THE BEE: OMAHA, SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 1922.

THE CULVERT

Weird Adventure Befalls the Man , Who Travels Back 25 Years Into the Past.

Always it is dangerous to revisit the place of goodly memories formed in the far past, but it may be doubted whether any one of us apprehends the danger till too late-till, in fact, the ourney has been made.' The sleepiest of hollows must undergo change, if only in its sleep, and the change, whatsoever it be, is disillusion-ment to the true pilgrim. Fond creature that he is, all remembrance and no imagination, he returns athrill with the anticipation of recovering that which he left reluctantly so many years 320.

The steamer was a few hours late-but that was a familiar touch; the pier had not been appreciably altered, though the dues had been raised, and a young man received them on the spot once occupied by a graybeard; the village, save that the roofs showed more slates and fewer thatches and that a new brass plate announced the existence of a bank, was, at first sight, as 1 had last seen it.

As for the folk-well, after all, quarter of a century is a long road when one would travel back to actualities.

On my passage to the inn I fancied I recognized, here and there, countenances middle aged or old, yet could not be wholly certain; whereupon a sort of shyuess came over me, and the salutation or greeting was never made. As I was to learn later, my old acquaintances of the village were similarly affected; they doubted, hesitated and let me pass by. With spirit a little chilled, I climbed the short

hill and reached the top, only for it to grow cold. The inn of remembrance had been partially rebuilt and enlarged and was now a hotel. No host met me at the door. With diffidence

I entered and came up against a little glass oftice. A young woman looked up from a ledger and greeted me unsmilingly, though politely enough. She spoke with an unmitigated Glasgow accent, and for a moment I wondered whether I had really arrived at one of the Outer isles within an evening's walk of the Atlantic itself.

Yes, my telegram had been received and a room reserved, the last available, as it happened. Might I have some supper?

A triffe haughtily she informed me that dinher was then in course of being served.

Dinner-good Lord! Disheartened, I went upstairs, made my modest toilet, put a novel in my pocket and descended to the coffee room.

One glance around, as I entered, was enough A score of guests, each making the most of two square inches of overboiled fish and a blob of pink sauce, gabbled at one another in what must surely have been affected gayety. Elegant gowns mingled with the latest in sporting costumes and a couple of shirt fronts completed my despair. Mercifully a small table in a corner was unoccupied.

"Curse their civilization," I muttered as I took my seat.

The more or less Swiss waiter, who lorded it over a quartet of waitresses-Highland girls, thank heaven-agreed that it was a fine eveing and presented a tray of hors d'equyres. Was there to be no limit to the mockery? I made a gesture of refusaal-disgust, perhaps. "Tick or claire, ser?"

I mumbled the one and he brought the other. its clarity was surpassed only by its innocence

of nourishing qualities. And so I came back to the inn of remem-

brance to find hospitality dismissed and formality in charge. When the drear banquet was ended I abandoned the company to its rank coffee and in-

credibly priced liqueurs and went out. But

As I halted also he rejoined me, saying, a little apologetically:

"It is a queer habit of mine when I am going over that culvert. If you'll mind, I was building it the last time you were here, five and 10 years ago."

"I remember!-and you continue to test the soundness of your work ?" "Maybe that will be it," he replied, and was

silent till I began to make inquiries about old friends, including some of his own.

His replies, though frank enough, were not exactly satisfying; indeed, so meager was the information that I wondered if James Fraser , had become a recluse, and, if so, why.

I had not come to the end of remembrance's list when he changed the subject.

"You are still writing books and stories. I see. I am a great reader nowadays. I read day and night. You would not have thought that of me 5 and 29 years ago!" "Anything but that, James. You seemed to

me to be cut for some real adventure." "Ah, well, we never know-we never know.



Alec McIndoer disappeared."

not so long after you were here the last time. Of course, since my uncle died I have been able to buy many books that were not for me before." He waved his hand towards the upper end the survey in some astonishment, I cannot slopes. "Yonder is my house. You will come to see my books and drink a glass to the old

I thanked him, my gaze on the austere, gray stone cottage with its steep, slated roof. It gave me a sense of grim bleakness, as do all the modern dwellings, even when the sun shines in that treeless place. Yet well I knew that the gray stone houses sheltered the same warm, human kindliness as did their ancient thatched neighbors.

