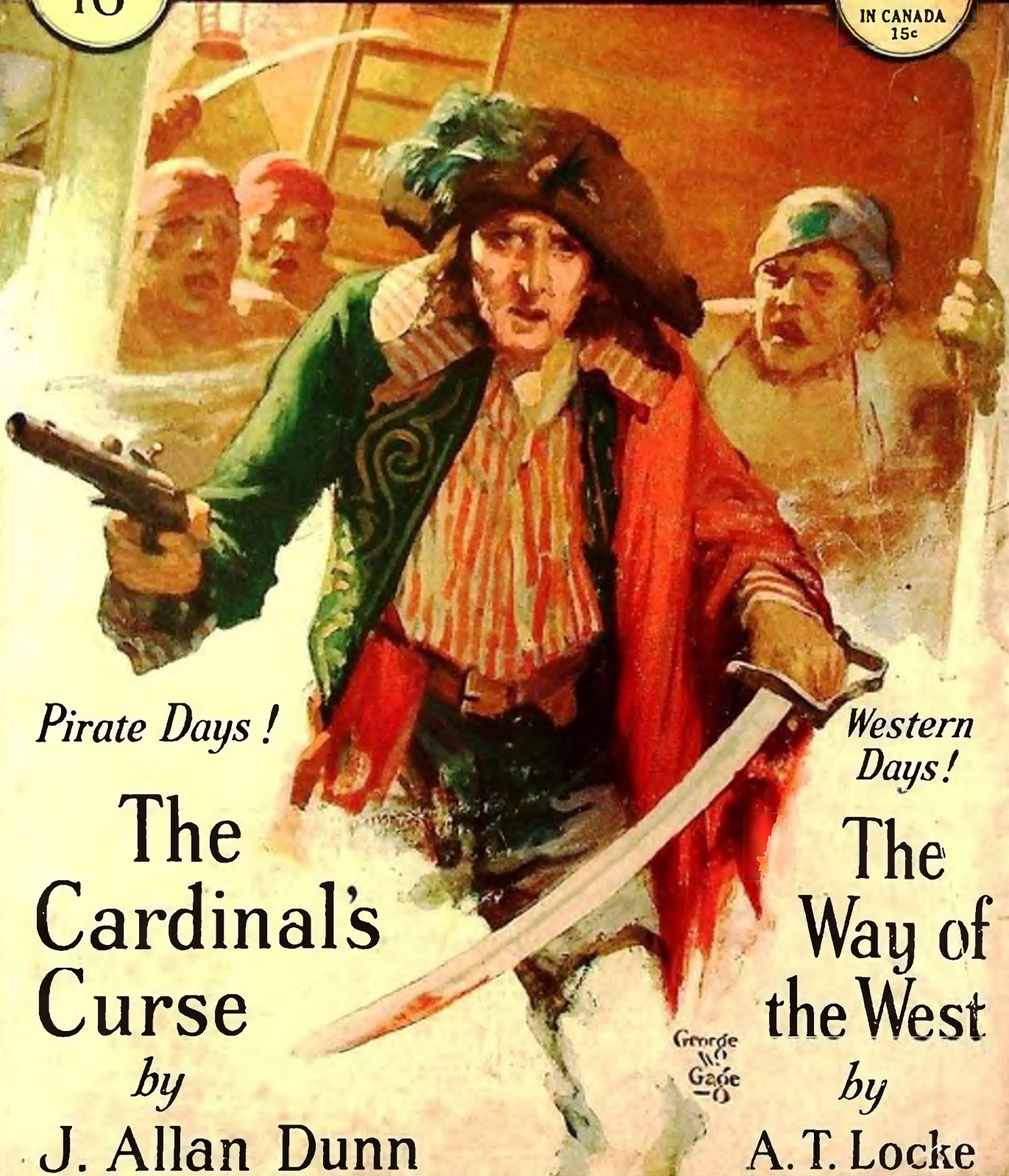


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The
Cardinal's
Curse

by

J. Allan Dunn

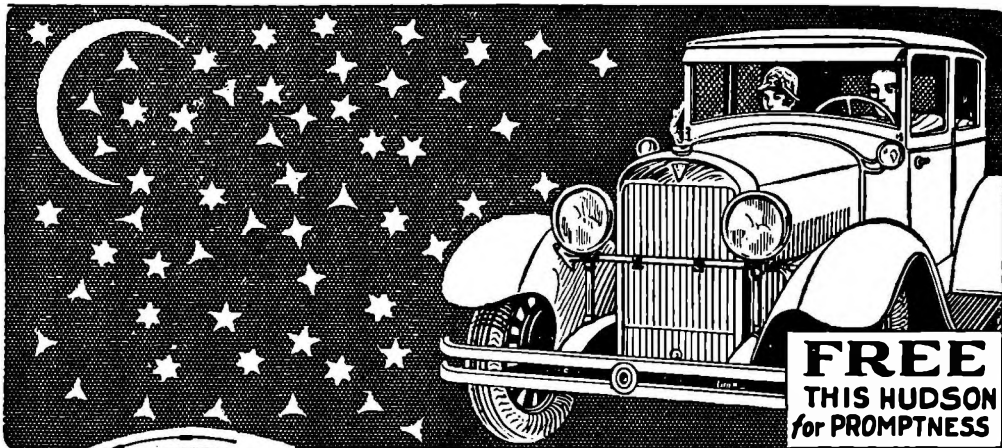
*Western
Days!*

The
Way of
the West

by

A. T. Locke

George
H. Gage
-O-



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THIS IS NOT A MAGAZINE CONTEST

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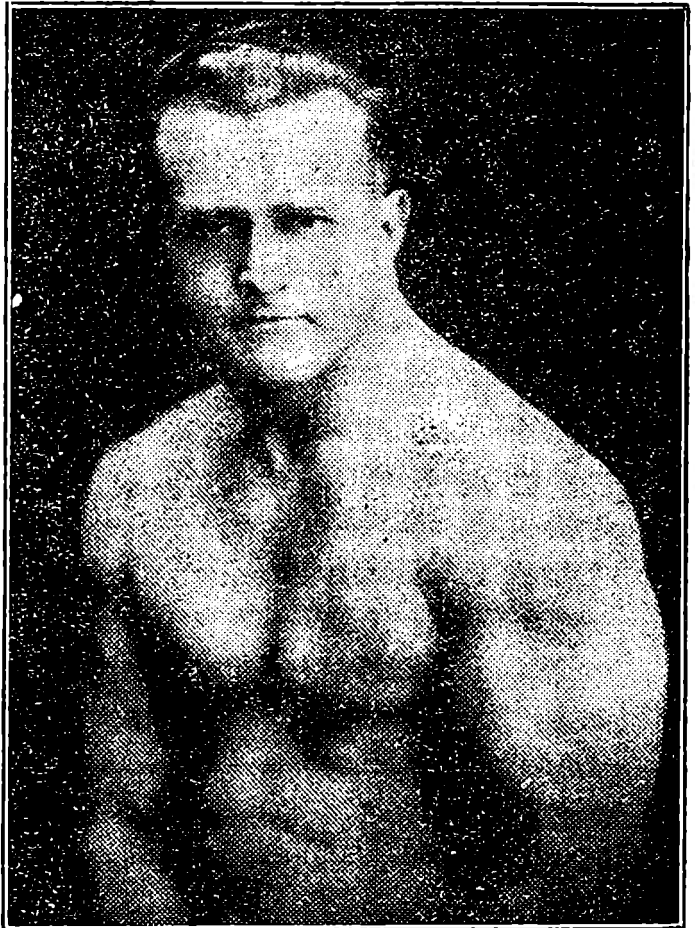
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ARGOSY



ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 201

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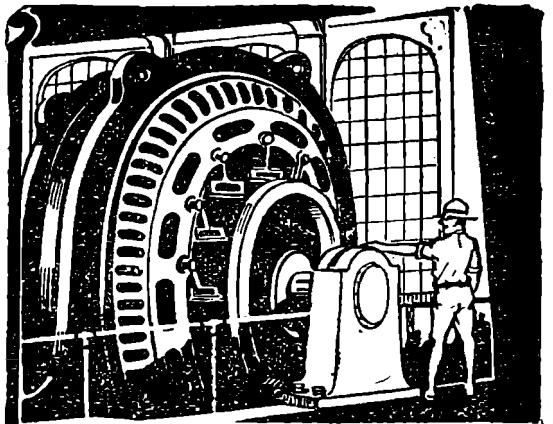
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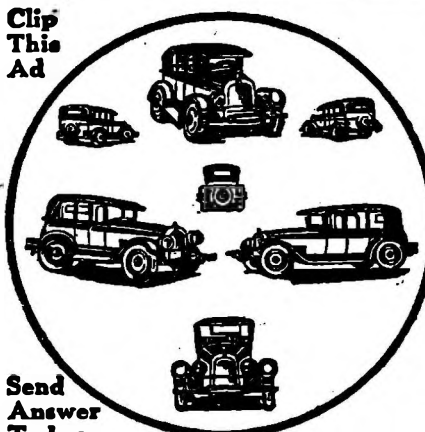
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ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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The deputy pushed Wanderin' Willie into the log jail

The Way of the West

Justice is sudden and stern in the range country; but it is sometimes blind and fumbling, as Sally Lee Corbin and a brave young wanderer of the rangeland discover

By A. T. LOCKE

Author of "Will Power in Packsaddle," "Case One Hundred and One," etc.

CHAPTER I.

DISASTER.

HE appeared to be at least sixty-five, this man who sat his horse so easily and gracefully as he rode along with his companion, a girl who could not have been more than twenty. His face was seamed and bronzed and his white hair, unshorn and unkempt, straggled out from under

the battered and dusty sombrero which he wore.

His lips, thin and tightly closed, betokened shrewdness and resolution and, perhaps, a slight disposition to stubbornness. His nose, slightly inclined to aquilinity, gave his countenance a certain aspect of aggressiveness, a faint suggestion of a ruthless disposition. His steel-blue eyes, however, while alert, were kindly and they revealed a

mellowness of temperament that rather belied the other features of his face.

"I allus thought, Sally Lee," he said to the girl at his side, "thet I'd hate to get to be a ol' snoozer. But I reckon it ain't so bad, Sally. It ain't so bad after all. Fer a fact, Sally, it's kinda peaceful-like and pleasant. Hyar I am, nigh on to seventy-five and I feel as spry as I ever did. I never thought a ol' hombre could be so contented. Fer a fact I didn't. I reckon I'll live to be a hundred, gal, if I don't start to sow some of them thar wild oats and get shot or lynched. But shucks," he continued with a smile, "I don't figger thet I'll cut loose no more at my age. I've had enough shootin' in my time, Sally. I'm right glad thet the ol' days hev gone."

"You saw some lively times, didn't you, granddad, when you first came out here from Kentucky?" she suggested with a little smile.

"Yes, I reckon I did see some lively times when I fust came hyar," replied the old man. "Fer years after I came hyar I saw lively times, too. Thar war ornery folks aroun' hyar fer many a year, Sally Lee; powerful bad they war, Sally; jest plain pizen, most of 'em."

The old man shook his head at the recollections that were coming to him and then he lapsed into silence.

"But, granddad," objected the girl, "there are still a lot of shady characters around the country."

"Shady characters!" sniffed the old man contemptuously. "If thar's any bad hombres aroun' these parts now, they must keep plumb in the shade. Leastwise, no one ever sees 'em or hears about 'em. Why, yo' know yourself, Sally Lee, thet I ain't toted a gun in ten year. Thar used to be lots of times, when I wouldn't have dared be without my shootin'-irons fer as much as ten seconds. But them times have gone," he asserted with an air of finality. "Thar ain't no more excitement no more. Why, thar ain't been a man

shot 'aroun' these parts in more'n six months. Look at Wallow, fer instance. Thet place used to be a he-man's town and now it looks like a camp-meetin' grounds!"

THE old man compressed his lips and Sally Lee Corbin knew that he was disgusted to the point of silence.

So, with a smile of amusement in her eyes, steel-blue eyes like those of the old man, she, too, rode along in silence. It was late on a spring afternoon and they were riding toward the west, toward the setting sun. The girl, like her grandfather, wore a sombrero. The hair waving out from under the broad-brimmed hat which sat jauntily on her head was of the color and sheen of newly minted gold. She, like the old man, was tanned by the sun, but her complexion had the fresh radiance of youth. She wore corduroy riding-breeches and leather boots; and a gray flannel shirt, open at the collar, revealed her shapely shoulders and the other alluring contours of her womanly figure.

Both Sally Corbin and her grandfather rode superbly, but there was a suggestion of weariness in the latter's mien which was not apparent in the girl.

And yet the pair had started for the little town of Wallow at six o'clock in the morning, and after lunching there and transacting some business which had required the attention of the old rancher, they had at once commenced the long ride back to the Bar-X.

For half the day they had ridden westward in the direction of the Big Horn Mountains which, misty in the distance, seemed to be wrought of translucent, silver-blue crystal. They had passed, for the most part, through rolling country that was damp and verdant with the freshness of the season. Here and there they had seen buttes rising from the more level country, buttes that looked as though they might

have been the dwellings or fortresses of some vanished cyclopean race.

They had splashed through torrential streams which, in the course of a few months, would become sun-baked arroyos. They had ridden over long stretches of road that turned and twisted through country that was broken and heavily wooded. They had seen vast herds of cattle scattered over the hazy distances and, here and there, like drifts of lingering snow, they had seen flocks of sheep on the green hillsides.

"Sheep!" snorted old Corbin, coming out of his reverie as he noticed some of the detested creatures on a slope they were passing. "Thar war a time—"

"I know," interrupted the girl. "There was a time when the cattlemen hereabouts held the range for themselves. And yet—" She paused doubtfully.

"And yet what?" asked the old man a little irritable.

"I suppose," sighed the girl, "that people need mutton and wool just as much as they need beef and leather. I suppose that the sheepmen had a right to live."

The old man grunted disdainfully.

"They never had," he exclaimed positively. "They never had no right to live a-tall. They ruined th' grass wherever they went with thar dratted woolies. And we ran 'em off," he continued fiercely. "We ran 'em off in th' good ol' days." He shook his head mournfully. "If I took a shot at a snoozer now," he added, "I suppose I'd be arrested and put in th' calaboose. Thet's th' law fer yo'," he said bitterly. "Thar's too much law aroun' hyar."

"Well," the girl replied, "the law brings peace and it seems to me that that is a good thing."

"Peace!" growled the old man. "Thar's too much peace. People don't know how to fight no more. Look at our cow-pokes!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Not one of 'em carries a gun. None of the waddies carry guns

no more. All they do is chase a few innocent cows aroun' in the daytime and sit aroun' in the bunk house in the evenin' and sing hymns."

"But they don't have to carry guns any more," the girl objected. "There is law here now."

"Law!" grunted Corbin. "It 'll bring tarnation ruin to the hull country if it keeps on. Men ain't men no more. They don't hev to perfect themselves, thet's why; the law perfects 'em and they let the law do it. Yo' should have seen 'em lined up ag'in' the bar in the Corral Saloon back in Wallow in the ol' days. Every man thar had two guns and some of 'em had three. And they could use 'em, too; they knew how to fight in the ol' days."

"And I guess that men know how to fight yet," replied the girl defensively. "They just don't have to fight, that's all."

"No, I reckon they don't," conceded old Corbin rather bitterly. "It's money thet fights nowadays instead of men."

THE girl looked sidewise at him with eyes that suddenly became sober with apprehension.

"Did you have any trouble with Pinkham, granddad?" she asked after a moment's pause. The old man looked straight ahead as he answered her question.

"Thar was no trouble," he said quietly. "Not a bit of trouble. He jest refused, thet's all, to listen to any renewal talk. He said thet thar warn't no use of discussin' the matter no-how."

"But why?" gasped the girl. "Everything is going to be all right. You had two bad years—everybody around here did—but you caught up some last year and everything looks good now."

"I know, I know," replied the old man. "But I reckon thet Pinkham 'u'd like to git hold of the Bar-X and he thinks he's got me whar he wants me. Looks a leetle as if he did, too, with

them notes and mortgages that he holds." Then he looked at the troubled girl and smiled. "But yo' can't never tell, honey," he continued softly. "Yo' can't never tell." His face became grim. "Thar's ten thousand and more in cash in the bank and thet 'll carry us along fer awhile. I'll give Pinkham a fight to the finish," he asserted vigorously.

"You mean, granddad," she amended, "that *we'll* fight him. Count me in on this. Don't forget that I am right with you, pardner."

His eyes were moist with emotion and warm with love and appreciation as he looked at the slender young girl.

"Shore," he said, "I know. Yo're jest like yore granny was," he added tenderly.

"And Buck will stand by you" she said proudly. "He will stand by you to the very end."

"Yes, I reckon he will," admitted Corbin. "Buck is a good boy, Sally. He's a man, Buck is. When yo' two git married I'm goin' to turn the Bar-X over to you and Buck. Thet is," he added, "if thar's any Bar-X left."

The face of the girl flushed a trifle and she kept her eyes averted from those of the old man.

"And then," the latter continued, with a mischievous smile on his wrinkled face, "I'm goin' to sit back and ride herd on the babies. I'll be like a ol' snoozer sittin' peaceful-like in the sunshine and watchin' his lambs."

The girl touched her horse with her spurs and, as the animal leaped ahead, the old man saw that the tips of her ears were scarlet and he chuckled quietly to himself.

Sally Lee Corbin was embarrassed, just as she always was when her grandfather made any of his frequent allusions to her approaching marriage to Buck Randall, the young foreman of the Bar-X. But, mingled with her embarrassment, there was a sense of delightful warmth. She loved Randall with a sweet and virginal passion and

she knew, too, that he idolized her. But she was serenely contented to keep this knowledge to herself. She wished, at times, that her grandfather would stop teasing her about Buck. And yet, every time he did, her senses seemed to sing with rapture. She wished that he would keep his silence, but she knew that he wouldn't because, ever since she had been a fatherless and motherless little girl, he had loved, and adored, and teased her.

She heard him riding up behind her and, feeling that she could not look him calmly in the eyes, she touched her horse once more with her spurs. They were riding through a ravine and the white road beneath her was mottled with shadows. In a few hundred yards the highway would pass out of the broken country and the Bar-X ranch house and other buildings and the far-flung acres of the vast domain would be visible beneath her. She wanted to keep ahead of her grandfather, she wanted to reach the corral first, she wanted to turn her horse over to one of the boys and hasten up to her own room. Babies! That was the first time her grandfather had ever suggested such a thing. She heard a sharp report, but her mind was in such a turmoil that she scarcely heeded it.

She rode along until, suddenly, it dawned on her that she was riding alone.

A vague but frightful premonition took quick possession of her and she was overwhelmed with a surge of fear. She reined in her horse sharply and then managed to look over her shoulder. There, some distance back, her grandfather's sorrel was standing riderless in the middle of the road. With her heart beating madly she swung her roan around and dashed back in the other direction. The sorrel was stirring uneasily and pawing nervously in the dust. She saw the crumpled figure of her grandfather stretched out on his back near the side of the road. With a half-suppressed

sob of terror she leaped from her saddle and knelt down beside him and peered into his face.

There was an ugly hole in his right temple and a stream of blood, coming from the wound, was trickling down the side of his head and into the dust of the road.

CHAPTER II.

TEN THOUSAND REWARD.

OLD DAN CORBIN had been dead for a week and, for four days, had been at rest under the soil in the bedraggled little cemetery of Wallow.

From the moment she had leaped from her roan and, kneeling in the road, had found that her grandfather was beyond all aid, Sally Lee Corbin had been the prey of an all-consuming passionate wrath. There in the shadows of the ravine, when she finally knew that he was dead, sorrow and rage had taken possession of the girl. She had dashed up the wooded side of the hill that towered to the right of the ravine and, with tears in her eyes, had sought some trace of the dastardly coward who had fired from ambush the shot that had killed her companion. She had beat her way through the brush and the timber, seeking some trail that she might follow, even to the end of the world, in quest of the slayer of the old man who was so dear to her.

She had had no fear for herself, despite the fact that she was unarmed. Blindly and tenaciously she had scoured the hillside until the sun had gone down and the darkness of the night had brought her vain search to an end. Then, her tears dried by the cold spirit of vengeance that had been aroused in her, she had made her way down to the road again. Tenderly, with caressing hands, she had moved the limp body of Daniel Corbin to the very edge of the highway, and then, after gazing

down upon it for a moment, she had leaped to her horse and had galloped like mad to the Bar-X. Standing in the bunk house, with her eyes blazing, she had told the story to Buck Randall and the Bar-X punchers.

"Ten thousand dollars in gold!" she had exclaimed, "to the man or men who will bring in that murderer dead or alive!"

There had been no need for the incentive of a reward to spur the riders of the Bar-X into action. Old Dan Corbin, whose exploits in an almost mythological past had been the themes of endless bunk house discussions, had been idolized by his men, and they had been preparing for action even while Sally had been telling her story. All the time she was talking the men had sought out their cartridge belts, holsters and guns.

The moment she had finished, they swept out into the night, the girl riding silently with them, and combed the countryside until another night had fallen. One of them had sped into Wallow, another had ridden north to Poco, another south to Dorado. And the Bar-X forces were joined by other grim-faced men who rode themselves and their horses to exhaustion without a murmur of complaint.

But not a trace had been found of the one who, from the shelter of the woods in the obscurity of a ravine, had fired the shot that had laid old Corbin low.

Ten Thousand Dollars in Gold for the Body, Dead or Alive, of the Slayer of Daniel Corbin.

Placards, bearing the above inscription, were on display in Wallow, Dorado and Poco. Sally Lee Corbin herself, with taut lips and flashing eyes, had nailed one of them in front of the general store and post office in Wallow on the day after her grandfather had been buried.

She had told Buck Randall of her intention, and he had been silent for a moment before speaking.

"I reckon, Sally," he then had suggested, "that the people hyarabouts 'll do what they kin without any reward. And besides—" he had hesitated, rather embarrassed.

"I know what you are going to say, Buck," she had replied. "You are going to tell me that the only real asset the Bar-X has left is a deposit of a little over ten thousand dollars in the bank. Granddad confided in you just as much as he did in me." She paused a moment. "I am sorry that there is only ten thousand dollars left to offer. If I had fifty thousand dollars I would make that the amount of the reward. Granddad was good to me—he was my pardner—and I will give everything I have got to avenge him. I will go the limit, Buck!"

"I know, Sally," he had agreed. "but—"

"You are going to tell me," she had interrupted evenly, "that everyone around here knew granddad and liked him, and that they will do their best to catch his slayer without being spurred on by a reward. I reckon they will, but I am not taking any chances."

SHE had gone to see Silas Pinkham, the owner of the bank at Wallow, and she had found him at his desk in one of the windows that gave him a view of the main street of the straggling cattle town. He was a middle-aged man, inclined toward portliness, and his eyes had the cold, greenish-blue tint of ice.

He was a thorough Easterner, a man of business, and Sally, ever since she had been old enough to form likes and dislikes, had felt a certain contempt for the dealer in mortgages. He had greeted her effusively and with an air of sympathy which her keen intuition told her was pure hypocrisy. She had felt herself despising him more than ever because he had refused the last request that her grandfather had made.

"I may need ten thousand dollars in

gold on short notice, Mr. Pinkham," she had told him after perfunctorily acknowledging his condolences. "I am offering that reward for the murderer's capture."

"H-m-m-m," he had breathed, tapping his desk with a pencil as he looked at her. Then, after a pause: "I heard about that reward, Miss Corbin." He had looked down at his desk and had furrowed his brow as if she had made a very weighty request that required long and careful consideration. She waited impatiently and was about to speak when he looked up.

"Don't you think," he said, in a deep and ponderous voice, "that, under the circumstances, such a reward is rather—er—extravagant, Miss Corbin?"

"That's not the question," she had replied shortly. "It is my understanding that the Bar-X has a credit here somewhat in excess of ten thousand dollars. I asked you if I might have ten thousand dollars in gold whenever the need for it arises?"

She had not been able to temporize with the bull-necked, heavy-jowled man in the swivel chair. She had known, too, that it was a time for diplomacy, that the day undoubtedly would come when she might be, to a great extent, dependent on the favor of Silas Pinkham. But, with the recklessness of youth, she had swept that consideration aside.

He had looked at her then with a faint smile of amusement on his face, a smile which seemed to hint at his experience and power, a smile that had a gleam of contempt in it, a suggestion of arrogance, a subtle and intangible menace. He even had assumed, when he had replied to her, an air of humility which she knew was mere mockery. It had infuriated her, she had felt her cheeks flame with rage.

"I was going to give you the advantage of considerable experience," he had told her, "but, of course, you know best. Of course. Why not?"

Ten thousand dollars in gold will be here for you whenever you need it."

He had picked up a sheaf of legal documents and had commenced to peruse them. Trembling with fury, Sally had made her way out of the office without further ceremony or without receiving another glance from Pinkham.

That had been two days before, and now, riding away from the Bar-X on the way to Wallow early in the morning, she still was thinking about it. Her contempt for the puffy Pinkham had crystallized into hatred, and she had found herself wondering, in the past couple of days, if he had not in some way been responsible for the death of her grandfather. But she had dismissed these vague suspicions as too absurd. Pinkham had been in Wallow for a number of years and had never, even remotely, been connected with any acts of violence. He had, it is true, absorbed a number of ranches in the vicinity, but he had acquired them all by the perfectly legal procedure of foreclosing mortgages.

As much as she despised the man, she had not been able to give the slightest credence to her fugitive suspicions.

She suggested to Buck that Pinkham might have had some hand in the murder, but Randall, too, dismissed the idea with a decided shake of his head.

"I wouldn't put no crookedness past Pinkham," Buck admitted, "but he's too big a coward to hev anything to do with a killin'. He'll strangle anybody with his money," the foreman asserted, "but thet's as far as thet dollar-chaser 'll ever go."

Buck looked at her very dubiously when she told him how she had treated the banker.

"It's better to have Pinkham fer a friend than a enemy," he told her. "Yo' should have been more perlite, Sally."

She flamed up at this.

"How could I be polite to that—thing?" she demanded irefully. "I just couldn't be, that's all. I will treat Pinkham, and everybody else around here, just as I believe they deserve to be treated," she had stormed. "No better and no worse!"

SALLY was thinking of Buck now as she rode along in the direction of Wallow. She felt a little disappointed in him. She wondered if, as her grandfather had said, the old breed of the West was vanishing, along with the old desire to turn, in times of trouble, to the administration of six-gun law.

And yet, she considered, she could hardly blame Buck. She herself, born and bred on the range, had always been an advocate of peace ever since she had been old enough to understand the ways of life. She had never before, of course, been a victim of violence, either direct or indirect; the wanton slaying of her grandfather had been the first act of injustice from which she ever had suffered.

Her lips tightened as she thought of the murder of the inoffensive old man. No matter what the attitude of Buck was or might be, no matter what her past conceptions of law and justice had been, she intended now to avenge his death in one way or another.

She was riding into Wallow to have a talk with the sheriff, Pat Dumbarton, with whom she was very well acquainted. He was an old-timer, and for many years he and her grandfather had been intimate friends. Sally Lee had no doubt but that he was doing everything within his power to apprehend the perpetrator of the crime that had stirred the district so deeply. But she wanted to inspire him to greater efforts if such a thing were possible.

He, too, had been inclined to dissuade her from offering a reward for the capture of the murderer. He had taken this attitude despite the fact that

he, very likely, would be one of those to benefit by it.

Why, she wondered as she rode along, did most people seem to place money above friendship? What was money in comparison with the accomplishment of what was so obviously an ordinary act of duty and justice?

She came to the place in the ravine where, from the thickly wooded hillside, the shot had been fired. She felt an impulse to spur her horse past the scene of the crime, but, instead, she brought the animal to a halt. There was nothing, she knew, to fear from the old pioneer who had died there, and her whole spirit cried out a defiance to the unknown person who had slain him.

She lingered there for awhile, studying the hillside, peering up at it as though she expected it to reveal the secret that it possessed. Perhaps, she felt, the mysterious killer was even then concealed somewhere in the foliage above her; his gun, at that moment, might be pointed in her direction. She paused there defiantly, hoping that it was; she felt that, even with a bullet in her, she could storm the hillside and, with her thirty-eight, bring the slayer to justice if, even for a moment, he would reveal his whereabouts.

For she had worn a gun since the night when, with her loyal adherents, she had scoured the moonlit terrain in search of a man who must have vanished like an apparition.

But the ravine was silent, save for the musical tinkling of the little creek which ran along the bottom of it, and, at last, she rode on her way. She reached Wallow between ten and eleven o'clock and she looked neither to right nor to left as she rode up the main street of the little cattle town.

She knew, as she passed the bank, that Silas Pinkham was seated at his desk in the window. He was always there. Always, apparently, he was keeping one eye on the inside of the bank and the other eye on the town of

Wallow. His attitude, in the past, had aroused a certain contemptuous amusement in Sally. Now, however, her memories of his cold and calculating expression, his air of self-satisfaction and power, awakened a bitter resentment in her.

She felt almost impelled to glance in his direction as she rode past the bank, but she successfully resisted the impulse.

She was conscious, as she went toward her destination, that many people stared at her, and she flushed with anger and impatience. She noticed, too, that there were a great many horses tied to the hitching rail of the Las Palmas Saloon.

It occurred to her that it was the fifteenth of the month, which was, for some reason or other, the general pay day in the district. There would be many men in town that day, and there would be the usual amount of care-free, reckless indulgence in the minor vices that Wallow afforded. The Bar-X pay roll, she thought with a sense of relief, was taken care of for the month. There had been sufficient surplus in the bank, above the reward she had offered, to insure the payment of the wages due her men.

Some of the Bar-X boys, undoubtedly, were in town. Buck Randall himself might ride in later. He generally did on pay day so that he might keep an eye on any of the Bar-X riders who, under the influence of a few drinks, might be inclined to stampede.

The office of Sheriff Dumbarton occupied the front room of a crude, one-story frame building which abutted, in the rear, on the more substantial structure of heavy logs which served as a jail. A heavy door, opening from the room behind the one in which the sheriff made his quarters, led into the calaboose, which commonly served only as a place of confinement for cowpokes who became hilarious beyond the bounds of discretion and decency on their monthly pay day sprees. The jail,

however, was a stout structure and, once in it, a prisoner was securely confined.

SALLY found the sheriff alone in his office, tilted back at ease, his feet on his desk.

The front legs of his chair clattered to the floor as he rose to his feet when she opened the door.

"I'm right glad to see yo', Miss Sally," he said in reply to her greeting. And then a shadow came into his eyes. "But I'm right sorry to tell yo' thet thar ain't no news yet. We're doin' everything, Miss Sally, thet we kin, but—" he shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Sit down, Miss Sally," he added, drawing up a chair for her.

She sat down and, after a moment's hesitation, she spoke to the friendly old official.

"It doesn't seem possible," she said doubtfully, "that the one who did—that thing—can't be rounded up. There must be some way to—" the sentence trailed off to a vague conclusion as she clasped her hands nervously together in her lap.

"I know how yo' feel," the sheriff smiled sympathetically. "I know exactly how yo' feel. But it's got me, and everybody else, jest plumb puzzled, Miss Sally. Thar warn't no motive, nohow; thet's the trouble. Yore gran'paw didn't have no enemies, leastwise none thet no one knowed about. We've hunted in every direction, Miss Sally, yo' know thet. But, so far, nothin's happened. And we wanta git 'im, too, whoever did thet shootin'." A grim expression succeeded the placidity of his countenance. "Thet's the worst crime done aroun' hyar in many a year," he sighed.

He lowered his head and the girl waited in silence for him to continue.

"The trouble is," he finally said, "thet thar ain't no trail to follow. Thar ain't no clew thet points to no one. It might have been some one thet yore gran'paw knowed long ago,

of course, but, hollerin' Hannah, I knowed 'im as long as any one hyarabouts and I can't remember thet he ever made a enemy who would shoot 'im thet way."

He shook his gray head dubiously. "It warn't robbery, neither, 'cause whoever shot Dan must 'a' seen yo' with 'im, and yo' warn't shot at. I jest can't understand it and I don't reckon, Miss Sally," he concluded apologetically, "thet 'we've got much chance to catch the ornery skulker who waylaid yore gran'paw. We'll do our best, of co'se, but—"

The door of the little office was suddenly thrown open and a stalwart young man who wore the badge of a deputy sheriff entered the room. Sally saw that there was an air of excitement about him and she also observed, through the open door, that there was a crowd of people outside in the street. She heard a babel of voices come through the door and she caught a glimpse of two men on horseback out in the road in front of the office. She could see that the arms of one of them were bound to his side and she thought that she caught the glitter of a gun in the hands of the other rider. She saw Sheriff Dumbarton rise to his feet and then she heard the voice of the deputy.

"Thar's a hombre out hyar thet I reckon yo'd like to meet, Pat," the deputy said.

"A hombre I'd like to meet?" questioned the sheriff. "What's his name?"

"I don't know his name yet," admitted the deputy, "but I reckon you'd like to meet him anyway. He's the gent thet killed Dan Corbin."

CHAPTER III.

WANDERIN' WILLIE'S SURPRISE.

"THEY'VE got him?" exclaimed Sally, rising to her feet.

"Yes, miss," the deputy told her. "He's a stranger to me, and another stranger brought 'im in, but thar

ain't no question but thet he's the guilty one. Why, he's even confessed."

Sally, following the sheriff and the deputy, walked out of the office and joined the crowd that was milling around in the street. She stood close to the doorway and watched Pat Dumbarton as he shouldered his way up close to the horseman who had brought in the murderer of her grandfather. She heard the sheriff's gruff voice.

"Yo' say thet this feller yo' brought in was the one who killed Dan Corbin?" he asked.

"I don't have to say it," came the surly reply. "He'll tell yo' so himself."

The sheriff was quiet for a moment as he scrutinized both of the men on horseback.

"I reckon," he finally said, "thet both of you'd better come in the office so thet I kin git the hull story. Some of yo' fellers," he said to the crowd, "help thet gent down from his hawse. I don't think thet he kin 'light with his hands and feet tied thet-away."

"And be careful of him," the other stranger cautioned. "I reckon he's a bad one, thet feller."

Sally, standing on the threshold of the sheriff's office, felt a thrill of exultation. There was justice in the world after all. She looked again, more carefully, at the young fellow who was accused of firing the shot that had brought the life of her grandfather to an end. The thongs that, running under the belly of his horse, had bound his feet together were being untied and, while this was being done, he was sitting erect in his saddle. His face was lean and bronzed and there was rather a somber expression in his dark blue eyes. His surroundings, however, did not seem to give him any undue concern. Even the menacing murmurs that arose on all sides of him seemed to leave him entirely unmoved.

"Swing him!"

"Get a rope!"

Threats like these, uttered in growl-

ing voices, seemed to rise on every side, but the man at whom they concerned the most seemed to pay no heed at all to them.

Then Sally, whose heart beat a little faster as she heard the ominous mutterings, found the sheriff standing on the step beside her. His guns were in his hands and she sensed the tenseness of his attitude.

"Listen, yo' fellers!" he snapped, and the words came from his mouth like bullets from a gun. "Thar ain't goin' to be no funny work hyar," he asserted. "Thet thar hombre is my prisoner and I reckon I'll have the say about him. Yo' thar, Red," he continued, speaking to his deputy, "see to gettin' the feller in the office. I'll stay hyar whar I kin keep an eye on the crowd."

"Shore, Pat," came the cheerful voice of the deputy who was helping untie the rope that bound the feet of the prisoner.

Sally became aware of the fact that Sheriff Dumbarton, while still keeping his eyes on the crowd, was speaking to her.

"Yo'd better go in the office, Miss Sally," he was saying. "Thar might be some shootin' and I don't want to be accused of hidin' behind a lady's skirt."

So she backed slowly into the little office, but, inasmuch as she did not close the door, she still could glimpse the proceedings outside. She saw the stalwart young fellow dragged from his horse by a half dozen pairs of hands and, for a moment, a feeling of horror possessed her.

She wanted her grandfather avenged but, somehow, her heart sickened at the thought of witnessing the violence that seemed to be impending. Staring past the looming Dumbarton who was framed in the doorway, she saw the flaming head of the deputy, Red Knowles. She saw that one of his hands was gripping a shoulder of the prisoner, while with the other he thrust back the crowd.

"Careful, yo' fellers!" she heard the cold voice of Dumbarton warn the restless crowd. "Careful!"

SHE suddenly felt rather helpless and wished that Buck Randall would appear on the scene. She thought that she saw the faces of some of the Bar-X punchers on the outskirts of the crowd, but, if she did, they were blocked out of her sight the next moment by Dumbarton who came slowly backing into the office. After him came the swarthy-looking stranger who, at the point of his guns, had brought the captive into Wallow. Following after them, came the bound man himself, who was being thrust forward and at the same time shielded from the crowd by the vigorous and aggressive Knowles. Then the deputy slammed the door behind him with the muzzle of his gun and, releasing his prisoner, locked it.

Angry and inquisitive faces were peering through the two windows that faced the street and Sheriff Dumbarton impatiently drew down the shades.

"Now," he said, "I reckon we kin git down to business and find out what this is all about."

"Jest a moment, sheriff," pleaded the young man whose hands were bound. "I'm askin' yo' to see thet my hawse is taken care of out thar. I'm right fond of Pancho."

"Yore hawse 'll be all right," the sheriff assured him. "I reckon thet's the least thing yo' got to worry about. S'pose yo' tell yore story, stranger," he added, turning to the other man.

"Well, it's this-away," the latter replied. "I was ridin' through Dorado and I heerd about this hyar murder. I didn't pay much heed to it because I never figgered thet I'd come up with the gent thet did it. I was pluggin' no'th toward Sheridan, though and I happened to meet this hombre over in the foothills of the Big Horns. He sorta looked suspicious-like to me, but I never give a thought to the fact thet

he might 'a' killed this hyar Corbin and thet a reward was out fer him. But after we'd hed a few drinks together, out of a bottle I happened to hev along, his tongue got to waggin' and he tol' me about killin' the ol' gent. I reckoned then thet I had a chanst to round up a bad guy and at the same time, make some honest money. So I tied him up and brung him in, thet's all."

Sally had watched the stranger as he breezily told his story and she found herself disliking and distrusting him. He was a man of perhaps forty with a thin and swarthy face. A slight cast in one eye gave rather a wicked leer to his expression. His voice, at times, was inclined to break into weak and squeaky tones. There was something repellent in his smile which he seemed to try, without success, to make ingratiating and pleasant.

On the whole, he appeared to Sally to be a decidedly unprepossessing character, the kind of a man it would be well to watch. He was, she thought swiftly, not the sort of a person who would go out of his way to round up a bad man if there was no profit in it for himself.

"You've heard what this hyar gent has said," remarked Sheriff Dumbarton, turning to the accused young man. "Speak up, feller! Is he tellin' the truth?"

The young man paused a moment before he replied. His eyes were downcast and he seemed to be pondering over some rather weighty matter.

"I reckon I might's well admit it," he confessed. "Yes, I killed the ol' man they called Dan Corbin."

The confession came as a shock to Sally for, somehow, she could not picture the prisoner as a killer.

"Why," she moaned—"why did you do it?"

He raised his eyes and looked at her as if he was aware, for the first time of her presence in the room.

"Come, tell us why," urged Dumbarton as the young man looked quiet-

ly at Sally. "Why did yo' ambush an ol' man and shoot him down in cold blood?"

"I had my reasons," asserted the other after a moment of hesitation.

"But what were they?" begged Sally appealingly. "What were they? My grandfather never harmed you or anybody else. He didn't have an enemy in the world!"

There were tears in her eyes as she pleaded for an explanation and she saw the young man regard her with sympathetic surprise. But, after a moment, he regained his composure again.

"I can't explain, ma'am," he said gently, "but I had my reasons."

"If yo' folks don't mind," interrupted the squint-eyed stranger, "I'd like to be ridin' on. I've delivered the gent yo've been after, and it's time fer me to be goin'."

"Wall," commenced Dumbarton, "yo' kin go. Any time." The sheriff, it was very apparent, had not been impressed by the man and his voice was cold with disgust.

"But thar's thet leetle matter of a reward," the stranger reminded him with a thin smile. "I've delivered the gent yo' want and now, I reckon, yo' kin deliver me the ten thousand dollars in gold thet I want."

Sheriff Dumbarton was silent and he looked at Sally in perplexity.

"Give him the money and let him go," said the girl hastily. "I'll go up to the bank and get it, or maybe I can send some one for it. I wonder if Buck Randall is out in the crowd there."

THERE were many people outside; there was no question about that.

The sound of angry voices, the tramping of horses' hoofs, the shuffle of many feet, could be heard distinctly. Sheriff Dumbarton went to the door and, unlocking it, he opened it just wide enough so that he could thrust his head through it. The murmuring increased to a roar as he made his appearance,

but his sonorous voice rose above the babel of raucous shouts.

"Is Buck Randall out thar?" he called. Buck Randall pushed his way forward. In another moment, he was in the office and the door had been closed and locked behind him.

"I just got into town," he said grimly, "and found out what had happened!"

Then, for a moment, he stood there in the comparatively dim light and looked around the little office. His lips were tightly closed and in his eyes there was a gleam that boded evil for some one. His glance strayed to the stranger whose arms were bound behind him. The stranger, without a quiver, gazed back at the foreman of the Bar-X. For a moment an atmosphere of tension permeated the little room; those who stood there were motionless and voiceless. Then Sally went up to Buck and touched him on the arm.

"There is ten thousand dollars in gold waiting for me down at the bank," she told him. "Will you go and get it for me, right away?"

"It's true, then," whispered Buck, "thet yo've got the hombre that murdered the boss?"

"Never mind, Buck," said Sally. "Just go down and get the money. You know," she added hastily, "that you can't shoot a man with his hands tied behind him."

A grim smile appeared on the leathery countenance of the foreman.

"All right, Sally," he agreed, "I'll get the money. No, I can't shoot a man thet has his hands tied," he continued, "and I reckon it ain't noways necessary. Yo' kin hang a man with his hands tied behind him, though, and I reckon thet's what we'll do. The result 'll be jest the same."

"Thet's foolish talk, Buck," cautioned Sheriff Dumbarton, "and I wouldn't spill no more of it if I was yo'."

The door of the office was opened again and Buck Randall plunged into

the crowd and made his way in the direction of the bank.

"No time to talk now, boys," he said to those who eagerly surrounded him. "But we'll do some talkin' to-night," he added significantly.

Back in the office Sheriff Dumbarton was asking his prisoner a few more questions.

"Who are yo' and whar do yo' hail from?" he queried.

"I can't rightly say that I'm from anywhar in pertic'lar," the young man replied. "I keep pretty much on the move. They call me Wanderin' Willie. That's a good enough name fer me, I reckon."

"Humph," grunted Dumbarton. And then he turned to the squint-eyed fellow. "Who are yo'?" he asked.

"Why, my name's Dunham," the swarthy man replied. "I'm a law-abidin' cow-poke, I am. I just traipsed up from Texas. I got a gal up in Sheridan that I figger on marryin'."

"Yo' got a gal?" questioned the sheriff, amazed. "You?"

"Shore," asserted the other positively. "Met her through one of these hyar matrimonial agencies. She's a good-looker, too. She sent me her pitcher."

"Did yo' send her yore pitcher?" asked Dumbarton dryly.

"No," replied the other with a wink. "I jest wrote her that I was a young, upstandin', handsome sort o' feller. She won't mind when she sees the money, though."

"Maybe not," agreed Dumbarton somewhat dubiously. "Maybe not."

There was some more desultory conversation and then came a knock on the door.

"**W**HO'S thar?" questioned the sheriff.

"It's me," came the voice of Buck Randall. "Let me in!"

Again the door opened just far enough to admit Randall and again it was closed and locked.

"Jest a minute, sheriff," he said. "Pinkham came up from the bank with me and he wants to come in, too. He says he wants to get a look at the crook, but I reckon he wants to get Sally's check fer the ten thousand dollars."

"Thar's no reason why he can't come in," said Dumbarton who, like most men, had a certain respect for money. He had been eying the heavy sack that Randall had been holding in one hand. The sheriff opened the door again and Pinkham entered. He greeted Sally affably and then, looking around, cast a severe and accusing glance at the young man who had identified himself as Wanderin' Willie.

The latter, in return, calmly eyed the banker as though there was something amusing in his puffiness and self-importance.

Buck Randall raised the sack and dropped it on the table with a crash.

"Thar's th' money," he said. "Ten thousand dollars. Forty pounds of gold."

"Kin I take a look at it, sheriff?" the squint-eyed man asked.

"I don't see why not," Dumbarton replied. "It's yore money all right."

The other swiftly and eagerly untied the sack and, after peering into it, drew out a handful of double eagles.

"I reckon I won't stop to count 'em," he said. "I guess yo're a honest bunch of hombres and I'm glad I could do yo' a favor by bringin' in the gent yo' wanted."

He tied up the bag, pulled his sombrero lower over his eyes, and looked around.

"Well, I'll say good-by," he said. "If yo'll open the door, sheriff, I'll be on my way."

"But, my good man," objected Pinkham, "do you intend to carry that gold with you that way? Why not deposit it in the bank here? It is dangerous to carry specie that way."

"Maybe so," replied the squint-eyed man, "maybe it is dangerous. But I reckon that I kin take keer of myself."

"Well, have it your own way," the banker responded.

The sheriff had rather impatiently opened the door and the man with the sack of gold stepped out into the throng collected outside of the office. The sheriff locked the door and turned back into the room again.

"Is he on his way?" asked the young man who called himself Wanderin' Willie. "Has he gone?" There was now an air of excitement, of animation, about him.

"I reckon he has," said the sheriff.

"Well, then," replied the young man, "yo' folks had better light out after 'im, because I never killed this hyar Dan Corbin, and what's more, *I kin prove thet I didn't!*"

CHAPTER IV.

ALIBI.

PAT DUMBARTON regarded the young man with a cynical and unbelieving smile.

"Wall, now," he drawled, "thet's plumb int'restin'. I s'pose you'll be tellin' us next thet the feller who brought yo' in is the real killer."

Wanderin' Willie eyed the sheriff quietly for a moment.

"No," he replied, "I'm not sayin' thet. But I am sayin' thet he's a clever gent. And I'm tellin' yo' thet I kin prove, beyond any doubt, thet I didn't do the shootin'. Me, I've got a perfect alibi."

"Take 'im back and put 'im in the calaboose, Red," the sheriff ordered. "We ain't got no time to listen to no fairy tales."

"Well, if thet's the way yo' feel about it," sighed Wanderin' Willie, "yo' kin do as yo' please."

"Yo're right we kin," said Sheriff Dumbarton, "and thet's jest what we reckon on doin'!"

Sally Lee Corbin, listening to the conversation and gazing wide-eyed at the stalwart and unconcerned young

man who identified himself only as Wanderin' Willie, felt a sudden stirring of misgiving in her heart. Somehow the bronzed giant, with his clear and candid eyes, did not look like a man who would slay from ambush, while the stranger who had brought him in, the man with the saturnine countenance, looked like one who had unbounded possibilities for evil.

"Mr. Dumbarton," she heard herself saying, "why don't you let him explain?"

"Shucks," replied the sheriff, "he's jest tryin' to work some clever game on us."

Looking dubiously at the prisoner, Sally Lee said: "Tell me, won't you, how you can prove that you did not kill my grandfather?"

"Yes, ma'am," he replied quickly in a sympathetic voice. "I'll be glad to tell yo, ma'am." Then his serious face flushed a little. "From what I was told, yore granddad was waylaid jest a week ago to-day." He paused as if for confirmation, and she nodded her head. "Well, ma'am, a week ago to-day I was in jail down in Dorado."

"In jail?" she asked, her heart sinking a little.

"Yes, ma'am," he told her frankly, "in jail. It wasn't nothin' serious, though. Jest a cyard game, thet's all. Some gents pulled a cold deck on me and I sorta got riled up. The sheriff put me in th' coop, I reckon," he continued, "so thet the crooks could get outa town on their own laigs. It really warn't nothin', ma'am," he concluded with a shrug of his shoulders.

"And then what?" snapped Sheriff Dumbarton doubtfully. He had lost just a little of the confidence that he had possessed a few moments before.

"They kept me in the calaboose for a coupla days," the young man continued affably, "and then turned me loose. So I went ridin' on my way."

He paused for a moment and looked at Sally Lee, who was regarding him with tense interest.

"Yes?" questioned the sheriff.

"Last night, way over to the west of hyar," the prisoner continued, "I met up with thet feller who jest went ridin' on 'is way. In the evenin' he got the drop on me before I knowed what was what, and then he tied me up. He told me thet an old man had been killed hyarabouts and thet a reward of ten thousand had been offered fer the killer. He told me thet he was desperate, needed money, and was goin' to take me in and turn me over to the law. He said, too, thet he would have his gun on me every minute and thet if I made one false move he'd drill me. He didn't keer what happened to himself, he said; he was goin' to gamble on thet. I hed told 'im about my bein' in jail in Dorado, and he said thet I could easy prove a alibi and thet I'd be a fool to make him any trouble and risk my own life."

"Yo're a liar!" exclaimed Sheriff Dumbarton in a sudden rage. He felt, in his heart, that he had been deluded and made a fool of. "Yo're a liar, and yo' know it!"

