Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

"This is the fourth man we have found murdered. Who is marked to go next?"
Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.

THE DANDY AND THE TOUGH.

Not so mighty much for looks, stranger, with a comprehensive flourish of the whip which included the mining-town and its dusty surroundings — but what ye see ye do see!

And that's Chordito, is he, driver?

'That's Chordito City, you kin wager your saccharine existence, assuaged he of the box-seat, with a half humorous twinkle of his near eye as he safely discharged that mouthful. 'Not so wild and woolly as she used to be, mobile, when she was a healthy young kid sets art and don't give a damn ef I do; but the he-e-o fun is right there for posterity, when you scratch deep enough to git further in the circus vernacular, Ah — I say boss?

What is it, driver?

Billy Delancy cast a half-sly glance back along his side of the coach, then lowered his tones as though afraid of being heard by less friendly ears on the outside.

'Mebbe I'm a fool for my trouble, but things is a bitin' me jest about like this: Kinda curious about you.

Never heard of him or it to my know.

eh? Why?

'It's a mix, an' 'tain a hymn o' peace, nuther, with another of his humorous twine, as he stood on the back aboard at Blizard Bend, behind the yeller, an' hadn't been afeared of his sorest paw ever sence, then I don't want a chance.

One of the bad men from Bitter Creek, is it?

asked the dimified pillar, with a faint smile playing of his dark crooked lips.

That's what.

An' Pike hadn't growed no sweeter into the temper of him, all this lone.

'some of them boys been git down go inside, or take deck passagette onto the ruff?

Don Darling looked the faint surprise he was feeling, and that answered the questioned of words, since Delancy added in those same cursive lines.

Course it's jest a habit, like, stranger, but fer a fact Pike Hunter makes out like he had a do'st margrige onto the seat gusset, where he'd been afeared of the yeller we he an'. Ef Pike don't kick up a nasty bit of a row over it all, then I've been chavin' wind all fer nuthin'.

Driver Delancy hurried his words faster than ever in order to complete his friendly warning. For the stage was fairly inside the limits of Chordito City, and a dashing swing of the double wheels carried the dusty old coach into the fairly broad thoroughfare which was bordered on either side by neat buildings of the placard.

Something gray appeared into the face of the stranger, who was for the first time gazing upon the mine, or less celebrated mining-town, for he was by no means anxious to celebrate that event by sharing in a street squabble, even with so noted an individual as this Pike Hunter appeared to be. Letting his memory revert to the euphonious manners, and the stage had last left, Don Darling dimly recalled a tall, roughly-clad individual who had gruffly growled at the driver's ehew salutation before plunging into those dusty depths.

Was that the typical "bad man" of Chordito City? If so, why hadn't he entered his claim to the seat beside the driver? But he had not seemed at all perturbed by Delancy's thoughts, though his handsome face betrayed naught of the unreasoness he was actually feeling. Why not? A row — huh?

The dandified-looking passenger gave a little look over of disgust at the bare thought, gripping his reviling as the stage went suddenly jolt and swinging away as a wheel on his side struck a sizable stone, the four horses now being in a swift trot, and the box-seat in the usual halting place. The Grand, a fairly imposing building which appeared to be the principal hotel of the fair city, was given the turn out as a whole, with a good-humor quip or two for Billy Delancy.

This was nothing beyond what Don Darling had witnessed at each halt since leaving the steel trail for the stage line, but the novelty of such primitive customs had not yet worn off, and for the moment he forgot that annoying bunt left by the driver, but only to have it rudely brought back to mind almost before the dusty coach had ceased gliding away after that adroitly managed halting.

The side door was flung open before that halt was far behind. Through the three-inch opening plunged a tall, gaunt shape, clad in denim shirt, copper riveted overalls and a capless head.

An unspoken mass of sandy hair was topped by a grease-spotted white felt hat, and, when the light from the circular window revealed the small, vicious-seeming eyes, now turned toward the box-seat where Don Darling still maintained his seat, the instant sneer upon his really handsome face.

Fattening that sort brim with an opened hand, he held it high, and with his free hand he flung at the walls of the wagon the rays of the declining sun, then resting bony hands upon the cartrige-studded belt, which was of iron, he raised his forefinger. Hunter gave vent to a shrill, peculiar squelch as must have come from an enraged apache.

This warlike sound brought all eyes his way, and having cast his first, the second, and the third, and a sudden, compelling nodding his head toward the dandified stranger, then burst forth with:

Circus a-cumma, gents, an' right as ye kin hav a free glimpse of the ring-tailed monkey! Jest a seedy sample of the turrit-

Pike Hunter seemed determined that no doubt should affect his words, and for this swift left hand gave, an appropriate flourish as a compliment, then a booby finger pointed directly at the startled passenger.

Unhappy that handsome face bore false wit less. Don Darling had completed his whirl about this sudden address, and he by no means helped the situation any by his inarticulate admiring awe which he cast at the hulking money freighter to come town! An' ef this yer dodge don't keel ye off to mortal fast, the rest o' the grand show day do all pround in jine time!

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CHAPTER II
A MURDERING KILLING.

With wild laugh and angry leer the crowd believed Pike Hunter went down because of that swiftly-aimed blow, but a few others besides Don Darling were so situated as to feel confident the desperado staggered back even before those kicked knuckles fairly touched his face.

The man from Denver gave a startled ejaculation at this totally unexpected movement, and a second later his hand was out upon the bridle, as in order to foil any cunning snare, he stood on guard, ready for the rally which must surely follow.

Instead—Pike Hunter lay precisely as he had fallen, his only movement consisting of a shifting of his body, which lasted barely half a score seconds.

"Knocked out in the full round!" cried one of the group, while another added the explosive warning:

"Squawumph, up, Pike! Glass-eye's comin' fer yer pelt, red-hot!"

The hot flush of anger was fading from Dan Darling's face; the cool, natural quiet under such circumstances warned him of still worse to come.

When, accordingly, he threw himself into effort to regain his feet? Why had he fallen so suddenly, so limply, even before that blow could fairly rattle his head?

Why did he—sigh—was just like a corpse?

A buzz fell upon that assembly, and for a few seconds no one seemed willing or able to either speak or to move; then a man bent over the fallen desperado, giving a hasty ex-

austion, to start back with still paler face, and the words:

"Dead—killed too dead for skinning, gentle.

A chorus of startled cries broke from the crowd, and distinct above other voices came that of the dark-eyed, pale face turning as its owner forced himself to ask that question.

More than one of those present saw trouble coming, but Pike Hunter could hardly be asked to form one of that number.

Don Darling had his gun, and his name had but one method of expression, and those low, even tremulous tones formed its very op-

"Insult? You!" loudly exploded the ruffian, then bursting into a horse-laugh as he started back on his feet. "Hunt yer hole, critter! I've damped yer underpinnin', an'—now—about that hat!"

Yet the range was so short it necessitated a violent jerk of the head to elude that dis-
gusting missile; and the effort dislodged the silken cap, sending it rolling in the dust of the street.

With a howl of vicious exultation, Pike Hunter sprang forward, to falling property, yet even then clumsily disguising his real purpose by crying out:

"That's my hat, Gentlemen! But—ugh!"

The fellow dropped on all-fours in his seeming haste to secure the fugitive file, but one glance at the gun which suddenly upon the head hurled that shapeless mass, even as Don Darling sprung forward, to make a swift, decisive charge that gathered with its belted force.

The patent-leather coated that hairy face, bent and blotted the body, and with the amount of force which Pike Hunter was so proud; then the man from Denver sprung back with a cry of rage, and as the fellow's feelings the balance is not entirely against him.

The desperado scrambled to his feet, left hand sweeping to draw his sword, while with a howl hurst from his lungs as he realized the humiliating truth.

"He's got yer out for that!" he cried, jerking forth a long-bladed knife, giving it a ferocious fling as he leaped for the throat of the man behind him. I feel the balance is not entirely against him.

Knowing retreat to be well-nigh impossible, Don Darling stepped out from the circle; the shot, as Pike Hunter flung up his arms, staggering back, to fall limply as a dead man!

"Ach! Hum! A case of—accid—ent?"

"That's for your skill to decide, doctor," gravely said Elridge. "Call for such as near as may ye see you on yer way now!"

Paying not the slightest heed to those levelled pistols, Ransom Elridge turned toward Don Darling once more, moving closer to the stranger in spite of the fact that one or two surrounding girls already covered his person.

"Put on your guns, my good friend."

"Pray, who may ye be, then?"

"Ransom Elridge. I am mayor of Chloride City. I say it again, as one gentle-

DAN DARLING THE DETECTIVE.
Very well, Mr. Darling. You shall have a fair show, and no honest man can ask for more than that.

"If ever a man had been busied making an examination of the stricken desperado, but now he lifted his head, cast

a gliding toward the spot where the mayor was standing.

"What's the good word, Brewster?" quickly asked Mr. Elridge, without waiting for further

further invitation. There is no good word, properly speaking, in a corporeal, in an

answer to that impatient gesture.

"Impossible! I never—" impulsively he began, and then abruptly breaking off as that hand gripped an arm warningly.

If poor Hunter is indeed a corpse, he's dead of a cause far more purely natural causes. Then—what killed him?

There was a brief silence, during which the physician stared gravely down upon the body; but then he uttered, slowly:

"As to that, sir, I would not like to say, positively, without making a more careful and thorough examination.

"How long will it take to fairly make up your mind, Dr. Brewster?"

"Quite a while, of course; but—"

"Very well, doctor," with another peremptory wave of a hand. "Time is yours, and you are excused for utterance. Be so kind as to fall to work at once, will you?"

"Humph!" Dandy bowed just a thought stiffly, but as he again bent over the dead man, the mayor seemed content to let that point go. He was busy enough himself out in that matter without further help from himself.

Up to this moment almost perfect silence had reigned among the three of us, then an assembly of quite imposing dimensions as tidings of another tragedy took to itself with great determination. They were old friends, both as by nature and now but an ugly muttered sound came from a portion of the mass, while here and there a woman’s hand, hooded till the fingers, astonished the stranger whose advent had been so terribly marked.

Dandy calmly faced that mass, his tones smooth and even as ever in his life, although no man knew better than he how poorly he succeeded in so easy such a mob could crush his life out in case the murderous

whims should fairly take possession of them all.

"No time like the present, friends and fel-

low-citizens," he said, in his blandest tones.

"I owe the kind offices of Mr. Pike Hunter to my friend and partner in life. In death—if this really prove to be death—he is still more dear to us. His teaching tongue and his hand will be heard in opposition to the will of the mayor.

It was a strong testimonial to his influence as chief of the corridor.

Passing along a bare, cheerless entry, the stranger gave a little shiver as he caught a glimpse of the robed table in the big dining-room, but neither Darling nor Elridge seemed anxious for more than a passing glimpse, and they passed on to the dingy little "parlor" which lay nearer the rear of the barn-like building.

Once we were in the corridor, Mr. Elridge ques-

tioned his charge concerning the affair, scan-

ning the troubled face before him as Don Elridge had been forced to play in that unfortunate affair.

There's only one explanation I can give," the.stranger of the corridor City added, with a troubled look. "The fellow must have been drowned, for he was falling in the water, and then..."

Why, sir, sir, "honorable, my glove barely touched his face?"

Don Elridge was simply the most regarded detective in the city. He had always been more than..."

You needn't firmly believe all that, too, yet a man grows excited and hits much harder than..."

Dandy cut his speech short as the sound of hurried footsteps came to their waiting, and as the glass doors were opened from their chairs, the door was pushed open, a head was thrust in, for its owner to rapidly splutter.

"Doon wants you, boss! He's found out what killed Pike Hunter?"

"I'm going over to you, sir," decided Dar-

ling, half-doggedly.

"Perhaps you'd better," assented the mayor, but with a rising of Dandy's smoothly-shaven upper lip.

Together they passed from the room, along the corridor, then to the door of the corridor dining-room, where Jerome Felton was on guard duty.

The dead man lay upon one of the long tables, but grim and ghastly as that spectacle undoubtedly was, neitherpair of eyes gave it more than a passing glance, just then.

Dr. Brewster was standing beside the corpse, one big hand resting lightly upon its breast, the other clasped tight to his thump and forehead, between which was held some small object.

"You see me find out what killed Pike Hunter, Elridge, and I've done just that, sir!" was his salutation, professional reserve and dignity proving insufficient to wholly mask his triumph.

"What was it, then?"

"A bullet, from rifle or pistol! As he spoke, the doctor held up his right hand in the bit of formal exactness there in the room; but neither Elridge nor Darling seemed able to once more grasp the horror.

"Shot? You can't mean it, Brewster?"

"I have never heard there a shot, though..."

But I most distinctly remember hearing up at the mayor's honor! declared the physician, his heavy brow clouding with a flush of professional irritation coming to his face.

"It's true! I was there once more Pike Hunter was killed—by a bullet, that is said to have come down from the wound which I found and extracted from the wound."

"Just bear him out so much, Elridge, gravely spoke up Jerome Felton, coming forward from his station hear the door."

"I'll hear you out, myself, then. You can follow the track of the bullet for yourself, sir, if you see fit to take the trouble," briskly declared the doctor, turning to the corpse and utilizing the sandy beard for parting those jaws. "It entered right here—there's no one could tell the tongue—closer, sir, if you wish to judge for yourself!

"Seemingly losing all thought of the man who stood charged with that mysterious killing, Elridge obeyed, bending over the dead hunter's face, meeting the eyes with hands and tongue, he illustrated the facts which investigation had brought to light.

"I first noticed the tinge of blood which marked the subject's lips, you understand?..."

The mayor gave an impatient gesture, which Dr. Brewster was swift to interpret. "In the name of God, man, this is no rough, he spoke with greater directness.

Having secured the privilege of elbow-resting he lost to no one this faint clue, which resulted in the discovery of a bullet resting only a little ways beneath the skin at the back of Pike Hunter's neck.

Then it was easy enough to connect the two ends, sir," concluded the physician, wiping the flexible probe which had been lying upon that red-shirted breast. The bullet entered his mouth, without cutting or abrasing either lip, then passed through his neck, leaving an incised tear near the base of the bark.

Don Elridge had forced himself to keep silent during thePaget's earnest speech, saying:

"The whole corridor can hear witness that I had no gun in my hand until after this poor fellow fell to earth! And even his fiercest partition would not dare say I fired a shot, then or later on!"

There was silence in the room, but not so outside. Beyond a double the messenger, who had brought word to Mayor Elridge of the doctor's discovery, had taken the place, and behind that, the roar of many sturdy voices broke forth, de-

manding the report promised them by the official head of the front. The bullet entered his mouth, without cutting or abrasing either lip, then passed through his neck, leaving an incised tear near the base of the bark.

"We'd better all go, I fancy," gravely said Elridge, once more taking the lead in his business. "I'd like to know..."

"Guard that bullet, please, doctor, for it may prove a link to connect neck with murder..."

It was by no means a cheerful prospect, facing yonder howling, yelling mob, but every one was quiet, for Elridge led him toward the front of the hotel, or did he finish when his appearance; the roar of many sturdy voices broke forth, de-

manding the report promised them by the official head of the front. The bullet entered his mouth, without cutting or abrasing either lip, then passed through his neck, leaving an incised tear near the base of the bark.

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"Guard that bullet, please, doctor, for it may prove a link to connect neck with murder..."

In obedience to a bow and partial withdrawal, the physician stepped more promi-

nently in the front giving a clear, technical

report, and leaving no room for doubt.
ing the cause of Pike Hunter’s death, unless his head was taken to be an audacious fabrication.

"Did my blow have anything to do with the murder, Mr. Hunter?" the stranger from Denver asked, calmly.

"It did not," came the positive assertion.

"Oh, yes, it did!" she exclaimed in quite as strong a voice as was used in answer to the question. "You are scarce as the rarest of men; now appearing directly to the crowd.

"You were near enough to see and to hear everything that was taking place. When I drew a weapon or fire a shot before Pike Hunter fell back, did you see it? and if you didn’t do it, who did?" demanded a voice.

"Who shot Owen Yarwood?" cried Mayor Eldridge. "I was there at the scene, and my strong features showing poorly suppresses

excitement, his large brown eyes fairly glinted with the light that shine swiftly over those faces assembled on the level below. "Who killed Michael Mahoney?"

Instant silence fell over the crowd, and those near the steps recalled a whisper, as from some unseen source. Now the younger

colorful and sturdy figure covered during those few seconds of silence.

Ransom Eldridge recovered something of his customary composure, and making no attempt to answer his own questions, he moved closer to the side of the stranger whose entrance into Chloride City had been so mysterious.

"With what weapon were you armed?" "With what weapon were you armed?" the mayor stood thus for a brief space, then spoke again:

"You have not been born, as you doubtless know, that one day you will hear that death shot fired!"

Only a few made answer, but nearly every heart was quickening in anticipation of David Hunter.

"Did this gentleman draw a weapon before poor Hunter fell back?"

"No answer came up, with a few words in addition: no weapon was drawn, but a blow was aimed and delivered.

"You can’t figure out whatever, since the mayor declared that death came from shot of gun or pistol," reminded the mayor, "and certainly you, citizens! One of our number—my personal friend of many years, and partner of long years, is not posibly have killed Pike Hunter, else some among you would assuredly have heard the shot and notified it."

"Pike’s dead, hasn’t he?" demanded the owner of that monotonous voice who had cut a picture of stone figure before. "Who did kill him, then?"

At this blunt question that forced confessed, was in the way, and for once in his life, Ransom Eldridge permitted the rabbie to catch fair view of his unmasked visage.

Is this the man? This fly buzzing with an almost spasmodic gesture, his massive face flushed until it seemed nearly purple, which, in his violent outburst, broke into a hoarse, groaning cry as of one in mortal agony.

This is one half of all my property to know just that! I’d sacrifice my good right hand if I knew by so doing I could solve this mystery."

He broke off abruptly, fighting back his choking emotions, then huskily breaking forth again:

"Who killed Owen Yarwood? Who murdered Michael Mahoney? What caused the still unrecorded death of David Ashmore? Who? Who but the same pitiless demon whose latest atrocity we have but the day before come from viewing—poor Pike Hunter?"

Turning abruptly away like one who feels ashamed of the emotion which had, with the brutal honesty of his emotions, the mayor muttered in an undertone to the waiting physician:

There’s some of them still hanging back for the rope, and the city’s good name we can’t permit any such outrage as that would prove, under the circumstances.

"The missile entered his mouth, and I cut the bullet out from the back of his neck. Now, if you can imagine you just saw Mr. Hunter was facing when he showed the effects of that secret blow, at least what you must have been standing when that fatal shot was fired?"

The mayor might have been more clearly put, perhaps, but Dr. Brewster was perfectly satisfied with both summing up and him: judging him to be as imperturbable as he bows his conclusion.

"If nothing else, he had given Ransom Eldridge time to reach back, and now the mayor claimed their attention, his hand again resting on a arm of the bareheaded passenger as before, but with a significant difference: then it was as a guard, now as a friend.

"You have heard all that is in our power to explain, as yet, my good friends. How ardently I wish it were more, perhaps you can guess why.

"Then we haven’t grieve to do nothing—"

"What can we do, more than we have already done, I am sure. The man who beat the dead man, the man who killed the dead man, that’s what I care about"

"I’ll help you unless I am held. I know his heart, his heart, his heart."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DANDY AND THE MAYOR.

At this totally unexpected ending, the stranger in his turban and saffron of bronzen hood, but the harm, if any, was already done, and open resentment would only make a bad matter worse.

If Eldridge noticed this, he gave no sign, speaking rapidly to those assembled before the hotel.

"You all know how intimately I was acquainted with them all: with Yarwood, with Mahoney, and now—poor Pike Hunter! You know that, so to speak, we were as members of a single family! I knew the happy and the troubled years we shared like and like together, bearing up under the storms of adversity until the tears of despair fell, our tears, or who has wrought all this bitter, black ruin?

It was the final break of passionate nature, seeming to me to have been reigned as soon as lost, outwardly at least.

"Knowing this much, then, gentlemen, you can understand my reluctance when I repeat: I’m glad that Mr. Darling has been publicly drawn into this ugly tragedy. He asked to be excused for now he will have a personal interest in solving this horrible mystery.

"This is not for me, for the present, except just this: If there is any man present within reach of my voice as I speak, who recognizes the perfect lad—the gentleman of Mr. Darling, let that person hold up his hand, or else step frankly to the front."

Neither hand, word nor step challenged the stranger, and after waiting for something like half an hour, the mayor gave a grim nod of approval, adding,

"I thank you, in the name of my friend, Mr. Darling, for showing me this bow which included all those within eye-range.

Taking it for granted that the stranger was fully cleared of suspicion having an actual hand in the mysterious killing of the feigned desperado, Mayor Eldridge immediately turned aside, added a few words into the ear of Jerome Felton.

Chapter four

"Take charge of the body, Featon, you and Creed Wallace, please. You understand what remains to be done, of course?"

"I reckon so," but low gruff empha-

sls. "This isn’t the first time, Ransom, but—will it prove to be the best, I wonder?"

"I hope so,—I could almost pray so!" came the husky answer, as their right hands met, and the two men parted.

All of this Don Darling took note of, quietly remaining where left by the mayor.

For a few minutes of this time of rounding, he was quite willing to remain a dependent, so to speak.

Turning to his more recently acquired acquaintance, and for first time seeming to notice his bare head, the mayor gave the stranger, which drew the other after him into the hotel.

"Your luggage is here, of course?" Eldridge said.