A question hesitated at my lips. He had had

say, but having almost completed the circuit, I but my housekeeper would need a few days to came upon a division of shelves, all of which air and warm it. Then you will bring your things from the inn, and stay with me as long were packed with books bearing on the subject of murder. Here was no fiction, unless certain as you like-and be as free as you like. I canrecords of highwaymen were to be accepted as such. Some attempt had been made, I gathered, not give you fine food like the inn's, but I can to arrange the volumes chronologically, not acgive you always fresh fish and fresh milk and fresh butter and fresh eggs and fresh-made cording to their title pages but to their contents. In short, my host seemed to have sought to furscones and-30-year-old Talisker. nish himself with a sort of history of murder "My dear James," I said gratefully, "I'd from the earliest times. And I noticed, as prob-

come gladly, but I must go back on Saturday. ably his latest purchase, some 20 volumes of a For me the good times, I'm afraid, finished

"It will be four and 20 years in November." hid, he would terrify her-God knows how-so "No trace ?" "No trace."

"But why?"

"God knows." For a while we were both silent. I had never liked Alec McIndoer as I had liked James Fraser. Alec was a coarser grain and of a shifty nature; nevertheless, as our occasional companion on the water and among the hills, he had showed nothing but good humor and resource. "I think I will be leaving you now," said

James abruptly. "We are almost at the culvert," I said, with

an effort at lightness. "Hadn't you better test it again before you go to bed?" As though he had not heard, he held out his

hand, saying-"You will come tomorrow."

So we parted. Presently, pausing to light my pipe, I was informed by the tinkle of water that I was standing above the culvert. At this point a small torrent came down a black and rugged bed. At the moment it was a mere whisper, but an hour's heavy rain would set it raging. In the old days it had been a constant menace to the road, the surface of which its overflow frequently carried away. The culvert, though quite a small affair, some 18 inches wide, had apparently stood all tests, and Frazer was entitled to be proud of his handiwork.

But what had happened to Fraser-and the "single, woman down yonder?" The question kept me occupied till I slept.

Next morning, as Fraser had prophesied, I began to renew old acquaintnees. The experi-ence was pleasurable enough, yet less stimulating than anticipated. Somehow my mind was held by the thought of Fraser. I could not have discussed the man, but several people mentioned him, doubtless imagining that they had news for me. For themselves, as I gathered, the matter had long since ceased to hold interest.

Fraser, they said, was certainly a little mad -had been so for more than 20 years. The same applied to Flora Macloed, who was hardly ever seen abroad, and who had lived alone since the death of her parents, year ago. Love, it seemed, had made fools of them both, but what exactly had happened nobody knew. It was generally suspected that Alec McIndoer had come between them before he disappearedthat was another strange thing, but an old story now. McIndoer had made a good deal of trouble on the island, and some supposed that he had shipped on board an English trawler in the early morning. Anyway, a good riddance.

In the afternoon I went to call on Flora and discovered her at her loom. Absurdly enough, I expected to see an aged woman. I found a handsome one, grave indeed, with hints of gray in her dark hair and sadness in her fine eyes. With all her old native shyness and frankness she bade me welcome, and then she made tea. and we talked a while of the distant past-and of nothing else. I came away, feeling unhappy. I supped with Fraser. His housekeeper cer-

tainly did well, but the man's intense feeling for hospitality brought an ache to the heart. "You will not go on Saturday." You will come to me. I will get a boat for you, and you will have everything in every way you please.

You will stay, and the good times will come back again." It was the same the following night and I

almost dreaded the final meeting. But on Friday he seemed to have become re-

signed to my going. "When will you come to see me, James?" I asked him.

"Never," he answered gently.

After the housekeeper had tidied up and taken her departure, he brought out the Talis-

"Now I will tell the truth," he said. "I have not tasted whisky for 4 and 20 years. Nearly always the whisky will make a man talk too much. But tonight, my good friend, I will take drop, because I am going to tell you a story. If you would have stayed maybe I would not be for telling it, for we might have the good times for a while, but now"-he sighed-"I am tired and I will make an end of it all." Taking no notice of my concern, he charged the glasses, drew the table nearer the hearth, and seated himself opposite me.

that she could not move."