THE eyes of Wanderin' Willie became cold and menacing and, even with his arms bound behind him, he leaped toward the sheriff. But Red Knowles jerked him roughly back and thrust him against the wall and held him there.

"Yo're a liar, I say!" repeated the enraged sheriff. "What were yo' doin' around hyar anyway?"

The young prisoner impaled the sheriff with a flashing glance and, for a moment, maintained his silence.

"Maybe," he said sarcastically, "I was on my way to Sheridan to marry a gal I met through one of these hyar matrimonial agencies."

"Take 'im back and lock 'im up!" exclaimed Sheriff Dumbarton to Red Knowles. "Don't unbind 'is arms, neither!"

Red, pushing his prisoner before him, disappeared into the back room.

Those in the office heard the heavy door of the jail swing open, there was a brief scuffle of feet, and then the door banged shut again. The deputy reappeared, mopping his brow with a red bandanna. He wore a somewhat bewildered expression. Sheriff Dumbarton, too, looked rather lost, as if a prey to indecision.

"The fellow might be telling the truth," hazarded Banker Pinkham. "That fellow who got away with the money was a hard-looking customer."

"Red," commanded the sheriff suddenly, "take three or four men and bring back thet gent thet jest left hyar!"

"Yo' don't believe th' story thet thet big, lyin' hombre told, do yo'?" asked the deputy.

"I don't believe nothin'!" snapped Dumbarton, "but I ain't takin' any chances. Get out and be on yore way!" he said savagely to the deputy, who seemed inclined to linger and argue over the matter.

"Some one," he continued rapidly, "has got to ride down to Dorado and check up on this story. 'S'pose yo' go, Randall! Take one of yore men with yo' if yo' want to. It's jest about noon now. Yo' kin be back by daylight to-morrow if yo' fan along all night!"

"This is a lot of damn nonsense!" exclaimed Buck. "Yo've got the gent we want locked up right now."

Sheriff Dumbarton flushed with exasperation, and turned to the troubled girl.

"Yo' tell 'em, will yo', Miss Sally?" he begged. "They don't seem to take no stock in me."

"Please, Buck," pleaded the girl, "do as Sheriff Dumbarton asks. And hurry, Mr. Knowles, for my sake. It means so much to me."

"It's a trick," protested Red. "Nothin' but a trick. Thet bird wants to git a lotta men outa town and then make his escape."

Nevertheless, he went toward the door, and Buck Randall followed him.

"It's a fool's errand, but I'll go," the young foreman said.

"I'll take care of any escapin'," growled Dumbarton grimly to Red. Then he turned to Randall. "Maybe it is a fool's errand and then, again, maybe it isn't. We'll know more about it to-morrow mornin'. Do yo' want to go out now, Mr. Pinkham?"

"Yes," murmured the banker, "after Miss Corbin makes out a check for the money she has had from me. I brought some blank checks with me."

"Of course," said Sally. "May I use your desk, Sheriff Dumbarton?"

As she wrote the check she realized that it represented the last of her assets and she wondered, rather bitterly, if she had been swindled out of the money. There would be no begrudging the payment if it brought about the capture of the slayer of her grandfather. But the money was gone, it seemed, and it now seemed doubtful if the man who called himself Wanderin' Willie was the guilty person.

She signed the check and turned it over to Pinkham, who folded it meticulously and put it in his pocket.

Then the sheriff opened the door and, as the banker, Randall and Knowles passed out, Sally saw that the street was thronged with restless men. The door closed again, but, in another moment, she heard the swelling voices of the crowd. She knew that the story of the man who called himself Wanderin' Willie was circulating rapidly through the mob and she could tell by the men's derisive jeers that no one believed the tale.

Left by themselves, Sally and the old sheriff regarded each other in silence. She was shaken with doubt, and her disturbing emotions were apparent. There was compassion in the eyes of Pat Dumbarton; compassion mingled with anger and bafflement.

"Don't yo' worry, Miss Sally," he said with an assurance that he did not feel. "We'll git the guilty man or we'll git thet money back fer yo'."

"It's not the money I care about," she protested softly. "It's—" She was going to say vengeance, but somehow the word would not come to her lips.

"Yo' want to see th' feller swing thet shot yore ol' granddad?" suggested Dumbarton.

"I WANT to know," she amended, "that a man who could do such a cruel thing is—out of the way—so that he couldn't cause any more trouble." She paused a moment and then continued earnestly: "Somehow," she said, "I feel that the man you have is innocent. He doesn't look like that kind."

"Yo' never kin tell," asserted Dumbarton. "Yo' never kin tell."

"I wonder," she asked, "if I could talk to him for just a little while. I believe that he might tell me the truth, if he has not told it already."

And the girl felt, somehow, that the man whom she had met less than a half hour before, the man with whom she had exchanged only a few glances, would indeed open his heart to her. There had been something reassuring to her in his eyes, something deferential in his manner when he had spoken to her, that gave her confidence in him. She had been vaguely irritated when the sheriff had called him a liar, and she had felt the stirrings of anger at the insolence that had been shown him by Buck and Red Knowles. His calm demeanor when he was helpless and surrounded by his enemies, while a menacing mob milled around in the street outside, had seemed to add to his stature, making him tower above the other men who had been in the office.

"I reckon yo' kin talk to 'im if yo' want to," Dumbarton told her dubiously. "I don't see what good it 'll do, though."

"But it might," urged the girl, "it might."

The old sheriff led the way into the

rear office and then swung back a heavy wooden door and exposed the grated iron gate behind it. The jail itself consisted of one large, windowless room. Standing by the side of the sheriff and peering into the darkness, Sally thought at first that it was empty.

"Hey, yo', prisoner!" the sheriff called in a gruff and rather sulky voice. "Hyar's a gal thet wants to see yo'."

He appeared at once out of the darkness and came close up to the bars.

"I reckon thet I won't be int'rested in this hyar confab," the sheriff remarked grumpily. "I'll be in the next room, Miss Sally, and if yo' want me, jest sing out."

She heard his heavy footsteps as he retired into the front office and the squeaking of his swivel chair as he settled his weight down into it. Then she looked in silence for a moment at the equally wordless man behind the bars. She had supposed, of course, that it would be a simple matter to speak to him, to ask him impetuously to help her by telling her the absolute truth. But now that she was face to face with him she found, to her confusion, that she could not formulate her thoughts.

She felt her face grow warm with embarrassment and she knew that, there in the gloom, she was blushing furiously. She half expected him to smile at her, and she was conscious of a glimmer of gratitude for the grave sympathy which he seemed to feel for her.

"Yo' wanted to speak to me, ma'am?" he finally asked in a subdued voice.

"Yes," she said faintly. "I wanted to ask you if—if—" she faltered and lapsed into silence.

"Yo' wanted to ask me, perhaps, if I really killed yore granddad?" he questioned.

"No, no," she replied hastily. She looked at him intently for a moment. "No," she continued, "I don't believe that you did."

"Thanks, ma'am," he said soberly. "I reckon I'm grateful for yore faith in me."

Her belief in him grew stronger, and she found expression for the emotions that were deep in her heart.

"But some one killed him." The words rushed out from her lips. "Some one killed my grandfather, my friend, my pardner. He was old, and a good man. He had no enemies. There was no reason." She felt her lips quivering and the tears starting in her eyes. "And I offered a reward, every dollar I had in the world. I wanted that murderer caught," she continued passionately. "I wanted him to suffer for the terrible deed he had done. I was ready to sacrifice everything—everything—to avenge that vicious and cowardly crime."

She heard the man in the jail breathe deeply as she paused for a moment to regain control of herself.

"And now I am afraid," she added dully, "that I have been cheated and defrauded and made a fool of."

She turned away, and she brushed her sleeve quickly across her eyes; she did not want him to see her tears.

"So yo' offered everything," she heard him whisper with a certain wonder in his voice. "Everything—for the sake of some one yo' loved."

His manner changed. "Tell me," he whispered compellingly. "What are they doin'? Have they sent any one down to Dorado to check up on my story? Have they started after thet squint-eyed gent thet brought me in?"

She was silent for a moment, wondering if she ought to tell him anything at all. Perhaps Sheriff Dumbarton would not approve. But she found herself speaking softly and cautiously through the bars, telling the young prisoner what he wanted to know.

"They'll find out at Dorado," he said when she concluded, "thet I was really in jail when yore granddad was killed, and then they'll let me go. And then, maybe, I kin help yo'," he added.

He turned around and walked back into the darkness of the jail, and she felt a throb of pity when she saw those hands bound behind his back.

"Good-by," she whispered, "until later." She turned and walked out to rejoin the sheriff.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOG JAIL.

WANDERIN' WILLIE WATSON paced back and forth in the darkness of the little jail.

The girl with the dark-blue eyes and the glorious golden hair had been gone for a half hour, and since she had left he had been thinking of many things.

It had occurred to him that her eyes had the deep shade of azurite, that lovely blue carbonate of copper that he had mined down in Arizona.

And her hair? Well, it had the hue of native gold, but a silkier, softer, brighter luster.

There was something quiet and deep about her, something that made him think of the trackless forests of Oregon. She seemed as clean and lovely, as responsive and tender, as the light-green aspen that trembles in the springtime on the high hills of Colorado.

Wanderin' Willie Watson had thought of her in all of these ways; her attributes, as he sensed them, inevitably suggested comparison with the things he knew. And the things he knew were the things of the hills, the woods, and the plains. He was only twenty-six, but a man can cover a lot of ground in twelve years if he keeps on moving, and Wanderin' Willie Watson, in the course of that period of time, might have been found almost anywhere, doing almost anything, between Chihuahua and Saskatchewan.

Two months ago he had been punching cattle down around Las Vegas. Some voice within him had whispered that it was time to go north. The

promptings, this time, had been so insistent that there seemed to be something uncanny about them. Many times each year, for many years, he had been seized by the wanderlust. But this time it had seemed something different, something stronger. There had been something almost clamorous in the urgings of that inward voice, and during the few days that elapsed between the time that he first heard it and the moment that, all ready for the long trail, he had ridden away from the ranch where he had been working, he had been in a feverish state of mind.

Once on the road he had felt that sense of peace and contentment that nothing but travel can bring to a born wanderer.

Slowly he had drifted east and north and he had crossed the North Fork of the Canadian at one of the points where that river crosses the border of Texas and Oklahoma. He had drifted up through Kansas, touched Colorado and, coming to the south bank of the Platte up in Nebraska, he had turned his horse westward again. Slowly and aimlessly he had ambled along, reveling in the coming of spring, thrilling at the sight of blue skies overhead and the fresh green verdure beneath and around him. He had spent hours, as he rode along, in whistling melodies that had charmed his senses down in Mexico. Ah! that girl in Guadalajara who had played the guitar and sang!

Oh, yes! Wanderin' Willie Watson had met many girls in the course of his meanderings. And he often thought of them, in the springtime. Women had liked his bronzed and clean-cut face, his lean six feet of bone and sinew, his hair that piled up in thick brown waves and his eyes that smiled so easily.

But, to Wanderin' Willie, girls had appeared at the best to be fragile and capricious creatures. They were made to dally and toy with, to laugh at, sometimes to pity. But love, that kind of love that made men settle down in little immovable houses, had been

beyond the comprehension of Wanderin' Willie Watson. He had grinned, in fact, whenever he had thought of it. Women! They were weak at the best; and, at the worst, they were treacherous, deceitful, and not worth a thought from a square-shooting man.

He was thinking, as he paced back and forth in the darkness of the Wallow jail, of the girl in Dorado.

He had lingered in that town for a little while and had let her make his acquaintance in the Mesa Saloon and dance hall. She was petite and dark, undeniably Mexican, and she had reminded him of the girl in Guadalajara.

She had pretended a great infatuation for him that second evening in the hazy atmosphere of the place she frequented. She had told him, too, that she brought great luck to gamblers and had suggested that he sit in the poker game that was going on. She would stand back of him and bring him luck, and he, in turn, would split his winnings with her. He had smiled tolerantly at her suggestion, and sat in the game. There had been five others playing and, at first, he had won easily enough. Out of each pot he raked in, the girl had taken her share.

Then he had lost a big pot on a deal in which he had held a queen-high diamond straight flush; he had been topped by a king-high spade straight flush.

The girl had urged him to bet heavily and he played the limit on the hand, although he was, at the time, a little suspicious of it. He kept his composure until the deck came into his hands again. Then he ran his fingers deftly over the side of it. If the deck was stripped he would soon find out about it.

SUDDENLY he had felt the point of a knife pricking his left side, and he heard the mocking voice of the girl, who was holding the weapon.

"The *señor* weel leave now," she

trilled. "The *señor* know too much. We weel say *adios* to the *señor*."

He had abruptly thrust his left elbow out and had knocked her sprawling to the floor. In almost the same instant he had, with his right hand, shot the gun out of the hand of the player opposite him. Then his own gun, as if hit with a club, had gone twirling from his numbed fingers, and he had turned to see a big man with a star on his vest standing in the doorway. The new arrival had boomed:

"Throw 'em up and keep 'em up, yo' folks." The sheriff smiled. "What's goin' on in hyar, anyway? Drop that knife, Rosita, before I shoot the blade off'n the handle!"

"They're a gang of crooks!" Wanderin' Willie had exclaimed angrily to the sheriff as the latter approached the card table. "Feel the edges of thet deck of cyards. They kin deal any hand they please with thet layout."

"Shore," the sheriff had agreed with a smile. "And they usually git away with it, too. I happened by jest in time to save yo', stranger."

"To save me!" Wanderin' Willie had exclaimed. "Why, I'd of had 'em all kissin' the dust by this time if yo' hadn't shot the gun outa my hand. And I'll smack 'em full of lead yet, if I have to stay in this hyar town the rest of my nat'ral life!"

His indignation had been so genuine and unsuppressed that the good-natured sheriff had broken out into laughter.

"I like yore spirit, stranger," he had remarked, "but at the same time, I can't stand fer no bloodshed. I'll jest put yo' in the calaboose fer a coupla days, to give this gang time to git on their way. And if thar's any of 'em hangin' around when yo' get out, I'll turn my head the other way while yo' go gunnin' fer 'em. Fair enough, stranger?"

"No!" Wanderin' Willie had thundered. "It ain't fair noways!"

"Shore it is," the sheriff had said

with a grin. "Come a steppin' now, young wildcat."

And now, standing in the darkness of the Wallow jail, with his hands tied behind him, he smiled as he thought of how outraged he had felt when he had been obliged to obey the command of the sheriff at Dorado. That sheriff had a certain sense of humor that was calculated to make anybody smile.

Wanderin' Willie had been released from the Dorado calaboose two days later by the genial official.

"Thar's no use, son, of lookin' fer yore cyard playin' friends," he had said good-naturedly. "If they kep' on goin' the way they started outa hyar, they must be nigh to the border by this time. Yore ol' skin-an'-bones is over in the livery stable. Yo' kin fork it and ride along any time yo' want to."

"Skin-an'-bones!" Wanderin' Willie had shouted, indignant at the insult to his horse, Pancho. "I reckon if thet hawse was as fat as yo' are, it wouldn't be good fer nothin' but to make soap."

But the tolerant sheriff had only smiled and had voiced the mild assertion that he probably could run as fast as the next man if a "big b'ar" should pop out from somewhere and start ambling after him. The name of this exceptional sheriff was Bill Pickins, and he was commonly called "Easy" Pickins. He and Wanderin' Willie had at last parted the best of friends, and because of this Watson felt quite at ease. It would be impossible for any one to fasten the killing of Daniel Corbin on him.

It was fortunate, indeed, that he had been in a cell at Dorado at the time of the slaying. Otherwise. Well, more than one innocent man had been hanged on circumstantial evidence. But, even as it was, the whole affair was a nuisance. It would have been far better for him if he never had met Blackie Dunham. Well, he would settle later with Dunham.

He wondered vaguely what time it was. There was not a glimmer of

light in the windowless calaboose, and the heavy logs had been so well faced and so thoroughly chinked wherever necessary, that not as much as one thin lance of light penetrated the utter darkness of the place.

He had been conscious, for some time, of a monotonous murmuring about him, and now, for a moment, he found himself wondering what it was. A touch of apprehension chilled him as he realized the significance of the low and ominous undercurrent of sound that came to him from every side.

He found himself unconsciously making new and frantic efforts to wrest his hands free from the rope that bound them together behind his back.

HE now knew that outside the jail was a mob that was intent on gaining possession of him. And he had but little faith the sheriff would be able to hold the assailants of the jail in check. He felt the need of a cigarette, and he grunted impatiently as he thought of his inability to procure one. Again he wondered what time it was, and concluded that it must be getting on toward the middle of the afternoon. He tried once more to get his hands free, but only succeeded in chafing his wrists until they burned and ached intolerably. He listened, all the time, to the incessant murmurings that came through the heavy timbers. They seemed rapidly to become louder and more threatening.

It was the thought that the mob might swarm in on him when his hands were bound that irked him.

He did not want to be led to the slaughter like a helpless sheep. If it was written that his time had come to die, he wanted at least to die fighting. He wanted to feel his arms flaying back and forth in a tangle of humanity, he wanted to sense the mighty impact of crushing blows. If his arms were free he could stand in a corner and battle until he piled up a barricade of fallen enemies in front of him. Un-

fettered, something deep within him would have cried defiance to those ominous murmurs that came through the thick walls of his prison. He had confidence that, his shackles removed, he could batter his way through a hundred assailants.

So time passed by in the utter darkness and, at last, he heard a key turning in the lock of the heavy wooden door that swung outside of the grilled door of the jail. It swung open quietly, and Wanderin' Willie, back in the rear of the cell, saw the anxious face of the sheriff peering through the iron bars.

At the same time the prisoner heard plainly the roaring of the mob outside and, for the first time, he came to a full realization of the grave danger he was in. There was something bestial, something primitive, in the howling that came to him so distinctly. They had lost their individuality, their civilization, those men outside; atavism, for the time, had gripped them, and, once more, they were the pack with the scent of blood in their nostrils.

He walked up to the iron bars through which the frightened face of the sheriff was staring.

"Yo' hear thet noise outside?" the sheriff asked.

"Shore," replied Wanderin' Willie easily. "And I reckon I know what it means, too."

"I'll hold 'em off as long as I kin," the sheriff promised. "But—I don't know when night comes—"

"Shore I know," said Wanderin' Willie. "Thar's jest one thing I kin say, sheriff," he added. "Yo'll find out thet I didn't kill thet ol' man. What I'm tellin' yo' is the truth. I'm innocent, and yo'll find thet out from 'Easy' Pickins."

"I sorta believe yo', son," replied Sheriff Dumbarton, "and I'll do my damndest to pectect yo'. But yo' know how mobs be. Hungry, son?" he concluded.

"Fer some reason or other I ain't got no appetite a-tall," admitted Wanderin' Willie. "But I could smoke a cigarette if thar's one handy."

"Shore," said Dumbarton. "Put yore face out hyar and I'll fix yo' up." He put a cigarette between the young man's lips and then touched a match to it. "I reckon," he then said, "thet I'll untie yore hands. If they do git in yo' ought to hev a leetle chance to fight. Put yore back to the bars so that I kin git at the ropes." In two or three minutes, after considerable tugging and twisting on the part of the sheriff, Wanderin' Willie found his hands free. A sigh of relief came from him.

"Thanks, sheriff," he said. "Yo've given me a fightin' chance, anyway."

"I'd damn near let yo' out altogether if I could," admitted Dumbarton, "but I reckon thet the safest place fer yo' is right whar yo' are."

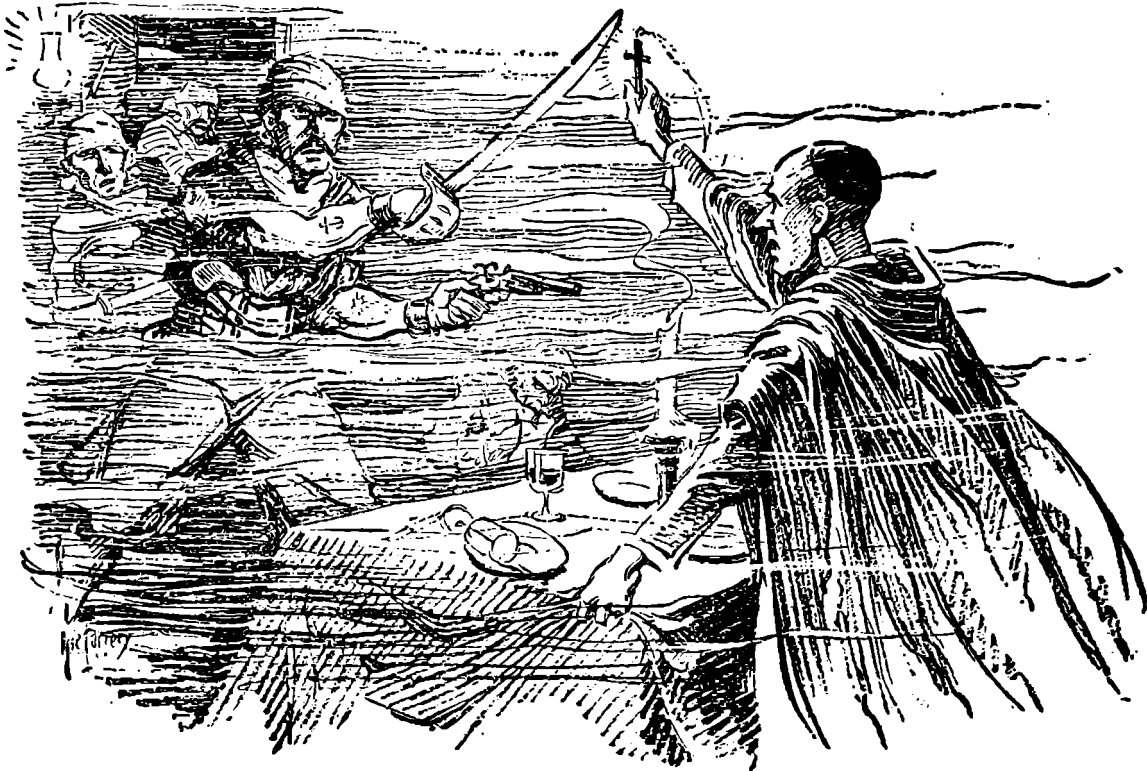
And then the door closed and Wanderin' Willie found himself plunged into darkness again. The hoarse and raucous voices dwindled to a low and ominous murmuring with the shutting of the door. He rubbed his chafed wrists and beat the blood into his half-paralyzed fingers. He was caught like a rat in a trap; there was no doubt about that. He thought of a girl with eyes like azurite and hair that seemed to be full of golden sunshine. She might be sorry for him when it was all over; he thought that very probably she would. And the old sheriff was a good sort of a fellow who would do his duty to the best of his ability.

Time went by and Wanderin' Willie knew that it must be night outside; he knew that the white stars were stud-ding the blue-black crystalline skies.

And then there came to him the acrid odor of smoke, and he thought that he heard a faint crackling sound.

He became suddenly conscious that he was warm, that the perspiration was running from his brow. His prison had been set on fire!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The cardinal towered in righteous wrath

The Cardinal's Curse

*Murderers in hot blood or cold were the pirates of the Spanish Main—
and they died as they lived, by cutlass and sword*

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Whirlwind Walsh," "The Pagan Ruby," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATE KETCH.

THE great galleon labored in the heavy sea, sagging to leeward before the furious southeaster that swept up the Windward Passage. The last of the smoking sunset burned out behind the Cuban sierra and the swift tropic night closed in. The blazoned scrollwork of the lofty poop vanished in the murk and now she was only a lumbering mass of shadow, pierced by her port lanterns and the glow from the great stern windows.

After her, out from Tortuga, came

the Roving Lady, ketch, decks crammed with hairy, tarry buccaneers. She clawed her way into the gale, unseen in the blackness, leaping the waves, close-hauled, gaining at every lunge.

Black Tom from Bermuda gripped the spokes of her bucking wheel. He felt the great muscles writhing in his broad shoulders and massive, wide-spread legs as he kept the course. Tops'l Wayne, the skipper, stood beside him, gazing at their quarry, his scarred and fiery face revealed in the light of the hooded binnacle.

"We'll take her on the port quar-

ter," he shouted as the wind shredded and swept away his voice. "Hold her up to it, man!"

The sable-skinned giant grinned. He knew his business, as did every man aboard, now crowding the forward rails. Black Tom would hold her up and lay her to it until the grapples caught and the freebooters went swarming up the galleon's carved sides, barefooted, their steel in their teeth for better climbing. Then he'd be with them.

Rare loot aboard. La Nuestra Señora de Almeria, homeward bound to Spain with treasures from the Rio Plate. She had called at Havana, and Wayne and his men had been watching for her, waiting for a night like this. Luck was with them.

Wayne went forward. Not a light showed, no glow of cheroot or pipe, not even a quickmatch. This was to be a surprise party. No need of Long Tom or the carronades. Pistols first and then cold steel. Wayne found his quartermasters and gave them terse directions.

"There'll be a deck guard of soldiers; weather-dodgers, standing alee. The crew don't count. Drive below any you don't kill. Anderson, you'll see to that. The officers will be swillin' in the cabin. Good booty, lads, gold an' silver from the Plate, pearls and gems. There'll be rings, too."

Red Anderson scowled but said nothing. He was supercargo, representative of the crew, but also of himself, first and foremost. There would be individual looting in the cabin, rings that could be held out from the general division secreted for private squandering. The Roving Lady belonged to all of them, captured by them off Florida; and although Wayne had been voted captain, Anderson believed he was the better man. He had an extra share himself by virtue of his office, but the skipper had five full shares, and that may have had something to do with Anderson's frame of mind.

"Stand by!" Wayne howled from the bows, whence his stentorian bellow carried better. "Ready with the grapples. We'll be up with her in five minutes."

The ketch slashed through the water. Spray shot with blue and green beads of tropical sea-fire sloshed aboard, shone in jib and the shallow pocket of the main. Men tightened belts a hole, loosened cutlasses and machetes, ground to razor edge in their leathern sheaths. Their pistols, ready primed, swung in loops on the baldric belts they wore across their shoulders; pistols with sharp blades welded to the barrels, that served as daggers when the charges were spent.

Anderson wore a sword, for he fancied himself with the weapon, though it was doubtful if his skill matched that of Wayne. But a sword was in itself a sign of rank, and the red Scot had his ambitions. Black Tom favored an ax. Others had boarding pikes, long knives. A reckless, swaggering, fighting outfit, gambling with life, with love, with loot.

BULL SWENSON, blond Viking, second in command, took charge of the grappling. He stood in the bows with the four men he had picked, ready to fling the irons.

Many would have picked Swenson for the best man on the ship. Physically he had no match save Black Tom. He was a rover born, the lure of the ever unattainable sea-rim in his soul. He lacked the savagery of Wayne that appealed to the wild spirits under him. Yet he was a first-class fighting man. He lacked also the will to play politics for popularity and the command, whereas Wayne and Anderson had scheming wits. But Wayne knew Swenson's value. None better as seaman or to lead a rush. A born fighter whose courage persisted to the last gill of his blood.

They were now almost in the galleon's wake, Black Tom holding her

up to the last point she would fetch in the wind's eye. They could hear a faint sound of laughter from open windows, high above them.

Black Tom shifted a spoke. The ketch was making eight knots to the galleon's five. He gave her a shoot and let her fall off as the main came down in lazylines, with the mizzen peaked and two jibs smothered. They were alongside, fast, clinging like leeches between the ketch's leaps up the tall side, boarding at the foot of the poop ladder.

Anderson and his men rushed the watch and guard before they knew what was happening. Bull Swenson was up, Black Tom with his ax. Pistols flashed and barked, there was a rally of steel and men fell, or were driven below the hatches.

Swenson almost beheaded the officer of the guard with a shearing blow from his cutlass where neck joined shoulder. There was scant fear of the Spaniard's blowing up their own ship. They lacked the spirit.

While Anderson stood sulkily on guard, Wayne, with Black Tom just behind him, charged up the poop stairs to the great saloon. Port and starboard, his men followed, a score and a half of weathered ruffians, bursting through the doors.

There was a great table set with plate and crystal on spotless napery. Wine was being served. Black Tom snatched a flagon from the tray of a cringing servitor, drained it, and kicked the man to the floor with the rest of his load. Musicians stared at the onslaught from a wrought-iron balcony, forgetting their melody in the harsh yells of the buccaneers.

The fine gentlemen, *fina gente* of Old Spain, rose in consternation. Unarmed, they sought their weapons. Only one figure remained seated, dominant for all that, clad in robes of heavy silk, the red sash broad about his lean middle, red skull-cap on his tonsured pate. His Eminence, the Cardinal Diego Cuerdo y

Valdez Zapata, bound home from a patriarchal visit to Cuba. At sight of him Wayne's red face grew purple. He had counted on finding the prelate.

Shots rang out. Men fell, clutching their wounds, save when bullets bored into their brains. The captain of the galleon snatched a bottle of Alicante from its wicker cradle and flung it straight at Wayne's head. The skipper smashed it in mid-air with his third pistol before shooting the other through the heart.

Swenson, entering now, cut down two men with his bloody cutlass. The place was a shambles, reeking of blood and powder gas, smoke wreathing above the candles guttering in the draft from the open door.

A stern voice broke through, authoritative. The prelate was on his feet, his dark eyes flashing in his austere face. He held aloft a cross blazing with sapphires and diamonds, that had swung from a golden chain about his neck. A great gem flung a rainbow sparkle from his finger.

"*In Nomine Dei—*"

A pirate snatched at the cross, but Wayne buffeted him aside.

"In that Name," Wayne blazed, "you hanged good comrades of mine at Havana recently. Now say your *Aves*. And hand over the jewelry."

The cardinal towered in righteous wrath and indignation.

"You *fibustero* dog, you infidel," he cried. "How dare you?"

Bull Swenson saw Wayne lift his fourth pistol. The blond giant tried to reach his chief, to prevent the shot. It was not that the other was a priest, but it went against Swenson's grain to kill an unarmed man, and a brave one.

The cardinal coughed suddenly, fell to his knees as the bullet seared his lungs. He sank against the table, grasping the cloth with one hand, the other raised, holding the cross. His red cap had fallen. Swenson had failed to thrust through the press in time. The dying prelate spoke.

"*In nomine—*" Blood choked him, flowing from his mouth as Wayne snatched cross and chain and set them to ornament his own gross body, plucking the ecclesiastic ring from the nerveless finger and dropping it in the capacious pocket of the green velvet coat he wore.

"Curse me, would you?" he growled. "I've stopped your glib tongue from wagging!"

A YOUNG man of the cardinal's suite, unhurt as yet, leaped out at Wayne with unsheathed rapier. Wayne, light on his feet, quick for his bulk, parried the first lunge.

"Come on," the pirate cried. "Make way, the rest. On with your *embrocado* and *staccato*. I'll match you, *señor*. I'll show you the trick of Alvarez!"

Wayne had learned sword play from a renegade and exiled fencing-master, and he gloried in his skill. The youth fought desperately and well, his set face as pale as the candlewax, bent to avenge the prelate's death. The cardinal lay face downward, his blood staining the rich reds of the costly rug a darker hue. The buccaneers stood all about, watching the play with professional appraisal.

Wayne's wrist was the stronger, but for awhile he was put to the defensive, so swift and keen was the attack. Once he slipped on a wrinkle of the rug and his left shoulder was grazed. His opponent fought with a desperate valor, that could avail him little. All about him were men who wished his death, would cause it whether he won this bout or not. At last Wayne began to press him. The younger man barely parried a high thrust in *carte* and came back with a whirling parry and riposte that was his last rally. Wayne met it, laughing.

"Riccori's lunge," he mocked. "Alvarez showed it to me. Try this!"

Wayne sank to one knee, his blade seeming to turn aside the other; but the

movement, the glare on the clean steel, was too swift for the eyes to register. The pirates only knew arm and sword shot out hard and upward, that the point entered the eye-socket of the young defender of the Faith and sank deep to the brain, red as Wayne withdrew it and regained his feet.

"The *coup* of Alvarez," he cried. "Now, let's to business." He saw Red Anderson in the doorway, his lank body giving him sighting advantage, watching keenly the swordplay, especially the *coup* of Alvarez.

It was brief and bloody work, then swift transfer of the loot to the ketch while Black Tom took the captured galleon's helm. It was the cargo they wanted, not the ship. When they cast off they took no prisoners. La Nuestra Señora de Almeria was a bonfire on the deep, belching fire and smoke, tinting the waves the hue of blood until she blew up and night blotted out the deed as the Roving Lady sped back to Tortuga laden deep with booty.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TORTUGA TAVERN.

LIMPING BAILEY named his tavern in Tortuga the "Fore and Aft." The title was a suggestion that all were welcome, no matter at which end of a ship they belonged. Save that a captain lived in the after cabin and was accorded some privacy and some extra shares for his rank, all men were equal in buccaneering outfits, and all had a right to enter the cabin when they pleased. Free and Equal Brethren of the Sea, they styled themselves.

The Fore and Aft was popular. Limping Bailey catered to all tastes, from rum to Xeres wine and canary sack. There were women who danced or romped, entertaining according to the patrons' tastes; women of every shade from buxom black wenches to the latest toast of the filibuster fleet,

Lola of Matanzas, who bestowed her favors charily and warily, exotic, intoxicating and provocative. She was worth much to Limping Bailey, the footless landlord, crippled by a round-shot in his own pirate days.

These days he was a good deal of a hi-jacker. The booty of most of his ex-comrades eventually came into his hands. He knew how to provide for their appetites, to whet them, and reap the heavy and sure profit.

Now, as he set a runner to his own lips, he watched Wayne trying to win the languid and indifferent Lola, who was setting her own value high, relishing little the bold and brutish advances of the skipper of the Roving Lady. Wayne whispered to her, enamored, excited by wine, set upon his purpose. He dangled the sapphire and diamond cross in front of her eyes, and fire came into them. Lola loved jewels.

"Where did you get it?" she asked him.

"Where I can get others, lass. It would look well against your breast."

"Let me see," she said and made to take it, but Wayne held both her hands in one great paw and laughed at her.

"A kiss for every sapphire," he said. "As for the diamonds—" He whispered in her ear. Disgust was hidden in her eyes as she surveyed him from under her long lashes. He tried to draw her on his knee, but she slipped away.

"Your fortune! I must know your fortune," she bantered, trained to cajolery, glancing to where Bailey watched her in a mirror which had been looted from a Spanish merchantman. "You must let my grandmother tell your fortune," she insisted and beckoned to a crone who seemed ancient, hobbling from table to table, half feared by the buccaneers, half hated. It was said that too many of her predictions came true, when they were evil ones. Not that it was hard to prophesy sudden death to those bent upon it.

She might have been the girl's grand-

mother, or her mother. Lola was well over twenty, at the height of her beauty. A few more years and she would begin to fade, to grow fat or to shrivel, wrinkle like a dried fruit. She coaxed Wayne to set down his hand, palm upmost, spreading out the fingers with her own.

"The right hand," the withered woman said. "So! The left shows what fate had for thee at birth. The right what you have made of life, what is now in store."

Flattered, Wayne set a gold piece in his palm and the old woman mumbled over it, making passes.

"A strong hand, a brave hand, the hand of a master. A strong life, a long—" She broke off abruptly, tracing the line about the mound of his spatulate thumb. She bent, looking more closely, peering near-sightedly, her patter stopped.

To the astonishment of Lola, she fumbled in the pocket where she had put the gold coin, and drew it out, placing it back in Wayne's hand. "I tell no more," she said. "I will not meddle."

Wayne gripped her bony wrist, holding her. "What fool's play is this? Is not my gold good enough for you? Finish!"

The fortune teller cried out in pain as his fingers bruised her tendons, ground her bones.

"Fool! Who is the fool?" she cackled. "Look then where Fate breaks that line. Look at that cross in the center of thy hand. Red, red as blood. Death is thy trader, and soon Death seeks a reckoning. This I tell thee free of cost. Further I will not speak. I will not meddle where the cross sets its mark. Not I."

With surprising agility she moved off, crossing the room, ignoring Bailey's frown. He saw she had displeased his best customer of the evening, best till the last of his loot was gone. Then he could go get more. He had counted on Lola to lure him, and

now Lola too had left him, and Wayne sat staring stupidly at the broken life line, at the red cross so plainly marked in the center of his hand.

He had never seen it before; he was sure of that. And why was it so vivid? Curse the old hag and her granddaughter! Witches, both of them. He looked up with a snarl at Bailey, limping up to him, a negro following with tankards on a tray.

"A stoup together, Wayne. A rare haul you made. All Tortuga talks of it. A gallant deed. Left the rest of the weasels asleep and took her in the storm. Drink, man; then let's play hazard. There's Simms of the Cayman—vows his luck is in. Mortimer of the Black Swan and others in the back room."

Wayne regarded him moodily.

"Do you see a cross in my hand, Bailey, a blood-red cross?"

"It is the itch for the dice box. A cross, say you? That should be rare luck. Drain the tankard. 'Tis of the best in the house."

IT was. It warmed Wayne's belly and quickened his blood. Gaming he loved. Bailey chinked a packet of gold pieces in his own hands. Two of his own men were in the game, others looking on. Black Tom was there, backing Wayne.

Red Anderson and Swenson were among the losers, along with the boastful Simms and Mortimer. From the first, Wayne could not lose. It was the devil's own luck, Simms declared, as he turned from his last coins. Wayne had drunk heavily, the fortune teller was forgotten.

Anderson's dour nature resented his own losses. He chewed his forefinger as he watched Wayne pile up his winnings and pouch them.

"What was that the woman said about a cross?" he asked.

"You have the ears of a fox, Red Anderson," said Wayne. "She was a prating hag. It was a cross that

brought me luck. A charm." He held up the prelate's glittering symbol.

"That should have been put into the common fund," said Anderson slowly. "It belongs to all."

"I killed him with my own hands. It belongs to me. I put in the ring, did I not? 'Sdeath, do you accuse me of holding out unlawfully?"

A little sweat gathered on Anderson's brow, and he wiped it away with a nervous hand. He meant now to go through with this. He had already sown seeds of discontent among the crew. Black Tom had agreed with him. The giant negro's eyes showed like crimson spangles as he looked at the jewel. Enough votes, and Wayne would get the black spot, be deposed.

"It should have been put with the rest," he said stubbornly.

"I begin to think you want to quarrel with me," said Wayne. "It has been in my mind for some time that you fancied you would make a better captain than I am. As for the jewel, it is mine, and no man takes it from me, save in one way. If you covet it, fight me for it, you lean Scotch herring. Win, and you get the cross and mayhap the captaincy into the bargain—if you win—from me!"

He flung the contents of his tankard into the other's face. It was not a pleasant face to look at as Anderson wiped it dry and mopped the wine from his shirt and coat. He had thought it might come to this. He had drunk sparingly. He had studied that *coup* of Alvarez and believed he could foil it. Moreover, he had constructed a riposte that was ingenious.

If he backed down now he would lose his office and his extra share, and he could never hope for the captaincy. He looked at Wayne's veined features, his bloodshot eyes, and saw that the captain's hand trembled a little with rage and liquor. Now, if ever, was his chance. Anderson was no coward, or he would not have been supercargo of the Roving Lass.

"The captaincy," he said craftily, "goes by vote. If I win the cross, it goes to the general fund—the cross or its equivalent in gold."

It was a shrewd stroke. If he won, Wayne's gold would be his by right of conquest and pirate law. He wanted the cross. He had seen the gleam in Lola's eyes when she looked on it. He set small store by her resistance; if Wayne had not been a clumsy fool he could have got what he wanted. And Anderson wanted Lola, among other things.

They brought in sand and strewed the floor with it, against slipping. The word passed, and the room was lined with men. The women were kept out. Bailey took a hanger, and the two rested their blades upon it; one duelist lean and long of arm, the other thick-set, powerful.

Bailey's blade went up, and the two engaged. For awhile there was only the scrape and grate of swords as they hissed and slid about each other. Bets were laid on Wayne, but Anderson seemed to hold his own. Wayne could not tempt Anderson to the long lunge that would expose him to Alvarez's trick. Anderson knew that, for all his practice, Wayne was the better, stronger man, liquor or no liquor.

THE moisture from the challenger's forehead ran down into his eyes. Wayne was fencing with him, wearing him down. The captain had a wrist of steel, the muscles of his forearm were like firm but flexible rubber. Anderson felt the inexorable force of them against his own, saw the slow smile come to Wayne's face.

Twice Anderson was touched, once a score on the ribs, the second a mere flick of the point on his upper arm as he parried and could not quite set aside the sword. Blood trickled down his naked arm, stained his sweaty shirt, clotted on the floor. He was afraid to risk the thrust that would bring the

coup. He was slowing up, and his carefully planned riposte must be dealt like lightning, accurate and instant. He should have ventured it when he was fresh, instead of feeling out his man and losing his own speed.

He felt Wayne's blade wrap itself about his own like a serpent, almost wrest his from his tiring hand. He stepped back, gasping a little in a demi-volte—and saw Wayne's eyes light up as the captain flung his right leg back in a quarter circle, then forward again as he crouched and his steel flashed to the thrust. As Wayne stooped, the chain, weighted by the heavy cross, swung forward. The hilt of his rapier caught in the slender links.

The links snapped, and the cross slid to the sanded floor, but the lunge was checked. It was enough. Anderson leaped in with the spring of a puma, and his blade struck, skreeled as it slid off a rib, gliding on, through the heart. Wayne staggered back, his jaw fallen, his eyes bulging, intense and ludicrous surprise on his face as he dropped his sword, staggered back to the wall, and slid down sidewise, as the prelate had fallen, face in the grit.

For a moment there was silence. A voice cried out shrilly, the high croak of the fortune teller. She had thrust in with her granddaughter, who stood still with lustrous eyes and folded arms.

"The cross! It was the cross that did it! I told him. Aye, I told him."

Bailey turned roughly on the crone, and she was thrust out. Lola glanced at Wayne's body and turned to follow. Anderson stood panting. Bailey clapped him on the shoulder.

"Wipe thy sword, man! You need a stoup. I thought he had you, but you held the devil's own luck."

Anderson looked at him, then round the room at the Roving Lady's crew. A sigh of weariness broke from him. Then he wiped his blade on the napkin a negro handed him, picked up the cross.

"I turn this in," he said, "or half the gold in his pocket as its value. It seems we need a new captain," he added, with a glint of triumph in his cold green-gray eyes, flecked with hazel. "That can wait. Will you have the cross, or the gold?"

"The cross," said Black Tom; but the others did not back him. Gold could be divided. They cast lots for trinkets. One man alone won. Let Anderson keep it. He had stood up to Wayne and fought well. Luck had been with him, but luck was what they needed in a leader. Wayne's was out. Anderson knew he was as good as elected.

He took the gold from Wayne's coat where it lay on the gaming table with his own, divided it fairly, and handed it to Swenson. He gave more to Bailey.

"Let all drink," he said. Then he rolled down his sleeves, ignoring his hurts, put on his coat, and went out of the room. The cross with the broken chain he put in his pocket.

Black Tom's eyes followed it covetously.

Anderson found Lola outside the tavern, alone, staring at the sea, where the moonlight flowed in a golden flood of light. She did not answer him when he spoke to her, glanced toward him as he took the cross out and let the beams coax out the rainbows.

CHAPTER III.

A PIRATE ELECTION.

THEY carried the body of Wayne down to the Roving Lady for a sea burial. There was no mourning, little sorrow. Such was their life. As the fortune teller had said, they traded with Death. There were even some jests at the amorous adventure they knew Anderson to be pursuing, wagers as to the outcome. Black Tom had little to say. He was a free man and a rover, and he ignored any sug-

gested inferiority because of his skin, rating himself a better man than most and as good as any. There were plenty of negro slaves in the Caribbean, but he had never been one, save for the time he was aboard the slaver. At the first chance he had killed his overseer, escaped to the bush and joined the buccaneers.

Liquor he loved, and money; and he had strong lusts. He coveted the jewel and he craved the girl. He could not think of the one without the white flesh of the other as she had revealed it in a *tarantelle* she danced one night. She had looked at him with an insolent disdain, but it had only inflamed him. What his chances were he did not reckon; he bided his time.

The Roving Lady put out to sea with Bull Swenson in charge. Black Tom had the wheel. He was a good sailor in many ways, though without Wayne's or Anderson's lore of navigation, and lacking Swenson's judgment of weather and current. Navigation was not highly necessary for them, so far as knowing their position counted. They were seldom out of sight of land; they knew the contours of the islands, they knew the cays, the reefs, the secret passages.

The two men were opposites. Both beautifully built and powerful; one white as milk where the sun had not stained him, the other dark as a plum. Swenson's fires were hidden; he thought slowly, made decisions after long consideration, and held to them. Black Tom had sudden, changing fits of sullenness, of rage, and ribald gaiety.

Wayne's body was sewn in canvas, round shots attached, and he was laid on a grating and slid into the sea. It was a clear night, and they could see his shrouded figure, trailing green phosphor, shooting down, baffling the sharks, though other creatures would give him ultimate interment.

The wind died, and they were long getting back. Gray-rose daylight dis-

closed the rocky island of Tortuga, Haiti beyond it in blue haze. Dawn had broken as they trooped up to the Fore and Aft, to eat ashore and drink a farewell toast to Wayne before they appointed their new captain.

It was not to be Anderson. They found him close to the top of the steep trail that led to the tavern and ended at the watch-tower where they sighted ships of Spain and other possible prizes.

His face stared at them. Bloodless, blind, upside down. Anderson's lanky body was stretched head first down a slope, his feet trailing in a tangle of broken vines, his left hand clutching more. In his right something glittered, caught the mounting sun with vivid coruscation.

His dead fingers clutched the broken chain from which the cross of the cardinal swung clear. There was a silver-hilted dagger deep in his breast, driven to the crosspiece guard. He had been dead some time. The corpse had stiffened.

They stared at him, amazed. Swenson looked at the dagger, and said nothing; neither did Black Tom—though both had seen it before. A third was not so reticent.

"'Tis the knife of the wench Lola! I saw it in her girdle." This from Dead-eye Reid.

"Bossu" Brochu, the ape-armed hunchback, echoed him.

"Aye, aye, it is the wench's. Belike she bewitched him?"

"For what, fool?" asked a third. "Little witchery in a knife. And she did not take the jewel."

That puzzled them, while Swenson drew out the dagger, wiped it on some rank leaves, and put it in his belt. The gold pieces Anderson had retained were spilled all down the slope, bright in the sunrise. The men sought for them. Black Tom disentangled the chain from the dead fingers.

"The cross goes into the general, after all," said Swenson.

The negro gave him an ugly look, but Swenson had spoken loudly.

"I want naught of it," said Bossu. "If I win it, I sell to Limping Bailey."

"Yah!" ejaculated Black Tom. "You not kill de priest."

THEY took up Anderson and returned to the tavern as they had left it, bearing a corpse. Bailey was up and about, exclaiming at sight of their burden.

"Burn me, I want no more of your dead men! 'Twill bring the place an evil name."

"Like enough," said Reid, "if you harbor wenches who are too quick with their knives."

Limping Bailey's eyes narrowed, his hand slid inside the open bosom of his shirt, fumbling.

"I've a mind to slit your throat for loose talk," he said.

But Swenson, looking at him closely, believed he knew of Anderson's death. His flesh mottled like head-cheese, his veins swelled with passion that he managed to hold in restraint.

"Bring out the wench Lola," shouted Bossu. "We found her knife in his breast. She should swing to the yard-arm for this."

"I know not where she is," replied Bailey.

Black Tom moved close to Bossu. It looked as if the girl had two inclined to protect her, for their own ends. Swenson made a third.

"We'll hear what she has to say," he said. He had the quality of command, the resolution of a strong man who has made up his mind. "Send for her, Bailey."

Bailey seemed irresolute. "I tell you," he said too loudly, "that I do not know where she may be found."

There was a wooden balcony that ran along the front of the tavern, from which its sign was suspended. A case-ment opening lengthwise was flung back, there was the slight creak of a

board under a light and rapid step, and the girl herself stood there looking down on them.

"I killed him," she said, without passion. "He brought it on himself. He sought to buy what I would not give, and then he tried to take me by force. I killed him—as I would any man I did not fancy."

She made no pretense of especial virtue, but, as she spoke, she looked straight at Swenson, and he at her. His bronzed face seemed swiftly flushed as if by the sun. Blue looked into brown. There was no cajolery in Lola's glance. She was quite unafraid.

"I would not touch his cross," she went on. "It is accursed! And I am not to be bought with gold. It is he who sought to rob, not I."

"The man who seeks to harm her reckons with me," blurted Bailey. The girl gave him a derisive glance, and her glance returned to Swenson, not in appeal, but asking for judgment.

"You were within your rights," he said. "You were not his woman."

Bossu grumbled, and Swenson turned to him with such fire in his blue eyes that the hunchback flinched.

"If he had taken her, or bought her," said Swenson, "it would be different. She fought for what she valued and was hers. We go back to the ship."

"You'll have a rummer first," said Bailey. "'Tis on the house. But leave the body outside." They trooped in and guzzled the liquor he set before them. Anderson was dead and, hard as they were and rough with women, they recognized some fairness in the matter.