"Hardly, I fear," with a faint smile.

What little I had—a pair of grips—went off with the baggage.

"They will be safe enough, at the Express Office, then. But you have no hat?"

"No, sir—no," with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"I won a wrong idea as to the nature of your baggage with its pointed gables and duds have worn an silk tile from Denver! And now—only for that hat, he might be alive!"

"I don’t think that way," came the swift, guarded interjection from the lips of the mayor. his big brown eyes casting a wary glance around as if some on some hated and feared enemy. "I believe the trap was ready set and only waiting for the opportunity. I’ll send a man for now; wait here for a moment, will you?"

The mayor hurried away, passing into the office even when addressed, bearing a fairly presentable felt hat which he handed to the man from Denver.

"Put it on, understand. We do better, friend. Now—you’re going with me, of course."

This was an assertion, rather than a query, and with a degree of meekness by no means his customary habit, the young man yielded to that gentle suasion with such some on some hated and feared enemy. "I believe the trap was ready set and only waiting for the opportunity. I’ll send a man for now; wait here for a moment, will you?"

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Although for several years quite noted in mining circles, Chloride City was by no means a show place. There were no hotels, and it was even said that the name of the city, named structure was pretty well up to the northern limit of the "city."

The mayor received the two as they strode along, and those hardly touched upon personal matters. The mayor did express the old-time loyalty and expense, where he lived a bachelor life with only a male housekeeper, but beyond that no information was volunteered.

Although only a story and a half in height, built of wood, the house was really very fine, and the front windows, where an unusual amount of "gingerbread work" had been indulged in, the roof being of glass and scroll saw. The paint was neat and fresh, and several shapely trees had been left as nature planted them, ages ago, and still in the depth of the broad valley, the slightly sloping roof of which was guarded by an ornamental railing.

The mayor reposed to lie in a passing glance, but his mind was far too seriously disturbed by the unfortunate event to consider what he had been given that brief tribute to the taste of his present guides.

"Welcome, Mr. Darling! And badly welcome if—as I dare hope—your coming to Denver was not his." Instead of replying with equal frankness, the man from Denver cast a keen, searching glance to the face of the host.

"There is no one to hear our words, if that is your meaning," came the instant assurance. "My man is out at this hour, rustling up something for supper. But,
impulsively cried Eldridge, his eyes now almost glowing with their fierce ardor. "I firmly believe I can point out to you the assassin—yes, I do believe it is as dead as a doornail—his verbal postmark!"

While giving these explanations, Eldridge was leading the way into a side room, where a table stood with a pennant on it, and a small desk provided with writing apparatus, whereon it was arranged, and the sanctum.

Leaving the papers to the desk from the table, Eldridge begged his guest to be seated, then placing cigars and liquid refreshments on the table before taking another seat near him.

Neither man seemed in haste to take advantage of the hospitable arrangements, however, and the natural delay of their thoughts was shown by the words next let fall by the former—

"I'm glad to see you—and safely in here! At one time I hardly dared expect such a happy outcome of events!"

Eldridge shivered perceptibly as he mentally recalled the past, and his tones were not steady as he added,

"You surely were born under a lucky star, Darling! If not, you'd hardly have stood off that crowd long enough for me to work to the front, as I contrived to do, at length!"

"There was actual danger, you think then?"

"More; I know there was! Although he had been for months almost general favorite in Chloride, and to see him downed by a complete stranger, as it were, was shocking."

A frozen crepel over that handsome young face, and almost as though talking to himself,

"Poor devil! Who could have killed him? And how was the trick turned so smoothly?"

"That's part of what we earnestly hope you will bring to light, sir!"

"But a dozen hundred, and a half angry gleam came into Darling's hazel eyes as he bluntly retorted,

"What do you mean by that, my dear sir? Surely I never—"

"Why didn't I come to town with a brass band at my heels, and an advertising wagon for my chariot?"

At this query, the mayor gave another start, but this one was of comprehension, and his puzzled expression gradually altered—first to an expression of surprise, then to one that filtered the low laugh which followed.

"I catch on, as the boys say, my friend!"

"The point is, that a conversation with you and the press broadcast to all that muddle!"

"Well, for one thing I had to clear your skin from even the suspicion of which I took part in the death of poor Pike, seri-

exactly explained the mayor, seeing how thoroughly charmed his opposite now was.

"If I hadn't, your head would have turned mighty frosty, this very night!"

"I don't merely think I just know it wouldn't have turned out so far as that, Eldridge."

"I don't merely think, I just know it wouldn't have been as very different from the case of Pike, in which you explained in good time, I wanted to give full notice that the fight to the death was now fully, and with whom?"

"No answer was immediately forthcoming to this, and Eldridge kept the head, covering both eyes with his white hands. And he remained thus for the space of thirty minutes. He kept this up with silent emotion suffused in his voice, and his expression remained blank.

"That's it, I believe I can show you the identical creature who has wrought all this trouble!"

"In other words, sir?"

"I believe I can show you the identical creature who has wrought all this trouble!"

"This was far more than the man from Denver dared expect, and his own face caught an unusual flush as he listened. Surely not.

"This was far more than the man from Denver dared expect, and his own face caught an unusual flush as he listened. Surely not.

"What! No man? Surely you don't—"

"Or what comes in Chloride City for a woman, yes?"

"Or what comes in Chloride City for a woman, yes?"

"It hardly was possible!" declared Darling, still shaken.

"What woman is it you mean, then?"

"Wait until you see the Silver Queen, then ask me that! An angel of light to some, but to me—a three-fold murderer!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SILVER HORN.

Recent events had in a measure prepared the way for the next step for something out of the ordinary rut, but this came as a positive surprise, and his handsome face betrayed as much emotion as all the Silver is on exhibition nightly, at the Silver Horn.

A sporting resort, I take it?" came the half question, half reflection.

"Don Denver arched his brows a bit beyond the natural.

"Saloon and gambling-room, exactly," came the confirmation. "We are a full-fledged city, so far as title and airs can make one. We are something more than a bustling, hard-wooden stage, remember," said the mayor, with an apologetic smile in passing.

"And still there are wide open, I fancy?"

"Wide open all the time, and under high pressure for the most part," was the frank admission.

"And still there are wide open, I fancy, and with a little hesitation in promising you a fair view of the Silver Queen this very night, if you care to take the trouble."

"She runs this sporting resort, then?"

"Well, not openly, at least," said Eldridge, hesitating slightly like one hardly knowing just what word to employ for his purpose.

"Fred Freestone, an all-round sport and the nearest rival of Mr. Darling, and the Silver Queen takes a turn nightly at dealing faro for all comers, and I more than suspect this was even if Freestone is not playing propietor on a salary.

"Mr. Darling's questions had come fairly enough, but now he hesitated, frowning darkly as he twisted the end of his brown mustache between his thumb and forefinger, and crying over spilled milk, but I can't help saying it!"

It was intended to act under cover in this case when I accepted the offer made me—else I would have come to Chloride City under more compromising circumstances.

He was checked by an uplifted hand, followed by the grave words:

"I'm more than ever sorry that you spoke so freely, back at the hotel, Mr. Eldridge, and I could quite understand some of the girls crying over spilled milk, but I can't help saying it!"

"I'm rather than not attempt to argue the case right now, Mr. Mayor, but perhaps it's better to consider his manner, although his tones remained all that the most exacting could wish for, and were a far cry from what I expected before. I will explain more fully, later on, and when you have heard my reasons in extenso, I hardly think you will fault me for omitting him."

As he uttered these words, Ransom Eldridge rose from his chair, adding quietly:
If you would kindly excuse me for a few moments of discussion of a matter which has been on my mind for some time, Mr. Freestone.

My man has returned, judging from the racket he is producing, kitchen-wards. Meanwhile, competing for my attention is a graceful wave of his white hand toward the refreshments, then calling attention to a small and neat collection of books against the wall.

When left alone, however, the Dandy from Denver is not long consoled by the creature comforts thus suggested, but sat with elbow resting on table and brow clasping his hands, his brain slowly passed in review the truly startling events which had signalized his arrival.

Before starting on that trip which terminated so tragically, Don Darling had been warning about the extraordinary, but even with such a significant hint in advance, he was wholly unprepared for the
drama.

Who had killed Pike Hunter? How had that thing happened? That report handed in by Dr. Bristow as "certain"—been winging without attracting notice of a single one out of the many there assembled?

Visions of air-guns and powder both smokeless and soundless, assailed the musing man, but through all odds persisting mist still drifted, confusing all things if only by distortion.

Then too, what about this Madam Silver? This Silver Queen?

Surely a woman could never have committed murder! Indeed, would Ransom Eldridge say so much, with-out the power of saying still more? Don Darling no more thought when his present host came back to assure him supper was being hastened as rapidly as possible, while the prospect that was new to him, the mayor so contrived his movements as to hinder anything like connected thought.

Don Darling suspected as much, and his idea was confirmed by the mayor himself after a few sentences and the new combined had left them to enjoy the really appetizing meal his hands had prepared.

The mayor seemed anxious to cipher it out until after you have a fair view of the Silver Queen," formed part of his dissertation over the velvet and, said as I honestly believe that woman, I want you to judge her without even a trace of my prejudice, Mr. Darling.

The Denver Dandy said nothing, one way or the other, but his mind was busy enough to make no prevarication.

Was Ransom Eldridge really so impartial as he tried to make out? If so, why say a thing that makes his life have been done enough to prejudice even the most impartial of judges.

Seemingly, previously discussed, the two litigants and left the house, arm-in-arm as they strolled down-town, nothing in their manner or deportment betrayed their serious business nor fairly in hand.

"Of course you must be prepared for more or less staring," warned the mayor, "when you walked along through the pleasant evening. You'd have your share of that, even out about the evening of to-day, but so long as you are under my wing, starting is the very worst you need apprehend.

"I'll try to endure it," cooly answered the dandy, "I left off modesty when I put on this hat with the ample signs of the wine in your cane, with a half-humorous glance toward that article, 'I be prepared for-

less.'"

The Silver Horn? Yes, promptly de-clared the mayor. We'll drop in there first. It has a way of specialty opening of to-day, but so long as you are under my wing, starting is the very worst you need apprehend.

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At the Silver Horn a large and nearly shapeless hat. A rusty leather belt, to which were appended various small objects, the hand loops were filled with fixed ammunition for the Winchester rifle now lying easily in the holder's left hand.

Long hair which fell to his stooping shoulders, and muffled with a full beard. His figure, however, was now of almost snowy whiteness, save for a band of tobacco-yellow reaching several inches below his knees.

All of this the Denver Detective took in almost at a glance; but short-lived was his scrutiny, a score of years might have rolled over his head without obliterating the photograph thus taken by his brain.

Dandy Don, the Denver Detective. 7

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Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.

Turning and passing between the heavy curtains, Don Darling cast a comprehensive glance all round before he left them at the same time imitating the guarded whisper of his friend. "A war this winter," he muttered to his likeness: "why should I, though?"

"You're quite right, my boy," you reason later on, only—what was Reuben Reeves, and he is at least a possible factor in the puzzle you've come here to solve.

"And yonder is—the Silver Queen?" softly murmured the Dandy from Denver, his dark eyes glistening with an added brilliancy as the sudden moving of a man who stood at a faro-table adown the room, gave him an idea of the position of which he was now too occupied, standing up and then occupying the chair set apart for the dealer.

"That's Madam Silver, for a fact!" affirmed the mayor, both face and voice betraying a touch of unusual excitement just then. "Look you, a man is never an officer of the law by offense through betraying your interests! That is part of the programme! That brings me to the role of the Silver Queen, don't you know?"

If he heard, Don Darling paid no outward attention to those bitter sounding sentences which came so holly from the mayor's lips. For the time being he had eyes and thought for mysterious events where a woman who was best known in Chiricahua City as "Madame Silver," or as the "Silver Queen," held court. The case was brought to the Denver Detective as he stood there gazing upon that statuesque figure during those first few moments.

The woman was tall and of nearly statuesque perfection so far as physical outlines went, and only the right term to apply, he thought. Yet it was not this perfection which so possessed the Dandy's first glance. He had seen beautiful women before this. And yet—was the Silver Queen to be classed among the ornaments of that beauty list?

If so, the decision must be given on faith, for the abhorrence of false modesty could be caught, although her position was such as to give the man from Denver something better than a first sight. He had seen beautiful women before this. And yet—was the Silver Queen to be classed among the ornaments of that beauty list?

From crown to sole, this mystery was covered with cloth of silver; it seemed nothing less than woven threads of the unstable metal, shining as though each thread had been carefully burnished, whenever a movement of her superb figure caught the lamb light at a different angle. From crown to sole, yet all contrived so cunningly, so distinctively, that the conceal let yet see, to form the most thorough of disguises while permitting one to decide that the performer on the most obvious disfigurement led the Silver Queen to adopt the habit.

"Girls in silver threads from crown to sole, yet remaining a thing of beauty as well as grace. Covered face and neck and hair—long gloves that covered her hands to the last joint of thumbs and fingers, those bits of pink nature being left unprotected, because to carry the mask further would seriously impair, if not utterly destroy, her serviceability as faro-dealer.

"A thing which of course took on with marvelous swiftness, and for the moment forgetting his guide and protector as a lamb amongst wolves in the same way in which the Silver Queen presided, her pink-tipped hands of woven silver now slipping the false cards back into the silver dealing box.

In a slow, drawing voice the black-scanned hand "kept casting" the set piece announcing that the deal was about to begin, and naming the "soda," or card, of his choice, within the box, face upward. Although the evening was still young, there was something fair, though a portion of this was undoubtedly attributable to the sentiment which was holding Don Darling a special interest, mingled with curiously concerning the Silver Queen.

It was now that her mask was woven with apertures to fit the eyes, nostrils and lips, but while giving one a tantalizing glimpse of the face itself, it was such as to defy one's keenest judgment when exercised in an endeavor to decide the actual age of the wearer. The fact was, she went west, the Silver Queen might be still in her teens, or well along toward the turning-point of life, all depending on the quality of the nearly blind guess.

Neither Eldridge nor Darling attempted to press near enough to the table or to place a bet, but securing a position from whence he could observe without the minimum of fatigue or inconvenience to themselves, they waited: the mayor and Dandy soon becoming the making men of the room. Notes as he covertly studied yonder masked mystery.

Then an incident took place which went far toward casting light of a certain sort upon the Silver Queen, and at the same time showing her by her unwonted unfitness to occupy that responsible position.

Among the players who had been unable to obtain seats, there were a good many obliged to lean over those seated in order to place a bet, was a burly, roughly-barbed fellow, who advanced forward, and without giving him a bet from one painted card to another close by.

It was nothing more than being done at brief intervals, but the black eyes of the Silver Queen were upon the alert, and that moment a few feet back of the chips he fore her glistening hand shot out a revolver, tapping those knuckles sharply with its plated barrel.

"You are burning your fingers, sir," the Masked Mystery said, in low, but deep and perfectly clear voice.

"Reckon I've got a right to—!" Doch, gun ye, critic! That his metal rose and fell with stronger emphasis, and a tiny spot of blood showed where a knuckle lost a portion of its life.

"Hands off, sir. You are trying to steal a bet, and—"

"Steal nothing!" blustered the fellow, with a show of honest indignation. "If you wasn't a woman which—"

"This is from Birchwood!" came a cold, almost metallic voice from the fellow's immediate rear, and at the same instant the cold muzzle of a revolver chilled his cheek and almost barked his nose as he turned in that direction—to encounter the coldly-blazing eyes of Fred Freestone.

"If ever—I didn't—don't shoot, boss!" huskily gasped the cowed knave, shrinking away from eyes even more than from pistol. Space was cleared as if by magic, but the rascally fellow could not retreat further than the table itself. The Silver Queen pinned him while demanding of the case-keeper and general looker-out what had caused the disturbance to the coldly-blazing eyes of Fred Freestone.

"Tried to snipe a sneak, sir," came the answer, confirmed by the careless player. Fred Freestone was the only man who had given Birchwood the opening for his bit of fraud.

Fred Freestone coldly obliged the fellow to admit his trickery, and then to beg pardon of Madam Silver for interrupting the game.

This done, he replaced his weapon and jerked the cringing knave away from the table, giving him a shove, this, giving him a shove, this, giving him a shove into the brawny arms of another employee who generally acted as "bouncer." "I'll see you, Tom Birchwood," coldly ordered the proprietor. "And you, Tom Birchwood, come back here at your peril."

"I can't see how order for bouncing was performed, Fred Freestone bowed toward the masked dealer, and the game continued as quietly as before.

Only until the cards were all drawn from the silver box and the lay-out cleared from the table, for the men seated in the chair in obedience to another bow from the proprietor, passing around the end of the table, then the dealer to a side door, through which she vanished.

CHAPTER VII

Another Foul PlayMine.

As though that recently clad figure had been in reality a cunningly fashioned man, all eyes followed the Silver Queen until they caught her by the private entrance, and Don Darling even caught himself drawing a long, full breath as though that operation had been partially suspended during the interval.

The Silver Horn Sport stood at one end of the room, aside from the players and old and pale, only his unusually brilliant eyes betraying any degree of excitement beyond the general one. One was kept hand rested on the painted cloth, the other at his hip, not far from where that business-like revolver held a slightly crooked position.

As soon as the gentle echo of that closing door died away; Fred Freestone moved along the table, his eyes resting only on the vacant seat at the same time rapping sharply with his knuckles on the table, coldly saying:

"A gentleman's view of the place to his gentleman. As the majority of you ought to know by this time, the Silver Horn is not the sort of place to make a poor solitaire. If you have no friends, or friendly, or otherwise. Now—take notice: please!"

These drawn out words had been given one warning this evening, and that is crowding the limits. If another should become necessary to-night, I'll de- cover through the mouth of my deputy—"

As he uttered the final word, Silver Fred produced the same weapon which had caused the chips to "wilt" so abruptly, giving the nuzzle a little tap against the lay-out, and placing it most convenient to his pistol-hand.

Having said so much, and evidently desirous of making as much noise as possible with words, the proprietor of the Silver Horn deftly squared the deck for shuffling, only to make a doleful complaint of perfect silence that greeted his address.

Slipping the cards into the polished box, he turned to the gambler empty-handed, those of course to be placed before slipping the soda card.

The delay was brief indeed, for among other things, the smoking of two pipes, and the purposing of killing time, or spending an otherwise idle hour, there were a number of casual players who timidly hesitated to accept the new coin of r. close, relative as a support for a faro-lay-out lack-ing in sentiment.

Mayor Eldridge had availed himself of the opening to slip into one of the chairs, muttering positively to his disguised charwoman, "For the good of the house, understand! I'll be no long, Darling.

Standing back of that chair the Dandy from Denver quietly watched as the deal progressed, and having rather more than a superficial knowledge of the game himself, he saw that Eldridge was by no means a novice at playing faro.

Fred Freestone betrayed no inclination to "plunge," yet he was by no means niggardly in plunging his bets, show ing no disposition to fearful capital risk, or to hark back to a former position, and winning pretty much as he lost, although only a critical observer would find in the innuendo a trace of calculation or ready cash, and his winnings discharged in like coin.

Mayor Eldridge merely sat through that one deal, then gracefully resigned his seat to another player, drawing back quietly to rejoin his companion, the change causing no disturbance, and hardly attracting a glance from dealer or player.

Fred Freestone tried it a whim if the fancy is on my friend, was his low-pitched greeting, but Don Darling shook his head, regarding his "new friend"

"Bless you my dear fella, I hardly know one card from another, don't ye know?"

"I don't suppose you can be moving!"

The Dandy from Denver offered no objection to this, and as far as the situation seemed so little as to require much attention beyond the move of the chair towards the door, in the direction of the salon.

As Eldridge swept the heavy curtains aside with a decision, the same as far as Reuben Reeves was gone from the pace before them, for his tall, gaunt figure with well-bandaged arm, a crowd far more dense than then occupied the white-aproned bartenders of the Silver Horn.

Still acting on his motto of "good of the house," Mayor Eldridge called for drinks. The Dandy joining him at the bar, each sipping a delicate drink after the cus-
tomary fashion. And then, leaving a yellow cloud in its wake, the pleading urgent business as his excuse for not wanting "to see it out," Eldridge led the way to the rear door.

A rearward glance showed the mayor that they were not being followed by any of the Socialites. Ransom Eldridge was著名的 for locking arms with the stranger from Denver, he strode quite briskly along, turning occasionally towards the Darkling fellow, crossing the threshold of the Silver Horn.

"You seemed quite strongly impressed by that, Mr. Darling. It was my first observation, although this did not come until they had fairly lost sight of the gam- bling house. I have been early to ask just what was the nature of that Impression, sir. Have you had this a fair sample of the show, then?"

"Pretty well for a average, yes. The usual kind of criminal stuff it's not often that the Silver Queen is forced to make her voice heard, but-- Hi!"

The sensitive-cured detective had heard that peculiar "slap," yet if it had not been for this peculiar incident, he before his very face only a few hours earlier, he would have never thought of such a sound as the mayor now offered to that sound.

"What? You don't--impossible!" he cried, your face pale, as he glanced away, as though he glanced almost bewildered around, vainly looking for the would-be assassin.

"No such sort of either assault or of flight as he supported the shivering shape on one muscular arm; but the mayor was quite unacquainted. Ransom Eldridge railed with marvelous swiftness for one at all seriously injured, and jeered at her common place of carriage, he hoarsely uttered:

"This way--right ahead! Follow and back me up, Darling!"

