But alas! Sandy's reasoning failed him for once this time.

As Foley and Hildey came through under the bridge, the former cried:

"Steer to the right channel an' foller that boat; that's the one the kid's in."

"They're after us, darn 'em," said Sandy, "but we're gittin' ahead bully. Keep it up, Gil, an' we'll come out all right, see if we don't."

Dripping with perspiration, and with hands burned and blistered, Sandy and Gilbert were forging ahead and gaining on their pursuers, straining every nerve to increase their lead. As they rounded a bend in the channel, Hildey shouted:

"There's yer chance to plug 'em, pard. Shoot!"

Foley obeyed, and the boys' skiff, which was a metallic one, was bored through by the pistol ball. The water poured through the hole, and Sandy shouted to Gilbert:

"Drop yer paddle; take yer hat an' put it over the leak, tight as yer kin; bale with the other hand, or we'll sink in a minit. Lily, sit up, so yer won't get wet; but don't show yer head," and with a courage born of despair, Sandy renewed his efforts.

Foley was gaining rapidly, and it seemed that only a miracle could prevent the boy's capture before they reached the Devil's Elbow.

Three minutes passed with only the sound of the lightning-like dip of the paddles. Another short bend in the channel, and a hundred yards ahead was the confluence of the two currents, which were ever at war.

"Keep on bailing, Gil," cried Sandy, "an' when we git past the Elbow, if they're too close to us, I'm goin' to use my pistol on 'em, but I don't want ter shoot till I can make the shot tell fer all it's worth. Steady, Lily; hold tight, Gil; don't move, I'll git yer through without swampin', 'cause I knows every current in the Elbow."

Through the mad swirl of waters the boy held his boat, and steered her into the quiet tide beyond.

Leander and Dink were just turning the bend of the main channel an eighth of a mile away, and the skiff containing Foley and Hildey had reached the outer current of the eddy.

"Now you've got 'em," yelled Hildey, as Sandy's skiff veered to the left, not twenty yards from the other.

"Not if I knows it," cried Sandy as he shot square at Foley, the ball going through the sleeve of his coat, but leaving him unharmed.

"Curse yer fer a fool!" came from Foley, dropping his paddle and standing up in the skiff, which now had nothing to guide it but Hildey's exhausted arm. The skiff was rocking violently. Foley attempted to

balance himself as he raised his pistol to shoot. In a flash the frail craft was caught in the conflicting currents, it careened and capsized, and the two men were battling for life in the whirlpool.

Sandy was so intent on escape that he had gone some distance down stream before realizing he was no longer pursued. Suddenly an agonizing cry was borne on the midnight air:

"Help! Help! I'm drownin'!"

The boy rested on his paddle, and scanned the river in the direction of the voice.

"Don't let's let 'em drown like rats in a hole," said Sandy, and he started his boat back toward the bend.

"Gil, gimme yer pistol. They may be tryin' to play some trick on us, an' if they are, we'll be ready for 'em."

The precaution was unnecessary, for when they came near, they saw the upturned skiff circling around in the eddy, its paddles bobbing with the waves, and the hats of Foley and Hildey slowly drifting toward the bank.

Leander and Dink, meanwhile, had come up, and with the other two boys remained for fully half an hour waiting for some sign of the two robbers, but in vain; for far beneath the surface of the water in the maddening current, the ill-spent lives of Foley and Hildey were ended. They were dead in the cruel embrace of the Devil's Elbow.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIFTH STRING ***

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