CHAPTER I.—Wealthy and highly placed in the Chicago business world, denjamin Corvet is something of a realuse and a mystery to his associates. After a stormy interview with his partner, Henry Spearman, Corvet seeks Constance Sherrill, daughter of his other business partner, Lawrence Sherrill, and occures from her a promise not to marry spearman. He then disappears. Sherrill learns Corvet has written to a certain Alan Conrad, in Blue Rapids, Kansas, and exhibited strange agitation over the matter.

CHAPTER II.—Corvet's letter summons Conrad, a youth of unknown parentage, to Chicago.

(Continued from last week.) Alan looked up quickly. "Mr. Cor-

vet was-7" he asked. "Corvet was-is a lakeman," Sher-

rill said. Alan sat motionless, as he recol lected the strange exaltation that had come to him when he saw the lake for the first time. Should he tell Sherrill of that? He decided it was too vague, too indefinite to be mentioned; no doubt any other man used only to the prairie might have felt the

"He was a shipowner, then," he

"Yes; he was a shipowner-not, however, on a large scale at that time. He had been a master, sailing ships which belonged to others; then he had sailed one of his own. He was operating then, I believe, two vessels; but with the boom times on the lakes, his interests were beginning to expand. I met him frequently in the next few years, and we became close friends."

Sherrill broke off and stared an instant down at the rug. Alan bent forward; he made no interruption but only watched Sherrill attentively.

Between 1886, when I first met him, and 1895, Corvet laid the foundation of great success; his boats seemed lucky, men liked to work for him, and he got the best skippers and crews. There was a saying that in storm a Corvet ship never asked help; it gave it; certainly in twenty years no Corvet ship had suffered serious disaster. Corvet was not yet rich, but unless accident or undue competition intervened, he was certain to become so Then something happened."

Sherrill looked away at evident loss

how to describe it. "To the ships?" Alan asked him. "No; to him. In 1896, for no apparent reason, a great change came

"In 1896!" "That was the year."

bing in his throat. "That was also the year when I was brought and left

with the Weltons in Kansas," he said. Sherrill did not speak for a moment "I thought," he said finally, "It must have been about that time; but you did not tell my daughter the exact

"What kind of change came over him that year?' Alan asked.

Sherrill gazed down at the rug, then at Alan, then past him. "A change in his way of living," he replied. "The Corvet line of boats went on, expanded; interests were acquired in other lines; and Corvet and those allied with him swiftly grew rich. But in all this great development, for which Corvet's genius and ability had laid the foundation, Corvet himself ceased to take active part. He took into partnership, about a year later Henry Spearman, a young man who had been merely a mate on one of his ships. This proved subsequently te have been a good business move, for Spearman had tremendous energy daring, and enterprise; and no doubt Corvet had recognized these qualities in him before others did. Since then he has been ostensibly and publicly the head of the concern, but he has left the management almost entirely to Spearman. The personal change Corvet at that time is harder for me to describe to you.

Sherrill halted, his eyes dark with thought, his lips pressed closely to-gether; Alan waited.

"When I saw Corvet again, in the summer of "96—I had been South during the latter part of the winter and Bast through the spring-I was impressed by the vague but, to me, atarming change in him. I was reminded, I recall, of a friend I had had in college who had thought he was in perfect health and had gone to an examiner for life insurance and had been refused, and was trying to deny to himself and others that anything could be the matter. But with Corve I knew the trouble was not physical. The next year his wife left him.

"The year of—?" Alan asked.
"That was 1897. There was no question of their understanding and affection up to the very time she so strangely left him. She died in France in the spring of 1910, and Corvet's first information of her death come to him through a paragraph in a "And this?" newspaper."

Alan had started; Sherrill looked at

him questioningly. "The spring of 1910," Alan explained, "was when I received the bank draft for fifteen hundred dollars."

Sherrill nodded; he did not seem surprised to hear this; rather it appeared to be confirmation of some thing in his own thought.

"Following his wife's leaving him." Sherrill went on, "Corvet saw very little of any one. He spent most of his time in his own house; occasionally he lunched at his club, at rare intervals, and always unexpectedly, he appeared at his office. I remember that summer he was terribly disturbed because one of his ships was lost. The Corvet record was broken; a Corvet ship had appealed for help;

a Corvet vessel had not reached port. And later in the full, when two deckhands were washed from another of his vessels and drowned, he was again greatly wrought up, though his ships still had a most favorable record In 1902 I proposed to him that I buy full ownership in the vessels I partly



controlled and ally them with those he and Spearman operated. Since then, the firm name has been Corvet. Sherrill, and Spearman.