By J. J. Bell

Fraser drank and continued; "I never dreamed he would cast his eye on Flora. It was well known we were going to get married in the spring. But a young lass that hated Aleo. came and whispered to me. So I kept watch. I never let Flora go alone at night. But the weeks went past and Alec made no trouble. Every second night at 10 o'clock I took Flora home from her grandmother's house up on the hill, where Flora went in the evening to read to the old body, but we never saw the shadow of him. One afternoon, in November, when it was getting dark, Alec and 1 were setting out for home from a job close at hand. Alec had a great pinch-what you might call a lever-on s shoulder, and suddenly he turned around as by chance and the pinch struck me hard on the head, laying me flat. I was sore hurt, but Alec. was so vexed and he was so tender helping me home I could be angry with him.

"All the sanfo I gave a lad a message to Flora, telling her not to go out that evening. At 9 o'clock Alec came to ask for me. I was in my bed and my uncle told him I was in great pain, which was the truth. But near 10 o'clock something made me get up."

"I Had to Tell It."

Another sip-his mouth seemed to be dryand he proceeded: "I had not got far from the house when I met the lad-and he had forgot all about my message to Flora. I started to run, but my head got so bad I had to go down on my hands and knees and crawl along the turf at the side of the road. And no doubt that is how I came to catch him. It was a dark night, with rain drawlr; near after dry weather, so dry that not a drop of water was coming off the hills.

"Now you know where the path to Flora's house leaves the road-just a step beyond the culvert. The culvert opens so close to it that the path gets the spray in bad weather. The hill end of the culvert is covered with a grating. On this night the culvert was, of course, as dry as a bone, though anybody could see that it would not be so for long. 1 was creeping along, half dead with fear and sickness, and was getting close to the culvert, when I saw something moving on the rockly bed it flows into. A sheep. I thought at first, and then I lay flat, knowing it was a man. And I felt no more pain and all my wits came back. I crept nearer. The man was squatting down and doing something to his face. It began to shine-bluish. Then I knew. remembering what the young lass had whispered. Also I had read of such tricks. But I was not prepared for the next thing. He lay down and wriggled himself feet forward into the culvert. After a moment I understood. 1f Flora turned into the path then, she would see that awful thing looking out of the culvert. She might be paralyzed, she might lose her senses. But there was no more time for thinking. My wits were working. Give me some water."

He drank and went on. "Every inch of that culvert was known to me, for I had made every inch. Top and bottom, a foot from the mouth, a hole was drilled in the stones to hold a bar to keep the sheep dogs from going in. But the bar had never been placed. The tools we had left that afternoon were not 50 yards away. Now I was made of fire and steel. Away and back again, with all I needed. I walked heavily towards the culvert-that was to make him draw in from the opening. He would not take my tread for Flora's; besides, if she was coming alone in the dark she would be singing, as every-, one would know, 40 keep her heart up. I got down on my knees. In one minute I had broken through the surface of the road and found the top hole; in another I had forced through a short pinch, felt it find the bottom hole and jammed it firm in the top one. He was caged. He never made a sound, but soon I knew he was striving with the bar. But he had no power, lying in there on his belly. "I put back the surface, trod it down, and at the last stamped twice-like that-and damned him. And then the wind moved and the mist rolled down and the rainstorm burst. I picked up the tools and took them back to their place. And I mind telling myself that in an hour he would begin to drown, and would vell, and I must get Flora home before that, or, better, make her stay the night at her grandmother's. And then I fell down like a dead man. They found me in the morning and I was ill for a while. When I came to myself f knew I was a murderer and could never speak to Flora any more. And so I hated the dead man worse than ever in life, and so I still stamp on the cul- on his grave. . . . And Flora never spoke to me. Maybe it was her pride, but I think, too, she has the second sight. . That is nearly all. I had to tell it to a friend, And I have lost all friends but you," he said, and put his hand over his eyes. "Do not speak When I was able and the dry weather vet! came I went out in the night with a barrow of lime and opened the grating and shoveled it in. I went to look into the mouth of the culvert. but could not. He must have drowned with his arms inside the bar, maybe striving with it. But nothing can be hid forever. Well, well, I am tired of waiting to be found out. Tomorrow, after your steamer sails, I will just go along to the police station." I leaned forward, seizing his hand. "No, James-for God's sake, no!" I cried. "You have paid over and over again in punishment, and the beast deserved his death ---- " I fell back as the door opened. Flora came in, ghostly, yet younger looking than two days ago. Fraser got up, reeled, steadied himself, his hand on his heart, crying: "Flora, they are coming for me! You have come to warn---' "No, no, James," she answered in the Gaelle, and caught sight of me. I rose to go. She seemed to understand. 'Stay," she said in her sweet English; "stay and help us." "What is it, Flora?" asked Fraser, suddenly tremulous. "Give me your hand," she said to him, and me: "Take his other, like a good friend." Then softly, yet distinctly: "Alec McIndoer has come back.