"You handle them well," said Bailey, apart to Swenson. "You saved me trouble. I would not let loose of her easily." He spoke with meaning emphasis; the inference was clear that he claimed her, though Swenson doubted if there was anything behind his claim. There had been that in the girl's

look that was leavening in him, slowly inflaming him. There had been a lure in her eyes, a lure and a promise. Time had not touched her yet. Her beauty had been flawless in the searching light. She had not been afraid; she was one who chose her man.

They saw no more of her then, but again took down their dead and covered him with a spare jib. They had not forgotten the cross. Bailey would buy it, trade it for credit. The dice rolled and skipped on the deck close to the corpse. The last two were Swenson and Black Tom.

"One cast," said Swenson indifferently. He was not superstitious, but he was not keen to win it. He knew the girl would not approve of his possession of it, though he was hardly conscious of that thought. "You have the dice."

"I call nine fo' my main," said Black Tom. He rolled the cubes in his big palms and sent them spinning and rattling over a ringbolt. If he made nine, or the "nick," he won. If he threw a "chance" he must repeat that number before the nine appeared, or lose. A four and a two appeared. He made a five and an eight. On the fourth cast, one of the cubes showed a five, the other skipped and brought up tilted against a fold of the canvas shroud.

Then—it might have been from the wind, or some unnoticed motion of the ship—it fell square. Five and four. He had lost the main. His eyes rolled as he squatted to read the dice. He looked at the quiet corpse with his thick lips drawn back.

"Damn you, *buckra!*" he said. "You make me lose."

BY the rules there was no need for Swenson to throw. Bossu handed him the cross and he kept it in his hand.

"*Avez vous peur?* Are you 'fraid to wear it?" asked the hunchback maliciously. It was a challenge. Swen-

son expected now to be captain, but there were others aspiring to that office and the extra shares. Again his thoughts turned unwittingly to the girl. Finery became her. To flinch might cost him votes, and he was not afraid of the thing. He was as frankly pagan as any of his forbears who drank *skaal* to Odin.

"The chain is broken," he said. "I shall wear it."

None of them, save Bossu, had as yet attributed any especial evil influence to the symbol. The girl might be a witch, because of her grandmother, but the deaths of both their mates had been too obvious—by sword and dagger. There was nothing mysterious about that. The girl had called it accursed, but she was a woman and a Catholic.

They called a council, had rum brought in, and entered into the rite of secret election. Few could write, but they enjoyed the mystery of hidden ballot. Their method was simple. The carpenter produced a slotted ballot box and a calabash of white and black beach pebbles, kept for such occasions. Names were proposed and voted on in the order mentioned.

There were five names. Black Tom was not chosen and stood aside, scowling. He had seen the girl look at Swenson, and colored the other's intervention to suit his jealousy. He had lost the cross by a foul mischance that he was more than inclined to set down to *juju* on the part of dead Anderson. Now, for the first time, the suspicion entered him that the crew did not think a black man good enough to command them.

To expose his thoughts meant ridicule, right or wrong. He stood apart, brooding, a balked Othello.

Each man chose his pebble with turned back, but it had to be handed with closed fist into the carpenter's cupped palm. A man might favor his choice or defeat another's with extra votes.

Swenson had twenty-nine, the highest—practically three-quarters of their number. They cheered him and escorted him to the cabin, where Wayne's green velvet coat still lay. They had not buried him in it. It was a sort of piratical Elijah's mantle, gold-laced, wide-skirted, befitting a leader. They made Swenson put it on and laughed when his broad shoulders split the seams. Black Tom was not with them.

The negro had drawn back the sail, and deliberately spat in the dead man's face.

"Because of you I lose de cross," he said. "If I win dat mebbe I be cap'n." It was a childish attempt to save his own face, but his next phrase held more decision. "Some time I be cap'n of dis ship," he muttered.

It was not until sunset that they buried Anderson. By that time they were drunk, toasting the new skipper. They rigged no grating, but heaved the body into the lurid water. The canvas ripped and his ghastly face showed just before it went under. They made a jest of that, Black Tom a curse. Like Swenson, the black was pagan; but he believed in *juju*. *Juju*, from Anderson's ghost, angry because they were gambling for his property before he was sunk in the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIZE OF DEATH.

"THEY'VE made you captain," said Lola as she met Swenson outside the tavern.

"How did you know?" He was sure he was the only one who had come ashore.

"How could they help but choose you? You are a man, not like that gross pig, or that sly, skinny lecher." She was frank in her love-making and she came to him with eyes shining, lips parted. He took her in his arms and felt her heart beating through the kiss. Then she drew away suddenly,

touching his breast. The cross was beneath his shirt on the mended chain. He was not fond of display and there had been another reason why he tucked it out of sight when he left the ship. He knew that he would meet Lola.

"Don't wear it," she cried. "That pig, Wayne, said he killed a priest for it. Is it true?"

"That priest had many men from Tortuga killed."

"It is not well to kill a man of God," she said solemnly. He laughed at her.

"His God is not mine. I have no god," he said. She moved farther from him. She was in white, like a moth in the darkness, a fragrant moth.

"You have no God?" Her mood changed. "I do not care. My God will send me to hell when I die for my sins; but first I shall live. Take me with you when you sail. I love you. You love me—I have seen it in your eyes, your lips told me. I cannot stay here; if I do, I must kill Bailey. If you love me, take me. I shall be no care. I can fight as well as a man. Try me. Keep me."

She was exotic to his nature, swift, passionate, wonderful. It was not the first time a Latin woman had set flame to a Viking of the north. He held her close, and she clung to him, setting him afire with her kisses, her murmurs.

But in the end he was firm. The law of the ship, the rule of the freebooters was against having a woman aboard.

"Why?" she protested.

"If there were enough for all, there would be no discipline. The men would grow soft. If only a few, there would be trouble."

"But you would protect me. You would hold me. You would not grow soft—you are too strong."

"It is impossible. But I will see Bailey. I will tell him you are mine. If he touches you while I am away, I will wreck his tavern, and him with it. Burn all to the ground," he answered.

"I would save you that trouble. But if you will not take me, throw that cross away. Do not wear it. Give it to that black man. Let him bear the curse. He has looked at me— And give me back my knife." She placed it between her breasts, and they went up the steep trail to the watch tower.

That night she danced for him. The rooms were full, but, to Swenson, only the two of them were present. He was unconscious of the glowering Bailey, busy taking their gold, and watching, always watching.

At midnight a fisherman came in, a turtler from the cays. He brought news. He had seen a ship, a three-master, becalmed at sunset, south of Great Inagua in the Bahamas. It was dusk, and he could not tell her nationality from her rig or her drooping ensign, nor had he dared go close. All ships in those waters were fish for the freebooters' nets. It still held calm, but the man's light shallop had found faint airs and they had used oars to bring the word they knew would be rewarded with gold.

There were other buccaneering crews on Tortuga, some of their men in the Fore and Aft, to which the messenger had come straight on landing. But the Roving Lass had the first word of it. The men, half drunken, rose to their feet, shouting, surrounding Swenson. They went roistering out, some with pitch-knots, from a heap always in readiness, to light them down the rocky path. Roaring loudly, some supported others more than half-seas over; the lights bobbed, the coarse voices boomed in chorus:

*"Blood on the moon,
The chase in sight;
She'll be ours soon,
Ere morning light."*

*"Let decks run red
And dead men lie,
The sharks are fed
By those who die.
And dead men know no sorrow—sorrow!"*

*"So life shall pass,
A glass, a lass,
And we are gone to-morrow.*

*"The buccaneer
Straight course shall steer,
Nor trouble ever borrow.
Nor trouble ever borrow.*

*"Blood on the planks,
The dead in ranks
Are through with—"*

THE voices died away about a bend of the trail. It was a song written by an ex-clerk of the French Trading Company, a concern that had rashly thought to make money on Tortuga and had perished from lack of ability to collect accounts. The clerk, about to be sold as a slave, had joined the freebooters and become their poet and chronicler.

Swenson looked for the girl, but she had gone. Bailey came up, too, hand in his hairy breast, evil in his eyes.

"I've sent her to bed," he said. "Not your bed, you dog!"

He whipped out his cocked pistol. Swenson grasped it and wrested it from him as the charge exploded and the bullet struck the ceiling. Swenson struck Bailey on top of his skull and cracked it, leaving him there on the sandy floor with his brains oozing out like the yolk from a broken egg. He would not trouble Lola.

Outside he could hear the far-off chorus as the men reached the Roving Lady. On account of the two burials she was ready for sea.

*"Yo ho, yo ho!
Aboard we go;
The wind is free,
The chase alee—"*

There was a wind stirring, blowing from the heights of Haiti. Swenson tested it with his wet finger; he was all freebooter now, the girl set aside. He loved the roar of the Long Tom, the crash of carronades, the crack of pistol and the play of steel, the fierce rush to board and the hand-to-hand combat. The adventurous blood of his

forbears raced hot in his veins as he hurried down. Lola was safe from Bailey. He hoped the scurvy knave was dead. Swenson had worn no pistol, but luck had been with him.

The cross chafed under his shirt as he ran toward the ship.

Once he thought he saw, far ahead, a shadow that darted down the path, leaped from it, and scurried through the bushes. But he was not certain, and he took small notice of it.

He sprang aboard, giving orders. The ketch carried square sails and they went smartly up, main and mizzen wing-and-wing to catch what there was of wind. It strengthened, and they set out in the black night, heading up for Great Inagua. Just before dawn was a good time for the taking of a prize. The deck watch was sleepy, the others still drowsy in their bunks. Men's hearts beat slowly, their brains were not alert.

Fresher and fresher the breeze blew, swelling their sails. The men sobered rapidly as Swenson walked the deck, seeing all in order. Powder was brought up, and the shot; matches were set ready, pikes and axes stacked, pistols primed and blades sharpened. This was his first engagement and he meant it to be noteworthy. It was warm and the crew stripped to the waist. Swenson went to the cabin to shed his heavy coat and adjust his looped fighting baldric with the pistols that had once been Wayne's.

He took off his linen shirt and unconsciously straightened his great shoulders. He had little body hair and his skin was like ivory, the great muscles sliding easily in their sheaths. He heard a laugh and whirled. A boyish figure slid out from behind a carved *prie-dieu* that Wayne had used as a desk for his log.

It was Lola.

"You are a man!" she said admiringly. Then, as he stared at her in amazement, a glint of anger graying the sea-blue of his eyes: "You would

not take me, so I came. I bought these clothes from the pot-boy. You would have left me to Bailey, and he—"

"Bailey is dead, or will be. I cracked his scone."

"Would I had been there to see it! Ah, do not be angry with me. It is my fate to follow thee. Yours and mine are one. I have seen it in the grains of sand I blew with my breath and grandmother read for me. I will serve the guns—fetch powder—be thy cabin boy. I had to come. My heart would have been with you, and I cannot live without my heart, Olaf!"

She pronounced his name with a quaint twist and a whimsical smile that caught at his soul.

"I cannot set you ashore now," he said. "And you must stay below. Those are my orders. To-morrow, or to-night, we should be back in Tortuga."

"Who thinks of to-morrow? It is to-day we live, Olaf."

And Olaf Swenson forgot—until the ketch tacked. He went leaping out on deck.

"Who gave that order?" he demanded. It was getting light. He could see Black Tom's teeth agn.

"The chase is there," said Dead-Eye Reid. "She has sighted us. If we would overhaul her there is slight time to be lost."

"I am to be called, mark you," Swenson thundered.

HE saw the ship in the dim light of morning, making sail, water wrinkling at her bows, a hint of foam there as she got under way. She looked as if she might be fast; well rigged, canvas well cut, though she did not seem to be heavily manned. Her flag rippled out as Swenson surveyed her through his glass.

"She's from the American colonies," he said, dubious of her.

"With slaves aboard!" capped Bossu. "She knows what we're after."

Swenson was not sure about the

slaves, but he saw men on her poop about the battery she carried there. There was a flash and a boom and a round shot played duck-and-drake over the rough water, falling short as the hollow report came to them and the smoke drifted.

The ketch, half the length of the ship, was close packed with men. Her guns showed plain on the open deck as she rolled; she was not to be mistaken, in those waters.

Swenson bellowed orders. The main-mast was stepped well back, giving a long, free stretch of planking for the Long Tom. The tarpaulin was yanked from it, and from the port and star-board carronades. Bossu was the crack gunner, and he ran forward as the gun crew laid the weapon, serving fast and skillfully, ramming home the double shot, chained together.

The wind was rising with the sea. Over Haiti and Cuba there was nothing to be seen but a pall of vapor. Tortuga was blent into it. It was mid-September and the equinoctials were not far off. Here was half a gale already. It might be a hurricane inside of a few hours.

The ketch, sheets well out, raced for the ship. As she lifted, rearing on the crest of a great wave, the spray dripping from her bowsprit, water seething all about her, her rigging whining, Bossu set his linstock to the vent, the nitred tow sparking furiously in the fork.

The long tube belched, recoiled, and they were at it again, swabbing, sponging, reloading, while Bossu watched his shot strike the chase on the counter, white splinters flying while the Roving Lady quivered from the shock and leaped on, overhauling a foot to every fathom sailed.

Swenson sent up topsails. The ship crowded on more canvas until her sticks bent like whips, forging on with a smother of white water all about her. Flash after flash came from her poop; shot came over, plunging into the sea.

One smashed the starboard rail aft and plowed up the deck. Their quarry had the range, and they could shoot. A cross sea yawed the ketch and Bossu's next shot went between fore and main, tearing a hole in the lower course of the fore as he swore at Black Tom, who brought her up again. Swenson set a man to help him.

The sea was acting as if other impulse than the wind was troubling it. It rose in cross-crumbling pyramids, striking the ketch with the sound of mighty drums. The sudden changes of the sea floor, the cross currents from ebbing lagoons, served to send it into tumult.

The fury of the air increased in tremendous gusts. Swenson would not shorten sail. He snatched a brass speaking-trumpet from its hook in the companionway and shouted his commands. The course was changed and Bossu threw his long arms in the air with a furious gesture as the ketch plunged into the deepening hollows. Swenson was taking no more pot shots. He meant to overhaul the ship and give her broadsides.

Another shot struck low against the ketch, and there was a crash below. He thought of the girl. That hit must have pierced the cabin. But now they were coming close. On the ship they were trying musketry, too far as yet. It was hit-and-miss firing with any arms, in that angry sea. The sun split gray rack with a brassy glare.

Now they were ranging alongside. Men began to drop, and now the pirates lifted high and let fly the starboard battery, raking her decks. They drove ahead, out of the fire of the poop battery. There was a gun forward, not so long as theirs, and it vomited fire and smoke and an iron load that shattered their stern as they headed her. But the wheel still served. Swenson had feared for his rudder.

"To the sheets, wear ship!" he yelled.

The crew tailed on as the booms

gybed, the masts groaned and quivered, their tips weaving circles while the Roving Lass came about, the men hauling in. A topsail blew loose with a loud report, went by—like a wind-blown bird. They barely missed the plunging cutwater of the chase and, close to the wind, sped down her length to give her the port carronades between wind and water.

From the poop the ship blasted them. The ketch's mainmast showed a raw place gouged from the pine, but it held stoutly. The musketry had picked off four or five more of the buccaneers who lay gasping bloodily in the scuppers as Swenson shouted:

"Hard-a-lee!"

Once more they came up on the quarter.

NOW Bossu showed his skill. His missile slammed through, entering amidships, tearing the forward length of the ship athwart, below decks. The foremast tottered, slanted, fell. It was a hit, and a lucky one, that had broken the stick between its step and the main deck.

"Grape! Give them grape!" Swenson shouted.

The battery was being served again with incredible speed. On the chase the crew were racing forward with axes to cut away the wreckage that slowed the ketch as the fallen foremast dragged. The spreading bullets hit them like hail as, for a moment, the ketch lifted high and the big ship wallowed in the trough. It was murderous work. There were not more than six men left alive on the ship.

Long since, the ketch's black flag had been run up, and now the ensign of the chase slowly fluttered down. She had struck her colors. Heavy as her casualties were, she had more than evened the score. There were ten dead and as many mortally hurt on the Roving Lady.

"Lay her alongside," ordered Swenson. "Bumpers there, and irons!"

It was chancy work, with the sea growing ever more vicious, the wind howling. But they made it and, springing for the mizzen chains, boarded in evil humor. Bossu was among the first, and, in cold blood, shot down the skipper, a man with a graying beard. The temper of the buccaneers was savage; the pack was loosed. But Swenson sent Bossu sprawling. He had no mind for useless carnage on a surrendered prize. Wayne had been of bloodier mind.

With the fall of their captain, the colonial crew made a stubborn stand, useless against the pirate horde furious at the loss of so many of their own. The buccaneers cut and shot them down to a man. Bossu, his face bruised by Swenson, had his hump laid open, and was bleeding like a butchered hog.

The sea showed little but white under the blasting wind. They hurried to see what loot there was. Slaves were valuable, but they could not take many on board. Open boats were not to be thought of.

There were no slaves!

It was a barren victory. The ship was laden with cod, salted and dried on the coast of Massachusetts, to be traded in the West Indies for rum, cash and commodities. The victory had cost the raiders half their crew.

They set her afire, a pyre for her gallant defenders, and sheered off. Sail was lowered. They could not hope to beat back now to Tortuga. Not against that growling, raging sea and shrieking blast. Swenson stripped her down to a storm triangle at her mizzen, a rag of a jib, praying that the injured mainmast would hold out. Aft, the chase smoked and flamed furiously.

Little Inagua was to port, seen in a gleam of sun beyond the luminary was blotted out. Ahead were the Caicos Cays, treacherous, surrounded by coral traps. The Turk Islands first, mere dots that were the heights

of submerged reefs. Beyond the Caicos, straight in their path, Mari-guana.

Day seemed to have given place to night again in the gloom. The weltering seas had resistless power in them. Black Tom complained of the helm. It had too much play, and he feared to strain it. But it had little to do with the frenzied force that flung them onward, billows surging beneath their counter, threatening to poop them, making sport of them.

The sun was gone. Dead men sprawled all over the decks, a few groaning their last. A side sea, urged up by some suboceanic contour, flooded their bows and swung them almost broadside to the billows, carrying away the Long Tom that went crashing through the rail, the carriage wrecked, three men swept with it. Their "prize" was a crimson blob in the murk, swiftly left behind.

The hurricane was imminent. The mizzen stormsail went out of its bolt-ropes as if fastened with thread. They yawed and veered as the frenzied waves battered them. The jib rag was gone now, and they lunged onward under bare poles.

Swenson went into the cabin. Water swashed on the floor. Lola, in her breeches, sat wrapped in blankets on a transom beneath a ragged hole the round shot had made, high up but admitting constant spray.

There was another hole where the shot had gone through the floor to the lazarette. Under her blankets, as she flung them off, the girl was drenched. She was shaking, but not with fright. Her big eyes were reproachful.

"I OBEYED orders," she said, nestling to him. "Never ask me to do such a thing again. Oh! You are hurt!"

She dabbed with a cloth at the groove a bullet had made across his right breast, grazing his ribs. His body was runneled with blood. The

ketch was being pummeled hard. It was like a fighter covering up, crouching while his opponent strives to complete the victory, smothering him with blows.

"It is nothing," said Swenson. His tone was cold; to a man it would have been morose. He was thinking of the dead men, the cost of the futile fray. If the Roving Lady won through, they were lucky. He would have to sound the well, look carefully to that damage to the lazarette.

"You have won?"

"Nothing. There was naught on the ship of value. We won, yes, but lost half the crew. They fought devilish well."

She fingered the cross, and looked up at him. "Because of this."

"Nonsense. I am alive."

"Others are dead. You win nothing. The storm is on us. *Dios!*"

Even Swenson's steady nerves were shaken as the ketch shuddered and seemed to halt, driven low under two terrific blows upon the deck, followed by a heavy pounding against her side.

Lola followed out to see the wreckage of the mainmast. It had snapped under the frightful flogging of the wind, just above the place where the crotch of the boom hugged it. It had rammed the deck with its jagged end before it toppled, jerking halyards and topping lift so that the boom had been flipped free. Stays were torn out of the deadeyes from the starboard chain plates. Thrown out of control for a moment, before Black Tom could do what he might with a bare vessel and a shaky rudder, the mast had broken the port rail and was now overside in a tangle of rope, while more rope writhed in snaky coils and loops and thrashing ends. The forward stays were plucked from the stem, both back stays gone, the whole frame forward racked by the disaster.

Swenson led the rest with axes, to hack the wreckage loose before they were stove in. Black Tom did what

he could with the helm as they staggered down into the watery gulfs and up the long hills; the girl watching, clinging to the mizzen stays, Black Tom sending her sidelong glances that appraised her figure, to which her boy's clothes were molded by the sea.

The carpenter reported the ketch leaking, though he had plugged a shot-hole. Water was coming under at her forefoot along the garboard strake, where the wrench of the dismasting must have torn it from the keelson. The ketch was a fine vessel, but she was old, and she was being battered to pieces. She was little better than a hulk now, her jibstays gone with the rest of the forward rigging. The mizzen was no use to them. They could not set fresh sail on it—it would have utterly unbalanced their way, even if it held.

All about were spouting seas that rushed together in combat and sent up geysers of spray which the wind swept off in horizontal sheets. The gale sheared the crests of the waves even as it increased their momentum and their power. The horizon had contracted, the sky was lowering.

They had one sound surfboat left; the three others were gone, two with the downfall of the mast. To launch the last was madness. The clamor all about them, the wild confusion of sky and wave, was only a prelude. A hurricane was almost upon them. Out of the swollen, livid rack overhead, javelins of lightning sped, brightening the dull and tarnished daylight. Crashes of thunder rolled reverberating across the heavens like salvos of artillery echoing in the hills.

Their luck had gone. Misfortune held them in its clutch, powerless as a fish in the grip of a pelican. They were flogged by terrific strokes, and waves began to break over them. Black Tom headed her with the seas for a moment, and then a great comber, a black and white confusion of liquid marble came curving, hissing, lifting

the stern on its lower slopes before its crest curled and fell crashing in a cataract that bore the ketch down by its sheer weight and rushed on between the broken rails.

Black Tom, clutching his wheel, was buried to his shoulders. It swept men into the sea or catapulted them against housing and timbering, against the stump of the mainmast, crushing in their chests, snapping their limbs, before it spent its fury and subsided.

It tore the girl's fingers from the stays to which she clung so desperately that she left skin and blood behind her; swept her into the arm of Swenson as he sprang for her just as the great wave broke. He held the end of a still-belayed halyard, and he stayed with it though his arm seemed torn from its socket as he and the girl were taken off their feet, extended on the floor like waterweed in a mill race.

HE got to his feet, bruised, battered, helping Lola. Something had struck her head. There was a livid mark on her forehead and for a moment he experienced an agony of fear that he had lost her, even while he held her against the fury of the pooping sea. One or two more like that and they were gone. If she was dead, life did not much matter to him either.

Black Tom was spinning the useless wheel. The rudder, already damaged by the shot, had gone from the pintles. They were utterly helpless now and the ketch began to swing beam-on to the troughs.

Now the uproar was deafening. It seemed to numb the senses and faculties. The crew, their courage gone, crouched and stared with dull eyes at the terrible monotony of somber sky, rent by the wind, and the weltering tumult of the waves. It was the wind more than the sea that dominated the pandemonium. It came out of the caves of vapor with an ever-increasing volume, in blasts now sonorous, now shrill,

but always the droning bourdon note of the hurricane persistent, louder and louder. The seas crashed on the tormented hull, the spume was like snow in a blizzard, wave after wave piled aboard through the breaches. A following sea that caught them abeam would founder her. The main boom was chafing continually at the coaming of the big forward hatch, and the men were too apathetic to care.

There was nothing they could do. In calmer weather they might have made shift to set up the mizzenmast forward as a jury rig. They could do nothing with it now as the ketch was lifted, twisted, pitched and tossed; they could only cling to what they might and wait for the end.

Swenson cared only for the fate of Lola, fearing her dead. They were drenched perpetually; he could not feel her heart beat. Black Tom watched the two of them.

The end was coming. It had seemed as if the air could hold no more noise, but now the droning noise had become stupendous. The noise was the roar of an avalanche, of an earthquake, of any cataclysm, the angry bellow of outraged nature, its harmonies broken up, its forces loose, rampaging.

Under the black pall of the driving vapors came charging a wall of surf, distinct from all the yeasty fury in advance of it. It was the galloping white cavalry of the hurricane, resistless, swift.

Ahead of it, the billows got fresh impetus. The forward hatch was torn loose, the sea flooded the hold, and the Roving Lady lost what scant buoyancy was left to it. There was a bulkhead amidships, but it could not last long.

Over the racing line of white, lightning played. The thunder was a mere muttering growl compared to the awful clamor of the storm. They were in its direct path, the swath it would cut across the Bahamas.

Swenson spoke to the sodden figure he held in his arms. She would never

be wholly his now. His strength was as puny against the tempest as a straw in a cyclone. He could not save her, even if she yet lived. He did not want to live himself. His first command had been a failure, his first attack had ended in the wrecking of the *Roving Lady*. The prize was a mockery. Not his fault, perhaps. It was ill luck.

As he held her the cross and part of the golden chain rested on her body. She had called it accursed. He snatched it loose, breaking the chain once more and flung it from him. The wind balked the throw. It seemed to hang in mid-air. A flash of lightning showed it glittering and, as it fell, a jet of water leaped and struck at it, like a paw. It dropped, twining about the jagged stump of the mast. Swenson did not see it, but Black Tom did, and crept forward. He, too, thought the girl was dead. He might be dead himself soon, but he was not done yet. Life pulsed strong in him still, as it did in Swenson; and Black Tom's cupidity was still raging.

As for Swenson, it was with no personal belief in priestly anathema that he had cast away the jewel; rather as a sop, a gift to the old Viking gods that ruled the wind and sea; more than that, perhaps, because the woman he loved had hated it, had begged him to get rid of it. It was a little thing to do for her, the last thing now.

BUT he stared, amazed, tingling with a curious sense of the supernatural, as the black clouds to windward split in a blazing tear of electricity. For a second it seemed as if a cross had been blazoned there. Then it winked out and the girl stirred faintly in his arms, her eyes opening, looking into his, then at his chest.

"It has gone," she said, faintly. "Thank God for that!" Swenson did not gainsay her. The wish to live rushed back into his body, fired his will. There seemed no hope. No sea-anchor, even if he could urge the few

half-crippled survivors to rig it, would help them against that imminent mountain-high charge of the lashed ocean.

Black Tom got his jewel. He wrapped the chain about his wrist, tying the flexible links into a bracelet from which the cross hung pendent.

Suddenly they struck. For a moment the sea rushed over the ketch like a wolf-pack at the kill, ravening for mouthfuls. Then they were driven on. The mizzen was gone. The men were gone. Only the two strongest of them emerged—Swenson with Lola in the lee of the cabin housing at the head of the companionway, one arm hooked about the frame of the shattered skylight—and Black Tom.

They were being kicked over shoals by successive seas. There was no land in sight, the water was like a snow-drift in a gale. The bottom was being ripped off the ketch. She was waterlogged, and would have sunk if there had been depth enough. Once she held fast, jammed in some crevice; and again the waves swept her.

The air beneath the main hatch, compressed as the bulkhead broke, blew off the hatch, and blew up the planking of the deck. There was no more *Roving Lady*.

Swenson was in the surf, clubbing his way with one arm. Lola could not swim. He could not last long in the maelstroms, the snaky coils of water, but doggedly he fought on. The ridge of the wind-piled sea, the line of the hurricane, was broken by the shallows as it reached them. His flesh was torn, and he had no knowledge of direction, battling blindly until his strength ran out. His head shot into the air and he gulped it into his lungs for a brief second. Lola's head was on his breast, her black hair streaming.

His hand struck planking that broke his knuckles, and then it suddenly lunged beneath them, dishing them up from the sea. It was a broken section of the planking, still held together by transverse timbers, buoyant enough to

hold them as it was borne on, and they lay there exhausted, Swenson's fingers clamped between opened seams, the girl locked by his other arm.

A black body, gashed in the side and on the head, the blood washed away by the stinging brine as fast as it flowed, fought its way toward the little raft. Black Tom hauled himself up and lay beside them. The golden chain and its pendant were still wound about the left wrist.

The charging line of surf had gone ahead. The raft held, bobbing in the wake of the hurricane's advance.

CHAPTER V.

CASTAWAYS.

DAWN came, serene, clear, a marvel of azure and silver. Flying fish leaped and dolphins chased them as if in sport. Back of the hurricane all was smiling. The sea ran in long, regular heaves, its rage and terror worn out.

The raft still held together though some of the outer planks were loose. The three figures lay still, vaguely grateful for the warmth of the rising sun. Soon it would be no longer friendly. High in the heavens it would torture them, sapping their remaining strength, mocking them for their lack of water.

But now it was comforting, revivifying. The warmth laved their wrinkled bodies, restoring circulation. Presently they stirred. Black Tom sat up, his gaze roving about the blank horizon. He could not tell how far they had been swept, or where, though he knew the general trend of the hurricane had gone north and west. But the mainland was not visible, there was nothing in sight but the undulating sea, a soaring bird, the flying-fish and the dolphins. No sail. No thin line of palms. Nothing. Their lack of elevation would prevent them from sighting a low cay with machineel and palm-

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etto brush until they were close upon it.

But he did not reason. His brain at best was little better than that of an ambitious child. Now he was sheer animal, motivated only by instinct, by the laws of appetite and self-preservation. He had forgotten the bauble on his wrist and looked at it dully as he raised his hand. But his eyes glittered as they rested on the girl.

She might be for him either a living body or dead meat. His gaze became baleful as it met that of Swenson. The two men did not speak. Swenson sensed the brutal antagonism. He might have been on that little, frail refuge with a gorilla, a jungle man. Swenson had no fear of him. They were both hurt, but neither crippled. If either survived—and the girl with him—she would be his prize. If she died—Swenson came to quick appreciation of what that might mean to the black. His own eyes were clear with sanity. He looked at Lola with protectiveness, enhanced by the love that burned in him. She was his mate. They had come through the hurricane together. Fate had brought them to each other and not divided them.

His eyes narrowed. Beyond the black man he saw scythelike fins ripping the sea. Sharks, ranging about the raft, brought by the mysterious sense that guides them, swimming in patient patrol. Presently they would nose at the planks, try to tilt off the food they knew was there. Some of these planks were loose, might be used to ward off the scavengers.

Meantime he watched over Lola, strength flowing back in him, and watched Black Tom. Neither had any weapons. They were naked but for their trousers. Lola had the pot-boy's pantaloons and a torn shirt. Her slender, dancing feet were naked. One curving breast bore a bruise and there was another on her forehead. But her bosom rose and fell irregularly. She lived still.

The two men continued to watch each other. The sun rose and Lola awakened, smiled faintly at Swenson, and lapsed again into the semi-coma of utter lassitude. He set himself to give her what scanty shadow he might. The sun was harder on him than on the negro. His fair body was only slightly bronzed, and the rays soon began to inflame the outer tissues.

The planking rose and fell and the sea-tigers patrolled with grisly resolution. By noon, the sun was a scorching glare, the air windless in a sort of vacuum, as if the hurricane had exhausted the space between dark blue, brilliant, glassy sea and cobalt sky. Lola turned and murmured the Spanish word for water. Her lips were dry, there were deep shadows under her eyes.

"*Aqua!*"

Black Tom grunted. Swenson cursed softly; his own thirst was raging, but he was willing to suffer if he could alleviate her need.

A shark turned, rushed, sliding its unscaled, rasping length so far up that almost a third of it was out of the water, showing the dirty white belly, the crescent-shaped maw with rows of triangular serrated teeth, one coldly gleaming eye.

The raft slanted perilously. Swenson tore loose a plank and attacked the brute. It fell back, rolled, and came again, seizing the wood, almost dragging Swenson off, forcing him to let go. He saw Black Tom regarding him speculatively, sardonically. He must not leave the girl. To the other her beautiful body was merely a means of satisfaction, or subsistence.

Later in the afternoon, the sharks sheered off. A school of fish had raised a ruffle on the surface and the beasts went hunting easier game.

Swenson was thankful for the stupor that held Lola, prevented her from knowledge of their danger, kept her from the growing pangs of hunger and thirst. His lips blistered and broke.

His tongue was swollen and his back began to feel as if it was flayed. Black Tom crouched, muttering.

THE clouds were beginning to herd their fleeces in western pastures when the two men saw the palms, like big-headed pins, lifting above the sea rim. A current was setting them swiftly toward it. Not far off there was something that looked like a shadow resting on the surface, now resolving itself into the loom of land. They would not fetch that, but Swenson was content. Coconuts meant cool drink, and good food for shipwrecked, half-starved folk. The higher ground assured eventual escape, by their own means of visitation. Turtlers would be sure to call on the small cay sooner or later. They could subsist there on coconut meat and milk, shellfish, turtles' eggs, and whatever they might catch in the pools and lagoons.

As they drew close and it was certain they would reach it, Swenson roused the girl and showed it to her. Her parched throat refused much more than a croak, but she became animated with new hope.

The late night was shining through the breakers as they curved emerald to the reef, their surf, flung high like golden powder, while the sound of it came down to them. Swenson sought for an opening. That there was some sort of reef-gate was evidenced by the fact that the current, with the flood tide, was heading into a placid lagoon that held the reflection of two leaning palms, small fish skipping out of the calm water inside.

Black Tom was kneeling with a plank he had wrenched away. Swenson thought he might be going to use it as a paddle, but he showed no such intention; it would be but a clumsy subterfuge for quick work in the passage. Now the opening appeared. It was only a shallow notch, with the tide swirling in it.

Swenson knew absolutely that he

would have to battle with the black for Lola. The other had the jewel, and meant to have the woman. But Swenson did not fear the issue. He was a match for the other, and he had the girl to fight for.

The current swept them on, straight for the gap. Black Tom was the better waterman here, born and bred in the cays. He still knelt, holding his plank in both hands, poised. A wave urged them on, passed under them and went surging through. Then Swenson saw a blind roller coming. It shouldered them, unwieldy, lumbering.

Black Tom sprang into the breaker, kicking powerfully, churning the water to hold his place, using the plank as surfboard. He hurdled on to the lagoon, and swam ashore. Meantime, the raft blundered, struck a ledge of coral, and capsized. Swenson's head struck a timber and he knew no more.

The girl tugged at Swenson as he lay in the shallows. Waist deep herself, she dragged him, holding up his bleeding head, conscious of Black Tom seated on a low sandy bluff, his knees drawn up. The black grinned at her, deaf to her appeal for help. Somehow she got Swenson on the sand and drew his head on her lap. The wound was not deep. The blow had struck near his temple; he was breathing heavily, but still breathing.

Black Tom's long shadow, flung by the low sun, fell over them.

"You leave him 'lone," he said. "You my woman now."

In terror she looked at his muscular body and his avid face. She had no knife. She was afraid of this animal that regarded her so gloatingly and confidently.

"He's not dead," she gasped.

"Soon will be. Bimeby I t'row him in water. Barracuda git him. I git you. Long time I want you. You look at me like dirt. Now you do what I like. *Sabe?*"

She knew too well. It did not need the Spanish word. She knew men,

knew when they turned beasts. Far off, near the higher land, she saw the sail of a sloop, but there was no help there. None anywhere under the flaming sky. Sea birds flew, mewing, intent upon their own affairs, regarding the group with hard, hostile eyes. The fish splashed in the lagoon, now yellow as a daffodil.

"You come, missy!"

"No! Olaf! Olaf!"

Swenson moved, consciousness summoned by the frantic call. Black Tom retreated, grinning evilly, looking for a loose hunk of coral. Lola screamed and stood in front of Swenson, who had risen to one knee. Black Tom snatched up a heavy conch shell, its end pointed and murderous. Lola flew at him like a tigress, biting, clawing, clinging to him as Swenson slowly got up, swaying a little, gradually gaining full knowledge of what was afoot.

A cruel blow sent the girl sprawling. Swenson strode heavily past where she lay panting, and the Bermudan had dropped the shell to ward off the attack of the frenzied girl.

"Get up on the bluff, where there's more light to kill you," said Swenson.

Half responsive to old habits of command, half willing for the better footing, Black Tom retreated up the slope, past the two palms whose shadows fell on the beach like outstretched swords. The place was clear from scrub, save for a few trailing vines bright with blossoms, and the ground was firm. It ended in a horeshoe curve rimmed with bare coral.

SWENSON'S strength was coming back, fed by the steadfast fury of his cause. The light would not last long. Nor the fight.

It was a wild mêlée from the start. Neither of them knew anything of boxing. They were more apt with weapons than their fists. But Swenson struck the other a tremendous blow over the heart as the black came leaping in, a stroke that sounded like the strike of a

cooper's mallet, and hurt as much. It took some of the impetus out of the black's charge, and he grappled, trying to get a strangle-hold with his sinewy fingers. Swenson broke the clinch by bringing up his forearms wedged, and smashed again. The black's eyes were bloodshot; he was a gorilla man, an African primitive, gibbering in his native Bantu as he fought to choke, to blind, to maim; fought with teeth and nails.

At that, there was not much to choose between them in savagery as they struggled and struck, gripped and broke apart. If Black Tom was of the jungles, savage and brutal, Swenson was the Viking of the fiords.

Lola stood underneath the two palms, watching them. She saw the chain on the black wrist, the flashing jewel, and prayed that the curse of the prelate might sate its malediction upon the negro.

Her nails dug into the slender trunk of the coconut tree by which she stood as she saw them go down, rolling over and over in the grit, flailing, thrashing; first the white body on top, then the black, and then the white again, bloody now. Their bending shadows were as grotesque as if demons were fighting beside them.

Black Tom got a thumb in the corner of Swenson's eye and almost gouged the ball from its orbit before a slog to the belly sent him back. He nearly ripped Swenson's mouth with a vicious tug and yelled as Swenson bit hard and deep. The hot blood spurted from the finger, and the black turned himself into a bludgeoning battery of blows that forced the other to cover up and retreat.

There was no science to it. Swenson's shoulder was bloody raw where the teeth of the other had torn away the flesh. He had nearly broken the black's arm once in a clinch. Without knowing the name of the trick he had got a scissors once about the black's middle and nearly squeezed the breath

out of him, his forearm across the throat; but the black almost broke Swenson's arm and got clear.

It was too fast to be maintained. Swenson looked the worse, with the blood of both of them showing plainly on his lighter skin, but he knew he had hurt the other twice with vicious jabs over the heart. He had heard him grunt and seen him wince while a tiny uncertainty flickered for a moment in his eyes. Swenson knew the negro was not yellow, but he believed that his own spirit was stronger than that of the black man. Once he could plant in the negro's mind the idea that he might lose, Swenson had victory in sight.

They both were slick with sweat. The girl caught the rank odor of the black's exudation. Swenson's was just as offensive to the African.

With a howl the black, unable to batter Swenson down, leaped at him and, snarling like a beast, again tried to use his strong teeth. They grazed the skin close to Swenson's jugular, and the white man brought his elbow crashing against the other's jaw. For a moment there was furious infighting, and then the black tried to send his knee into Swenson's groin. He was looking for that trick, and others yet more dangerous and freighted with crippling agony. Again Swenson made the heart the target.

They were down again. The black had a grip like a vise just below Swenson's left biceps, the fingers seeking and finding a vein, a nerve, paralyzing the arm. Swenson writhed and the black grinned, sitting back on his body, riding the white's diaphragm. Swenson gathered his force into a dynamic outburst. He arched his body and let drive with both knees to the other's spine. Now they rolled apart.

The black's cries had been taunting; now they changed to yells of fury. His fist crashed to Swenson's jaw and sent him tottering, dizzy, a roaring as of surf in his ears, a feeling that he was sinking in great depths, unable to

breathe. He guarded himself instinctively, trying to reestablish coördination.

VAGUELY he heard the girl's shrill call of "Olaf! Olaf!" as the black forged in for the kill. Then, in the fading, uncertain light, Black Tom's foot caught in a trailing vine and he almost fell, arms outspread to save himself. Almost automatically, Swenson sent in an uppercut from his hip that straightened up his man and made a bloody mask out of the dark face.

Now, chin on chest, Swenson bored in with straight blows from his shoulders inside the other's wild swipes, shifting to hard, short body jolts as he closed. The black's flat nose was crushed, his thick lips split. One eye was closing from an earlier blow. He shook his head like a bull, backing up.

Swenson's eye burned like fire in its socket. His sunburned back was flayed now by the grit, and he ached from the heavy punishment they had traded. He was tiring, but so was his man.

Again the black tried knee to groin, and again Swenson twisted aside and got in a low punch. There was no thought of fair or foul play in either mind. It was mortal combat, and they were two man-brutes fighting for a woman, reacting only to emotions, throw-backs to the age of stone.

The black fell to his knees, trying to wrestle Swenson down, to fling him over his shoulder, but he could not budge the Northman's sturdy legs. Swenson slugged right and left at the unprotected jaw. The black let go, and scrambled off a few yards like an ape on feet and knuckles and then he turned and ran, leaping the horseshoe ridge of coral to the beach below, seeking a weapon.

Swenson was after him, his breath whistling, his lungs laboring. The girl came too, looking desperately for a

loose rock for her man, guessing Black Tom's intent. Out of the crimson and purple west the last of the light flared through the closing curtains of the day. It struck the sail that Lola had seen, making up for the cay, a turtler coming to catch the big marine reptiles as they crawled back to the ocean after laying their eggs in the sand.

But Lola and Swenson did not so much as glance at the sail that stood for rescue.

Swenson flung out his arm in front of the girl to check her and they stood staring, fascinated at the sight of Black Tom, up to his middle in a quicksand. He was sinking swiftly as the soft stuff oozed about him with sluggish eddies and little sucking noises that sounded above the murmur of the surf.

The black was silent, striving to gain footing, every effort setting him down more swiftly. It was horribly swift. He was up to his armpits, his long arms flat, then flung up as they felt the grip of the greedy mixture of sand and water. He laid his head back, and then he was gone. A flat bubble rose and broke. A hand and wrist was thrust through it. The sun struck the jeweled cross and the gems flashed.

Then the light was gone. The working fingers were gone. The cross was gone. The tropic twilight turned the sky to violet where stars were already peering through, as if the calciums of a mighty theater had been shifted. The sail had lost its rosy flush, but the boat was close in, fetching the cay on the end of the flood.

Swenson put his arm about the girl and she shuddered, close to him.

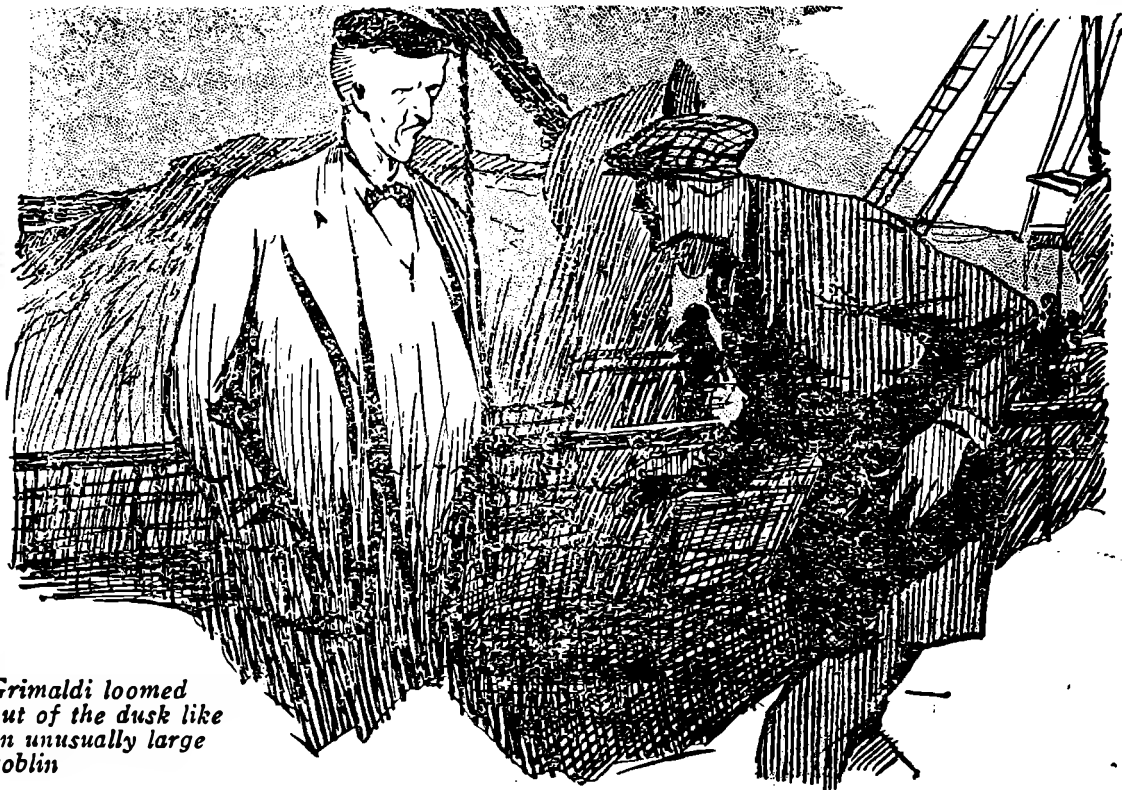
"That's the end, for him," he said.

She stopped quivering.

"The cross," she said. "It is the end of the curse! And, for us, it is the beginning—of everything!"

They stood in close embrace, barely visible in the dusk as the light draft shallop made the reefgate on the top of the tide.

THE END.



Grimaldi loomed out of the dusk like an unusually large goblin

The Spectral Passenger

Hungry for death and morbid delights, the ghoulish Grimaldi gloats over his horrible drama as Lionel Wing rashly opposes him

By FRED MACISAAC

Author of "The Press Agent," "The Golden Burden," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LIONEL WING, exporter, is just recovering from typhoid. His doctor insists he must take a sea voyage; but the financial problem seems insuperable until one Hernando Sortez commissions him to take a message to Jaime Portala, who lives in Petropolis, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro. The message is: "Let not the sun set till the moon rises."

Aboard the slow and rolling tramp *Stella Maris*, Wing finds a curious passenger list; mostly homeward bound Spanish and Portuguese South Americans. There are two pretty girls, a

fresh but likable cabaret dancer named Doris Drexel, and a beautiful girl of about twenty, Miss Wenham, traveling with her parents who have business in Brazil.

At his table, Wing finds an Iowa salesman named Gifford, an Englishman, Owen, Purser Sprowle, and—Grimaldi. Hairless, repulsive, almost colorless, with a beak of a nose, and slit of a mouth, this Grimaldi inspires instant loathing; he reminds Wing of an octopus. Grimaldi, so the purser says, is dangerous—a jinx; wherever he goes, disaster follows—and it mys-

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teriously strikes whomever opposes Grimaldi or betrays natural disgust at the man's personality.

Wing goes below—to find a dead man in his cabin (36). He is at first suspected, but the man had been killed with a knife through the heart, which pointed to a South American. An attempt is made to keep the death secret until some clues were found; but Grimaldi knows about it, in some way—and comes forward to identify the corpse as Montana, a cousin of the president of Brazil. Grimaldi, after establishing an alibi, smilingly admits getting into Wing's cabin from his own, (32), to inspect the body. He names four acquaintances of Montana—Emanuel Sôusa of Sao Paolo, son of Montana's employer; Gratz, Santos coffee merchant; Felix Issoto, Jewish jeweler of Rio; and Augustus Wenham.

Grimaldi confides to Wing that he takes a keen pleasure in being a spectator of death and disaster, and expects much joy of that sort on the present voyage; and advises Wing to watch the Wenhams for the next mishap. He warns Wing to remain strictly a spectator himself. But Wing cannot hide his dislike and suspicions of Grimaldi, and so seems in a fair way to be menaced by the man's evil influence.

Meeting Miss Wenham, Wing is invited to their cabin to share some potent foods and delicacies. On their way, they are stopped, horrified, by hearing a blood-curdling scream!

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE SHIPMATES.

IT was a woman's voice, wasn't it?" whispered Wing. She nodded. "Who gave that yell? Where did it come from?" cried a white-jacketed steward who came out of a cabin and confronted them.

"It seemed to come from ahead," said Lionel making a vague gesture.

There were now half a dozen people in the passage, men and women, among them Doris Drexel, in night dress and kimona, her little dog tucked under her arm. She was very pale and sick, but she smiled wanly at seeing Wing and Miss Wenham.

"Is the ship sinking or something?" she demanded. "Who's getting killed?"

"We don't know," said Wing. Miss Wenham detached herself from him and put an arm about the waist of the blond young woman to sooth her.

"Come back into your cabin, dear," she said. "You'll take cold. A woman screamed. She might have been having a nightmare."

"With pipes like that she ought to be in grand opera," observed the girl. "I'm glad my negligee is becoming anyway. G' night, Chuck."

The purser appeared from nowhere, reassuring the passengers.

"It was nothing," he declared. "Just a woman frightened about something. Go back to your cabins. No cause for alarm."

Muttering, the passengers retired. Miss Wenham returned.

"I'll see you later," she said. "I must go and reassure my mother,"

Sprowle wiped perspiration from his brow and turned to Wing for sympathy.

"What was it?" Lionel demanded of the purser.

"Blessed if I know. The stewards will visit all rooms and make inquiries. What did it sound like to you?"

"It sounded as if a woman saw something perfectly horrible and then it choked her," he said nervously.