Betraying no signs of weakness or material injury, the mayor rushed ahead through the mud on the barest of clothes, and amusingly confides to the point from whence that silent missile had been winged for his honor.

Thoroughly amazed, since he had seen neither shape nor flash, had heard no sound of shot, or heard the supposed firing, the mayor still gave the backing called for, and with gun in grip held himself ready to fight or to foot- note, as the case might be.

The stars and moon were out in unclouded glory, yet objects at any material distance were vaguely outlined and indistinct. Still, it seemed out of the question for even so abriss an assassin to have you within night shooting distance, yet escape unseen.

Ransom Eldridge sped along until at the next corner, then came to an abrupt halt in the mud, the fire of his picture and going up to cover an indistinctly seen figure not far ahead on one of the side streets. With the swiftness of the flash against his storm chal- lenge, followed almost instantly by the words: "What! His you, Reveres?"

The mayor's prompt answer, Eldridge dropped that arm and caught at a weapon, crouching down and peering ahead to the house under which he was thrust into the muck, witheld abruptly he rose erect once more, mutter- ing:

"Only a shadow, after all! I fancied it was moving, but--never mind just what and who old Reveres is, Darling! Time enough to show you the entire lay-out after we've safely reached home!"

Evidently abandoning all hopes of finding the mysterious old hunter, permitting Mayor Eldridge to lead the way directly toward his place of residence, neither man speaking an another until the front door were reached.

One or two moving figures were seen by the way, but the mayor gave them no particu- lar attention. Even if the secret assassin should be one of them, what proof could be brought against the man who had forever swept the floor by that silent force that silent shot must have been winged. And--has anyone caught sight of a second, and a low, amused, yet bitter laugh, broke from the firm lips of his host.

"Nothing but a good friend," he said, in explanation, a deft change of the shirt covering the other dent in his back.

"At last, to come into this museum!"

As he spoke, Ransom Eldridge placed three of the silver dollars on the table at which they were sitting.

"Bullet, the lot of 'em!" ejaculated the mayor, "after picking up and glancing at the bits of battered lead."

CHAPTER VIII

WHO WILL BE NUMBER FOUR.

This certainly seemed proof positive that an attempt had been made to kill the mayor of Chloride City, for even at that distance the sight of the Denve Detective was keen enough to make out the mark of a bullet to which his attention was being called.

Darling leaned forward to make a closer inspection, but as if in ignorance of that desire, Ransom Eldridge turned abrupt- ly away, saying almost curtly:

"Wait for me, please. I'll be back in a moment or two."

The mayor left the room by a door cut through the rear wall, and from the brief glimpse he caught through that opening, he could see that the chamber sacred to the repose of his host.

From beyond that closed door a few minutes elapsed. Then, as the mayor from Denver could grow at all impatient through waiting, the mayor made his reappearance, in a very bright light, and a small parcel held in his right hand.

This article gave an odd sound as it fell upon the table. The Denve Detective had taken a seat, and Don Darling gave a low ejacutation of interested surprise as he assured his fair scholar:

"A skirt of mail--that is it," he cried, even before touching that dully gleaming object as he gave it over to the mayor:

"My life-protector," amended his host, with a low, strange laugh as he balled nearer the late Mayor. "I have a heap of cunningly fashioned metal links,"

"Only for this," said Don Darling, "catching the skirt up and giving it a dint swing, Ransom Eldridge slipped it over his head, shaking it into place, the flexible links were coarse enough to his added store, thanks to the garments he wore.

Smoothing the skirt down over the breasts, and slightly bending the skirt up, he made amends for the contracted length, a finger- tip touched a barely perceptible dent in the links, directly over the heart of its wearer.

"Right there, you see," explained the mayor, "under his left shoulder. My life-protector, the lamp light. You heard the slap, and now--well, where would I be right now, only for this--life-protector!

With another sudden twist and writhe, the mayor came out of that steel network, and swiftly spreading the cunning fabrics across the table-top, drew a chair for his own seat-

"Don Darling with undisguised interest bent over that superb bit of work, admir- ing the skill of the artisan and the for- eign metal used in the links, the almost priceless bit of work had fallen.

Even without testing the mail with other cursory test, that slap was the key. The blow would even mar the integrity of those ingeniously linked bits of finely tempered metal, and the given blow by that silent force that silent shot must have been winged. And--has anyone caught sight of a second dent, and a low, amused, yet bitter laugh, broke from the firm lips of his host.

"Nothing but a good friend," he said, in explanation, a deft change of the shirt covering the other dent in his back.

At last, to come into this museum!"

As he spoke, Ransom Eldridge placed three of the silver dollars on the table at which they were sitting.

"Bullet, the lot of 'em!" ejaculated the mayor, "after picking up and glancing at the bits of battered lead."
“Precisely,” confirmed the mayor, then pointing out one among its mates, he added: “This one you heard smile—no, he cannot be expected never to smile.”

One side of this distorted bullet showed brighter than either of its mates, while pow- der dust adhered to the edges of the opposite tint and here and there an incrustation of dark and frowning. It seemed to restore his usual good humor to see that another one, which he had thought destroyed, was still present.

That smile quickly passed away, however, and with an abrupt return of gravity to face and to voice, he added: “I’m a marked man! Ay! with a fierce, passionate gesture as his right hand clinched the edge of the table. “Marked for the grave!”

“I hope not, sir,” almost feebly condoled the detective, firmly knowing what else to offer, just then. Ransom Eldridge gave a short, bitter laugh, then broke into a grin, while his forefinger almost viciously tapped those older dents in the shirt of mail.

“You have saved me from the secret savior,” Do Darling exclaimed, then frowning a bit as he turned to a rather close look at the ruined butt. “And I thought— it surely looks something smaller than the regular caliber.”

“You carry a keen eye in your head, Dar- lling,” with a short, odd laugh, then producing another caliber, the points of which he adjusted to the base of a regular .32 bullet which he drew from its brass case. “You keen, let me at another look at the unraveled bullet as being of no further use, Eldridge picked up first one then the other of them, while examined each unmarrred through the jaws of the calipers without touching either with his finger tips. "Smaller caliber, for a fact," ejaculated the detective. "Yet too large for either a .20 or a .25 unless my eyes are at fault.

"They serve you most remarkable well, Mr. Darling," assured the mayor, as he lowered the smaller caliber, the points of which were as close for the time being. "The bullets which struck me thrice, and the lead which never failed, had either been fired by some one of that caliber mentioned, And this being so, what inference do you draw?

"That these shots were fired with a .32 or .38 special, and once seen, it ought to be readily recognized?" said Darling, as he seated himself again in his high chair.

CHAPTER IX
THE STORY OF THE MINE.

Mayo killed the mayor with his abrupt gestures, as though to pin attention to that point for the moment, then said: "Is this the manner of your discover one to be made? Can you see the invisible? Hear the soundless? Grasp the invisible?"

"I am not so sure about that then even I may hold some faint hopes of your being able to solve this death riddle?"

"It's not that difficult to solve for me, Mr. Darling?

"It is not at all difficult to solve, Mr. Darling, as you have been informed by the explanation I made to myself, admitted Darling. "Well, granting that this shot was intended for your life, what ought to be our next move?

Before making reply, the mayor removed his shirt of mail, tossing it across to the desk. Then, turning to his chair, he lightly fingered those bits of battered lead, at the same time musing on the explanation he had just made to himself.

"Wonder if Madam Silver has an exclusive patent on a metal face-mask?" he shot at your life, Mr. Darling?"

"I certainly do think just that, sir.

"Have you anything more tangible than a bare belief, though?"

"Well a moment, please," gravely asked the mayor, leaving his chair and crossing to the desk at which he had been bending over it for a few moments before retaking his steps. "I’ll show you at least a portion of what I think.

In his hands gleaned a delicately adjusted pair of the tiny scales which came into the room with the adjustable one, and which are still popularly known as "miner’s scales," being used to this day for the purpose of weighing out the minute grains of dead and dust. Manipulating these delicate scales with all the skill which only long familiarity and practice can develop, Eldridge had weighed the two older bits of lead against each other, proving them of almost exactly equal weight.

Next, he weighed the brightest bullet against each of the two first, in turn, then produced the other bullet, Dr. Brown had cut from the top of the doctor. He added for the time being.

Up to this moment Don Darling had seemed rather listless, but now his brown eyes began to glint and a faint flash of color showed itself in both cheeks as he leaned closer to the mayor.

The scales very nearly balanced, that side holding the dead-bullet sinking a trifle the lowest.

"That can be accounted for by bearing in mind that this bullet is the worse battered, and that from contact with ridged metal," gravely explained the mayor. "I naturally weigh it more, since it has lost weight, in grains, and here you have that of a regular .32 caliber bullet.

"And you have saved from the secret savior?" Do Darling exclaimed, then frowning a bit as he turned to another look at the unraveled butt. "And I thought— it surely looks something smaller than the regular caliber?"

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CHAPTER X

THE CURSES COME HOME.

"It could not well be anything else, from the evidence," gravely said the Dandy from Denver.

"Such was our judgment, reached after long and painful deliberation, sir," was the sober response. "And then our verdict was delivered to the accused, by—by the one elected to preside over all.

"The prisoners were sentenced to drink the bitterest coffee which no hands save their own had prepared, they swore that they feared some of us had introduced the drug, to put them out of the way. That 'twas all an atrocious plot, to rob them of even their pitiful share in the mine they had discovered.

"We listened to all they could offer in self-defense, then went into secret session. Our verdict was—guilty.

"That was far more generous—excuse me, please!"

"It was what the member elected as judge..."
forced down their throats! And, drawing off a bit, leaving them still in bonds, we waited for him.

"That was not long in showing itself, for the dose had been made of crucible potency. The delirium, strength, and bluntness which we were already prepared. We had several bottles of that in camp. For wolves, no man knew, to have a fried钢 betting line touched an arm and a faint smile crept into his strong face, and when he spoke again it was in a voice so slurred and low.

"I understand you, far better than you comprehend me, as yet, Mr. Darling," he said, gravely. "They made us so cruelly strong, and had they not persisted in swearing to their perfect freedom from all thought of evil, we might not have forced the coffee down their throats against their will.

"But—when the poison began to show its workings—well, we fell to and did all we could to save their lives!"

"If you'd do it—yes, it is a bit—"

"Why should it? with a curious smile."

"We had not granted them absolution for their sin. It was not a different sin, it was just the one we wished to give them. I'll not lie about it, even to win your favor, sir."

"Somehow it sounds as if it were difficult to say more, just then. Without exactly understanding how it had been brought about, he felt himself placed very much in the wrong!

Although Ransom Eldridge was far too sane an owl to be the advocate of one who had gained, he let the opportunity pass, and so doing the Slicker was no worse.

"We did all we could to save their lives, sir, but failed. The poison was too strong for our collation, and both men died. One never uttered a word after his first fit, passing away like some literally dumb brute."

"The other—he who cursed us all so horridly for murdering him, even while he admitted that the dose had been prepared for us—he died, likewise, with but his latest breath he called down vengeance upon our heads. And he died, upon a woman, and it was a sweet vengeance that ensued."

Slocano, distinctly came those final words, though the expression before leave no parable, and the language of their meaning could not be doubted.

A brief silence followed, during which the mayor seemed trying to read the Denver Detective's thoughts, through his pale face—passing presently Eldridge resumed the thread of his narrative.

"They received a decent burial, when nothing more remained for us to do them. And then, gathered in council together, the nine survivors of the original company, and agreed, the best. And the right to the most under the most impressing of all, and the Slicker could be divided.

First, to proceed, we shall be revealed by what manner those two men came by their deaths, without regard to the phrase. And then, general. And so—after the word under which the theater, and the Slicker has been run from that day to this, Mr. Darling. We have no quotations on stock, remember. No person outside of the Slicker knows at what figures we hold the shares of stock, or can give anything more than a vague idea of the value of the six hundredth of the mischief, as many like Pike Hunter died possessed of it.

That sure, and who has left to share in whose property is disposed of, though it had asserted the detective.

And so, still, there will be taken by some of us, or else divided up between a number of the League. His legal heirs may know how much money comes to their share, but that is all.

Darling said nothing further, and after settling a few comparatively unimportant questions, in case any was thought essential, the mayor resumed his narrative.

"It would seem to the light of the night. Darling, to properly explain how we worked up the boom which has grown into the man who rules a city, with a touch of pride in both face and tones. "Enough for now that we had the Climax in readiness for actual work long before the strikers got wind, and foreseeing that a big rush would surely follow on the heels of that announcement, we made sure of the most promising of clues, on the line, as indicated by our developments,

"When all was in readiness, we told of the new discovery, backing up our tales with the help of the local machinery, as you can see for yourself. And now—for only for those awful curses and threats, we might easily return to them, a placidly and happily as is often given to mortal beings to feed the elements of doubt the longer, please, with a swift gesture of repression. "Was it those curses coming home? I've tried to beat back that horrid thought, only to have it return with double force! No—but let me tell you, Darling,"

"It was射击 on the broad of his shoulder, anger, cold and already stiffening in death!"

"What killed him?"

"You didn't mean to let Hunter this day?" almost sharply retorted the mayor, his brown eyes glowing redly under the lamp-light. "A shot in the heart, striking him in front. That was the only mark visible, save a slight scalp-wound from his head striking a stone when he fell, dead!"

And the bullet? Did it resemble those you used that morning?"

We took it for an ordinary 82 caliber, then. Remember, sir, we had nothing to do with suspicion being deeper, at that time. And so—we put poor Owen in a deep lot on the hillside, then hunted for his assassin."

The detective nodded his comprehension, and Eldridge continued.

"Yes, he was shot, like the other?"

"No. A knife had been driven through his heart, the blow plainly coming from behind. But, in either case, a shot from the right side, then ranging downward and to the left. Twas a deftly delivered stroke, and when the narrow blade was measured, and some one recalled how partial the foreigners of the Mediterranean—especially for example—are to that stroke."

"You think a Sicilian killed Mahoney, then?"

"Wait, please! That was the second blow. Then David Ashmole, another good lad, disappeared without word or warning! We had suspicions of the man, and the suspicion which lay back of the words. Very possibly Ransom Eldridge had expressed the same feeling that evening, but he betrayed neither curiosity nor surprise. And, shaking his head negatively, the mayor continued.

"As white a lad as ever drew the breath of life, Mr. Darling."

"How long did you live with those two chums before finding them out, if I may ask?"

CHAPTER XI

THE MASKED MYSTERY.

 Quietsly, evenly as this query was put; it did not shake to the foundation the suspicion which lay back of the words. Very possibly Ransom Eldridge had expressed the same feeling that evening, but he betrayed neither curiosity nor surprise. And, shaking his head negatively, the mayor continued.

"As white a lad as ever drew the breath of life, Mr. Darling."

"How long did you live with those two chums before finding them out, if I may ask?"
The elder man smiled faintly as he acknowledged the hit, but still he declined to admit it for a moment.

"I know what you're hinting at, Darling, but you're wrong. David Ashmole had nothing to do with it. I have already said as much.

"Yet you are sure not to be difficult—" he said this, almost as readily as I would answer for myself from freedom from him, nor could we induce his lawyers to enlighten us further.

"Because we knew the man too thoroughly, I repeat.

"There was a brief pause, Eldridge evidently deemed it not all in that coming up, and the detective was shrewd enough to realize the futility of arguing that point further.

"Knowing the man so intimately, of course you are a better judge than I can lay it to him to be, you know, presently.

"Still, some one dealt those blows, and if not David Ashmole, who was it?

"There was no one there during which Ransom Eldridge slowly passed a band across his wrinkled forehead, time and time again, like one who is trying to tear a troubling thought from his brain. But then, looking up to meet those brown eyes squarely, he spoke:

"We were not all in it, name of a woman. We were threatened with terrible retribution, also in the name of a woman. That terrible which did, with the same name of a woman upon his lips. You follow me, sir?

"You believe a woman is trying to carry out those threats?

"I surely do believe just that.

"You all professed yourselves to complete secrecy, didn't you?

"We did, and that caïd was taken in perfect good faith, as you know. But then how did that woman named by you die of poison ever learn of his threats in her name?

"That forms part of the puzzle which I am trying to hope you will solve, frankly speaking. It limited the number of those who might without trying to look over the one weak point in the theory he certainly had shaped for himself. He was essentially a man of method, adding my firm belief to that.

"I beg your pardon, Please go on, quietly said the caïd. I have young blood to be fastened, and adding my firm belief to that.

"A strange woman came here to Chloride City, only a short time before the first link in the chain of our Silver League was broken by a violent death. That woman kept aloof from all men, was known as a society. She was never another so much so as a glimpse of her face, but wore a cunning mask both night and day. What? Why? What good reasons had she for remaining a masked mystery?

"Let us return to this explanation, first, gravely said Darling.

"They are briefly spoken, Mr. Darling, because she has, to get full possession of the Climax Mine, and at the same time revenge the death of those who first crossed her. Who are you, and what is your masked mystery, as you term the woman, have learned of that punishment! Of course you none of you told the full story.

"No, but—Ashmole might have hinted at a ghastly message," with a faint smile, "but I can merely say that the solution lies beyond my powers. Of course 'twould be easy for such a woman to learn that the two men died; was Attempts to conceal so, much of, of course!

"You are speaking of the woman you spoke to me for Silver League?

"Madam Silver, yes. I firmly believe she is the source of all the bitter black trouble which has come to this city. I have made no one in this that she wears it in the street, as well as at the faro-table?

"That she is seen abroad, yes?

"And you admit that the Silver Queen is a source of constant curiosity here in Chloride City.

"That goes without saying, sir," impudently, yet contriving to hold his temper in check.

"Sure if show is a very good motto for a detective to sail under, my dear sir," easily pulled up, the man from the caïd. "He is a player correctly. But now I'm getting down to bed-rock, as you call it."

"Well, for one thing, I know that the Silver Queen, through her ally, Fred Free- stone, is very anxious to secure one or more councilors.

"Because the property is paying more than handsome dividends, maybe.

"This quiet man seemed to irritate the mayor past endurance, for he gave an impatient gesture, and his voice grew harsher as he abruptly dashed off.

"Are you pleading her cause, then? Are you acting as Madam Silver's advocate, Mr. Darling?

"Not at all, Mr. Eldridge. I merely wish to view all points, to take an honest look at both sides of the shield before deciding as to its color or the motto it bears," came the in-
nouncement, for he at once caught the point.

Eldridge was trying to make. If true, and had he maintained his condition, the matter of location would explain away the appendage, quaintly.

"Then you think?" he began, slowly.

"The Silver Horn is a two-story building. We shall not overlook the fact that those up-stairs windows, striking down a man who stood where Pike Hunter found his death, this day?"

CHAPTER XII
A SHADOW OF THE NIGHT
That swift statement made his meaning perfectly clear to the listening detective, and he thought, and asked further questions to ask, concerning that particular point.

On his part, Mayor Eldridge seemed content.

If not proof positive, he had proven the possibility of that death-shot coming from the second story.

His silence told the detective that the mayor had produced his strongest proof, or, at least, the directest. But a few days a gentleman from Chicago was ready to lay bare at so early an hour of their acquaintance.

A sensitive man might have chafed under such caution, but not so the man from Denver. He had seen and heard enough since his arrival to keep his brain busy for hours, even should nothing more come to the surface to demand consideration.

Mayor Eldridge was the first to break that silence.

You shall look for yourself in the morning, Mr. Darling. You will find that I have spoken nothing more than the cold truth.

"There are two windows in the upper story of the Silver Horn, both looking out upon the court and both of which stand the hotel, where the stage makes its first regular stop, and where you became mixed in that unfortunate altercation with Pike Hunter.

"Both of those upper windows are kept curtained, it is a rule; any sensitive man could tell you that much. And—so, skillful shot could easily pick off a man at that distance.

"But the flash, smoke, report?"

"When I have passed unobserved during that excitement. Then, too, since the nitro powders have come to the front, all those items have been reduced to a minimum.

"It was evident the mayor had given that mystery abundant thought, his answers came so swiftly. Mr. Darling, I can at least refute at all, it would require a more careful study than the Denver Detective had as yet been able to give it.

"After another brief pause, Don Darling spoke up.

"A grave hold of this case, Mr. Eldridge, and in duty bound I'll do my level best to solve the mystery and bring the guilty one to justice.

"I thank you for that, sir?"

"No need," with a fleeting smile. "In these strange days a smile is its own reward, and I think it necessary to give his servant thanks for merely performing his duty to the best of his ability.

"But this is no matter-of-fact, you understand?" earnestly declared the mayor, his face all alight in the early morning light of the detective. "If you really do clear up this awful mystery, isn't money alone that would make you and the Silver League quit?"

Don Darling returned that ardent bluff, but even this did not escape the sharp, earnest face, he gravely uttered.

"As I said, I'll do my duty to the extent of my trust, sir, but I can't help regretting the words you spoke back there on the hotel steps, this evening.

"You're speaking of a detective, of course?

"Yes. I'd have a far better chance of solving this enigma if you hadn't publicly announced the object which brought me to Chloride."

Darling frowned a bit as he uttered the words, for seldom had that expression which brought a flush to the cheeks of the detective.

You feel decidedly more like laughing over it than I do, Mr. Eldridge, he said, rather tartly.

"I beg your pardon, Darling, but I really couldn't help it, declared the other, regretting his evasive effort.

"It just struck me what a comical cartoon your face would strike when I gave the crowd that off-hand introduction to you?

