THE SMUGGLERS' BEACON--A COMPLETE STORY

By Violet A. Simpson.

"'TWILL be our last run for many a long day now, my wench," said Wenham. "I'm pledged t' stand by t' boys this bout, but I'm e'en a most past it now, beazled and doddlish. So doant grizzle. By then ye've been church-cried, I'll be in t' chimney corner like any proper old gaffer."

He laughed, with a boisterous ho-ho, his vigorous tones echoing from rafter to rafter, of themselves giving the lie to the idea of failing powers, and as he strode across the house place to where the cutlasses hung, the powerful build of him seemed to dwarf even the solid oak presses that stood like Goliaths in each corner, reaching to the ceiling as if in support of the huge molded beams laid flat across it from end to end.

Neither did he mean his words to be taken literally. Was he not Daniel Danham, renowned throughout the countryside, the head of the famous Rutley gang? He gloried in his reputation, not least because the revenue authorities, while realizing it, had never a handle by which to bring it home. To all intents and purposes, he followed his ostensible calling as fisherman and industrious tiller of his own farm—a peaceable citizen. Therein lay his triumph.

Everybody knew that he was the life of the smuggling trade in that part of Sussex; no one could prove it. Time after time he had entertained the excise officers up at Branckways—obsequiously polite, ostentatiously ready to expose every nook and cranny; and no sooner had he seen the last of their horses' hoofs scurrying up over the ridge of the Branch hill than out from the secret hiding place in the old farm house would throng the gang, not even troubling to stifle their contemptuous laughter, to slip, after a few minutes' carouse, out by the back way to the next rendezvous on the Levels.

The glow from the wide hearth, piled up with logs, made an armoured Berserker of the sturdy old man, as he stood critically fingering the edge of one cutlass after another, his tarpaulin coat shimmering in the light, sheating him like a coat of mail. He made preparations leisurely, opened his coat to shift the belt stuck round with pistols, hitched a cutlass to one side and then stooped to sharpen his long-handled knife against the sole of his jackboot before thrusting it down again between boot and knee.

Catherine sat on the settle within the chimney corner and watched him silently, the tears blurring her grave gray eyes. Not tears of fear, nor of disapproval, nor even of simple emotion, but those of physical fatigue, uncomplainingly endured. Every expedition meant for her, a daughter who had inherited her father's vitality only to the intensifying of her capacity for all-absorbing affection and therefore suffering a sleepless night of anxiety beforehand, and a 24 hours' vigil of agony to be borne alone in the isolation of the deserted hime.

Motherless, and without kith or kin except this father, whose life might at any moment be forfeited, the only other human being to whom she could turn for sympathy or support was the lover who shared in his reckless exploits—Jan Bethune, lieutenant of the gang.

Daniel Wenham, manlike, took his life in his hands, and never troubled to think what the tension meant to the woman left to inaction, not realizing how peril cuts deepest in the hearts of the ones who must needs look on.

He crossed the house-place to where bottles and glasses stood on the round table and drank off a tumblerful of brandy.

"You'm a good wench, I biuy," he said, using the Sussex dialect with, however, but faint trace of the accent. He was of Danish descent on his mother's side, brought up on the East Anglian coast.

"We'll cut our sticks once t' church-hawlin's done. I'll send word of t' Beacon's to be littled. Caan't say till us be all met."

He opened the back door, facing south-west, and though there was no wind the inrush of frosty air made both him and Catherine shiver.

"'Gert frosten tonight, he'? I'll walk again t' boathouse-duck shooting, if any one asks—till 'tis dark," he went on. "Good night, Catherine; good night, my girl!"

He shouldered his gun, stood stamping his feet on the frost-bound threshold a few moments, and then, with a wave of the hand, marched away seaward. He might talk of age, and would never see 60 again, but a boy might have envied the athletic carriage, and he held himself erect as a dart.

Catherine followed him to the door, remaining there long after he had become but a blurred speck moving against the snow-covered landscape of the marsh, oblivious of the cold, her eyes slowly traveling from point to point of the familiar scene before them. Behind Beechy Head, southernwards as near as might be to the point rising clear and straight out of mid-channel, the winter sun was setting. It was a still, keen evening, and sky and sea alike were unruffled. From the point there to her right stretched away inland the sweeping lines of the Wealden, faintly roseate, as the snow-crowned ridges caught and threw back the slanting sun rays till, circling far round to the north their glow dissolved in the heavy undefined banks of gray that lay massed up against the horizon, only waiting for a shift of wind to rise and overspread the cloudless cup of the sky.

Round and brilliantly red in that frost-crisped atmosphere the sun, a fire-giant in his powers of transformation, was turning the white winter world into a warm-hued Paradise, as if bent on vitalizing the lifeless beauty of snow-covered meadows, icicle-bound and currentless air.

To Catherine's very feet fell the long shafts of brilliant crimson, catching alternate wave-crests across the bay, until the curved sheet of softly heaving water seemed to her as if changed into a field studded with pink-tipped daisies, and the levels, stretched as a ruddy playground, the deep slashes where the dykes intersected only showing as dark red shadows. Catherine had a fancy that their outlining pollards, holding up heads of scraggy twigs, icicle-hung were exchanging their crystals for rubies, so vivid was that mid-winter sunshine over the glittering landscape.

