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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 195 SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 1928 NUMBER 5

The White Antelope

The athlete who sought a job in Africa and found his American training came in handy

By CHARLES L. HALL

Novelette—Complete

"AFRICA!" echoed the elderly secretary of Glendale's athletic association. "Why, what in the world are you going to do in Africa? You won't win any cups there."

The speaker, who was sitting behind the only desk in the small office of the association, slid back on his chair and stared up into the calm, set countenance of a blond haired youth.

"It's not to win more cups, Mr. Wilbur, that I'm going to Africa," answered the young man, somewhat gravely. "I've got to get a job—a real job—one that has more behind it than the weekly pay envelope. I can't live on cups or trophies; they are good for ornaments, but you can't eat them."

Bert Conway leaned lightly against the side of the desk and toyed with his

soft felt hat while he spoke. His keen blue eyes sparkled with the fire of enthusiasm and confidence.

"But, Bert," implored his friend, "you have a good job with that construction company; are you going to give it up and strike out blindly for something better? I think you are foolish, and I must advise you not to do it. Remember, there are many fellows much worse off than you are."

But Conway was not to be deterred so easily; he had spent many hours of thought planning a way in which he could extricate himself from the rut that he believed he was in.

"I quit that job this morning," he announced simply.

Mr. Wilbur tapped the desk top with his fingers nervously. A slight frown passed over his face. He turned his gaze out of the window and remained silent.

"I came in to tell you," Conway continued, "that I am leaving Glendale for New York to-morrow morning."

"But why, Bert? What's it all about?" the other demanded solicitously. "You just getting restless?"

Conway reddened slightly. The broadside of questions embarrassed him. It was a trait of his to confide in no one, not because of distrust of others, but on account of Mother Nature having wrought in his sterling character, above everything else, the attribute of self-reliance.

He didn't want to answer any questions. He only wanted to tell his friends that he was going and then go.

Now, however, he felt that he had to say something, so he answered: "I guess I am."

Mr. Wilbur rose from his chair, walked around the desk and placed his hand on Conway's shoulder, gripping him firmly.

"You are Glendale's athlete, Bert," he said, slowly. "You put Glendale on the map in sport last year by winning the thirteen foot pole vaulting championship of the State. We want you to stay and carry off the honors in the inter-State contests this year. We don't want to lose you."

Conway showed no signs of weakening.

"I hate to give up that part of it, I'll admit, but it is getting me nowhere."

"Oh, yes, it is! Yes, it is!" The secretary hastily reassured him. "You are on the road for the Olympic Games."

"Sport is sport and work is work, Mr. Wilbur," returned Conway seriously. "And I am going to Africa to work. I feel like a failure here. I feel as if my four years in the college were wasted."

"Don't be hasty," advised Wilbur. "Rome was not built in a day, nor a week, nor a year. Look at me; I am a graduate engineer also. I've been in Glendale all my life, and I am sure I am better off here than I would be roaming around the world."

Conway looked at him; at his gray hair that lay slightly ruffled on his forehead, and at his tired eyes.

"Yes," said Conway to himself, "there are many others like you."

A shudder went through him as he pictured himself doing the same kind of work all his life. No, sir, he was going to make something of himself; he was going to the wilds.

Conway looked down at the floor, shifted a little, then said: "I couldn't stay in Glendale all my days. I'm just not built that way. I've got to get out into a place where a man must take care of himself or die. I want excitement, adventure and lots of it. This routine stuff is driving me goofy. I've read a lot about Africa, and I know it's the place I'm looking for."

The secretary walked over to the window and glanced out. He scratched his chin contemplatively.

"Have you a job there?" he asked finally.

"No, sir," answered Conway quickly. "But I'll find one I'm sure."

"I don't think you will find one as good as the one you quit," the other warned him. "What was the matter with that job?"

"It bored me stiff. The same old grind. I was assistant to the surveyor and I pulled his chain and tape all over the county. There was no chance for advancement. If the surveyor died the company might give me the job, and they might not; they would probably hire one of the dozens of engineers with twenty years more experience than I have, who are always begging for work."

Unconsciously, he was becoming confidential. Mr. Wilbur listened, attentively, though he gazed constantly out into the sunlit frosty street, for it was December.

"You are wise in selecting a warm climate," he said at last, a trace of a smile coming over his wrinkled face.

He walked over to his desk and sat down. His many years of association with young men as the secretary of one of their organizations had taught him all that there was to be known about them, and he perceived that Conway was not to be sidetracked by idle persuasion.

If he were to intercept the doom that he saw the boy headed for he would have to employ other tactics. A few reminders might help. So he began with more intimate questions.

"I thought you told me awhile back," he said in an earnest tone, "that all the funds you inherited upon your parents' death had been expended on your education?"

Slightly flustered, Conway answered, "They were."

"Then how can you go to Africa without money? The trip alone takes a small fortune, and what if you don't land a job immediately?"

"I've got enough money to get to New York, by day coach on the train, and once there I'll get a job to work my way on a ship bound for Africa, and while the ship is in one of the coast ports I'll look around for a shore position. Of course if I don't find one, I can always come back on the ship.

Conway's eyes sparkled, as his imagination pictured the mysterious future.

The secretary hummed and tapped the desk with his fingers.

"You are taking an awfully big chance, Bert," he said soberly.

Conway glanced toward the window.

"What is life but one big chance," he answered.

The gray-haired secretary studied the young man with skeptical eyes. It was only too plain that his arguments were falling on deaf ears.

"Well," he said, rising slowly, "all that I can say is good luck to you."

He walked over and shook hands with Conway and as the two turned toward the hallway, Conway stopped and laughed.

"I suppose you think I'm crazy, Mr. Wilbur," he said. "But I guess if I want to lose my head, after all it's mine."

Wilbur accompanied Conway out into the hallway, where Conway found his overcoat on the coat rack. He crawled into it. Then he turned and faced the club official, putting forth his hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Wilbur." He read disappointment in the elderly man's face.

"Don't forget," responded the secretary, "that you are Glendale's champion jumper, and when—and when you come back on that ship, we want you to come out here and win the inter-State championship title for us."

"When I come back on that ship," Conway repeated to himself. Was it possible he was being laughed at? Something seemed to swell up in him, and he flushed.

"I don't think I'll be coming back, Mr. Wilbur," he blurted out.

The two men gazed at each other, then, after a final hand clasp, Conway opened the door and went out.

A blast of cold air shot through the doorway, sending the secretary hurrying back into his office, where he shook his head dubiously.

II.

In answer to the clarion call of the jungles, Bert Conway was now on the ocean. He had ripped the bonds that tied him to civilization and burned his bridges behind him.

He had landed a job, as the most ordinary of ordinary seamen, aboard a ship bound for the West Coast of Africa. Had his destination been Europe he might not have been so fortunate, but often vessels that were bound for where he was going left port short-handed or with their crew partly shanghaied.

As a rule, so one of the other deck hands had told him, seagoing men did not fancy the fever infested towns of West Africa; sometimes they died down there while the ship was in port.

In reality, Conway's job had most to do with a scrub brush and a bucket of water, and the ship whose decks he helped to clean was the steam vessel Neptune, which started to toss the moment it got outside Sandy Hook.

Conway was human, so he was sick the first day. First, he felt dull, then dizzy; he swallowed, gulped, but his throat was dry; he wished he was dead or that the boat would sink and then, for the first time in his life, he fed the fish of the Atlantic. He clung to the rail listlessly, staring down at the greenish water, utterly regardless of the intense cold wind blowing in his face. His brush lay on the deck at his feet.

Suddenly, a harsh voice crackled through the icy atmosphere: "Hey, you feller, can tha' sightseein' an' grab yer brush. Clear off that snow."

It had snowed two or three days before while the ship lay in dock and there were still some traces of it left.

Through bleary eyes, Conway glanced toward the speaker. A red faced, blue-nosed Dane stood hovering behind him. The battered blue cap that he wore over his scraggy hair had the word "Boatswain" in gold letters across the front of it.

Bert looked into the steel gray eyes of the seaman, appealingly, but he saw no indication of sympathy come into them. He picked up his brush and swept off the snow.

"Gosh," he mumbled to himself, "I wish I was in bed."

The boatswain lumbered away, giving Conway a sharp look as he went.

The frigid wind whistled and shrieked through the rigging. Time and again spray came over the bow and soaked everything in sight, then ran off to the side and back into the sea by way of the scuppers. Once or twice, Conway had been drenched with the salty water, but it braced him up rather than weakened him.

He felt better as he moved about, and soon he had forgotten all about the motion of the ship. He was rapidly getting his sea legs.

The Neptune was cargo laden and bound for a dozen ports along the West Coast of Africa, the first of which was Boma, in the Belgian Congo, and situated on the Congo River. She was a typical west coast tramp, one of hundreds that ply those waters.

Her captain was a Dane, and, no doubt, in his day had been known as a brute. However, he was seldom seen on the bridge, and Conway never ran foul of him.

As the Neptune progressed slowly but steadily southward, the weather changed accordingly. The frosty climate of New York was replaced by soft, balmy breezes. The water became clear and sky blue. Conway put his gloves and muffler in his valise and went on duty with rolled sleeves and open shirt front. The atmosphere cleared up and he could see the horizon: a distinct blue edge against the lighter colored sky.

He tanned in spite of his light complexion and blond hair. At first the skin peeled off, then it darkened. He noticed several others of the crew undergoing the same process.

For the most part his shipmates made up a heterogeneous mass of humanity: the lascars complained of the cold, while the Scandinavians avoided the sun; West Indian mulattoes held themselves aloof from the pure negroes; a Scotchman, an Irishman and Conway clung together, while a lonely Portuguese groveled with the ship's cat.

In the course of days there sprang up a rivalry between the Scotchman and the Irishman, over Conway. Neither of the two liked each other, naturally enough, but each wanted Conway to be his pal.

The weather was now hot. The ship had been out two months from New York, and the skipper expected to raise the coast of Africa in a few days. It rode the now complacent sea, motionless. There was not a ripple.

Life aboard the Neptune for Bert Conway proved to be a continuous performance of scrubbing or brushing from morning until night, and excepting for the interludes furnished by his two rival friends, it might have palled, but, as it was, he found little time for retrospection. He was eager only for the future. He was anxious to see what the Dark Continent looked like in daylight.

Conway was not striking out blindly for something better, as Mr. Wilbur had intimated. He had read much about Africa, and it was on what he had read that he based his plans.

He had absorbed with eager mind glowing descriptions of the Rand gold mines, of the diamond mines, the copper mines and the life surrounding them. His imagination had run wild.

He dreamed of the huge forests where negroes extracted rubber from trees, of the life led by the trader and the plantation owner. He pictured himself in those surroundings.

He felt certain that he would fit into the scene, somewhere; it was so big.