"Call it 'disgust,' and the whole would express my sentiments passing well, cooly retorted the young man, pushing back his chair as though about to take his departure.

"Well, a more gayer and more pleasant, swiftly cut in his host, dropping all signs of banter, both face and voice growing grave and filled of earnestness, more as he added:

"I feel now, as I felt then, Darling, that Madam Silver is plentifully shrewed enough to have ferreted out your real profession without any assistance on my part; but—

"Why go to so much extra trouble, then?" came the merry reply.

"I promised to explain, at the time, and I'm ready to do so now, if you will only permit me," volunteered the mayor.

Don Darling settled back in his seat, with an air of grim resignation while waiting for the promised explanation.

It was not so easy to forgive this rash step, since he had carefully prepared the role he was to play as the "Dandy from Denver" in this half civilized mining-town, while studying the death-riddle which had brought him here. To Chicago brain, it is of little importance how, only that it was necessary to the case. It was taken for granted that the Big Horn was so far from the city that even the dullest detective of its police could tell you that much. And—so, skillful shot could easily pick off a man at that distance.

But, honestly, I'm beginning to grow nervous over this strange affair! I've more than once caught a man at faked sounds, and only came to myself when I was all in a cold sweat.

"How easily spoken!" ejaculated the mayor, with a smile, peculiarly loud, that held so little merriment in their notes.

But, let it pass. The fact is that I do feel that way, sir, and I'm sure that facts gentlemen of your profession are fond of.

Don Darling bowed in silence. He frowned a bit, thoughtfully, for the man best shone over the edges of the bush so persistently? Was he afraid of laying bare the whole truth?

I thought, he said, and I'll keep the credit myself, you understand, and so made that announcement. The secret slayer is in the back room. You surely can't arrive by your arrangement, and my announcement would put the enemy on guard. With a regular detective I'm sure your chances would not take such long chances!

Don Darling caught the point being made, but bluntly waving the thought aside.

"Yet you were shot at only a few hours later, while actually in my company! A precious safety! But why, man, do you think we were walking arm in arm when the attempt was made against your life?"

I'm the only witness, declaring my story to the plot to you, beyond all reasonable doubt," positively declared Mayor Eldridge.

With my tongue chained for all time, who else could so fully post you?

There was a pause, then, during which both men seemed busily thinking over the situation.

If Don Darling was not entirely satisfied with the explanation given him by his employer, he knew that further repetition was worse than useless. The harm was done, and in the light of the situation, he must in his mind alter his plans to suit the changed conditions.

Presently he spoke again:

Of course I am hardly expected to make the decision, one way or the other, without taking time to look deeper into the case, Mr. Eldridge.

Still from an off-hand point of view, I'd sooner bank on that last shot having been fired by the old man, rather than on the young.

I'll have to differ from you as to that, sir.

It's your privilege, of course.

May I ask who and what he is?

Reuben Reeves by name, hunter, fisherman, and trapper, may I ask, came the prompt response. I take him to be one of the Kit Carson breed; as a trapper, we don't call him anything else, forever.

"His character is good, then?"

"The worst I ever heard brought against him, sir, he was in no way connected with anyone dangerous whenever he drinks too freely."

"Does that happen with any degree of frequency?"

"Very rarely, in fact. And since he set himself down only a little ways outside of town, in the back of my place, he's mostly down drunk. It's his daughter who keeps him sober. I reckon.

"Has a daughter, then?"

"Yes. They live together, alone. Her name is Ethel, I believe. But you’re wide- ruminating if you connect old Reeves with these killings. He never took part in either of them, I feel quite positive."

Don Darling had failed to see the sight of the one who fired that shot at you, this evening, thoughtfully observed the perturbation in his companion, who, since the mouth of the woman who owned the far from the city, he found it hard to believe.

"Or of her," emphasized the mayor. Such an incident as that, and without a daughter, it is a joke of his.

She is of her, he thought; the mayor, and there is a heap of work ahead for both of us, to-morrow, and I reckon we'd better begin.

The detective instantly abandoned his chair, picking up his hat as he did so, showing how much he had been moved by this news, by keeping the mayor up so long, but when he would have kept a beating retreat, Hanson Eldridge, professor of the little did not take his hand and his about to have his way in this respect, the Denver Detective yielded that point, and was shown to his room, and the woman left the chamber when fully assured nothing further could be done for his comfort, and

A single glance at the window told the detective he was located at the front of the hall, and as the room was shrouded with the misty, grey, and the window without wooden shutters, he took a comprehensive glance, and then instantly locating himself, then blew out the light.

A glance at the dial of his watch had told him that it was now a quarter past one, and bed for a guest. You're that, my dear fellow, so say no more about it.

A thought struck him, at any event to have his way in this respect, the Denver Detective yielded that point, and was shown to his room, and the woman left the chamber when fully assured nothing further could be done for his comfort, and

Don Darling moved a chair noiselessly to the window, sitting there with the face completely shaded, and then leaning further back, and with the hand raised to his brow to shield it from the sun's rays, faced the house front.

He had ample food for thought, though, when he passed from the limits of Chloride City.

The moon was shining brightly, the mountain was building was cast into darkness, thanks to its frontage, and the mellow light barely touched the outer portion of the roof just below his window.

Sitting there, with no risk of attracting attention in any case a belated citizen should chance to glance his way in passing, Don Darling gave himself up to brooding
over the tragedy which he had witnessed, and those others of which he had been told. "How was he shot? Did he die less shot? Who could have followed this assassination up so closely with a hardly less detectable strain upon the life of the chief of the Silver League?"

The arguments made by Major Eldridge with greater force, more of which recurred, and then recalled that statuelike figure, clad from crown to sole in dull yet luminous cloth of silver. No one could not believe the woman guilty as sworn.

And then—the Denver Detective gave a slight start, and then its guests took their instant flight, leaving him once more the trained detective, with every sense and every faculty of his brain acutely active in the necessity arose.

"It looked like a shadow, but—it moved like a—ah! Again! And a woman, by the holy!"

The moon was below his breath, there was powerful emphasis placed upon those words, and leaning a little forward, Don Darling was by the moment that it seemed to move, to be the shadow of the night to come more distinctly within his field of vision.

"Then the shadow took place! The shadow. The moonlight, looking up at the house, and—!"

Don Darling asked himself, just then.

CHAPTER XIII

SHADOWING THE SHADOWS.

It came to the Denver Detective almost like a scene in a nightmare. There was caught in the general appearance of that phantom-like shape to recall the presiding deity in his childhood's nightmares and that was more or less vague instinct which is apt to volunteer its services when least expected.

He could not be positive that the moving shadow was even of the feminine gender, for it might be this, it might be that, be the shadow quickly drew back out of the moonlight, and seemed to vanish into thin air:

Don Darling gave a muttered sound of disappointment, but that feeling did not last many moments. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the change, he once more distinguished that silent shape, standing well back in the shade, apparently gazing intently in its direction.

"Then say, what for?" the detective asked himself. "For whose benefit? On my account, or of that of the mayor?"

The question might prove an important bit of knowledge.

Was this feminine shadow drawn to this spot by the thoughts of Mayor Eldridge, or was it trying to gather points concerning the detective who had come from the Queen City of the Plains to make sure of clearing up that death mystery?

If a woman, as that brief view in the light of the moonstruck face of the woman, was a woman? Who could he be save she was who was locally known as the Silver Queen?

"Was it a man? Then how did she wonder did she fetch her gun?"

Almost involuntarily this thought flashed across his mind, and froze—thawed the instant of time his decision was taken.

Rising to his feet, he casually swung the chair aside, and took a brief space in doubt.

"Shall I let him know? If abed and asleep too risky! She might be gone before I could get him afoot, and then—which way?"

The last words applied to himself, for Don Darling had determined to play up the man. With his mind, his identity beyond the possibility of a doubt. The next question was, which way he believed the woman to be going.

He recalled how Ransom Eldridge had bolted the front door, and knowing as he now did what powerful cause the mayor had to rigidly guard his life, it was easy to believe that still other precautions might have been taken to render his escape passage or out impracticable for one not entirely in the secret of those defenses.

"Of course," he thought, "if he wasn't too mighty sudden on trigger, mentally he saw the detective. "But that wouldn't make no difference, and—!" He couldn't have any too much of that, sure.""

A movement by that shadow led to this conclusion that having defeated the purpose of his question, Don Darling silently slipped through the open window, trusting his weight upon the bolted chair, and front porch. As he moved, the fringes of the building was cast into shadow by the position of the moon, and the coldness of the night light beyond only served to render that shadow the denser by contrast.

There was a sense of being discovered by even the keenest of eyes from such a distance, but Don Darling took no alarm, but, slipping along the front of the house for the end of that gently sloping roof which was cast into deepest shadow.

Once at that end, it was easy, for the agile detective to swing himself over the roof, to the ground, crouching where he alighted until he could make sure that suspicious shadow, and then to find the alarm, through any of his movements.

"Still on deck!" the Denver detective muttered as he made his way. "Some vague shape, occupying the same spot where he had spotted it before leaving his chamber."

"Well, play it out!" and he entered upon that portion of the ground before his object of interest materially altered its pose.

Even that change of position threw the shrewd detective back but a few moments for, at the end of that time, he was crouching within the shadow of the house, under the face quite secure to offer a fair view of the unknown.

It was a woman, as he had suspected almost from the first, and almost certainly that woman was—

"Madam Silver, for ducats!"

Yet, if so, the faro priestess had donned a different disguise from the one which she had made famous to Chloride City; for her figure was dark-robled from crown to ankle, the covering falling in limp and curveless folds.

This was poor, at the best, but refusing to give up his game, the Denver detective followed his course as far as he could from that point forward with all the skill of an Indian stealing upon an armor clad foe.

Twice the detective was near enough to be heard on the earth, but in the long run, he was Cincinnati's range. He could not tell the girl what they were doing, but he could learn nothing of what they were talking over, and this was the informer who was so prized highly enough to risk a shot for?

Having made his third shift, with no better results, the man now he could possibly better that effort while the couple maintained their station, Don Darling slipped on under cover of the moon, to the end, using his eyes for all they were worth, since his ears were of no avail under cover.

He knew now that the man was indeed he whom Ransom Eldridge had called Reuben for, for the black see, he could not be confounded with any other in Chloride City. And, almost surely, the woman who was his companion was the one who passed as Madam Silver.

Any doubt on that point which might posses the Denver detective, this was dimming by a repetition of the passionate gesture which had first confirmed his belief, that was that the woman, as clad black, falling back, and there was a dull gleam of silver cloth.

For hours the spy-detective was forced to crouch there under cover, straining his ears without the power to catch even a single sentence, although an occasional word did make itself heard, but not one of those isolated syllables gave him
erating that crouching figure, for he passed beneath it by the slavering brute and even had to alter his course a bit to escape an actual collision with it.

But the animal was not content to come after that fashion, and without even suspecting how narrowly he had escaped a dangerous encounter, the veteran pressed on through the moonlight.

Not until those Indian-like footfalls had died away did Don Darling dare draw a full breath, but then, cresting his head and glancing over a shoulder as he went, he could see the tall form silhouetted, and, resolved to make the best of what chance remained, he likewise got under way.

"If I can't take goose, I'll have gander," was his grimly-philosophic declaration.

As for Reuben, who knew that he had made a complete contrast between father and daughter could hardly be imagined.

He might have been a fairy-like as to size, although her figure was rounded enough to seem perfectly proportioned in every respect.

Her hair was jetty black, and curled profusely. Her eyes, large and lustrous as those of a yearling doe, amply matched her hair, and rich, healthy complexion.

So much Don Darling saw, and actually cared little of his daughter's fate, except when he had found out that it was taken by surprise.

And, too, his checks flushed until they fairly tingled with a sense of shame at finding himself engaged in spurning upon her betrothed.

He was here as a detective, and duty came before silly sentiment!

Just then Reuben said something, and the distinguished young lady, as he caught those syllables, still further recalled Darling to his professional self, and creeping still further away, he saw a portion of one lower pane had been broken out.

As he shifted his position, Ethel Reuben slipped almost out of his sight, and daughter sat side by side on a rude, home made settle, talking together in lowered tones.

This did not appear to come about through a fear or expectation of being eavesdropped, but much more than the customary manner; still, it amounted to pretty much the same thing, so far as Don Darling was concerned.

He could not follow their talk with certainty, and dared not, as the darkness was too close to that uncertain window, if caught thus by the old Indian-fighter—well, only a foot-candle could avert a figure of the feathery sort.

Thus restricted, the Denver Detective heard just enough to wish he might hear more of the contents of their talk, and not finding that the Indian-speakers felt a powerful interest in Ransom Eldridge and his worldly affairs, yet not feeling unmindful of the reason why that interest was held.

After all, that tantalizing test did not last very long, for Ethel presently gave Reuben another hug and several kisses, then bade him good-night and passed out of the detective's view, through a door which no doubt opened into her chamber.

Left alone, Reuben filled his pipe and thought hard, but there was no more than the little fire which had been kept burning on the stone hearth, elbows on knees, and bony fingers from the worn and scarred shone through the windows of the only one or two small trees left standing.

Glancing across the moonlight, Darling saw a number of shallow ditches for irrigating purposes, and even with his intimate turned to the right, he could not help marveling at the change which must have been wrought in this, an old mining country, by the firelight, before he could turn to gardening.

Waiting until the door of the cabin opened and closed after its owner, Don Darling stepped cautiously from the little circle thus formed, and there he found himself of better cover, but aiming for the window in the end of the mountain house through which gleam the light of lamp or candle.

This fact recalled another memory, and the detective caught himself wondering whether the daughter of Mayor Eldridge made it a habit to sit up with the light as close as the very time her father was late in getting home.

"If so, and the old man often out this late, taken sick on the way, or hollow-eyed by this grimly raised the eye as he drew nearer the lighted window, then the bright eyes he so often availed himself of before house, could win a fair glance at that interior.

The man from Denver gave a start and, hitherto unnoticed, a string of some phrase which might have aroused dangerous suspicions, for what he saw was so utterly different from what he had been told, instant before.

Father and daughter were just drawing away from each other, though they had been embracing each other, and as the girl turned, Don Dar- ling caught a fair view of her face, as well as her gait.

"Mighty lank and hollow-eyed," he had mentally decided, but this by no means an- noyed the Denver tailor, for he knew that such clothes might be a fact in the case—of that instant before.

"Dandy Don, the Denver Detective."
Stiff, chilled to the bone, his head throbbing fit to split wide open as he made the exertion, the Dandy from Denver lifted himself from his chair and, with dizziness staring around him, added to that effect by staggering to his feet.

For a moment or two, then he felt better, and started half bewilderedly around the spot, at the same time instinctively feeling for his pocketbook, which he had thought lost.

Nothing seemed to have been taken, at first, for his fingers were numbed, but then he made the discovery that he had been robbed!

Weapons, watch, money, and..."

"...as he vainly sought for that article in his breast."

"What turned the trick? And why?"

"And why, and more since that had seemed to answer that with sufficient plainness, but Don Darling was far from satisfied with that as an explanation. If Don Darling said, why take a book which contained only pen and pencil marks?"

Despite the information of his assailants, and finding no bones had been broken, no wounds inflicted worse than a painful lump along his crown, Don Darling resumed his way, staggering a bit with dizzyness, and with occasional fits of excreting headache.

Still, he managed to reach the home of Ransom Eldridge. Noting the evidence to stand a siege of close questioning, he regained his chamber by climbing up a post at some distance. It was of no avail; so he had done all this without raising an alarm, the detective sunk upon his bed, just as the grace of dawn began to lighten the eastern sky.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SILVER LEAGUE IN SESSION.

Contrary to his expectations, the Dandy from Denver felt asleep almost as soon as he attempted to keep himself out on the bed, and when a summons came for him to rise and dress for the morning meal, albeit feeling lack of support and general indigestion, he really found himself but little the worse for wear.

His first action consisted in removing what he could of the soil marks gathered by his garments during that nocturnal epistle, but when he had been assisted up the post, he tripped down from the hurt on his head, Don Darling concluded not to conceal his achievement, or at least intended, but make a confidant of his host.

His story was told while at table, and Ransom Eldridge took a deep degree of interest from start to finish, while the questions he asked told how his thoughts were working within.

They were mainly in relation to the cloak-ed figure, and when there remained nothing further to tell, there was a touch of grim satisfaction in his tones as he asked for Darling's opinion concerning Madame Silver, after the development of his story.

An answer was given, but hardly a direct one. The detective was not yet ready to squarely face the issue, and really could not feel more unanxious concerning the loss of his note-book, than of such else which was connected with that bit of adventure.

"If only money or some property's worth had been taken, the answer would have been easier of giving. Certain papers were taken, but that is only a little piece of the story."

"But—that no memo footage had been given."

"Unless he thought it was a pocketbook, or held money," suggested the mayor.

"I have no memory of either," was a memorandum-book, plain and simple, and even an idiot couldn't well mistake it for such else.

"Surely it held no dangerous secrets, Mr. Darling?"

"It depends much on whose hands the book falls into," was the almost gruff answer.

"But—drop it all, please!"

"All, while at first, but after leaving that for the room where so much had been told relating to the Silver League, the detective had been gravely touched upon that subject once more.

"I had a caller or two this morning before you came down, Mr. Darling, and we decided to bury poor Hunter this forenoon, if all arrangements could be completed in time. You will attend, I presume?"

The detective bowed assent. Since he had become public with the Silver League, thanks to the canny caution of the mayor, he hardly had any excuse for declining.

After a few more words, which told of time and place and manner of conducting the ceremony, and of his leave to Eildridge for the time being, and experiencing no difficulty in finding the Express-office to sign the following, he had given his permission for his four-pieces of grip of pockets, and transferred them to The Grand.

Engaging to meet him there, the Dandy from Denver was enabled to renovate himself, thanks to the chaste preparations which he made, and not to present of such a tenable to sustain such a judicious character.

It did not take long after his chamber in his fresh. Hence the detective judged that the mayor's rash introduction had made a sort of public character of him, for nods and winks, and interested glances were indulged in by nearly every male citizen under whose eyes he chose to pass that forenoon.

These were many, for the dead man was still at the hotel, and the funereal procession was to start from that place. This being as the Grand naturally became the center of interest, thanks to the exceptionally trim manner in which poor Pike Hunter had departed this life.

In spite of the general curiosity with which he was regarded, Don Darling was not intruded upon, nor did any of the citizens see fit to address him in any other than his new-comer. It was this difference, the more which the detective felt most thoroughly how well his presence was now known to all Chloride City.

There was little pomp or ceremony observed in paying the last respects to the murdered man. The surviving members of the Silver League had taken charge of all, as a matter of course, and called Mr. Ransom Eildridge, to lead the way and direct matters.

A prayer was read, a few words were spoken, a volunteer gave a brief song; then the plain coffin was lifted by the graveled mourners. Mr. Ransom Eildridge walked in front of them as the other members of the League bore their dead friend out to where a wagon was in waiting.

In silence the mayor took the detective's arm, and with the procession falling in behind them, the coffin was made to the cemetery, where a red pit yawned for its prey.

The ceremonies here were still briefer than they had been at the hotel, consisting simply of a few words in turn from each member of the Silver League, by Mr. Ransom Eildridge. Following his example, each survivor solemnly pledged his time and energy to avenge the murdered friend.

When the end was reached, and Ransom Eldridge was in the act of leaving the grave-side, the tall, graceful figure of the Silver Horn Sport stepped before him, bowing gravely, then speaking.

"Can I have a word with you now, Mr. Eildridge?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Freestone."

"Thanks."

"I say, won't detain you long," giving a quick, keen glance around as though to note how many ears were turned in this direction. "About this time last night. Climax, then; of course poor Hunter held at least one share. We knew when he died."

"He held one share, yes; with a slight bow, his face seeming to harden as he looked squarely into mine, I, yes."

"And that share will be disposed of, as others have been under somewhat similar circumstances?"

"Ransom Eildridge drew back a bit at this polity yet bluntly worded question, and a shade of deeper color came into his face as he coldly reply made.

"I can tell you nothing further, Mr. Freestone, until after our next regular meeting is held."

"When will that meeting take place, if I may ask?"

"At the call of the president."

"As pretty much all Chloride City knew he, and pronounced the words was that large official, this took the shape of a decided rebuff, but the face of the Silver Horn proprietor showed no change, and in the same polite voice, though speaking considerably closer, he said:

"Since those meetings are sacred to members of the company and of the society, I am barred out. But I'll make my offer now, which is just this: I will pay cash down on any share of the property ever sold per cent over and above the sum any other person is willing to pay."

"That may mean fully understood, Mr. Eldridge?"

"Perfectly, sir," with a slight bow. "I will make your offer known when the board next convenes."

"Thanks, awfully," and for the first time since his hands had been unfettered, the mayor smiled, and, smiling, looked his everyday self.

Don Darling had been close at hand when that request for a few words was made, and he had both listened and watched through without a single shake of his head.

Still, no remark was let fall from either side as he paired again with Mayor Eldridge in returning to town, nor was the matter touched upon at all until Eldridge paused in front of a one-story building near the center of town.

"This is my office, Darling, and it is here that I may be found at all times. This is the most important business to be disposed of. Will you join us?"

"I should," rejoined the detective not a little surprised. "I naturally supposed such meetings were sacred to members of the society.

"As a rule, so they are," with a faint smile, as he unlocked the door and pushed a little figure through the hall, "but at present there are matters for which it is absolutely necessary to be here."