"I was down in thirty-two with the captain and Sousa, and it sounded like that to me. I knew this was going to be a harrowing voyage," he sighed. "You know why."

He took Wing by the arm. "Let's go up to my office and have a snorter. After this you must need it."

"I think it would do me good," ad-

mitted Lionel. "It's lucky I didn't take this trip to recover from nervous prostration."

They slipped into the purser's cabin and Sprowle dug a black bottle from a drawer underneath his berth and set out two glasses. He poured and they touched glasses and sipped the tepid and reviving fluid.

"I'm going to get another ship if I have to stay ashore a year after this voyage," declared the purser. "Too much excitement. Come in."

There had been a tap on the door and the chief steward presented himself. His round red face was pale and his piggy eyes were frightened.

"**B**EGGING your pardon, sir, I want to speak to you alone," he said unsteadily.

"About the scream is it?"

"Yes."

"Wing's all right. Speak out."

"Well, sir, it came from cabin twenty-one on the port side. It's occupied by the Senhora Veliza. She's dead, Mr. Sprowle."

Sprowle laid his glass down very slowly, his eyes sticking out of his head. "Oh, my God," he muttered. "Another?"

The chief steward nodded. "Strangled. Dr. Roundsby's been trying artificial respiration, but it's no go."

"Who is she traveling with?" demanded the purser.

"Don't know, sir. She went directly to her cabin when she came aboard, and hasn't been out of it. She is in her berth in her nightdress, sir. A very good-looking young woman, if I may say so."

"Where is the captain?"

"He wants to see you right away."

"All right. I'll be along."

"What will the captain do? Put back to New York?" asked Wing.

"I wish he would, but we are carrying the mails this time, as one of the regular mail boats is in drydock. Besides, these are Brazilians, not Amer-

icans, and this is a British ship. No, he'll have to go on. Two, and this is only the first night."

"Grimaldi predicted something like this, didn't he?" mused Wing.

"Damn him, he did. And more, too. Don't forget that. There will be other killings. A beautiful young woman strangled!"

"And I heard her dying scream. Probably I wasn't fifty feet away, but did not know where to go to help her."

"You were not alone?" asked Sprowle sharply.

"No, Miss Wenham was with me."

"Well, I've got to go, Mr. Wing."

"I'm going to the smokeroom to get another drink," said the American. "I want to be where there are people. My stomach feels as though it were twisting itself around."

"I'm going to the skipper. He'll be in a state. Two in one day. One stabbed and one strangled."

The little purser, white and almost tottering, went out, and Wing followed him. He found his way to the smokeroom in which six or eight men were assembled all, talking at once, the Latins gesticulating violently and talking shrilly.

Lionel Wing sat down at a vacant table and ordered a whisky and soda and then a man rose from the other side of the room, crossed to him and sat down; the fellow who had made the sign to him earlier in the day.

"Your name Wing?" he asked. Without his cap he was even less prepossessing, if possible; a low-browed, furtive, and thoroughly untrustworthy person, assuming appearances signified anything.

"Yes," Lionel answered reluctantly.

"Got it off the passenger list. Funny thing, you look exactly like a friend o' mine that I expected to find on board. Bird by the name of Slavin. Know him?"

"No, I don't."

"He's just out of stir for a job he never had nothin' to do with, and I fig-

ured he'd look pretty pale, so I thought you was him. You look just like him."

"I haven't been in prison, thanks. I was in hospital for some weeks."

"Well, you weren't out in the hot sun. Big doings on board, hey?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"The hell you don't. This Dago that was found dead in your stateroom, and now this dame that was croaked. 'Nother dago, wasn't she?"

"I have heard they were both Brazilians."

"Well," grinned the man, "so long as they stick to chewing up each other, it's all right with me; but us white people on board got to hang together. My name is Kregan, Mr. Wing. My friend and I was thinking of getting up a little game o' stud just to pass the time away. Care to take a hand?"

"I'm so nearly broke that I couldn't afford to play penny ante," he said, frankly. The fellow and his friend were obviously crooks and if he could convince them that he was not fair game, they might let him alone.

"You don't say!"

"It used up all my savings to remain in the hospital," Lionel said, "and then I was ordered to take a sea voyage. When I get back to New York I won't have a cent in the world."

"Ye-ah? Then you wouldn't mind turning an honest penny."

Wing smiled. "It would have to be honest."

"Oh, sure. Well, see you later."

He rose and returned to his companion who was of the fat and flabby species of criminal. Wing sat with his drink and saw them regarding him from across the little room and, undoubtedly, discussing him.

WHAT an extraordinary collection of passengers this craft was carrying, Lionel thought: Brazilian murderers, American crooks, and that sinister demon Grimaldi. Where was he, by the way? Probably prowling about below, devouring, like

a foul monster, the gossip of the stewards regarding the unfortunate woman.

A thought. That scream sounded as though she had suddenly been confronted by a frightful object and then choked. The face of Grimaldi was terrible enough to cause the cry and those hands of his, those long snaky fingers, how they could coil about a white neck! But no, the beast did not do his own killing; of that the ship's officers were sure.

Thinking that Miss Wenham might have returned, he sought the salon, but it was now empty. He saw that it was ten o'clock. He was very weary and he determined to turn in.

He made a thorough examination of his new cabin and observed with relief that, unlike the fatal 36, there was no door of communication with the next stateroom, while there was a stout bolt upon the inside of his door. The walls were solid, the porthole much too small to admit an individual, assuming that a killer were able to walk like a fly along the side of the ship. It seemed safe enough, yet he dreaded the thought of falling asleep.

He lay down, fully dressed, upon his sofa, and for a long time remained awake. In the end he slept, and, rather curiously, had pleasant dreams.

When he awoke the sun was streaming in through the porthole, the sea was calm and the ship rolled gently and with the utmost deliberation. At least Grimaldi's prediction of a storm was not verified, he thought. The man was partially insane, with a degenerate love for the horrible. Well aware of the apprehension his appearance created, he received a ghoulish satisfaction from playing upon the nerves of the superstitious.

A steward came to announce that his bath was ready, and, as he lolled in the warm salt water, he thought more about the winsomeness of Miss Wenham than of the double tragedy of the day before. There was a Brazilian feud on the ship, perhaps; a horrible

thing, but, as the American crook had stated, so long as they confined their activities to their own people, the natives of the United States were in no danger.

So he looked like a chum of the man named Kregan who had finished a term in jail. Well his own prison pallor would soon yield to the warm sun and the tropics. Life was pretty good; he had made a delightful acquaintance, had three weeks to improve it, and, as for Grimaldi—pshaw!

Breakfast turned out to be the first satisfactory meal. The process of broiling ham and frying eggs is so simple that even the chef of the *Stella Maris* was able to perform a creditable job; and Grimaldi seemingly preferred to breakfast in his cabin, so he was not on hand to depress the eaters. The Englishman, Owen, came in late and nodded in friendly fashion.

"A fine day," he declared. "Things are looking up, what? I hear they buried the poor fellow who was stabbed at five this morning. Sewed him up and pushed him off. It's as good a burial as any."

Evidently he had not heard of the second crime, and Wing did not want to spoil his breakfast so he kept quiet.

"I've heard of this Grimaldi," continued Owen. "A gloomy cove. Very unpopular in Rio, and I understand why. Quite chills one to look at him, and he talks like a voice from the tomb. Not bad that, I say. A voice from the tomb."

"And quite your own," smiled Wing.

"Eh? Oh, well, maybe it's biblical."

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIMALDI GLOATS.

ON deck the sunlight was dazzling, the ocean brilliantly cerulean and sparkling like a mirror. A number of passengers were about, promenading, or settled in their deck

chairs. Nevertheless, there was none of the gayety usually so evident among tourists at sea on such a day, for it had been impossible to conceal the news of the second crime.

Fifty passengers and a crew of one hundred were imprisoned in the moving steel box which was the *Stella Maris*, and nearly all of those were actually aware that among them moved one or more brutal murderers.

The natural instinct of peaceful people is to depart at top speed from the neighborhood of danger, or to grow tense and even panic-stricken if restrained; so the situation on the *Stella Maris* that morning was most alarming to Captain Grigsby and Purser Sprowle. As Wing came on deck he saw them in conference at a corner of the bridge, but the subject of their conversation, of course, was unknown to him.

"Everybody knows now that Montana was stabbed to death," Sprowle was saying, "and almost everybody heard that woman scream last night. The people in the near-by cabins heard the stewards talking, so if all on board don't know already that two murders were committed yesterday, they will know it soon. The chief steward reports that his crew are uneasy, and the passengers are likely to get out of hand if something isn't done. I suggest you put into an American port."

Grigsby had his hands thrust into the side pocket of his uniform coat, his legs spread wide apart.

"You know what's in the strong-room?" he said.

"The gold. Yes."

"Well, you don't know that the company is getting a bonus of one hundred pounds for every hour we cut off our running time in delivering those kegs of twenty-dollar gold pieces to the Scotch bank in Rio. There's some big deal on down there, and they have to turn over five million in gold on a certain day or lose out. Dry docking the regular mail boat shifted the con-

signment to us. We have the best of coal this trip, and ten extra hands in the fireroom. I told the owners that I thought I could cut off three days from our regular running time, which means a profit of seven thousand, two hundred pounds for the company. If I put into an American port, for any reason whatever, I lose my job, the Scotch bank gets into a terrible hole, and there you are. We might be detained a week while the American police fuss about these crimes. I can't do it, Sprowle."

"No, of course not. I didn't know about the bonus."

"If I get into trouble with the police for not going into Charleston or Savannah the company will stand back of me. You see how it is."

"Of course, but there are already two or three women locked in their staterooms afraid to come out. Half a dozen men have stopped me this morning and demanded that we turn back and put them ashore. Suppose the crew gets panicky. What then?"

Grigsby, in Wing's opinion, was a stupid, self-opinionated man; but he did not lack bulldog grit.

"I'll shoot any blasted mutineers—and, as for the passengers, they can't dictate to me."

"The thing to do is to find the murderer," declared Sprowle.

"Well, damn it, find him."

The purser pulled at his little black mustache. "If these crimes had happened later in the voyage, when I had time to get a line on the passengers, I might have a chance to figure the thing out, but I don't know anything about these people; only half a dozen have ever sailed with us before. Meanwhile they'll be discussing it all over the ship and getting more and more alarmed. After all, you can't blame them. Who'll be the next victim?"

The captain looked along the deck below.

"There's that fellow, Wing," he said. "Montana was killed in his

cabin. He was near the stateroom where the woman was killed. We could lock him up and tell the passengers we had caught the murderer. That would calm them. All that worries them is that he is at large."

"Oh, I say," protested the purser. "That would be filthy. Wing was with Miss Wenham in the passageway last night, and we're pretty sure he had nothing to do with stabbing Montana. I'd sooner lock up Grimaldi."

"What? Not on your life," exclaimed Grigsby. "We let that brute alone."

The purser laughed with understanding. "Right you are. I'm hanged if I know what to do."

"HA!" snorted the skipper. "I have it. Put up a bulletin to the effect that the criminal who is responsible for the crimes committed on the *Stella Maris* has been captured and is locked in the brig. That will satisfy the passengers and make the murderer breathe easy. Then he may make a false step, and we'll nab him."

"They'll want to know who the prisoner is," demurred the purser.

"None of their confounded business."

"They'll count noses."

"No, they won't. You don't know all the passengers by sight yet yourself; how can they? A lot of people were sick yesterday, and invisible. And, for all the passengers know, we may have locked up one of the crew."

"That's right, too, sir; but the crew will know there is nobody in the lazaret."

"It will take 'em a day or two to find out, and in the meantime we may discover something. You are armed, of course."

"You bet," asserted Sprowle. "I strapped on my gun last night."

"What beastly luck, upon this voyage of all voyages. We've beaten our best day's run by sixty miles for the first twenty-four hours, the barometer

is up, and things look good for several days. Well, go and write that bulletin. Find anything interesting in the woman's effects?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Too bad. And, say, we can't shove the body over secretly as we did Montana's. We've got to hold a service over it, but we'll do it at five tomorrow morning. What vile luck!"

The purser descended from the bridge and encountered Wing, who had made a circuit of the deck.

"Any news, Mr. Sprowle?" he asked.

"The best," was the surprising answer. "We've run down the person responsible for both crimes and have him safe in the lazaret."

"Congratulations! Who was it?"

"I can't give that out," said Sprowle, evading the young man's eyes. "Captain's orders. I'm just going to put up a notice on the bulletin board, and you might tell anybody you meet. Sort of stop them from worrying, eh?"

"Yes, indeed. It certainly cheers me up. It's an awful sensation to know that a double murderer may be sitting next to one, ready to commit a third killing. Was the fellow crazy?"

"Well—er—something like that. I can't go into it."

From close at hand came a jeering cackle; the men turned and saw Grimaldi, who wore rubber-soled shoes and had come up to them unheard. Sprowle glanced at him nervously and hastened away.

"So they have caught the murderer," sneered the livid man.

Wing nodded. "Yes. Have him safely locked up. That's a relief, isn't it?"

The man's face distorted into his repulsive smile. "Wonderful news, if true. Don't be a fool, Mr. Wing. Sprowle is lying."

"Oh, say."

"Certainly. A dodge of the ship's officers to keep the passengers from

going mad. It won't help much when the third killing takes place."

"For God's sake," Wing exclaimed, "don't say such things, Mr. Grimaldi! The least we can do is coöperate with the captain and the purser in their effort to assuage the alarm of the passengers."

"I'm just a spectator at the play," replied the ogre, "and I reserve my right to hiss bad acting. You made the acquaintance of Miss Wenham last evening. A charming girl, isn't she?"

"Yes," Wing said shortly. He did not wish to discuss Miss Wenham with this foul creature.

"An excellent prima donna for our opera," stated Grimaldi, then with a wave of his claw he shuffled away.

Wing stared after him with hot eyes. Evidently the fellow was mad, and it was by no means certain that he was a harmless lunatic. In his diseased mind there seemed to be some animus against Miss Wenham. Prima donna of an opera. He persisted in considering the horrible tragedies already enacted on the ship as a prelude to something more horrible.

Prima donna! In the few grand operas Lionel had ever seen, the heroine perished with the hero in the last act. Was that what Grimaldi had in mind? Was the sweet and winsome girl, who so appealed to him, in danger in this affair? Absurd. Yet there was at large within the narrow confines of this ten-thousand ton ship the person or persons who had already slain two passengers.

WING went resolutely below and sought the purser, whom he found fastening with thumb-tacks upon the bulletin board at the head of the main staircase the announcement of the capture of the killer.

"I have some information for you, Mr. Sprowle," he said in a low tone, for passengers were already beginning to cluster.

"Come into the office," replied the

official. "Yes, madam. You need not be alarmed. We have him hard and fast. I'm sorry, but the captain has forbidden me to tell his name."

Sprowle sat on his bunk and motioned to the swivel chair before his desk.

"Any information will be gratefully received," he said with a wry smile.

"Just after you left me Grimaldi informed me that your announcement was a falsehood," stated Wing.

"The confounded brute. What else did he say?" muttered Sprowle.

"He asserted it was a device to allay anxiety, nothing more."

The purser nodded. "He's right enough. I told the skipper it wouldn't be believed. That malicious devil will drop a word here and there and we'll have the whole pack on us in no time."

"He persists in considering the events on this ship an opera performed for his benefit. What worries me is that he has cast Miss Wenham for the rôle of prima donna. That means that, in his mind, there is a connection in the two murders and a group of passengers on board. He predicts another killing. Are the Wenhams mixed up in any way with this Montana?"

"We took Mr. Wenham in to see the man last night, although he was pretty seasick. He identified Montana all right and then Captain Grigsby questioned him closely regarding his acquaintance with the fellow. He says that Montana owned the house in which he and his family live in Rio and that necessary repairs have not been made by the agent, so, a few days before he left New York, he telephoned him and asked for an appointment, but Montana said he would call at Wenham's hotel. They had a pleasant talk, Montana promised to write his agent to make what repairs Wenham required, and they parted on the best of terms."

"How do you suppose Grimaldi knew that Montana had visited Wenham?" asked Lionel.

The purser shrugged his shoulders

hopelessly. "What doesn't that devil know?"

"Did Mr. Wenham know that Montana was coming to the steamer?"

"He said not."

"Did he know of any reason why the man might have been killed?"

"No. Say, Wing, after all, you're just a passenger, and you act as though you were a policeman. Are you?"

"No. I am sorry if I presume, but what Grimaldi said frightened me. I'm going to make it my business to see that nothing happens to Miss Wenham. It's my opinion that Grimaldi could solve the whole mystery, and a New York police detective would choke it out of him."

Sprowle nodded assent. "I wish to Heaven the third degree sharps had him in their clutches. I have no objection to talking things over with you, Wing. I like you. I believe you are honest, and two heads are better than one. Captain Grigsby says it's my business to nab this killer."

"Perhaps my questions may be of some help then," said Wing eagerly. "Have you radioed New York and asked the police for information about Montana? His office might explain his presence on the ship."

"Radio went last night as soon as the identification was positive, and no reply has come yet."

As though a cue had been given, the door opened and a steward appeared with an envelope.

"Radiogram for you, sir," he said.

Sprowle grasped it and tore it open.

"Listen to this," Sprowle said excitedly. "It's from our office:

"Police informed by chief clerk, Montana company, Montana visited Stella Maris to bid good-by to friend named Gustavus Wenham. Wharf detective reports Montana arrived in taxi with beautiful young woman, Latin, dressed in black, wearing black hat. Radio further developments."

"Then Wenham lied to you," said Wing hesitatingly. "I saw him on

deck shortly after sailing. He looked like a very honest, very decent man."

"Well," replied Sprowle, "he was sick last night, and the captain let him off easily, but you may be sure he'll get a questioning now."

"Do you suppose—could the woman Montana escorted have been the woman who was strangled?"

"Yes," exclaimed the purser. "Yes. She was Latin, dark, and good-looking. We've got a dozen Brazilian women on board, but I don't think any of the others could be called beautiful. She had black clothes and a black hat in her wardrobe."

"Then she might have known who killed Montana, or who had a motive for doing it; and the murderer, aware that she might betray him, crept into her cabin and strangled her."

"That's a reason for the second crime," agreed Mr. Sprowle. "That's logical. Look here, Mr. Wing, I'd like to talk things over with you because you have a way of putting your finger on important points. Keep your eyes open and tip me off to anything you discover. I'm going down now to make another search of the poor woman's effects."

CHAPTER IX.

WINGED DEATH.

WING left the purser's office and descended the wide staircase to his own deck. When two steps from the bottom the ship rolled suddenly, and he staggered and reached for the hand rail. As he did so, something whizzed by his head and struck the wall at the bottom of the staircase with a crash, then fell with a double thump to the deck. At the same instant Miss Doris Drexel, her little dog under her arm, emerged from a passageway.

"What ho?" she exclaimed. "Who's throwing things?"

"Hello," he gasped, as he reached

the lower companionway. "Glad to see you about again. That thing came from the deck above."

"Looks like a jump rope," she said. "It came whirling through the air and just missed you, Mr. Wing."

He stopped and picked up a heavy cord which lay curled upon the deck. It was about three feet long, and at each end was a small but heavy ball of lead.

"Too short for a jump rope," observed the dancer. "What on earth is it?"

He frowned and then his face cleared. "It's called a *bola*," he said thoughtfully. "It's an Argentine weapon. The line hits an ostrich in the throat, and the heavy balls cause it to coil around him so tightly that his neck is broken. Good Lord!"

"Some friend of yours tossed it at you? If it would break the neck of an ostrich, it would break yours, Chuck," she said excitedly, and her eyes dilated with fear.

Instead of answering, he ran up the staircase, but the upper companionway was empty, as might have been expected. He returned slowly and rejoined the girl.

"Playful, wasn't it?" he muttered, with an effort at a smile. "Let's go out on deck." He examined the *bola* more carefully, and saw that its cord was of catgut. Each of the lead balls weighed a quarter of a pound. It would not only have broken his neck, it would have come near to decapitating him, he thought; but he said nothing as he thrust the deadly weapon into his pocket.

She placed her little hand behind his left elbow, observing that he was very pale.

"Care to talk about it?" she asked softly.

"Yes. Why not?" He laughed in strained fashion. "After all, a miss is as good as a mile."

"Who is there on board who doesn't like you terribly?"

They were ascending the stairs. "Nobody, as far as I know," he answered.

"Are you mixed up in this Brazilian mess?" she demanded.

"Certainly not. I never saw or heard of either of those two unfortunate people."

"Well, you came within an ace of being as dead as they are. Gee!"

They began to ascend the stairs, and the ship rolled again, causing them to lurch to port.

"If I hadn't made a plunge for the banister," he said, "the *bola* would have struck me in the back of the neck. Did you see anybody above?"

She shook her head. "No; I saw something whirling, and then heard a *bang-bang* where it struck the panel. You look out, Chuck; they're after you."

He nodded. "The first failure. That's encouraging. Look here, Miss Drexel, you better keep away from me. I'm a dangerous companion."

"I don't scare," she stoutly maintained.

"Just the same, you go out on deck alone. I'm going to see the captain about this. Please don't tell anybody about it. Have you seen Miss Wenham this morning?"

"Yes. She came into my cabin about half an hour ago to see how I was. She said she would be on deck soon. There's a nice girl."

"Isn't she! Well, see you later."

"I hate to leave you alone."

"Please do. I've got his weapon. I'm probably safe for the present."

HE descended to his cabin without other incident, and promptly bolted the door. The steamer trunk which he had pushed under his berth was halfway out on the floor, the door of his wardrobe was open, and his shirts inside had been tossed around.

"Now, I wonder who did that!" he muttered. "Sprowle may have had

my luggage searched looking for evidence to connect me with Montana. Or the murderer may have been trying to get a line on me. It's two hours since I went to breakfast, and it might have been done at any time. Well, if he was after loot, he found nothing."

He sat down on the sofa and took out the instrument which had so nearly put an end to him. After contemplating it for a few moments he smiled and nodded his head.

"This is a real clew," he said to himself. "I don't think they know anything about the *bola* in Brazil; it's a weapon of the Argentine pampas. As a knife and revolver are more deadly weapons, I doubt if a Brazilian would trouble to learn how to use this thing."

He remembered that he had read somewhere that it had taken Douglas Fairbanks six months to learn how to throw the *bola* for his Argentine film "The Gaucho," and Fairbanks was famous for the speed with which he acquired stunts.

"There are not likely to be many Argentines on board," he thought, "and this limits the number of suspects. But why elect me to the company of people to be murdered?"

Wing had no interests of any sort which might interfere with the plans of whoever was dealing death on board, while the man and woman who had been slain were South Americans whose existence for some reason might have endangered some of their countrymen. The attack on him seemed unreasonable.

The versatility of the methods used by the slayer needed explanation. First the knife, then the naked hands on a poor girl's throat, and finally this weird weapon of the pampas. Perhaps the thrower thought that he could recover his *bola* as he had the knife, and Wing, lying at the foot of the stairs with a broken neck, would be supposed to have fallen down the staircase and perished accidentally.

Well, quick action was necessary. The *bola* gave sufficient grounds for locking up any Argentines on board, and he would demand that Captain Grigsby take some such action.

He was rising to seek the captain, when there came a heavy knock on the door, and he opened, to face Sprowle, who was accompanied by two stewards.

"Come right in, men," said the purser, whose face was grim and whose eyes were sharp and hostile.

"I was just going to look for you," began Lionel Wing.

"Well, here I am," snapped Sprowle. "After leaving you I returned to Senhora Veliza's cabin and went through her things. In a compartment of her pocketbook which I neglected to open last night I found this."

He extended a small oblong of pasteboard, which Wing took and recognized.

"One of my cards!" he said.

"Precisely. Turn it over," the purser growled.

Wing read the words in amazement:

Must see you to-night. Leave your door open.

This was written in blue ink in a flowing hand.

"Well?" demanded Sprowle.

Wing handed it back. "You found my card in her pocketbook?"

"Precisely."

"So you came here with your stewards to arrest me for her murder?"

"About that. Yes," Sprowle remarked grimly.

"IT'S not my writing," Wing said quietly. "Compare it with my signature on my ticket."

"You could have disguised your hand."

Wing paused, then: "In which case, why write the message on my card?"

"I hadn't thought of that," admitted Sprowle with less acerbity.

"Besides that, I was in the passageway some distance from her stateroom in the company of Miss Wenham, when the woman uttered her dying shriek. Miss Drexel joined us immediately, and several stewards saw me."

"That's right, sir," said one of the stewards. "I saw the gentleman with the lady. They were walking down the passage, and I saw them just when the Brazilian lady yelled."

Wing smiled. "So you see, I have a perfect alibi."

"Then how did your card come to be in her pocketbook?" demanded the crestfallen Sprowle.

"I don't know, but I can make a guess. Somebody who wished to throw suspicion on me put it there this morning. You say it wasn't there last night?"

"It might have been. I didn't find it."

"I have no doubt you looked very carefully last night," said Wing.

"Well, I thought I did," the purser said.

"Now permit me to tell you something. When I entered this stateroom a few minutes ago I found that my trunk had been opened and my wardrobe searched. In my trunk was a small package of visiting cards. The searcher took one of them, wrote the message on the back of it and got into the stateroom and placed it in the woman's pocketbook."

"Why?" asked Sprowle who was no longer hostile, just bewildered.

"Because he wished me suspected, of course. Now, did you ever see anything like this before?" He held up the *bola*.

"What on earth is that?" demanded the purser.

Lionel explained it and its uses and then narrated his experience of a few moments before upon the staircase.

"After all," demurred Sprowle, "we only have your word for that."

Wing smiled triumphantly. "On the contrary, Miss Drexel was there just

as the thing was thrown and saw it hit the partition. We picked it up together."

Sprowle dropped limply on the sofa beside the passenger.

"It's all beyond me. Why try to kill you?"

"I couldn't understand, but now I know. Suppose my body had been found with a broken neck at the foot of the ladder. Accidental death. Then you discover my card in the woman's pocketbook. Montana was found dead in my original stateroom. Obviously I killed them both. I could make no defense. And the murderer lies low and goes safely ashore at Rio."

"Are you sure that piece of catgut would kill?"

"Ask anybody who knows or has read about the pampas of Argentina. I was just going to suggest that you arrest all the Argentines on board and among them, undoubtedly, you will find the murderer."

"Hum," grunted the purser. "It's not so easy as that. Trouble is, there are no Argentines among the passengers. Not one."

"Then in the crew."

"Possibly. I'll go over the crew lists immediately."

"In the meantime, my life has been threatened, and I demand protection."

Sprowle made a gesture of despair. "How can I protect you? I can lock you in the lazaret for the rest of the voyage or you can lock yourself in your stateroom and I'll place an armed steward in the passage outside. Two murders and one attempt. This is perfectly awful!"

"Well, are you convinced that I am innocent?"

Sprowle nodded. "Personally, yes. Your alibi last night was perfect. We searched your luggage yesterday immediately on transferring it to the new cabin and we know you had no knife in it. Of course the knife could have been thrown out of a porthole; probably it was. I'm sure you are the vic-

tim of a plot, Mr. Wing, but who is responsible for it?"

"I GUESS Grimaldi," Lionel said quickly. "I consider him crazy and his mania is homicide. I have had no contact with any of the Brazilians, but this man knows me and has gloated to me over the crimes. I think he ought to be locked up at once."

"No," replied Sprowle. "We have no evidence against him. He has a perfect alibi like yourself in the case of the woman."

"I know he claimed he was on deck during the period when Montana was killed, but I didn't see him last night."

Sprowle sighed. "At the exact moment when the scream was heard, Mr. Grimaldi was on deck talking to Captain Grigsby. You see the situation."

"Talking to the captain!"

"Furthermore, he was most helpful in enabling us to identify Montana. All the people whom he said knew the man admitted it. We haven't the slightest excuse for suspecting him and you may be sure we won't bother that fellow unless we have all the goods on him."

"Meanwhile somebody is stalking me and I may be killed at any moment."

"You can keep to your cabin," suggested Sprowle.

"No. I'm not going to make a prisoner of myself. I'm going on deck now, but you bet I'll keep my eyes open."

"I'm going to assign a man to keep you in sight, if you don't mind," said the purser. "This *bola* incident, followed by an attempt to throw suspicion on you—"

"Preceded, I should say."

"Right you are, preceded. It means they are after you now and we can't have a third murder. Why, we should never get another passenger."

Wing laughed harshly. "I see your consideration is not entirely for me."

Sprowle looked confused. "You

know what I mean. It's that we have every reason to protect you. I don't suppose you are armed."

"I never fired a revolver in my life."

Impulsively the purser thrust out his hand. "God protect you," he said fervently. "We'll do what we can. I should hate to see you get scragged. I rather like you."

"That's something," he replied with a smile. "I reciprocate."

"And may I have that *bola*? I want to show it to the skipper."

"I have no use for it. I hope the thrower hasn't got another."

Mr. Sprowle retired and Wing was left to his thoughts. When a young man, who has lived quietly in a great city most of his life without ever encountering crime in any of its ramifications, finds himself marked for destruction by unseen criminals who have already demonstrated in two cases their death-dealing powers, he might be expected to fall into utter panic; but Lionel Wing had already experienced his moment of terror and now he found himself strangely exhilarated, tingling with pleasurable excitement.

In going after him, Wing assured himself, the Unknown had overplayed his hand. The ship's officers might be impotent to lay hands upon the killers, perhaps might never discover them, but he, Lionel Wing, to protect himself, would unmask them. He had come on board still physically below normal and in a condition of mental lassitude; he was not much stronger now, but his mind was clearer than ever and he was confident he knew the person responsible for what had happened—Grimaldi.

Grimaldi had a confederate, of course; but he plotted things. He had known when Montana would be slain and constructed an alibi for himself, and had undoubtedly sought Captain Grigsby by design at the moment when brutal hands closed on the throat of the unfortunate woman who had time for one appalling shriek before she

died. He burned to confront Grimaldi, accuse him of the crimes and force a confession from him; and if he had found the sinister one during the next quarter of an hour he would probably have been rash enough to do so.

CHAPTER X.

WENHAM'S NATIVITY.

IT is astonishing how completely a person can disappear, even on a small passenger ship, for a brief time. Wing circled the single promenade deck, entered salon and smoking room, and prowled through the passageways in the stateroom accommodation without a sight of Grimaldi. Of course Wing could not enter any stateroom save his own.

His fever had worn off and discretion reassumed control by the time he finally went on deck again, to be hailed by Doris Drexel. She was sitting with Miss Wenham and her parents in deck chairs just below the bridge. It was his first sight of the dark girl that day, and her welcoming smile temporarily banished his detective ambition.

"I want you to meet my father and mother, Mr. Wing," she said cordially.

Mr. Wenham stretched out a thin, wrinkled hand and smiled faintly.

"I was overcome by the ship's motion yesterday," he stated, "and I am still weak, so you will excuse my not rising."

He had a crisp way of speaking which indicated the New Englander, and his thin face and drooping gray mustache increased the impression.

"I'm delighted to meet you, sir. How do you do, Mrs. Wenham?"

"I am better now, thank you," she said pleasantly. "I recover quickly, even if I do succumb easily."

Mrs. Wenham, he decided, was charming, and when she smiled she looked like her daughter. He thought it nice for a woman to grow old in the fashion of Mrs. Wenham.

"Sit on the end of my chair," suggested Doris. "Mr. Wing is not so robust himself, Mrs. Wenham."

"You have had a severe illness, have you not?" asked the lady. "The girls were discussing you before you came up."

He lifted his eyebrows to Doris who responded with a slight shake of the head and he knew that she had not mentioned the *bola* incident.

"I am quite shaken, too," added Mr. Wenham, "by the ghastly affairs of yesterday. I knew Senhor Montana."

"The purser told me you had identified him," replied Wing. "I hope he was not a close friend."

"Oh, no," said the old gentleman. "An acquaintance only—but violent death is dreadful in any case."

"And the poor woman," added his wife. "That shocked me even more. What are the ship's officers about, that they have not found the murderer?"

"But there is a sign on the bulletin board saying he is safely locked up," said Wing.

"Oh, that," scoffed Miss Wenham. "Nobody believes it. Mr. Grimaldi told us a short time ago that it was a device of the captain's to calm the passengers."

"The fellow ought to be locked up himself," declared Wing angrily.

"Ssssh," warned Mrs. Wenham. Her husband lifted a monitory hand.

"Young man," he said gravely, "I beg of you to be careful how you speak of that person. I assure you he has extraordinary powers."

Lionel suppressed a smile. "I would hardly expect such a statement from an American of your type, sir," he replied.

"And what type of American do you think I am?" asked the old gentleman rather sharply.

"Well, I should say you were from New England, probably Boston."

Wenham lifted bushy eyebrows.

"The type perseveres," he said whimsically. "I was born in Rio de

Janeiro although I am an American citizen. My father was a Bostonian and I went to school at a New England college."

"So you see, father is entitled to his superstition," declared the daughter. "My grandmother was a Brazilian woman. That's why I am such a brunette, perhaps."

"HAVE you any theory regarding the crimes?" asked Wing of Mr. Wenham.

"I told the captain half an hour ago that he must hunt two killers," replied the old man. "Montana was killed by a knife man. Wielders of the poignard would not be likely to garrot a person. The knife is quicker and much more effective."

"Gus," implored Mrs. Wenham. "I think I shall go mad if you persist in talking of such things. Mr. Wing, please change the subject."

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely. "It was most inconsiderate of me to bring it up."

"I'm frightfully interested," exclaimed the cabaret girl. "Chuck, if Mr. Wenham's right, they must look for three murderers."

"Good Heavens, has there been a third death?" Mrs. Wenham almost shrieked in alarm. Doris colored with confusion, and Wing looked vexed.

"No, no," he said hastily. "Miss Drexel meant—well, the fact is that somebody threw a *bola* at me as I was going down to the lower deck, but it missed."

Wenham turned ghastly pale, and his wife, observing it, caught his hand and squeezed it. Unobserving, Miss Wenham asked in wide-eyed astonishment:

"What's a *bola*?"

"I'm sure we should drop this discussion," Wing said meaningly.

"No," replied Mrs. Wenham. "What is it? I never heard of such a thing."

Lionel was obliged to explain. "It

might have no significance at all," he added. "Somebody might have been practicing with it unaware that I was in danger, and ran away when he saw that it had almost found a target."

Mr. Wenham, who had closed the lids over his tired eyes, opened them.

"Don't try to deceive yourself, Mr. Wing," he said quietly. "You were the target, it was intentional, and they will try again. Be on your guard."

"What makes you think such a thing, father?" demanded Miss Wenham with frightened dark eyes.

"The *bola* in the hands of an expert is a deadly weapon," he continued. "I warn you, young man. Look out for yourself."

"Please take me below," said Mrs. Wenham. "I am terror-stricken. We shall all be murdered."

The Wenham family rose and departed, the girl casting an apologetic glance back over her shoulder.

"I put my foot in it that time," said Doris penitently.

"I'm rather glad you did," he said. "Did you notice the effect of that word on Mr. Wenham? He's in deadly fear of something, and I think he could put his hand on the *bola* thrower if he dared."

"I think he's an old darling," she answered. "Imagine anybody who looks like him being half Brazilian and being born there. Why, he might have come out of Nashau, New Hampshire."

"Well, let's not tell anybody else. I don't think they will spread the news."

"I've got some news myself," she surprised him by saying. "In addition to the Brazilian Black Hand, we've got a choice assortment of New York yeggs on board."

"What do you mean?"

"I worked in night clubs in New York," she reminded him. "When a gunman isn't out blowing off somebody's head, he puts on a dress suit, gets a girl, and buys wine in a night club. I have seen three bimbos who

were in the habit of dropping into Gatney's Garden when I worked there a year ago. Why are they rolling down to Rio?"

"Do you think they killed—"

"No. A cobbler sticks to his last. If they had bumped off the gentleman and lady it would have been with a gun with a silencer on it. I think they are just as much puzzled as we are. And you bet none of those gorillas knows a *bola* from a boomerang."

"Do you suppose they were run out of New York?"

"No, sir. They have influence. One of them was head executioner for a bootlegger who had a pull like a Percheron."

"They have some game on. One of them is a fellow named Kregan, isn't he?"

"Why, yes! How do you know?"

"Had a chat with him in the smoke-room. He mistook me for a friend just out of Sing Sing. When I explained who I was and that I was broke, he asked me if I'd like to earn an honest penny."

"Are you broke? That's too bad. Seems if all the men I get a crush on are what-you-may-call-it — impecunious."

"Don't be silly. I think it all sounds as if they were up to something, doesn't it?"

"Well, I hope, between the Brazilian cutthroats and the New York cannon-eers, that they leave enough people alive to navigate the ship. I like a certain amount of excitement, but I'm just getting over being seasick. Mister captain, stop the ship, I want to get off and walk!"

"Isn't it our duty to report this to the captain?" he considered.

"Take a look at him up there! One more idea in his noddle and he'd explode. I wish we had a policeman on board; just one bone-headed New York cop. How I love them!"

"Just the same—"

"Ain't you in trouble enough with

bola jugglers practicing on you?" she asked earnestly. "Take a wise girl's advice and let those yeggs enjoy themselves. As we're both broke it's sure they're not after us."

"After all, they may be going down to Rio to a convention," he said with a grin. "Hark. The gong for what they call lunch on this cruiser."

CHAPTER XI.

GIFFORD MIXES IN.

MR. GIFFORD, the brush salesman, was Henry to the trade, but to his intimates he was known as Hank. Young men go West to be cowboys, but bright young cowboys go East to become business men, and to the inhabitants of Spruce, Wyoming, the city of Des Moines was east. His father was the village blacksmith, and Hank was riding the range at the age of seventeen. At eighteen he was a "pointer," which means a particularly efficient cowhand; and at nineteen he had decided that there was no future in punching cattle, so he had gone East and got work in a grocery store.

He was boiling with ambition, studied hard at night school, emulated the speech, dress, and habits of the Easterners of Des Moines, and graduated after a few years into the sales force of the Supreme Brush Company, in which business he was signally successful. Supreme brushes were sold all over the United States, and in the course of time old Elias Yardman, the head of the company, decided to add South to North America and to begin with Rio de Janeiro.

As there was no great eagerness among the older salesmen to leave home and mother or wives and children for a far distant shore, Hank Gifford cantered in with the job. He had boarded the *Stella Maris* frothing with enthusiasm. Having no standards of comparison regarding ocean liners, he

was much impressed with the ship until the first dreadful luncheon, and even that did not completely dash his spirits, but seasickness did.

He felt deadly shame when it forced him to seek his cabin, but his humiliation was soon forgotten in the agony he suffered. In time he fell asleep, but he did not sleep happily or well; and it was not until the sea subsided in the early morning that he dropped into a deep slumber which lasted until noon. He awoke refreshed and in fair shape, but he dared not get up, for through his cabin porthole he could see the dark blue sea very slowly yield to the light blue sky, and the sky then permit the sea to replace it, which meant that there still was some slight motion.

The *Stella Maris* was one of those old-fashioned ships without a ventilating system, and its inside cabins were aired by means of a small opening near the ceiling in the partition which separated them from the outside cabins; a very inadequate device, especially if the ports of the outside cabins were closed.

Lying in his berth, Gifford gradually became aware of voices on the other side of the wall, and, having nothing better to do, he listened.

"Who croaked the dame?" somebody was asking in a hoarse voice, like a man who had tuberculosis of the throat.

"Search me," said a second voice, rather high pitched. "I suppose the same guy that knifed the Dago."

"Yeah, but what's the game? We can't do a thing till we find out, Steve."

"It ain't got nothin' to do with us."

"Why aint it? Those two stiffs must have had a lot of jack. Maybe the frail had some swell sparklers. Don't overlook nothing, that's me."

"Well, he's in the hoosegow now. I seen a notice on the bulletin board."

"I seen that, but this Spanish mackerel, Grimaldi, was in the smoke-room and he tipped another Spig that

it was a lot of bushwah, see. The captain put it up so the dames on board wouldn't pass away from fright. It's the bunk."

"They might ha' got him, though."

"Go on. This captain couldn't catch soup on that mustache of his. They ain't got him."

"Well, it don't stand to reason people with jack and jewelry would take passage on a gunboat like this. If you ask me, it was a 'love crime,' the kind you read about in the tabloids."

"Anyway, we got to find out. We got to know all that's goin' on. It's business, see."

"Oh, sure. Well, s'pose we go up and lay round the smokeroom. That's where you hear things."

Gifford heard the door slam and knew that the pair had departed. He continued to lie in bed and think about what he had overheard. Although he was not a New Yorker, he understood the depraved English in which they spoke well enough, and he comprehended that he had for neighbors a pair of crooks.

"GUESS I'll have to keep my door locked," he thought. He had heard of the death of the Brazilian woman from the steward, who had tried to persuade him to eat breakfast, and he was satisfied from the conversation that these particular criminals knew no more about it than the rest of the passengers. Nevertheless, they were on board for no good, and the sooner he got a look at them and tipped off the ship's officers about them, the safer would be the bank rolls of the various passengers. All he needed, now, was an inducement to get up, and this was sufficient. He rose, dressed leisurely and recognized that the curious feeling in the pit of his stomach was hunger, not seasickness.

He remembered pleasantly the man who sat next him, Wing, and the pretty little blonde with the dog, to whom Wing had promised to introduce him.

He wondered if she had been seasick, and he wondered what they would have for lunch. The way he felt now he could eat anything.

He moved down the corridor and observed a man in uniform some ten feet ahead of him without paying particular attention, not even distinguishing whether it was a steward or navigating officer. In truth, he could not yet recognize the difference by the uniform. As this official was passing a side passage something flashed out like the forked tongue of a serpent, dropped over the officer's head, tightened about his neck, and dragged him toward the passage.

Gifford came from a country where he knew a rope when he saw one, and he could drop a loop over the horns of a steer as handily as anybody in Wyoming, so, emitting a whoop, he plunged to the rescue. He dived for the officer's legs and grasped them tightly, then, releasing one of them, he thrust his right hand under his left shoulder and a gun appeared in his hand.

"Drop that rope!" he thundered.

He saw a man in the passage, his back to the porthole and his face deeply shadowed, who was hauling in his prize like a fisherman drags in a big fish. He heard an oath and the fellow disappeared through a stateroom door to the right, slamming it shut and snapping the bolt.

"We'll get him all right," muttered the Westerner. He then stooped over the half strangled victim and removed the noose.

The man's face was already dark, but his ordinary florid coloring quickly returned while his tongue uttered a succession of hair-raising maritime oaths. Gifford helped him to his feet.

"He went into that cabin, mister," he said. "What did he rope you for? What's it all about?"

"Steward!" bawled the man in uniform. "I say, steward. Where in hell are you?"

"Here, sir. Here sir," came in

cockney tones from two directions and a pair of stewards bounced into view.

"Is something the matter, Captain Grigsby, sir?" quavered the first, who was terrified by the expression upon the face of the mariner.

"Burst in the door of that cabin and drag out a miscreant who tried to strangle me," he roared.

"Aye, sir, if you'll let us pass."

Instead, the captain pounded upon the door of the cabin—number 18—with a big red fist.

"Come out, you scoundrel," he bel-lowed. "Come out or we'll break in."

One of the stewards picked up the lasso, a shortened lariat, and gazed at it in wonder. Gifford took it out of his hands and inspected it intelligently.

"Is that the captain?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yes, sir, it's Captain Grigsby. What happened?"

"He was roped and they were dragging him into that cabin when I stopped them." He had returned the gun to its place under his left arm. Carrying a lethal weapon was one Far-Western habit that humdrum city life had not broken.

The stewards were making funny noises in their throats expressive of astonishment and alarm when the captain turned on them.

"Get the carpenter and have him open that door with as little damage as possible," he said more quietly. "The fellow can't get out."

"If he got the connecting door open, he might, sir," offered the steward.

"Damn you, why didn't you think of that? Go see!"

THE steward returned from the next passage aft in a moment.

"It's already open, sir," he reported, pale and shaking. "Whoever was in there went out by the other stateroom, and got away."

Captain Grigsby made the air blue for a couple of minutes, then he turned savagely upon Gifford. "Who in hell

are you and what do you mean by carrying a weapon on board ship?"

Gifford looked surprised and hurt. "Considering I saved you from being choked to death by drawing it, you ought to be glad I have a gun. I don't care if you are the captain, you're darned unappreciative!"

Grigsby inspected him, stroked his mustache and recovered his temper.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said mildly. "Of course I'm glad you had the gun. Probably saved my life. Why didn't you shoot the blackguard?"

"Old habit, sir. He didn't have a gun in his hand. I thought we'd nab him when he ran into the stateroom."

"You saw him, though," the captain said hopefully.

"No, sir. His back was to the light. He was a man about five feet eight or nine."

"We'll get him! He must have been very powerful to knock me off my pins."

"It looked as though there was a second man in the stateroom also pulling on the rope."

"Ah, two of them! This is too much. What is your name, sir?"

"Henry Gifford."

"Well, come with me, Mr. Gifford. I want to talk this over with the purser. Throwing a bally lasso at a captain on his own ship. Never heard of such a thing."

"But aren't you going to do something, captain? Search the ship. Those men haven't jumped overboard."

The captain laid his hand on the American's shoulder and to do it he had to stretch, for Gifford was tall and Grigsby was no more than five feet six.

"That's just it," he said. "They can't get away and after what happened yesterday I don't want to raise a ruction and petrify the passengers. That confounded rope cut my neck. It's a wonder it didn't break it."

"I can't understand why they should attack the captain of this steamer?"

"Well, well, you come with me to

the purser and give a description of the dog you saw, and then there will be a quiet round-up of all suspicious characters on the *Stella Maris*. Meanwhile keep your eyes open at lunch and see if you can recognize him. I should have thought of that connecting door when I was pounding on No. 18, but only a dozen or so of our cabins are *en suite*. I don't have to tell you how much I am in your debt, sir. You won't, of course, tell anybody about this. It would only do harm."

"I'll keep it quiet, captain," agreed Gifford.

It might be supposed that the thud of the fall of Captain Grigsby, the bumping of his body along the side passage, his oaths and his terrific pounding upon the door of stateroom eighteen would have made it impossible to keep such an occurrence from the knowledge of some of the passengers, but it happened at an hour when even the most lethargic of the travelers were on deck, and if any had continued to lurk in their staterooms they appeared not to have been sufficiently interested to investigate.

CHAPTER XII.

THREATS.

NEITHER Grigsby nor Sprowle appeared at luncheon, partly because the skipper had a red circle around his neck which might provoke undue interest, but chiefly because they were closeted in the skipper's quarters endeavoring to pierce the veil which obscured the purpose and identity of the evildoers on board.

Grigsby was a careful navigator, an excellent disciplinarian, and a good man for his job; Sprowle, on shore, would have been a clerk and that is what a purser was before the development of passenger traffic made him a business executive; this unraveling of mysteries was not in the line of either of them, but they had to try it.

"Montana might have been killed for revenge; the strangling of the woman might be considered a crime of passion; but the throwing of a *bola* at Mr. Wing and the attack upon myself, these things are unaccountable," declared the skipper after Sprowle had topped his story with the experience of Lionel.

"No," replied Sprowle. "The attempt to throw suspicion upon Wing by placing his card in the woman's pocketbook connects the *bola* throwing with the first two crimes. However, roping you does not. Do you suppose the poor Brazilian girl was choked by a lariat?"

"The doctor says she was strangled by hand. What a horribly versatile lot of murderers we have on board—four different methods. What next? What next?"

"They did not want to kill you, they wanted to capture you," the purser hazarded. "But if they captured you they could not hide you. We know every inch of this ship." He mopped his forehead. "For Heaven's sake, sir, put into some port. This is beyond us."

"No," said the stubborn Grigsby. "If I break my record to Rio, these murders won't lose me my post; but if for any reason I fail to deliver for the company, I'll be on the beach and don't you forget it. That gold goes through."

Sprowle threw up his hands in excitement. "What a fool I am! That's it, captain. The gold! They're after the gold."

Grigsby stared at him.

"Five millions in gold, American currency in little kegs, fifty thousand dollars to a keg, and no questions asked about spending it," he continued. "That's why they attacked you, sir. That explains it all."

"The dickens it does," protested the captain. "Even if there is a gang on board to get the gold, they wouldn't work it this way. They would lie low

and at a propitious moment make an effort to take the ship; they wouldn't advertise their presence by indiscriminate murders, by tossing about cowboy lassos and South American *bolas*."

"It's a motive for attacking you," said the purser doggedly.

"What good would it have done them to get me in the cabin? They couldn't keep me. And if they killed me, the first officer would take command, and after him the second and the third. This has nothing to do with the gold, I tell you." His voice rose in anger and Sprowle was silenced but not convinced.

"That fellow Wing has a clear head," he said after a moment. "He knows everything except this and since they have attempted his life he is as eager as we are to nab these fellows. This Gifford is a fine upstanding youngster. You know what he told us about the two crooks in room eleven."

"What he heard acquits them of any hand in the murders," the skipper reminded him. "You think we might put these men to work for us, under cover?"

"They can keep their ears open. Wing is doing that already."

"There is Grimaldi," reflected the captain. "Only I don't trust him. Get out the passenger list and we'll go over the names on it one by one. By eliminating those we know are harmless we make a start."