Of course, his plan of action touched only the high spots. There were so many small details attached to a venture such as his that he could hardly be expected to foresee everything. He realized that obstacles had to be met and surmounted as they bobbed up, and that it was there the danger lurked.

He had to do the right thing at the right time. So far so good. As yet he had no reason to regret having decided to hunt for a job in Africa.

As the Neptune neared land his mind dwelt more and more on the moves that he must make when the time came. It was now a matter of only a day or two before the ship touched at a port.

If he remembered rightly, some one had told him it was Boma, in the Belgian Congo. He had read of it often, and now thrilled at the thought that it was only a matter of hours before he would be walking around there.

Not having the slightest idea of what he would be up against, he found himself worrying. He had no details. He lacked information. The only alternative was to get that information.

The next night he found his opportunity. Stepping out of the fo'c'sle, he spied Paddy, the Irishman, sprawled out on top of the forward hatch, staring up at the stars, a pipe dangling from the corner of his mouth.

Conway walked over and sat down beside him. A couple of lascars were asleep on the far end, sheer contentment, with the warm sea breezes, spread over their brown faces.

"Paddy," Bert asked quietly, "how long will the ship be in Boma?"

The Irishman sighed heavily and gripped his pipe firmly between his teeth.

"Two days, I should say," he answered sleepily.

"Do we dock?"

"Nope."

"Is it a big place?"

"It's the capital of the Congo."

"I know, but is it a big town? Lots of people?" Conway inquired, making himself more explicit.

The Irishman swung around and stared at him curiously.

"An' what's eatin' you, lad? You sound as if you was goin' to buy the place. No, it's not a big town, it's a small one. Sure you've heard of the Congo."

"How can I get ashore if we don't dock?" Conway demanded next. The fact that the ship did not dock complicated matters a bit.

The Irishman studied him out of the corner of his eye.

"Some of the Hindus that come alongside with lace and rum will take you ashore if you pay them."

Conway pondered over what he had heard.

"If any one was to ask me," volunteered the Irishman blandly, "I'd say you was plannin' to jump the ship."

Conway flushed under his tan, but ignored the remark.

"Well, it's a bad place, the Congo," the other went on. "Not too wild for an Irishman, but most people ought to keep away from it. They die there like rats."

Conway had become meditative, but finally a question came to his mind.

"Where *do* we go into a dock? What port?" he asked.

"There isn't a dock on the west coast, an' there isn't a place where we get so close to land as at Boma. At Boma we go up the Congo River a way an' anchor. At the other ports we lay off the coast an' send the cargo ashore shootin' the surf in the lifeboats an' jest about half gets there. The only place we touch a dock in tha' whole trip is at Cape Town, an' that's the last call."

This threw new light on the matter, and Conway found himself with a weighty decision to make. Should he do, as the Irishman said he thought he was going to do—jump the ship here? Or should he keep on going down the coast? Well, he'd wait anyway and see what the darned place looked like.

III.

"HEY, ya' feller, who do ya' think ya'r? A first-class tourist?" boomed a voice behind Conway, who, for a moment, had relinquished his brush to gaze at the low-lying, yellow coast of Africa.

It was the big Danish boatswain, who moved on down the deck as Conway started to work again.

Bert swore under his breath. It wouldn't be long now, he told himself. Life aboard the ship had not been a bed of roses for him. He had felt the spurs of the big Dane more than once since they had put out of New York, and he welcomed the yellowish sandy coast as a means of escape.

The ship was astir with activity as preparations begun for unloading. Hatches were uncovered. Booms were hoisted. Cables were unwound and threaded through sheaves. Winches rumbled. Unmindful of the commotion on her deck, the Neptune plugged along through the placid sea.

The broad mouth of the Congo River loomed ahead. The helm was put over and the ship pointed her bow toward it.

They passed a lighthouse located on a sandy island. Conway estimated the river to be fifteen miles wide at this point.

The Neptune plowed its way up the murky stream, hugging the north bank, which was covered with a blanket of lowland palms. Several miles farther up, the river narrowed. The cool sea breeze disappeared as the ship became confined between the two banks. It became intensely hot.

The channel wound through the lowland swamps of the coast, marked by some dilapidated floating buoys, until

it came to rolling country; then the ship followed the center line of the stream.

To Conway, it was, as he pictured things, the Garden of Eden. He could not see a moving creature on either bank. An hour later he made out several white spots on the north bank, far upstream. He watched them and eventually recognized them as buildings.

Paddy came along the deck and stopped by his side.

"That's Boma," he said cheerfully. "It's a blithering hot hole."

Conway's heart beat fast with excitement.

Steadily the Neptune pushed upstream against a powerful current until it came abreast of the white buildings, then, in a thunder of clashing iron, dropped anchor and shut off its engines.

The ship lay about a half mile from the bank. Conway saw another ship farther upstream, riding at anchor and almost completely surrounded by small rowboats.

Now a half dozen small boats put out from the bank and headed for the Neptune. He guessed, they were the bumboat peddlers that Paddy had mentioned.

Discipline had disappeared during the excitement attendant on their arrival. Several of the crew leaned against the ship's rail and scanned the tropical splendor, but none of them saw it as Conway did. None of them experienced the same emotions that he did.

Some inward voice was saying to him: "There you are, young man, that is what you want. It is what you asked for; now do your stuff."

He almost sighed.

The city was buried in a shroud of palms, only part of a white wall peeking out here or the corner of a grass roof there. It was like a rich tapestry, beautiful, but indistinct.

He watched the small boats draw alongside. They were loaded with boxes and baskets, and manned by brown-skinned men. Although he had never seen Hindus before, he knew that such they were on account of their long, straight black hair. They were not negroes, he was certain.

They crawled up the ladder on the side opposite to where he was standing. He studied each face, as it came up over the rail.

To him, they appeared an evil-visaged crowd. Each one had a jet black mustache that contrasted oddly with the chocolate brown color of his skin. One of them, Conway imagined, had a more sympathetic look in his eyes than the others, and for this reason he selected him for his experiment.

He moved a short distance away from the other members of the crew, who lounged alongside of him, so that their conversation would not be overheard. Then he waited for the Hindu.

Two of the others offered him their wares first, but he waved them away with a flip of his hand. The one for whom he was waiting, finally spotted him and came rushing toward him to offer him his lace.

"Some very rich lace, sir?" he said in English, unfolding a very large tablecloth and spreading it over his shoulder. "Or some fine—"

Conway regarded him closely before interrupting him.

"Say, how much do you want for rowing me ashore to-night?" he asked in a low voice.

The Hindu's rascally black eyes seemed to pierce his brain in the effort to read his intentions.

"You jumping the ship?" His black eyes smiled as they regarded him intently.

For a moment Conway hesitated then blurted out: "No—I mean, yes. I want to see some one ashore."

"I'll take you there for ten francs, mister," the Hindu answered.

"Gee, how much is ten francs in American money?" demanded Conway.

"About thirty cents," answered the peddler promptly, showing that he was accustomed to selling aboard American ships.

"That's all right," said Conway softly, "I'll go with you as soon as it gets dark. It's after five now. Come around to the fo'c'sle then. Savvy?"

The Hindu assented and shifting his laces on his shoulder, strolled down the deck toward a group of sailors. Conway watched him and then went below.

By the time the sun had set and a hot night had settled down over the river valley, Conway had all his belongings together and packed in his valise. When he had finished, he sat down on his bunk to rest.

He counted his money. Five dollars and fifty-seven cents in all. Just how long he could live on it ashore, he could not guess.

He had some pay due him for his services aboard ship, but to demand it now might arouse the suspicions of the officers. He decided that it was best to forfeit the money.

He glanced through the porthole and saw that it was dark. He had been alone in the fo'c'sle during the entire time and felt confident that he had been unobserved. Now he stepped outside the companion doorway.

Something moved just beyond and a voice asked quietly: "Are you coming with me?"

Conway drew back as he recognized the Hindu.

"Say," he said, "run your boat under the stern of the ship and wait for me there. I'll come down a rope, over the side."

Five minutes later, Conway dodged along the deck, through the darkness, to the stern, unseen. There he tied his valise to the end of a rope and let it down into the waiting boat. The Hindu untied it and signaled to Conway.

The latter then fastened the rope to the railing, and climbing over, slid down it to the boat. The entire coup had been effected unobserved, and in another minute Conway was being rowed to the bank of the river under cover of the darkness.

IV.

Now that he had deserted the ship Conway felt much the same as if he had broken jail and was making a dash for liberty. He imagined that every one was after him. He wanted to hide.

When the boat finally touched the shore he picked up his valise and jumped out. He paid the Hindu for his part in the game, then arranging the handle of his valise so it would rest comfortably in his hand, stumbled up the bank in the darkness.

He found himself, a few seconds later, strutting down one of the tree bordered avenues that led away from the river and through the town.

"Now for a room," he told himself as he moved through the night.

He could feel a gravel road beneath his feet, but he could see nothing. Here and there, a dim light flickered through a thin place in the foliage, which Conway took as an indication of a residence.

He groped his way for several minutes until he came to a clearing with only the sky above it. There was not a house in sight. He must have gone beyond the town.

True, it was not a big place, but perhaps he had got onto a side street. He retraced his steps until he came to a cross street that he had passed unnoticed.

It showed a half circle of light in the distance which reminded Conway of a tunnel. He turned down this street.

Five minutes later he was gazing up at a two-story adobe brick building. The entire front of the lower floor, which was on the street level, was wide open, revealing the interior to be a café.

A balcony spread across the front of

the second floor, to which a stairway led from the street. A man was descending the steps.

Conway walked over to him as he stepped to the ground.

"Is this a hotel?" he inquired politely.

"Sort of a hotel," the man laughed.

"Are there any rooms vacant? Can I get a place?" Conway interrogated, a light of hope coming to his eyes. At least some one here spoke English.

His valise was heavy. He was tired and sweating.

"Certainly, I can give you a room," the man assured him. "Don't you find those clothes too heavy for the Congo?"

He indicated the woolen suit of American clothes that Conway wore.

"Guess they are," Bert agreed.

The other turned and ascended the stairway, signing for Conway to follow. He led the way to a door on the far end of the balcony, unlocked it and pushed it open.

He lit a candle. Conway saw the interior to be furnished with a chair, a washstand and a mosquito-netted bed.

"When you finish your wash, come below to register, please."

"All right," answered Conway. "Are you the proprietor of the hotel?" Bert figured that it might be well to get on friendly terms with him if he was.

"Yes," was the answer. "But we are two, my brother and myself. He is away at the plantation. Are you an Englishman?"

"No, I am an American," Conway hastily informed him.

"Oh!" exclaimed the man. "One is as bad as the other."

He turned on his heel and went out. Conway puzzled over the response.

What did he mean? Apparently the man, though he could speak English, was neither an American nor an Englishman.