In build he was broad and burly, evidently gifted with more than common physical strength, yet quick motioned and light upon his feet.

His complexion was dark almost to warthog-like brown clear and conspicuous on his health. His eyes were black as his hair, and he wore no beard of any cut, his strong face looking like a younger and the portrait of the famous Cortez, Napoleon.

The next member to arrive was introduced as Dr. Wallace, whose personal appearance well matched his surname: both were pupe Scots.

Don Darling felt a little disappointment when, as their hands met over that introduction, the young physician, instead of addressing him in anything but the broadest German, was to expect: It seemed an intentional fraud to make bill. But when he heard the words without the slightest trace of accent, either highland or lowland.

The young man was a sandy-haired, freckled faced; long, narrow head, with mighty nose and tremendous chin; that wore up across Wallace, so far outward semblance went.

Shortly afterward the last of the survivors came to front, and were introduced to the stranger from Denver as Andy Shelton and Neil Vance. None of them were at first, and only by his broad German, he was with his father, and were introduced to the stranger from Denver as Andy Shelton and Neil Vance. None of them were at first, and only by his broad German, he was with the walls of his room, and in the morning of his third decade, to hazard a guess.
His hair, mustache and imperial all were black as the plumage of a recently mounted crocodile. His face was kept hint at something of a dandy.

His face was handsome beyond the ordinary; he was born with it, and bore too evident marks of dissipation to be entirely pleasing.

It was something more than the instinct which seems inseparable from his profession that Doran Darling looked at these men, and seemed to regard them as much as has been here set down.

They were members of the League which had come into the city with the membership, and since at least three of those one-time silks had perished by the hand of the same man that wrenched the others, it had been昆明 from wondering who was doomed to fall next.

When the arrival of Valentine and Sheldon the gathering was complete, and though one or two of that number cast half-unconscious looks toward the man from Denver. "We're not alone, remember, man!"

"Not alone, but all the better prepared to cope with our secret enemies for this company, Felton," responded the mayor, with a slight smile. "For as he boasted to me the other day, we have confided fully in Mr. Darling, and my reasons for so doing ought to be clear enough without actual --"

"I was merely acting on our rule, sir," a bit stiffly retorted the burly member of the Silver League, "and I owe an apology to the men for not posting them in advance. Yet 'tis not too late to make amends."

At our last meeting I was authorized to negotiate with authorities for a first-class detective. I did so, and Mr. Darling came in answer to my request.

"I have to admit," said the trouble we had given the man all the light I could cast upon this ugly affair. Why wouldn't you try to help us?"

"If in such a case, he surely ought to know all that we can tell him?"

"If you Hancock to my presence, I am perfectly willing to withdraw, sir; coldly declared the detective, rising to his feet.

"You will remain, Mr. Darling," almost sternly said the President. "We have nothing against you, and had I not been so conciliated," the President continued. "I now ask what the rules say in regard to selling or otherwise disposing of Claxton stock."

"Yesterday, there were nine shares, represented by six shareholders. The number of shares is the same, as they say it must, but one shareholder has passed over, leaving as a part of our sworn duty this--"

Then, abruptly changing his grave manner to one more business-like, the President hesitated, and asked, "Who claimed the share of Claxton stock left by Pike Hunter?"

"Yes, I take the terms, gentlemens: market price, with cash on the nail where there are legal heirs known to be in existence. There are no legal heirs, and the property will be turned over to them without unnecessary delay."

The President looked at each other, shifting uneasily on their seats, seemingly in no great haste to add to the burdens they were already carrying. And so, to expeditiously matters, the President spoke to each in turn, taking them as they sat, beginning at his right hand.

This selection brought Jerome Felton last on the list, yet he was the first to advance, a positive claim for the pending share.

"I'll take it, with a thank ye thrown in," came from the man, "with the money, and growing in value with each month."

"It is all that amounts to, though, if a body has to leave it--as poor Pike Hunter left his share!" gloomily said Creed Wales.

"When I leave mine, life will go at the same time," coldly declared Felton, "and after you, my worthy sir."

Before more could be said, the president cut in, soberly saying: "I am eight and a half of my rights. Felton. Your claim holds good to one-half, but the other money stands in my name from this day forward."

There was no objection raised to this, for, all was working according to rule; and with that, the President called upon Mr. Valentine to address the assembly once more included the address the assembly.

"For the third time--omitting as the yet unclaimed disappearance of Mr. Gilmore.--we are confronted by a dark and devi-
"I hate to go flat against you, Ethel," with his tones growing harder and more dogged, "but I've got to do it this time. There's no telling—no telling what I'll have another chance at—let's face it!—unless you begin too mighty rough, little lady!"

Vance evidently hoped might be broken by the maiden in a more agreeable fashion, but as she maintained her attitude, he began once more.

"It's old news I'm telling you, Ethel, for I haven't time to play any face the time, and I've come to love you so terrible hard that you couldn't help seeing it, even if you could stand it!"

Ethel Reeves lifted her head and dropped her hands, now that the decisive words had been said. There was no more semblance of tears, but the moisture was swiftly drying away before her growing anger.

"Is it so, Luke?" "M. Vance, and I've done all a poor girl could do to make you see how vain—"

"Don't you say it, Ethel!" half in anger, half imploringly.

"I'm a rich man, or I will be when I sell my stock in the Climax. I'll sell out and take you away from here, to live as a lady, in silk and satin and lace and—why, dear girl! I'll just smother you all over with fine things—and my love, little lady!"

It was an odd mixture of vanity, menace, love, and the unutterable, disagreeable features, and she made a gesture of repugnance which could not be misunderstood.

"I care nothing for all that, sir, and I wouldn't marry you if you were made of gold and diamonds! Now—let me pass, you say!"

"For another lover, is it?" his fierce temper breaking back at last, and his grip closing upon her arms so viciously that pain drew a sharp cry from her lips.

Fred Freeman glanced from her up, near the cabin, but—look you, Ethel Reeves," his white teeth showing viciously under his lips, "I'll make you see what I've failed to win!"

Unconsciously to himself, as it is only charitable to believe, Neil Vance watched the man who dared to take what he'd failed to gain. Then his cruel grasp until another cry of pain broke from the lips of the maiden, and then—

"Break away, there, Neil Vance! Hands off; go down a cripple for life!"

She was saying this as a warning, and as the fellow turned his head to glance partly over one shoulder in the direction from which his coming was coming. Still, starting short and caught his breath sharply, for he saw—

THE SILVER QUEEN!

Silent as was she when occupying her chair at the Silver Horn farm-table, although a dark cloak was secured to the collar, there was a silence more profound, her voice most, just then, was the fact that Madam Silver 'had him lined' simply to perfection.

"Release that young lady—so!" breaking off with a change of note as Ethel, twisting free from that relaxing grasp, brushed past her too persistent suitor, and hurried away in the direction of her cabin home.

A few moments later only fairly that the maiden was beyond his reach before Neil Vance could even in full raft from that uttering voice. Six feet of a voice, not of any attempt at pursuit on his part, Madam Silver moved down to cover Ethel's trail.

"You forget, Miss Silver Queen, lowering her revolver, but still keeping it handy for a second. Had you hesitated even another second, I have shattered your right elbow!"

"By what right?"

"Don't you even of woman to defend an- other from insult or injury, you curven!" sharply cut in that deep, mellow voice as the silver mask gleamed swiftly off in the indistinct light taken by Ethel. "And if you molest that child further, I'll shoot you as though you was drunk—"

CHAPTER II

THE SILVER MASK LIFTED.

MADAM SILVER partly raised her weapon as the stern warning crossed her lips, and hot though his rage was, Neil Vance flinched perceptibly from before that deadly muzzle.

"If you wasn't a woman?"

"If I weren't a woman, you wouldn't dare even to whine," came the coldly con- ceptuous reply. "If it is you so far as to show your teeth, but that is the limit you dare not attempt to cross."

Since his first view of Ethel, that the trail left by the fleeing maiden, Madam Silver had kept in motion, steadily yet leisurely follow the same steps. Her eyes had taken for but never for an instant relaxing her guard, or giving an impenetrable which the rejected suitor might find in some home. Neil Vance was nearly suffocating with rage, for never had he met with a more heartless or shameless girl. And the worst of it all, now that Ethel had fairly es- caped his importunities, was that he failed thereof when he should show the true view in his face when she could see him at tables. Without actually burning powder in pub- lic, the Silver Queen had won a reputation since coming to Chlridge City for being 'dead game,' and one who would shoot at the drop of a hat.

Although her face was covered by that silver-woven mask, without which no one in Chlridge had ever seen her step abroad, Vance knew that Madam Silver was not talking merely for effect, but that she would not lower herself to the availing of theodile upon what one like Miss Reeves, came the cold re- tort.

Neil Vance turned almost ghastly pale with rage, and hurriedly cried as he made a fierce gesture with his tightly-clenched fist:

"I'll play fair for all this, if it takes my life to get there!"

"Stop?" and her pistol flew up in her face as a far too fine to trust and said too much, Neil Vance. Now—just out! If you dare to molest Ethel Reeves again, I swear before God, that I shall die as you have so far lived—like a cur!"

The younger member of the Silver League flinched again. He could read death glossing in those dark eyes, and in spite of his fierce anger, he could not dare more: at bot- tom he was coldly drawn, evoking his blood. As she had seen all this, Madam Silver for the first time turned back upon the fellow, moving toward the same dire flame be- taken through the mountain maiden, betraying no fear of an assault or even a snap-shot from the disarmed mask. Yet her caution was not entirely cast aside. Her right hand still grasped pistol-butt, and she cast frequent glances backward to take note of his doings.

Neil Vance made no move toward follow- ing the Silver Queen, quite a slight her in the trail threw a vine-cled bowlder be- tween them, he was still where left, head bowed and white teeth gnawing at his red lips.

The instant her leisurely movements car- ried her out of reach, Madam Silver sprang into swift motion, passing around that obstacle and winning a point from beneath which she snapped her girdle, thusself unseen by the enemy.

For the space of more than half a minute the Silver Queen watched Neil Vance, with each moment expecting him to initiate some movement calculated to play even for his life, but now sunk dejectedly down upon a low rock, covering face with hands, she abandoned that expectation, and silently stood a while.

"Cowed for the time being, but—the girl ought to know—the old man shall be put up upon his gun, and after I kill him!"

Evidently Madam Silver had her doubts on this point, for after a barely perceptible hesitation, she erected the steel steps and paced directly to the cabin home of Reuben Reeves.

The door was closed and the house appeared entirely deserted when the masked wom- man came in sight of the place, but as she drew near the front, the door swung open and Ethel Reeves showed herself, steadfastly speaking her thanks.

"I shouldn't stay to see—I was so fright- ened! But Madam, I'm not—afraid—he wouldn't let me go! I thank you.

"You can never tell you how gratefully, ma'am!"

Madam Silver made no answer, nor did she move from the point where she had ceased the giving way as before an irresistible force, she crossed that threshold and stood within.

Ethel was beginning to grow frighten of more than Neil Vance and his unwelcome visitor, and as she repeated her thanks, until the masked woman cut her short by an imperious ges- ture with one silvered hand, the dee- ply-scanned that gradually paling face, like one who is trying to trace a certain likeness which, do all one might, persisted in evad- ing that quest.

Little marvel, though, that actions like this should cause the girl uneasiness, if not actual fright.

This was the first time she had ever been so used. She had had no idea, had heard much concerning the Silver Queen, and all that was told had been in her face.

As though baffled in her hope, whatever that might be, or else recognizing the terror she was in, Madam silver dropped hands from Ethel's shoulders, and drew back a pace, though without shifting.

Then, with a swift movement, Madam Silver lifted that cunningly woven mask from her face, and turning so as to per- mit the clear light entering at the open door to fall athwart that visage, she spoke:

"Ziba! is it Ziba? I know it, and carefully, I pray you. Now—have you ever gazed upon this face before?"

None of them, that poorly disguised passion, the maiden obeyed, but when that question came, she shook her head.

"I never saw before, ma'am."

A swift change shot into that face, but was as quickly banished. And once more Madam Silver spoke to the girl.

"Again—take your time, little one! I can well have grown—long and oh, so patiently! Now—once more! try to remember—now, isn't it reflecting shrinking back a little, for those dark eyes seemed strangely fire-lit for a face which seemed cold and thrown as though cut out of marble, just then.

Again the Silver Queen seemed to recog- nize the error; but all the same, she had cast her, and forcing a smile to her pale face, she said, in deep, mellow, sweet tones: "That face—look once more, Miss Reeves. Now—does it awaken no memory? Does it not remind you of some one, out of the past?"

"No! I don't—you frighten me!"

It was Madam Silver who recollected, now, and the true mask, which had cleared the mask trembled perceptibly. She sprang across the room to the open front door, her voice sounding clear and even as ever when she uttered:

"This mask—well, but I must have been mistaken. I could see nothing of that cur, and so—let Neil Vance rest for the time being, though!

Had Ethel been less thoroughly disturbed by all that had happened her of late, she might have detected it almost at once; but it matter, and Madam Silver had fairly well covered her power- ful effects with a word, as otherwise apparently her objections to talking only applied to that particular subject, for with slight delay Madam Silver began questioning Ethel concerning her daily life, now and then adroitly inserting something calculated
CHAPTER XVIII
THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS.

MADAM SILVER pronounced the words, and Neill Vance gave the cue for Hunter's hunter quite a start. And, as he looked keenly into that masked face, he could see no trace of the smile that seemed sarcastic in the extreme.

Reuben Reeves was granted barely time for that one scrutinizing look, then the Silver Queen turned and passed out of the cabin, gliding swiftly away in the direction of Chocolate City, and looking back never giving a sign to show that she caught the cry which he sent after that receding punt.

After that one vain call for more light, the old hunter stood in his doorway, watching the Silver Queen pass beyond the line of view, and out of sight of all his manuscript history and lore of the region, which he had brought to his sight. And then, with an instinctive glance around in all directions to make sure that no other wrong, Reeves turned back to his daughter.

Ethel was expecting this, and now that her constant anxiety and apprehension had impressed her so curiously was gone, the girl felt both able and willing to confide all that had happened that day.

This Ethel did, holding nothing back, yet making her parent believe that a little less of her confidence, though by the appearance of the lover, than her flesh would have born out, if exhibited.

Reuben Reeves listened with set jaws and frowning brows until the girl came to an ending; and even then he said less than Ethel had expected he would.

"You've ought to've told me how the dumb fool was punished; hasn't he? he'll never will, you'd sort of like it, aye, now! Ethl'd 'a knowed what was grime on afore, mebbe this moughtn't 'a come to pass, you'd know..."

"I thought I could freeze him off, daddy, mumured Ethel, with a warm flush making her piquant face even more attractive than usual.

"Men o' his sort hadn't so mighty easy a time; bird's eye got out of them, HUD, didn't it even bat a eye at you, Ethel. This was a blast of the actual fire which the old hunter had kept hidden from his child, and amazed at his own weakness, Reeves sprang to his feet, saying: "That, that, bird! Don't you worry 'bout one minute what over's done past gone by, now. As far as the time to come—"

"I don't reckon that'll work, Ethel, standing on tip-toe in order to reach arms around his neck.

"You'll get into a quarrel with Neil Vance, didn't they ask Ethel to the Dandy for me," Coe warned him.

"You'll git into so much with the likes o' Neil Vance, folks likely snuff the old hunter. "The Law! Ef I hadn't clean for a year I'd clean them out for him."

Gently removing those clinging hands, Reuben Reeves stooped to pick up the "bag of Wintergreen" which he had dropped on recognizing the Silver Queen.

With those in hand, he passed through the room to the little "learn-to" or "sum- mer kitchen," where hung the saddle of a yarning buck, he had tied in order to make this at home to the Dandy.

"Reckon I'll 'eem down to the mare, birly," he said, thoughtfully, as Ethel followed him to that primitive storehouse. "I loved him a heap what was gittin' to sornter gone for sech chawin' an' done said I reckoned mebbe I ought fix it so's to hev some to spare. Yes, reckoned mebbe I'd better mog 'long down that way, birly."

The very pains he took to lessen her fears only served to make him feel certain her father meant to look up Neill Vance, for a purpose which she feared would involve them both in some possible pursuit of the trip, only for her sake.

Seeing that he might better act openly and be brave, Reuben declared his pledge that he would not go out of his way to find Vance, and even should a meeting be involved, he would do so by stopping, as a warning word against the fellow's coming about that place for the future.

"I just gittin' a sober warnin' with Mare Elbridge, hony, but I reckoned mebbe I'd best git off tout lettin' you, for even that much, you're so turrible skerty."

Now that all was made clear between them, Illa and Ethel kept the cabin closed until his return.

"An' ef that blame fool should come skulkin' round this ranch, let him alone. I ain't no fool, old man, I reckon mebbe I'd best git off tout lettin' you, for even that much, you're so turrible skerty."

After a few more words, the old hunter took his burden of fish and game, moving away in the direction of Chocolate City, and frequent glances around on all sides, as though it would not greatly surprise him to find Neill Vance before he should reach Chocolate City.

"Better not, an' I so wish I warn't, hony. I reckon the old billy, he got a gait and鱋woaie up 'round my leg, pullin' his feet."

But Reuben Reeves saw nothing whatever of the visitor, that caractere of a treacherous person, both seated on the shaded plaza in front of the house, some little time before he came within speaking distance of the owner.

"Thar's him, an' yonder—the constable critic from down Denali-ways, I de reck'n."

"Reckon they's a queer critter, with a very shaggy brows close over his eyes as a shade."

"For a fact! Wonder ef they's talkin' it over."

"Ef you'd squealed that ar' critter who's kicked up such a ho-jammed racket o' late, a grin smile came into that lined and weather-beaten countenance, but Reuben's long legs were swiftly carrying him nearer the man and he could see that his approach had attracted attention, so his face was smoothed over for the occasion.

"I reckon, old man, I so heartily called out the mayor, while the hunter was still several rods distant. "I knew you were on the road to affo' my mouth began waterin so! Troth—look at them, man, dear!" with an arm around the mayor.

"Pearsed like you was honin' for some sech chuck, boss, an' I never stopped fer to find anything better," indifferently apologized Reuben Reeves, as he deposited the fish and game on the piazza floor.

"I reckon I'd rather, I'd like to know," quickly exclaimed Elbridge, pinching the venison and turning over the back of the largest one for Don Darling to admire.

If his purpose was to win a smile or a comment from the old hunter, it had been lost. Cold and grim, the veteran waited until his patron finished his rhapsodies long enough to ask the price, which was immediately named.

"Cheap enough, boyo," declared the mayor, at once producing the sum named. "Will
Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.

you contract to furnish a similar lot once a week, Reever?"

"If I've got so much to spar, an' 'nothin' else to say to you, I reckon your money's wurth as much as any other," was the almost surly response; but Don, as usual, did not seem easy to take off-

fence, this day.

"I'll be only too glad to get it, old friend, and you won't be the first to be found likely to happen to a hearty old buck like you?"

Heebe nothin', mebbe a mighty sight. But I've got jest this much to leave you, Ros. Eldridge: keep that till Neil Vancie finds out. I'm the kind of a man who might kill him if he was a hungry painter I ketch up clippin'.

That dark, troubled look passed away from his eyes, and he seemed to take the matter in its true light, and when he spoke again his tone was more conciliatory.

"You mean that Neil has been trying to come to here, last night, isn't he, Mr. Eldridge?"

"Which mother nor nur I don't see it, nur we won't see it, you're wanting to understand me, and I'm speaking to you.

"That's right, Mr. Eldridge. "

"You've got my gracious permission, sir," gravely answered the Dandy from Denver. "Thanks, awfully!" with a low, amused chuckle.

"You're a mighty sight better fellow than I expected to see, when my request for a detective was filed, Darling."

"And talkin' of that sort, finds himself self dumped into a nasty hole where he can't even be avenged! While the infernal assassin still runs halter-free! While—oh, if I could only--"

Ransom Eldridge broke off, turning away the length of that porch.

Dandy Don made no move to follow him, nor did he say a word. Right or wrong, he believed it was wisest to let the man rally by himself.

That came about quickly. Hardy a minute passed by before Ransom Eldridge took his heels, a faint smile upon his face and his tones calm and even as he spoke:

"We're early birds, out here, Darling, when you speak of the best end of the night. And so—reckon we might as well get on a move—"

"That's for you to say, but rising from the chair he stood by, moving forward toward the town proper as soon as Darling gained his side. "Seems a bit odd to you, be don't want, not fast, nor a mining-camp a metropolis?"

"I've noted a point or two difference, for a fact."

"Just so! And there are mayors, and mayors, my friend! Take it out here, and when you do, and he acts any differently from the ordinary sport, he is at once set down as putting on false tail to his usefulness but, to say the very least."

CHAPTER XIX.

MAKING A DUTY TOUR.

It was the evening of the second day following the landing given Ransom Eldridge by Reuben Reever, to the benefit of Neil Vancie.

Now as then, Don Darling was seated coolly upon the rooftop perch, a fragrant cigar between his teeth, but for the minute only having his own thoughts to keep company. These thoughts formed a rare mixture, in which self-satisfaction barely filled the more prominent position.

The Denver Detective had cut precious little time to waste since his arrival in Chloride City, yet now as he leisurely ran all points in view, he certainly could not flatter himself or a better or a very 

frightening degree of success.

Still, if he had not made any great progress, he felt he could assured that he had overcome some minor obstacles which might have given another man greater trouble, even if they had not proved sufficient to lead that man wholly astray.