She had her moments when imagination strangely jostled against the stern facts that ruled her life, making them the more difficult to face.

Hers was not the stoical unimaginative nature of the free South Saxon, able to endure and act without the burden of thought. Face and form witnessed to both her Jutish and Norman blood, for her mother had come from Jersey. Fair-haired and fair-skinned, her level dark eyebrows shaded clear gray eyes; the features were well-defined and sensitive, the jaws square and heavily moulded, the forehead broad.

Straight and erect she stood, haloed in the sun, her figure lightly built, but strong in its perfect proportions. There was grace in every line of her—and with it the intellectual heritage of seeing more than lies on the surface.

Branchways stood isolated in all that wide expanse of level, seaboard country. A belt of elm trees, askew and twigless, ringed it round. The farm-house dated back to pre-Reformation times, as its construction showed. Right in the middle, rose the huge chimney stacks, as the center up to which the rest of the irregular buildings converged. On the southern side one long slant of tiled roof reached from the clustered chimneys to within two feet of the ground, and close beside it, so that the farm stood on its very bank, a stream ran Channelwards. It caught the sunlight side ways as Catherine, stepping a little way outside the house door, which opened in an angle to the southwest, glanced adown it—a long, thin red line. The thick ice had been broken earlier in the day for the boats, and only a glaze lay on the surface. Underneath, for the sea was but a half mile distant, the tide still showed itself in pulsations that sought each flutter of light.

Catherine suddenly gasped.

"'Tis like a river of blood!" she cried.

The sun threw up a last sheaf of flames and dropped. Instantaneously the shadows fell. Catherine put her hands impulsively before her eyes; it seemed to her as if she were watching by some deathbed. She could bear thought no longer, and turned hastily indoors.

Here was only cheerful warmth, a sense of peace and beauty, light and comfort—the only shadow at all that thrown by a man standing in front of the hearth. It was Jan Bethune. He had come in unseen and unheard, by the front door.

At the sound and sight of her he went forward, and took her by the shoulders. It was not an ungentle gesture—merely a possessive one, the tenderness of a self-dependent nature whose feeling do not show themselves in caresses of unnecessary words. Those were strenuous times—those early years of the nineteenth century—rough and uncouth, and these two, both strong in their separate personalities, took life as it came to them, and so shaped it to themselves.

"I came to tell ye we are 'out' tonight. At 9, the Beacon is to be lit. But doan't stay up for us. That's all I came in again t'say. Good night."

There was an undercurrent of passionate tenderness in the man's voice, and he passed one hand lingeringly down her arm till he could grasp her hand. Catherine stood motionless.

"T' Beacon? Is it to be dangerous tonight?" Her voice shook.

"I mightn't have seen ye again," he said evasively.

She gave a little choking laugh.

"Ye were here—'twas only an hour sen'."

"So? 'Tis much longer surely——" Then after a pause, "I can wait five minutes."

Catherine stretched out her other hand, dragged the settle an inch nearer and pushed him silently upon it; then knelt down by his side, and put both arms up and around him. Her face, as she upheld it with the firelight illuminating every feature, looked beautiful, the eyes luminous with feeling in which that craving to protect, instinct in the love of women, mingled oddly with her attitude of helplessness.

"I cannot bear ye going," she said in a toneless whisper. "Always—perhaps—to— death—to lose you."

He put his face down close to hers, but his eyes looked past her. "I can't draw back, my lass. I gave my word—so long as I remain single——"

"Oh," she said. "Oh!"

A thrill shook through her as if, under the pressure of terrible fear, all lesser feelings, strong in themselves, were leaving her.

It was not out of the quiet reserve of her natural self that the next words came.

"Then let it be soon," she whispered. He understood both what the strenuous words cost, what underlay them, what they meant.

"Whatever thou wilt, my soul. 'Tis I who have waited so long."

The logs shifted and fell, with a splutter of sparks over the two silent figures. Then the eight-day clock suddenly began its whirring prelude to the hour. Simultaneously the two loosened their hold, and rose to their feet. He took her two hands, and looked earnestly into her eyes.