Conway pulled off his shirt and sponged himself with water. "So this is Boma," he told himself, "the town where Bert Conway starts to get somewhere."

He liked the place, although he had not actually seen it at close hand. But Conway was one of those beings who like a place or dislike it ten minutes after they arrive.

Half an hour later, in better spirits, Bert locked the door of his room and descended the steps to the street. He stopped before the café and scanned the faces of the occupants to make sure that no one from the Neptune was there.

He breathed easier as he failed to recognize any one. He went in and selected a table in a far corner, practically unobserved.

The atmosphere of the place was hot and strange. Something was wrong, but he could not say just what made him imagine it.

He guessed that the others in the café were traders and hunters from the descriptions he had read. They bellowed at each other with husky voices.

Through the din and tobacco smoke, negro boys, clad in dirty white pants, backs naked, darted with trays of cold beer from one table to the other, serving the overheated and overexcited white men.

From his corner Conway studied the scene curiously. To him, it seemed, that at each table the destiny of the world was being decided, such was the fervor of the disputants. The din was nerve-racking.

Then it dawned on him like a flash. He knew what was wrong. And the realization stunned him. He had believed at first that it was only the jumble of voices, the noise he had sometimes heard on the radio, but it wasn't.

They were speaking a foreign language and listen as he would, he failed to understand one word.

He had never thought of the possibility of another language than his own

being spoken in the Congo. But the place was Belgian, he reasoned, so it was natural they should speak their own language. He had never thought of this contingency.

He became despondent. Disappointment swelled up in him as he foresaw the impossibility of remaining there, unable to converse with the inhabitants.

He could not learn French or whatever they spoke, immediately. All he could do was to go back to the Neptune and keep going until he found a British colony.

His mind retraced his trip from Glendale.

"Gee," he said to himself, "why didn't Wilbur think to ask me if I spoke a foreign language?"

"Good evening," a voice said over his shoulder.

He swung around, startled. The man who had shown him his room stood by his side, smiling. He had a slip of paper in his hand.

"Will you fill this out?"

He handed the slip to Conway and procured pen and ink from the counter. Conway read over the questions on the paper, then filled it out, as requested. It was the register slip for guests.

After he had filled in all the answers, he handed it back to the hotel man who had sat down opposite him.

"Who do you come out for?" inquired the fellow, glancing at the slip of paper.

Conway was only too glad to unburden his chest.

"I come out for myself. I come out to get a job. But it looks as if I will be going right back because I don't speak the language," he said.

The man stared at him curiously, but sympathetically.

"What is your business?" he demanded.

"I have done surveying work since I left school," Conway informed him, a ray of hope in his eyes.

"Yes," went on the hotel proprietor slowly, "you must speak the language if you want to work here. My brother and I are Dutchmen, but we speak English and French."

"I don't care what I do," volunteered Conway, clinging to a hope that the man might help him. "I'll do any kind of work and the more dangerous, the better."

His auditor screwed up his face oddly. Evidently he was thinking.

"My brother might have a job for you if you like something dangerous," he informed him; then added: "You see, my brother is plantation manager for a Dutch company of Amsterdam, Holland. The main plantation is just outside of Boma and he is very busy there. Well, a few weeks ago, the Amsterdam office wrote him a letter, telling him to find out if it were possible to open up their other plantation, which is five hundred miles inland. Now, I ask you, is it possible for my brother to be in two places at the same time?"

Conway shook his head negatively.

"They are fools in Amsterdam," the man declared hotly. "I know, and all these fellows know"—he waved his arm indicating the men in the café—"that it is a waste of time and dangerous to go there. You see, there was a plantation there once. It was just starting and then the negroes rebelled in the region. All the white men were killed. But listen, that was ten years ago. To-day, if you ask any of these traders, they will tell you the blacks are still bad. They kill white men every year and eat them. They are cannibals."

He pounded the table to accentuate the last statement.

"And they want my brother to go there, can you believe it? They are fools in Amsterdam."

Conway wondered how he was going to figure in the matter; was it possible they would send him?

"Well," went on the hotel man, recovering from his indignation, "my brother wrote back to Amsterdam and

told them that the country was still bad, because every one who had been near it said so. They replied to his letter and told him to send some one up there immediately, or he would lose his job; and furthermore, they said, one of the Amsterdam managers was coming out to Boma to see that it was done. My brother declares he won't go. He would rather lose his job than his head. So maybe if you go to see him he can give you a job."

Conway had listened intently and had got the drift of the situation. He finally had been given a chance to lose his head, if that was what he really wanted.

"If you come back, that will be fine," put in the proprietor. "If you don't, that means the country is still bad."

Conway nodded comprehension.

"Where can I see your brother?" he asked finally.

"He will be here to-morrow morning about eight o'clock. If you come down, you can talk to him."

As he rose to go he nodded to one of the customers of the place and said something that Conway did not understand.

"All right, I'll come down and see him," Conway informed him.

The hotel man disappeared through a doorway that led into a back room of the place, leaving Conway in somewhat of a whirl. Perhaps, after all, he would not have to go back to the Neptune, he mused.

He had come down to the café with an appetite, but the excitement of the evening had robbed him of it; so he returned to his room and went to bed, without eating anything.

V.

THE next morning Conway awoke after a hot and fretful night. With sleepy eyes he looked through the open doorway of his room, out over the balcony railing at the maze of palms that were bathed in sunshine on the property opposite.

He jumped out of bed and looked at his watch. It was five minutes to eight.

"I'll have to hurry," he told himself.

Completing his toilet, he descended to the café. As he entered a very fat, red-faced individual raised his jowls from their task of consuming a steak and regarded him intently.

Conway passed by and sat down at a table in the corner.

While he was wondering if the fat man was the person he had to see, his friend of the night before stepped out from the back room.

"Good morning," he said cordially. "That's my brother over there."

The fat man swung around and stared at Conway through bleary eyes. Bert walked over and sat down on the other side of the table.

Two negro boys became instantly occupied in arranging the table for his breakfast. Meanwhile, the two brothers conversed in Dutch, and Conway assumed that they were discussing his case.

Finally the other brother retreated to the back room leaving Conway and the fat plantation manager alone, excepting for the black boys who waited on them.

"You like dangerous business?" queried the manager in English which was not as fluent as that of the hotel man.

"Yes, sir."

"Ven you like start? To-morrow?" he demanded bluntly.

"Why—er—yes. Say, am I hired? I thought—" Conway stammered. Things were developing too fast for him, but he left them to go as they would.

"Ve pay not much money," the Dutchman explained slowly. "But it iss like diss. If all iss vell up dere, you have good yob. You become manacher."

Conway's eyes sparkled as he pictured himself manager of a plantation in West Africa. He began to eat excitedly.

"But also," went on the other dryly, "you have a bad yob now. Muzaking is a black chief. He kill many white mans. He chase oudt everybody and he iss still dere some place. Maybe he make good friend now, but dat iss da point I bring oudt. If you make friend with him, you iss de manacher and if you don't, you iss no manacher, you iss dead maybe. See?"

This sounded like high adventure to Conway, but that was what he was after, wasn't it?

"But, say," he stammered, hardly believing his ears, "I don't speak the language. I don't know the country. I can't speak with the blacks, much less the white men."

The Dutchman was playing his cards artfully. He perceived the opportunity that lay within his grasp. The chance of restoring amicable relations between himself and his employers, by sending a man to that infernal region. Belgians had guffawed at the job.

"Vot? You iss afraid?" He feigned surprise.

Conway pushed the dishes back from before him nervously. He planked his two elbows on the table and crouched forward toward his would-be employer.

"Afraid?" he laughed, then he exclaimed: "The more danger, the better I'll like it. I'll take the job if you can use me."

"Fine!" exclaimed the Dutch manager, a broad grin distorting his red face.

He rubbed his big hands gleefully, then clapped them. A negro voice answered from behind the counter. The Dutchman said something that Conway took for words in the negro dialect. The black disappeared through the doorway that led to the back room.

"Ve go to the plantation now and I giff you all your equipment," the Dutchman informed Conway. "You sleep here to-night. To-morrow you leave for up country."

While he was speaking his brother entered, trailed by the boy who had been sent to call him. There followed a brief conversation between the two men, which Conway failed to understand. Then they left the café.

It was an hour's walk to the plantation, which lay hidden among the rolling hills behind Boma. Palms and banana trees met the eye on every hand.

Negroes, mere specks of blacks, moved about in the fields adjacent to the post buildings. Small grass huts flanked the clearing, in which loomed the white walled and grass thatched habitation of the Dutchman.

Streaming in sweat, for the sun was now high, the Dutchman trundled up the steps, followed by Conway, and dropped into a long chair on the veranda. He indicated a bench for Bert, who was none the worse for the hike.

The house seemed to be alive with negro boys, who kept poking their heads out of the windows and doors to get a glimpse of Conway. They were unaccustomed to the sight of a white man wearing European clothes and a cap

Conway's head ached, as the sun seemed to burn clean through his cap; he noticed that the other wore a cork sun helmet.

"I have no clothes for the trip," he remarked, somewhat hesitantly.

The Dutchman waved his arm impatiently.

"I gif you everything you need," he replied. "Vot iss your name?"

"Conway—Bert Conway."

"Mine is Oscar Maaz. Vell, Mr. Conway," he went on, "I gif you everything. First, to-day, ve get twenty blacks for de caravan. I gif you von good headman. Den ve get to von place and fix a tent and outfit for de camp. You take some dishes from my kitchen. I gif you von cook—not much good—but he know someding.

Den a personal boy—he iss too smart for me—he speak English a little, but you be careful for him—he iss too smart like."

He lapsed into silence and peered at Conway through his piggish eyes as if he expected Bert to say something.

"How do I get up there? Is there a train or a boat or something?"

"You go up the Congo River in a peroque—small boat—two small boats for you and your camp. You go up for four hundred mile, den you take a valk for one more hundred mile and dere you iss."

Conway gasped as comprehension of the immensity of the venture dawned on him. His dream was becoming a reality. Perhaps a bit too rapidly to his liking.

He had failed to perceive the masked eagerness with which Maaz wanted to get him started. Although Conway disliked the man instinctively, he felt that he had been frank in submitting his proposition.

VI.

A BAND of twenty burly negroes were rounded up from the plantation crews to act as paddlers and caravan men on Conway's trip into the interior. The headman that Maaz had promised to supply was placed over the crew as headman.

He was a very old, faded, but agile negro, with much experience in the life of the jungles.

Dishes and kitchen utensils were gathered and packed in a big iron trunk. A tent was mended and then rolled into a small bundle.

For food and medicine Maaz bought everything he thought Conway would need, in order to get to the other plantation, and gave him two months either to be dead or back in Boma.