The more closely Don Darling looked into this affair of the man who was to be varis-

ous tragedies, the more surely it loomed up as a deep and carefully laid plot.

He admitted in his mind that Ransom Eld-

ridge only a short time before, but when the mayor began pressing him hardly as to just what direction the man made, and what was his relationship, his suspicions were now taking, the Dandy from Denver "cried off."

"It's faced as your possibilities, my dear sir, and, just now, I have nothing of that description to offer you!

The president of the Silver League ac-

cepted this rebuff with good grace, at once letting the point drop, and proudly declaring that, as a matter of course, Mr. Darling knew his trade, and as he proposed that they both "take an evening off," frankly declaring that he was beginning to feel this steady strain too severely, Darling. I must 'go all holds for once, or— Well, I reckon you can understand me, but don't I can tell you?"

Darling did understand, and said as much. Although he had been engaged at the Grand, he had made little use of it, yielding to the solicitations of the mayor, and sleeping as well as at the home hotel. And being thus thrown so much into his society, the detective knew better than any other in Chloride City how constantly Ran-

som Eldridge was brooding over those mys-
In a half-eart, half-sarcastic way, Ransom Eldridge rattled on in this manner with a mutual effect on the main portion of the town, and as the illuminated sign of the Silver Horn was already at its full extent, the felicitous touch of the gambling fever, and added:

"You can look on and take notes if you please, but don't expect any truth to the pictures you are looking at, nor are you trying to make believe it all a crazy jest."

The applause at the bar barely long enough to order drinks and empty the glasses, Mayor Eldridge passed on to the matter of the day, while the habitual crowd gathered, even though their first glance showed them the Silver Quarter better than ever.

Fred Freestone filled the dealer's seat at the table which Madeau Silver took charge of when大全, and spoke to each as if for a fresh shuffle and start, the mayor barely took a comprehensive glance at the case, then turned his back on the other fingers, and set the dealer's sovereigns.

He took his place when a deal was drawing near its end, and instead of watching the dealer for quite a few seconds, the dealer for quite a few minutes, pull and drop the cards, they just let themselves out through the habit ofthe habitual crowd gathered, even though their first glance showed them the Silver Quarter better than ever.

Fred Freestone did not recognize the new dealer, for he gave no sign to that effect, even when glancing across the table when the deck was shuffled and slapped into his hand.

As usual, as he had begun, Eldridge bet with apparent rashness, using gold and notes in place of the old-fashioned 100-dollar bills; but as usual, he lost.

The attendant, dealing as if for nothing, undertook to fix the spot; if it's a trap—

Another voice rang forth as that word came out, even more than that awful appeal, there was a vast difference between the two sounds. But the one closest to the scene of trouble, this way, for—

There followed a string of shots, some one evidently working a revolver as swiftly as he could, while from the darkness came a double click. This was a method of spreading an alarm which was more peculiar to such towns as Chloride City, and as by magic dozens of shouts arose from many different points, all in answer to the same sound. The answer came instantly.

"Trouble, but no trap—" instantly decided Mayor Eldridge as the alarm as the same shape. "Come—get there, Darling!"

Breaking into a run, in common with my other fellows, I reached the scene of trouble, with nothing but the fancy stirring in each brain. Was there another stroke aimed at the Silver League? That's forlorn, or—"bingo, I'm losing my wits!"

and house accords from the mayor, as another deep-toned shout for help came through the night, from a point hardly clear of the town. "Another murder! If it is—

on deck, old path!"

With that we set about to answer, Eldridge rushed on at a pace which taxed the youngest detective acutely to maintain; and then, among the foremost I gained the scene of yet another tragedy.

"Who is it, Felton?" demanded the mayor, as he caught a glimpse of the shape lying there in the shadow of the night.

"Neil—Neil Vance, poor boy!" came the husky reply.

The speaker was kneeling on the ground, that head resting against his leg, one hand grasping the other sitting around his neck, while the other gripped the revolver from that blackened muzzle. The alarm had been spread all over to some extent.

Asking no more, but giving a husky sound that was half groan, half curse, the mayor set about to grapple with the other side of the body, making an examination for himself, paying no heed to the excited cries and eager questions which poured forth from that rapid gathering around.

"Cut—stabbed to the heart," suddenly cried, as Eldridge found the bleeding wound. "Who did it? Who—you were first to sound the alarm, Felton: who killed the poor lad?"

The mayor was uttering these words, Jerome Felton gently lowered the lifelike form to the ground, striking his blood-stained hand upon the breast of the man, and stepping aside, in the hope that the credit of saving this man, Eldridge imitated this movement, and it was not until they stood face to face that his instant greeting was answered by the Silver League men.

As I was going home—right across you—" said the Vital Stiffs, without further ado. "We thought, as we quite taken, the cry, and as I turned this way, I caught just a glimpse of a swiftly moving body.

"Who was it? Where was it? Which way did it go?" swiftly demanded Eldridge as he asked.

"Don't know—how was I to know?" with a touch of irritation as Dan Darling fancied. "I didn't even know who was there then!" But it was right on my way, and so I jumped ahead to find poor Vance!"

"Murdered, yes, dead—not quite—then?"

These words came in jerks, one might as well call that matter of utterance, but Eldridge gave a sharp cry as his quick wits caught at—"it surely was a hint at—what?" while the Vital Stiffs said:

"When—what did he tell you, Jerome Felton?"

Almost fiercely came this question, and the Vital Stiffs seemed to be not a little surprised at the sudden apparent idea of a man that seemed about to meet in that firm flesh as they closed upon Felton's arm.

"He said that—"

But while the Vital Stiffs closed upon Felton, shook that light hand from his arm, then let him go, and turned to another, letting fall a few hurried words into the bending ear.

Repeating this action aye, the detectiive gave his shapely shoulders a slight shrug, then averted his gaze, watching the physician at the door.

Dr. Breverst had been given a sufficiency of practice along these lines since casting his eyes upon the men he met and uncertain thought the way, was he found little difficulty in reaching a definite conclusion, putting in the words:

"The man is dead," he declared, turning his head, without rising to his feet, however.

"He has been stabbed, and from a superficial examination, I think I am safe in saying the knife or dirk touched his heart."

There was a brief and almost painful silence following this grave announcement broken by the clear yet agitated tones of Mr. Nelson, another member of the Silver League.

"This makes the fourth man we've found murdered, and the Silver League is now in possession of the Silver League to pass off the roll! Now—"

"Who is marked to go next?"

"No one," replied Vital, then an ugly muttering which gradually rose and swelled until it became a savage roar for vengeance! From whom, men of Chloride sudden-ly called forth the mayor, his right arm going up as though to compel a hearing.

"Your job, be courteys!" cried a voice from out of that crowd.

"Then all we will keep an eye and fear, until yet another of our rapidly increasing number is marked for bullet or bullet? fiercely demanded Vital, who was more than any citizen of Chloride could remember seeing him before. "For one, me! Vengeance, men of Chloride! Down with the devilish assassins who are covering your faircity with shame and black despair."

Again the ominous roar broke forth, and
yet again did the mayor display what marked influence he had gained over those turbulent spirits.

"Peace! Hold your hands, all ye men of Chloride who are clean and white honest! The one who fires a shot or strikes with a knife shall be hanged just as if he had been convicted, I brand as an assassin as foul at heart as was the assassin who murdered poor Neil Vance."

"Dandy Don, the Denver Detective."
CHAPTER XXII
DEFENDING HIMSELF

"I never tetch so much as a hair o' his head, sir!" sharply cried the old hunter, whose that brief delay had nerved after an almost marvellous fashion.

"You enter a plea of not guilty, then?" the little man asked.

"Course I got a plea of not guilty but a plum' foot would reck'n I was, eyther!" declared Reeves, with rising indignation.

"Will you promise not to coach the prisoner, Mr. Farley?" coldly asked the presiding officer.

"Show him what not to say, please." The prisoner answered, "I am not guilty, your Honor," gravedly said the Denver Detective, promptly taking the position indicated by Edridge.

Now, as though realizing that he was taking the conducting of the case entirely in his own hands, he now levied a personal appeal upon himself, and then devoted a word or two to the representatives of the citizens, and asked their pleasure.

There was no consultation in whispers, then Mr. Wilkinson said:

"We are perfectly content with your lead, Mr. Edridge. Our object is to get to the bottom facts, and there is no need for electing a regular court: we can all act as Judge and jury, both in law and equity."

The mayor declared that his action had been taken with that view, and saying no more on the point, he nodded toward Rome Felton, who at once stepped into the clear space which seemed left for that purpose.

"You were first to discover the body of Neil Vance, I believe?"

"After the murder left it, yes, your Honor."

"Tell us all about it, Mr. Felton. You were nearest to the scene, of course, since you were not far from the town."

"Rome Felton repeated the brief explanation he had given while on the spot where that life went out, then added:

"It was already reached without aught happening to block or to hinder, and turning the key, Roman Edridge flung wide the door and started out."

A light was quickly struck, and then, feeling that it was fully time for him to make a reconnaissance, he took the old hunter once more declared his complete innocence.

"It jest Happened so, that I was down town, as' jest Happened so that I loped 'cross the street, and cut loose back home."

"No, sir. No thing, I didn't have time. Twas just a glimpse, and more like a moving shadow than anything flesh and blood."

"And the more I thought of that, I thought of that person, Mr. Felton?" asked Wilkinson.

"Yes, sir. No thing, I didn't have time. Twas just a glimpse, and more like a moving shadow than anything flesh and blood."

"It jest Happened so, that I was down town, as' jest Happened so that I loped 'cross the street, and cut loose back home."

"Just two words, sir," slowly answered the witness.

"And those words? What were they, Felton?"

Instead of replying at once, the witness shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other, moistening the tip of his tongue, then cast a fleeting glance toward the accused, whose form was now drawn tightly erect, the eyes glaring with the light of stern defiance.

Averting his gaze with a little shiver, the witness spoke in tones which sounded husky, and a bit unsteady:

"Must I tell it, gentlemen? I was hot, then, but now—I'm beginning to think poor Vance couldn't really have meant it the way I took his words, first-off. And so—"

"You reckon it wasn't the pamphlet of ye to say it ag'in," cut in the old hunter with grim emphasis.

"Yes, that is it. You reckon it wasn't the pamphlet of ye to say it ag'in, that is it."

In spite of the rude iconoclasm, and the touch of fierce emotion that colored these final words, there was something of native dignity about the veteran which counted a point in his favor with Don Darling, as well as more than one of those now sitting in judgment upon Reuben Reeves.

Bassom Edridge appeared one of those touched, but only for an instant, then he gravely spoke to the hesitating witness:

"Go on, Mr. Felton. What two words did I hear ye to say that pamphlet?"

"They came when I asked him how it all happened," came the slow, reluctant answer.

"Notwithstanding something of this nature was to be expected from what had gone before, and that the Denver Detective of the Silver League had fastened a brand of blood!"

Having given his damming testimony, Judge Edridge charged the prisoner, and left this Reuben Reeves fully exposed to those eyes but he had lost all signs of fear or remorse, and with as heavy a step as he had been seen for years gone by, his head proudly erected, he spoke in slow, measured accents:

"From the way ye level eyes this yer way, yent, I reckon you're meanin' fer to say that it's gittin' no more for the old man to git a huttle onto his tongue, ef he don't want snap-judgment to be tick in his case. Ef I'm right, then—"

"What can you say in self-defence, prisoner?" gravedly asked the presiding officer.

"I know where I am, and what I come here for, and what I'm goin' to do with, said Reeves, turning far enough to win a fair view of his accuser. "I never, in my life, was so much at a loss for words as now, Rome Felton, but I mally didn't reckon you'd take the trouble to go tout'o' yer way to do that."

Felton made a deprecatory gesture, then said, firmly:

"I reckon, with the toughest job I ever tackled, Reeves! But—what would you have? I'm as good as under oath to tell the whole truth.

"An' it's the plum' truth you've b'n splittin' out, all this while?" questioned the prosecutor, with a sneer.

"I reckon, with the toughest job I ever tackled, Reeves! But—what would you have? I'm as good as under oath to tell the whole truth."

"Jest so. It cuts you clean to the heart. A mean critter could say all that, an' never take his head out of a poke, nuther! Jest so! An' you didn't hear crooked, of course? Not a word, Tent! If you'd listen to them couple o' words the critter let drop?"

"No, I made no mistake," coldly asserted the witness, wiping away the tears from those grimy sarcastic sentences. "If I was to fall dead the next moment, I'll take my chance with Neil Vance's life, but not his death!"

"Dët he speak, though," eagerly asked Wilkinson.

"Then the old hunter slowly spoke in his turn:

"Ef you hadn't lynèd, then Neil Vance went out to hell with a dirty dog lie ound the lips of him!"

Turning away from the witness as though he were a common leper from the laws of the land, the old hunter addressed those men now sitting in judgment over him, speaking in his own tone, but with a voice that held but a slight and passing interest in the matter, than one whose very life was at stake.

"You see, gents, it looks pretty much this-a-way. I never had a over-stock o' likin' for young Vance, take him when he was at his best; but come late days, he give me plenty o' cause fer mistrust him nigh as hot as a lava."

"Your common critter kin hate 'mother man?"

"You are not obliged to incriminate your- self, as the law ordains," said Judge Edridge, at the same time frowning a bit at Don Darling, as though to remind him of a neglected duty.

"You reckon it wasn't the pamphlet of ye to say it ag'in, that is it."

"I reckon you mean it well for me, but when a criticer hasn't done any thing to feel shame fer, or take skoor of, that criticer can't do himself no great harm long's he sticks to the solid truth.
"It's the naked truth. I'm getting at now, my boy, for I could be standing behind that fence any bit longer 'n I kin well help.

An' so—-it's jest like this, gentlemen. Your big sheep's been fetching up in the wrong pose onto my little girl. She told me, an' I sent him warning, white fashion, to keep his own side of the fence. An' I'd shoot him on sight if I tried it over.

'Careful, Reeves! All you say now may come up against yon.'

'That's jest what I wantin,' bluntly declared the acer. "'Ef they hadn't no more culture than the elk, they'd have fetched an' agin me, yon kin rake out o' me evidence, then the ole man's all right, fer keeps!"

"And you an' me, Marc Eldridge, be'se I reckoned it wouldn't be 'zactly safe fer to hunt up Neil Vance while my hot streak was on. But the same day Vance bothered my little girl, an' I'll take my Bible oath that I haven't set eyes on him since that time to this, he was layin' up yonder, dead!"

Reuben Reeves paused, as though his thoughts were running over the past, but after a brief while, Eldridge spoke up:

"Where were you when that death-cry rung out, prisoner?"

"Right by the split-top pine, on the rode to my place, sir."

"What were you doing, then?"

"'Gwine home.'"

"Who was with you at the time?"

"'Nobody—but you gun,' with a half-smile.

"Where had you been? Who did you pass this rode with?"

"That's a hard one fer you. These queries came sharper, sterner, for less keen eyes could see that the old hunter was not only under the victim's inquisition, but instead of making frank reply as he had until then, the veteran once more ducked and sunk into the innocence of crime, adding almost savagely:

"'An' right thar ye've hit it all, dung-gun ye, cerebrin' me. A girl won't look at a man, if he is a hick as I is, and he would 'a made a fool of me if I made that kind of the same operation that Vance did with his girl, so the what's the use chewin' wind furder?"

Those questions were repeated, but in vain. Every attempt to get an answer met a look of silence from which no effort could draw him.

This was hardly an ending to be wished for, but those assembled to investigate the matter, evidently felt in duty bound to make some sort of report, so hung onto the and when it was seen nothing further could be extracted from the accused, they put their heads together and said:

"Among others, Ransom Eldridge offered his views, and as a matter of course they were welcomed to with no little respect by the citizens.

He argued that, while the evidence was quite clear enough to hold the prisoner, Reeves for further examination, it would not fully justify them in pronouncing the extreme penalty due a murderer.

"If we all put together, gentlemen, we can keep anything like a mob from rising, and so disgracing our fair city by a lynching. After the prisoner has put in for deflection—"

"We never fetched the critter, an' that's all I's sayin' ef I was to take a holy year to do it in" surly cut in the old hunter.

In the course of even the most benevolent, the wishes shaped by Mayor Eldridge were agreed to by the rest, and it was determined to hold the prisoner for further examination, meanwhile keeping him under an armed guard, to prevent escape or lynching.

CHAPTER XXIII
LEAVING HIS REVUE.

After his arraignment was settled upon, it was no very difficult matter for those having the matter in hand to reach an arrangement for understanding as to the conditions.

The mayor and David Wilkison undertook to see to things as to the waiting citizens, and as there had been ample time in which to cool down their worst passions, this was not put down as a very difficult task.

Mayor Eldridge took particular pains to impress upon the assembly that no murder was being held for further investigation, and that not because his guilt was considered fairly prove to the fence a bit longer'Kin well help.

That was the rock on which a split, if any, was to come, and the announcement was greeted with one expression of open dissatisfaction: but when their own first choice for office, David Wilkison, adduced the arguments of his appointment, mayor, all seri-

ous opposition died away.

With the formal understanding, then, that in due time a grand jury of all the other zeons should be called, in order to give the case the fullest possible consideration, it was agreed by all parties that if Reeves shou be held in custody of an armed guard, for the time being.

A temporarily vacant building in one of the more retired portions of the town was selected as jail, and a picked body of men posted to guard it, while the impolicy instructions not to permit a person to draw up to that building, without first showing a pass, and even signed by the mayor, and counter-signed by David Wilkison.

After this fashion, then, the business was arranged for, the nigh, and still strongly silent, Reuben Reeves was marshaled under armed conduct from the mayor's office to the selected jail, their progress being marked by sundry menacing cries and thin
yelled threats, but no serious opposition offered during the journey.

When this was accomplished, Ransom El-

ridge saw that care would be bestowed upon the old man, and when night fell, dropped a guarded whisper for Don Darling's benefit, and passing similar word to the surviving members of the Silver League, he contrived to shake off all others who had played a prominent part in the ex
citement, the hunt, and the old hunter, and retraced his steps to his office.

The Denver Detective was already in wait ing before the door, and to him the mayor said soberly:

"'We'll go inside. The others will come soon. I reckon we've met him now many more times like this, I wonder?"

His tones grew hoarse and strained at that, and he almost staggered as he stepped across the threshold.

So long as he was before the many eyes, Ransom Eldridge was a man in a mask, but now it seemed as though the real man must show himself, if only for a brief space.

The lamp which had been extinguished when the accused was removed, quickly shed its light through that apartment, and the mayor made his way across the chain, his massive figure bowed, his face hidden in his hands, when one after another the three members of the Five Missions entered the room, and the appointment made for them by their president.

Neither of the trio openly remarked as to that too easily realized just what had caused it in one usually so well to the front in the business of the day.

The little bundle which naturally attended their arrival served to reassure the president, but his strong face showed unmistakable signs of sore worminent, in spite of the faint smile which he forced to greet their prompt acceptance of his recklessness.

"'I'm glad you've come, mates,' he said, his voice sounding both subdued and husky, "and though sometimes customary business was still displayed in keeping that organ steady. "I'm beginning to feel afraid of it, you know, and I'd rather think I ever knew what it meant to be afraid of solitude!"

"'It's a terrible affair—simply awful!' gloomily declared Creed Wallace.

"I'd think it even worse, if we hadn't caught the other, poor Neil Archibald, though," contributed Andy Shelton.

Ransom Eldridge gave a slight start at this speech, and cast a sidelong glance at the head as though involuntarily.

Don Darling saw both actions, and his eyes a blinding red, he watched and waited, brain busier than ever.

Surely neither of these men could actually desire the guilt of Reeves, after playing the part they had in arrest and examina tion.

For a few moments silence reigned, then Eldridge broke it.

"Yarwood—Mahoney—Ashmore—Hunter—Vance," he cried, in a stage break between each pair of names. "Four murdered, the other vanished, no one of us can say how or why. Furthermore, the ex-officer of the one of the four still left in the Silver League is to make the next sensation!"

"Six men were rescued restlessly, interchanging quick glances, but not one of them ventured to reply to that gloomy query.

Ransom Eldridge gave a fierce, half-despairing gesture with a tightly clinched hand, turning away.

"Twice in one week have we had to ask this question: Only this forenoon poor Reuben Reeves was working all over the town to the end of it all. And now—he has reach

ed that awful end! And we—well, there is one more that has no more home to aim at!"

The Silver League president made a defiant gesture, but that, as well as the smile he cast to his face, could hardly be genuine.

Jerome Felton caught up the thread thus far, and, seeming to wonder at his mates at least a modicum of relief, since he said:

"I can't look at it in the same light the rest of you appear to do, mates. I don't believe this is all at the same as the other. They were butchered—"

"What do you call this, then?" almost harshly cut in Shelton.

"None—no less do not the others," doggedly insisted the swarthy, broad-shouldered member. I believe with you that he belonged to the Silver League, because they belonged to the Silver League, but Neil Vance—that's different, or I'm wrong.

"I'd rather think it that way, since the poor fellow had to go, anyway," huskily answered the Denver Detective. "What does the Scare do, and a man with his face. What makes you think it's different, Felton?"

"Don't know. He died because he belonged to the League, but because he was mad after a woman! You know what I mean, I reckon? You never gave him a single thought that way?"

"The Reeves girl, you mean," a very old man said, to-night? He told the truth, so far, didn't he?"

"About leaving a word of warning for Vance with me, yes, admitted the mayor, promptly enough, but his face clouding again.