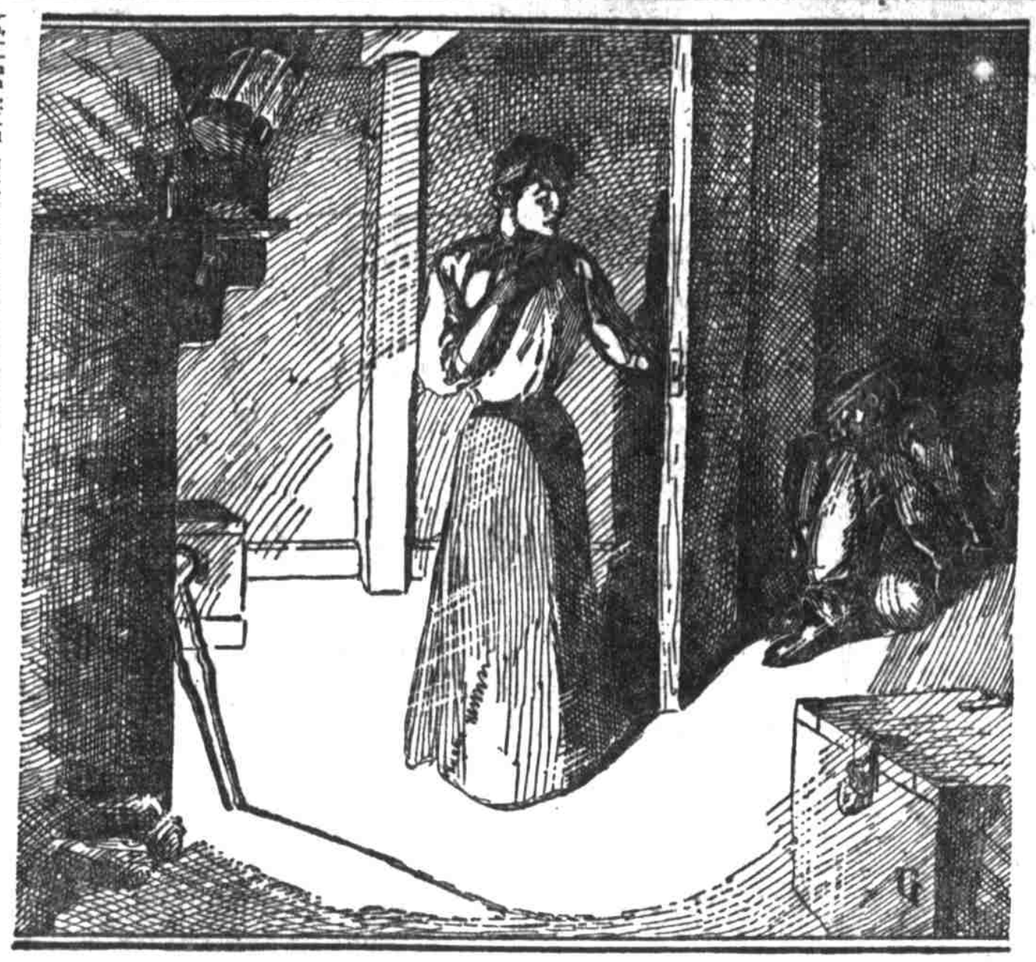
"God keep thee, lass, my lass," he said.

He left her with his kiss warm on her lips as she tremblingly re-echoed the prayer

"God keep thee, my man!"

Neither considered in the depths of their earnestness how far the nature of the expedition was one demanding such protection. The morality of the exploits which courted the danger from which they prayed to be saved did not occur at that moment. The smuggling trade, and all that it involved, stood upon the law of local opinion, and had received absolution. Lawless, unjustified, leading to crime which often reached the lowest dregs of human brutality, were the enterprise, upon which both father and lover expended the best of their talents and powers. Yet as the door shut to, and the sound of footsteps died away on the snow, Catherine flung herself on her knees and prayed. And then, smuggler's daughter, though she was, aiding and abetting in evil practices, she rose strengthened and calmed, to do what she conceived to be her duty. Her prayers held no mockery for her.

Yet mockery seemed living in the shadows. A rushing sense of something apart from loneliness gripped through and feeling—danger, and more than danger. It seemed almost as if she were battling against evil which threatened to close in upon them. She went over to the window, peering out into the darkness, then paced to and fro on the brick floor, thankful for the sound of her own scraping footfalls to break the silence. A look of strained expectation hardened her face, her arms hung straight out on either side of her while her eyes stared into the distance, as if she could, by sheer desire, pierce walls and darkness. Imagination was at work, conjuring up pictures before her.



"IT FELL UPON THE FORM OF A MAN."

The clock struck seven. It reminded her that there was work to be done. Mechanically she cleared away tumblers and bottles, and set out the table with preparations for a meal. They would all be coming in, some 20, 30, or 50 men, perhaps, before morning. She moved about, piling up the hearth, and setting fresh logs ready for use by the side of the brand-irons. From the bunch of keys hanging at her waist she selected one, and crossing to the oak-press on the left-hand side of the hearth, unlocked it.

It contained nothing but wearing apparel. She took out a little black hood, and tied it closely over her head, and then, unhooking a fisherman's coat, buttoned herself slowly into it. All her movements were slow, as if she only longed to make her occupations take up more time. Leaving the press ajar, she went to the chimney corner, and taking down from a shelf high up within it a horn lantern, lit its turpentined tuft of wick inside, and then turned towards the press in the adjoining right hand corner. The doors flew widely, showing the press to be quite empty. Catherine stepped inside, raised herself on the tiptoe and ran her finger along the molded beam that passed directly outside and overhead. Almost instantly the back of the press moved, disclosing a flight of steps leading upwards. The secret was so contrived that the inner side of the press was in reality the wall of the house place, and had it been moved would have revealed nothing except that it was built on the wall instead of being, as it appeared to be, a piece of furniture complete in itself.