An extremely surly negro was hired as cook, having learned his trade in the kitchen of the Dutchman, where he found life not too sweet. The Dutchman was cruel to his negroes, cuffing them on the slightest pretext.

Being an old-timer of the Congo, Maaz was capable of giving Conway pointers about travel in the interior. He told him where and when to camp. How to handle blacks and how to chastise them when necessary.

As a final counsel, he advised Conway to rely on his negroes. They had lived in the Congo all their lives, and if he could obtain their confidence they would take care of him and conduct him better than the advice of any white man.

"When you don't know what to do, ask Ink," he concluded.

This was a negro lad of about fifteen, but with years of experience reflected in his eyes. He had been turned over to Conway to act as personal boy. He was the one who had proved to be "too smart" for the Dutchman.

Conway saw in him only a mischievous youngster and immediately became attached to him. To describe one negro was to describe all of them. To Conway they all looked alike.

But Ink was different. His nose was not flat and spread all over his face as were the others. He had two rows of fine ivory teeth, that glistened white when his face folded itself into a smile.

His eyes were alive and friendly. The others were surly or deadened by the use of hemp, in which their owners indulged.

Ink was intelligent and it was that to which the Dutchman objected. He wanted dumb brutes that he could maul about. But Conway had a different character, and knew that he and the boy would get along.

The preparations for his trip up country were completed in record time, and now, the day after Conway had been introduced to Maaz, all his equipment lay before the main house, ready to be carried to the river and loaded on the two peroques that were owned by the plantation company.

Conway found himself thinking more and more about his meeting with the cannibal chief. He was to go directly to the area where once stood the old plantation buildings on the company's holdings. He was to start, or pretend to start, reclamation work on the plantation until chased out or—or —what?

Well, he didn't know. Under no circumstances, Maaz had insisted, was he to chase the chief or seek him. He was to ignore him completely. If the chief objected to his presence in the region he would not hesitate to make Conway conversant with the fact.

The wisdom of the Dutchman's advice was apparent to Bert and he decided to follow it. But he would certainly like to know more about Chief Muzaking.

That afternoon, garbed in clothing adapted more to the tropical climate and the rough life he was about to venture on, Conway said farewell to the Dutch manager.

His khaki sun helmet in his hand, he shook hands with Maaz, and strutted off down the dusty road behind his long line of negroes, each one with a bundle on his head. Ink carried his raincoat, his water canteen and a rifle.

Bert thrilled as he pictured the future. At last his dream was fulfilled—he was in Africa.

At the river's edge Conway found the two giant peroques tied to stumps. Ink and the headman of the caravan instantly took charge and loaded the outfit in the two boats carefully.

Once or twice Conway had to indicate that one side was too heavy. His orders, which he gave in English, were understood by Ink and were immediately obeyed.

As the loading progressed Bert realized that in Ink and the headman he had two experienced jungle-men. The headman assigned ten caravan men, the cook and himself to one boat and the other ten, with Ink and Conway, to the other.

Instantly a rivalry sprung up between Ink and the headman. One strove to outdo the other. They vied with each other for approbation in the eyes of the white man.

Conway smiled inwardly as the fifteen-year-old boy argued with the elderly headman. Enthusiastic youth versus wise old age, he mused.

After having taken their places in the dugouts the headman motioned to Conway to go ahead. Ink flared up and sputtered something back at him in the negro dialect. There followed a heated argument, while Conway looked on curiously.

"Boss," implored the lad excitedly, "he say you go ahead because he like stay back an' come slow. Dat black man no good."

The boy shouted something to the headman in a tone which often accompanies the taunt "I told you so," whereupon the other glared back a sour look and commanded his own negroes to pole out into the stream. Ink had told him that the white man would go last.

Conway had learned something already. Maaz had been right when he said, "Rely on the negroes," but he had failed to add the warning that some negroes were crafty and that he should use his own judgment on what they did in certain cases.

After the first boat had poled up stream about a hundred yards Conway gave orders to shove off. They hugged the bank where the current was negligible. Five sweaty blacks poled each boat while five rested. The cook, Ink and the headman were exempt from the task, unless they wished to stretch their muscles.

There were no curious white men at this hot hour of the day to wave farewell to the party as it rounded the bend in the river above the town of Boma to disappear in the African bush.

A mile or so downstream, although Conway had not noticed it, the steamship Neptune, emitting vast clouds of

smoke from her funnel, was moving down the river, her nose pointed toward the sea.

VII.

DURING the days that followed Conway studied diligently the map of the region he was to attempt to reopen, until in his dreams he could picture the lay of the country. They had to hunt out the mouth of the Kassi River, from which point their trek overland began.

"Take a walk for a hundred miles and there you iss," Maaz had instructed him. Easy to say, thought Conway.

During the day they scudded over the water, one boat always a couple hundred yards ahead. Monkeys peeked out often from the tops of overhanging trees and cackled indignantly at the invaders. A crocodile now and again slid off a sand bank as the rhythmic chant of the paddlers interrupted its sun bath.

At noon they would come up to the bank for rest. The sweat-streaming blacks could then loll in the shade of a tree or plunge into the serpent infested waters of the river in relaxation for an hour. Ink made coffee over a small fire and Conway ate a light lunch.

During these many stop-overs Conway always found the negro boy talkative. It was at one of these wayside camps that Conway learned valuable information from him.

Bert was sitting under a palm tree attempting to doze while his porters pranced about in the cooling water of the river. Ink and the cook sat by the side of the small fire over which a coffeepot was heating a few feet away.

They had been out from Boma ten days and were expecting to reach the mouth of the Kassi River within a day or two.

The caravan men were excitedly shouting at each other, regardless of Conway's desire to sleep. Suddenly Ink's shrill voice made him open his eyes.

The boy was endeavoring to quiet the men and had finally lost his temper when the blacks refused to be dictated to. He hurled violent language at them in the native dialect.

Conway watched, amused. Seeing that he was being laughed at, Ink gathered up a handful of small pebbles and fired them point blank at the nearest black, who received them full in the face.

He reached out, caught the boy, and twisted Ink's left arm around behind and practically lifted him off the ground. Conway sobered instantly.

He was on his feet and, rushing up to the negro who had seized Ink, and without a word, sent him sprawling over the beach.

The negro, who was practically naked, let out a shriek as he hit the ground. There he lay, rubbing his jaw and staring up into Conway's furious eyes insolently.

Ink rubbed his wrenched shoulder. Conway looked at the two of them. He wished that he could have spoken the native dialect in order to give the big negro a tongue lashing. As it was, he could only talk with Ink.

Silence spread over the onlookers, who stared with frightened eyes at their comrade, sitting foolishly on the ground.

Ink's shoulder was not badly injured, but it was very painful. Conway opened one of the trunks and took from it a soothing liniment. After an application to the sore joint the boy felt better.

"Boss," he said to Conway, "des black mans is no good. Dey like kill me."

Conway looked up from his task of massaging Ink's arm.

"Why they like kill you?" he asked curiously.

"Because, boss, de boss in Boma tell dem," was the answer.

"Which other boss?" he asked.

"Mr. Maaz," the boy replied. "He no like me much."

There were tears in his eyes. Conway was astounded.

"How do you know the boss in Boma told these men to kill you?"

The boy wiped his wet eyes with his fist. He stared around until he spied the headman of the caravan, who was leaning against a tree by the water's edge. He pointed at him.

"He say me," he wailed.

Conway motioned to the headman to come to him. The elderly black lumbered over and stood before Bert.

"You tell him, Ink," said Conway seriously, indicating the headman with his finger, the end of which almost went into the latter's eye, "that if anything happens to you on this trip, that he dies also."

The boy translated the threat into native dialect so that the headman could understand it. The negro listened unaffectedly. He turned and walked away when Ink had finished.

It hardly seemed possible that Maaz was a murderer, Conway reasoned. Perhaps it was because Ink had been bullying the headman too much that the latter decided on this means of scaring the boy into docility.

"That black man no tell truth," Conway tried to assure the youth.

"He tell much truth," Ink argued.

"How you sure?"

"I hear dat boss say much to headman in Boma. He say you no come back no more."

Conway stared at the boy dumfounded.

"I come back no more?" he repeated.

"Boss say, in Boma, you like go see Muzaking. He tell des black mans to go take you dere, quick. Den come back quick. He give you chop, good for one months. He say more chop no necessary. You much dead after one months. I hear him say like dat to headmans in Boma."

Conway studied the lad, then laughed loudly, patting him on the head. No doubt, Conway reasoned, the boy had overheard some remarks about the dangerous trip, made by Maaz, and not knowing sufficient about the matter, had misconstrued them.

Ink stared up into Conway's face appealingly.

"Boss, I hear much truth," he went on. "Every man who go to see Muzaking he die. Muzaking much big leopard. Why boss like go see him?"

"I go work big plantation now," answered Conway.

"No good, boss," the boy warned him. "He kill all white mans every year. All white mans in Boma understand Muzaking much. I speak you truth. I little black boy. I live in Congo many rain season. I like you. I speak you, you go see Muzaking, you die. De boss in Boma no good. He tell you go see Muzaking, he no like you. He tell me go see Muzaking, he no like me. Much same like."

The boy was in earnest and Conway changed his attitude toward him from light laughter to cold sobriety.

Evidently Maaz did not give him much chance of success. After all, Maaz only wanted some one to go into that region so that, when the manager from Europe arrived in Boma, he could say: "Oh, yes, I sent a man up there, but he was killed two weeks ago, so you see my first letter to you was correct."

It would cement the friendship again between himself and his company.

Conway pondered over the matter and found himself, after fifteen minutes, with an entirely transformed point of view.

At first he had felt as if he was working for Maaz as an employee, but now he felt as if he were on his own. Ink had changed his whole attitude.

True, Maaz was uninterested in him; he had done his duty by outfitting him and sending him on his way. If he died on the way or was drowned en route he cared not. His duty was performed.

But he had a job to do and he vowed that he would do it. Turn back? Never. From now on he was working for himself. And Ink was to be his headman.

They continued on up the river, and two days later arrived at the mouth of the Kassi River. The rapids, which were indicated on the map in Conway's possession, could be heard, a low rumble, through the air. These rapids, spread across the Kassi a mile or so above the junction, prevented further use of the peroques.

This entailed the hundred-mile march overland. To carry the boats around the rapids would require a hundred negroes, so such a course was out of the question.

The equipment was unloaded and a camp made. Conway gave the negroes one entire day to loaf before striking off through the jungle. The peroques were pulled upstream a short distance above the camp and worked into a swamp, where, in a bed of papyrus, they were left concealed.

VIII.

THE trail overland had to be broken as the caravan moved on. Keeping the forest-fringed Kassi River always about a mile to his left, Conway gave the direction to the headman. The route skirted dangerous swamps and plunged through dense jungles, down into deep ravines that emptied into the Kassi, up the opposite steep slopes, thence across undulating plains.