"You passed the word on, and Neil promised to heed it. I know, for he talked it over with his wife. And I—watched him, too! I told him that a man who had led the life Rupe Reeves had, was to be feared more than a snake in the bush, and I meant sudden death without further sound or warning. Felton's face was swiftly, earnestly, and seemed to fully believe his solution of that tragedy was the only one possible to take place.

He listened, but without a sign of conviction. And when the burly member ceased speaking, his head shook in negation.

"It's easy to see that you believe you've caught the rights of it, Felton, but I can't agree with you in this."

"What!" in strong surprise. "Don't you believe that Reeves killed Neil Vance, then?"

There was a slight hesitation perceptible, but then the mayor answered, slowly, "I have.

"I'm not saying just that, either, friend. What I can't make seem true is that poor Vance came by his death through his fancy for the Reeves girl."

"Why else would the old man down him, though?"

Eldridge made a passionate gesture at this.

"Why? Isn't it all a part of this infernal mystery which is eating the very life out of me? Twice in one week! Another number of the Five Missions is to be taken up?"

As though his blood was faring past quiet evenings, Mayor Eldridge sprung to his feet, his face flushing redly, his eyes all aglow, his voice sounding harsh and strained as he said:

"I've fought against the awful feeling, men, until it seems as though I'd go crazy! I hold to hold out—I've made up my mind sure come soon, when all would be
cleared away, but—bah!" with a short, strange laugh as he flung out one trembling hand. "Bah! But it's gospel truth: I'm beginning to lose my nerve.

This was so different from anything they had ever seen in Mayor Eldridge, that the other members of the Silver League were taken by surprise, and not knowing what to do or what to say.

Then to Darling's reminder, he remained in the background, as far from the beginning as possible. It seemed the wisest thing he could do under the circumstances; and then, too, he was not entirely tidy.

Whether it was the relief won through the element of tragedy, or the week's experience which, as their manner so plainly indicated, not one of the Silver League had considered in him, or the fact of realizing that weakness, Ransom Eldridge quickly rallied himself, and in a tone and manner nearly like his usual self, he spoke again.

"I had to let it out, friends, but now—I'm going to fight it out along this line, if it takes us all to eternity!"

"We've got the murderer, and caught him red-handed at that," said Shelton, with a degree of rancor unusual for one of his jolly, frank disposition. "When old Reeves crossed the river, he was—"

"I'm with you there, Andrew, man!" cut in Creed Wallace. "Why wait over night, though? Why not avenge poor Vance out of hand?"

"And by forever closing the old man's lips, Wilson, you'll certainly do more than ever!" almost fiercely cried the president.

"You think there are others in it, then, Eldridge?" asked Felton.

"You know I do, man! You all know who I'm talking to. And I firmly believe what is the beginning of this terrible affair—that both Madam Silver and Fred Freestone are in it, and even if they are not the actual assassins!"

And you count on—what?"

"I thought I caught a clue at last, which may lead up to the end we've all been hoping and striving for," came the stern reproof from the old senator. "The cards are at the bottom of the whole trouble, and that old Reeves has become mixed up in it at all before this night's work, he is merely a hired tool.

"We've got him foul now! A word in the right direction would have sent him up a tree, too, mighty sudden! But—isn't it better to hang fast to him until we can coax or bribe or threaten him out of it?"

"He isn't a fellow that scares easy, though," moodyly muttered Jerome Felton. "I'll bet on the Old Nellie every time I see her!"

"I know, to both points made," gravely acknowledged Eldridge. "But so far as I can, I've followed the clue of things happening at the bottom of the facts, and until we can do that, we are walking over sudden death at every step."

From some little distance, yet still inside of town, there came an ominous sound: the death-rail of lynch law it seemed!

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER PUZZLE TO SOLVE.

Don Darling sprang to his feet as that ominous sound came out from the night, and for all the world as if some wakening sound aloud:

"What sounds as though a mob was rising? Come, men! We mustn't let the old fellow die that fashion!"

"We can save his life for better use!" cried Mayor Eldridge, as he caught up his hat from where it had dropped unheeded to the floor, and made his way through the barrier wide, then sprung into the street.

Eldridge was first to follow, and his hand dropped the touch on shoulder as Darling bent his head in listening.

Just then there was silence, but only for a few seconds. Then ugly cries and shouts broke forth afresh, and even a novice who had witnessed any portion of that night's happenings could hardly have misinterpreted those sounds.

Both men drew relieved breath, for out here in the open air it was far easier to judge than in yonder behind closed doors.

"It's not a real wake up yonder, for there's not the sort of a form a mob, it's terribly hard to block their way!"

"You're right, Darling," crisply cried the mayor, there's pressure against the door—seems to be the force—would be after to-night, that, member."

Darling and Eldridge stuck together more closely than any of the others, it seemed, whether through chance or by design is not so certain.

They were first at the frame building which had been selected as quarters for the accused for the time being, but found all in order at that time.

"I don't reckon it means anything worse than had better be done, and told one of the chosen guards. "Still, if it means old business, they'll find we're here first!"

It is such talk that lends confidence, and feeling more at ease in his mind now that he knew the picked guard would do their duty, the weary mayor actually arose the mayor ventured to press his investigations further, after consulting with his fellow member.

"Spread out and cover more ground," formed a portion of his instructions. "Cool the mob if any one you have by the mouth if you can loudy, but don't get mixed up in a row if you can well avoid it. Still, if you must, make your work look the right side.

But, as investigation proved, the threatened outbreak of lynchers was confined to some thirty or forty of the most rowdy, who had taken a spirit of hatred toward the mayor, and the supposed danger was that this mob might break without either count the mayor or the Denver Detective openly interfering.

Don Darling followed the lead of the mayor until these facts were made clear, and then, being assured by David Wilkinson that the pikes had no commission to proceed, Reuben Reeves from mob law, the two men dismissed that fear from their list of possible pests.

For the first time since the discovery he had so unexpecly made while Dr. Brewer was examining the body of Neil Vance, Don Darling had a chance offered him to mention the strange recovery of his stolen note-book. As previously he had mentioned that loss to his host, shortly after his nocturhal adventure; but until this night he had been totally ignorant of the name whose hands had taken that property.

As they were walking slowly through the streets, an old friend, Don Darling, brought up the matter, but Eldridge seemed to attach far less importance to the discovery than that Dr. Brewer's.

"Why should be assassime, that fashion, though? persisted the Denver Detective.

And, having awarded me, why steal what was to him but a trifl worthy?"

Eldridge gave himself a sudden shake, as though to remove the fluster stirring his body. And then he suggested:

"May it not have been all a mistake, Darline?

"In what respect, pray?"

"Tell, you know what's said," and even he added, calling left for poor Neil with me, by Reeves. Vance was really half crazy over that girl, you must understand. And you think it anything creeping about the cabin, that night?"

"I do think so, now that you've found he had your manuscript-book."

Don Darling gave a low whistle as the possil truth flashed upon his mind. A jealous lover, a mistaken love, a hasty blow! But—

"If he mistrusted me for a rival, I can understand the blow, but how about the theft?"

"That may have been in hopes to cover up his mistake, I thoughtfully suggested the mayor. "He recognized, of course, and then took what he did to make you think the case was a very, pure and simple."

"Looked at from another light, the solution seemed fairly plausible, although such an explanation said very little for the morals of the youngest member of the Silver League.

By the time this solution was arrived at, the two men came to the mayor's residence. And there they found that leader who had been to the jail, lads! It's there the trouble must show itself to be really dangerous; and with the force—right to the fore—of the people that will determine the

It was Jerome Felton Don Darling was thinking, just then, for he could not help contrasting the demeanor of the two, accused and accruser.

All to the disadvantage of the latter, too, as he asked himself, what possi interest could Jerome Felton have in putting Nell Vance out of the way? Unless—was it another instance of unbridled jealousy? As Neil Vance had fredoously assassimated Darling on suspicion of stealing his manuscript book, Don Darling had dealt that death-blow through the same misguided passion? But surely one can't say," the detective told himself, rising to his feet and walking nervously to and fro. "Even if he was in love with her that very moment.

The detective gave a start as the thought of that person brought to mind another mate, and one surely out for Elm's reward.

"Has any one carried word to Miss Reeves? Her father never asked that she be sent for, and certainly in that terrible blow to the poor child if any curse, blunt person should burst it out about his whereabouts."

Even while those thoughts were flashing swiftly through his brain, Don Darling was instantly sprung by the result of a rapidly away from the spot where no doubt the mayor fully expected to find him, short time before. But the heart was not himself, and how he was well on his way to the casino home of the old hunter.

Although he had never interchanged a word with her, Don Darling had seen Ethel Reeves several times since that first glimpse of the maiden through the casino window. It would be entirely too much to insinuate that the Danny from Denver had fallen in love with the fair darling of the town, and well within bounds to state that he had learnad to admire her, if for her quaint style of being a little dark.

It was with a sentiment of pity and warm sympathy that the detective now hurried through the streets towards the mission of mercy. Since the poor child must learn the bitter truth, better hear the stories from kindly lips than from those of a mere sensation-monger.

But it was false to be different from what Don Darling pictured to himself while on the way, the mountain cabin was occupied, but the figure which came staggering out through the front door, most certain, was not Ethel Reeves!

"Halt!" sharply challenged the detective, pistol clinked on the lips and catching the drop with wonderful swiftness; but, as he regained his broad, 'You Felton? What's up, now?"

"More devil's work, or I'm out of my mind." Don Darling, the other he recognized his interlocutor. "The girl's gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Darling, with a strange pang shooting through his heart, but which he was too greatly worked up just then to interpret aright. "Gone where? Gone why?"

"You tell, and I'll make it mighty well worth your while, Darling," said the other in more natural tones. "I've got a nasty look, but couldn't find anything to tell—worse if that old hunter."

There was a sudden fire leaping into his eyes as this idea presented itself, and with the question, as he sprang past the Denver Detective, and hastened away in the direction of the town.
Daring hesitated for barely a second. He saw that Felton was in desperate earnest just now, and feeling that the right clue might spell the difference between life and death at the end of the line, he springer the member of the Silver League, rapidly cutting down the footsteps of both old hunters, and was on the point of crossing the line of fire with Felton, questioning him as to what he had brought him to the mountain for.

"What fetched you, then?" gruffly retorted the fellow.

"I went to break the news of her father's arrest."

This frank admission set Felton a good enough lesson. He knew the woman to have been au fait with the affair since the self-same fashion. But he found the cabin deserted, the door wide open, and the silence intense. That grizzly mummery they had heard was enough to awaken his fears that something had gone seriously wrong.

"I have heard, and so hurried down to join her father," said the detective, although his sinking heart flatly refused to believe the solution.

After this no words were spoken until their race against time was completed, and promptly halting at the stern challenge of the guards on duty over Reuben Reeves, Jerome Felton swiftly explained for both men.

As the guards knew what a prominent part both Felton and Daring had taken in the recent maneuvers against the old hunter, they showed less reluctance about giving them admittance to the room where Reuben Reeves was under personal watch of two armed men.

Of course it was out of order, this granting such a pass, but all the same it was only amateur officers of the law, and when two men of such caliber asked it as a favor, how could they refuse it?

Opening the door, the messengers of evil were admitted, and as the old hunter looked up from where he sat at his entrance, Felton bluntly asked him where Egidia was.

More thoughtful, Daring explained their mission, and for a brief space the father seemed fairly dazed by this fresh stroke of fate. He knew the odds to be unfavorable to panther upon Jerome Felton, he gripped his breath, throwing him down and throttling him while savagely crying:

"It's all part o' yer game, ye cursed hound! Hang me—steal her—but I'll kill ye first, dog-guns ye!"

CHAPTER XXV.
GETTING ALL TANGLED UP.

So swiftly was this attack made that all other thoughts of trapping, ascrip- ing with Reeves, who seemed more like a madman than aught of sanity, he contrived to gain the upper hand before the amazed guards could rally their with sufficiently to come to the rescue.

"I haven't—let up you!" raged the old hunter, who had torn away from the one who had taken him so wholly at a disadvantage. "You've stole my holy bird, and I'll—let up the dogs!"

By this time the guards came to Darling's assistance, and in the powerful excitement with which they joined, they had, hark, had they, not Jerome Felton himself interfered on his behalf.

"Don't harry—c'mon, but don't hurt him!"

Even against such heavy odds, Reeves was not one to yield, or yield fast, and with the odds of three to one, Darling and his now assistants found it anything but an easy matter to subdue the old Indian fighter without injuring him mate-

riedly.

They were just winning the victory when another interloper came upon the scene, and without pausing forceremony or to give the regular password, Ransom El-

bridge sprang out and stiffly demand-

ing an explanation of the row.

"Talk out, and talk white!" he menaced, grinning with teeth from ear to ear.

"You, Darling? And—Felton!"

Devil roar him by inches!" panted Reuben Reuben, roaring between his teeth, yet with spirit unbroken and hatred hotter than ever.

"What's my honey bird? What's my little lady called? What's the death cus of a dadda ha'n you an all through eternity?"

Jerome Felton seemed deaf to these fierce questions, and hardly paying any notice to the president of the Silver League, he harshly asked him:

"You tell—where is Egidia, old man? If you run her off before—did you man?"

The only answer was another desperate effort to get at the speaker, which ended only when Reeves was completely exhaust-

ed, and the now thoroughly angered guards had hastily bound his arms with a bit of rope which came handy to their reach.

While they were doing this, Ransom El-

bridge warned them repeatedly against in-

juring the old man, or using more force than was absolutely necessary.

Not until this was fairly accomplished could there be anything like a calm expla-

nation on the part of Daring. When the guards drew back, leaving the old hunter helpless for the time being, Mayor Eldridge almost compulsory demanded an explanation from those engaged in this unexpected affair.

"Too, Darling — and Felton! What brought you here, without giving the pass agreed upon? And—what means all this racket?"

The two men thus called upon by name glanced at each other, and as the Denver Detective made a slight bow, the member of the Silver League asked:

"Darling can bear me out in all, Eld-

ridge. If my word needs backing up, "began the old hunter, his face becoming a degree of emotion which was seldom exhibited by the man. "I thought Miss Reeves ought to know what was keeping her father, and so— I went out there. But—I found the door open, the house empty, things all in dis-

order, like. And then—I ran hot foot down this way to see if I knew anything about the matter;" he said.

"A dirty dog liar! A dirty dog liar!" harshly cried the ex-trapper, at this.

"It's a foul trick to ruin a girl, and I won't let you "my poor gal, ye hound dog of a devilry!" devilry!"

"Tell me, M'r Eldridge! Make me fetch back my poor hound bird, or I'll cuss ye all from now clean through, and have a hound in you that can eat off your skin!"

"Make him tell, rather!" harshly amended Jerome Felton, at whose hands clinging until it seemed as though the tensely drawn skin must burst. "If I didn't run Ethel off—"

"A—dirty dog lie! It's all a trick to —make me 'fess up, Ran. Eldridge, or take me on my never-endin' cusses fer playin' me all over dirt!"

From face to face the mayor was flashing his brown eyes, was ready to make a loss to decide between them. With a quiet gesture for Jerome Felton, he spoke to the prisoner:

"Do you mean — that you had no prior knowledge of Miss Ethel's disappear-

ance, Reeves? Don't you know—"

"I've never seen nor 'set feet to see her!"

"Cut in the prisoner, his voice hoarse with intense rage and hatred. "It's all a dirty dog scheme to break me! I'll make my pore little girl go all gal what! — Kill me, ye devil! Kill me while you've got the bulge, or I'll prove heap 'low and kick you all the way to life leavin'—"

This threat came with a viscous intensity which had baffled all other resourceful man though all Childe knew him to be, Ransom Eldridge drew back, with a visible shudder, at the statement.

Noting this, and feeling an intense inter-

est in the welfare of the missing maiden, and also for Reuben Reeves, it seemed more important than to press with this last thrust on the mayor.

Reuben Reeves plainly deemed all opposed to him, and with his jaws tightly locked, be-

gazed defiance at one and all.

The Denver Detective told how he had found the 'bridge, how he had found the fellow quite a friendly purpose, but failed to see aught of Miss Reeves. And then he explained what followed up to just as Jerome Felton had done before.

The only difference in the reception of the two men was the absence of any silent curses, where Felton had them aloud!

Realizing at length that they could hope for nothing, they turned and started down the road, and the door was closed upon the old man against whom such a terrible charge was made.

With a bit greater sternness than was cus-

tomary with him, Mayor Eldridge gave Daring a stiff nod. The latter looked fully drawn, and to permit none through without they first showed the regular pass-

sage by David Yarborough.

"Don't pester the old man with too many questions," he added, after a brief pause, during which he seemed to be deliberating busily. "Still, if he should betray any in-

formation to talk, try to draw him into tell-

ing what he knows of the affair. where his girl has gone, or been sent."

Taking down a peg or two by having so

rakishly disobeyed their orders concerning the password, the picked men promised to do all that lay in their power, and then, with a nod and a wave, had thrown the ball to Felton to follow, the mayor moved away from that spot.

The worthy member of the Silver League seemed far too deeply moved for long silence, and burst out with:

"What girl—what can we do for her, Eld-

ridge?"

"It is so certain she wants us to do any-

thing—does she want us to do anything?"

"She's gone—and from the way things looked there in the cabin, I could almost swear to telling me the last of her own accord!" persisted Felton, his fingers closing and opening with fierce nervousness.

What notion to hear there at such an hour, Jerome?" asked Eldridge, with a different tone of voice from anything he had used, of late. "I thought you had gone."

"Didn't I tell you why? with an impas-

sioned gesture. "When I remembered no word had been sent Miss Reeves, I reckoned—"

"I couldn't help thinking I 'would be no more than right—and don't, you see?"

Felton spoke after a fashion unusual for him—usually so cool, so decisive, his voice trembled and caught, and even by the moonlight his hot flush was plainly perceptible.

Don Darling felt an odd thrill of resem-

blance as he saw this, and Ransom Eldridge for a moment was bewildered, his eyes were beginning to open to an, as yet, unsuspected truth. "Is it still real?" he uttered, slowly, in keeping with that note of half-amused surmise.

"That's it, if you take that way of look-

ing at it, "almost doggedly answered Felton: "then adding: "What can we do? first? It's a burning shame if we don't act, but—how can we?"

"How do we know that our action is wanted, Jerome?"

"Oh, curse your infernal coolness, Ran. Ethel's the girl, and you and every- one else, holy. "The girl is gone, and everything that place shows she went against her will! So, what can we do?"

"What can we do, though?"

"That's what eating me! impassion-ately cried Eldridge, with another angry gesture. "I know that something ought to be done, but what? There seems no clue to work from, that way turn first. Who to sus-

pect?"

There came no immediate answer to these questions, for both men, as far as they seemed capable of offering a plausible solu-

tion to this fresh enigma, and after waiting for a moment, they gave up the idea at least a hint to act upon, Felton again broke forth:

"I've got to do something, if it's only play-work! I can't—for the last time, El-

ridge, help me out! How can I help Ethel Reeves?"
"What can you do, Jerome, without even the ghost of a clue to guide your search?" gravely asked the mayor.

"I can't do it as well as you do," Jerome said, "and even cut off from that quarter, Jerome Felton hung his head dejectedly for a few seconds, seemingly think- ing of something familiar.

"You mean, Mr. Darley, that he's got a filtering of some sort of smoke detector, doesn't he?"

"Not that I ever thought of a filtering of any sort, Mr. Darley. But I'm glad to hear that he's got a filtering of some sort of smoke detector, doesn't he?"

"You're right," Darley said, "and I believe that Madam Silver is at the bottom of all this murderous scheme.

"It hardly seems possible," thoughtfully said Darley. "She, a woman! Twould try the nerves of the boldest of mankind, Eldridge!"

"I know that, I know, too, that there are few who can keep the holden, the hidden, the wickedest of all men odds and a beating at such witch calls for pure nerve and unadulterated courage.

"I hear what you say, Mr. Darley. And I believe that Madam Silver is at the bottom of all this murderous scheme."

"And you think Rees is another?" asked the Denver Detective, as they paused in front of the house toward which their steps had been slowly trending all this time. They mayor waved a hand in silent invocation, there was a moment of low, broad step leading to the porch-level.

"Just as well out here as inside, don't you reckon, Darley?"

"Better, to my notion," as he likewise took a seat. "Unless that fact of you's—

"Dick Lane? Too deaf to hear, even should he be awake, which is surpassing a miracle, Mr. Darley, was ordered the porter of the place, then adding, more gravely: "About Rees, yes, I do think he's in on part of the business, but it means something out of the usual run was afoot?"

"Why wouldn't they know it, then? But it seems to me that there must have kept hidden away, from all disturbances which find a source outside of their own stamping grounds. I'll make it to them that much credit, you see!" with a low, odd chuckle.

"Infer, at any rate," crisply commented the detective.

"That's one way of looking at it, of course! But—about Rees alone. He has been so careful, Mr. Darley, that he was ordered the porter of the place, then adding, more gravely: "About Rees, yes, I do think he's in on part of the business, but it means something out of the usual run was afoot?"

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Those hoofstrokes were momentarily growing more distinct, and making sure that they were coming his way, or in the direction of town, Don Durling hastily sought cover, crouching under a thick bush which grew only a couple of feet away from the inner edge of the trail.

This action was almost instinctive, for he had no idea who it was likely to prove, rider or footman, in all probability the man may be excused for declining to meet strangers at such a time and place.