Catherine took her lantern, and made her way up. The stairs were winding and irregular, but though the walls on either side were rough, they were hot to the touch, for the staircase ran up between the clusters of chimneys, the space it occupied taken from the thickness of their inner sides, and so impossible to discover by any calculation.

In a few minutes she had reached the top. Another spring loosened a trap door, and she stepped out under the sky on the middle of the conglomeration of chimney stacks. No one on the roof, not aware of the secret, could have found a way down by any other means than by a ladder, or hazardous slide down the slanting stretch of roof. Within the cluster of chimneys was a hollowed recess, set far back, covered and sheltered on all sides from the wind or rain, and open only on the side facing the sea. It was lined with fireproof bricks; within was set a huge iron cage, with holes pierced on the seaward side, and arched over with a funnel which opened into one of the chimneys. Catherine opened the cage, and, unlatching her lantern, cautiously set fire to a slow match laid crosswise upon a heap of black mixture within. In another few seconds from the holes pierced in the side streamed out into the darkness a strong light, throwing long narrow shafts straight and high till Catherine's eye could follow their path no farther. The night otherwise was black as pitch. The beacon was so constructed that it shed no light upon house or neighborhood, and could in point of fact only be discerned at a certain angle far out at sea. It hung like a star in the sky.

Catherine waited to see that the material had fairly caught; then, shivering with the cold, made more piercing by the absence of friendly lights from moon or stars, retreated to the staircase. Her task so far was done; it was just striking 9. She gave one further comprehensive look round after rehanging her lantern in its place and locking the press door; then, taking a tallow dip from the chimney shelf, went slowly across to the stairs leading to her bedroom. The wearing emotions through which she had passed had dulled her to that passive endurance which is almost apathy. She undressing, upon the bed, fell almost instantaneously into the dreamless sleep of exhaustion. The time ticked on, the sound of the muffled wagging of the pendulum of the big clock only interrupted by the falling of some log. There was not a breath of wind. Outside the elm trees reared themselves motionless and the beacon light shone unflickering in its strange setting of black, thick nothingness, even the outline of the house was lost. There came a quick cry of some startled peewit, and a faint crackling as if, fluttering perhaps across the stream, the ice had given beneath it. Catherine started up in bed, listening with every nerve on the stretch.

A soft stealthy movement, a gentle swish as of parting waters—she sprang from her bed to the window. It was too dark to see, but surely that must be the boat coming up stream? Thank God—they have returned. A faint sound of footsteps, a low, soft, well-known whistle a signal she knew so well, and then followed another noise equally familiar, the grating of kegs being rolled up from the stream to the secret cellars.

Then all was safe, she need trouble no more. Until that moment Catherine had hardly realized the horror of the fear upon her. She sighed a deep sigh of profoundest relief, and, relighting her dip, began to prepare in earnest for a real night's rest. The noise ceased presently; they had gone down again for a second boatload. She was just unloosing her hair, when it occurred to her to go down and see if the fire burned well and that she had forgotten nothing. To slip down the shallow staircase took but a few moments. How homelike, how peaceful, how calm! The light gleamed across the bright red-bricked floor, to creep in fascinating patterns up the polished wainscoting, and play across the rafter-ed ceiling upon the molding of the beams.

The bunch of cutlasses here, the bundle of old blunderbusses there, tossed the light back from steel blades and barrels to her housewifely pots and pans ranged on the other walls. Upon the old corner mirrors and the wonderful figures carved in bas relief upon the doors of the presses themselves seemed stirring into life beneath the weird touch of that magician's wand. Catherine watched, lulled into dreaminess. Her physical vitality was at low ebb, exhausted by her emotions, and the mystic part of the nature had gained the ascendancy over the active working brain.

Her eyes followed the shadowy curves, facsinated, but without attaching any meaning to what she saw—the why or wherefore.

Yet it was not fantasy; the carved figures were moving as the press doors moved slowly, slowly outward—and then a strange sound roused her—a sound inarticulate, smothered, but one of pain. She started, and over her face flooded the quick blood. Her usually firm lips had been parted in a dreamer's curve, now the muscles suddenly contracted. She did not know what physical fear meant, and even if she had, the dominant note in that stifled sound would have quelled it. Nothing—child, animal, sickness or distress—nothing that had in it the element of dependence or appeal, appealed to her in vain. She went across with a firm step and pulled the door of the press wide open. The firelight streamed in. It fell upon and illumined the form of a man so doubled that his knees were nearly to his chin. As the doors swung back he jerked so that he could move his head. Catherine made a step inside so that she could see his features clearly. They were those of a young man, but so discolored, the matted hair hanging over his forehead, damp and stained, that all she could realize was that they were those of a stranger. He raised his eyelids heavily as the light streamed in hot and searching. What Catherine read in the bloodshot eyes went straight to the wall of pure human feeling in the heart of her. She leaned quickly forward and removed the gag that was in his mouth.

"Tell me," she began; then broke off and went across to the table, poured out brandy, and, coming back, held it to his lips. He drank eagerly, though with difficulty.