Ink remarked that it was strange no tracks of humans or animals were to be seen. It was desolate country.

Conway found it expedient to throw the party on half rations on account of the small quantity of food that Maaz had fitted him out with. The men grumbled, but Conway insisted.

They moved on, day after day, until finally they emerged from the almost impassable jungle and found themselves on a vast plain of tall brown grass. Conway could not see over the top of it. In order to get his bearings from the Kassi River he had to climb to the lower limbs of a scrub tree, with which the plain was sparsely dotted.

It reminded Conway of an immense field of mammoth wheat. The country was dead; apparently it hadn't rained for weeks. The stalks broke off and were thrashed into a straw under foot as the caravan trampled over it.

The negroes suffered, as no breeze could penetrate the grassy forest, but swept over the tops of the grass, leaving the column of marching men to bake beneath the savage sun.

Conway was now searching for the old camp site of the men who had been there years before. He wondered if it would be possible to find any traces of it after all this time. His map indicated that the plantation included all this grassy plain, naturally enough, because no deforesting was required.

Conway pushed on boldly, though ever alert for signs of the chief Muzaking, whose domain he was now treading uninvited. Somehow he could not force himself to believe that the fellow was as bad as he was made out to be.

They followed the direction given by the map, but by nightfall had not arrived at the point, which was marked on the chart by a cross. The old site.

They threw up a temporary camp. The tent was pitched and the men pulled up the grass for several yards around it. Ink began preparations for Conway's dinner.

Weary and exhausted, Bert flopped down into his long chair and fell asleep. The sun was just above the horizon, but descending rapidly.

The chill of evening was settling over the region. The caravan men finished the camp, disregarding Conway's slumbers, and withdrew, as was their custom, to a place a hundred yards away, where they made their own beds and covers out of the grass.

Bert could not say how long he had been asleep, when he suddenly awoke. Something had struck him a blow on the side of his face.

Through bleary eyes, he perceived Ink standing by his side, fear written in every feature. He jumped up.

"Boss," the boy whispered nervously, staring at the back of Conway's tent, "somethin' make noise in de grass dere."

The grass had been cleared around the tent for about ten feet and Conway's eyes tried to penetrate the maze beyond. A noise continued, steadily and stealthily.

Before Conway thought to get his rifle, the stalks parted and a band of savages leaped forward into the clearing surrounding the tent.

"Muzaking!" gasped Ink, concealing himself behind Conway.

Bert froze in his position. His mind failed to function. He was only able to stare at the mob of blacks that poured from the brush.

Paint-smeared and spotted, wearing narrow loin cloths of cats and armed with spears, double-edged knives, Conway realized that their visit was not friendly.

But he was not to die without a fight. He was about to make a dive into his tent to get his rifle when his attention was drawn to a giant negro who had just sprinted into the clearing.

Adorned with an enormous headdress of eagle feathers, heavy iron armlets and a magnificent leopard skin that just touched the ground, Conway made him out to be the chief, Muzaking, himself. Ink had called him the "leopard chief," his dazed mind recalled.

The chief confronted Conway, his bold animal eyes staring at him coldly. Conway tried to retaliate, but the savage glare was too much for him.

Meanwhile, several of his band had got between Conway and the tent. Bert was cornered.

He pulled Ink from behind him forcefully.

"Ask him what he wants?" commanded Conway.

The boy immediately recovered his self-control at the sound of Conway's voice.

The boy interrogated the chief as ordered, in a loud voice. The small negro contrasted oddly with the mighty warrior chief that he addressed.

The chief stared at the boy indifferently. When Ink had finished, the chief turned around and motioned to one of his henchmen.

Ink, panic-stricken, jumped away and grasped Conway about the waist, his eyes hysterical and crying.

However, as the situation developed, it became apparent that Ink's apprehensions were unfounded. The chief had called his aid to act as interpreter for him.

Recovering himself somewhat, Ink again repeated his question.

The chief received the interpretation from his aid, pondered for a moment, then answered in a bass voice.

"He like tent," reported Ink after the chief's interpreter had translated the answer from the language of the cannibal into that of Ink.

Conway gulped as comprehension dawned on him. The chief, apparently, had no intention of killing him. If he had, why would he ask for the tent? It was his already.

Conway told Ink to pull the stakes and roll up the tent. He was prepared to present to the jungle maharajah, if it meant the acquisition of the dignitary's friendship, any part of his anatomy excepting his head.

For that the chief would have to battle. To gain his friendship with a tent was a bargain.

After Ink had complied with Conway's instructions and the stately gift lay in a bundle at one side of the clearing, the band of blacks subjected the baggage and bed to a minute inspection.

They pawed over everything, until with a threatening growl, the chief called them off. He indicated to two of his warriors to take the tent and depart.

The sun was now below the horizon and it was rapidly becoming dark. Some of the warriors, shrieking weird cat-calls, darted into the grass and were gone.

Fearful lest the chief depart before he had explained who he was and that he intended to reopen the plantation, Conway summoned Ink.

"Tell him I live here many moons. I come live here, with him," he instructed the boy.

Ink complied. The warrior listened attentively. Then the chief began a lengthy discourse, his cold voice sounding as if coming from the dead.

When he terminated his reply, Ink turned to Conway somewhat confused. He was thoughtful for a minute as if endeavoring to arrange his material.

"He say no good place for white mans," the boy finally reported. "He say Muzaking big chief here."

"But I give Muzaking the tent. We are good friends now," Conway reminded him.

"No, boss, he no Muzaking. Dis black mans, Chief Shanganso an' he bad friend to Muzaking."

While he was learning these astounding facts Conway did not note the withdrawal of the chief and the balance of his band from the clearing.

IX.

THE next morning the caravan had one less bundle to carry. The tent was now the property of the Chief Shanganso, who through a case of mistaken identity, had secured possession of it.

They pushed onward through a grassy plain in the direction that led toward the old post site. The map told Conway that two tall royal palms marked the spot.

Several times during the morning, he climbed up and gazed over the tops of the grass, but he failed to see any trees other than the one he was up. "Perhaps they had been blown down," he told himself.

At noon they arrived at the spot where the plantation buildings should have been, but there was no indication of any such thing. The tall grass made it doubly difficult for Conway. He could not see more than five feet away from him in any direction. Perhaps they were only a couple hundred yards from it.

An idea! "Burn off the grass!" he said to himself.

He ordered the headman to pile all of the baggage in one spot and then cleared a space out around the equipment for fifteen feet. He struck a match and set fire to the dry vegetation.

The wall of grass surrounding the little party broke into flame with a roar. The blacks and Conway fell back and crouched to the ground. It was as if the landscape had been sprinkled with gasoline, such was the violence with which the conflagration started.

It grew in volume and spread rapidly over the ground. Clouds of dense black smoke sailed skyward from the wavering blanket of fire.

The little party, coughed and choked as the wind, changing, sent the fumes back over their heads. Fortunately, Conway had thought to clear the ground around the baggage, otherwise, he would certainly have lost everything.

When the fire had burned fifty or a hundred yards away, they were able to breathe more freely. But the fiery tornado swept on with ever-increasing fury, leaving behind it, a level, black stretch of smoking stubble.

The flames leaped upward for thirty feet, crackling and roaring, until the fire resolved itself into a low rumbling, as it moved rapidly away from them, in all directions.

Conway was amazed; he had not expected to set the countryside on fire, but there was no means of stopping it now. He wondered if Shanganso's camp lay in the path of the flames.

Suddenly, Conway saw something move in the smoky distance. He grabbed his rifle and waited as it passed into another cloud. Then, leaping out of the maze, an antelope streaked past, his hide smoking where the fire had scorched him. Conway raised his rifle and dropped the animal in its tracks.

It was the first moving creature, other than serpents, that he had seen on the trip. The caravan men shouted in joy, as the prospect of a good meal dawned on them.

While waiting for the fire to move on, Conway and his men skinned the antelope.

After an hour the fire had mowed the plain for a mile around and with one glance the stumps of two royal palms were recognized about three hundred yards to the left of where the baggage lay. Conway decided to make his camp just where he was, on account of the ash that covered the rest of the area. At last, he sighed, he had arrived.

Now there remained only the task of meeting the chief Muzaking, leopard prince of the taboo region, and making friends with him. Conway had been bitterly disappointed the night before when he discovered that he had kowtowed to some unknown negro, instead of to the sovereign, Muzaking. It was humiliating.

He felt that he should have maintained a better control over his emotions before the black and also made certain of his identity. As it was, he felt that he had belittled the white race.

After much deliberation, he decided that the party would camp on this site until Muzaking should evict them. In the meantime, he would proceed with the reclamation work. It was evident that a house should be constructed to take the place of the lost tent.

He looked about for material. Along the river bank Conway saw, from the hillside, a small growth of bamboo. With these, he believed, he could build a house like those he had seen on the outskirts of Boma. The walls were constructed by setting the poles close together.

However, he had one more night to sleep in the open. From his bed he watched the crimson glow on the dark sky, as the fire burned along the horizon, and felt regretful for having disturbed the antelope. Perhaps, some had been burned alive.

However, he had enjoyed the tender steaks with the same gusto as had his porters.

The next morning, intent on building a house, he distributed the axes and bush knives that Maaz had thoughtfully included in his equipment, and led the way down the slope toward the river. The bamboo poles proved just the right size, about six inches in diameter.

He instructed the headman to cut about a hundred and leave them piled on the river bank. On the morrow they would transport them up the hill.

Returning to his camp about noon, he found Ink and the cook preparing his lunch, but also watching two black objects on the horizon.

In a few minutes, he made them out to be negroes and coming in the direction of his camp. He was more curious than alarmed.

He suspected they might be messengers from Shanganso. Perhaps, demanding something else. He decided that Shanganso had obtained all the souvenirs due him.

However, when two heavy negroes, streaming in sweat, staggered up to the trio, he failed to recognize any one he had seen the night before. They stopped before him, coughed loudly from the exertion their lope had demanded, and glanced furtively at the invaders.

Ink mumbled something to them. They regarded him insolently and responded in deep guttural voices.

"Des black mans come from Muzaking," Ink informed Conway.

At last, he said to himself, news from the front.

"What do they want?" he directed the boy to ask them.

Ink immediately became engaged in a lengthy conversation at certain periods of which Conway expected violence on the part of the two couriers. He

moved over closer to Ink to protect him and give him more courage.

Finally they lapsed into silence and Ink turned to Conway.

"Dey tell us go home, boss," he said nervously. "He say white mans make much trouble here. He burn grass. He give Shanganso much presents. He say, no can stay here."

The boy regarded the two messengers reflectively, as if recalling to mind some details.

"He say Shanganso no friend of Muzaking. He no like Shanganso. An' no friend of Shanganso can be friend of Muzaking."