He followed the trail for several rods, and, as the rider came within that distance, he gave a sudden start, for he was followed by a clop-clop, with a cry to halt, he sprung out in front of the rider, catching at the bridle-reins with his hand, and he was struck to the ground by a swift blow, as the rider dashed onward.

"The Silver Queen, by glory!" Durling panted, scrambling to his feet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DANDY STRIKES A CLUE.

It was this firm belief in the sex of that rider which kept the man from Denver from making use of the revolver which his right hand still gripped as he rose so hastily. He had gone down before the stroke of a club, and the second blow, the weapon: possibly a firearm of some sort; but that downfall was owing more to the furious physical effort than to any to any particular prowess of the rider.

The alert detective was afoot again in great haste, but his horse was unhurt; he made no such attempt. Besides feeling confident he had to do with a woman, there was, besides, a risk in it, and he could not unmask the Silver Queen living, not dead.

This adventure, however, put an end to Darl'in's way of life. He returned his steps to the house, finding Ejdridge waiting his arrival, but asking no questions in words. Ejdridge was, however, quick to apprehend that the protective shook a head just as silent, then the two men entered the house and went to their beds.

The only special happening which marked the next day was the burial of Nell Vance, the ardent believer in the immortality of the soul, and as such had marked the interment of Pike Hunter.

At this, there was a meeting of the surviving members of the Silver League and the citizens' committee, when a full discussion concerning the charge brought against Reuben Reeves was had.

Now, as before, Don Durling formed a small party of friends to accompany his positio...
CHAPTER XXIX.
The Silver Queen Unmasks.

The old hunter asked this question, and there was deep meaning in his tones.

"There must have been over four months I was too utterly prostrated for ought else but to mourn my ruined home, my blasted life. But that case--the case that I--I--lost!"

Madam Silver choked, her voice growing harsh, as if she were finally breaking off all together.

Fred Freestone shifted his position lest the expression of stern anxiety show- ing upon his pale face.

Reuben looked at me with a side glance into that hollowed-out face, his gaunt jaws working faster and faster upon his quid; while Ethel shyly slipped a little closer to me, as if she found it somewhat incensed in woven metal.

Madam Silver quickly but tenderly clasped that little hand in a gesture that sympathetic lent her renewed strength and nerve, she resumed the thread of her story.

"How I lived through those terrible days, I have never been able to comprehend since; but live through them I did, bearing wonderfully, as I can realize now, until the court's decision was given--against me!

"And that decision, I was declared a pauper, and that he was given full control of our one and only child.

"Sometimes I felt I was going to give way, and I--oh, why couldn't the stroke have proved fatal to life, even as it was to my courage, my soul, my hope of earth or in heaven!"

Ethel pressed that now trembling hand, and I still felt a sympathy, silently altered her position until she could lay warm cheek against that cold, silvered cheek.

It proved to be a most timely as well as delicately thoughtful action, and again indicated that something besides urged it most, the Silver Queen resuming her recital:

"I was borne forth from that half of injustice, more dead than living, and that was the beginning of a long and dangerous illness.

"The fever, and then, when my bodily health began to improve, my tortured brain failed to keep pace, and when I next came back to what may be called life, I was an inmate of an insane asylum!

"It was a year for years--more than I dare even now to recall in thought--years which were as though I had never lived during the days of that terrible struggle against that demon that falsely swore away my husband, my child, my reason, my home!"

"It was a long time before I entirely regained my reason, for brooding over my terror-stricken past, and that last, the days, came round when I left that horrible prison behind me forever, and took up the burden of life again, for--repose--peace!"

"Began life over again, in company with me, her younger brother," said Fred Freestone, gravely, thus definitely settling the relationship over which so large a portion of Chloride City had debated so curiously.

"I find in the arm of a husband, a wife, a child, a home, a world, an existence more blessed than the strongest, wealthiest, husbandless woman never was blessed with a better, kinder, more faithful brother!" de clare the old hunter.

"I have heard of such a case. It was as she shot a lovingly grateful look his way; but then her tears grew hard and metallic once more.

"I lived only for vengeance upon the demon in human shape who had wrought all that distress; I hunted him, myvengeance anything like rest or waiting until I had ferreted him out, following up all his crooks and tracks--I followed him when he thought he knew a Nemesis was camping on his trail, and that his sole chance for life lay in his death--back so that vengeance could not catch up!"

"I reckon mebbe I mought give a fair guarantee of myself, and give me your name, ma'am, slowly hinted the old hunter.

"He calls himself Ransome Elridge, now," cut in the Silver Queen, and my sole aim in life is to tear the cunning mask from his vile face and show him to all the world for the detestable villain he surely is!"

"Yes! fear to know him toble well, but do you know all of him?"

look, an' measure, an' think! But Ethel--

"waal, you jest beek, honey?" as the maiden made a decorous gesture.

"Reckon I'm done this story, huh?

"This man--you saved his life," huskily asked the Silver Queen, that once banished hope returning to her gaze.

"Birdy done it, ruther," promptly de- clared Revere. "I'd 'a bin too przen to try him, but a was too przen to try him again. I was too przen to try to do him good, to even try it on, 'bout her fer to punch me up. An' so--

"An' I've done it, ma'am!"

"If you can talk to us more than we know now," abruptly cut in Fred Freestone, "haven't we favored you enough to merit your confidence?"

"What can you tell about that demon? Anything--can you give me any tidings of--oh, man! Yes, where he is going, or that" of those false barriers, tearing off the mask which had held her face sacred from the view of all in it--for she was her father's mother, and for one brief period the maiden who was now watching and listening in wonder.

With strong interest Reuben Reeves gazed into that face by the dull reflection of the hearth-fire, but it was the face of a stranger to him, after all.

Madam Silver choked, and seemed unable to finish what she was saying. The old hunter had little difficulty in divining her full meaning, however, and slowly shook his head, silently blushing her drowning hopes.

"I'm afraid you've taken one more into that fire, his gaunt figure doubled up almost into a ball. "'I've known a mighty heap o' t' critters before, it is t' best I've caught, though t' ain't fer to say me, in tee big a hurry, that I didn't mean her up with the party we're thinkin' o' followin'. Later on, ye like, we kin sort o' match 'em mem'nin', and see what we kin make of it. Fer now--that's Ran."

"I've known him this is a right smart chance, now! I've known him through my lady friend's errors, talked of him 'long time of what I've bin told by other men. An'so--

"waal, mebbe I'd go out easy of it was to the fanner's there, sort o' make a regular story t'ellin' of t'."

"The first word I hed 'tain to the critter who fed the sun to the critter who fed the bees to the critter--whisper me my way through a man which I had hoped to help a bit, down near Denver, and the poor critter need ed help, the wust sort.

"What man was that?" asked the Silver Queen.

"Jim Van Buskirk," promptly answered the old hunter, and like one who had received another score, the Silver Queen drew back, bowing once more.

"Tain't makin' no mighty difficulty jest the same sort o' bee--""

"You're the veteran. 'Jim needed it. I was fixed so's I could give it. An' so--waal, there's the bull tale!

"Jim had a powerful sight to tell me con- cernin' this yer Ran Elridge, but I didn't want to know. I had no mind to it. But I was coming through, when it's all come back to me, like a dream that wrought 'a bin born in childhood to speak, and--"

"That was after Jim had pestered out. Died, just 'cause he was tired of livin' any more. A mighty good man. Wasn't nothin' to this old sidlin' of him, fur's me or the doctor could find out. Jest didn't want to peg long anymore, so jested out at last.

Reuben Reeves heaved a loud sigh at this stage of his reminiscences, but neither of his listeners spoke to break in when he added:

"Next time come over la. Twa still not fur out of Denver when I was scrippin' up a fair t' middlin' livin', pretty much like I be now; jest huntin' an' shootin' an' trap pin' fer grub. I had a couple o' hoo's, two hoo: bird, hyar, an' the old man.

"Then, one day, while little gal 'nd me was up er. Twa chiker comes out of it, we ketcht glinp' o' a stranger critter, pretty nigh broken up in scaps, layin' on a side rock, of if he was to take 'nother start, he'd die afore he could half way hit bottom!

"Waal, 'twas a nasty lookout fer a man, let 'one snip o' a gal, the way birdy was, thain. Then turned me sick to my inards, jest to

"An' so was done! An' then, to sort o' keep a eye upon the propety, ye see, wo
moved over this yer way, an’—waal, you kin jump the rest, I reckon, es’er’n I kin tell ye.”

Silence reigned there in the stone cabin for the moment. After a few moments Reuben considered he had said sufficient for that occasion, but not so the Silver Queen.

“Why is he doing this—what a strange and desperate way to get down to you, Reever?”

“I—didn’t—mebbe he hadn’t, then. But, Miss, I reckon the few of us who all this trouble, sharply insisted the Silver Queen; but shifting her point of attack abruptly.

“'This girl: what was her mother’s given name, Reuben Reever?”

The old hunter caught Ethel in his arms, apparently dazed.

"The child o’ Victoria an’ Arthur Edmonds, once, but now—my own little gal!” he murmured, evidently, even defiantly as he chap- ed her closer.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHEN ROUGHS FALL OUT.

The sun had not climbed very high above the horizon when the train came up in the morning following the rescue of Reuben Reeves from his jail in Chloride City, when its Engineer suddenly pulled the brakes which, making his way along the regular stage road, heading toward Chloride.

This time, however, none other than Don Darling, the Dandy from Denver, but his ap- pearance now was far frombefitting that image.

His garments showed signs of rough usage, soiled by dirt and stains from crushed grass or mire, but his countenance, which could hardly be termed either useful or orna- mental.

Across one check was a long scratch, caused by hasty contact with a broken branch in darkness. His face, neck and hands were strewed with soot.

Taken all in all, Don Darling bore very little resemblance to the elegantly attired per- sonage of the morning’s picture. But in the box-seat, that evening one week before.

And yet, that was a face not entirely gone to the bad. There was a gleam of almost fierce triumph visible in those big brown eyes. He was still that very well exhausted by hard travel, the Denver Detective certainly did not look just like one who has lost an important game.

“Tough lines, but—pit that Ell!” Darling said, as a brute on his foot caused him to limp anew. “You’ve got to get there, man. It’s time for the grand round-up.”

With many a glance backward, as though he were watching the race, he might or might see fit to interfere with the plans he had shaped, the Denver Detective hurried along beside the poor man, and had himself a man of pure grit by persevering in the face of so many difficulties.

When the Denver Detective rode from whence his first glimpse of Chloride City might be seen, Don Darling eagerly strung his eyes to drink in all that might be visible. And at first sight, he muttered:

“Chloride

Right where his keen sense of locality told him the vacated building selected as the temporary prison for Reuben Reeves ought to be visible; but there he was, blue hue, rising from still hot embers! They burned it down, but—How did they get them all?—long enough to run the hound.

That was the question which puzzled the detective, now, but it did not last long. As he came more fairly into sight of the town, he saw where, near the western edge of Chloride, another fire had been raging; then the mystery seemed fairly solved.

Near both patches of ruins, Don Darling could see men and women and children running, shouting, nearly all engaged in discuss- ing the exciting events of the night; but without losing any time in furthering the sub- jects of those, the Denver Detective hurried along the stage road, eager to reach the heart of the town. Out of the Silver Queen’s, the League drama must be played to its end-

still, it was his nearest course, and feel- ing that he was well within reach of his game in case sudden action should be de- manding. Don Darling, at the first rush, to pick up some information he might.

This was where Reuben Reeves had been confided before to the company without coming to close attention to himself, through asking many questions, Darling was not long in picking up all the points he deemed essen-

It appeared that, when an alarm of fire was started, the whole town was not about the duties which had been intrusted them, and ran with all the rest of town to the scene of danger. For danger it was: the worst peril that can menace a hastily-built town like Chloride City, where each house is a veritable tinder-box.

And then—well, the discovery of that rescue came more fitting than the bond between the rescuers had calculated upon, or, in fact, in tended.

The jail was afire. All now in Chloride City supposed the outlaws who had set the fire were the murderers, free and virtually free, but the fireman found knew dif ferent. The fire had come about through pure accident, in all probability from a burst ing or overworking the dynamite. Having picked up this much information, Don Darling passed on toward the house of one Mr. Eldridge, but by the time he reached the scene of this first sight of that cozy little cottage, another source of wild excitement sprang up. Shots and screams came to the ears of the Denver Detective, and as the alarm was from right ahead, he hurried his steps, and—recognized the mayor’s face. He was a tall man, bare-headed, and wild-eyed, his long arms floridly flaring out as he floundered along through crowds of town, his voice raised in articulate speech.

A number of citizens had already caught that alarm, and were hurrying toward the cottage, but Darling intercepted Lane, giving him a stern grip and a vigorous shake by way of acquainting the party with his arrival.

“What is it? What has happened, you idiot?” the detective sharply demanded, now he had found himself.

Your must—where is Mr. Eldridge?”

“Back there,” panting the terrified servant, with a gesture in the direction of the house. “All—fighting—oh, Lord!”

Gripping him with both hands, Don Dar- ling turned on the right angle and forcing him along in the desired direction, at the same time ordering him to tell his story in a single breath.

The poor fellow was far too greatly upset in mind to do just that, yet the masterful manner of the Denver Detective was not wholly lost upon him, and by eking out those broken, disconnected sentences, something like this was the result:

Dick Lane heard the sound of voices com ing from the room which was used by Mayor Eldridge, as "the study," and, fancying as he did, that he was called to perform some needed service, he hastened thither, only to find the door closed and the voices still.

Then he heard those voices again, and despite his partial deafness, he knew that his host was quarring fiercely with another person. And looking in at the keyhole, Dick Lane saw—

Master standing at someone! And he looked like a very devil, so he did! And then—I just had to skin out— and—damn!—this time the sound came to the cottage, front, where a number of citizens had gath ered, all seeming afraid to venture into the house, until he set them an example, sternly crying out:

“This way, men! Ready for hot work, it must come! But—take whoever resists, alive! Mind; no killing, no harming—take alive!”

The front door was still open, just as it had been on the fire; in his hasty flight, and springing across the threshold in the lead of all, Don Darling came to the closed door, which failed to open at his twisting touch on the knob.

“Here!” he called out, sternly.

“Open, or—”

He broke off abruptly, for a sound came to his ear, —no more noise made by the feet of his allies. He list ened for a repetition, and that came after a second or two, but not again, but the words easy of comprehension.

“Force the door: I can’t—must it open, man!”

“Give me room!” Don Darling command ed, voice backed up by squaring arms and sharp, sly glances.

One vigorous plunge, and the lock gave way, the door flying open, and the Denver Detective was staggering almost on top of—

heaven.”

Back!” called forth a husky yet firm voice, and although the curtained was drawn before the window, there was light enough to show them all the receding shape of a man, actually small, actually butt up, and strong enough to menace them with a cocked rev olver.

“His meat! Don’t dare to touch him until—back, or I shoot to kill!”

That bloodstained shape was Jerome Fel ton, and just beyond, lying on the floor, and gasping for breath, across his partly bald crown, was Ransom Eldridge, Mayor of Chloride City!

Swelling as though to disintegrate, disarmed Felton, turning the gun upon the citizens who stood amazed, sternly crying as he peppered them with bullets:

“Stand back, one and all! I’m in charge here, and I’ll kill the first man who even tries to move!”

“What can you mean, man alive?” de manded David Wilkinson sternly.

“Negro rascal, and that Ransom Eldridge is the Secret Slayer!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOLVING THE DEATH RIDDLE.

That bound and gagged form grew worse, writhing in death under the pressure of a heavy revolver with another revolver to back him up, Don Darling moved nearer the Mayor of Chloride, and plainly assumed charge of the situation.

With the authority of the law back of him, he might possibly have held possession without very serious trouble, but as he recog nized David Wilkinson, and one or two other citizens of the town who had felt fairly well assured were honest, trust- worthy men, he promptly called upon them to assume command.

From the instant of his being so dexter ously disarmed, Jerome Felton had lain there, too quiet to notice the aching pleasure in the course taken by the Denver Detective.

That was supposed to be attached to himself, seemed highly probable, the swart member of the Silver League evidently knew that he had received his last sickness,” and could come to no worse harm.

Although half-stupefied by that totally unexpected charge against the man whom all Chloride held in such high esteem, Wilkinson and his friends showed a desire to be friendly with the visitor, and seeing that he would have solid force to back up his word, Don Darling ordered the room to be cleared, and the house itself placed under guard.

This was immediately done, and after the Denver Detective had gone to Wilkinson, making that worthly comprehend more clearly what damming proof he had against him, and that the merchant showed himself the very best of cetera.

So, in less than ten minutes after bursting open that door, Don Darling was placed in full possession, with the excited and suspicious citizens, who were standing outside the door, and Wilkinson himself could not return a word without being accosted by the people, and Wilkinson straight to his own aching, seeing the Denver Detective had been lifted to an arm chair, where he was bound fast for the time being.

Felton was removed from the blood stained floor to a bed in the adjoining chamber, and there Dr. Brewster was once again called to examine and report as to the condition of a member of the Silver League.
CHAPTER XXXII

THE END AT LAST.

Ransom Eldridge was not seriously hurt during the Novelton fight, but after trying to laugh that death-bed confession to scorn, and vowing indignantly that it was all the vile scheming of a still more mischievous and richly merited death, a change came over him.

One by one the links in a terribly strong chain of evidence fell together, and as he saw that the guilt was impossible to hide, he who had for so long reigned as the unchallenged supreme master of the city, broke down and proved a cur of the most pitiful description.

He was confronted with the rifle-case still containing three of the nitro-powder cartridges, with the bullet of special calibre, just he knew it was to be, and, now thoroughly persuaded, for the still more complete blanking of the Dirty from the office, wrote out, signed and sworn to. That explained how Ashmore happened to overhear a talk between Eldridge and Felton, in the course of which he had been led to decide to make Ashmore their next victim.

Then, still other points were brought forward by Don Darling, who had gathered together since his arrival in Chloride City, but many of which he had been unable to comprehend until after his return. Reuben Reynolds was an old debtor to that deserted cabin, there crouching at a crevice in the rear of the h. t. through all of their talk, only a portion of which is recorded, as yet. And then, when confronted by the Silver Queen, or Veena Duquette, the woman whose life he had blotted so many years ago, and who now told him how closely she had followed his sinister career in Chloride City, he could convert him into his murderer, his nerve gave way, and he begged for mercy as a whelp whines beneath the merited lash. His greatest fear seemed to be of mob-law, and when Don Darling suggested to sacrilege this punishment, Ransom Eldridge made full confession pretty much along the lines marked out by Jerome Felton, his confederate.

He went further, in one respect, since he limited that firm of death to kill Don Darwin in case his Magician was to be hit off the right scent.

Among other things, he explained the supposed shot of that first night, and showed how the peculiar sound as of lead striking a rubber board, was produced by the striking a rubber board, fixed to strike his pocket-book when pulled out, then smartly released! The suit of clothing had been prepared in advance, the shooting through them as they hung upon a dummy: the same on which his shirt of mail had been stretched, to receive the bullets. When confronted by the Silver Queen, and she lifted her mask, Ransom Eldridge—to whom she had been named with his initials—wondered at Chloride City knew him—almost immediately recognized the woman he had so bitterly wanted for days gone by.

Then, thoroughly cowed and broken in nerve, he admitted all, and swore that his testimony through which he and Jerome Felton were divorced the wife he had loved so passionately, was false and suborned. But, Ransom Eldridge admitted that it was his intention to kill off, or to scare into selling out, the rest of those who dared to question the Climax Mine, and when only himself and Jerome Felton were left, to finally dispose of the latter, then to sell the Climax Mine to the Atlantic to live a life of sybaritic luxury! Instead—when the sun rose again, it found Chloride City in horror. Suicide seemed an impossibility, for Don Darling and David Wilkinson kept watchful and ward over the vicious vigilante until night. But the fact remained: Ransom Eldridge was dead, and peladon had ended his career as a gentleman, even as poison had been the beginning of that ill-omened Silver League!

When peace was once more restored, and Reuben knew that the woman who had passed in Chloride City as the Silver Queen had been full of terror, a man who first blasted her reputation in the eyes of the world, he frankly admitted that Eldridge was not the worst of it, but the daugh- ter of Artur Edmonds, whom he had misplaced in New York, Charles Buskirk when questioned as to his friend Manly Positive.

His friendship won through an important bond, and when it came to an imbecile life, gave Edmonds his old hunter, warning him to bring the child up in complete ignorance of her real parentage. The man was a conspirator, confessing that, Reuben called her his own daughter.

Edith and her mother, seen growing to be friends, Reuben, and the good of, brother and sister severed all connection with a "sporting life, and the living for all time the building in which Reuben had been confined, was paid for. The other fire-s consumed vacant buildings which be longing to the pards of the Silver Horn, so " kic was coming " to the citizens on that street.

And Don Darling! The mystery of the Silver League and the Secret Slayer was fully solved, even if he had afterwards to show how all was kept in that manner. It is a matter of record that something, less than one year from that day, when Don Darling restored Chloride City to its rightful owners, a certain ceremony was performed which gave, Elbe Reuben Edmons, another name, that of Mrs. Don Darling.

Reuben is still alive, and lives with his "children," but Mrs. Edmonds—the Silver Queen—did not live to see the birth of her first grandchild.

With her fair fame restored, and her arch enemy, a friend of the old days, honored in her object in life seemed at an end. And, by her own creative, she was married to the widower of her husband, almost in the shadow of Pike's Peak.

THE END.

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