"Tell me," she said again, "how do you come here?"

He moved his lips slowly, and at first no sound issued from them.

"They brought me—the Calliope—Indies—homeward bound."

Catherine started back.

She ran a comprehensive glance over him. He wore a uniform, and it was draggled, wet and soiled. As he lay a dark stream was slowly coursing down upon the red bricks.

She had realized at once by his voice that he was of gentle birth—not belonging to her class. From the first moment of the discovery had been surging through her mind a bewildering undercurrent of conjectures. It was no revenue officer, then. And she knew every trading sloop along the coast. The Calliope was a name unfamiliar to her.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

His answer was to raise the swollen eyelids again with physical agony in the eyes that brought tears to her own.

"My arm is shot through—broken. They have tied the cord rather tight. If it could be loosed—I shall not run away—or molest you—" a smile flicked painfully. "Even if I were not—hurt—parole!"

She saw then that his wrists were tightly bound behind his back, and another cord lashed his ankles. Without a word she took a knife from the table, cut the ropes through, and then, putting her arms round him, lifted him down upon the floor. He lay at full length as if dead; in the reaction after the strained position consciousness had left him.

Catherine knew no further hesitation. In the recesses of heart and mind a turmoil of horrible haunting questionings—fear she dared not put into words—were besetting her, but outwardly her movements were calm. Lint and bandages from the corner of one press, water and basin, cushion slipped softly under his head, collar unloosed, boots drawn off, and the sleeve ripped to the shoulder—then in the intervals of pouring brandy between the clenched teeth and watching the gradual return to consciousness she began to clear the matted hair and moisten face and head. There was a deep cut across his face, bruised and marked, and a bullet wound breaking the shoulder.

Catherine shook with horror, realizing in a flash of vivid imagination, added to her practical knowledge of surgery, what suffering had been inflicted and endured. Her hands were firm in their touch, but her pulse throbbed high. And she dared not face the awful thoughts that would force themselves in. What did it mean? Who was responsible?

The eyes unclosed. Color faintly flecked the pallid cheeks. He made a movement to get up. Catherine put him back, dipped morsels of bread in the brandy and held them to his lips. He swallowed them gratefully. Presently he spoke, unasked:

"I am the captain on board the Calliope—schooner; we are homeward bound. We were told of a safety beacon warning us off a reef in mid-channel skirting Beacky Head. We mistook it, or it was a false one. We piloted in, as directed, curving in shoreward. Our ship foundered. We were attacked and boarded. I don't know by whom; they came to pillage, not rescue. We were outnumbered in the fight. I was taken and brought up by boat—you know the rest. It is a poor welcome to England. They were English. What can you tell me?"

"Then you are no revenue officer?"

"No."

Catherine hid her face in her hands. He watched her, a dawning light of understanding in his eyes.

"They were smugglers? I have heard of a famous band along here. Or—wreckers? We followed the beacon as we came up stream—I saw that. Are you one of them?"

Catherine dropped her hands.

"My God!" she cried. "I don't know." She threw out her arms as if to steady herself.

"I don't know," she repeated.

Her world lay at her feet—void of all but nameless horror, the worse because love struggled there still. She had heard it vaguely hinted that such things were done—but her father—her lover! And had she herself been the instrument to bring innocent men to wholesale slaughter?

"Were they all killed?"

"Many of them—my brave men. Homeward bound to wives and daughters—home. And by Englishmen—at home."

"God ha' mercy on us," she said.

"And they will kill you."

"Yes; I was witness."

Catherine lifted her haggard face.

"I will save you," she said. "For their sakes."

She pressed her hands against her eyes. Through her mind flitted one possible course after another, each vague, chimeric, dismissed as soon as conceived. Concealment in the house was impossible; the prisoner missed, every cranny would be searched. To turn him out on the marches to hide in the dykes would be only death in another form, in his state, and on such a night. Perhaps she could get to the stables, saddle a horse. Even as the idea came a sound upon the night startled her; in the hush of the windless frost the turn of a bird on a twig might have been heard. And upon that tense uplifting of their whole being the faint crack and wash of the frozen waters, parted and driven upon the river banks, beat loud. She looked wildly round. There remained but one chance. It leapt before her as a flash of sun from behind clouds. In a moment she had sprung across the house-place, unlocked the press and touched the spring.

"I will save you!" she muttered. "Trust yourself to me. It is a secret way—to the roof. You will be safe."

It seemed superbuman, her strength. Partly lifting, half carrying, she got him across.

"I cannot come," she cried. "They will ask for me. Follow the steps to the roof. Hide in the chimneys——"

She had stooped to the top of the staircase and to her own room just as the house door opened from the back. And the first to enter was Jan Bethune.

Catherine clasped her hands over her breast and prayed. They came crowding, trooping, plunging into the house, rolling as if blind, or helpless, in the mad loosening of self-control—the inrush of savage instincts. She shuddered as she fell on her knees. Some went to the table and drank, quaffing off tumblers' full, scarcely diluted, of the spirits—some staggered to the warmth of the fire. No one spoke, but from each to the other went the low hum of reckless abandonment after a strain which had snapped. Presently there was a stir. Jan Bethune strode to the head of the table and rapped hard upon it.