"Our friendship had strengthened and ripened during those years. The Alan bent forward, his heart throb- intense activity of Corvet's mind, which as a younger man he had directed wholly to the shipping, was directed, after he had isolated himself In this way, to other things. He took up almost feverishly an immense number of studies-strange studies most of them for a man whose youth had been almost violently active and who had once been a lake captain. I can not tell you what they all were-geology, ethnology, nearly a score of subjects; he corresponded with various scientific societies; he has given almost the whole of his attention to such things for about twenty years But he has made very few acquaintances in that time, and has kept almost none of his old friendships. He has lived alone in the house on Astor street with only one servantthe same one all these years.

"The only house he has visited with any frequency has been mine. He has always liked my wife; he had-he has a great affection for my daughter, who, when she was a child, ran in and out of his home as she pleased. My daughter believes now that his present disappearance—whatever has happened to him-is connected in some way with herself. I do not think that

Sherrill broke off and stood in thought for a moment; he seemed to consider, and to decide that it was not necessary to say anything more on that subject.

"Is there anything in what I have told you which makes it possible for you to recollect or to explain?"

Alan shock his head, flushed, and then grew a little pale. What Sherrill told him had excited him by the coincidences it offered between events in Benjamin Corvet's life and his own; had not made him "recollect Corvet, but it had given definiteness and direction to his speculations at

to Corvet's relation to himself. Sherrill drew one of the large chairs nearer to Alan and sat down facing him. He felt in an inner pocket and brought out an envelope; from the envelope he took three pictures, and handed the smallest of them to Alan. As Alan took it, he saw that it was a tintype of himself as a round-faced

"That is you?" Sherrill asked. "Yes; it was taken by the photog rapher in Blue Rapids."

The second picture, Alan saw, was ! one that had been taken in front of the barn at the farm. It showed Alan at twelve, in overalls and barefooted holding a stick over his head at which a shepherd dog was jumping.

"Yes, that is Shep and I, Mr. Sher rill. It was taken by a man who stopped at the house for dinner one day; he liked Shep and wanted a picture of him; so he got me to make Shep jump, and he took it."

"Doesn't it occur to you that it was your picture he wanted, and that he had been sent to get it? I wanted your verification that these earlier pictures were of you, but this last one s easily recognizable."

Sherrill unfoided the third picture; it was larger than the others and had been folded across the middle to get it into the envelope. Alan leaned for ward to look at it. "That is the University of Kansas

football team," he said. "I am the second one in the front row; I played end my junior year and tackle when was a senior. Mr. Corvet-7" "Yes; Mr. Corvet had these pictures

They came into my possession day before yesterday, the day after Corvet disappeared; I do not want to tell just yet how they did that." Alan's face, which had been flushed

at first with excitement, had gone quite pale, and his hunds, as he clenched and unclenched them nervously, were cold, and his lips were very dry. He could think of no possible relationship between Benjamin Corvet and himself, except one, which could account for Corvet's obtaining and keeping these pictures of him through the years.

"I think you know who I am." Alan

"You have guessed, if I am not mistaken, that you are Corvet's son.' The color flamed to Alan's face for an instant, then left it paler than before. "I thought it must be that way."

he answered; "but you said he had no children. "Benjamin Corvet and his wife had ne children.

"I thought that was what you meant." A twinge twisted Alan's face; he tried to control it but for a noment could not.

"Do not misapprehend your father," Sherrill said quietly. "I cannot prevent what other people may think when they learn this; but I do not share such thoughts with them. There is much in this I cannot understand; but I know that it is not merely the result of what others may think itof 'a wife in more ports than one.' as you will hear the lakemen put it. What lies under this is some great misadventure which had changed and

frustrated all your father's life." Sherrill crossed the room and rang for a servant.

"I am going to ask you to be my guest for a short time, Alan," he unnounced. "I have had your bag carried to your room; the man will show you which one it is."

Alan hesitated; he felt that Sherrill had not told him all he knew-that there were some things Sherrill purposely was withholding from him; but he could not force Sherrill to tell more than he wished; so after an instant's irresolution, he accepted the dismissal.

Sherrill walked with him to the door, and gave his directions to the servant: he stood watching as Alan and the man went up the stairs. Then he went back and seated himself in the chair Alan had occupied, and sat with hands grasping the arms of the

He seemed to be considering and debating something within himself; and presently he seemed to come to a decision. He went up the stairs and on the second floor he went to a front room and knocked. Alan's voice told him to come in. Sherrill went in and, when he had made sure that the servant was not with Alan, he closed the

door carefully behind him. Then he turned back to Alan, and for an instant stood indecisive as though he did not know how to begin what he wanted to say. As he glanced down at a key he took from his pocket, his indecision seemed to receive direction and inspiration from it; and he put it down on Alan's dresser.