Conway at once perceived the jealousy that existed between the two chiefs. Muzaking was angry because he had given his tent to Shanganso.

"He say, you burn grass where he like kill big white antelope. He say you make bad medicine on hunt ground. He no like you stay here. He like come to-morrow an' make go."

This was a little vague to Conway. Evidently he had ruined the chief's hunting grounds by burning off the grass. That a white antelope had been his game.

It seemed impossible because he had never heard of a white antelope; the one he had killed had been an ordinary roan. It was a bad break. Everything he had done since he had entered the region had affected the friendship he had sought. Possibly ruined it.

"He say, white man burn no more grass. He say, white man go home."

The two messengers turned to leave, but Conway called them back. Anger seethed within him. He was to be bulldozed no longer.

If the grand stand display of firearms was to begin, let it come. He was ready.

"Tell those black dogs," he exploded, "that white mans no go. He stay here for good. Let them come to-morrow."

He was fuming and his angry eyes tore into the insolent expressions of the two runners. They sobered slightly.

After Ink had explained Conway's answer, the two departed, loping off over the stubble. Conway watched them as they went.

"Let them come to-morrow," he growled to himself.

X.

CONWAY found himself in a predicament that demanded the utmost wariness lest it result in disaster for the entire party.

As his first move to thwart calamity, he instructed Ink and the cook to keep secret everything that had taken place. The caravan men had all been in the bamboo forest on the river bank, and knew nothing of the chief's ultimatum.

Conway could rely on Ink, but not on the cook to hold his tongue, therefore, he assigned to the boy the task of watching him closely.

He wondered if he was a fool to attempt to hold off the hordes that Muzaking would throw against him. Should he run now, while the running was good, or fight it out?

The more he pondered, the more he resolved that it was a personal question of supremacy that was at stake. The thought, that his success over the negro chief meant the acquisition of the plantation for a company in Amsterdam, never entered his mind. To him, it was Bert Conway versus Muzaking, and he decided to fight it out.

He was sitting in his long chair staring at the ground at his feet. Suddenly he gave a decisive nod to his head as he decided upon his course and looked up.

Ink was staring at him.

"Boss, you no go to Shanganso?" he inquired, his eyes alight.

Conway frowned as the thought dawned on him. His own tan features brightened.

No, he wouldn't go to Shanganso, but he would send for him to come with all his band. Perhaps, together, they could hold off Muzaking.

He dispatched Ink to the river to get two runners for the mission.

"Get Shemba and Mamba," shouted Conway to the boy as he sped down the slope headed for the patch of grass and papyrus, where the caravan men were working.

He knew these two negroes to be the fleetest of his gang and it was fleetness that was required now.

He wondered what was the strength of Shanganso's forces. If ample, it was only a matter of his reaching them before Muzaking attacked.

Ink returned in half an hour with the two blacks, breathless and streaming in sweat. The sun was blazing.

First he had to instruct them as to the errand, then, he thought, it might be a diplomatic move to have them deliver at the same time that they asked the chief to come to his aid, a gift.

He dug through his trunks until he unearthed his woolen suit of American clothes, just the thing, he pondered. He could get more when he got back to Boma. Or—maybe he wouldn't need clothes any more.

But where would Shanganso be found? Where was his lair? Perhaps he was the chief of a band of roving, wild hunter savages and had no camp. Perhaps he was now far away. But he had to be found.

"Where is Shanganso?" he asked Ink. He knew that the boy could not tell him, but he had to ask some one.

"Out dere," Ink replied.

Conway watched the kid wave his arm toward the distant horizon, swinging it in an angle of about fifteen degrees.

There was nothing to do but send the runners off in a direction parallel to the Kassi River. It was the best bet. It was doubtful if the chief had crossed the river.

"Tell them, Ink, to go along the river until they come to our old camp, where we saw them. Then, if they go to the water and back up the hill for two-three mile, they find them. Give them this present and tell them, Ink, to give it to Shanganso himself. And, be sure to tell him to come as fast as he can, with all his men."

It was a gamble. If Shanganso arrived, they had a better chance of holding out. If not, he had to rely on his caravan men to support him.

"I go, too," he heard Ink say, after he had translated Conway's instructions for the two runners. "I find Shanganso."

Conway looked at the brave lad and smiled. He was too small.

"No, you stay and watch the cook." He saw that the boy was disappointed and added: "No, I need you here, Ink, I can't talk with the men, and if the cook squeals, I am alone. Savvy?"

The two runners, uncertain as to the meaning of all the talk, gazed from Conway to Ink, and from Ink to Conway.

"That's all," finished Conway. "Tell the two men to get on their way. And hurry."

Immediately, upon Ink's interpretation, the two blacks turned on their heels and started at a smart pace across the stubble. Conway wondered if they would ever get there. Perhaps they would find Muzaking instead, who no doubt would murder them.

He realized that they were risking their lives, but they did not know it. But, after all, he reasoned, they were all liable to be carved up on the morrow.

XI.

THAT evening the caravan men returned from the papyrus and bamboo forest, with heads bent, tired from the day's work. They deposited their axes and knives alongside of the baggage and trudged off to the little compound where they slept under the stars, totally unaware of the impending attack.

Ink had successfully intercepted the cook's outbursts and other than several remarks of consternation over the departure of Shemba and Mamba there

was no further discussion of the situation.

The night wore on, but Conway could not sleep. The fateful day that loomed ahead of him made him restless. He turned from side to side, endeavoring to fall asleep, but all in vain.

The night air oppressed him. But he was not afraid.

"Let it come," he said to himself, over and over.

Toward morning some animal came near and emitted a kind of booming, strangled moan, an ominous and startling sound. A jackal that had been scavenging around the native compound answered with his shrill, hysterical laugh.

Conway jumped up and grabbed his rifle. Something dashed over the plain and was gone.

Slightly unnerved by the sudden awakening, he sat on the edge of his camp cot and watched the heavens redden in the east. Sleep had wholly deserted him.

It was the day of days. His mind went back to Glendale. It was less than three months since he had left his old job to hunt for something where he had to take care of himself or die. He had accomplished his purpose. What was to be the outcome?

The Southern Cross faded in the south as the red splendor of the sunrise flooded the plain. From gray, the stubble turned to amber, then as the sun flamed over the rim of the world, everything dazzled in the strong, golden light.

Conway dressed and ate his breakfast, glad that the fretful night had passed. With daylight, tranquillity had settled down.

As the first light of the growing day spread over the ash-strewn waste he thought he saw a cloud of mist on the horizon to the north. He peered over his meal, which was spread out on the top of one of his trunks.

The stronger the light grew, the more certain he became that it was not mist, but a cloud of dust. Something was churning up the ground like a herd of cattle on the Western plains in the States.

The cloud rose higher.

"Black mans!" shouted Ink loudly. "Des comin'."

Conway glanced toward the rest of his crew. They were all watching the horizon. Much like frightened sheep.

"Where's the cook?" he demanded of Ink quickly.

They both looked around, but he was not to be seen. Ink dashed toward the compound, and Conway saw the boy, a few seconds later, shoving a negro over the ground and out of the mob that clung about him.

He pulled him before Conway, breathless and struggling.

"He tell dose mans about Muzaking," declared the boy, releasing his grip on the cook, who stood shaking nervously like a mangy mongrel about to be whipped.

The caravan men, with the headman, swarmed around Conway threateningly. His own men were going back on him, he saw.

He made a step toward the rascally cook who had spread the story and caused the mutiny. But the cook bounded backward and burst through the ring of negroes that surrounded the trio, sending several sprawling over the ground as he fled. He had no intention of being caught.

"Catch that black!" roared Conway, Ink shouting the same thing to the caravan porters; but no one moved. The headman stared at Conway insolently and mumbled something.

The black line of nearing savages spread over the entire horizon. There were hundreds of them. The clamor of the onrush was growing louder.

Before Ink could tell Conway what the headman had said, the latter, followed by the entire gang of blacks, had turned and started in the direction of the fleeing cook. They headed for the river.

"Boss, he say dat de boss in Boma tell dem to come home quick." Ink finally interpreted.

So they were not chasing the cook to catch him, but deserting along with him.

For a moment Conway felt like raising his rifle and dropping a few.

"The dirty dogs!" he swore under his breath.

"I say you, des no good, boss," Ink reminded him.

Conway looked at the fifteen-year-old boy and patted him on the head. At least he had one who would die with him.

Then he looked out at the oncoming hordes. It was a wild sight.

Bounding ahead of the others was a giant negro, leading them, urging them onward, shrieking and howling his commands.

The black line behind him surged forward, sending vast clouds of dust into the air. Lithe like panthers, stark naked, they advanced across the rolling plain, intent on murder and blood.

The long spears of native steel flickered and lunged in the morning light, the huge skin shields that each savage carried danced about drunkenly as they leaped forward.

There was no mistaking it. It was Muzaking. What had happened to his two messengers Conway could not guess. It was too late now. Shanganso could be of no further use.

It was time for quick and decisive action. The savages were almost within throwing distance of him. He had expected to make a stand with the support of his own men, but they were gone. It was impossible for him to remain here alone with Ink. He might as well try to escape. It was plain suicide to stay.

Thrusting some extra ammunition into Ink's hands, he started with him down the slope in the general direction of the papyrus swamp swiftly as they could run. There were no signs of the porters visible, although they had disappeared in the same direction only a few minutes before.

With thunderous din the mob bounded onward. An arrow sang over Conway's head as he plunged into the tall grass which skirted the papyrus and bamboo.

As he penetrated farther and farther into the maze of underbrush with Ink at his heels, Conway heard the man-killers come to the edge of the grass. There was a lull in the screaming.

He heard a shrill negro voice shouting commands, then the din flared up again and spread down each side of him toward the river. He was surrounded.

He stopped, breathless, to listen. The clamor rose all around him, excepting on the side on which, he knew, lay the river. They had formed a U about him, with the river blocking his escape on the upper side.

Conway glanced quickly around for signs of the caravan men, whom he knew to be somewhere in the maze about him. But nothing moved.

He made his way with difficulty toward the river, where, if worse came to worse, he would jump in and risk the crocodiles by swimming downstream.

Apparently the attackers had stopped all around the patch of grass in which he moved stealthily toward the river. He wondered what was their game, but he was not to wonder for long.

The wind made a sudden change, and with it the smell of smoke drifted to his nostrils.

"Des burning de grass!" panted Ink, fear-stricken.

Conway gasped as he saw a sheet of flame spurt up and lick the sky all around him excepting on the side occupied by the river. There was but one alternative; he had to make for the stream.

He stumbled in the entanglement under foot several times, and finally came upon a pile of the bamboo poles

that his men had cut the day before for the house that would never be built. He flopped down on them and gasped for breath.