Catherine looked steadily down at him. His face was white as if hardened into stone. His eyes shone with an unnatural glitter, but the muscles of the mouth were firmly held.

"Bring out the prisoner," he said. "We've our captain t' count for." For the first time Catherine missed her father.

She hid her eyes; but hearing, strained to an acuteness that was physical pain, brought the drama before her as if she saw it acted—the quick shuffling of the hustling men to the press—the harsh grating of nailed boots on the brick floor—the sudden hush—the awfulness of the outburst. Above the tumult rose one voice, that of Bethune, commanding, ordering, marshalling. Then a stampede.

Catherine flung herself back into her room and upon her bed, dressed as she was, pulling coverlet and blankets over her. There came a tapping at her door and a voice calling her softly. It was Jan. She rolled over on her face, pressing it on her pillow, with her hands clenched over her ears.

She would not hear. He called her a few times, and then rapped, softly at first, and presently louder. She could have screamed aloud—biting the pillows beneath her, her fingers thrust so hard into her ears that it almost seemed as if they must be meeting through her head. But the press keys lay under her—they would know he could not have escaped that way. Only her father besides herself had a key to the press. Murder in cold blood should not be—she would save them against themselves.

"Oh, father! Oh, Jan, Jan——" the words ran in a meaningless round: but no sound fell from her stiff lips.

Softly the door opened and she knew he was looking in. Save the bed on which she lay, without valiance or hanging quilt for possible concealment, her room was bare to nakedness. It held no cover for a dog.

"Asleep! Sound. Thank God!"

She knew how the tones lowered and softened, the tones and ways of the Jan she knew—her Jan.

He shut the door too gently and went away.

There was the sound of trampling overhead and confused voices throughout the rambling building.

She sat up and pushed the heavy hair from her forehead. Of course, he could not be found; they would think he had himself escaped. There were no traces; she had carried off basin and towels with her in her flight.

Silent she sat crouching in voiceless prayer, never heeding the cold, though her teeth were chattering and her lips and hands blue. The tallow dip was nearing its socket; it flared in the draughts from the ill-fitting leaden casement. She watched the shadow of the rings it made on the bare rafter-ed ceiling, fascinated by the odd succession of circles up—up, all the same, never ending.

Suddenly upon the silence broke a roar from outside—Catherine leapt to the window, head and shoulders thrust out before the cry had faded on the night. Below were a little group of men, gesticulating up at the roof. Their voices came clearly up to her. She knew at once what had happened. He had moved across in the light of that fateful beacon and had been seen.

She flung herself across the room again, and against the door. It yielded, then stuck, and she realized it was wedged outside. She beat it with her fists; called—but her voice, dying away in a gutteral echo, carried no sound. The aperture gave her two inches space. She stood clinging to the low lintel, her face pressed against the opening. They were now all crowding back again from within and without the house, and the noise of feet only supplemented the low mutterings like thunder circling round the hills, waiting the moment to burst. The rough reckless scuffling, each only pressing on to be first through the narrow opening, and up those stairs—oh, how every nerve thrilled with suffering, acute, real, with the sound of something dragged down; oh, she knew the hard jagged stone steps so well, and for a wounded man dragged in fury! She swayed helplessly—it was to her as if she herself were sharing in what he felt. She could see something of what passed, but the aperture showed her only a slip of blank wall in the house—place across which occasional shadows fell—the drama playing its part in shadows before her. Jan appeared to be sitting at the head of the table with one or two others, and the rest of the men opposite. She could hear what they said.

"We hold you as hostage for the life of our leader and captain. Your life is forfeit—"

"And his." The reply was clear and steady.

"It must not be."

"You have mine."

"They'll try t'Captain come t'Assizes. You say t'word that you'll not witness so he goes free, an' 'tis your life may be; you can make t' choice."

There was a pause, and then came the dignified accents again:

"I am an officer in his majesty's navy. We were returning home after serving king and country abroad. We were led by a false beacon aground and boarded by rascally pirates—our own countrymen. My crew is murdered, my ship looted—I am myself a prisoner. You have all the fortunes of war but one thing. Your captain, notorious, so I believe, through these parts, is in the hands of those of my crew who survive. His being taken means that your gang is dispersed; your evil practices stopped, I take it. He will swing, and so will all of you. You ask me to save my life by giving my word to save him—free to murder other innocent men and continue wrecking ships by his false beacons for the sake of booty—"

His voice stopped. Catherine saw a hand placed over his mouth. A low growl ran around the assembly.

"Our captain must be freed, or you hang."

"I would not save such a scoundrel if by moving a finger I could. A scourge to the earth!"

There came a wild shout. Above the surging tumult rose one articulate cry to Catherine's ears.

"Tar him up, and make him his own beacon. 'Twill give 'em light t' hang our capen, or for us to rescue 'en—"

She opened her lips to scream; it was in vain; no sound came from them.