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something, ere I left the house, bade me ask a question of the clerk, whereby I learned that the hotel door was locked at 11. In the old & had stood on the latch all night-if one may set the word for the long, lovely twilight that held, tore dreams, more repose than ever slumber come, afford—so that a man might take his fill of sea a slong or, were it his humor, hold communion with the fairies of the black reefs and yellow coves, the ghosts of the gray and purple mountainside, till dawn dispersed them, Going westward; I soon left the village behind and came upon the well remembered vista of a heaving, winding road, gouged from the moor, with crofts on either side, some of which, noted, carried new cots where ancient ones had formerly stood-not so sorry a change if. haply, some of the old dwellers remained. Beyond the farthest visible turn of the road lay the outer loch, tranquil, darkly smiling, dotted with skerries, opening wide to the Atlantic. On my left the moor fell away toward the water, on my right it rose steeply toward the grim, fearfully weather seared ranges. At every step a memory stirred, and gradually a strange, yot familiar, sense of mystery wrapped me round about.

At that hour few were using the road, but on the crofts folk still found work to do, and my eyes were ready for a wave, my ears for a A casual look at the stranger was | hail all I received, and presently I was walking with the last companion I should have dreamed of meeting here-loneliness. It was not fated, however, that I should travel far in such wise. I had come within sight of the last of the

crofts when a man, who had lately passed me, overtook me, speaking my name.

"Well., well," he said, shaking my hand warmly, "and you have come back again once more!

My pleasure at being recognized was tempered by my inability to return the compliment. There was something familiar in the peculiarly soft voice, but to the sound of it my eyes should have seen a man in his prime, and the speaker was white haired and furrowed of countenance. Yet neither was he altogether a stranger, and suddenly I said:

"Can you be James Fraser?"

"Ay, ay," he answered, "I am just James Fraser, and I forgive you for not knowing me at once."

I shook his hand again, for in those summers of long ago he and I had been close comrades, sharing adventures on the sea and in the mountains. Once, indeed, we had come near to drowning-together, and twice we had been lost. wellnigh for good, among the mists up there. I had a swift vision of him as then-a fine looking, dark, muscular young fellow, working along with others on the road we now trod, talking the Gaelic like a native, though he was hardly that, having come to the island, an orphan from abroad, to live with an uncle when he was 12. Our intimacy was no doubt quickened by the fact that he was readier than his neighbors to use the English, and possibly because he had seen something of the outer world. A stronger. finer, gentler soul, I often told myself, I need never hope to meet.

He joined me in my walk, and presently I inquired whether he had had an illness.

"No," he answered, as one used to the question, and added, "but I am not working now. My uncle, you see, is dead. He left more money than anybody expected, and he left it to myself, with his house-the last house you can see from here. Maybe I am not so strong as I was when you used to come here, but a roadman's life is a hard life, especially in a climate like this, and I left it when I could, before the rheumatism got too deep in me." He went on to inquire whom I had recognized in the village, and nodded at my reply.

"Well, well, you were maybe too keen in expecting to know the old friends at once; tomorrow you will find them, and they will find you when you least expect it. You will-" He halted abruptly, and with his right foot stamped twice, sharply, on the ground,

a sweetheart when I saw him last. Now, some how, I fancied, he had the look of a widower. trials. Even as I decided not to ask he answered.

in case you are remembering some things, I will just tell you, once and for all, that there is a single woman down yonder."

but the "down vonder" was enough. The cot on the shore of the loch was a landmark of memory, for there we had always got the boat for our fishing and other sea excursions.

he added. "And now all is said."