The curtain of fire hemmed him in and cut off the air. His eyes smarted from the smoke.

He was cornered, he realized, but he was still alive. He rose presently and stumbled on through the smoke and papyrus.

Suddenly he felt himself sinking in the soft soil of the river flat. He took another step and sank to his knees in mud. He struck a swamp.

Extricating himself, he backed up and then saw that the papyrus marked the edge of the swamp, broken by projections and indentations of solid ground. He followed the line, cutting across the points cautiously, but came up against the roaring fire on his left.

He retraced his steps and tried to make his passage to the river on the right. The fire pushed him back, choking with smoke.

There lay the swamp between himself and the water. Ink saw his predicament and wormed over the places where Conway had sunk in, but a couple of yards farther on, with a loud splash, he sank to his hips.

The boy grabbed the stem of a papyrus plant and held on. Conway procured one of the long bamboo poles from the pile behind him, and fished him back onto dry land.

Above the crackling and roar of the conflagration Conway could hear the savage yells of the bloodthirsty negroes beyond, as they pranced about, following up closely behind the flames. They intended to roast their prey alive, Conway perceived.

Dismay seized him as he realized his predicament. Hemmed in, with a fire on three sides and a swamp of quicksand on the other, every means of escape had been cut off.

To jump in the swamp was suicide, and to remain where he was meant to be burned to death.

He flopped down on the bamboo poles, his eyes swollen and watering from the smoke. It was death, finally, staring him in the face.

Ink moved about in the sparsely covered papyrus swamp, searching for a projection of solid earth which would lead to the river.

Suddenly Conway heard another splash at one side of him. He looked through the smoky atmosphere and saw a dim form struggling in the mire several yards away. It was Ink.

"Good Heaven!" gasped Conway, starting out after the boy.

But he did not get far, stopped by a strange sight. Ink was pulling himself over the surface of the swamp by reaching from stalk to stalk. His light body enabled him to keep up, and he was getting farther and farther out toward the river. Finally he disappeared from sight in the smoky entanglement.

Conway retraced his steps to the bamboo pile and sat down, covering his face with his hands.

"Now I'm alone," he told himself. "No one is dependent on me. Might as well die here, a failure, as forty years from now, still a failure."

He remembered having said that he would come back a success or he would not come back at all. And now that the test had arrived—he found that he had meant it.

Ink was gone.

Tears came to his eyes as he thought of the courage of the youngster who had stuck with him to the last. It was his fault. He should have told him to run away with the rest of the men.

The leaping, wavering flames advanced until Conway's clothes seemed to burn his skin. Still he sat with his hands covering his face.

The tall, thick grass was like tinder. As it approached the damper ground of the swamp, the clouds of dense black smoke increased, but the flames diminished in size. The wild savages brayed lustily on the other side.

Conway revolved the events of his entire life in his mind much in the manner of a drowning man. He wondered if it would have been wiser to have remained in Glendale; to have gone after the Interstate championship for Wilbur.

It was with that question that the thought which saved his life came to him.

He sprang from his position, and through watery, smarting eyes peered up at the fence of flames, now a scant twenty yards from him. He could do it. Sure, he assured himself—easy.

Sensing that his predicament could not have been any worse, he pulled off his smoking khaki shirt and hurled it from him. His skin almost shriveled up in the intense heat.

He pawed through the pile of bamboo poles rapidly, regardless of his pain. He struggled with one of the poles, and finally extricated it from the heap.

A thin bamboo, about fifteen feet long and very elastic. He examined it hastily. Then with one more glance at the approaching fiery wall, he poised the pole and dashed rapidly toward the flames.

He went as close as he dared, and then, planting one end of the pole firmly in the flames before him, he swung himself upward with all the strength he could muster, and vaulted clear of the fire.

Upward he went. The pole seemed to waver under his weight; for a moment he thought it was going to topple backward; but then, regaining its momentum as he passed over its point, eyes closed, it reacted to the strain it was under and sent Conway hurtling through space.

His face and body felt suddenly chill as he emerged from the cloud of smoke rising upward from the flames. His eyes seemed glued shut; dizzily he opened them, just as he felt himself hit the ground. He rebounded and forced his sore eyes open.

He was in the clear air on the other side of the fire and fifteen yards beyond the ring of hideous savages. He had vaulted clear over the entire band of attackers.

He could not believe his eyes. Although, breathing easier, he hesitated; just what should he do?

Before him he saw the long rows of prancing negroes come suddenly to attention; they gazed alternately between the black cloud of smoke, which soared over their heads, and himself, who lay on the ground. His skin was black with smoke and scorching. His khaki shorts were smoking.

Consternation spread over their painted faces as they realized that Conway had leaped over the fire. They stood motionless to see what he would do.

Conway looked over the fiendish crowd. Most of them were stark naked, their black, glistening muscles quivering with excitement. They peered over their shields at him with cruel but dumfounded eyes.

Many were armed with formidable spears of odd but deadly points. Splotches of red, yellow and white pigment marked their bodies and faces; plumes of wild birds, manes of lion or strips of leopard skin decorated their red-daubed hair.

Long knives hung from their girdles of hide. And bows and arrows were strapped securely to their backs with thongs.

They were an inspiring mob, but Conway failed to get any thrill out of their evil appearances.

To him it was clear that they thought he had come out of a smoke cloud.

One by one the spearmen moved over closer to peer at him cautiously. He sprang to his feet, not sure of their real intentions. The blacks drew back, afraid.

Now that he was out of the fire, what should be his next move? He sized up his chances of making a dash for liberty. Not much, with that pack

staring him in the eye. One arrow would be sufficient. He waited.

From along the line of blacks near the river there advanced a giant savage whom Conway seemed to recognize, and as he came closer he saw that he wore a headdress of eagle feathers and porcupine plumes. A leopard skin touched the ground, hanging from his waist.

Heavy iron armlets encircled his powerful arms. It was Shanganso, the leopard chief. Conway gasped. What did this mean?

He stared at the monster who approached him, vainly endeavoring to recognize a glint of friendship in the lionlike eyes.

The fellow spoke in a deep, resonant voice. He gesticulated wildly, pointing up at the cloud of smoke, at the band of astonished onlookers, at Conway, and finally at himself.

He spoke so seriously that Conway feared to indicate that he was not understanding a word that was being said. He nodded, and from time to time uttered the word "Gaucho." It sounded as though it meant something, he thought.

He believed that the chief was telling him he was not to be killed. Where was Ink? That was the only solution. He had to find Ink.

The fire had burned itself out and was now smoldering at the edge of the papyrus swamp. Conway glanced toward it.

Pushing roughly against the skin shields of the hedge of blacks, who were staring at the proceedings curiously, he forced his way out of the crowd and made for the swamp.

Shanganso stared at him oddly. Several of the warriors darted after him as he skirted the mire, shouting for Ink loudly. He came to the river bank and peered down stream.

Then he started. A body was floating on the surface a few yards down from where he stood. It was Ink.

Conway dived into the water and struck out for it. He shivered with the thought that Ink might be dead.

He swam alongside of the boy and grabbed his shoulder. The lad's hand clung to the stem of a papyrus plant.

As Conway gripped him firmly, he was relieved to feel his shoulder squirm and at the same time the boy screamed. Then he opened his eyes. He saw Conway and instantly let go of the papyrus plant.

They swam back to the point on the bank where Conway had first seen him and dragged themselves out of the water, breathless.

The two—man and boy—stared at each other happily.

Dripping with water, they were surrounded by Shanganso's band of savages, curiosity bulging in every expression.

"Ink," asked Conway, finally coming to the point, "what this mean? Look at Shanganso. Why Shanganso chase us?"

The boy stared, dumfounded at the chief. He too failed to understand.

Somewhat cleaner, due to his plunge, Conway listened to the dialogue of the two impatiently. Was he to be stewed or roasted, or was he to remain there a peaceful citizen?

These questions were being settled.

The boy listened attentively for fifteen minutes. Conway was almost a nervous wreck. However, finally the discussion was terminated, and Ink came over to him.

He looked up at him, a broad smile on his face, his white teeth flashed.

"He say Muzaking an' Shanganso same man. Only Muzaking bad an' Shanganso good," the boy explained slowly. "He much mad when boss no go home when he speak. He much mad when boss burn grass. He say he like kill white antelope in grass dere. He say he kill white antelope each year. But first he tell white antelope to go home. When he no go, he kill him. White meat make much good medicine for Muzaking."

Conway listened, amazed. So he was the white antelope, his mind told him.

"He no kill white antelope; you boss now, because you real one. He say you jump more than all antelope he see. He much like see boss jump high."

Conway gulped as the realization of his success dawned on him. He did not hear more of what Ink said. His dream had come true.

A few minutes before he was resigning himself to accept death and defeat, now success with friendship was his.

He gulped, and pushed Ink over backward playfully.

"You little old son of a gun!" he chirped.

The uncouth savages, who a few minutes before had been licking their lips in anticipation of some good white "antelope" meat, swallowed their disappointment and now laughed heartily with Conway at his own mirthful antics.

"Tell Muzaking or Shanganso, or whatever his name is, that I'll teach him how to jump after he gives me some men and I finish my house," he directed.

Conway's attention was drawn to two forms that lay on the ground a short distance away. Several of the warriors were kneeling around them. He moved closer; he saw they were animals and dead. Then he recognized them as antelope.

He chilled when he thought how closely he had come to lying with them, a white antelope.

THE END

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The Stream That Sings the Sweetest

THE stream that sings the sweetest
And dances with the breeze
Is not as wide as shadows
Of its friendly mountain trees,
And it cannot hear the ocean
For its own wild harmonies.

The stream that sings the sweetest
Makes not the greatest stir
When it meets the bitter ocean,
But it bears a breath like myrrh,
And spells the moon had woven
When the mountains sang to her.

Oh, heart that knows the gladness
Of earth that has its dream,
Why cannot you go singing
Like this little mountain stream
That gleams to death in waters
That, a moment, catch the gleam?

Glenn Ward Dresbach.

The Screen of Ice

Gillian Hazeltine prosecutes outside the law to prove to lovers the adage: "What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive."

By GEORGE F. WORTS

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY SKELETON.

BY his enemies Gillian Hazeltine was referred to as the greatest scoundrel practicing criminal law in the State, if not in the entire union. By friends he was paid the kind of homage deserved only by demigods.

Those who suffered because of Gillian Hazeltine's cleverness called him inhuman. Those who benefited by it called him superhuman.

Those who hated and feared the man saw in him all the detestable qualities of a *Mr. Hyde.* Those who liked and admired him saw in him the nobility of a *Dr. Jekyl.*

Somewhere between those two widely divergent points of view the truth undoubtedly lay. Old court room records have done Gillian Hazeltine many a grave injustice. Certainly, he was not as black as his enemies have painted him.