On the list were fifty-one names. Six of these were American women, fourteen were Brazilian women and one was the dead *senhora* who must be buried at sea in the morning.

THE purser crossed off the names of Wing, Gifford, and Grimaldi and hesitated at that of Wenham.

"He's an old man and he's frail," said the captain. "He may have lied about Montana not coming on board to see him and he may not. It's possible that Montana told his office he was going to the ship to say good-by to

Wenham, but actually escorted *Senhora Veliza* and didn't want it known. It's curious no steward remembers seeing him in her cabin or Wenham's. Now this Gifford admits he has been a cowboy and knows how to throw a rope, but as he rushed to my rescue, it's evident he didn't throw it. If Wing didn't have a witness to the throwing of the *bola* I'd doubt him; and it may be that this actress girl is a confederate at that."

"It was Miss Wenham who was with him in the passageway when the *senhora* gave her death cry," the purser reminded him.

"That's so. Well, cross him off. Now these two crooks in cabin eleven are Kregan and Mott. Gifford's statement lets them out. Then we have Sousa, whom I don't trust, and Gratz, the coffee man from Santos, and Issoto, the Portuguese Jew. Issoto might plot a crime, but he wouldn't execute it, and Gratz is obviously a respectable old German.

"Mr. Owen is an Englishman in the rubber business," said the purser. "He's O K. And Duncan Ross travels for a whisky house in Scotland. Thomas Billet is a linen draper of Manchester. That's all I know on the list."

"Leaving twenty. Eight Americans, two English, one German, and nine Brazilians. We'll have each of them up this afternoon to give an account of himself."

"And there is the crew, sir. We took quite a number on in New York."

"How many stewards?"

"Six. Three Americans, the others are English who happened to be out of a job."

"Six, eh? The deck and fireroom crew could hardly get into the passenger quarters. Let's see, I've eight new men in the fireroom and I think we took on ten or twelve deck hands. Assuming there is a gold plot, that's hardly enough to take the ship—only twenty-five all told. I'll make a quick

search of the crew's quarters for arms and you go through the boxes of the new stewards. If Gifford sees anybody who looks like my assailant I'll lock him up first and question him afterward."

"Didn't you see anything yourself, sir?"

"No. I landed on my back with the rope around my neck. I'll make the beggar sweat for that!"

During the afternoon various male passengers who were sunning themselves on deck or lounging in the smoke room were touched politely on the shoulder and invited to call on the captain in his cabin where they found the purser also. Each man was forced to supply considerable information regarding his circumstances at home and reason for the voyage. Among them were two Brazilians, an Englishman and three Americans who were between five feet eight and five feet nine inches in height and who looked capable of jerking the small, fat captain from his feet by means of a rope dropped around his neck.

Kregan and Mott were suspected upon their appearance, suspected that is of being dishonest although Captain Grigsby did not think they could have participated in the outrage upon himself.

Doris Drexel could have informed the captain that a smooth well-dressed dark and rather romantic-looking young man whose name on the passenger list was Louis Peterson was unpopularly known to the New York police and suspected, although never tried, for two or three cowardly murders on behalf of a bootlegging ring; but, as Captain Grigsby supposed a gunman must look like one, Peterson passed muster very easily.

Later Gifford took a stroll with the purser and inspected the persons whose stature came within his limit of five feet eight or nine, but he was quite unable to identify the rope thrower. It was a highly unsatisfactory investiga-

tion from the standpoint of the ship's authorities.

LIONEL WING spent the afternoon so pleasantly that the grim background of things faded from his mind, for he sat in a deck chair beside a lovely girl whose one-quarter Brazilian blood made more limpid her lovely dark eyes and added luster to her thick bobbed hair, without affecting her purely American point of view, or interfering with her Yankee sense of humor.

Like most young men in the company of a sympathetic listener, he told her the story of his life, confessed his failure in business and the slightness of his prospects, and got delight from her understanding and encouragement.

"Father has been having rather a hard time of it, too, in recent years," she told him in return. "We used to have lots of money, but he lost it in rubber speculation and he had to take a poorly paid position with an American electrical company. It didn't look as if I would ever see New York again, but a few months ago something came up, I don't know just what because he wouldn't tell us, but it enabled him to resign and gave us enough money to come to the United States for a visit."

"Some mission to New York, I suppose?"

"I imagine so. He has been very busy in New York, and the mission seems to have been successful because he told mother we could take a nice little villa in the hills outside Rio. It's lovely there in the hills. You must come to see us."

"If you are willing to repeat that invitation by the time the ship gets to Rio, I most certainly shall."

"But why shouldn't I?" she asked naively.

"Well, we'll be seeing so much of each other on shipboard that you may get to hate the sight of me."

Her laugh was flattering. "Not likely. I think you're nice."

"And I certainly think you are," he said earnestly.

"I don't know many nice young men at home," she informed him. "I don't like the Brazilians very much and the climate seems to do something to the young Americans that go down there. Either they were very wild before they came, or they get that way. Perhaps it is because the Latin way of looking at things is so different.

Gifford had by now made the acquaintance of Doris Drexel and they promenaded violently, throwing a laughing remark at the two occupants of the chairs each time they passed and laughing more when these were too absorbed in each other to answer them.

When the sun was setting they walked out to the bow of the ship and, watching the gorgeous pictures that nature painted on the western sky, remained there until it grew dusk.

SEVERAL times during the afternoon Lionel had seen the Sousa person pass their chairs, regarding them with a deep dissatisfaction which amused Wing and which she did not appear to see. Now as they leaned on the rail, the Brazilian came up behind them and spoke.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Wenham," he said in sibilant tones which nevertheless conveyed resentment. "Your mother sent me to find you and remind you that it is almost time for dinner."

He spoke good English and only the clipping of certain words revealed his nationality.

"Oh, I must go. I never realized how late it is. Don't bother to escort me, Mr. Sousa," she exclaimed. "*Au revoir*, Mr. Wing."

Sousa bowed and remained behind.

"Mr. Wing," said the young man in a low voice, "you monopolize the young lady."

Wing whirled on him and looked into a pair of furious black eyes.

"And what business is it of yours?"

the American demanded insolently. "I don't recognize your right to comment, Mr. What's-your-name."

Sousa stepped closer.

"You may find it desirable to recognize it," he almost whispered.

The American's laugh was insulting.

"Is that a threat?" he demanded.

Sousa bowed gravely. "You may take it so if you desire."

"Bosh," he scoffed. "Say, what's your weapon, the knife or the *bola*?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Well, this conversation doesn't interest me anyway," Wing said nastily.

He walked away, leaving the Brazilian motionless near the bow.

"I ought to have taken a wallop at him," he reproached himself as he regained the promenade deck. "Confounded insolent swine. Most likely her mother never sent him for her at all." He muttered this aloud and an eerie cachinnation sounded close by while Grimaldi, detaching himself from the dusk, loomed up suddenly like an unusually large goblin.

"I was leaning on the forward rail," said the weird being, "watching you and the young woman observe the sunset and each other, until I had to strain my eyes to distinguish you. And then Senhor Sousa asked me if I had seen you. Naturally I pointed you out. It was a very pretty picture."

"I consider it damned officious of you," snapped Wing.

"Unless you control your temper, Mr. Wing," sneered Grimaldi, "I am afraid you won't live long. Death comes suddenly on this ship. The *bola* may miss but—"

"Oh! You know that?" he gasped.

Again the weird cackle. "I know everything, young man."

"Then you probably know that I don't like you," he ejaculated and walked rapidly away. First the insolence of Sousa and now the meddling of Grimaldi. He thought it was more than he could stand.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



*The plate glass window burst inward
with a crash*

Human, All Too Human

When a railroad man shows yellow, he's done—unless he takes the hard up-hill road Sam Bridger climbed, at the throttle of his engine

By DON WATERS

AROUND the bend of the curve on the same track, the yellow beam of an oil headlight suddenly glared not three hundred yards in front. The engineer on the 127 grabbed the whistle cord in his right hand as he jammed the brake valve lever into an emergency application with his left. With a hoarse *waaah!* from her whistle and a chattering clatter from her drivers as she took the "big hole," the 127 swayed and, with locked drivers, "cat-hopped" along the rails toward the fast approaching locomotive.

Perhaps if Sam Bridger had a bit more experience, it never would have happened. Perhaps if he'd been in close quarters often before, he'd have done differently now. But he was

young. He'd just been promoted and was still a bit nervous at running an engine. He did not stop to make that instant calculation which he should have made instinctively.

Instead, Sam sprang down from his seatbox platform, yelled to his fireman, "Jump! She's going to hit!" and without waiting, leaped blindly out the gangway.

Arms outstretched, feet in front, Sam Bridger did the "bird act." He landed in a clump of briars alongside the tracks, turned over a couple of times, and then scrambled to his feet. Save for a few places where the thorns had raked him, he was unhurt. His train, a baggage car and three passenger coaches, ran past him, each locked wheel streaking fire as it slid over the

rails. Wide-eyed and tense, he listened for the crash. None came. Instead, the familiar note of the 127's exhaust blared out, a rapid chattering rumble, sharp and staccato above the whine of grinding steel, then stopped. The train came to an abrupt standstill.

The engineer's face became a study in plainly expressed emotions. He knew exactly what had happened. Shovel Nose, his negro fireman, had stayed with the 127, had reversed, turned the sand on—and prevented a smash-up.

A flush of mortification swept over Sam Bridger. The negro had stuck by the engine, had done the things that he, Sam Bridger, as engineer, was expected to do. The thought came over him, he'd better leave, not go up there. His fault this, without even a thin excuse. He knew now the orders were to go into the siding a couple of miles above, wait for a special to pass. Hadn't paid much attention to the orders when he got them, hadn't even read them. The conductor had mumbled something about a wait order, then hurried back to his card game in the smoker.

No excuse. He had not heard the conductor, or else had misunderstood him. Sam was up against it. Quickly he worked his way through the briers and walked alongside his train up toward the engine. He saw the open car windows, saw the heads and shoulders of the passengers leaning out, unnoticed by them. He heard the questions called after him: "What's up? What's the matter?" walked through the barrage of questions, unanswering.

For his eyes were on the two engines ahead where a couple of torches cast a flickering, wavering light over a group of men. He came up to them, saw the pilot of the 127 not six inches from the pilot of the special's engine. He recognized the men who grouped around Shovel Nose: the division superintendent, the trainmaster, the master mechanic, the road master. The

officials had been making an inspection trip, and were then on their way back to the terminal. They were showing the new superintendent over the division for the first time. His first trip over, and this had to happen. The rest of the officials would surely be sore about the affair. Sam had "run right into their faces." No chance to talk himself out of this hole, they had him.

He squared his shoulders, threw back his head, assumed a devil-may-care attitude that he was far from feeling and stepped up to them. The new superintendent turned, looked at him. A scornful expression crossed his face as he stared hard-eyed at the engineer for a full minute.

Unheard by the rest of the group, in a low voice, he said one word that carried reproach: "Yellow."

Sam's face flushed, his fists clenched. He started to speak, could find no words to say.

The trainmaster turned from where he had been questioning Shovel Nose and rapped out a demand: "Give me the train orders."

Sam, unspeaking, handed them to him. A quick glance at the flimsy, and the trainmaster said: "You fellows are relieved from duty right now."

A MONTH passed. The brakeman went back to work. Then the conductor was reinstated. Sam walked the poolroom "turn around," loafed the time away; monotonous, dragging days. At first he had been confident he would not be held off long. Then, gradually, as day after day went by, that surety turned to uncertainty.

Filled with a vague resentment at what he considered unfair treatment, he took up the matter with the Brotherhood. A silence filled the hall as he stated his grievance. He had but followed the oldest law in existence, self-preservation, he said. No one had been injured, not a cent's worth of company property destroyed. All the rest of 17's crew had gone back to work.

Standing before the assembled mass of engineers, he looked over them. From face to face, his eyes wandered. He saw scorn and disdain, contempt, saw cynical expressions, withering looks.

"Why, then, am I not put back?" he managed to blurt out.

From the back of the hall, some one uttered the words: "Aw, go on! Ya know well enough. You're yellow, that's why."

Sam Bridger stood for a minute, choking, mortified, unable to utter a word. He started to speak, to defend himself, stung by a sense of injustice. He knew there was no use defending himself. He'd been tried and judged. With bent shoulders and downcast eyes he walked down the aisle and out the door. No need to expect help from his gang. He knew now what every one thought and the knowledge burned like living fire through him.

Out before the hall, Sam stood thinking. Then he squared his shoulders, crossed the street, went upstairs in the depot and entered the office of the superintendent, "the colonel." The division had already added the complimentary title to the new superintendent, although he was not entitled to it either by age or by virtue of military service.

Sam stood for a moment looking at the superintendent. He was at least five years younger than himself, he thought, yet he gave a man an impression of authority. The division already respected him. A square-shooter, a hard-hitter, this young official.

"Colonel," Sam spoke, "colonel, I pulled a boner. I jumped before I thought. I want you to put me back to work."

The superintendent shook his head slowly.

"Wait," Sam asked. "Wait till I'm through. I don't want the job, not for itself, but every one—every one thinks I'm yellow. I want my chance to show them different. Will you give me that

chance? God, man, you don't know how badly I want to live that down!"

For a long minute the young man sat chewing on the butt of his cigar, gazing thoughtfully at Sam Bridger opposite. Then he nodded.

"All right, Sam, I'll take a chance on you. Mark up for your run. You'll not fall down on me again, will you? I know how it must feel to have every one think you're yellow. Courage is one of the prime characteristics of a railroader."

Sam held up his hand. "When the next time comes, I'll guarantee no man can call me yellow, colonel."

So Sam went back to work, back to his job running an engine and a chance to prove himself, a chance that was long in coming.

The years passed. Sam Bridger married, bought a home within calling distance of the terminal. His life became fixed and ordered. One by one, the children came. A girl, another, then a third. The old 127 went to the scrap heap, a bigger engine took her place. The little light rails were replaced with heavier steel. There came automatic block signals and telephone dispatching, electric switches and train control. One by one, the hazards were removed from railroading as safety devices multiplied. Ten years had gone by, and the old haphazard, hit-and-miss railroading was a thing of the past. Sam's last child was born. He called him Jack; he'd be a railroader certain.

As time passed, the judgment of the engineer became a matter of less and less importance. The adventure, the romance had departed by the time Sam's son went to firing. Railroading became a matter of precision and mechanics, the human element relegated to the background. The engineers were engineers no longer; they'd even taken the name from the fellows who pulled the throttles. They were called engine drivers now. The older men died off, a new generation took their places. A

quarter of a century slipped by, year by year; but human nature had not changed.

SAM BRIDGER'S "age" accumulated. He stood for the best runs on the division, the preferred jobs. Few men could "bump" him now. One night, changing clothes in the washroom, he idly glanced at the "age" bulletin posted on a locker. His name headed the list. He was the oldest engine driver on the division.

A thoughtful expression settled on his face. Down at the foot of the list his son's name showed. Jack Bridger had just been promoted from fireman. His son had moved over to the right-hand side of the cab. Jack was an engineer now. On the strength of his promotion, he had started buying a home.

There was a reason behind that. A girl, laughing, red-cheeked, the belle of the division, the colonel's daughter, Jack had won his way to her favor just as he had won his promotion to engineer. Tentative, not yet settled, that affair. The colonel did not know how far the intimacy had progressed. But Sam knew; he'd seen them together often. She came down to the depot every night, met Jack when he got in.

The superintendent might "clamp on the brakes," "hang a stop signal" in front of Jack, "set him off into a siding." For, as Sam Bridger realized, the colonel remembered. The others were all gone now. Even Shovel Nose had passed on, ten years ago.

"All gone," he muttered. "All except the colonel."

The colonel was now a little, white-haired man, slightly bent; a little peppy man, easy to wrath. He was aging fast, and the increasing responsibilities of a growing division were making him nervous and irritable.

Sam glanced into the mirror above the wash bowl, looked intently at his reflection. He, too, showed the marks

of the advancing years. His face was wrinkled, his eyes were a faded blue, his hair gray. He himself had not long to stay. Inexorable age was creeping up on him. He'd soon be beyond railroading. He'd go, and the old mark would not be erased, the old, almost forgotten epitaph, "yellow," would still be on him. And his son Jack, just starting out on the adventure of life—was Jack to be hampered by having to carry his father's burden?

Sam walked out of the washroom toward the coal chute. He winced a bit as he went along. His rheumatism was bothering him to-night. It must be going to rain again.

The 4040, a big, high-wheeled passenger locomotive, stood under the tipple. They had just finished coaling her.

A hostler climbed down. "Hey, Sam! Wrap her up and take her away!" he called. "She's all set, air tested, sand domes filled, pumps oiled, even the grease cups and the lubricator looked after."

"Eh?" Sam ejaculated, surprised. "I generally got to chase myself flat-footed to get a jack ready to go out. What's the idea of all this consideration?"

"Oh, we gotta order from the old man to be sure everything was O. K. on her to-night. Something up. I don't know what it is. I only know I don't want the colonel crawlin' down the back of my neck fer not doing what he ordered."

Wondering a bit, Sam stiffly crawled up into the cab. He glanced across at his fireman.

"All set?" he asked the young fellow that sat on the left-hand seatbox, smoking a cigarette.

An airy wave of his hand, and the fireman called across: "Let her roll for all of me! She's not mine."

Sam shoved the short power reversing lever down. He flipped a switch over his head. With the motion the headlight shot a cold, hard beam out

in front, illuminating the yards ahead as bright in its path as sunlight. He eased the throttle toward him, kicked open the cylinder relief cocks. Easily, gently, the big engine moved out from under the coal chute and down the yards toward where a switchman's lantern swung in a highball. ✓

As he passed, the switchman yelled: "Get that pile of scrap iron out of the way! You're a-blocking the track."

Sam, for want of a more suitable reply, called back: "Aw, go wash the back of your neck! You're crummy!"

The locomotive took the switch, backed down to where her train waited. Sam started to couple up as he had done hundreds of times, regretting that on the spur of the moment, he had not thought up a hotter retort to shoot at the switchman. A lantern swung across his path, flagging him down.

"What's that hump-backed, limber-necked, splay-footed shack flagging us for?" Sam grumbled.

The fireman spoke from across the cab: "Hold her, Sam." His voice arose above the hiss of the air from the brake valve.

THE yard switchman, his lantern bobbing, ran toward the engine.

"Hey, Sam," he yelled, "we got orders to hold 67 to-night for a special. Gonna couple right on behind you. She's due in soon."

"What the—" Sam ejaculated. "By George, that's a fine come-off! Here I got a drag, all I can haul now, and they hang some more behind me. I'm a gonna get me a pair o' opera glasses, so I can see the rear markers. How do they expect me to make the time?"

He stuck his hand out of the window, felt a few pattering drops fall. "It's a raining now. I'll bet it pours to-night. Wet rails and a heavy drag I bet they never filled my sand domes. By—" He stopped abruptly as another man walked out of the shelter of the lighted train shed toward the engine.

He recognized the superintendent as he came up into the cab.

In a low voice the colonel said: "Sam, we're holding 67 for a special. She's due here now."

At Sam's woebegone exclamation, "I'll be late sure, colonel, if they hang any more tonnage on me to-night," the superintendent's expression changed. "Oh, that's what's eating you? Well, set your mind at ease; it's only one car. You needn't yodel so loud."

"Hauling an official?" Sam inquired.

"No," the superintendent replied. "Gold."

Cautiously he told Sam the details. A run on a bank down the other end of the system; gold to stop it. Must not have a delay. They were waiting at the end of this division to pick it up and wheel it along the rails. Four hundred miles away, that bank to which the gold was consigned must open in the morning. The money had to be there. It was a close schedule, but each division had handled it on time.

His voice trailed off. He had turned, looked back. Sam saw what had attracted his attention. There, clearly showing in the lights from the depot, a couple stood outside the iron waiting-room fence, Jack Bridger and the superintendent's daughter. Close together they stood, the girl's head up-tilted, laughing into Jack's face. As the two men in the 4040's cab watched, she raised a hand and set it on the young man's shoulder affectionately.

A long-drawn-out station blow sounded. The superintendent at that sound looked full at Sam Bridger. For a second the two old men gazed into each other's eyes. No word was said. Sam knew the colonel had just become aware of his daughter's intimacy, and, to judge from the expression on the superintendent's face, that knowledge was troubling him. Sam wondered whether the colonel was thinking of courage—and heredity—as he got

down from the cab and walked slowly back to enter a Pullman.

Down through the yards an engine threaded the maze of green and yellow switch lights, running fast. Looking back, Sam saw it haul up the track alongside, cutting the depot from view. The steel blind baggage car pulled past, the switch light ahead changed color. He heard the sharp staccato rattle as the engine backed up and kicked the car down on to his train. Sam opened the throttle on the 4040, and, moving backward, slowly coupled up to the car just set on.

Hardly had he bumped when the car inspectors coupled the air and signal hoses. Leaning out of the cab window, Sam looked back. In the light under the long umbrella shed, he saw the conductor and the superintendent raise their hands simultaneously. Jack and the girl were nowhere to be seen. A lantern swung, a voice called out: "All aboard!"

To the lift of the throttle, and the urge of live steam, the drawbars along the string of coaches stretched one after another. The wheels turned, and passenger train No. 67 moved out of the terminal, out into the falling rain, out into the night and what lay before.

The drivers slipped a time or two passing down through the yards. The train behind was heavy, the rails slick. Sam knew he'd have a difficult run to-night. He'd be right on the job or else he'd pull into the terminal late. The "old man" was riding 67. There would be no excuses for a delay. Passing the yard office, Sam blew a low *boot-boot* on his whistle, waved his hand to the three or four figures outlined against the windows. Silhouetted clearly in the lights from in back of them, he saw their right arms swing in sweeping, upraised "highballs."

A little thrill of pride swept over him. They had paused in their work, those fellows who were so accustomed to passing trains, paused to give 67 a

highball, a good-luck hand, and a fare-thee-well signal. He turned his head and looked back at his long train, baggage and express, Pullman and diner, chair car and observation coach; they stretched back a thousand feet to the yellow marker lights on the rear, a dozen all-steel coaches, electric lighted, steam heated, with all the comforts of a fine hotel.

HE paused at the thought. There was more behind him to-night than that. No telling how much wealth the special car carried, no telling how much of the yellow gold lay right behind his tender coupling. A fortune there without a doubt, more money than he'd make in a lifetime of work.

Ca-chu, ca-chee, the tempo of the exhaust swept regular and monotonous out over the wet night. Running fast, passenger train No. 67 drove ahead, led on by the hard, dancing headlight beam that glistened on the slanting raindrops.

Sam glanced at his watch as a telegraph shanty flipped into the circle of light, swept backward. He called across to his fireman:

"We're five minutes late! We gotta make it up."

The fireman shrugged his shoulders carelessly, jerked the injector open. The rumble of water running into the boiler blurred his answer: "I'm a doing my part, ain't I? Ya want me to get out and push?"

Sam shook his head, turned to look through the wet narrow pane of glass in the front of his cab. No pride in their jobs, these young fellows coming on the road now. And their jobs were sinecures compared to what they had been back in the days when he started firing.

An expression of disdain swept over Sam's wrinkled face. Nowadays there was no work to firing a locomotive. To sit comfortably on a seatbox, twirl a valve, and have an automatic stoker

worm the crushed coal into the fire-box—that was all there was to a fireman's job to-day. They didn't even have to get out in the wet and cold any more to take on water. That reminded the engineer; the track tank ahead, where he usually dropped his scoop and filled up with water, was out of commission.

A malicious little smile wrinkled the corners of Sam's eyes. He pulled out his train-order flimsy from his jumper pocket, read the orders.

"I see," Sam called out, "we got a meet with 68, and"—he paused—"I see where the White Pine water trough is on the blink. We'll have to stop at the tank at Oakdale for water."

The fireman nodded. "Yeh," he agreed in a disgusted tone.

Sam glanced at his watch, shook his head. He was not making up the time he'd lost to-night waiting for the special. It was exactly ten thirty now; he'd even lost a minute since he started from the terminal. He saw the glow in front die out of the sky. No. 68 had headed into the passing track, cut the headlight off, and was waiting for him to go by. With a swish and a roar, a clatter of wheels thumping the rail joints, a low whistle call and a wave of his hand, Sam swept past the string of coaches, rounded a curve, and shut off a couple of minutes later beside a water tank at Oakdale.

Hardly had he stopped when a voice from below hailed him. The superintendent wormed his way up into the car.

"We've got to mooch along, Sam," the colonel said in a worried tone, pulling out his watch. "This stop for water sets us back. We're ten minutes late now."

It seemed to Sam that the other man wanted to say something else, something that he found hard to put into words. A suspicion that had concerned Jack entered his mind.

"Sam," the superintendent spoke hesitantly.

But Sam did not hear him. With a start he noticed the air gauge. The train line pressure hand had flipped down suddenly, was even now crawling up again. Quickly he looked back. In the light from under the cab roof he saw the fireman shove the tank spout up with a quick movement, saw him leap down across the pile of coal, vault onto the shovel sheet in the gangway. They both turned amazed eyes on the young man who without a word dodged through the narrow opening on the left between engine and cab, leaped clear, and disappeared.

"What the hell?" the superintendent ejaculated.

THEN comprehension dawned on Sam. The fireman's sudden frantic swing out into the darkness, that wild, fear-filled look on his face as he jumped—it could mean but one thing. From his vantage-point high up on the rear of the tank the fireman had looked back over the train, to see what was concealed from the cab. Some one had opened the train line, some one was tampering with the air hoses between the coaches. Some one had cut off a car from the train. No need to ask what car.

"Holdup!" Sam yelled in an excited voice, started to follow the fireman.

Foot upraised, he stopped at the expression on the superintendent's face.

Above the *clankety-clank* of the stoker feeding the fire and the shrill squeal of the headlight turbine, between the heavy beat of the air pumps, the superintendent said:

"Sam, if you leave me now—"

Then Sam Bridger remembered. In the swift flash of an instant his thoughts went back to another day, buried in the limbo of the past. His thoughts leaped from that long ago to the scene before the depot to-night. Jack, his son! If Sam didn't hit the ball now, Jack's chances were gone.

"We're up against it now, colonel,"

Sam spoke nervously. "Up against it now," he repeated.

He reached over to the can rack above the fire-door, tilted his cast-iron torch toward him, looked at steam and air gauges, at the water bobbing in the glass. There was an air of resignation about him, which slowly changed to one of suppressed excitement. His eyes glistened.

Sam Bridger's chance had come.

Up through the left-hand gangway the black, ugly muzzle of an automatic rose, followed by a man's head. A slouch hat, pulled down, almost touched the red bandanna handkerchief that concealed the lower part of his face. The head rose, then a pair of shoulders. One foot came up on the shovel sheet.

A voice, muffled, a metallic threat ringing in it, growled:

"Stick 'em up! We mean business."

Out of the corner of his eye Sam saw the superintendent's hands quickly raise, noticed the curious, strained expression on the old man's face, as though he had come away from home and forgotten something. For an instant the man behind the automatic shifted his eyes from Sam to the other occupant of the cab. In that instant Sam acted.

With a movement as sudden as it was unexpected, he reached for the handy torch. It swung in a swift, short arc to crash down atop the head which was almost level with the cab window. Sam's right foot flew out and caught the bandit in the chest; his left hand grasped the automatic pistol. The masked man struggled feebly to retain his balance, to hold his gun. Then loud, abrupt, the pistol streaked a red-blue flame from out its muzzle.

Sam's knees sagged, his face was white and strained. Backward the bandit fell out of the cab. Sam stepped over to his seatbox as the pistol clattered to the steel floor of the cab. In a far-away, strained voice Sam spoke:

"We gotta make a run for it now, colonel. Our only chance."

He leaned against the corner post of the cab as though to catch his breath; then he bent forward, shoved the reversing lever down, opened the throttle. With a *swish* from her exhaust, the locomotive started—started, and gathered speed rapidly. Inside a half mile they were thundering along through the night faster and faster.

"God help us, Sam, when we have to stop!" the superintendent called.

He received no answer for a long time. The steady, monotonous rumble of the exhaust, the springing surge of the drivers, the *click-clack* of the rail joints, and the drumming noise of the rain on the steel deck above, sounded loud and menacing.

At last Sam Bridger answered. With a trembling finger he pointed to the heavy torch lying on the floor.

"Send the news by that, colonel. Clear the rail ahead." Sam's voice was shaky. "Send a message, have help at Junction City. I'll take her there."

The superintendent understood. At Junction City, the largest town ahead, the police would have time to organize a reception committee while the 4040 made the run there. The colonel wrote a message on a sheet of paper torn from his notebook, pulled out the wick from the torch, and stuffed the note into the spout.

A FEW minutes later a telegraph operator at a flag station, sitting contentedly propped up in his chair reading, glanced out at an approaching headlight.

"Sam's wheeling 67 to-night," he muttered to himself, reaching over toward the telegraph key. "Wheeling 'em for sure. He's five minutes ahead of schedule. Well, I got to go to work and interrupt my readin'."

Then, even as he started to report 67's passing, he dodged, jumped sideways, yelled panic-stricken. With a screaming crash, the big plate-glass

window before him caved in. A heavy cast-iron torch ricocheted against the stove, caromed off, hit the wall with a heavy thump, and split open.

A greasy cylinder of paper rolled across the floor.

"Hey, some guy on that jack has got queer ideas of a joke," he muttered. Then he noticed the paper. Wondering, the operator picked it up, unfolded it, slowly made out the jerky, almost illegible scrawl:

No. 67 has right of way over all trains. Carrying train robbers. Prepare arrival Junction City.

The superintendent's name was signed to it.

In another minute the operator had forgotten all about the story he had been reading, and the busy little tongues of the sounders all along the division were clicking out the tale.

Cut-a-chu, cut-a-chce, cut-a-chu, cut-a-chee, the 4040 drove hard along the glistening rails, drove hard toward Junction City, passing the block signals one by one.

The two in the cab knew their message had gotten through, for at each passing track, by whistle sound and lanterns swinging, they saw and heard that they were being hurried along. And never a yellow block light showed to slow their swift run, never a red signal blinked its forbidding eye to stop them.

The hand on the speed indicator gauge had crawled up past sixty, past seventy, and now hung on seventy-five. A mile and a quarter a minute, over a hundred feet a second, no man could hope to unload from that train and live to tell of it.

Back in the steel coach behind, panic reigned, for the robbers soon discovered that well-laid plans had gone amiss. When they reached the pre-arranged rendezvous, instead of coming to a stop as they had arranged with the engine stick-up man, they whisked past at a mile-a-minute clip. And

when they pulled the emergency cord, instead of the sudden stop they expected, there was but a momentary drag, a fire-flinging screech from the brake-shoes.

For Sam Bridger was waiting for that move. At the check to his speed he had reached up and grasped a lever set above the brake valve, the independent brake. With a hiss, he knocked the brakes off the engine. Now he had them. The brakes would leak off the car soon. The E. T. equipment, a newer, more efficient device, gave the engineer complete control. In the old days they could have set the air on him at any time and stopped him. He would haul that car now, even with the brakes on; the 4040 had the power. But the highwaymen were not done yet.

Sam spoke, a tremble in his voice. "Colonel, they'll come over the top. They'll boost a man up through the side door. You take care of him."

The superintendent nodded, picking up the automatic pistol.

Sam Bridger arose from his seatbox, reached up on the boilerhead, and shut off the steam valve to the headlight turbine. The cab lights turned red, died out. The cold hard dancing beam of the headlight was suddenly swallowed up by the darkness. The 4040, her exhaust a sonorous rumble, drove blindly through the night. Rain drummed on her steel sides, swished through the gangway.

The green-blue flashes of lightning that every few minutes lit up the scene showed the two old men, one on each seatbox, sitting hunched over, still and unmoving. Sam, on the right, hung head and shoulders out the open window, watching the block signals—blurred blobs of light that appeared mist-enshrouded through the rain, took on color, became green, and vanished in the darkness as the 4040 roared past them.

The superintendent crouched in his corner, his eyes on the top of the car

behind as it showed in the lightning flashes. His right hand held an unfamiliar weapon, its muzzle notched in the cab's open rear window corner, pointed up and backward. Whether from the vibration of the engine or for another reason, the pistol beat a *rat-a-tat-tat* with its muzzle against the steel edge of the window.

The 4040 clattered over a switch. The street lights from a little town illuminated it for a second. In that second a black bundle on the top of the car behind moved, raised up. A streak of fire spurted out. Above the noises of the running engine the crash of a pistol shot sounded terrifyingly close.

From the cab it was answered by two more shots. The figure on the car top straightened up, swayed unsteadily, then, with a wild scream, pitched down.

"Got that one, Sam," the superintendent called across, laughing hysterically.

Sam did not answer. He hunched still lower, sat with scarce a movement save when, every few minutes, he stirred, reached up his left hand, and grasped the throttle to shut off when they swept down a grade, or widen it out on the uphill stretches.

A QUARTER of an hour passed. The automatic stoker worked on, *clank-clank*, monotonously. The *chug-chug* of the air pumps, the *ca-chee, ca-chu, ca-chee, ca-chu* of the exhaust, and the *click-clack, click-clack* of the passing rail joints was broken as Sam Bridger reached up, caught the swaying whistle cord. Long drawn out, hoarse, vibrating, a station blow drowned out all other sounds, even that *thump-thump* from the rear that told of flats on the coach wheels. He'd put those flat spots on when the bandits set the air on him.

The locomotive drove around a bend on to a straightaway. Down the rails,

past the limit board, through the yards, she thundered to where a lighted train shed showed. Sam shut off, moved the brake valve. With a clattering chatter the brakes took hold, and with strings of fire streaking off from their treads, the spinning wheels on engine and coach came to a sudden stop. A cordon of armed men lined either side of the track, closed in on the car.

Sam Bridger had brought the run to a close.

Yet he seemed to pay no attention to the din and the shouting. With his right hand on the brake valve, his left on the throttle, he sat staring straight ahead. From the crowd surrounding the car in back a louder shout welled up.

"Sam, they've got 'em!" the superintendent called.

Then he jumped across the cab, grasped Sam Bridger's limp shoulders. "Great God, Sam," he muttered, comprehension dawning on him, "you made that run after you were shot? The gamest—" He stopped, wonder in his voice as he fumbled, trying to undo the engineer's jumper.

Sam Bridger looked up, white-faced, trembling, tried to speak.

The superintendent leaned over, saw the expression of anxiety, reassured him in a husky voice: "You've made it all right with me, Sam, and—for Jack." Then he exclaimed: "A doctor—I'll get a doctor!" and he turned to get down from the cab.

Sam's voice stopped him. "Hell, colonel," he said, "I'm not hurt. I was simply scared stiff. I wasn't hit; I—I—" He hesitated. "I guess I'm yellow all right."

"Yellow!" the superintendent cried. "Yellow! Say, Sam, you're true blue. I was so scared myself when that guy came up in the cab, that I—"

Sam nodded understandingly.

"Me, too," he said.

The two old men clasped hands, grinning sheepishly at each other.

THE END.



Jeremy Crutch squinted evilly down the long barrel of his pistol

Ho For London Town!

All England was plotting and spying as bold Will Halifax and a gay young rogue named Shakespeare went adventuring in Queen Elizabeth's realm

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "When Trails Were New," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM HALIFAX, son of the late Sir Harry, rides toward London in the year 1585, seeking fame and fortune at the court of Queen Elizabeth. His father had died in a mysterious fight with two men of the Earl of Leicester, Lord Lieutenant for the county; and Tony Pepperday, a lowly bailiff, had bought up liens on all the Halifax property, foreclosing on it. Pepperday then had forbidden the marriage—which he had formerly sought—of his stepdaughter, Mildred, and Will Halifax.

So, with Mildred's kisses and encouragement, and owning only the horse he rides, Will starts out. On the way he falls in with a merry and clever fellow, one Will Shakespeare of Stratford, and soon the two are close companions, though, of course, Halifax is a gentleman. Shakespeare is running away from his wife, Ann Hathaway, who is past her prime and shrewish, and he and Halifax have sundry adventures.

They are held up by a highwayman, but Halifax disarms the man, and,

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finding it is Jeremy Crutch—whom his father once saved from hanging—he upbraids him, and makes him trade his fine horse for Shakespeare's sorry nag. Crutch, begging for liberty, gives Will Halifax a gimcrack, a little green figurine inside a box, which he had taken from Joshua Stiles, a London merchant, who seemed to set great store by it.

In London, they lodge with Roger Tunby, a merchant, who had often visited Sir Harry. Tunby seems suspiciously eager to get Will Halifax a berth on a merchant ship, and he suspects that Tunby either has a scheme to conceal or else owes his father money. Shakespeare learns from the mail carrier that Tunby and Pepperday correspond, and that Tunby hopes to marry Mildred to his son, Edward.

Halifax calls on Stiles, who is eager to get back the box, and makes an appointment with him at his home in Spitalfields for that evening. Halifax, returning to the city, runs into one Benjamin Berden, a spy of Secretary Walsingham of the council. Berden guesses the meaning of the gimcrack, and takes him to Phelippes, a spy of Lord Burghley's, who confirms it—that it is a secret token of the papist Mary Queen of Scots, who is conspiring to overthrow Elizabeth and gain the throne.

Halifax is ushered into Secretary Burghley's presence. Burghley gives Berden a warrant for Stiles's arrest, and then tells Will to take Captain Jacques and four men and lodge Stiles in the Marshalsea prison.

Will is in a quandary; this obviously is a secret and dangerous business, and if it miscarries in any way, he knows he will be disavowed by Burghley; he has no commission, and Berden has the warrant. But, outfacing both Berden and the bully Jacques, he rides forth. A 'prentice lad, Jack Giles, who has been following him admiringly, brings him the information that Stiles has twenty men ambushed at Spitalfields to

take the bauble from Halifax and is planning a getaway by the river himself.

Will sends Jacques and his men to draw the ambush, while he and Berden go to Stiles's boat. They surprise him aboard, and tie him. Suddenly they hear two of Stiles's men running toward the boat.

CHAPTER VIII (*Continued*).

OF THE TAKING OF ALDERMAN JOSHUA STILES.

TWO sturdy figures loomed out of the fog and one of them hove a massive block of frozen mud at me that missed and made a great splash in the river. I had brought no pistols, nor had Berden, but I bade him take one from the prisoner, if such he had, and in a moment Berden fired. He purposely aimed high, hoping to scare the men away. But they were bold men.

One of them came leaping from the bank, legs foremost, and I might have had him on my sword point, which would have split him like a herring. Even now I rather wonder that I spared him in that excitement, I having challenged fairly in the queen's name and having, moreover, the right to preserve our prisoner from rescue.

But I have seen much wonderfuller sparings since then, aye, and in the heat of battle, when the culverins were belching, so I think God had a hand in it, although there are so many differences these days about doctrine that I doubt a bishop could explain the truth of it to any one's satisfaction. I only know I might have killed, and had excuse as well as lawful right, yet did not.

The man landed on the boat's edge with a sailor's cunning, and in such a rage as if he stormed a Spanish galleon. It was an easy trick to shove him over-side. He went down splashing like a porpoise in a net, as splutterful of blasphemy as fish afrying. Like any

sailor, he loved risk of sword-thrust better than a wetting.

Then the other came, as gallant as the first—a shadow hurled out of the fog, his hanger whistling as he aimed at me. Him I had to handle roughly. He had fought in many a sea engagement. Later I learned from him the trick of falling on the shoulder blades and kicking upward at an adversary—a trick that the dons say shows our barbarous ill-breeding. But, after all, we English like to win our battles, and, be what we may, we seldom stoop to their ill-mannered habit of shooting into a captain's cabin through the stern ports. No gentleman would do that!

I was jealous of that seaman's ardor and I bear him no ill-will for having kicked me half a boat's length, though I carry a scar yet underneath the short hair, where my head struck smartly on a thwart. He followed up with spirit, and we fought, we two, like catamounts among the luggage, each with a hold on the other's wrist and our faces set so close that we could dimly see each other's faces in the fog. I liked him, and I tried to break his neck, and he mine.

I had the better of him at last and bade him yield, my knee thrust in his belly, so that he could hardly even swear for lack of wind. And by that time Berden had the alderman so trussed that he could safely leave him, so he came and tied the sailor's arms after he had kicked the man's hanger overboard. Then he was all for drowning him along with his fellow.

"Time presses," said Berden. "There will be another score such helions down on us as soon as they have done with Jacques. We can't take prisoners. We have no spare horse."

But I could hear the other fellow gasping, with his grip on the edge of the boat as he tried to climb in. I bethought me then that a gentleman in London lacking servants of his own might better have been born into another's service, for if he lacked

breeding also, he should feel dishonor less.

And I suspected that such loyal fellows as those two seamen might haply change their colors, with good grace, if they should understand that their erstwhile master was a traitor to the queen. So I pulled the other fellow in and threw him down beside his mate, which was no light task, he fighting all the while. And when I had breath enough again I spoke them fairly.

"My honest men," I said, "I'll spare you for your courage because England needs such merry men. And if you still think Stiles worth following when you know the truth about him, you shall both go free—or else with him into the Marshalsea to share his punishment. If not, you shall have your choice of serving me or finding a master better to your liking. Joshua Stiles lies under warrant of arrest."

THEY gave in sulkily, the wet one swearing brimstone oaths. But they passed their words. They struck hands on it when I had untied the other one's arms. The one gave his name as Futtok and the other Gaylord—from Sussex and Lincoln.

There and then I bade them show us how to reach the river bank dry shod, so they made a gangplank of the boat's thwarts, bringing the boat closer inshore by easing the warp that held her nose upstream. Then I bade them show me where the alderman had stowed his documents, although Berden was all for hurrying away at once before the twenty should descend on us.

It was well I thought of it. The alderman had got a canvas bag, stuffed full of treasonable matter, as it transpired later, between his knees, and he was writhing as he lay, trying to have the bag overside. I guessed rightly that it held the evidence that the Lords in Council needed.

That thought bringing forth its like, I presently suspected that the boat held other treasonable luggage; so before

we left I opened a good gap between the seams, at risk of breaking off my sword-point, for the oak was tough. I thought the evidence might lose no authenticity by lying under water for awhile; and when we were all ashore I loosed the warp and threw that in the river on top of the sunken boat, so that when the twenty seamen should come to report their brush with Jacques they should look for the warp and, not finding it, should suppose that the alderman had run away and left them to their fate.

That, I learned, was what took place. In their indignation at his deserting them, as they supposed, they all went to the Guildhall the day following to lay complaint against him. They were arrested at the Lord Mayor's order, on the charge of having aided and abetted treason. But, the queen's ships in the Medway lacking seamen, they were turned over to Sir John Hawkins and signed on to help to chastise the Sea Beggars, as we call the Holland pirates who make war on any shipping they can find.

We gagged the alderman with one of his own stockings that I cut away above the shoe, and I gave him the roan to ride, taking up Giles the 'prentice on the mare behind me.

Berden had to take the two seamen up behind him, and Giles carried the bag of papers, so we were better than well loaded and in no shape to make speed.

Besides, the horses were restive from having stood so long in the cold, and the sailors could not ride, so we made slow progress toward the Marshalsea. The lad Jack picked the way for us with senses that no other than a Londoner possesses, recognizing way-marks that, to me, were only blots of deeper fog.

Presently Stiles made shift to bite the stocking through and spit it forth, and when he spoke I listened to him with curiosity, warning him that he should fare ill if he cried for rescue.

He had got back some of his assurance, having noted our lack of a following and our fear of pursuit. I suspected he knew who Berden was, although he did not speak to him by name.

"Lad," he said to me, spitting the wool from his teeth, "I am a widower and childless. Bear that in mind. You do an honorable man injustice, and yourself no good thereby, for though they may lock me up in the Marshalsea they will hardly keep me. My friends are powerful. The Lords in Council will beshrew you, after I shall have won forth. They are not like to let live the lad who wrought their underhandedness. They offer you now, it may be, a handful of pence for a dirty treason—but what thereafter? Were it not wiser to deal handsomely with me and win a fortune?"

But the trimmest tongue in England could not have persuaded me that night. All I could have craved to grace my exploit would have been that Mildred might see me riding on a secret errand for the queen and bringing in the fruit of it! If Stiles had offered me a thousand pounds he should have reached the Marshalsea no poorer, nor I richer. Berden did not dare to treat with him, I not consenting.

I let Stiles talk on.

"You seem to me a likely enough youth," he said when he had spat forth a few more strands of wool. "No knowledgable man would blame you, lad, for not knowing you are being gulled. But you will be a Paul's man presently, when they have cast you off—a penniless adventurer, dining more often than not with Duke Humphrey, at anybody's beck who has a shabby stroke of work to offer; a bravo, ready to be bought to riot; a cajoler of drinks and broken bread in taverns; later in the pillory, your ears nailed. Last of all, the gallows. Dozens have met that fate, who started by doing

treasonable work for Burghley or that caitiff Walsingham."

I WAS curious to learn the price at which he thought me purchasable.

"I have a love and I would marry her," I answered.

"Dowerless, I doubt not," he retorted. "Set me on my ship downriver, and you shall marry your love and make her fortunate."

I let him talk on, glad to keep my thought on anything except how wet and cold I was.

"You told me," he said, "you are the son of Sir Harry Halifax. But he is dead. Where is your home in London?"

Without giving that a thought at all I answered I lived at the house of Roger Tunby.

I think that was the greatest surprise of all that night, both to him and to me and Berden.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed. "Has Tunby betrayed us? Then we are indeed undone!" For a few minutes after that he was silent, but he was a weak man, he could not contain his anger, which indeed had carried him already out of bounds.

"Tell Tunby this from me," he blurted suddenly, "that though he ruins me, and it may be others, there are true men yet who will bring him to a dire end!"

Berden contrived to nudge me, encouraging me to tempt the alderman to say more. But, truth, I did not know how to go about it, and, after a long silence, Berden offered to befriend him for a good round sum of money.

But the alderman could see through that pretense as easily as I did: Berden would have pocketed the bribe, if he could get it, without selling more than his civility. The queen had no more trusty servant when it came to final issues, and though he well liked to line his pocket, no more than a semblance of his friendship was for sale.

"Small need to cozen you with

money. I will have you hanged!" Stiles answered.

That uncivil speech brought silence on us all, I full of thought of Roger Tunby, wondering about the old chuff, marveling that he should act so loyal to the queen yet be so treasonable, and admiring such great subtlety of Providence as could toss me, at my first essay, into this whirlpool of intrigue, to make my way or drown.

The fog shut down on us more thick than ever, so that even Jack Giles lost his reckoning and I began to weigh alternatives, as to whether we should seek warmth and shelter in a tavern to await the morning, or go forward at the risk of footpads. But I thought of Sir Francis Drake again, and shelter seemed not so tempting, nor the footpads so fit to be dreaded.

And I suppose we looked more capable of fighting than we were, since none molested us, although I saw men lurking in the fog, and once or twice our alderman appeared to think of slipping from the saddle to take his chance among the lurking rogues, planning to buy their aid, no doubt, with promises. But I warned him:

"Dead or alive," said I, "the warrant reads! Dead or alive you shall reach the Marshalsea!"

He dreaded death. So, what with riding headlong for awhile, and young Jack spying a tavern signboard that he recognized, we found the Marshalsea at last and drew rein by the great gate, where the fog was so dense that we could hardly see the iron bars.

A watchman with a halberd and a candle lantern challenged and appeared more fearful of the guard we bade him summon than of us, for he ordered us away to hell or any other bed we favored.

Him we made afraid of us with most uncivil speech until he called the guard at last. But their officer was clamorously indignant at our demand that he should go and wake the keeper of the Marshalsea.

We had to threaten him too, and it was long after midnight, and we frozen, when the keeper came at last, not over sober, and as quarrelsome as any toss-pot at the summons from his warm bed. Berden was afraid of his authority, but I had not had Berden's long experience of such men's spite. Said I:

"You do your duty or you'll learn what wrath is; for I'll hale Lord Burghley from his bed to take you to task for this night's insolence!"

He made small trouble after that, although he spoke me scurvily and tried to send us off without his signature; but Berden would not let him have the warrant otherwise, and so we rode away at last, myself well satisfied with having angered him, but Berden anxious and not pleased with me for having boasted I would pull the keeper's beard were the gate guard not too many to make that sport profitable.

We had no warrant for the seamen, so we brought them with us, two on the one horse that the alderman had ridden.

CHAPTER IX.

"COUNT ON BERDEN."

THEREAFTER we found Lord Burghley's house with even greater difficulty than we had found the Marshalsea, because a light wind, chilling our bones, disturbed the fog into swirling fumes around us. The mud grew slippery and our horses afraid of falling, so that we were as bewildered as cattle on market day.

But we reached a great iron gate at last and rang a bell that tolled with comforting mellowness within the lodge. The porter, with a glance at Berden, admitted us into a courtyard wherein horses stood, and servants at their heads, but we could hardly see them in the foggy link-light. A man came close to scrutinize us and I marked the Earl of Leicester's badge

on his shoulder. Then I recognized the fellow, and he me.

"By the rood, it's Will Halifax!" he exclaimed. "How do you like London, Will?"

Before I could think of a retort to match his insolence he turned away, and by the light about the porch I saw him enter the great house. Something about his manner of entering stirred dread in me. We waited, Berden having sent our names in by the porter's underling, and it may have been half an hour, we standing there, before the Earl of Leicester came out.