Taking my arm, he drew me from the road. and we made a short cut across the moor towards his home.

"You have forgot how to walk on the heather and moss," he remarked presently as I stumbled among the bowlders. "The body forgets more easily than the mind.", And again he went off at a tangent. "I have still the housekeeper that was my uncle's, though she does not sleep in the house. She is getting old, but she does very well. You will be thinking it is a queer thing to see your old friend the rough roadman in such softness!"

He came to the house. He pressed the latch and opened the door. He entered before me, then turned and held out his hand and, for the first time, smiled.

"Come away in, come away in," he said very kindly; "none was ever so welcome, for you bring back the good times of my life."

I was touched, not the less because I saw his eyes fill.

Next moment we were in the kitchen, warm after the keen air, fragrant with the peat fire. The room was plainly, even barely furnished. and there was no attempt at decoration; but in that dusky, homely atmosphere the glow of peaks, the shine of brass, and the glimmer of scoured wood answered sufficiently the desire this train," dismayed Helen, gazing him, of one sick of a blatant, garish city, and offered, down the snowy road, the blackindeed, a haven of solace after yonder stupid, pretentious little hotel.

He put me into the well-worn armchair by Within reach of my hand were a couple of short shelves of books. But the orange red fire held my gaze while he brought from a cupboard and placed on the table glasses, quaint old stocky things, and a stone jar. From the shelf in the window he took a white jug of water, muttering, "she filled it the last thing," and from the chauffeur sprang out to open the live so far out?" dresser a corkscrew, and with them came back

to the table. Then suddenly conscious that he was break- Warren bundled Helen into the car. ever. ing a seal on the big jar, I sat up and protested that there was no need.

"It is the true Talisker," he said as if he had not heard, "and it is as old as our good friendship. My uncle never touched the whisky, but he would always keep it in the house."

Cautiously he filled the old fashioned measuring glass abrim, and spilled it into mine.

"Take water, if you will," he said. "Nowadays I take it myself."

We raised our glasses, and looked at each other. Just for a moment his honest eyes wavered. Then he murmured the old Gaelic salutation. I echoed it awkwardly, and we drank,

"The true Talisker," he said, setting down his glass, while I wondered why he had taken only water. .

He led me to the room on the other side. was lined with books. A small fire smouldered in the grate.

"Books must have a fire in this place," he remarked. "I keep it burning summer and winter."

Yet before I had been 10 minutes in the room, I perceived that he was no lover-only a accentuated her sentimental mood. user of books. Not that his library was illchosen; most of the volumes were of works which had stood the test of time, and those which were modern had that for their only reproach.

He spoke little as I passed along the shelven.

1 -

recently published series of famous murde

"Ay, ay," he said gravely, "you are thinking Then aloud-"Perhaps you can manage it, if "I am a single man," he said quietly, "and it is a queer fancy. But it is a wonderful thing to study a murder, and judge the man or woman for yourself-maybe putting yourself in his or her place. I have thought that once in a while He offered no guidance of gesture or glance. a man has been hanged with a better conscience than the man he killed. . . . But you must come back and have a look at them in the day-

light.' "Upon my word, James."-I said, as we re-"We have not spoken for four and 20 years," turned to the kitchen, "if I had ever thought of your becoming a reader. I should have prophesied nothing but out-and-out romance for you." "There are not so many romances without murder in them," he said motioning me to the

armchair, and taking out his pipe, "and maybe not so many murders without a romance somewhere behind them. How long are you going to stay with us?"

"Only three days, James."

meet us."

coat.

door.

cigar.

"But this is nonsense! Always in the good times you stayed a month or two. I have a room for you, and it is as clean as the blue sky,

about 25 years ago. "Ay, ay," he said softly, as if to himself.

you sleep over it. Say nothing now. And, anyway, you will take your supper here tomorrow and the other nights. I thanked him heartily. "That hotel is a

fearful place." I added.

"Yes, I have heard it is an hotel now. . I may as well tell you that I have pot been in the village for-for many years." And yet again he broke off and asked whether I would be for trying the fishing this time.

Later, as he accompanied me along the road, I put the question that had been floating in my mind throughout our talk.