"Jan, for father's own sake. No, Jan—Jan!" She fell, her hands sliding nervelessly down the door posts to the floor, and lost consciousness.

She recovered it in silence, and a strange smell of smoke, thick about her. She roused herself up. Her room was dark with it, and but for the open window she must have suffocated.

She stumbled blindly to reach it, and the frosty air, sweeping in, shook her back to herself. Across her mental consciousness a swift array of pictures passing in review, and with that the quick realization of the present.

Upon the snow outside a brighter glow was lying—leaping, vibrating. The house was on fire.

The knowledge came with a sobering shock. All her powers returned in a flood tide. Her room was but a little distance from the ground; a vine grew up the wall. Descent and escape were easy. As she placed her foot to the ground the leaping flames made sunset around her once more. Against the deep-toped sky black and starless, the farm house was blazoned in fire. Not a creature was in sight, the house had evidently been deserted, but up the stream came rising shouts, and the splash of hard-driven oars coming nearer and nearer. One moment she stood irresolute, raising helpless eyes to her burning home. Against that background every object loomed distinct. Up on the roof among the chimneys, as yet untouched by the fire, sat the figure of a man, motionless—distinct and clear, even to the very ropes binding him. Catherine uttered one cry and dashed into the house. Thick columns of smoke rolled against her, but she knew neither fear nor resistance. Across the house place she fought a way and gained the press. The doors were open. A moment of blind fumbling, but custom and habit were strong; the trapdoor swung back, and the steps were clear before her. Up and up, through smoke and flames, heedless, fearless, she plunged. "For Jan's sake, or father's sake—for the sake of those souls, Good Lord deliver!"

She was on the roof at last.

He looked round and smiled, the smile of a man looking death in the face.

"They meant to burn me," he said. "I am tied."

He was fastened within the cage, tied hand and foot.

"The pan of charcoal and tar is beneath. It ought to have reached me long ago, as they reckoned. Only I managed to kick it away, and they have managed to drop the torch elsewhere. I should have burnt in any case. I cannot move, even if not bound."

He made his explanation, calmly as Catherine loosed the knots. "I could not get you downstairs the way I came. It is blocked. But I will try."

As she spoke here came a crash, and the chimney behind fell. "The way is blocked," he said. "Save yourself by the roof. I cannot move. Slide down the slant."

Catherine was looking steadily at him.

"My father," she said, "is the captain. For his sake and Jan's no murder shall be done in this house. I shall not go alone. Come, or I stay."

Up from the stream at their feet came that splash of oars, every second louder, clearer, nearer, and the roar behind, and the crackling, and rushing grew more intense, too.

Catherine looked down.

"Jan!"

"Catherine!" He saw them both, steadied himself upright in the boat, and held out his arms.

"Slide down the roof till your feet reach the gutter niche. Then jump. I shall catch you. Now, at once!"

Catherine turned to the helpless figure beside her.

"It is my man, and my father,' she said, simply.

"Make it easy for me." She stooped suddenly, wound her arms strongly round him, and before he had time to realize what she meant, both were sliding at terrific speed down the slanting roof.

Mechanically her feet felt for the gutter ridge, mechanically steadied on it. Jan was already reaching up toward him as she swayed and tottered, his arms were round her burden.

But the days of the Rutley gang were over.

1,800 MILES OF OPPORTUNITY--Continued From the First Page of This Section

orient, must be in position, by means of the contributory Intercoastal canal, to fight the world's competition in China or lose Panama's richest guerdons.

Of Americans, more truly than of any other people, it may be said that their right hand knows little of what their left hand does. There are too many of them. So it happens that enormous industries, huge crops, vast traffickings, spring up overnight in one section of the land and thrive for a generation before their importance is comprehended by the energetic sections that are minding their own business, 1,000 miles away.

Take Texas. In 1890 Texas thought she might be able to raise a little rice, if she studied the subject deeply enough and was willing to work hard enough. She got a crop of 75,000 pounds. It looked good to her, and she spread on her rice crop.

Ten years later Texas was raising 800,000 pounds. That looked very good; and Texas has spread some more. Within three years more she had a quarter of a million acres in rice, and her rice crop amounted to 400,000,000 pounds, the following year, and it has been jumping ever since, for there are 4,000,000 acres of rice land awaiting cultivation, and only a few years will elapse before half of it is working and the crop is worth $75,000,000.

Yet the bulk of the American people still associate rice with pigtailed Chinese wading to their hips in flooded mud flats somewhere along the Yang-tse-kiang, or with little Japs paddling about in little Japanese ponds. For half a dozen years colonies of those very Japs have been growing in Texas and Louisiana, acquiring fortunes from American rice lands and making ready for the time, so near at hand, when they will be able to float their harvests along the intercoastal canal, one way to feed the craving millions of the United States, another way, by the Panama route, to feed the clamoring hordes of China.

And the railroads have thrown up their hands. A good deal less than a century ago, convinced that, if the canals fathered by Washington should live, they would starve, the railroads concluded they had better bite off the whole United States and be done with it. Forthwith they bit. But it was a mouthful that had a way of growing; and the grand original, omniverous bite has proved more than they can ever chew.