"I've brought you," he said evenly, "the key to your house."

Alan gazed at him, bewildered. "The key to my house?"

"To the house on Astor street," Sherrfil confirmed, "Your father deeded the house and its furniture and all its contents to you the day before he disappeared. I have not the deed here; it came into my hands the day before yesterday at the same time I got possession of the pictures which might-or might not, for all I knew then-be you. I have the deed downtown and will give it to you. The house is yours in fee sample, given you by your father, not bequeathed to you by him to become your property after his death. He meant by that, I think, even more than the mere acknowledgment that he is your father." Sherrill walked to the window and stood as though looking out, but his

eyes were blank with thought. "For almost twenty years," he said, "your father, as I have told you, lived in that house practically alone; during all those years a shadow of some sort was over him. I don't know at all, Alan, what that shadow was, But it is certain that whatever it was that had changed him from the man he was when I first knew him culminated three days ago when he wrote to you. It may be that the consequences of his writing to you were such that, after he had sent the letter, he could not bring himself to face them and so has merely . . . gone away. In that case, as we stand here talking, he is

still alive. On the other hand, his

writing you may have precipitated

something that I know nothing of. In

either case, if he has left anywhere any evidence of what it is that changed and oppressed him for all these years, or if there is any evidence of what has happened to him now, it will be found in his house,"

Sherrill turned back to Alan, "It is for you-not me, Alan," he said simply, "to make that search. I have thought seriously about it, this last half hour, and have decided that is as he would want it-perhaps as he did want itto be. He could have told me what his trouble was any time in these twenty years, if he had been willing I should know; but he sever did. Your father. of course, had a key to the front door like this one; his servant has a key



"For Almost Twenty Years." He Said. Your Father, as I Have Told You, Lived in That House Practically

to the servants' entrance. I do not know of any other keys." "The serv: nt is in charge there

now?" Alan asked. "Just now there is no one in the house. The servant, after your father disappeared, thought that, if he had merely gone away, he might have gone back to his birthplace near Manistique, and he went up there to look for him. I had a wire from him today that he had not found him and was coming back."

Sherrill waited a moment to see whether there was anything more Alan wanted to ask; then he went out.

### CHAPTER IV.

"Arrived Safe; Well."

As the door closed behind Sherrill, Alan went over to the dresser and picked up the key which Sherrill had left. He put it, after a moment, on the ring with two or three other keys he had, and dropped them into his pocket: then he crossed to a chair and sat down.

Sherrill had spoken of the possibility that something might have "happened" to Corvet; but it was plain he did not believe he had met with actual violence. He had left it to Alan to examine Corvet's house; but he had not urged Alan to examine it at once; he had left the time of the examination to be determined by Alan. This showed clearly that Sherrill believed -perhaps had sufficient reason for be-Corvet, Sherrill had said, had married in 1889. But Sherrill in long knowledge of his friend, had shown firm conviction that there had been no mere vulgar liaison in Corvet's life. Did this mean that there might have been some previous marriage of Alan's father—some marriage which had strangely overlapped and nullified his public marriage? In that case, Alan could be, not only in fact but legally, Corvet's son; and such things as this, Alan knew, had sometimes happened, and had happened by a strange combination of events, innocently for all parties. Corvet's public separation from his wife, Sherrill had said, had taken place in 1897, but the actual separation between them might, possibly, have taken place long before

The afternoon had changed swiftly into night; dusk had been gathering during his last talk with Sherrill, so that he hardly had been able to see Sherrill's face, and just after Sherrili had left him, full dark had come, Alan did not know how long he had been sitting in the darkness thinking out these things; but now a little clock which had been ticking steadily in the blackness tinkled six. Alan heard a knock at his door, and when it was repeated, he called, "Come in."

The light which came in from the hall, as the door was opened, showed a man servant. The man, after a respectful inquiry, switched on the light, He crossed into the adjoining rooma bedroom; the room where Alan was, he thought, must be a dressing room, and there was a bath between. Presently the man reappeared, and moved softly about the room, unpacking Alan's suitcase. He hung Alan's other suit in the closet on hangers; he put the linen, except for one shirt, in the dresser drawers, and he put Alan's few toilet things with the ivorybacked brushes and comb and other articles on the dressing stand.

Alan wondered, with a sort of trepldation, whether the man would expect

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to stay and help him dress; but ne only put the buttons in the clean shirt and reopened the dresser drawers and laid out a change of things.