I knew him instantly. The link-light glittered on his gold chain, for his cloak was undone. He was followed by his master of the horse and several others. At the foot of the steps I heard him ask "Where is the fellow?" He who had first recognized me pointed.

The earl mounted such a wonder of a chestnut horse as made the heart leap at sight of his movement. He rode toward me until I could see his handsome face under the link that burned against the wall near where I stood.

I wondered that the queen could love him, as rumor proclaimed that she did, though he was the prettiest man in England, were the surface all. He looked too like a foreigner for my liking, and many a mean counter-jumper I have seen possessing the same manner of asserting gentleness where none was. He mistook his insolence for courage and his arrogance for brains.

"How now, Master Will Halifax?" he exclaimed in his hectoring voice, scowling at me darkly. "You dare to mow foul faces at me, sirrah? I will have you well whipped for it! I'll learn you to ape and grin at me because your brawling father drew his sword unjustified! Look sharply to your manners!"

I forebore answering. A hot retort would have invited all his men to have at me, although I doubted he would

dare to have me slain in Lord Burghley's yard; but though I might have escaped a dagger thrust, I should at least have ended in the kennel with a broken head. He waited, hoping I would give him an excuse; then, since I did not, he gestured to show his scorn and rode on. But one of his followers, thinking me a block on which to tread to his own preferment, stayed to pick a quarrel.

"Turn your face to the wall," he ordered, "when his grace the Earl of Leicester rides by! By the rood, your very glance is insult! 'Od's blood, you insult his grace by living!"

I took a step toward him to discover whether it were spunk or vapor that inspired the fellow, who began to feel himself embarrassed by his loneliness, for the gate was open and the earl and his party were cantering through. He reined away from me, but not soon enough to escape my answer.

"Tell your master the earl," I said, "the next time he lets you fasten up his breeches, that if he fears the truth about himself as I look forward to the revelation of it, he may well dislike me!"

It was a rash speech, and Berden chided me for it, but I felt myself already high in Lord Burghley's favor, and I was young in those days.

"He will repeat that to the earl, who will have you silenced with a dagger in your back," said Berden.

Then a servant came and ordered Berden into Lord Burghley's presence. I supposed that I should go too, but the servant said he had no orders to admit me. So Berden, with a nod to me, went in alone and I stood shivering with cold—not fully knowing until then how cold I was—and thoroughly dejected.

I HAD imagined myself telling my own story, studying to speak with modesty and yet omitting nothing that should give a good conceit of me; for to tell truth I was not a little vain

of the night's performance. I had imagined myself saying a good word for Berden. But I doubted Berden would accredit me with more than should increase his own reputation. He was liker, at that, to damn me out of jealousy.

I laid it to the Earl of Leicester that I was left there shivering in the yard, he having had time to accuse me to Lord Burghley. And then gloomier foreboding fell, and something like terror seized me. I perceived that caitiff Jacques, his head in bandages, his manner shrouding him in stealth, seeking to avoid my recognition as he crossed the yard. I tried to overtake him, but he mounted, and I heard his horse go slipping on the cobbles through the front gate.

It gave me no grief that his head was hurt. I would have loved to open up a wider crack, not doubting he had told such tales as should forever harden Lord Burghley's face against me.

I was heartsick to believe that he who stood first with the queen should be so purblind as to believe there was a kernel of truth in so foul a nut as Jacques. The fellow's soul was on his face, all void of honesty. It was a foul pass that a Lord in Council should lend ear to that rogue, while he left standing without in the yard the son of as loyal a knight as ever lived.

And as I stood there, stroking the horses for the sake of the comforting feel of their faithful muzzles on my cheek, there came a last thrust to my vanity that seemed to strike the very ground from under me and leave me outcast. Came a footman, heavy-eyed with sleep and surly that the errand took him outdoors in the murk, picking his way mincingly across the cobbles lest he soil his buckled shoes.

"Are you Master Will Halifax?" he demanded. "Benjamin Berden sends word that his lordship has no further use for your services to-night, and if it pleases you to tell what roof you will patronize, I am to take the message."

I was too disgusted to return a civil answer. Likelier than not, I thought, they will inform the Earl of Leicester where I sleep, that he may pursue his feud and rid himself of inconvenience. They will use Jacques for a witness that I claimed a queen's commission when I had none.

I answered, I would send word in the morning where I lodged, thus opening my mind to new perplexity; for the two seamen and Jack the 'prentice were sitting against the wall, chins on their knees, not as wretched as I, because they thought me able to provide for them, but wet and cold and looking to me for comfort.

However, the thought of them put new spirit in me, since it set me pondering how to rise to such a difficult occasion. Thought of Mildred's purse, with money still remaining in it, brought her confidence to mind, which stirred in me enough lees of manhood to cause me to act steadfastly before my followers.

I beckoned to them and they followed me out of the yard on foot, young Giles leading the horse, having chafed himself so sore against the saddle that the courage failed him to mount and try to ride again, although I dubbed him Sir Meacock; and the sailors swore that, being seamen, God had not intended them to ride, nor would they, not though a whole company of angels, or the queen herself, should come and bid them.

So we were a slow procession. And, oh, the loneliness of London, with a gray fog melting into cold rain, and the drip of water from the eaves, and road stones slippery with thawing mud, nor no friends, and a life's hope spilled, I thought forever, on the thankless flags of a queen's minister's front yard!

FEAR makes men see more devils than all hell could ever hold. Each moving pool of mist, each shadow between house lamps, seemed to us to be the lair of murderers; my discon-

tent had spread like a contagion and the others, aye the horses no less, shuddered at every sound, as I led the way, not caring whither, careful only to lead on lest they, overtaking me, should ask me more than I could answer.

'Od's misery! I did not know whither to lead. I thought of Roger Tunby's house and then remembered how the old chuff was a suspect. Should I return to him and spy on him—my host who had done me a kindness? Should I warn him rather? That were tantamount to treason against the queen!

I knew not what to do, and I be-thought me of making for the coast and Flushing, to lend hand in the Dutchmen's quarrel with the King of Spain. With two good horses, two good seamen and a bright-wit 'prentice lad, I thought I might be welcome.

'Twas the mare that saved us from I know not what calamity. The streets were all alurk with wounded soldiers from the Dutch war, starving and in wait for any passenger worth stripping, afterward to fight among themselves like animals for scraps of booty. There was not a dawn that year but that saw naked bodies lying in the street; and for reprisal they were hanging two or three dozen at a time on Tyburn Tree. We were running away from danger rather than in search of anywhere to sleep.

But the mare remembered where I had bedded her knee-deep in straw near Roger Tunby's house. She picked her way by some inhuman sense toward that mews again. And suddenly, as I began to recognize the street, or thought I did, there came a shout, and a mass of darker fog than ordinary shaped itself into a group of men who rushed toward us.

I drew sword and it was only by the grace of God that I did not kill the man who came first. I should have been the enemy of the whole world if fortune had not caused my mare to slip and stumble on a slimy cobblestone and

so turned aside my point that otherwise had slit Will Shakespeare's throat.

"Why, Will!" he panted, smiling. He was badly out of breath. "Such poxy welcome to a friend? Are you grown rich, that you cry 'out' upon me, as Roger Tunby does? Or are you sworn for Flanders and seek practice ere you have at Parma's infantry?"

The men who were pursuing him turned tail when they saw us ready to defend ourselves. I jumped down from the mare and hugged Will, never realizing until that moment how close we had grown toward each other.

"Will," I said, "I'd sooner have this than pots of gold! You give me comfort!"

"Echo it then. I need it, too!" he answered. "I have watched here at the risk of being cudgeled, hoping you might pity your dumb brutes and bring them back to stable. I am like them, sans bed, sans supper."

I asked him if he had no money, for it seemed strange he was supperless.

"Marry, yes and no," he answered. "I am locked out like the house cat. Imprimis, for returning without finding you. Secundo, Tunby saw the housemaid smile at me, and such old bawds as he are ever puritans, forbidding cakes and ale because remorse hath made them fearful of their latter end. Where bed we, Will?"

He had left his purse with Tunby in the morning to be kept safe. I, too, had left my second-best suit, pistol and some other valuables in the house.

I would have clamored at his door to force an issue, only there were now my three men to be bedded; and there came, too, the thought that if Roger Tunby were involved with Stiles it might be hazardous to visit him at that late hour.

SO there seemed nothing for it but Burbage's mews, where there was warmth, at any rate, for us and better comfort for the horses. We roused a sleepy hostler, and when he

had helped us to clean and feed our beasts, I made him fill an empty stall with good, clean pea straw, he protesting that his master Burbage was not an innkeeper and would as like as not send him vagabonding in the morning, with new employment not so readily to be found in London.

Whereat Will told him he was no worse off than his betters, and we lay down on the straw, all five of us. And for awhile we talked, because sleep withstood our wooing, the seamen and Jack Giles adding their accounts to mine of our adventure and of the scurvy trick I had been played in Lord Burghley's yard, I grumbling that we ought to look at princes and their ministers for example of such open dealing as should put us all in countenance.

Said Will: "Whoever kept a book of all that princes and their ministers do, Will, were wiser if he kept it under lock and key—aye, wiser still if he burned it, lest the angels overlook a page or two and drown the world in tears. Marry, our suitabler employment is to vex our spirits for the cozening of that knave Tunby, who will else outcozen us."

I cried a pox on Tunby, and the 'prentice began telling us the reputation that the man had in the City—honest in some little matters, but a rogue in great ones.

"So that they trust him with a bill of wool, but they elect him to no aldermanship."

Heavy-hearted, I suggested we should get our odds and ends from Tunby in the morning and then set forth to the war in Flanders. But Will had no stomach for that.

"I hear that Dutch maids are like plow mares, big o' hoof and quarter—and such full-moon faces as offended the Lord Harry when they brought him Ann o' Cleves to bed with. Fog, too, and we have enough o' that in England. Wet feet, taxes and the plague—what need to travel farther?"

So I spoke of deep-sea venturing,

the sailors urging me with tales of gold and of decks all slippery with dons' blood, declaring that was God's work for an Englishman. We fell asleep at last to dream of gold bars taken from the dons, and of Dutch sea-beggars hove to in the channel looking to steal honestly won booty homeward bound, counting on the speed of hulls new sanded, whereas homebound English ships wore weeds like women's kirtles from the warm seas and were easy to come alongside.

In the morning we held consultation in a tavern, where a good meal and a quart apiece of French wine stiffened us, and Futtok swore he would rather go to sea against the dons and risk the Inquisition than take his chance of sitting in the Marshalsea with Stiles.

However, Will Shakespeare favored brawling in no sort, being minded there are gentler ways of growing fortunate. And he was owlish wise in that mood.

"Go you, Will," he counseled me, "in search of Berden. He will not provoke you too far, since he has judged your mettle, and you might snatch back that credit he has stolen from you. And he may not be an ingrate after all. Have you had proof of it?"

He would go himself, he said, in search of new employment, liking Tunby not at all; but first he would get his purse from the old chuff, making the excuse to him that he would look for me all over London, nor knew how long the business might take. We would meet at the mews.

JACK GILES, the 'prentice, having had a taste of venturing, vowed he would follow me now to the world's end. But Futtok and Gaylord could not ride and were afraid of horses; furthermore, my horses needed rest; and I knew the reputation London had for horse-thieves, and for exchanging good horses for bad ones while the owner's back was turned; so I arranged with Burbage for my two sea-

men to stay at the mews and muck out horse-stalls for their dinner and no money.

Then I hired two horses from the mews and forth we rode, Giles and I, he groaning at the blisters on his hams and I not greatly wiser for the yesterday's adventure. London in the rain was such a murk of wet and dirt as made a man feel old before his time. It was an in-doors day, for gossiping in ingles, and the stench of house-trash rotting in the kennels made me homesick for the sweet country smells and for the sight of hedgerows. I had not an inkling where to look for Berden; but I thought of Paul's, where all men met o' mornings; and since the streets were half-empty because of the rain, Berden might see me if he were stirring.

And presently the moody music of the street-cries, the housewives putting shawled heads through the windows, chattering, and the peddlers making tents of pitched cloth to protect their wares from the rain and the drip from the eaves so entertained me that I rode on marveling, not caring whether I were seen or not.

"Hot codlings—who'll buy hot codlings!" "Onions—white St. Thomas onions!" "Green brooms—new brooms!" "Shoone—old boots—old shoone!" "Steel and tinder-boxes—buy a light-oh!" "Tinker, tinker! Pots and pans, oh, pots to mend!" "Knife-grinder—knives to grind!" "A mouse-trap—buy a mouse-trap—catch 'em all alive-oh!" "Any wood to cleave?" "Oh, hot fine oat-cakes!" "Whiting—smelts or whiting—any whitebait—Greenwich whitebait—all fresh!"

Such a medley of appealing noises as aroused new humor, making the heart merry in despite of weather.

I rode slowly along Fleet Street, where the prison stands, and saw the prisoners in shabby clothing begging from the passers-by through the iron bars of the entrance gate—a fate that

any man might share if debts grew deep and creditors importunate.

Awhile I watched the market around Charing Cross and then turned back again toward Paul's yard, where men and women were crowding one another in the rain to watch a trained bear.

Whether the Fleet prison or the bear more served me I cannot tell. Berden saw me both times. He was coming from the Fleet, where he had been questioning a prisoner; and he was on foot, since the queen is jealous of the bills for horse hire, so that he could not have overtaken me unless I had dallied.

"By the Savior, I thought you lost!" he shouted, elbowing his way toward me and nigh pulling me out of the saddle, so glad he was to find me. I thought his manner overdemonstrative for such short acquaintance, so I drew on caution—not that the sight of his ugly visage did not make my heart leap.

"Last night you wished me well lost," I retorted. "What now? Shall I snatch another chestnut for you?"

"Hot-pate! Berden is your friend," he answered; and he led into a tavern where about a hundred coxcombs rustled it and diced for tavern wenches' kisses, or for Spanish jewelry, or to see who should throw mud at the Spanish ambassador on his way to an audience with the queen that afternoon. We found a quiet place behind an oaken screen in a corner, but the tavern maids were too distracted by being kissed and shouted at to notice us, so we drank nothing.

"**M**AY God preserve you, Will Halifax, if I'd not been there last night you were no man's lucky penny!" exclaimed Berden. "Marry! If an earl should dislike me as his grace the Earl of Leicester dislikes you, I'd run for it! He had been striving until nigh on midnight to win over my Lord Burghley in advance of the morrow's meeting of the Lords in

Council, and had withdrawn at last into another room—to sulk, I daresay; he is given to it. But his servant told him he had seen you in the yard, and he came in again fuming, brushing past me, who was waiting by the door until Lord Burghley should see fit to speak with me. He was ramping hot-indignant, black with anger.

"Gramercy and God's boots!" says he. "What foul treachery is this, Lord Secretary, that you play hob with a Halifax in your yard? By the Lord's teeth, if the queen should hear of it she'd rate you for a practiser not fit to sit at table!"

"Plenty more he roared, and all to the same tune, Lord Burghley looking owlsh at him, twitching with the gout and saying nothing, waiting to let him spill himself before laying match to his own long cannon—which is my Lord Burghley's method always; he's a great one to let t'other do the talking. You'd have thought, to see him sitting there with one leg on a trestle-rest and brandywine in a glass beside him, that he was at a sermon from the household chaplain.

"Sir Harry Halifax was a pickthank knight who drew sword against two of my gentlemen," says my Earl of Leicester. "And for no more cause," says he, "than that I was willing to assume the guardianship of a maid named Mildred Jackson, whom he had the insolence to wish to marry to his lack-grace son—that lout who stands without there in your lordship's yard. Doubtless he hoped with the girl's fortune to discharge his own debts, since she will inherit large estates from her mother's side ere long, being last of her line."

"Mildred is no ward for any man. I' faith she has a stepfather who is her legal guardian," I interrupted.

"Wait. I am coming to that," said Berden. "Lord Burghley sipped some brandywine, but not a word he answered, no, not even nodding, chin on chest, and any one who did not know

him might have thought him drunk. The Earl of Leicester went on raving at him:

"That young jackanapes who stands without dared to have the banns of marriage read three Sundays running, but by the grace of God I heard of it. I warned her stepfather—a hind named Pepperday, who has strangely advanced himself by shrewish practices—I warned him to forbid the marriage lest I cancel the land-holding that he has from me. I also sent word to the parson not to marry them. Sir Harry Halifax met my gentlemen and picked a quarrel on the strength of it. And now, I doubt not, that young squibbe without comes practicing to win your lordship's influence. I warn you: have him whipped out of the yard unless you wish to lose my friendship, my lord secretary!"

So now at last I knew the secret of my father's death. I had never doubted his having fallen in an honorable cause; but it rendered me speechless—aye, it choked me to know he had fallen quarreling in my behalf. A generous and merry-hearted knight my father was, as full of hot speech as a kettle is of steam, and yet as kind as Christmas, without an ignoble thought to mar his disposition.

But Berden did not notice my agitation, he was too full of his story. He went on:

"MY Lord Burghley looked up at last and saw me where I stood by the door. He looked choleric, and I thought he would dismiss me from the room. But instead he ordered: 'Send one of the servants, Berden, and dismiss that lad Halifax. Bid him begone and not darken my door again!' But as he spoke he made a sign with his fingers—thus—so that I understood he was talking to impress the Earl of Leicester and was not so set against you as it seemed. Therefore I tried to couch my message to you so that you might not say where you

lodged, lest it should reach the Earl of Leicester's ears, but so you might understand that I meant to find you. But I doubt if the servant—a sleepy and dull-witted fool—delivered my message properly."

I shook my head, and Berden resumed:

"When I returned to Lord Burghley's presence my Lord of Leicester passed me on his way out, looking mollified, and now there stood Jacques in the room with his head all swathed in bandages. He did not see me, for he stood facing Lord Burghley; and 'Od's onions; the knave was telling his own story of the night's adventure, he not knowing we had lodged Stiles safely in the Marshalsea. He was singing his own praises, telling how he rode with his men to take the alderman while you and I sat swilling in a tavern. He made a long tale of how he fell into an ambushment of sailors and how he got his head well broke. He tried to mend his head and fortune by beshrewing us two, saying it was our fault that Stiles had escaped and, moreover, that you had claimed to hold the queen's commission, of which he said he thought you unworthy if in truth you held it and it were not a false pretense, he having seen no document. Whereat Lord Burghley finished his glass of brandywine and sent Jacques to the buttery to have his head examined by the steward, he passing me on his way out and looking liker to die of agitation at the sight of my grin than because of his hurts.

"Lord Burghley was eager for his bed by that time, so I had to make short work of my story of how you and I took the alderman, but I gave him the receipt from the keeper of the Marshalsea and told him how Jacques had behaved. When I'd done he asked me:

"Did Halifax pretend to hold the queen's commission?"

"By the rood,' I answered, 'he pretended nothing, but he showed good courage and a ready wit.'

" 'But did he claim that I had given him appointment?' Lord Burghley insisted. He was sharp on that. So I answered you had made no claims of any kind.

" 'That lad may go far,' said his lordship. 'Does he quarrel readily?'

" I said: 'He fights like a flash o' lightning, but to pick a quarrel with him a man might have to show him where the profit lay in not avoiding it.' I told then how Stiles had offered you a fortune to let him escape, and what answer you made. Whereat he nodded. And presently he said to me: 'The Earl of Leicester slew that lad's father for the sake of a guardianship that he can never get unless he slays a profitable tenant likewise. So I believe that he will seek to slay the tenant, whose name is Pepperday. And it so happens that circumstances favor the Earl of Leicester's plan—which, nevertheless, may be prevented if we make speed; and I think young Halifax may gain preferment, even though he does not gain the wench, who is a rich prize.' " Berden glanced at my excited countenance, and went on:

" **F**OR a long while after that he sat still, chin on hand, the firelight playing on his crafty face. There are spies—spies everywhere. I doubt not he was meditating how to take me in his confidence and yet to keep what he should tell me from Sir Francis Walsingham, whose servant in truth I am. He, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Earl of Leicester vie with one another for the queen's influence, and it is strange how Lord Burghley employs so few agents of his own, preferring rather to borrow them from either of the other two, thus learning something of their practices at risk of letting them be privy to his own. But me he has found silent both ways, so he trusts me more than he does some folk, nevertheless not trusting me more than the queen trusts any of them, which is to say, piecemeal and by fits and starts,

with ever something in reserve. At last he looked up, staring owlsh at me, and said:

" 'Berden, there is a city merchant by the name of Roger Tunby, a dealer in wool, affected to the Queen of Scots, who receives a deal of correspondence from the Earl of Leicester's tenant, Pepperday, most of it by the hand of the common carrier. It is known that Tunby has been in league with Stiles and others to give comfort and, it may be, treasonable service to the Scots queen. Tunby involves Pepperday, and we will take the lesser foremost in the hope that Pepperday in fear of torments may betray his principles. Thus we may catch many disaffected men. But it must be done before the Earl of Leicester learns of our purpose. He is swift and passionate. And if he should slay this rogue Pepperday for his own ends, he might not only get the girl to ward, but he would thereby also break a valuable chain of evidence. It must be done swiftly and in silence. None must know of it until Pepperday is safely in the Tower and racked for testimony.' Thus spoke Lord Burghley!"

" Said he nothing further about Mildred?" I demanded.

Berden laughed. "No more than this: that if the wench has substance and is nicely born the queen herself may like to dispose of her in marriage. That would put her out of your reach, Master Will! He bade me lodge the girl in safety without the Earl of Leicester's knowledge, and to watch shrewdly that you have no intimacy with her. For I am to take you with me down to Brownsover, with as few men as we dare, because of the risk of talking. I have the warrant."

"For Mistress Mildred Jackson?" I asked.

"Nay, for Tony Pepperday."

So my feelings were mixed of relief and new anxiety. By a stroke of fortune I was given leave to save my Mildred from the Earl of Leicester's

clutches, which would nevertheless bring us no whit nearer to the state of man and wife. And I was now unarguably Berden's man, not he mine. I could not pretend this time to have a queen's commission in my pocket; and this called for wits and good will unless he and I were to fall foul of each other's disposition.

"Berden," I said, "I did you an injustice. When that man brought me your message in the yard—"

"Pish! Tush!" he interrupted. "Any greenhorn would have thought me treasonable to a friendship. Any old hand would have sworn it was so. If you were a practiced hand at court I could never convince you this minute that I lie not. But the truth is, that I like you; and another truth is that a like or a mislike couldn't mend inevitables. An I liked you twice as well, we'd be of small use to each other but for fortune that throws us together. Count on Berden!"

I SAT silent, seeing he was turning over in his mind how he might turn me to his own use under a cloak of amity. For my own part I was puzzled to know how to manage him. Suddenly he shot a question at me across the table:

"Tell me about the popish plot in Brownsover!"

I laughed. It sounded clownish in my ears that little Brownsover should make a stir in London. All our countryside might possibly have raised an hundred men, not counting the Earl of Leicester's following; and of the hundred more than half would take the queen's side of whatever quarrel.

Moreover, the Earl of Leicester being reckoned chief of all the Protestants in Warwickshire—though little he cared for religion, only serving what he thought the strongest cause—and he being Lord Lieutenant of the county, there was not much chance of popish plots succeeding, though the wandering priests were many, as all men knew.

"I only know," I said, "that Tony Pepperday was formerly a Papist and recanted."

"With his face," said Berden. "How about his heart?"

"He has none." I was confident of that.

"Well, I will tell you this," said Berden. "There is many a port in England by which foreigners might land to set the Scots queen on the English throne. One is Plymouth. Another is Bristol. Brownsover is nigh the main road to them both. A man in Brownsover might busy himself cozening the yokels to receive such strangers with a good will. Once a Papist, always a Papist. Tony Pepperday, mark me, will cry for a priest and unction and a mass or two to save him when the Tower rack tightens his sinews and loosens the truth!"

The thought of Tony on the rack was no more satisfying to my mood than the knowledge that I was now subordinate to Berden. But I saw my way to overcoming Berden's advantage, just as I hoped to save Tony the pain, not giving credence to the story of his plotting, for which I judged he lacked the needful spirit; nor did I consider the rack a reasonable instrument of justice.

"Berden," I said, "I have three men and two good horses. Need we more men?"

"Nay," he answered, "not with you and me to lead. 'The fewer the merrier!'"

Whereby I knew I should not be too long his subordinate.

CHAPTER X.

OF THE FLIGHT OF ROGER TUNBY AND
THE RESTITUTION THAT HE MADE.

BUT I had yet to learn the inwardness of Berden's news. Lord Burghley had unbosomed to him more, of urgent import, than he choose to have repeated to me, Lord Burghley

trusting him because he knew, I doubted not, particulars of Berden's past, and choosing me for this new errand because the Earl of Leicester's enmity was likely enough to make me strive to come between him and his quarry; also because my love for Mildred, spoken of by Berden, made me sure to try to rescue her from any other mortal's clutches; and because I knew scarce any one in London, which should make me clap my tongue less than another might; and because I did know Brownsover; and not least because I had my own horses, so saving expense to the queen.

Concerning which I may as well write this now as later: in the more than fifteen years that I have served her with brain and blade and at the risk of life and limb, I have never once received from the queen in full my wages or expenses; nor am I a rare instance of her parsimony!

Himself the queen's chief minister, Lord Burghley never knew from day to day what sudden change of policy might leave him beached on the rocks of ridicule or see him scolded like a thief for daring to oppose some scheme of Leicester's or of Walsingham's—they three plotting each against the other and united in nothing except jealousy of lesser ministers and zeal to preserve England from a foreign yoke.

"This poor caitiff, Tony Pepperday," said Berden, "is but a straw man, whom the Earl of Leicester will accuse of treason for the sake of obtaining the Jackson girl to ward, and whom Lord Burghley will likewise accuse for the sake of forestalling the Earl of Leicester, whose ways he knows, and I know also. Burghley will wait on the law. Leicester will take law into his own hands. Our business is to spoil the Earl of Leicester's game in Burghley's interest. It is dog eat dog in London Town."

But if that were so I was minded first of all to look to mine own profit. Willing though I was to serve the

queen and to obey her ministers, I was likelier to be useful—aye, and useful in higher matters—were my purse well lined. I made up my mind that instant to see Roger Tunby first of all, and in spite of Berden's urgency, he pleading we should spur for Brownsover within the hour. He tried to hector me.

"Will Halifax," he said, "you ride at my behest. You must obey me!"

But I answered I was sworn as yet neither to secrecy nor obedience and he could ride without me if he saw fit. Whereat he grew silent and I understood that either Lord Burghley had commended me or else Berden judged me to stand higher in his lordship's favor than as yet was advertised. I was encouraged of his silence.

So we rode to the mews, where I was careful to choose horses such as sailormen might ride with risk of nothing worse than chafing. Will Shakespeare was there. He had won his way into Burbage's crabbed graces and the two were chaffering. Beside the mews, it appeared, Burbage was owner of a theater out in the fields across the river and did a double business, hiring out horses to the gentry who rode to the plays, where his son James Burbage was the great tragedian.

Will had a plan to make a little substance for himself by caring for the horses while their riders saw the plays; Burbage was to give him the monopoly, and in return he was to rest assured that the horses were well blanketed, and neither horse nor blanket stolen. Burbage, in return for the monopoly, demanded money surety; and there negotiation hung, Will having neither money enough nor bondsman.

I DREW Will aside and told him what I had in mind regarding Roger Tunby. Presently he and I went on foot together to the old chuff's house and found him in a great rage, bullying his 'prentices for no reason that they or anybody else could understand; but knowing what I now did, and guess-

ing what I guessed, I thought it likely enough that his own forebodings agitated him.

Tunby would have kept us standing in the rain the while he lectured us anent our dallying and gadding. Noticing my cloak was torn, he called me toss-pot and accused me of tavern brawling, saying he did not doubt I had found me a bawdy shrew already who would drag me down to beggary, and serve me right.

But when I told him I bore word from Joshua Stiles the alderman, he changed his tone of voice and invited us into the counting house at the rear of the shop. It was too dark in there for us to see each other's faces readily.

I let Will Shakespeare talk first, and he made a drama of it, so far better than any argument I could have invented that I was glad to sit still.

"Tunby!" he said. "Roger Tunby! Age hath no such privilege as maketh ill-faith honorable. Neither doth a friendship die with buried bones. None may challenge that engrossment of a contract 'tween the living and the dead. Nay, Tunby! Destiny commands fulfillment or the penalty, nor no alternative!"

"What do you mean?" Tunby stammered.

"Did not Sir Harry Halifax formerly—yet too informally—intrust his money into your hands to be profitably used, the profit added to the principal, and both anon to be returned to him fully and fairly reckoned?"

"Nay!" said Tunby. "Nay, nay!"

"Did not that in all things else unfrugal and too careless gentleman charge you with the payment of the money to his son, if death's untimely scythe should sweep himself into the realm whence none returns?"

"Never!" said Tunby. "There was no account between us."

"None? Then no dilemma faces young Will Halifax? No compact, honorably kept, accounted, and timely paid, obliges him to stand between you

and the ax of justice? Does he owe you no consideration? Gratitude imposes no concession? Validates no claim on generosity? Appeals not to his manhood, that may otherwise command him in the service of the law, inexorable, ruthless, to uncover treason and see thy gray hairs, Roger Tunby, go in sorrow to a traitor's grave?"

"Nay, nay!" said Tunby. "What do you mean, sirrah? Talking to me of treason in my own house! I am a loyal subject."

"So said Stiles, a miscreant now lodging in the Marshalsea."

"In the Marshalsea? Stiles in the Marshalsea?"

"Aye, taken thither by Will Halifax on royal warrant and accused of treason. Blubbing in the Marshalsea, accusing others, naming his accomplices—in terror of the rack and Little Ease awaiting him, and of a cheerless dawn on Tower Hill where traitors to the realm pay forfeit! Tunby, better a debt repaid now to Sir Harry's hallowed memory, than closing your life's long credit in a bankruptcy of shame!"

ROGER TUNBY gazed in terror at us, gaping, with the spittle drooling from his lip. It was dark where he sat in the corner shadow, but I could see his eyes wide with horror wavering unsteadily as he tried to summon dignity, clutching the table to keep his hands from shaking.

"You—and a royal warrant?" he said, staring at me. "So soon?"

"Soor on the westward road, to Brownsover again, whence Tony Pepperday must come to answer for his practices," said Will. "The warrant reads that he and others are conspiring to set Mary, Queen of Scotland, on the throne."

"And you—you say nothing?" said Tunby, leaning forth out of his corner to stare wide-eyed at me.

"The less said the better," I answered. "But I will say this: that I give you opportunity to play the hon-

est man, which if you do, I will not hold earlier lapse of memory against you. How much did you owe my father?"

Suddenly he yielded, like a bladder pricked; so suddenly that I doubted his performance, though his words were suitable.

"Willy," he said, "Will Halifax, your father, Sir Harry intrusted a thousand pounds to me to put out at a venture, principal and profit to be kept against your future need and nothing to be said of it to you lest the thought of the money should whet your recklessness ere years have taught you money's value. I was to pay it to you at my own discretion."

"How much is it now?" I interrupted.

"Fifteen hundred, and a few odd pounds."

"Then pay me," I demanded, laying my hand on the table, palm up. I had no doubt he was cheating me, but fifteen hundred pounds in minted money with which to start life was a stroke of fortune better than any I had dared to dream of, and I blessed my father while I waited, watching Tunby's face, which was a picture of cunning, relief, anxiety and disaffection toward me.

"I have no such sum of money in the house," he said.

"Then neither have I hope to offer you," I answered. "From the Marshalsea to Tower Hill—"

He interrupted: "Treasury bills, Will Halifax, for fifteen hundred pounds, and gold and silver for the balance, is the best that I can manage. But a treasury bill is mandatory, payable on due date, and therefore readily convertible into money in the city at a discount."

I would have preferred the minted money, but I took the parchment and the few gold coins and wrote him a receipt in full, which Will Shakespeare witnessed. Tunby locked the receipt in his iron chest, then turned to me and said slyly:

"Know you what it means to compound felonies? You are involved now in the same conspiracy, to stand in the same dock, plead to the same offense and suffer for it with the rest of us if we stand convicted!"

Ludd knows I was not a lawyer, but I saw a hole in that indictment! So I set my fist under his nose and spoke to him sharply, for his own good:

"Get you out of England ere I overlook your one night's hospitality! You sought to steal my father's money, doubtless for your own son, along with Mistress Mildred Jackson, whom you also coveted for him at my cost! Get you out of England! Get you to that ship whereon you boasted you would send me out of mischief's way! Get you swiftly out o' reach of the queen's messengers and warrants! Get you gone before nightfall—before Joshua Stiles can tell his story on the rack and you and others follow him to groan forth all you know! The rack hurts old men worse than young ones, Roger Tunby!"

AND with that I left him, caring not much whether he should run away abroad or stay to suffer questioning—for they put them all to torture on a charge of treason, and no favors shown to old age.

Presently, Will Shakespeare and Benjamin Berden witnessed a receipt that Burbage gave me for the treasury bills. I staked a hundred pounds on Willy Shakespeare's honesty—aye, and on Burbage's, also, for we drew no written contract, lacking time. Will was to have the horse monopoly and Burbage was to hold the hundred pounds as warranty. The rest he was to keep for me until I needed it, but fifty pounds I drew to carry in purse and saddle-bags, in great part for my own conceit, but partly, too, for the sake of the effect on Berden.

Burbage agreed to keep my best suit at the mews and to have it cleaned and mended against my return, he having in employment tailors who were used

to furbishing the actors' finery. Then we wasted no more time, but took the road in order to defeat the Earl of Leicester, who, said Berden, was a swift one in his own devices though a laggard often enough in affairs of state.

And Ludd! How the Londoners laughed to see my following! Futtok and Gaylord rode like honest seamen, and the 'prentice hardly better, only lacking their determination because there was no skin where he chiefly needed it and he swore that the saddle was red-hot.

But that night, when we lodged at a wayside inn, I understood a little of why England's name is such a terror on the seas; for though those sailors, aye, and the 'prentice, too, were wearier than the horses and as sore as questioned felons, there was no complaint beyond such cannonading blasphemy as sailors use, nor not a word of flinching in the cold dawn when they had to mount and face another long day's jolting with their skin afire.

But by the time we came to Browns-over, near midnight of the second day, and set the dogs abarking in the yard of Walter Turner's house to rouse him out of bed, we were a rag-tag-looking crew, and Kate, Walter's sister, had to stir the wenches to bring simples from her closet and perform all manner of such intimate accomplishments as women understand. And, by the rood, the horses needed caring for no less, so it was an hour before Walter and I had private word together.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW JEREMY CRUTCH ESCAPED THE GALLOWES TREE.

"SO soon from London?" Walter asked me. My men were still guzzling in the kitchen shamelessly, as if I never fed them, and Walter and I were at last alone together.

But I demanded news of Mildred ere I would tell him anything, and what he answered set me in such an agitation that I forgot my manners and kept him for awhile on equal tenderhooks.

"You didn't know? You haven't heard?" he stammered. "Didn't you meet them on your way down? Pepperday has gone to London, and she with him. They left yesterday. And they were hardly gone afore John Gable, one of the Earl of Leicester's captains, and a following of five came hunting for Tony Pepperday. He was all a-mud and in a hurry. Not finding Tony and Mildred, he was in a fine fury, I can tell you. He came here questioning, but I knew nothing. So he went back and searched the house. He took all the papers—aye, and the bills and receipts, in a sack, and Madge Ambleby the maid of all work; and so rode to Kenilworth, cursing the day I was born because I knew nothing and would tell him less. He would have taken me, too, had he dared; but an Englishman's house is his castle, and he knows my aunt is Mistress of the Royal Pantry."

"Said Tony why he went to London?" I demanded.

"Not he. Tony was never a talker, unless to accuse some one. They rode attended by two of Tony's farm louts, Mildred astride on the black mare between them, and Tony alone in front with the blunderbuss across his knees, peering to left and right as if he expected highwaymen at every corner. Mildred wore a mask, and man's clothes under a long cloak, and, by the rood, she looked more manful than the other three together. She called to me, but the wind was blustery. I heard only that they were on their way to London; she said something or other about you, so I supposed you knew of it."

Slow witted friends are better than sagacious enemies, but I could have struck good Walter Turner as he sat there yawning. We had come so fast

and halted by the way so seldom that we might easily have ridden past some inn where Mildred and Tony rested without me knowing, or they either.

There were horses enough in Walter's stable. But the men were as good as half dead, and I doubted they could ride another furlong without a night's sleep. I went into the kitchen to look them over, and by my face they knew there was ill-luck uppermost.

"We must turn back toward London. We go now," I said. "Master Walter Turner will lend us fresh horses."

"Aye, aye, master," said Futtok, and he and Gaylord began pulling on their coats. They shamed the 'prentice by taking pity on him, so that he put a brave face on it and cursed them for a pair of Gravesend Billyboys, all tidewise and no oaring.

BERDEN was already three parts drunk. He had been mixing ale with some of the Geneva that Walter Turner had from a friend in the fetching trade from Holland. He was snoring on the settle. When I shook him awake he swore he would ride no farther that night, not though the Earl of Leicester and a duke or two to boot came clamoring.

And since he fell asleep again I let him lie. But I bethought me of how we were on the queen's business, and it were a pity not to link that importunity to my own need. So I took the warrant from the pocket inside his shirt and asked Walter Turner to horse him and send him forward as soon after dawn as he should wake.

And so away again, good Walter calling to us to watch the puddles at the crossroads rather than waste time questioning innkeepers who might have been paid to keep their knowledge to themselves; for it was as clear to Walter as it was to me that Tony Pepperday had got word somehow that the Earl of Leicester's men were after him, and he was likelier than not

to take a side road. Why should he go to London? Why not Plymouth—Portsmouth—anywhere rather than London?

And why should Mildred take the road to London now in man's apparel? Whose was she wearing? Not Tony's. She could never have worn Tony's; he was too small. Mildred is high as tall as I am, and as strong and healthy as Tony was pinched and poisoned-looking.

I hate a mystery. It may be that is why heaven has inflicted such a number on me to unravel, trying, I suppose, to teach me patience, which has been a hard task even for Omnipotence to do, and not yet nearly finished.

Ludd! but I lacked it that night, turning ever and anon to listen through the wind-shriek and the swishing rain for sounds of my three followers, who lacked as much of horsemanship as I did of consideration for the honest fellows plodding uncomfortably along in the murk behind me. And nothing I gained, except to fret my horse, having to wait for them at every cross-road.

I knew that dawn was due, because I could hear the kine at a farmhouse near by lowing to be milked—and presently I saw the milkmaid's lantern, that made me shiver the more for the thought of the warmth within the byre.

But it was so dark that I could scarcely see the hedgerows, and the wait seemed endless; I was minded to ride back along the road, supposing my three might have met with accident, when I heard their plodding splash at last—and then voices beyond them, and the noise of at least a dozen horses overtaking us.

I spurred. Those weary men of mine were not in fettle for incivilities. It flashed across my mind that the Earl of Leicester's men were on Tony's trail too. They would claim the privilege of Lord Lieutenant's men, warrant or no warrant; and it was likely to fair ill with any one they chose to sus-

pect, or to bully for the love of the display of their authority. There was no law against our being on the road at night, but there was naught to prevent their suspecting us if we should give an unready account of ourselves.

MY men thought me a highwayman, so suddenly I came on them, not daring to raise my voice. I turned their horses, that were eager enough to follow mine, through a gap in the hedge, since hedges mean barns near by, and a barn means shelter, hay and oats. That I managed it without hurt from my seamen's hangers was enough evidence of the condition they were in. And when they recognized me they were as silent as I could wish, from very weariness.

Dismounting, I muzzled my horse in my cloak to prevent his neighing, and I was just in time to make them muzzle theirs before the overtaking horsemen drew abreast and halted on the far side of the hedge. There was barely enough dawn light yet to show them like ghosts on horseback, me peering through the briers: thirteen men, and in another moment I knew certain that they were the Earl of Leicester's.

"A foul lie, Dodson," said the leader's voice. "A trick o' yours to turn me toward yon farmhouse! You heard eggs a-frying in your dream, you glutton! A fine greeting his grace will give us if he learns we missed our quarry by turning after every smell o' bacon that tickled sleepy Dodson's snout! Horses, you say? You heard 'em splashing? 'Twas but an echo—or your fancy. Ride on!"

Twelve rode forward, but the thirteenth stayed, and he their leader. I could sense him more than I could see him nosing through the hedge gap. He would come through if he heard the least sound, and he could not help but hear one, since the horses, weary though they were, would not stand still forever. I slipped bridle and saddle off Futtok's beast, a plow horse bor-

rowed from Turner. The officer cried out, for he heard that, careful though I was:

"Who lurks there? Come out and show yourself."

I pricked the horse toward him, using my sword point, and the beast went to the gap to nuzzle the newcomer, both horses nickering.

"'Od's passion! A plow horse!" I could hear him stroke the horse's muzzle. "Left you straying on a night like this, eh, Dobbin? Such a master should ride at a horse's tail and hop headless!" He struck our plow horse to prevent his following, and rode on.

Thinking myself well ride of that party, but wondering how, now they were ahead of me, I could keep them from capturing Tony and Mildred, I caught and resaddled the horse for Futtok, he being unable as much as to attempt it in the dark, although at sea he could find his way aloft at midnight and attend to rigging of whose existence not a landsman dreamed. And after awhile I led the way along the highroad, slowly because it was growing light. I showed a bold enough back to my men, but felt unpleasantly unlike the valiant hero of my previous imagining.

ANON we came to a byroad, leading northward, where I noticed tracks that were not those of the Earl of Leicester's men. There was one place close to a tree, where a horse had stood a long while; and not far beyond it was a place where the mud was stoached up and a horse had gone in hock deep. It was hard to judge how old the tracks were, since the rain lay deep in them, but I judged they might have been made the evening before, or later.

Seeing that the Earl of Leicester's men had ridden on, not noticing those hoofmarks in the dawning light—and in truth, if I were not a huntsman I should not have seen them either—

I turned along the byroad to discover what they might mean. I drew back to a walk to spare my men and horses, and I had not ridden far when I saw smoke rising from a hole in the thatch of what might be a shepherd's cabin—but no sheep near, for there was neither dog, nor smell, nor bleating; nor was there much smoke.

We were following the tracks of six horses, of which one was lame and had turned aside across the fields toward that hut; and at the place where he had left the lane there was a confusion of marks, as if the riders of all six horses had paused there holding conference.

There I left my three men and rode alone along a hedgerow toward the hut, picking the way along the headland carefully so as to make no noise; and, dismounting when I reached the farther hedgerow that ran north and south, I tied my horse and approached the hut on foot.

It was a small hut, with a door at one end, and a window or rather a hole in the midst of the side that faced toward me. There was a nag's head sticking through that hole. The creature whinnied to my animal, who answered; and even while I cursed that ill-luck I recognized the ungainly lazy sorrel on which Will Shakespeare had commenced his ride to London.

In another moment Jeremy Crutch came through the door, a flute in one hand and a pistol in the other. He was noticeably no more pleased to meet me than I him.

"How now, Jeremy?" I said. "Not in Plymouth yet? Would the nag not carry you?"

"By the rood, have you come to make me fair exchange again?" he answered.

And with that he drew aim at me, squinting evilly down the long barrel of his pistol.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



Be Cheerful

WHEN your aching heart is breaking,
And life seems an undertaking,
Don't forget the hour is darkest
That precedes the golden dawn;
And remember, though an ember
Will your hopes be in December,
So be cheerful in life's springtime
While the years are rolling on.

Don't be whining, fretting, pining,
Even though the sun's not shining,
Just remember that a rainbow
Soon will shine across the sky,
Cooling showers bring the flowers
That help brighten up the hours,
So be happy and contented,
You can be so if you try.

Earle Liederman

The Baby of the Boswell Line

All's fair in love and business—but Bill Carter, star salesman, was determined to be more than only fair

By HAROLD MONTANYE



Bill Carter was selling as he had never sold before

ALMOST every one who ever came in contact with Bill Carter—christened William Andrew Carter—agreed that he could “get away with murder.”

What they meant was that he was a likable fellow who seemed to sail right by every major difficulty in life without being aware of them. It was not so much that he was lucky as it was that he had a charming manner, frank blue eyes, and a way with people. And the odd thing about it was that it hadn't given him an enlarged cranium.

That was why it was such a blow to him when Sarah Felton gave him a certain unexpected answer. She said: “I'm awfully, awfully fond of you, Bill. In fact, you're the finest boy I've ever known; but I wouldn't marry you.

Things have always fallen into your lap too easily. You've never had to stand up and take a good ‘sock on the button,’ as the sports writers say. You were born with a fetching manner that has brought you almost everything you have wanted without having to work for it.

“Take your job, for instance. As soon as you got through college the place was waiting for you, because you were an All-American end, and they knew you would have a following who would give them a lot of business. Why, all the men who buy your bonds realize that you don't know beans about the bond business. When they want to get some real information they go to some one else to get it, and then they give you their business out of friendship.

"I know of other boys who are just like you, and they made terrible husbands. They held their jobs for awhile, because of their personality; then their firms found out that the only thing they had was personality, and it wasn't enough. And they would not try to learn. Take Phil Massey, for instance. He—"

"Take nothing!" Bill broke in, and he got up from the bench where they were sitting, with his hands clenched and his face white and tense in the moonlight. "Take nothing! I asked you to be my wife, not my critic. I understand, without your going into it any further."

"You think I'm going to turn out to be a dud. Well, I'm not, and I guess I'll live if you don't marry me. If I wanted to, I could say a lot of things about calculating girls, girls who stop to weigh a chance for real happiness against a lot of money. That's the kind of girl you—"

Bill stopped because there wasn't any one listening to him. Sarah had said "Oh!" three times in a row and walked out on him. As she hurried across the street Bill could see that she was crying, but he was much too angry to follow her.

What Bill Carter did next is excusable—unless you want to condemn several million other young men for having done the same thing. He hopped on a down-town bus—he and Sarah had been sitting in Central Park across from the apartment where she lived—and made for a certain place on Forty-Sixth Street where you have to be known to get in. At twelve o'clock that night Bill was telling the driver of New York's last horse cab that he was a failure in life because a girl had broken his heart.

The cabbie drove Bill home and helped him up the steps, chuckling to himself because Bill reminded him of the old days when a fellow could "get a bun on" without wanting to break all the windows on Broadway or fight

with every cop. He liked Bill, just as did every one else.

The next morning Bill went to his office with a head that was heavier than a barrel of water, and a taste in his mouth that made him suspect that the Russian army had marched through it. After he had talked with several customers in the office he called on some others outside and then went to get some lunch.

It was while he was eating luncheon that he began to realize how much Sarah Felton really meant to him. He began to think over the things she had said to him the night before. At first the very thought of her words made him bristle, but after a bit he began to check up the things she had said, and he began to wonder if perhaps they weren't true after all.

The more he thought about it, the more it worried him. That, and Sarah's verbal barrage of the night before, changed his whole life. At least, they started the change that brought it about.

IT came about in this way. A few days later Bill was reading the ticker tape, mechanically calling out sales and thinking about Sarah, when Edgar Jones, the junior member of the firm, came up to him and introduced a bluff, portly man of about fifty.

"This is Mr. Ellington, Bill," Edgar said, and he put a hand on Bill's shoulder. "You'll remember as an old grad, Mr. Ellington, that Bill here, Bill Carter, trimmed the Army and Princeton single-handed a couple of years ago."

Mr. Ellington grunted and ran his gaze over Bill's frame in a way that said: "What of it?"

Bill was annoyed at Edgar, and he showed it.

"Bill will take care of you until Mr. Campbell comes in," Edgar said, and went back into his private office. Bill wished that Fred Campbell would stick around and talk ticker talk to his own customers.

"What do you think of the market this morning, young man?" Mr. Ellington asked.

"Looks strong to me," Bill said. "Specially the motors. It came over a few minutes ago that the Crane and Howard outfits have merged to fight Combined Motors. They're both up three points. And I heard last night that the Appleton people are going to join them. I think Appleton is good for a ten-point rise."

He realized after he had spoken that he shouldn't have put it that way. It wasn't ever safe to tell a customer that you actually thought a stock was good for a certain profit. It was safer to say that, according to reports, or according to the paper value, or according to the influence of something else, it *ought* to be good for a rise. Then if the customer got out with a loss, you could explain that the influence you had hoped for had gone bad. Passing the buck, they call it in the army.

"What's Appleton been doing lately?" Mr. Ellington asked.

"Why—er—" Bill grabbed a stock exchange quotation sheet and read aloud: "Closed last night at 56, opened 55 1-2, high 57, low 55 1-2."

"How has it sold this morning?" Mr. Ellington asked.

"Why—er—" Bill ran the ticker tape that was piled in the basket through his fingers until he came to the initials PR with a 2 and 57 after them. "Here's a sale at 57."

"What has the common stock been paying?" Mr. Ellington wanted to know next.

"Why—er—" Bill grabbed at the stock exchange quotation sheet again.

"You don't seem to know much about a stock you're recommending for a ten-point rise," Mr. Ellington said sourly, as Edgar Jones joined them again.

Bill smiled amiably, but he didn't mean it. He picked up his hat and headed for the door. When he got

out of the building he walked across the street to Trinity churchyard and sat down on a bench. There were a lot of stenographers sitting on benches reading books, and one or two derelicts with dirty faces and stained beards.