"The business of the country has increased 110 per cent within a decade," remarked James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern, "and the traffic facilities for handling it have increased only 10 per cent. It would take 75,000 more miles of railroads to meet the traffic conditions existing today, and the fresh investment requisite would amount to more than $5,000,000,000. The railroads would welcome a relief from the strain," adds Mr. Hill.

There is a steamer than travels these days from Pittsburg to New Orleans and tows 32 barges every trip, which last 15 days. The barges carry 600,000 bushels of coal. It would take 100 freight trains, of 16 cars each, to handle that little job—and they would have to work on it for months. And they would cost $160,000 more.

It is one example of what our interstate commerce alone amounts to, a commerce worth just 20 times the value of our foreign exports and imports. Europe has, in all, 80,000 miles of perfected waterway. We have 18,000 miles that are still utterly imperfect. But, on those imperfect 18,000 miles, we are now carrying more than all Europe is able to load upon her 80,000.

No wonder that railroads would "welcome relief from the strain," when their whole unequaled system broke down under it, even while the country's waterways took care of a fraction exceeding the water-borne commerce of internal Europe.

And no wonder that, until the jaws of Mr. Hill and the other "giants of industry" fairly ached in the despair of their futile mastication, they were politely willing to keep on chewing.

Roughly grouping the transportation questions of the United States, the time has arrived for the installation of an automatic cream separator. The railroads, after feeding with their feet in the trough until they are so unwieldy that they can scarcely waddle, realize that the whole milk diet is one the eve of shifting them to the shambles of government ownership.

Passengers and fast freight—the cream of commerce—will be good enough for them. Let all slow freight be diverted to the navigable streams and the Intercoastal Canal. And there, after a long period of business turmoil and a short one of narrow escape from a condign visitation of popular wrath, appears the solution of the transportation problem.

We quote a clinching example: In one year there passed through the Sault Ste. Marie canal, between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, a total freight of 44,270,680 tons, carried an average distance of 333.3 miles at 0.85 of a mill per mile for every ton, and giving the whole cost of $21,420,584. The average freight charge on the railroads at the same time was 7.6, nine times what it cost by lake and canal.

But suppose it was only half a dozen times as much—suppose the railroads had already invested the $5,000,000,000 Mr. Hill admits they can't possibly raise for investment, and suppose some mania of altruism were to induce them to throw off 33 per cent of the pound of flesh they are accustomed to cut out of the living body of commerce and manufacture. The cost of moving that one year's business of the "Soo" would have been over $187,000,000—actually $156,000,000 more than the expense of moving it by water.

One year—only a single past year at the Sault Ste. Marie; only a horsepipe trickle out of the cataract waiting to gush into our waiting 19,000,000 miles of opportunity.

And the total cost of the intercoastal canal estimated at half a billion dollars—$50,000,000 per year!

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE GARDENING

Demonstration of Power of the Mind on Flower

From the New York Times.

TWO women walking up Broadway stopped before a florist's window in which was displayed some gorgeous begonias, a mass of pink bloom, the sort of pink bloom that even in the dead of winter convinces one of spring. As they stood looking, one of the women remarked:

"It sounds unkind, but those pink begonias always remind me of Christian Science."

"It is unkind," interrupted the other, "to the begonias! I've heard that the language of Science and Health is flowery, but I'm sure it can't be like any flower as dainty and exquisite as these."

"I don't mean that; listen to my story. Last year I was visiting in a little town 'up the state' where Christian Science flourishes. My room was directly across the way from the Science reading room, the windows of which were filled with lovely plants whose beauty I ventured to comment upon one day when the reader was paying me a visit.

"'Isn't it wonderful about those plants?' she purred, 'it must be the mere atmosphere of Science. With no care at all they attain perfection. Those in my own home are not nearly so successful, though I give them constant attention.'

"Of course, I thought this was bluff, but when I returned her visit, it certainly looked as if she were speaking the truth. There were a number of plants, but none of them looked too chirpy.

"'You see,' she murmured, as she saw me looking at them, 'though I try to keep my room harmonious and free from false thoughts, the plants do not thrive as they do at the reading room, where error never enters. A marvelous demonstration for Science.'

"I was non-committal, for I was sure there was more here than met the eye, and two days later I discovered the secret. It was this way. As fast as the plants in the reading room ceased to blossom or began to droop, she unostentatiously removed them to her own home, putting others in their places. She then nursed the ailing ones until they were again ready to demonstrate that there was no such thing as fading for plants nurtured in Science. You see, I was coming home late in the evening, and I ran directly into the reader, who was letting herself into the reading room under cover of the darkness and in her arms was a big begonia plant, a gorgeous mass of pink blossoms. She was too intent on her errand to notice me, so I watched her go in, and when she came out she was carrying a very worried looking geranium.

Next morning I went over to the reading room, and there was the begonia and around it an awed group of Scientists, while the voice of the reader softly purred:

"'A glorious demonstration, is it not?'"

G. Edward Addicks, who has been of Delaware politics for some time, is out with an announcement that he will be a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor of the state next year.