"I was to tell you, sir, Mr. Sherrill is sorry he cannot be at home to din ner tonight. Mrs. Sherrill and Miss Sherrill will be here. Dinner is at seven, sir."

Alan dressed slowly, after the man had gone; and at one minute before seven he went downstairs.

There was no one in the lower hall and, after an instant of irresolution and a glance into the empty drawing room, he turned into the sma!! room at the opposite side of the hall. A handsome, stately, rather large woman, whom he found there, introduced herself to him formally as Mrs. Sherrill. Her reserved, yet almost too casual acceptance of Alan's presence, told him that she knew all the particulars about himself which Sherrill had been able to give; and as Constance came down the stairs and toined them half a minute later, Alan was certain that she also knew.

Dinner was appounced, and they went into the great dining room where the table with its linen, sliver, and china gleamed under shaded lights. The oldest and most dignified of the three men servants who waited upon them in the dining room Alan hought must be a butler-a species of creature of whom Alan had heard but never had seen; the other servants, at least, received and handed things through him, and took their orders from him.

What Sherrill had told Alan of his father had been iterating itself again and again in Alan's thoughts; now he ecalled that Sherrill had said that his daughter believed that Corvet's disappearance had had something to do with her. Alan had wondered at the moment how that could be; and as he watched her across the table and now and then exchanged a comment with her, it puzzled him still more. He had opportunity to ask her when she walted with him in the library, after dinner was finished and her mother had gone upstairs; but he did not see

then how to go about it. "I'm sorry," she said to him, "that we can't be home tonight; but perhaps you would rather be alone?"

He did not answer that. "Have you a picture here, Miss Sherrill, of-my father?" he asked. "Uncle Benny had had very few plo

tures taken; but there is one here." She went into the study and came back with a book open at a half-tone picture of Benjamin Corvet. Alan took it from her and carried it quickly closer to the light. The face that looked up to him from the heavily glazed page was regular of feature, handsome in a way, and forceful. There were imagination and vigor of thought in the broad, smooth fore head; the eyes were strangely moody and brooding; the mouth was gentle, rather kindly; it was a queerly impelling, haunting face. This was his father! But, as Alan held the picture, gazing down upon it, the only emotion which came to him was realization that he felt none. He had no emotion of any sort; he could not attach to this man, because he bore the name which some one had told him was his fa-

ther's, the passions which, when dreaming of his father, he nad felt. Alan stood still a moment longer, then, remembering the book which he held, he drew a chair up to the light, and read the short, dry biography of his father printed on the page opposite the portrait. It summarized in Alan shut the book and sat thoughtful. The tall clock in the hall struck nine. He got up and went out into the hall and asked for his hat and coat. When they had been brought him, he put them on and went out.

He went down the steps and to the corner and turned west to Astor street. When he reached the house of his father he stopped under a street lamp. looking up at the big, stern old man-

sion questioningly.

He could not call up any sense that the house was his, any more than he had been able to when Sherrill had told him of it. He own a house on that street! Yet was that in itself any more remarkable than that he should be the guest, the friend of such people as the Sherrills? No one as

yet, since Sherrill had told him he was Corvet's son, had called him by name; when they did, what would they call him? Alan Conrad still? Or Alan Corvet?

the lighted sign of a drug store and turned up that way; he had promised, he had recollected now, to write to . . . those in Kansas—he could not

call them "father" and "mother" any more and tell them what he had discovered as soon as he arrived. He could not tell them that, but he could

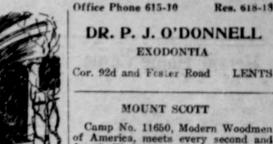
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write them at least that he had atrived safely and was well. He bought a postcard in the drug store, and wrote "Arrived safely; am well" to John Welton in Kansas. There was a little vending machine upon the counter, and he dropped in a penny and got a box of matches and put them in his pocket.

He mailed the card and turned back to Astor street; and he walked more swiftly now, having come to his decision, and only shot one quick look up at the house as he approached it. With what had his father shut himself up within that house for twenty years? And was it there still? And was it from that that Benjamin Corvet had fled? He saw no one in the street, and was certain no one was observing him as, taking the key from his pocket. he ran up the steps and unlocked the outer door. Holding this door open to get the light from the street lamp, he fitted the key into the inner door; then he closed the outer door. For fully a minute, with fast-beating heart and a sense of expectation of he knew not what, he kept his hand upon the key before he turned it; then he opened the door and stepped into the dark and silent house,

(Continued Next Week.)

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