"Is your old fellow roadman, Alec McIndoer, still on the island?" He removed his pipe to spit in the ditch. "I thought you might have heard," he returned. "It was in the Inverness paper, anyway. Alec

McIndoer disappeared." "What ?--- disappeared ?" "Ay, he just disappeared."

"When?"

"Please say nothing till I have finished." he said, and took a drink. His pipe lay neglected on the table. "Well," he proceeded, "I am going to tell you how Alec McIndoer disappeared. Alec McIndoer was a bad man, but I was latenearly too late-in learning it. He could do what he liked with women. There must be women on the island that curse him to this day. I do not know whether curses can follow a man to hell, where Alec surely is. I was not afraid of him, though I knew that for all my strength and for all his slimness he could have broken my back quite easily. He was like a cat on his feet, a tiger in his fighting-and-cruelty. Yet he could not run quickly, for something was wrong in one of his legs. So he would spring out-out of the dark-on a woman. Or, maybe, lying

The Married Life of Helen and Warren

the way. Indifference.

She remembered her glowing em-From the lighted warmth of the barrassment when the chauffeur had Margie. train the deserted wind-blown plat- glanced back, and her flushed, conform seemed bleakly unwelcoming, fused dishevelment when they ar- case with any of Warren's relatives. How could they stand it? "Be a joke if there's no one to rived.

Warren buttoned up his She was never rumpice which bit-Warren's caresses, she thought bit-"Why, they 'phoned they'd meet terly.

"Dear, I'm cold," shivering against limbed trees only shadowy outlines "Pull that rug up around you." The Missing Thrill.

in the early dusk. Why had he changed so much "Huh, their car may be out of it the same thrilled drive. in the country."

"Someone's coming now!" at a "Damnation!" spluttered Warren, distant honk through the snow- as a jolt of the car over a frozen dry, sickening heat of a hot air furmuffled air. Another moment, and rut knocked his hat over his eyes. nace. a car glimmered down the road. "Rotten roads. Beastly trip out here, 'Sorry to be late, sir," as the anyway. Why in blazes do they "You didn't think it far last time,

You wished we could ride on for-"It's all right-we just got here."

"Hello, that's their place!" he "Oh, there's something warm at my feet." peered out at the lights twinkling Raising the robe, she exposed a flat paper-wrapped package. through the snow-burdened fir trees. "That's a soapstone, ma'am. This Turning in at an open gate, they car's not heated." drove up to an old-fashioned house.

"How nice and old-fashioned!" "Down, Bounder, down!" repri-Helen snuggled against it. "Dear, manded the chauffeur, as a big collie this is going to be a wonderful ride, barking excitedly dashed out from Don't you remember we came down the side porch. "Oh, what a dear!" Helen stooped here a few weeks after we were

married? It was a dark, snowy Sunday afternoon just like this." to pet him. "He had a sore paw when we were here before." "That's so, we did," taking out a A path of light fell across the

porch, as the door opened and a "It was awfully cold! Don't you stout, genial wan came out to receive remember how close you held me?" them. "Hello, Bert!" Warren greeted

nestling against him. "Um-um." lighting his cigar, un- his cousin. "Why the Sam Hill do responsive to her wistful suggestion, you live so far from the station?" "You don't call this far? How All the way out she had been

thinking of that other trip, compar- would you like to do it twice a day?" ing Warren's adoration then with "No commuting for me. Hello, his curt indifference now. An emo- Margie, you're looking fit." tional love story read on the train "You can leave your things in the

hall. Helen, I guess you'd like to go The bleak, snowy fields enhanced upstairs. Don't let him paw yousheltered intimacy of the car, he's getting so rough!" "Oh, I love collies!" as he raced Under the rug, her hand stole into

his, but there was no responsive alread of them up the stairs. When, a few moments later, they But if she had changed in that,

pressure. Her throat ached with poignant were settled in the living room, toward Warren she had not changed. Whether he or chance had planned that I should memories of that other drive-only Bounder insisted on lying on the She could see him in the mirror

Helen's Sentimental Mood Aggra-vates Warren's Crabbed about her, he had held her close all conch beside Helen, his head in her opposite, dispatching with hearty relish a liberal helping of cold chick-"He's shedding dreadfully-you'll en, oblivious to her pensive lack of be covered with hairs," warned appetite. Yet, on that other trip, his only thought had been of her.