Sarah was right, he reflected. He didn't know a darn thing about the business he was in. If one of his customers wanted a report on a stock, he would turn the whole thing over to a statistician who would make up a simple report that even he could understand. He would take the report to Edgar Jones or Mr. Miller, and ask them what they thought about the stock, and then he would quote parrot-like to his customers. Most of his customers didn't want reports, anyway. They played golf with him or went out on a party with him, and the next morning they would drop in or phone him and say, "Buy me a thousand shares of so-and-so," and that was all there was to it. He was just what Sarah had called him—a come-on man, a kind of ballyhoo fellow who got the people into the side-show.

Suddenly he felt sick—so sick that he didn't want any lunch. It was Bill's first good sock on the button, and he didn't know quite how to take it.

What he finally did was to go in an office building to call Sarah on the telephone. He couldn't get any answer, so he called her brother Chet's office.

Chet told him that Sarah had gone up to Canada camping. "She's with the Haydens, Ann Lancaster, Dink Lee, and some other people," Chet said.

At first he was just disappointed because he wanted to talk to Sarah and tell her how he felt about things. Afterward he began to think about the people with her and especially about Dink Lee.

Dink and Sarah's brother Chet had both been in his class up at Yale. And it occurred to Bill that Dink was just

the kind of a fellow Sarah had in mind for a husband. He was serious, he had a definite purpose in life, he was inclined to be bald, and he had a lot of money.

Bill could picture Dink commuting to town in a club car, going back in the evening to a proper suburban home with bushes and things all around it and Sarah inside it. Only there he closed his eyes and shuddered to shut out the vision. He opened them again rather abruptly as he bumped into a stocky stranger.

Bill mumbled an apology and ducked into the building that contained the offices of Miller & Jones. He didn't even stop to consider what he was going to say to Edgar Jones. He just went into his office and said: "You can turn my customers over to any one who can keep them, Edgar. I'm leaving."

"You're what?" Edgar said.

"I'm leaving, quitting."

"Well, now, what the—"

"Nothing," Bill hastened to say.

"It's a good job, plenty of pay, and I like it, but I'm through. I can't tell you just why, because I'm not sure that I know myself."

Edgar got up and stood beside his desk and mopped his face with a handkerchief. He had just been going over some papers that didn't please him at all, and Bill saw that he was going to explode and say a lot of things; so he opened the door and slipped out.

"I'll come in here and get my things in a day or two," he said over his shoulder. But he didn't. He didn't go back to get them for six months.

WHEN he was in his room at the Yale Club he sat down and thought the whole thing out. That evening he moved to a quiet hotel. He sold his car and a few of his personal belongings to straighten things out at the club and to give him something to live on until he landed a job.

Then he began what he considered a systematic campaign to get the job. It consisted of scanning the want ads in all of the papers, and then applying in person or writing a letter. He was determined to get a job without assistance from anybody. He would get it entirely on his own, with a boss who thought an All-American end was something made in the United States to keep books from falling off a table.

But no one seemed to be very much impressed with his business record and capabilities. When he told a prospective boss how much money Miller & Jones had paid him, the prospective boss either looked incredulous or decided that there must be something wrong with him or he wouldn't have quit. They regarded him suspiciously, as though they thought he was some sort of a crook. Once he tried to explain just why he had left. When he had finished his halting explanation the p. b. grinned sardonically and made a few cryptic remarks about love. Bill found himself out on the sidewalk wondering if after all he wasn't a fool.

The way he finally landed a job was funny. He answered an ad in the paper and the firm wrote back telling him that they were sorry, but he failed to come up to their high standard of requirements.

By that time his money was almost gone and his feet hurt most of the time. He was getting desperate, even thinking of going back to Edgar Jones and admitting that he had been crazy.

So he took the letter and went around to call on the people who had written to him. There was something about the letter that gave him encouragement. He figured that if they would take the time to write him a letter, they would give him a chance to say his little piece.

He got the job. They told him that they answered all applicants with a form letter. If any of the applicants had the perseverance to follow up the letter, they must be possessed of the

very thing they wanted. They wanted, they said, men who could take a rebuff and go back for more. They wanted men who could sell.

"I'm your man," Bill said. "What do I sell and when do I start?"

Horace Boswell beamed and pushed a button on his desk.

"You start now," he said, "and you sell the Boswell line—mange cure, worm medicine, and dog biscuits. You get forty dollars a week, your expenses, and a month's trial."

The door opened and a man came in and was introduced to Bill as Mr. Wright, the sales manager.

"Mr. Wright will put you through the usual course of training and give you your territory. I watch all of my young men and I expect results," said Mr. Boswell and he swung around in his chair in a form of dismissal.

Bill followed Mr. Wright into his office where he began a four-day course of study in how to sell the Boswell line. It didn't sound so hot to Bill and the mange cure had a particularly vile smell; but he was game. He went at the work with a determination that startled Mr. Wright and prompted him to tell Mr. Boswell that the new salesman was a go-getter. "He'll get orders," said Mr. Wright.

And Bill did. After his first week out on the road with another salesman he began to send in orders daily. At the end of his first month Mr. Wright wrote him that he had exceeded the largest month on record in his territory and called him in to the home office. There he was given a larger territory that took in some good-sized cities where he sold the Boswell line to distributors.

Some of the smaller towns he covered had terrible hotels and worse food, but after the first couple of weeks he didn't mind so much; he was wrapped up in his job. There was something about it that fascinated him, a kind of thrill that he had never experienced with Miller & Jones. He sat in rail-

road stations and on trains pondering on how to get larger orders. He studied his line, and compared the relative value of Boswell's cures with the other lines on the market. He became convinced that Boswell's was a hundred per cent better than any of them. In other words, he was sold on his job.

THEN he got an idea. He told Mr. Boswell about it when he was called into the office to be put in charge of a crew of three men covering New England.

"If," he said to Mr. Boswell, "our chemists could find some kind of a formula that would mix with our mange cure and not smell so bad and leave the healing qualities intact it would cost but very little more, and we could sell it at twice the price we get for Boswell's Mange Cure."

"If," Mr. Boswell said sadly. "If that could be done I would be many times a millionaire instead of a joke to my wife. She has told me many times that the mange cure business would be all right if I made enough money at it. Otherwise, she says, it is little better than being a stable-hand. I have had a half dozen chemists experiment and have spent a great deal of money, but have never been able to find anything that would neutralize the smell without killing the effect."

"But there must be something," Bill insisted.

"If there is, we haven't been able to find it," Mr. Boswell answered. "And I don't have the money to keep two or three high-priced chemists experimenting. My grandfather founded this business when man was contented to be conveyed from place to place by the thing God intended he should be—a horse. The automobile, and the fact that people live in cities and can't keep dogs, have spoiled our business. Our salvation would be a remedy for human baldness. But I'll be damned if I'll market a quack medicine that would be a disgrace to the Boswell name."

Mr. Boswell's face was flushed. Bill wondered just what Julie was like. Then it came to him that Mr. Boswell had his Julie, and he had Sarah. There wasn't an awful lot of difference in their situations except that probably Julie was fat and forceful while Sarah—Bill sighed. It made him ache to think of her slim, young loveliness.

When he left Mr. Boswell's office he was disappointed, but he wasn't through. He was too young and too eager and too optimistic to take the word of a person who knew the business thoroughly. He, like many another young man before him, could only learn by bitter experience.

Inquiry had revealed that for every bottle of mange cure there were two dozen bottles of human hair tonic sold, and at about twice the price per bottle. He intended asking Mr. Boswell to put him in charge of the marketing of a hair tonic if his idea was good. He had collected a great many figures to give force to his belief that he could put it over. He had even mapped out a sales campaign covering all of the Atlantic seaboard.

So he kept on thinking about it. He bought books about hair dyes and tonics and had two or three tonics analyzed. He got Henley's Book of Recipes, Formulas and Processes from a library and tried innumerable combinations. Nothing came of it, because he was unable to neutralize the unpleasant odor of Boswell's Mange Cure. He became resentful that Mr. Boswell's grandfather had concocted a formula with such a terrible smell. He even tried blending various perfumes with the mange cure. None of them worked. But he kept right on thinking about it. It was always in his mind when Sarah wasn't.

The next time Bill got into New York he was only there for a day and a half. He was hurrying to catch a night train for Buffalo when he ran into Chet Felton. They shook hands and Bill asked about Sarah, quite fail-

ing in his attempt to be offhand. Chet grinned and said: "She was asking about you the other day in a letter. She said she would like to have your address if I ever ran into you."

Bill gulped and said: "Suppose you give me her address and I'll drop her a note. I'm on the road most of the time and she might not reach me."

"She'll be at Presswick, the Lancasters' place up at Lake Simcoe, for the next couple of weeks," Chet said. "It's about forty or fifty miles out of Toronto. They all motored down and dropped her there for a visit with Ann Lancaster. Lemme see." Chet dug in his pocket for a letter and Bill copied her address.

Then he had to run for his train. It wasn't a very long run, but when he sat down in his chair he was awfully hot. But he was smiling. He didn't come out of his trance until the train had stopped at Harmon.

At first he kept thinking over and over that Sarah had wanted his address. Then he began to wonder what else she had said. Was that all? He wondered what Chet's sly little grin meant. It could mean that Chet knew she liked him, or that he knew she couldn't stand him. But since she wanted his address, it *must* mean that she liked him—unless, of course, she only wanted to tell him again that he was a dud.

WHEN he had finished his morning's work in Buffalo Saturday he picked up a time-table in the hotel to see just how far it was to Toronto. He hadn't even a thought of going there. Then he told himself that it was a fool idea.

He got a late afternoon train that landed him in Toronto a few hours later. There he went to the King George Hotel and tried to get the Lancaster place on the telephone. Having no success, he arranged to rent an automobile. It wouldn't cost him very much more than half a week's pay.

It was a lovely Sunday morning, just the right kind of a day, when Bill took the wheel of the McLaughlin roadster he had rented. He listened carefully to the directions the garage attendant gave him and promptly forgot them. When finally he got on the concrete road leading into Newmarket he was singing at the top of his voice.

He passed a slow-moving car full of French-Canadians, who stared, then laughed in high glee at him. He stuck a hand up over the back of the car and waved at them; then sang again.

It was eleven o'clock when he turned into the blue stone drive that led to the Lancaster's house. There was no one in sight. He crossed the porch and banged on the front door. Receiving no answer he went around to the side and knocked again. He alternated between the two doors for ten minutes, and still there was no sign of life from within.

Finally he cut around to the back of the house. There, seated cross-legged on the lawn near the edge of the lake, was a Chinaman. Something turned over in Bill's heart as he knew that Sarah wasn't there. Almost he turned and climbed back into the roadster. But he didn't; and he was glad, later on.

He walked across the lawn and called: "Hello. Anybody home?"

Turning, the Chinaman answered: "Allee gone but Ah Low. Me cook." Full lips spread wide over gleaming teeth in a cheerful smile.

"Be back soon?" Bill asked.

"Go long Georgie Bay. Mebbe now, mebbe to-morrow."

"Hell!" said Bill candidly.

"Allee same," said Ah Low, adding, "tloo bad."

Bill stood silent for a moment.

"Tell them—tell Miss—tell them," he said, "that Bill Carter was here, please."

"Allee same," said Ah Low.

"Nice place here," Bill said, looking out over the lake.

"Nice for Chinaboy," said Ah Low,

8 A

"Fish?" asked Bill, pointing to the lake.

"Mebbe," said Ah Low.

Bill sat down beside Ah Low, gave him a cigarette, and told him two stories that brought cackling laughs of approval. After awhile Ah Low said: "Mebbe you like food, heh?"

"I could bite a lion in the mouth I'm so hungry," Bill admitted.

Ah Low chuckled, got to his feet and started a shuffling across the lawn with Bill beside him.

When they got in the house Ah Low disappeared for a matter of twenty minutes. Then he called Bill into the dining room. On a table was a variety of foods that would have done credit to a Paris chef.

"You eat, heh?" Ah Low said.

"Eat is right!" Bill answered, and he did so, with Ah Low hovering about to be sure there was nothing lacking.

It was while Bill was eating a large piece of deep dish apple pie with a sliver of fresh cheese that he began to study Ah Low. It was the first time in years that he had seen a Chinaman in the costume of his native land. And while he studied him, meanwhile regretting his inability to finish the apple pie, he noticed that his queue was braided and wound about the top of his head.

"How come you keep your long queue, Ah Low?" Bill asked.

"Ah Low keep old-time customs. No likee new China fashions," he beamed.

"You have a lot of it. Doesn't it ever fall out?" Bill asked.

"No fall out. Me lub plenty with lotion."

"Yeah?" Bill said casually, but his eyes suddenly brightened.

"Allee same," said Ah Low.

"What kind of a lotion?" Bill asked.

"Allee time for hair," said Ah Low.

"Like allee same family medicine. Makee hair glow."

"Humph!" said Bill.

"Allee same," said Ah Low.

Bill pointed to his forehead where the hair had just begun to recede.

"Will it make hair grow there?" he asked.

"Allee same if lub," said Ah Low. "Gleat glandfather, live in China. Hair go 'way. He lub." Here Ah Low indicated how his grandfather had rubbed. "Allee same come back."

"Is that so?" said Bill.

"Allee same," said Ah Low.

"Got any of it around now?" Bill asked.

IN answer Ah Low disappeared. When he came back he had a small brown bottle. Bill took the bottle and sniffed. Then he sniffed again and tried to hide his excitement.

A few minutes later he was sitting beside Ah Low on a couch; and Bill Carter was selling as he had never sold before.

And when he drove out of the Lancaster driveway late in the afternoon he was bubbling over with suppressed excitement. A mile down the road he took a paper from his pocket and read it carefully. Then he startled three old ladies by whooping at the top of his voice. He made the King George in Toronto in an hour and a half, and took the night train to New York.

In the morning instead of reporting to his office he got in touch with Leslie Clyde, head chemist for a concern who analyzed everything from rolled oats to fire clay. Together they went over the ingredients contained in Boswell's Mange Cure, and the things that went to make up Ah Low's ancestral hair tonic. For two days and nights they made laboratory experiments; and finally they discovered that by mixing a little over two-thirds of Ah Low's tonic with one part Boswell's Mange Cure, and adding an inexpensive alkalioid they had a mixture that was both fragrant and soothing, and in which the various oils blended perfectly.

The only thing that was in doubt in Bill's mind was whether or not it

would pass muster with old man Boswell after experiments. Leslie Clyde was certain that it would, so they used up another day filing the necessary papers to patent the formula.

When Bill reported to Mr. Boswell the next day he found him in an irritable mood.

"You've been out for a week," said Mr. Boswell, "and we haven't had even a telegram from you. We wired you twice and wrote you three letters to tell you that we have decided to drop prices on all of our products." Bill ignored the reference to his silence, and began to argue with Mr. Boswell about the other's announcement.

"If you're going to do anything you ought to raise your prices," Bill said. "The best way to let your competitors know that you're licked, and to give them a good talking point, is to drop your prices. When you cut prices people get suspicious and want to know what's the matter with your stuff. Why, in the department stores, any time they can't move an article at one dollar, they jump the price to one dollar and ninety-eight cents, and people break arms and legs trying to buy it. When I was on Wall Street, if we had a block of stock we couldn't move at one hundred we would jump the price to one ten, and people would wire in their orders to be in on the rise."

Bill was getting mad. Just when he had something worth while, old man Boswell was losing his nerve. Bill concluded firmly:

"If you cut a single price, I'm through!"

Mr. Boswell swelled up like a toad. He stuttered and choked and glared. After a moment he managed to say: "Well, what in hell's holding you? You're not so good that we can't get along without you. I've been running this business all my life without you!"

"And how?" Bill interrupted. "Now look here, Mr. Boswell: I came here in perfectly good faith, and I've worked hard, and I've sold mange cure.

I repeat that if you drop prices I'll get out. But you are *not* going to drop prices!"

"Well, of all the downright impudence—"

"No, it isn't," Bill interrupted again. He was calm now, because of the bottle he had in his bag. He drew it forth.

"And here's why," he said. He pulled the cork and stuck the bottle under Mr. Boswell's nose. Mr. Boswell sniffed. He looked at Bill and sniffed again. Then he took the bottle and poured a little into the palm of his hand.

"Now what the hell is that?" Mr. Boswell asked.

"That," said Bill, "is the baby of the Boswell line. It will grow hair on the proverbial billiard ball, in case you want hair on your billiard balls. It is the formula you have been trying to find. In other words, it's Mrs. Boswell's million dollars."

Then Bill knew he had him. He pushed Mr. Boswell into a chair and talked as he had never talked before. He told Mr. Boswell all about the formula, where it came from, and how they could market it. He finished up by telling Mr. Boswell that he would take charge of all sales in the future, would only ask a small royalty on each bottle at the start—a percentage to go to Ah Low—and would not ask for a partnership until the new tonic was over the hill and a proved success.

"And what do I get out of this?" Mr. Boswell asked.

"Me," Bill smiled.

All of which was fresh, but it wasn't offensive because Bill still had that charm that earned him money before he started to work for it.

WHEN he left the office three hours later he was the new salesmanager and it looked as if there was nothing ahead of him but a rosy future.

And then, of course, he began to think about Sarah. Not that he hadn't

been thinking about her whenever he had the time in the past few days. In fact, Leslie Clyde had said during the second sleepless night in the laboratory: "If you would stop standing around looking off into the great open spaces, perhaps we could get this damn stuff to mix."

And now that he had done something on his own, with his own little hatchet, as he put it, he wasn't any closer to having the reward and reason for his acts than he had been before. He began to worry over Chet's remarks about Sarah and the house party; and decided to hurry to the Yale Club and check up.

When he got there he was amazed that there was so little change in the course of a few months; just about the same crowd of fellows hanging around talking football and what-not in just the same way they had always done. They all pounced on him and asked him where the devil he had been hiding and gave him a half dozen invitations to parties within fifteen minutes.

He got into a violent argument with Pinky Store about the way the coach was playing the ends on defense, and forgot about everything else. That is, he forgot about everything until he saw a half dozen fellows standing around Dink Lee, shaking his hand and making laughing remarks while Dink grinned and beamed.

Pinky stopped talking and followed Bill's gaze and said impatiently: "Dink's engaged and you'd think he was going to marry a queen or something instead of a girl, the fuss he's making." Dismissing that, he went on: "But you can't tell me that an end can play wide—"

He stopped when Bill abruptly deserted him. Pinky saw that he was quite white and started to follow him. Then he remembered the way Bill had disappeared a few months before. Perhaps old Bill was going a little crazy. Meantime Bill disappeared into a telephone booth.

Bill leaned against the back of the booth. He was so heartsick that he was sick and weak all over. There couldn't be any doubt about to whom Dink was engaged. Nobody could take a motor trip with Sarah and not come back engaged to her if she was willing, he told himself. And there hadn't been any one else with them except Ann Lancaster and—

Bill wiped his hand across his eyes and pushed open the door of the booth with a bang. It was the old story of the drowning man grasping at the straw. It *might* be Ann, just possibly. He looked wildly around for Dink. He saw him, just about to cross the street in front of the club; and rushed out after him.

When Bill reached the street Dink was disappearing into the Grand Central Station. Bill shouted at him and started across the street on a run. He had to know! It wasn't possible to go for another half hour without knowing.

And then something hit him. He didn't even see it. He found out later that if he hadn't been so adept at open field running he would have been hit two or three times before.

When he woke up he was lying in bed, and his right side hurt; and a funny-faced nurse was pushing a thermometer into his mouth and asking him questions. When she took it out, he said: "I was taught not to talk with my mouth full, and, anyway, it's my turn to ask questions. What the devil am I here for, and is it the prison ward?"

She laughed and shook her head. "You must be quiet. You were struck by a taxicab and it broke three of your ribs and lacerated your scalp."

Bill put his hand to his head and asked politely: "Recently?"

"Yesterday afternoon," she said.

Bill was silent for a moment because his head and back and side and the rest of him ached. Then he said: "Well,

let's start at the beginning. Once upon a time there was a good pedestrian and a bad taxicab and—"

"Sh—" the nurse said and turned to the door as another nurse came in. She walked over and they whispered for a moment and looked at Bill.

"Come out of the huddle and let me in on it," he said.

His own nurse hesitated and then she said: "Miss Felton is calling on you. Do you want to see her?"

Bill tried to sit up. Both nurses rushed at him and made him promise to lie absolutely still if they would bring her in.

The next thing he knew Sarah was holding his hand and Bill was trying to keep from passing out from sheer happiness.

"I," he said, "was trying to catch Dink Lee to ask him if he was engaged to you when this happened. I think I was also going to give him a smack on the nose if he told me yes. I guess a taxi driver thought it was a free-for-all game of tag, and he tagged me, plenty!"

"You silly," Sarah said. "I'm not engaged to any one but you. I have been ever since that night in the park. I couldn't ever be so mad at any one I wasn't engaged to."

"Then you're going to marry me in spite of what I am?"

"I'm going to marry you in spite of anything, even you," she said.

Then he told her all about his new job and what he had done. When he had finished, she was crying, and he said:

"That's a fine way to act when I tell you I'm not going to be a dud."

"I knew all the time you wouldn't be," she wept. "I told you all those things to wake you up."

"You did," Bill said grimly, "and now you've got to suffer for it. Instead of being the wife of a banker you're going to be the wife of a big hair and tonic man."

THE END.



"You would, would you!" he said between his teeth

The Black Ace

Threatened with murder at the hands of Touchon's agents, Madame Storey makes a last desperate effort to outmaneuver the fiendish psychologist

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Murder at Fernhurst," "It Never Got Into the Papers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

MME. STOREY, the famous criminologist, is retained to put the clever charlatan, Dr. Jacques Touchon, behind prison bars. He pretends to be a "psychosynthesist," or soul-builder, inveigling wealthy women into confiding their secrets to him; then he has a confederate blackmail them.

Mme. Storey meets Touchon, who pretends to make love to her, although he knows she is investigating him; for he thinks himself cleverer than she, and enjoys the deadly game.

She hires Basil Thorne, an actor, who finds Francis Fay, Touchon's con-

federate, and scares him into making an appointment with Mme. Storey. But Touchon somehow learns of it, and appears just ahead of Fay. He, Mme. Storey, and Bella Brickley, her secretary—who is telling the story—are in the office when Fay appears. From behind a tapestry some one cries, "Judas!" and shoots Fay. Touchon, playing protector, kills the assassin.

The man is identified as Arthur Sims, "Blondy," an accountant. His buddy, Jack Coler, or "Scarface," disappears. Mme. Storey's agent Crider traces him, keeping him from shooting

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Touchon as the killer of his pal Blondy—for they did not know that their colleague Fay was working for Touchon. Crider also learns that Scarface runs the Cobra Club, a place where "associate members"—wealthy thrill hunters—can mix with "regular members," gangsters.

Meantime Touchon, working through Inspector Creery, stupid political appointee, who is jealous of Mme. Storey, frames up a "confession" by Barney Craigin, convicted murderer, that he had paid Fay to have Blondy to kill Mme. Storey, and that Blondy, double crossed, was about to kill both Fay and her when Touchon interfered. She cannot get Craigin to retract, although she traces his wife to a new home, where she is displaying considerable money.

Touchon, who has discredited Mme. Storey as an investigator and covered his own crimes, now retires from practice, burns all his records before her eyes—and has the audacity to propose to her. She guesses his next move, and frustrates his attempt to kill Scarface, his sole link with the past.

Although Touchon immediately surrounds her with private detectives, she arranges a secret exit from the Sixty-Second Street house which backs up to her Sixty-Third Street home.

She tricks Touchon into telephoning, and has the conversation overheard by Mr. Greenlees, chief clerk in the office where Blondy and Scarface worked; and he identifies the voice as one which called Blondy the day of the shooting.

She and Bella bob and dye their hair, having wigs made for their natural selves; and, masquerading as the wealthy young Inez Van Benthuisen, she, with Bella and Basil Thorne, get themselves taken into the Cobra Club. She meets Scarface, who is a handsome, tigerish youth, and at once there is an intense battle of wills, Mme. Storey convincing him that she likes him, but will not let him make advances.

To carry out her masquerade, she asks her "father," Van Benthuisen, to invite several of the gangsters, and he, liking Mme. Storey and enjoying the novelty of it, does so.

Scarface, by now, half realizes that he is in love with "Inez"—and begs her not to come to the Cobra Club again; he does not dare to see her any more, for he realizes he cannot be just a pal. She, by this time, has grown to like the handsome and candid young Lucifer so much that she tries to prevent him from doing just what she had wanted to do at first—to confide in her; but he insists on talking. He confirms all her suspicions—that he had given fifty thousand dollars to Mrs. Craigin to purchase the doomed man's "confession," and also that he does not know his employer—Mr. "Caspar"—is really Dr. Touchon. Caspar has forbidden him to kill Touchon until after the Storey case is wound up—and Scarface admits that if his boss does not remove the menace of Mme. Storey, he will order Scarface to do it.

Mme. Storey feels that she cannot honorably use Scarface's confession. When she returns home, the case is suddenly brought to a crisis—for Touchon appears, having learned that she was outsomewhere the night before. He demands that she come with him on a yacht he is going to charter; and she refuses, outfacing him in spite of his full use of his hypnotic eyes. The minute he leaves the house, she calls Scarface, and makes an appointment to meet him at the Cobra Club about six that evening.

CHAPTER XXX.

PLANNING MURDER.

SOON after Mme. Storey had talked to Scarface on the telephone we closed up the office and took a taxi to her house. Our fat spy followed close in another cab. How

sick we were of seeing his stupid red face! I expressed myself on the subject with some heat, but Mme. Storey only smiled unconcernedly.

"As long as we can see him, we know where he is," she said.

At her house we gathered together in little bags everything necessary for our make-up in the parts of Inez and Emily, and issued forth again, this time on foot. Our spy followed us west through Sixty-Third Street in his taxi, driven at a snail's pace. There was not another person in sight in those quiet blocks.

At the Park Avenue corner there was a handsome traffic policeman who was an old acquaintance of Mme. Storey's. She beckoned him to the sidewalk. Like every other normal man, he was not proof against that radiant smile. The cab had stopped about fifty yards behind us, waiting to see which way we would turn.

"Mr. McGuire," said Mme. Storey, "there is a man in that taxicab who is following me. It is rather annoying."

"I'll soon settle him!" said McGuire, taking a long stride in the direction of the cab. We followed.

Our fat friend tumbled out of the cab and started running pell-mell down the street. He was not built on racing lines. It was too comical a sight, and all three of us burst out laughing. McGuire was taking after him, but Mme. Storey said:

"Let him go. He is not worth leaving your post for."

The taxi driver, pale with anxiety, awaited the policeman. In response to McGuire's questions he protested that his fare had picked him up in the ordinary way, and that he knew nothing about him or his business.

"I think you're lying," said McGuire, grimly.

"Oh, perhaps he is telling the truth," said Mme. Storey serenely. "As long as his fare has run away, I will engage him." She climbed in. "Take

me to the Grand Central Station, driver." She leaned forward with a parting smile. "Thank you very much, Mr. McGuire."

We left the handsome blue-coat chuckling delightedly on the curb. I was laughing too. It was so neat and simple a trick to run poor flatfoot away, and then commandeer his cab. The chauffeur would tell him later where he had driven us, but that would do him no good. From the Grand Central you can go anywhere.

We took the shuttle train on the subway over to Times Square, and from there drove to the Madagascar Hotel, where we engaged a room. We dressed and made up at our leisure, and when the time came left the hotel by a side door, and had ourselves driven down to the neighborhood of Delancey Street.

By this time it was dark. Chiglick was waiting for us in the lobby of the theater, and steered us as usual into the clubhouse. As we passed through the lower hall, Mme. Storey called my attention, with a glance, to the unattended telephone switchboard, and I began to perceive her plan.

It was the custom at the Cobra Club for the staff to dine shortly before the place opened for business at seven o'clock, consequently we found them eating. Scarface, Maud Heddle, Monk, Cora, and others were seated about a big table, while the various attendants and lesser fry were at other tables down the room. Mme. Storey surveyed them with a glint of satisfaction in her eye. Every person in the clubhouse was accounted for except the guard at the gate in the back yard and the cooks in the kitchen. There were several waiters moving about in attendance on the tables, but they did not use the main stairway; they had a service stair at the back of the building.

Scarface leaped up with lighted eyes when Inez appeared. The poor lad was further gone than he realized. Curiously enough, Maud Heddle no longer

seemed to be jealous. Being at ease in her mind respecting Inez's intentions toward her young man, I suppose she thought his romantic attachment would do him no harm. We were invited to partake of their meal, but Inez did not wish to become tied up in that manner. She declined, saying:

"Emily and I can only stay a few minutes."

SCARFACE led her to a small table near by where they could talk in private. Cocktails were brought them. I sat down with the others, consequently I could not hear what was said at the little table. However, I knew the line that Inez meant to take. She was making believe that Scarface's disclosure of his murderous intentions toward Mme. Storey had kept her awake all night, and that she felt it her duty as a friend to remonstrate with him. It was only an excuse, of course. She had no expectation of diverting him from his aim. Scarface had gone too far to draw back now. Loyalty to his "boss" was a kind of fetich with him.

There was a rattle of talk at my table, Cora and Monk bickering as usual, and Chiglick confiding the details of some outrageous crime to me out of the mouth corner that was nearest my ear. But I had little heart to listen to any of that. I was sitting at the side of the big table, and I could watch Scarface. The changing expression of his handsome face was eloquent of what was going on at that table; his hungry gaze at Inez; his sullenness and the obstinate shaking of his head. Once I heard him say with a kind of hard despair:

"This does no good. I can't lead your life. We've got to cut it out."

Across the room near the head of the stairs there was a telephone booth. While the staff were at dinner it was connected with the exchange through the switchboard in the hall below. The door of the booth stood open.

When we had been in the place for ten minutes or so the bell rang. The sound caused my heart to beat fast. Scarface immediately got up.

"That will be for me," he said. "The boss always calls up at this hour. Wait for me."

But Inez rose too. "You will be talking some time," she said; "and Emily and I really must go."

His face fell. For the moment he forgot all about his telephone call. "But I'll see you again?" he said breathlessly.

"I'll call you up to-morrow," said Inez. "We'll talk about it then."

He went into the telephone booth while Inez and I said good-by to the others. Chiglick got up to accompany us—none too willingly, because his dinner had just been brought.

"Oh, that isn't necessary," said Inez. "Fritz is in the yard to open the gate for us, and all we have to do in the alley is to open the door into the restaurant and walk in."

So Chiglick, relieved, sat down to his dinner, and Inez and I went downstairs alone. At the foot she whispered:

"Listen in at the switchboard. I'll go back and keep them engaged with some excuse. If you hear me laugh, leave the board quickly."

By this time my heart was beating like a trip-hammer, and my hands were trembling so that I could scarcely pick up the headpiece. I could not slip it over my head, because of the necessity of keeping one ear open for a possible signal from my mistress. I held one of the receivers to my ear and let the other hang. When I heard Touchon's voice over the wire it turned me a little giddy. Fortunately there was a pad and pencil lying on the switchboard, and I automatically started to take down what I heard. The familiar act of writing shorthand steadied my nerves.

When I started to take down my notes Touchon was saying:

"No. — East Sixty-Third Street. It's an old high stoop dwelling that has been altered into an English basement, and converted into two duplex apartments. Our friend occupies the two lower floors."

"I get you," said Scarface.

"There's only the one entrance," Touchon went on, "and I have a key to it. I will mail it to you to-night to the address you know of, together with floor plans. The party must be pulled off on Monday night. That will give you forty-eight hours to get ready for it. On that night our friend and her secretary are attending the Franklin Theater to see the first performance of 'What's in a Name?' They will get home about eleven fifteen, or later if they go to supper." Touchon hesitated. "Er—there's a tocsin in the hall just inside the entrance door," he added.

He was referring to our burglar alarm, of course. Scarface got it, for I heard a dry chuckle from his end of the wire."

"It is turned on every night after all are in the house," Touchon went on, "so you must pay your call before that. I recommend the hour of half past ten. The servants will then be in bed. Their rooms are on the top floor, three flights up, so they will not interfere with your *tête-à-tête* with the lady. You can make yourself comfortable in the house until they get home. I'm sure I need say no more. The secretary sleeps on a cot bed in our friend's room. All this will be shown on the plan. You will be leaving them both a little gift."

Touchon spoke this last sentence in a purr of infinite evil suggestiveness, and a strong shudder went through my frame. I was listening to the plotting of my own murder!

A SILENCE followed, then Touchon asked sharply: "Do you get me?"

"Sure, I get you perfectly," answered Scarface in a drawling voice.

"Well, then?"

"I'm sorry, boss," drawled Scarface, "but I can't attend this party. It would have to be pulled off in some other style."

At hearing this my heart leaped with pleasure. So after all Scarface had a good heart, or else it had been softened by his passion for Inez. However, my pleasure was not long-lived, as you will see.

"I am the one to decide how it shall be pulled off," said Touchon angrily. "What's the matter with you? Have you lost your nerve?"

"I reckon not," drawled Scarface.

"Maybe your feelings have changed toward our friend?"

"Not at all," said Scarface coolly, "she's just as much my friend as ever she was, and you know how much that is. I think she ought to get just what you propose to hand her! But this kind of bedroom party don't suit my style, that's all. I know what I can do. I couldn't carry this thing through—er—*à la sang-froid*, as the French would say." I supposed that he meant "in cold blood."

"You've got to do it," said Touchon haughtily.

There was a brief silence, then Scarface's voice came over the wire hard as flint, yet with a regretful sound in it: "Boss, you've been a good friend to me and I hate to say this. You've never taken that tone to me, and it don't go down, see? The only answer to that is, I'm damned if I will!"

There was a longer silence here. I could picture Touchon struggling with his rage, and Scarface coolly standing by his guns. Truly, the irresistible Touchon was coming up against a series of immovable objects to-day; one could almost have felt sorry for him. Finally the purring voice sounded over the wire again, and I knew that he had backed down—as of course he had to.

"Well, can you get somebody to take your place at the party?"

"Sure!" said Scarface cheerfully—it was like a dash of cold water on me. "There's a fellow in my crowd down here. The coolest hand in New York. Just the man!" (I knew by intuition that he was referring to Chiglick). "He gets five hundred dollars for an engagement, a thousand for two of course."

"Very well," said Touchon coolly; "I will send you the money with the other things. Pay him twenty per cent in advance, and the balance afterward. But do not meet him afterward, of course. We will soon know from outside sources if he has given an artistic performance. Arrange with him in advance some place where you can send the balance of his pay. See that he is carefully instructed in his part. It is nothing to me, of course, if anything in the house sticks to his fingers, but you had better warn him if it does, he will only be putting a rope around his neck—and perhaps yours, too."

"I will take care of that," said Scarface dryly.

"This show is bound to create quite a furor in town," Touchon went on. I could fairly see the cruel grin on his face. "I know you would hate to be let in for anything of that sort, and I suggest that you take a trip to Venezuela to attend to some business for me until the applause dies down."

"Suits me," said Scarface.

"We will have to have a meeting before you go," said Touchon, "so that I can instruct you in what you have to do down there, and turn over the necessary capital to you. Suppose you meet me at two o'clock Monday night—or to be exact, Tuesday morning. By that time we will know if your friend's show has got over—I admit the possibility of a doubt to you of course, but you must take the line with him that *he cannot fail!*" There was an ugly suggestion in Touchon's manner of saying this. "You and I know," he coolly concluded, "that we cannot let him fail and get away with it."

"I get you," said Scarface grimly.

"Very well," said Touchon; "meet me at—"

AT this moment I heard Inez's silvery laugh overhead. I hastily put down the headpiece and lifted the switch. Squeezing up my notes in my hand, I made my way to the foot of the stairs, composing my face as best I could. I was already standing there, looking up impatiently, when Inez and Monk appeared at the top.

"Did you think I was lost, Emily?" she asked gayly.

"Well, I wondered," I said.

"I forgot to tell the crowd," she said, "that dad wanted a group picture as a souvenir of the party last night, and we were discussing where we would have it taken. Monk has finished eating," she went on. "He is going to see us through the alley."

She kept up a rattle of talk with him in order to distract his attention from my strained face.

When we were safe in a taxi she asked eagerly: "Did you get the essential part of it? I gave you as much time as I dared."

"Oh, Heavens, yes!" I stuttered, beginning to tremble at the mere recollection.

She put her hand over mine, and I told her what I had heard. She listened with a smile, and a hard bright light in her eyes.

"Just at the moment when Touchon was making an appointment to meet Scarface," I concluded, "you gave me the signal."

"That doesn't signify," she said coolly. "If Scarface ever goes to that rendezvous it will mean that we have failed."

"It's all a blind any way," I said. "I mean the part about sending Scarface to Venezuela. Touchon's voice was simply purring with falsity then. If Scarface does go to keep that appointment he will never leave the spot alive."

"Of course not," said Mme. Storey, thinking about something else. Her mind was already leaping ahead to checkmate Touchon.

"How on earth could Touchon have got a key to our house?" I said.

"That's easy," she returned. "How often have I handed him the key at night to open the door for us! Perfectly simple for him to palm a piece of wax and take an impression."

"Then why did you let him have the key?" I said, aggrieved.

"He held out his hand for it," she said with a shrug. "To have refused so natural an act would instantly have aroused his suspicions. One can always change the lock on one's door."

"Then change it at once!" I begged her. "To-night, before we go to bed."

But she shook her head, smiling. "It is essential that Chiglick, if it is to be Chiglick, should get in on Monday night when he tries his key."

I groaned.

"But why not have a couple of men waiting inside to entertain him?" she said consolingly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PISTOL PRACTICE.

ON the following afternoon, Sunday, Mme. Storey called up Scarface at the club. The moment he heard her voice over the wire, he said:

"I must see you again!"

"Now who's taking water?" said the supposed Inez teasingly.

"I can't help it," he said. "This is really the last time. I'm leaving the country."

"Oh!" she said with a drop in her voice. She gave his hungry heart at least that crumb of comfort. "Shall I come down there?" she asked.

"No," he said sullenly. "The fact is, the gang down here has heard me swear off seeing you any more, and I'm ashamed to have them know how weak

I am. Let me meet you somewhere else. By daylight," he added wistfully. "I have never seen you by daylight."

This was not exactly to be desired. "I'm afraid that can't be managed to-day," she said. "I have some people coming here to tea, and they are certain to stay until dark. If you are going to stay around the club, I'll call you up at the moment they go, and you can come up here."

"I have to be in the club at six-thirty to receive a telephone call," he said.

"Well, why not come up here as soon as you have finished talking? I can't ask you to dinner to-night, because we are going out. But I could talk to you between seven and half-past. The only difficulty is, dad would expect Emily to be present at our talk. He considers you rather dangerous to daughters."

"He needn't be afraid," said Scarface gloomily. "You are safe from me. I can put up with Emily if I have to; I'll come."

"All right. But wait until you get another call from me."

We then called up Mr. Van Benthuisen, who very willingly consented to have Inez receive Scarface in his house as planned.

Just as we were setting out from the house Mme. Storey dropped a neat little .32 automatic of blued steel in her hand bag. I had seen her load it carefully with three blanks and two loaded shells, but she did not then tell me what it was to be used for. Outside we found that our fat spy had given place to-day to one of a saturnine complexion, a more resolute-looking customer. However, we succeeded in shaking him in the subway by darting across the crowded platform of Grand Central from one train to another. We then proceeded to the Madagascar where we had kept our room, suspecting that we would need it again to-day. There we changed our make-up and our clothes, and taxied to the Benthuisen mansion.

Mr. Van Benthuisen introduced us to Mrs. Endicott, his housekeeper, a discreet woman who was to be taken into the secret. As we were talking together in the hall, Mme. Storey said, without thinking of the effect it would create:

"Is there any place in the house where I could shoot off a pistol without doing any damage?"

The multi-millionaire's vast body heaved in a series of silent chuckles. "God bless my soul!" he said in pretended dismay. "What next!" He turned to the horrified housekeeper with an innocent air. "Mrs. Endicott, is there any place where she can indulge in a little target practice?"

"Well, there's—there's the cellar," stammered the housekeeper.

"Show her the way to it," said Mr. Van Benthuisen. As we walked away he called after us: "I beg of you to spare my boiler. That's all."

It appeared that the engineer would be off duty during the time Scarface was in the house, and there would be no one in the cellar. When we returned upstairs Mme. Storey suggested that if Mr. Van Benthuisen and the housekeeper heard the shots, it would be quite in keeping for them to rush to the spot to inquire.

SCARFACE came. He and Inez sat on a *vis-à-vis* in one of the vast drawing-rooms, while I made believe to busy myself with a book near by. I read the same lines over and over without the slightest comprehension of the sense. Scarface showed no trace of awkwardness in his magnificent surroundings. I wondered what his beginnings had been. We never knew. He was gazing at Inez as if he could devour her, but she avoided meeting his glance.

"I'm leaving the country to-morrow night," he said harshly. "I don't know for how long. At any rate I'll never see you again. I'll manage to cure myself when I'm away."

"Need you curse me as you go?" she murmured.

"Oh, it's not your fault, of course," he said, looking away. "But you've done things to me. I can't help resenting it."

"You'll get over it," said Inez.

"Sure I will," he said bitterly; "but it don't help any to be told that now."

There was a silence.

"There's one thing I want to tell you," he went on in his harsh, downright voice. He spoke low, but in the stillness of the big room I could hear every word. "I'm not going to harm that woman we were talking about."

"I'm glad of that," murmured Inez.

"Not that it matters really," he said with a scornful lip, "because if she is put out I shall certainly be privy to it. But I don't mean to do it myself, if that is any good to you."

"It is, rather." She was silent a moment, looking down at her hands. "I've changed my mind about those things," she presently went on. "It was a mistake for me to try to interfere in your life. Each one of us has to dree his own weird. You had a better notion. You never tried to influence me. The thing we've all got to do is to hew straight to our own line."

"I suppose so," said Scarface indifferently. "Not much use talking about it."

"The only thing I dislike," said Inez, "is to see you working for hire." I perceived that she had some special reason for saying this.

"Oh, that's what we all have to do, one way or another," said Scarface, shrugging.

"Not all," she said. "A few men run their own show. You are strong enough."

The suggestion made him uneasy. "Well, my boss and I will soon be through with each other," he said, seeking to turn it off.

"Are you going to see Touchon before you leave?" asked Inez unexpectedly. So that was what she was after!

Scarface scowled blackly. "No," he said sullenly. "The boss told me to leave him alone until we had concluded our business."

"Always the boss!" said Inez with delicate scorn. "The other was your own private affair. If you are going away for an indefinite time your resolution will gradually weaken. You'll end by submitting to the injury."

"Are you urging me to get Touchon?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes," she said boldly. "You owe it to yourself! Besides, Touchon richly deserves it. I've been learning something about him. He preys upon women under pretense of treating them with his psychosynthesis. He blackmails them."

"I knew nothing about that," said Scarface indifferently. Touchon's sins against others left him cold.

"Well, it's true," said Inez. "A friend of mine is among his victims. She doesn't know that she is being fleeced, poor thing." She cunningly flicked on his sore place. "You haven't spoken of your pal lately. That was such an appealing nickname that he had. 'Blondy.'"

Scarface rose abruptly and walked away. "Please cut that out!" he said.

"Nobody but a nice lad would ever be called that," murmured Inez.

He faced around. "What are you trying to do," he said, "drive me wild?"

She shrugged.

His mood changed abruptly. He came to a stand, staring at the rug under his feet. "I might do it yet!" he muttered. "After midnight tomorrow I'll be released from my promise. If I could reach him at that hour!"

"That ought not to be difficult for one like you," she said.

HE returned to her. "Who is this friend of yours who knows Touchon?" he demanded.

"Mrs. George J. Julian," said Inez. "I expect you have heard of her."

"Oh, her name is in the papers often enough. Is she familiar with his place?"

"She ought to be. She goes there nearly every day."

"Do you think you could get from her without her guessing what it was to be used for, a rough plan of his place, to give me an idea how to get in; how to get around inside; how to get out again?"

A hint of demureness appeared in Inez's smile. She had hooked her fish! "I'm sure I could get it for you," she answered quickly. "I'll undertake to have it in your hands some time tomorrow."

"And perhaps you can find out at the same time what Touchon's movements will be tomorrow night," said Scarface. "That would be a help."

"I'll try to find that out, too."

Scarface sat down facing her again. There was a bright, savage light in his eyes now—the same look that had been there the first time I saw him. "I could go away almost happily if that was done!" he said.

"Have you the wherewithal for the—job?" asked Inez.

"Sure!" he said with the utmost coolness. "I am never without that." From his hip pocket he fished out an ugly gleaming .38 automatic.

"It's too big," said Inez as cool as he. "A sharp eye could detect that in your pocket."

"So much the better," retorted Scarface with his hard smile. "It will make the owner of the eye more polite. In the final outcome it's my best friend," he went on, regarding it with a kind of derisive affection. "It will not fail me. It will be the last thing on earth that I look at!"

As the implications of this speech stole upon me, all the blood around my heart seemed to turn cold. He was so handsome, so quick with life!

Inez changed color, too, and a sharp little cry of pain was forced from her. "Oh!" She quickly recovered herself.

"Many people must know that gun," she said.

"I reckon so," said Scarface carelessly. "I don't make any effort to conceal it."

"It is dangerous," she said earnestly. "With this new science—what do they call it—ballistics?—they can trace the bullet right back to the gun that fired it. Swap with me," she said persuasively.

Scarface laughed outright. "Well! That's the first time a woman ever asked me that!" He shook his head. "I wouldn't feel at home with a new gun."

"But you can try it out first," she said eagerly. "Please swap with me. If I'm not going to see you any more I'd love to have something of yours to keep."

Scarface's eyes brooded on her burningly.

"Huh!" he said, with tormented, curling lip. "That would be a funny love token—a gun!"

Inez held his glance steadily. "Not funny at all," she said. "Love and death are the only real things."

His eyes blazed up. "Ah! you would be a woman worth having!" he said. "By Heaven, I wish—I wish things had been different!" He turned away. "Sure, I'll swap guns with you," he added in an ordinary voice. "If yours will shoot straight."

INEZ ran out of the room to fetch it. Scarface cast a grim eye in my direction. "Interesting book?" he asked.

I closed it with a snap. "Of course I'm only stalling," I admitted. "But it's not my fault if I'm obliged to listen."

"It doesn't matter," he said with a bitter note of laughter. "You're a good scout, Em."

My heart ached over him. I felt ages older than he.

Inez came back with the gun in her hand. "It's not as big as yours," she

said with a pretty anxiety, "but it's just as effective."

"Sure, if you put the bullet in the right place," said Scarface carelessly.

He took it; examined it with the eye of an expert, and was about to open it when Inez adroitly repossessed herself of it. "Come on down cellar and try it," she said eagerly. "The walls are thick. Nobody will know."

"Going down cellar" in a mansion like that is not so simple as it sounds. However, Inez had been shown the way. We passed through several corridors, crossed a sort of service hall without meeting anybody, and finally found the stairs. They led us down into a wide, low, whitewashed place, floored with cement. It was spotlessly neat. Inez had turned a switch at the head of the stairs which flooded the cellar with light.

The house was supported on heavy brick piers. With a piece of coal, Inez made a cross mark on one of them and, stepping off fifteen paces, took aim and fired. The shot crashed under the vaulted roof. Her bullet flattened itself, not exactly on the cross mark, but very close to it.

"Good shooting," said Scarface laconically. He took the gun, and scarcely seeming to trouble to aim, fired. The lead pellet impinged squarely on top of the first one.

"Marvellous!" cried Inez.

"The gun's all right," said Scarface carelessly.

"So is the gunner," she said admiringly.

She took the gun again to replace the spent shells, keeping up a running fire of words to distract his attention. "My father gave me this gun. He believes that every woman should know how to shoot. I used to practice shooting in the yard, but the neighbors complained. Then dad built us a regular shooting gallery at our country house." Scarface could see her replacing the two shells, but so cunningly did she manipulate the gun that he did not see

they were blanks, like the three shells already in the magazine. She handed it over to Scarface.

"Hereafter, its name is Inez Van B.," he said, pocketing it.

At the head of the stairs we met the portly millionaire rushing toward the spot with the pale-faced housekeeper in his wake. "Good God, Inez! What is the matter?" he cried.

"Why, nothing, dad," she said, wide-eyed, "we were just trying my gun down cellar. We didn't hurt anything."

"Humph!" he grumbled. "You might at least let somebody know when you're going to unlimber your artillery."

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOUCHON SMILES.

JACMER TOUCHON had been calling up Mme. Storey at intervals during this Sunday. I marvelled at his effrontery, but my employer was not surprised. "He would," she said dryly.

Grace had been instructed to tell him that the ladies were out. However, when he called up after our return from Mr. Van Benthuyzen's, Mme. Storey said she would speak to him. When she returned from the phone she said he had asked very humbly if he might see her. She had told him to call after dinner.

"Must we submit to it?" I said involuntarily. "What's the use now?"

"He has a very good reason for calling," she said blandly. "He wishes to lull us into security. And we for our part must appear to be lulled. We don't want him to change his plans now."

When the bell rang that announced his coming, I began to tremble inwardly. To save my life I could not have helped it. Mme. Storey, seeing the signs of it in my face, became a little impatient.