But as Helen never felt quite at The heat was growing intolerable. she was grateful for Bounder's wor-"Don't you think it's warm

shipful attention. Playing with his here?" she ventured at last "Is it? Why, I hadn't noticed it." silky cars, it seemed not so necessar to join in the family gossip. Crossing to a side window, Margie "Uncle Joe's bought the old Milton opened it a grudging inch.

house. He's doing it over for Clara The faint breath of fresh air re--you know she's to be married in lieved but slightly the oppressive the spring." warmth, Yct, after a few moments, "Not a bad investment-that's a she rose to close the window

the hearth, my feet on one of those old rag commission, or the chauffeur off on rugs, the colors of which grow never tiresome. a bat. A lot of things can happen arm about her now would have made open that new parkway." Warren a nervous shiver. "I'm afraid of was always keen on real estate. drafts-one's so apt to get pneu-The room was suffocating-the monia this weather,

Murmuring a polite assent, Helen resigned herself to the enervating Helen, who loathed heat, was long- heat.

ing to have a window open. She It was not until they were for a was rehearsing a timid request for a moment alone, as they returned to "little air" when supper was an- the living room, that she managed to whisper an anxious:

nounced. Her hope that the dining room "Dear, won't you say something would be cooler was dispelled as about opening a window? I'm almost soon as they entered. If anything, sick."

the heat was more oppressive, "Well, you can't freeze out every "You folks haven't been out since body-just because you're a fresh-that trip just after you were mar-

ried." Bert was sharpening the carv- And on that other trip, he had ing knife. "Doesn't seem that long, been so gallantly attentive to her does it?" every wish.

Flushing at his sharp rebuff, again some ways it seems ages," sighed Helen, thinking of Warren's Helen curled up on the couch to inchanged attitude. dulge in morbid broodings while she forced a facial interest in Margie's

Aunt Laura's Teeth.

"Hold on, not all white meat," protested Warren. "Give me the sec-ond joint-yes, plenty of the fixings. Seen anything of the Daggetts late-

The same words she had used 'We were there last Sunday. Some before! With a swift heartache, she remembered. And Warren, who had of the gravy? Aunt Laura's having been on the couch beside her, had trouble with her teeth-pyorrhea answered as he tweaked Bounder's Afraid she's going to lose them all."

The talk drifted on. Helen thought cars, "Of course, he does! How can how thrilled she had been at this he help it?" family gossip on their first trip. It Now, he was on the other side of had made her more intimately a part the room, laughing at Bert's golf of Warren. of Warren.

Are All Marriages Like This? Aunt Laura's teeth and Uncle Ioc's avestments failed to thrill her now Were all marriages like this? Did

the thrills and romance always end with the first year? She thought over (Turn to Pase Seven.)

account of a disagreeable neighbor.

Once more, the devoted Bounder

settled down, his head in Helen's lap.

"You do like me, don't you, dog-

We let Fraser down into his chair, still holding his hands.

"Yes," she went on very gently, "you thought him dead. James. But I heard his screams that night and I let him out half drowned-and we put the bar back and everything as it had been. For he made me take an oath that I would never speak to you again, never tell you that he had escaped. Do you understand me, James? I had to take the oath or he would have killed you. O, yes, he would! So I have never spoken to you all these years. Every month he sent me a letter reminding me of my oath, to say he was watching. . . . And I knew why you never spoke to me-poor man. Well, it is all over!"

I gave Fraser whisky, and at last he spoke. "Where is he?" he faintly asked,

"In my house," she deliberately answered, "and he is dead." Fraser awoke. "Dead! Oh, Flora, you-"

"I might have done it, James," she said softly; "I think if I had seen you as you are now, so white and tired, I would gladly have done it. But I did not. God did it. The man burst in mad drunk and shouting-I do not know where he came from-and fell down in a fit, and just died." She turned to me. "You will help us," she said. "We must have the policeman and, I suppose, the doctor."

"I'll fetch them," I said, and began to look for my hat. Before I found it they had forgotten my presence. She was on her knees beside him; his

I went out into the calm twilight. I did not

(Cppyright, '1922.)

hurry on my errand. The dead could wait. The

arms were round her. .

living had waited a long time.