"Silly Bella!" she said.

"But the man means to murder us!" I said.

"Not to-night," she said.

I resented what seemed to me such an unnatural calmness. "My flesh crawls when he comes near, as if he were a gigantic spider!" I cried.

"Well, don't excite yourself with poetic images," she said with a provoking smile. "I hope it is the last time you will have to put up with him. Obviously you must remain in the room to forestall a scene like yesterday's."

There was nothing fearsome in Touchon's outer aspect, of course. On the contrary, when he entered Mme. Storey's charming 1850 drawing-room, he was so handsome, florid, perfectly turned out that anybody would have said that he adorned the room. His squared shoulders, his air of authority suggested a pillar of society rather than a bloody-minded criminal. True, he had a humble and contrite look, but it was the look of a generous man who expects to make full amends and be forgiven. Gone was the old devilish mockery. He seemed genuinely chastened, even apologized to me.

"Ah, Bella, if you knew what torments I have been through since yesterday morning, you would not be so stiff with me, my dear."

It was all a sham. Deep in the friendly appealing eyes glittered a core of hatred, and my flesh crawled at him still. They say that hatred endows one with a kind of clairvoyance, and I believe it is true. I understood Touchon pretty well by this time. I could see that he was obtaining a strange, perverse pleasure in thus seeming to wallow in remorse while secretly he gloated over the fact that we would be dead within thirty hours. What a horror!

At the same time I reflected that he could probably see through me too, and I was careful to keep my eyes down.

"I have come to beg forgiveness,"

he said to Mme. Storey, spreading out his hands. "I lost my head completely yesterday. Will I ever be able to live it down with you?"

My mistress disdained to play any part with him to-night. She was merely wary and courteous. "I don't feel that I have anything to forgive you," she said good-humoredly; "you did me no injury."

This was a blow to his vanity, and he visibly winced under it. However, with his infernal cleverness he instantly sought to turn it to his advantage. "Oh, that is worse than your anger would be!" he said in well-simulated dismay. "While there is anger there is hope. Please be angry with me!"

Mme. Storey merely shrugged.

He saw that he was taking the wrong line, and immediately changed it. While he made his eyes imploring there was still a suggestion of sharpness in his glance. It was the perfection of acting. A great actor, of course, must keep all his wits about him even when he appears to be abandoning himself to emotion. "But I am not to be forbidden your presence?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, no," she said promptly. "You are a most entertaining companion. Why should I deprive myself of that pleasure?"

She baffled him. He cast down his eyes and rubbed his lip.

Mme. Storey did not wish to baffle him, so she added in an impulsive manner:

"Oh, let's forget about it. I hate these 'situations.' I am perfectly willing to go on with you as we were before, so long as you do not—" She concluded with a shrug.

"Oh, you can depend on that," he said very earnestly. "Of course it is too much to expect that you will immediately let down your guard with me. But if you will only give me time, you will see that I have mastered myself!"

Mme. Storey smiled in a friendly way, and the grim comedy went on.

Neither completely deceived the other, of course, but just the same we gained our point, for Touchon never suspected that we apprehended danger at his hands.

AS she often did at home, she had dressed herself for the evening in a gown which, while not slavishly following the fashion of that by-gone time, still suggested the quaint period of her drawing-room. She also had a large embroidery frame for crewel work, with which she used to toy, for no other reason, I suspected, except that it was in the picture. At least, the work upon the frame had progressed very little during all the time I had known her.

Bringing it out now, she gravely busied herself in front of the fire with her bright colored worsteds. The fact that she had occupation for her hands gave her a considerable advantage in her game with Touchon, and he perceived it.

"Crewel work scarcely seems to suit your character," he said, with the faintest hint of a sneer.

"Oh, I am a many-sided woman!" she said provokingly.

A fresh skein of worsted was required, that had to be rolled in a ball before it could be used. Mme. Storey made Touchon hold it for her. Never will I forget the picture of the masterful Touchon sitting in that most abject of positions, handcuffed in a skein of wool.

Mme. Storey, enjoying the joke, rolled it with the greatest deliberation. Touchon enjoyed it too, in his way. His eyes glittered with that dark pleasure that I have spoken of. He was thinking: "To-night you queen it over me, my lady; to-morrow night you will be dead in your bed."

"What are you and Bella doing to-morrow?" Touchon asked.

"The usual thing," said Mme. Storey. "We will spend the day at the office."

"Must you?" he asked.

"What do you propose?" she countered.

"I wondered if you would allow me to drive you over to the Erie Basin to look at the yacht *Maraquipe*."

Mme. Storey raised her palm.

"That's out," she said in a tone he could not possibly mistake.

"Oh, I know, the trip," he said humbly; "but the yacht is so beautiful I thought it would give you pleasure to go over her."

"That's just it," she said. "What's the use of subjecting myself to the temptation if I can't go?"

He let the subject drop. Presently he said:

"Morris Duchatel is giving a recital at the Town Hall to-morrow afternoon. They say he is top hole."

"Concert tenors give me a pain," said Mme. Storey. "Especially the ones with fancy names."

He tried yet once again. "We have never been to tea at the Ribblesdale," he said. "It's the place of the moment. How about to-morrow afternoon?"

"Oh, take us some afternoon later in the week," said Mme. Storey with a clear brow. "To-morrow I have to come home early to dress."

I wondered at Touchon's persistence until I reflected that he would probably consider it advantageous, in view of what was to happen later, if he had been seen publicly with Mme. Storey on that last afternoon.

She appreciated this perfectly, of course. Presently she said slyly:

"How about to-morrow night?" She knew that nothing would tempt Touchon to accompany us in the evening. "Bella and I are going to the first night of 'What's In a Name?' We could get an extra seat if you'd care to come."

"I'm so sorry," said Touchon. "I am booked for a dinner of the Psychologists' Association to-morrow. Hideous bore."

9 A

"What time will you get away?"

"Not before midnight. I'm supposed to be one of the features of the show."

It was for a similar reason, no doubt, that Touchon asked for a glass of water by and by. Mme. Storey rang for Grace. Touchon did not perform the slightest act without calculating its effect.

He wished Grace to be able to testify later that he had been received in the house to-night on a footing of intimate friendship. While Grace was in the room he fairly sparkled with amiability and good will.

When he finally got up to go a curious stillness came over him. I mean a psychical stillness, for of course the physical man continued to talk and gesticulate as usual. His eyes were fixed and glittering. He held Mme. Storey's hand longer than was necessary, drinking in her features with an extraordinary greediness. Her face was averted. Then the same to me. You would have said he loved me then.

I was not deceived. He was bidding us a final farewell, you see. He was thinking: "To-morrow you will be dead. Let me fix your faces in my mind forever to feed my hate." A poisonous emanation seemed to come from him, that made me giddy. When he took my hand such a wave of repulsion overwhelmed me that I thought I should faint. And all the time he was smiling, still expressing his contrition for what had happened yesterday, making a date to take us to tea on Tuesday afternoon!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SETTING THE TRAP.

WHEN we started out for the office next morning we discovered that the watch upon our movements had been removed. Neither the fat sleuth nor his saturnine

successor was in evidence. We walked through the empty street to Park Avenue and on through the long block to Fifth, and there was no one behind us. Later we satisfied ourselves from the office windows that there was no watch upon our door.

"It is natural enough," said Mme. Storey, smoking reflectively. "Touchon does not want the detective agency drawn into the investigation that would follow upon our murder." It made me shiver to hear her speak of this event in such a matter-of-fact way.

"He knows," she went on, "that the sleuths will never volunteer the information that they have been watching us for days past. It would put the agency in too bad a light, especially if they were unable to tell the police who had employed them. Touchon has called them off. Let us be thankful that our hands are freed for this day at least."

My mistress would not see Scarface again. A meeting might easily have been arranged after dark, but she said that good-bys were too harrowing to the feelings, and there was no doubt from her expression but that she meant it. Instead, I was sent to meet Scarface in the concourse of the Pennsylvania Terminal while it was still daylight.

"Emily's hair is not dyed," said Mme. Storey, "nor does she make up to look younger than she is. You will be safe from detection."

Of that meeting I need say little. Scarface was scarcely polite. I could not blame him; his disappointment when I appeared alone was bitter. I gave him the plan of Touchon's apartment, calling his attention to the ease with which he could escape through the dining room window; and I told him that Touchon would get home from the Psychologists' dinner about midnight. Knowing his habits as we did, Mme. Storey and I had no doubt but that Touchon would go home and put him-

self to bed for the benefit of the servants, before he started out to keep his later appointment with Scarface.

"I'll be there when he gets home," said Scarface grimly.

On the other hand, I satisfied myself from my observation of Scarface's manner that he had not looked inside the gun Inez had given him.

From his talk I gathered that there had been no change in the night's arrangements.

Mme. Storey and I dined at home alone. She, bland and composed, ate with an excellent appetite, but my reserves were wearing thin. I could feel myself becoming waspish. I was not intended for a life of excitement. We drove to the theater at the usual hour in Mme. Storey's own car. Same old first-night gang, half of them coming to be seen, the other half coming to see them, and the play a secondary consideration altogether; much self-important parading up and down the aisles, and pretentious talk in the foyer.

The play was an insignificant comedy. Mme. Storey followed it with attention, and laughed in what I supposed were the right places; but I was on pins and needles, longing and dreading in equal degrees for the performance to end. As yet I did not clearly understand Mme. Storey's plan, though my instructions were explicit enough.

It is always useless to ask her to explain herself in advance. She only smiles provokingly.

The end came at last, as all ends must, and we drove home. Then the real drama of that unforgettable night began. From in front, the house was completely dark, but in the dining room we found little Chiglick, handcuffed, seated in a chair, and imperturbably smoking a cigarette. Basil Thorne, and another man of Mme. Storey's, called Stephens, were watching him. A .38 revolver lay on the table.

"He gave us no trouble," said Basil. "Walked right into our arms."

As they were both nearly double the size of Chiglick, this could almost have gone without saying.

"We took that from him," said Basil, nodding toward the gun.

I could see the bullets in the visible chambers, and I shuddered. One of those bullets had been intended for me!

When we came in Chiglick cast a hard glance in our direction through half closed eyes. But he partially recognized us, and his eyes opened suddenly. When Mme. Storey smiled he knew her.

For once the little desperado was shocked out of his impassivity. He leaped out of his chair—then dropped weakly back into it. The cigarette slipped through his fingers.

"Inez!" he gasped. "*You?* Inez!"

"No, Rosika, really," said Mme. Storey, lighting a cigarette.

THE little gangster quickly recovered himself. Stoicism was his religion, and he was ashamed of having lost it. Picking up the cigarette with his manacled hands, he stuck it flippantly in the corner of his mouth. He cunningly applied himself to flatter my mistress.

"Well, you are some sleuth," he said. "I've got to hand it to you. If I had to be pinched, I'm glad it was you done it."

Mme. Storey smiled.

After all, Chiglick was only human. "Does this mean the chair for me?" he asked. His attempted swagger only made him look boyish and piteous.

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that," said Mme. Storey.

He looked at her doubtfully and from her to the gun on the table.

"Yes, I know what you came here for," said Mme. Storey, "but a miss is as good as a mile. You are not my mark."

"Is it Scarface?" he asked eagerly.

"No, it's not Scarface either."

"Then it's Scarface's boss," he said.

"And you'll get him too."

Mme. Storey blew a cloud of smoke and surveyed the prisoner through it. "Chiglick," she said dryly, "it's very wrong of me, but I rather like you."

"It's mutual," said Chiglick with an insinuating grin.

Mme. Storey refused to be drawn. "But there isn't much I can do for you—because of that," she went on, indicating the gun. "I am bound to uphold law and order. I can't let a gunman loose on the community. If I could persuade you to give it up—"

"If *you* was to give me a job," said Chiglick, glancing at her out of the corners of his eyes, like a schoolboy begging a favor that he expects to have refused, "then I could go straight. I could work for you without dyin' of dry rot."

"Well, I might," said Mme. Storey. "We'll talk it over another time. Now I've got work to do. You will come with us now, Stephens. Bring two pairs of handcuffs."

Basil's face fell.

"I'm sorry I can't take you, Basil," she said. "It's because Scarface knows you. As soon as we are out of the house, you can turn this man over to the police. All you need charge him with for the present is unlawful entry."

There was to be no change of character to-night. We tidied up before the mirror and were ready. We did not believe we were being followed, but there was always that possibility. It was for this reason we had driven home from the theater, and dismissed Mme. Storey's car for the night. There was even a chance that Scarface himself might be watching the house in order to satisfy himself that Chiglick was on his job. Therefore we went out the back way, taking Stephens with us. This Stephens was a nice young Englishman, very quiet and dependable.

Crider was waiting for us in Sixty-Second Street with his taxi. When we drew up before the Westmoreland my heart was thumping so that I thought my companions must hear it. Crider was left watching from a good vantage point outside. His particular job was to make sure that Touchon did not escape, in case there was a slip-up in our plans. If Touchon left the house after having entered it, Crider was to seize him and hang on to him whatever might betide.

Mme. Storey and I were well known, of course, to the hall servants in the Westmoreland. They saw nothing out of the way in this late call. The captain remarked pleasantly:

"Dr. Touchon has not yet come home, madame."

"We'll wait for him," she said carelessly. "Oh, by the way," she added as with an afterthought, "don't mention to him that we are waiting." She glanced toward Stephens. "I have a little surprise for him."

Mme. Storey's smile has a compelling quality. The attendant nodded complaisantly. There was not the slightest danger of his disregarding her wishes.

It was now about twenty minutes to twelve. Boker, Touchon's old servant, opened the door of the apartment to us, clad in his trousers and a dressing gown. Mme. Storey and I had a real affection for this gentle old soul. He was very much embarrassed to be caught by ladies in such a guise; but we were privileged visitors, of course, and he opened the door wide to us.

"My master will not be home until twelve o'clock," he said.

"Well, it is almost that," said Mme. Storey. "We'll wait."

We were admitted into a little many-sided foyer with doors all around. These admitted to music room, drawing-room, library, dining room, and a corridor that led to the rear rooms of the apartment. The door immediately facing the entrance door was that of

the library. Boker turned on the lights, and we walked in there. The old man was for retiring then, but Mme. Storey detained him.

"I want to speak to you a moment, Boker."

"Allow me to dress, madame."

"Oh, that's not necessary," she said.

Clutching his gown around him, the old man came into the room with a wondering, innocent air. I hated this part of our task.

"BOKER," said my mistress gravely, "you know what my business is?"

"Why, yes, madame, somewhat."

"I am a psychologist like your master, but I am also frequently engaged in criminal investigations."

"I know," he said, nodding his head. "I read the papers."

"I am sorry to say," said Mme. Storey, "that I have come to take your master into custody."

In this she was stretching the truth a little, but the old man was too simple to comprehend it. He staggered back. He was pale enough at all times, but he became paler still. "What—what—" he stammered. "What for?"

"Murder," said Mme. Storey.

He cried out sharply as if some one had hurt him. "Oh! Oh! I know nothing about it!"

"Of course you don't," she said kindly. "Much has gone on here that you know nothing about. He used your gentle and innocent personality to give a color of respectability to his establishment."

"But, madame, how do I know—" he gasped.

"True," she said, "you have only my word for it. However, I must know whether or not you are going to assist me."

"You are a kind lady," cried the distracted old man, "and a clever lady! But he has always been a good master to me, too. I must stick by him, mustn't I?"

"That's what I expected you to say," she said regretfully. "You deserve a better master. But, you see, I must secure you."

The old man, with a glance of terror at us, turned to the door. Stephens, prepared for such a move, flung an arm around him, and clapped his free hand over Boker's mouth, to still the inevitable cry. Boker went limp at once. He was too much terrified to struggle. We whipped off his dressing gown, handcuffed his wrists and ankles, and gagged him with a handkerchief.

"Be gentle with him!" adjured Mme. Storey. Stephens picked up the frail figure bodily, and, carrying him to the extreme rear of the apartment, laid him on his own bed, and shut the door of his room.

Stephens had not much more than returned to the library when the door bell sounded.

"That will be Scarface," said Mme. Storey coolly. "Take off your coat, Stephens; also your collar and tie. Drop them behind something. There is no hurry. You must not be too quick to open the door. Now put on the dressing gown and rumple up your hair. Good! Now you can open the door. Rejoin us in this room afterward." She switched off the lights in the library.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FACE TO FACE.

WAITING in the darkened room we heard Stephens cross the foyer and open the front door. We heard Scarface's cool, firm voice ask:

"Is Dr. Touchon at home?"

"No," said Stephens.

"Are you expecting him soon?"

"Well, I scarcely know," said Stephens. His manner of slight suspicion was very well done.

"I am William Touchon of Cincinnati," said Scarface coolly, "his

nephew. Perhaps you have heard him speak of me?"

"I can't say I have," said Stephens woodenly. "Was he expecting you to-night?"

"No," said Scarface. "This was an unexpected trip, but I thought I ought to call, late as it is, because I am sailing to-morrow."

Stephens was not going to make it too difficult for him to enter, of course. He appeared to unbend. "Come in, Mr. Touchon," he said. "As a matter of fact I am expecting my master very shortly. Please wait in the drawing-room."

Stephens switched on the lights in the big room, and Scarface followed him in there. We heard Stephens say politely: "Will you look at a magazine while you are waiting?"

"Thanks," said Scarface.

Stephens then left the room, and allowed his footsteps to be heard dying away down the corridor. Presently he came softly back, through the dining room and rejoined us.

Then we set ourselves to wait for Touchon. I had experienced so many tremors of agitation this night it seemed as if I could bear no more, yet the worst was all before me. At this moment I was so completely terrified that a desperate calmness descended on me. It has happened before—the courage of the weak that comes at a crisis, and I am profoundly grateful for it. I ceased to think about my fears. I became almost as calm in demeanor as Mme. Storey.

The library, where we were, adjoined the drawing-room where Scarface waited. There was a wide opening between with portières now pulled all the way across. At our backs there was a similar opening into the dining room. I watched Scarface through a tiny crack between the portière and the door frame. He was sitting not far from me, with the magazine in his hands. His face was pale and fixed, with the triangular furrow deeply

etched in his forehead. A bona fide servant would never have admitted a caller in the middle of the night whose face bore such an expression. It was like a beautiful tragic mask.

He flung the magazine on a little table and stood up, looking about him coolly and sharply. The unshaded windows attracted his attention, and he went from one to another of them, pulling down the blinds. As a matter of fact, though the apartment was on the ground floor, it was nevertheless too high for one to see into the rooms from the sidewalk, as we had discovered early in the game. But Scarface did not know that. Afterward he pulled out the plan of the apartment, and stood in the middle of the room studying it, and glancing about to get his bearings. He looked into the music room which adjoined the drawing-room on the front; then he came toward the room where we were hidden.

We softly retreated through the dining room and down the corridor toward the rear of the apartment. Scarface did not turn on the lights in the other rooms, but he must have had a pocket torch, for we caught the reflection of its flash. We heard him unfasten the window in the dining room which gave on the little balcony overhanging the sidewalk. This was to provide his means of escape later. He did not venture down the corridor, evidently fearing to run into the servant.

He returned to the drawing-room, and we three stole back into the library. Unluckily Scarface had drawn the portières all the way back in order to guard against a surprise from that side, or else to facilitate his getaway. There was still plenty of room to conceal ourselves around the corner of the opening, but the room was too bright; we could not watch Scarface and there was too great a danger that he might surprise us hidden there. We remained in the dining room unable to tell just what he was doing. These

were the hardest moments of all to bear. Finally I breathed in Mme. Storey's ear:

"He didn't touch the portières into the music room. If we crossed the foyer, we could watch him from in there."

"You go," she said. "Stephens and I must stay here in case one of them should attempt to escape through the dining room window."

MY factitious courage threatened to fail me at the idea of being cut off from my companions, but since I had proposed the plan I could not very well back out. I caught and pressed Mme. Storey's hand and stole into the foyer.

When I was in the middle of it, I heard Touchon's key inserted in the latch of the front door. You can imagine with what swiftness I whipped into the music room. I felt as if the devil were treading on my heels.

I heard Touchon enter, and close the door behind him. Immediately afterward a bell sounded somewhere in the rear of the apartment. I supposed that he was ringing for his servant. Perhaps he wished to ask why the drawing-room was all lighted up. At any rate no one came, of course.

I applied my eye to a crack between the portières, and could see down the length of the big room. Scarface was standing at the other end with his back to the fireplace, and his eyes fixed on the doorway leading to the foyer. His right hand was concealed behind him, and I knew that it held the gun. His head was a little thrust forward, his expression was deadly. Inside I had a horrible feeling of caving in. Though I knew the shells in Scarface's gun were blanks, it seemed too awful to allow even a sham killing to be acted out without interference.

Touchon, vigorous, florid, commanding, strode into the drawing-room, having left his hat and coat in the foyer. He was close in front of

me, but as he turned toward Scarface, I could only get a quarter view of his face from the rear. "What do you—" he began to say, when his voice suddenly failed him. He had recognized Scarface.

Scarface was walking toward him. "I guess you know who I am, and what I came here for," he said, with his deadly smile. He produced the gun.

Touchon's face turned greenish. His authoritative manner collapsed like a pricked balloon. Yet he stood his ground. Scarface stopped walking. He was enjoying that moment. There was a pause; then, as Scarface started slowly to raise the gun, Touchon found his voice again.

"You can't shoot me," he said. "I am your boss. I am Caspar."

The effect of those words upon Scarface was electrical. He went recoiling backward, his face clownish with dismay. The gun clattered to the floor. "That voice!" he muttered.

Touchon dived for the gun like a baseball player stealing a base. Scarface was too much shaken to stop him. Touchon secured the gun, and backed off, laughing in triumph, though his voice was still quivering with deathly terror. "You fool!" he cried. "I'm done with you, and now you've given me an excuse to put you out of the way!"

Scarface stood there like a stock, and let Touchon shoot at him. The discharge crashed through the room. Harmlessly, thank God! The sound of it brought Scarface to his senses. His face turned utterly savage.

"You would, would you!" he spat between his teeth like a tiger. He sprang at Touchon, and caught him by the throat. The second discharge of the gun burned the skin of Scarface's temple, but did him no further hurt.

Touchon dropped the useless gun. His hands dragged vainly at the strong hands around his throat. Scarface bore him back, back, until he fell across a carved chest. Scarface, grinning down

at him horribly, planted a knee upon his breast.

"So you were Touchon all the time!" he said. "That's a good note! You had me fooled all right." He was only playing with his victim now. He released the pressure on his throat a little to let him speak.

"Let me go! Let me go!" gasped Touchon. "I swear to you I—"

"Aah!" snarled Scarface. "You sent my pal to do your dirty work, and then you killed him for his pay! You are the Judas!"

"I had to! I had to!" gasped Touchon. "He would have been taken. Then we'd all have been done for. You, too!"

"You sent him there, didn't you?" demanded Scarface.

"I had no choice," gasped Touchon. "Fay was about to betray us. I had to act quickly."

"You were there yourself," said Scarface quickly, "why didn't you take care of Fay?" There was no answer from Touchon. "No!" Scarface went on, savagely baring his teeth, "you just let it out that it's your habit to kill your men when you're through with them. Now I'm going to kill you—with my bare hands—slowly."

TOUCHON'S head fell back over the edge of the chest. I found myself looking at his distorted face upside down, and closed my eyes. The hideous tension was broken by the voice of Mme. Storey. With infinite relief I saw her enter from the other end of the room, with Stephens at her side. Stephens had a gun in his hands to guard against eventualities.

"That will do, Scarface," she said quietly. "Let the State execute him. It's more fitting."

It was the second ugly shock the young man had received within five minutes. He looked around at her, astounded, snarling—but he did not leave his prey. He half recognized her, I think; a confused look came over his

face. "Who are you?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Rosika Storey."

Scarface, further shaken, looked at Stephens as if for confirmation.

"This is Mme. Storey," said Stephens. "She'll take care of Touchon for you. We have the goods on him now. A confession in the presence of three witnesses."

Scarface, in a kind of daze, reluctantly backed away from his prostrate victim.

Touchon slowly raised himself, holding his tortured throat, and stared at Mme. Storey. He felt very sick. The man was cured of his megalomania; in the moment of his defeat he suddenly became ordinary. I wondered what I had been afraid of.

To give the man credit, he accepted his downfall stoically.

Meanwhile Scarface also had his scowling glance fixed upon Mme. Storey. Recognition was just beginning to stir in his mind. Stephens edged around between him and the way out through the library.

Mme. Storey spoke crisply to me: "Bella, throw up one of the front windows, and blow your whistle."

I obeyed her. This was a signal to bring Crider to our assistance.

Scarface recognized me, and by me, he instantly knew my mistress. "Inez!" he cried hoarsely. "You! You have betrayed me, too! What a world to be born into!" His voice held unspeakable bitterness.

My mistress started as if she had been flicked with a whip. I declare the tears started to her eyes. "Betrayed?" she said proudly. "What do I owe to you?"

Scarface straightened up. "Oh, nothing whatever," he said with curling lip.

"I played fair with you from the start," Mme. Storey went on, her voice still showing that she was hurt. It was the first time I had ever heard her condescend to defend herself. "As a

woman to a man, I mean; that's all that matters. Answer me! Didn't I play fair with you?"

"Oh, that way, sure!" he muttered, looking away, dejected. "But you looked me in the eye and swore you'd be my pal."

"And haven't I been?" she demanded. "Twice I've saved your life from this beast, if you want to know it."

"Say!" Scarface burst out with a sudden interest, "was it you in the park that night?"

"Bella and me."

"No!" he said, amazed.

"And it was I who opened your eyes to this man," she added.

Scarface lowered his head. His heart was too sore at that moment to permit him to be quite fair, but he had no more to say.

Crider joined us, and the police were sent for. As Touchon's strength returned, it seemed wiser to secure him. Mme. Storey told the two men to tie him up. How strange, how passing strange it was to see the great Touchon submit to it like any ordinary crook! As she wanted a private word with Scarface, she shepherded the others into the foyer.

"Scarface," she said, when the three of us were left alone in the drawing-room, "I don't require your evidence now, in order to send Touchon to the chair. The police will be at the door directly. I will go forward to meet them, and the way out through the dining room window will be clear. Bella won't stop you."

A renewed joy in life broke in his dark face like the sun coming out. He nodded eagerly. His eyes beamed gratefully on Mme. Storey, all his injuries forgotten.

Her eyes were soft on him, too. "I'm doing what a pal can," she murmured, "and more than I ought. I have my job to do," she went on, "but myself, I never judge anybody. My sympathies are oftener with the hunted than the hunters. Go lead your own

life as you must, Scarface, but promise me one thing, for friendship's sake. No more killing."

"I promise," he said, meeting her glance. "I guess you've earned the right to tell me." Suddenly with a beautiful, natural gesture, he caught up her hand, and pressed it to his lips. "You are more wonderful than I thought," he whispered.

A MOMENT later the police were at the door, and Mme. Storey went to meet them. Scarface, with a friendly grin in my direction, quietly faded out through the library. I knew I should never see him again. What a wrench it gave my heart—he was such a beautiful young animal! There is no justification for such a feeling; one simply cannot help oneself.

I pass over all the uproar induced by the coming of the police, with part of the populace in their train. The telling of our story; the incredulity, the amazement, the questioning. How chagrined Mme. Storey appeared to be when it was discovered that one of her principal witnesses had slipped away during the excitement. She scolded me for not being more careful; I was hard put to it to keep my face straight. Only Touchon was mum; he perceived clearly enough that his goose was cooked. Well, he accepted it like a man; after all, there *was* something big about him, even in his fall.

He was finally carried away by the police, Crider and Stephens accompanying them as complaining witnesses. Mme. Storey and I were left in possession of the magnificent apartment. We hastened to liberate poor old Boker, and to put him in charge of everything until matters were settled. Mme. Storey's last act before leaving the house was to lead me into the library. She said:

"There's something here I want to show you, Bella."

Touchon's escritoire stood beside the window. She let down the flap, and pulled some papers out of a pigeonhole. They had a strangely familiar look. I recognized my own typescript. Looking closer I saw that they were actually the early vouchers I had made out for our expenses in the Touchon case. I read off: "Dinner to Dr. Touchon at Mme. Storey's apartment. Expenses of trip to Sing Sing to interview Craig—"

I looked at my mistress in blank astonishment.

"How did these come into Touchon's possession?" I asked.

"Honestly enough," she said. "He paid for them."

My mouth hung open. For a moment I just could not take it in.

"Touchon himself was our mysterious employer," she went on gravely; "the dead wife mentioned in his letter was just a touch of artistry. The man was drunk with egotism. He found ordinary people too easy to master; life was tame, and he required a stronger dram. Well, I was largely in the public eye, and he conceived the idea of provoking a test of skill with me. I suppose the fact that I had once rebuffed him still rankled in his mind; he was no doubt jealous of the success of his former pupil. It was characteristic of his demoniac humor to hit upon this scheme to ruin me and master me. One must admit there was something splendid in his effrontery. Even though he started out by describing to me what his game was, such was his overweening confidence that he believed he could outwit me; and," Mme. Storey concluded dryly, "he very nearly got away with it, too!"

I marveled at the light that this cast on the lurid deeps of the human consciousness. I understood then, why my mistress latterly had delayed sending in our expense vouchers to the bank. "What a strange creature is man!" I murmured.

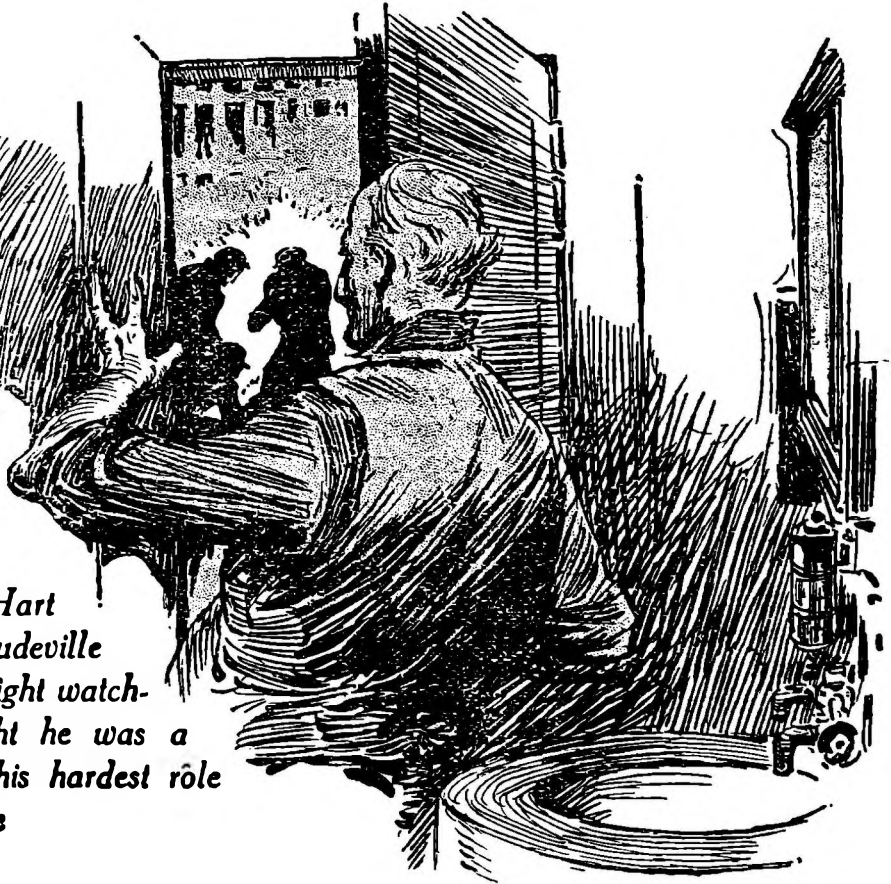
THE END.

The Comeback

By MELVILLE C. COLEMAN

He saw them cutting through the steel lock with acetylene torches

When Eddy Hart had to quit vaudeville and become a night watchman, he thought he was a has-been—but his hardest rôle was still to come



THE grizzled old night watchman and furnace-tender of the People's National Bank sat, pipe in mouth and chair tilted against the wall, in his own special corner of the cellar. His age-lined hands listlessly thumbed a copy of the current issue of *Variety*, the weekly newspaper of the theatrical world.

Like all small-time vaudeville artists, Eddy Hart's lifelong ambition had been to make the big-time circuit and enjoy the supreme thrill of seeing his name glaring brightly on the wide canopy over the entrance to the Palace Theater of New York City, the Mecca of vaudeville success.

But just when he thought he was

putting over the best performances of his entire career, just at the time he saw the glad realization of his ambition near at hand, he had received the blow that bowed his head and saddened his heart. His booking agent had told him, in kindly but unrelenting fashion, that he couldn't route him any longer; Hart was getting too old to go before a public who demanded youth and nothing but youth. He was a has-been, and not even good enough for small-time vaudeville. Since then, life had been merely a matter of somehow existing from day to day.

The old watchman only paused on each page long enough to read the heavy black type of the captions. It

was hard to read by the dim light that sifted through the grit-covered bulb above him.

It had never occurred to him that he could remedy this condition by simply wiping off the dust.

Suddenly his eyes lighted up and his heart leaped. He could hardly believe what he saw. It was a long time since he had received the thrill of seeing his name in print. He wiped away a tear. To think that some one on the staff of *Variety* still remembered him and thought enough of him to mention his name in its columns!

It meant a great deal to the lonely old man who hungered so for the glare of the footlights. This was the next best thing to returning to the stage. He lifted the paper up close to his worn old eyes and stood up to get nearer the light. His lips moved unconsciously as he read:

EDDY HART NOW NIGHT WATCHMAN

Eddy Hart, one-time vaudeville actor, is now employed as night watchman by the People's National Bank of Plimptown, New York.

Although his heart is still on the stage, five years ago Eddy declared that he wasn't quite as spry as he used to be and retired from the profession.

Before leaving the profession, Eddy was for years one of the most popular—

The old watchman started up as his keen old ears detected the sound of a soft footstep walking across the floor above him. He put out the light and, noiselessly as a cat, hurriedly climbed the stairs to the bank floor above. His heart thumping against his ribs, he peered into the bank office through the door that topped the basement stairs. It was just as he had thought. The dim shadows of five or six men moved about among the cages.

His blood chilled as a sharp whisper cut its way to him through the air. "Where's the watchman?"

"Guess he's downstairs."

"Well, you and Lefty go down and get him."

THE old watchman reached for his gun, and his heart sank. It was not there. In his haste to get upstairs he had forgotten to take it off the top of the ash barrel, where he always put it so that it would be handy without interfering with his seated comfort. If he turned back, they would spot him before he could reach his gun. There was only one way out.

Hugging close to the wall, he stealthily slipped down the hall in the opposite direction from which the bandits were approaching. He was headed for the men's washroom. He knew what callous men he was up against. If seen or heard, he would be shot down in cold blood. He prayed that nobody had locked the washroom. Every moment was precious; he wouldn't have time to fumble for his keys. His heart in his mouth, he turned the knob and pushed, then sighed his relief as the door opened. He slipped in and locked it from the inside.

His scalp tingled when, a few seconds later, one of the bandits turned the knob and whispered: "Guess it's locked for the night."

Then another voice said: "We found his gun, but he's not there. The old rummy must have gone out to fill his flask."

Although the watchman was now safe from harm, he had his duty to perform. He cursed himself for being such a forgetful old fool as to leave his gun behind. What could he do, an unarmed old man, against a half dozen armed and desperate men? But he must find some way of giving the alarm or somehow preventing the robbery.

Then Eddy Hart chuckled to himself, for out of the past a plan of action presented itself to him. When even *Variety* had intimated that he was too old to perform his specialty, he had begun to believe it himself. Here was

the golden opportunity; he would prove that he was not too old, or die gloriously in the attempt.

When the sound of the bandits' footsteps had disappeared down the hall, Hart unlocked the door and peeked out.

All the bandits were clustered around the door of the vault, while two of them were cutting through the steel of the thick lock with acetylene torches.

The old watchman took off his shoes and tiptoed down the hall toward the switchboard. Abruptly he threw in the switch that controlled the lights in the main banking room, which contained all the cages and the vault, flooding it in a blaze of light and setting the stage for what was to be either his greatest or his last performance.

The bandits looked up, their eyes wide and startled. Two motors roared outside as the drivers, believing their accomplices caught in a trap, raced away to safety.

"Drop your guns," rang out crisply from one end of the bank room.

"Put up your hands," came from another corner.

Gruffly another voice growled at the hesitating bandits: "We've got a man at every door and window. You can't see us, and we've got every one of you covered. If you're sensible you'll drop your guns where you stand and file quietly into that big cage right behind you. It's plain suicide for you to do anything else."

For a moment a deep silence, ominously foreboding, filled the air as the bandits stood rooted with terror.

"Well, what do you say?" urged a fourth voice.

"Come on, make up your mind. My trigger finger is getting nervous," piped in a fifth.

The bandit chief had been dumfounded, for where a moment before there had been no one, a regiment seemed to have sprung up out of the ground. He was only now beginning

to collect his scattered senses. Although he couldn't see the men who had so miraculously surrounded him, he could hear their voices and knew that his gang was outnumbered.

Only a madman would attempt to fight an enemy that he could not see and who could shoot him down in cold blood if he made the slightest offensive move. Grimly the gangster, realizing that, in this case, discretion was the better part of valor, turned to his men and said: "They've got us this time. They could shoot us all down before we could get out. No use going to the chair for murder. Drop your rods, boys."

Sulkily they filed into the cage.

Trembling with joy at the success of his scheme, the old watchman sprang into the room, picked up one of the guns off the floor and sped over to the cage to lock the door. Two of the bandits, upon seeing no one but an unarmed old man enter the room, advanced threateningly toward him.

"Get back from that door or you'll get plugged," roared a stern voice from behind them, and they cowered back with the others.

The old watchman entered the cage and took the key from its slot inside the wire mesh door. Quick as a flash he stepped outside, automatically locking the door by shutting it.

Then he stepped back to call the police. He lifted up the receiver, but the telephone was dead. He should have known that they would clip the wires.

Without taking his eyes off the cage, he backed up until he had reached a window that fronted on the street. With a backward swipe he smashed the glass with the butt end of his pistol.

A man was passing by. He looked up, startled by the crash of the broken window.

"Quick, get the police. The bank's been robbed," shouted the old watchman.

The man dashed off.

Half an hour later, with the bandits safe in jail and two policemen on duty upstairs in the bank, the old watchman once more went down into the basement to read and smoke his pipe.

Softly humming to himself, his eyes serene with the satisfaction he felt on having successfully practiced his profession in the theater of life, proving to himself, at least, that he was not too old and would make good if given the chance, he took up *Variety* to finish the news item he had been reading:

Before leaving the profession, Eddy was for years one of the most popular ventriloquists in small-time vaudeville.

Any of his old friends that find themselves in Plimptown should be sure to look him up.

THE following afternoon the old watchman, while still in his furnished room resting up from the labors of the night before, was surprised by a visit from Frank Hadley, his former booking agent.

"Hello, Eddy," greeted the booking agent, "how does it feel to be a celebrity?"

"What do you mean?" asked the old watchman, his head still foggy with sleep.

"Haven't you seen the morning papers?"

"No."

"Here, read this."

The old watchman feasted his eyes on the glaring headline and introductory paragraph of the story that Hadley pointed out to him in the big

metropolitan daily he had just handed him:

SINGLE-HANDED, OLD VENTRILOQUIST CAPTURES BANDIT GANG

By using one of the tricks he had employed during his long stage career and throwing his voice to every section of the room, Eddy Hart, the old night watchman of the People's National Bank of Plimptown, New York, made the bandits who were robbing the bank believe that they were outnumbered and surrounded.

Realizing what a sensation the old watchman would be, Hadley had lost no time in securing him a list of first-class bookings on the promise of a good act written around his exploit. With the most difficult part of his undertaking accomplished, the only thing remaining was to get the old ventriloquist's signature to a contract. It was for this purpose that he had come to Plimptown.

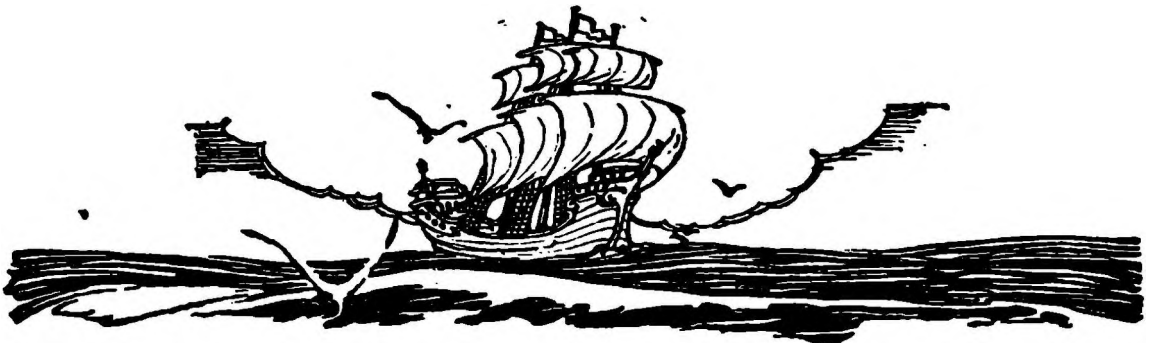
It was the happiest moment of the old ventriloquist's life when he learned he was to go back on the stage. In his new joy he forgot all about his elation that morning on receiving the thousand dollars the bank had presented him with as a reward for his bravery.

"By the way, Frank," asked Eddy Hart, "where do I open?"

"At the Palace."

"The Palace!" Almost unable to believe what he had heard, the old watchman echoed the words of the booking agent in an ecstasy of dreams come true.

THE END.





Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



"THE COMEBACK"

AN appropriate title is "The Comeback" for the first story with which Melville C. Coleman breaks into ARGOSY. It marks a very definite step in his own comeback. Let him tell you about himself:

First of all I am twenty-three years old, American born and a graduate of Fordham Prep. Before I was twenty I had clerked in various offices, played the piano in a dingy Greenwich Village cabaret, pounded the ivories at rehearsals of one of New York's most prominent musical comedies, organized my own dance orchestra, and worked in a theatrical office.

Then I decided to become a business man. After taking some courses at a business school I was given the opportunity to become secretary to a man prominent in automobile advertising and publicity circles. Was promoted to be editor and advertising manager of *The Service Bulletin*, an automobile trade paper.

While in this man's employ I had the pleasure of seeing my publicity stories appear in the leading class magazines and daily newspapers of the country, even though they were generally without a signature, or else were signed by some one else. I worked day and night for a year and a half, and then human flesh could stand no more, and I had a breakdown. I lost my voice and grew weak as a baby. Smash went my whole career in advertising and publicity, for without a voice a man is a total loss in contact work in those two professions.

I had always had a sneaking desire to write stories, and now was my chance. So I took the moth balls out of my trusty portable and started burning up the keys. Although my voice and strength have fully returned, once started at writing I found that I didn't want to do anything else.

MELVILLE C. COLEMAN.

HERE comes a Costa Rican who thinks he recognizes his country as the setting for Cunningham's "Notches":

New York, N. Y.

I am writing to let you know that I enjoyed Eugene Cunningham's story, "Notches," as he based his story on my country, and the Tinoco administration. Federico was hairless, and his brother Joaquin was the Minister of War and the real ruler. He killed several

men in duels, but he always gave them the first shot. It was never found out who killed Joaquin, but I know that he never gave him a chance for his life, for my father was second commandant of police, and a close friend of Joaquin and Tinoco, so I know the details.

Keep up the good work.

His full name was José Joaquin Tinoco. Please ask Mr. Cunningham if I am not right.
A COSTA RICAN.

GARRET SMITH'S "Girl in the Moon" brought in quite a few like the following:

San Antonio, Texas.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY ever since I could read. My father has been a subscriber for over twenty years. Some record, eh?

I cannot say which stories I liked the best, as I've read so many, but I like them every one.

I just finished "The Girl in the Moon." It was a dandy story.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY will always be my favorite magazine. It can't be beat.

An ARGOSY bookworm.

KATHLEEN CALL.

HERE are some addresses in reply to requests for information. We can supply you with most back issues of the magazine, but when we are unable to do so we are glad to extend the services of this department to help you secure the issues you seek. "The Ship of Ishtar," by A. Merritt, appeared in our issues from November 8 to December 13, 1924. We can supply all of these issues to any who desire to read the story.

Leavenworth, Kan.

In regard to "our magazine," I think "we" are doing fine. I also think we are getting some very good stories for a very small amount of cash.

In your December 29 issue, F. Schulze, of Chicago, Illinois, asked if he could secure "The Ship of Ishtar," by A. Merritt, in book form. I believe he can from the Fresno Book Shop, 1944 Tuolumne Street, Fresno, California.

And also in the same issue, Benjamin Best wishes to secure the issues of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY containing the story, "The Blind

Spot"; Richard Zorn, of North Baltimore, Ohio, can supply him with some secondhand copies, perhaps.

As I was not buying this magazine when "The Ship of Ishtar" was printed, I would like to know what issues the story ran in.

I like all your stories very well, can't say anything against any of them. I like the "scientifiction" stories best; but I can't kick about your Westerns, because somewhere, somebody likes Westerns.

Ray Cummings's latest story, "A Brand New World," was wonderful.

W. Wirt's novelettes are very good. I think they are about the best of that kind on the market.

I have just started "The Phantom in the Rainbow," by Slater LaMaster, and am looking forward to more by him.

JOE HATSCH.

IF you Cunningham fans will just take things easy awhile we'll soon have another of his Western novelettes in your hands—even a better one than "Lord of Liarsburg."

Dallas, Texas.

I have been anxiously waiting for another Western by Eugene Cunningham, of the same caliber as "Lord of Liarsburg." That story hasn't its equal when it comes right down to a real yarn of the West.

We lovers of Western stories are disgusted to some extent with the modern trend—too much fiction—written by some bird while vacationing out on his aunt's ranch. Too much coincidence, and not enough of the real stuff. Just as well:

Make the hero a Samson,
Who with one mighty pass,
Slays all of the villains
With the jawbone of an ass.
E. G. MOSELEY.

MR. BONAR thinks some of his old buddies may be listed among ARGOSY's readers and wants to get in touch with them:

Chula Vista, Calif.

I am writing for a twofold purpose, the first of which is to cast a vote against the suggestion of Mrs. Sanchez for a discontinuance of Argonotes. By all means keep Argonotes in full bloom; I get a great kick out of some letters you get. Believe me, dear editor, if you tried to follow out all the suggestions you get you would be the eighth wonder of the world or in a padded cell.

Now, seriously, you just run the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY to suit yourself and in the way to make the most out of it. I have no complaint in regard to ARGOSY. I have been reading it for a number of years and have found that it is hard to beat.

I know millions of readers read the ARGOSY, so I think I am coming to the right place with my plea, which is this: In November of 1898, I entered the Soldiers' Orphans Home, at Davenport, Iowa. About the 1st of June, 1901, left. Now I wonder how many readers of Argonotes who may see this were in the "I. S. O. H." during that time, and if they will write to me. I will pass out the addresses to others and we can have a real reunion. During my stay there I was in cottage No. 14. Miss Kate Stout was my matron. Miss Stout, if you see this please write. I would like nothing better than to hear from you.

W. BONAR,
F Street, Box 36.

"GUESS MY WEIGHT" certainly brought out the chuckles—and some hearty ha-ha's as well:

Revere, Mass.

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for the past several years, and wish to congratulate you on the quality of your stories. Authors like MacIsaac, Swain, Cunningham, and the likes are certainly a big asset to your magazine.

"Guess My Weight" struck me as especially comical and certainly did put new "pep" into me after a day's work in the office. Keep up your good work.

JOSEPH POFCHER, D. M. D.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

I did not like _____
because _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____



Looking Ahead!

COMING!

NEXT WEEK!

HIGH BARBAREE

A Tale of Strong Men and of the Sea

A Complete Novelette

by **ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE**

Off the coast of Nova Scotia this story is laid—
aboard a Halifax hell-ship. And there is two-fisted
action from line to line and paragraph to paragraph.

It is the opening story of the ISSUE OF FEBRUARY 23rd

THE BLOOD OF MORGAN

A Two-Part Central American Story

by **LIEUTENANT JOHN HOPPER**

starts in the same issue. Into the Nicaraguan revolution with the
U. S. Marines a curious intrigue plunges the hero of this excellent
tale. We consider it the best story Lieutenant Hopper has written
—which is covering a lot of territory.

THE GOLD GOD LAUGHS

by **THEODORE ROSCOE**

is an unusual feature short story. Laid in the frontier regions of India,
it breathes the mystery of those far places. A story you will
remember.

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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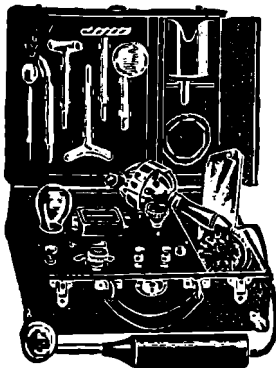
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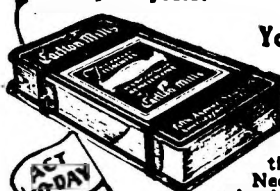
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