It is the simple purpose of this narrative to present Gillian Hazeltine in such a fair, impartial light that the reader may draw his own conclusions.

On a day in January, Gillian Hazeltine, or the Silver Fox, as he was sometimes bitterly referred to, sat in his luxurious private office and, with the innocent curiosity of a child of six, watched a film of ice form in delicate, lovely tracery on the window pane beside him.

On the other side of the window snowflakes were thickly falling. The day, from a mild and sunny January

morning, had abruptly turned gray and cold and blustery. The temperature had dropped from a degree somewhat above thawing to one well below zero.

And with the abrupt fall of temperature had come large, white, feathery flakes; until, now, the rooftops of Greenboro were obscured and the shining black asphalt of the streets was being misted, and here and there obliterated by the white magic.

The papers would refer to this descent of white magic as a blizzard. Traffic would be hampered. Trains would be delayed. Regrettable accidents would occur. By nightfall, a mighty wind would come shouting down from Canada. The superintendent of the local weather bureau would delve into musty records and triumphantly pluck out the thrilling fact that to-day was the coldest and snowiest and most boisterous January twelfth in several years.

The brilliantly keen mind of Gillian Hazeltine was totally absorbed in a dreamy consideration of the window pane. Arrows, rectangles, triangles, rhomboids, stars, and crosses were swiftly taking form before his delighted eyes.

Bitter cold without and steamy warmth within were causing the entire pane swiftly to be iced. As he watched, the last remaining transparent area was suddenly obscured by a flashing of interlacing needles.

He could no longer see what existed beyond the window. While he had sat there, watching, his vision had been shut off by the rising screen of ice. All of the windows in his office, he now discovered, had been similarly coated —and the world was lost from view.

His efficient private secretary, Marian Lawrence, entered, observed his preoccupation and smiled thinly. In her crisp, breezy manner she inquired:

"Are you ready to dictate your summary of the Kolster matter, Mr. Hazeltine?"

He looked at her guiltily. "I'm afraid I'm not, Miss Lawrence."

"You promised to have it ready to go over with Mr. Kolster to-morrow morning," she reminded him, with the reproving note in her voice that is a good secretary's privilege. She hesitated.

"A Miss Anita Ravanno is outside. She won't say what she wants. I knew you wanted this Kolster matter out of the way and I tried to get rid of her. I said you were busy."

"I am never too busy to see Anita Ravanno," he exclaimed. "Send her right in, Miss Lawrence."

"Can't I tell her to drop around to-morrow, after this Kolster business is cleared up?"

"I'll clear it up after she's gone," said Gillian.

"Miss Ravanno, unless I'm badly mistaken," said Miss Lawrence with some asperity, "won't give you an opportunity to get back—to the Kolster matter. She is agitated about something. And I've never yet seen a beautiful, agitated woman come in this office that you weren't demoralized for days. She's tried five different chairs in the waiting room since she came in."

"Does she say it's important?" Gillian wanted to know.

"Don't they all?" cried Miss Lawrence.

"I'd better see her," Gillian decided.

"Very well," his secretary sighed and gave him a look that said: "What an imbecile you are where women are concerned!"

Gillian winced slightly under that look. As his excellent private secretary withdrew, he realized that he should be devoting his utmost concentration to this latest scrape into which Dave Kolster had tumbled instead of giving his ear to some appealing young beauty in distress.

But he didn't feel like concentrating on the careless sinfulness of Dave Kolster. He felt like being amused, entertained. And there was nothing

in the day's work half so entertaining as lending his able guidance to beauty in distress.

He hoped, while he waited for her to appear, that Anita Ravanno was as beautiful as Dolores, her mother, had been. And he wondered, of course, what kind of trouble the daughter of Dolores Ravanno had got herself into. People seldom came to him except to be extricated from trouble; beautiful, agitated young women—never!

There had always been, he reflected, a shadow of some mystery over the Ravanno household. Time and again he had wondered why that aristocratic family had put forever behind them the land of their birth—Chile.

And why they had chosen to settle in the then growing, but obscure town of Greenboro; the handsome, fiery Felipe to grow old with his beautiful wife and to die; the only child, Anita, to grow up—into what?

Gillian was thinking of Anita Ravanno as he had last seen her—a weedy little spindleshanks of a girl of eleven or twelve, seated on the grass at her father's feet—when a slender young woman of twenty entered his office with a soft, eager rush.

He caught a swift impression of glowing heroic dark eyes, of matchless ivory skin delicately flushed, of a lovely bright red mouth, of small white hands emerging from black kid gloves. She was petite and beautiful—every whit as beautiful as Dolores Ravanno had been in her youth.

Melted snow in tiny drops lingered in the black silkiness of her fur wrap and sparkled like jewels. She might have been the season's most notable débutante. A necklace of small but authentic pearls was at her lovely throat. A ruby of warmth and brilliance glowed on the little finger of her left hand. The Ravanno ruby. It was an heirloom, that precious stone.

One glimpse of her apprised him that this glowing beauty was not suffering from want of material blessings. And his quick scrutiny of her hands told him all that Miss Lawrence had conveyed, and more. He had long ago made a practice of looking to people's hands for their states of mind. Hands, he might have put it poetically, were messengers of the soul. At least, long observation had taught him so.

The hands of Miss Ravanno were white and fluttering like terrified moths. She could not keep them still. Here, he guessed, was a soul at all odds with its owner; a soul tormented and fearful; a soul threatened and in torture.

It was a cold, moist, nervous hand in which, quickly clasping, he found corroboration.

"Mr. Hazeltine, I do hope I'm not taking you away from important work, but I simply had to see you. I—I'm in trouble."

How many times had these walls rung to that wail—I'm in trouble!

Gillian, lowering her by the elbows with gentle force into his deskside chair warmed to the warmth and color of her voice.

It was sweet fine metal, her voice, as her mother's had been—a golden reminder to his romantic mind of tropical stars and tinkling lazy guitars and palms dipping and murmuring to the lure of spiced trade winds. The tropics had an unfathomable appeal to Gillian.

Her white hands fluttered on the chair arms; terrified moths.

With her great brown eyes dwelling anxiously on his, she said:

"It's rather a long story."

"And it concerns a man," Gillian gently added.

Her eyes flew open wide. "How do you know?"

"It generally does," sighed the famous criminal lawyer.

"You were my father's closest friend," the girl went on, so hurriedly that her words fairly jostled one another. "I know that he would have wanted me to come to you. I don't know how much you know of my

father's and mother's past, Mr. Hazeltine. Do you know why we left Valparaiso and came to Greenboro?"

"That was a subject mentioned only once between us," Gillian answered. "I was curious at first. A great many of your father's friends were curious —at first.

"I said on that occasion that I thought it strange, curious, that he should have left Valparaiso for the United States, when he seemed to have no particular interests here.

"I recall that he seemed embarrassed, rather angry, in fact, and he passed it off by some reference to your mother's health. She was better off here, I think he said, than in Chile. The matter never came up between us again. I respected your father and admired your mother for the two splendid people that they were—and I have never been inquisitive, Anita."

"The truth—" the girl began and stopped. One hand had flown to her mouth. She was gnawing at her knuckles, staring at him rather wildly.

Suddenly she sprang up. She went to a window, as if with the intention of reposing herself by a glimpse of distances. She lifted her hand as if to touch the obstructing screen of ice, then whirled about.

"Mr. Hazeltine, do you mind if that door is closed?"

"Not at all," said Gillian. He got up, closed the door, and returned to his chair.

"Sit down, Anita, and get it off your chest. You'll feel better."

She came slowly back to her chair, without for a moment removing her eyes from his face. She slid into the chair and gripped her hands tightly.

"We left Valparaiso," she got out in a low, husky little voice, "because my mother was—a—*thief!*"

The Silver Fox opened his humidor and selected a cigar. With methodical slowness, he chewed off the tip and lighted the cigar. All of her color, he observed, had left Anita Ravanno's face. He would never know the agonies associated with that confession.

He said gently: "There are worse things in life than to know that one's mother was at one time or another the victim of some unfortunate weakness. I only know that your mother, through the years that I knew her, was a woman of the greatest charm.

"I have always thought of her as a woman possessing the finest and noblest character. And I shall continue to think of her in that light, Anita. I don't see why one of her early escapades should trouble you now."

"Trouble me!" the girl wailed. "It's threatening my whole future!"

Gillian waited for her to explain herself. When her silence persisted, he said, in the same gentle tones:

"I shouldn't have to assure you that whatever you tell me will be held in absolute confidence. You know how fond I was of your father. I will help you in every possible way, Anita. But if you are permitting that early—I insist on calling it an escapade—cloud your life because of some question of family pride—"

"Oh, damn family pride!" Anita cried. "All I heard from the time I was a child was pride of family, the honor of the name. I think family pride is silly. I know what was wrong with my mother. I've studied it.

"I've read every book I can find on it. She was normal in every other respect; but she had a rather uncommon nervous disease that neurologists call kleptomania. There's nothing mysterious or shameful about it, as far as I'm concerned.

"My mother was a thief because times would come when stealing was irresistible. Sometimes she took things of utterly no value. Sometimes she took things of great value. You can imagine how it affected my father, with that terrific pride of his. I know now what caused her kleptomania, because, as I say, I've gone through every book on the subject I could find.

"I had a sister who would have been two years older than I if she had lived. She died when she was less than a year old."

"And it temporarily turned your mother's mind," Gillian helped her.

"From all I can gather," Anita Ravanno went on, "she went completely out of her mind for almost a year—from grief, of course. Physicians in Valparaiso agreed that having another child would cure her. Well, I was the cure. But I didn't work—quite. Not until we'd been living in Greenboro for four years.

"The last lingering trace of her mental derangement was kleptomania. But she didn't steal just anything, Mr. Hazeltine. She stole only things that a baby could wear or use. Isn't it quite logical to you that my sister's death would have affected her in that way?"

"Quite," Gillian nodded.

"My coming did not cure her kleptomania," Anita continued, "although it apparently cleared up everything else. She continued to steal baby things, not all the time, but only when one of these spells came on. Usually she stole trifles—little shoes, socks, toys; but one time she stole a pearl necklace."

Gillian was bending forward, with cigar clenched in a corner of his mouth. Her voice was so low as to be almost inaudible. He wanted to miss no word.

"Chile isn't as broad-minded, as civilized as the United States," Anita proceeded. "In Valparaiso, a thief is a thief. Kleptomaniacs aren't acknowledged.

"My mother was arrested, charged with the theft of the necklace. And, in spite of all that my father could do, she was sent to prison for a year. All of her smaller thefts—or as many of them as could be traced—were mentioned at the trial. She was simply branded a thief.

"My father, of course, almost died of the disgrace. He was a poor man, then; but the blow didn't break him. He was, as you know, a mining engineer. I don't believe any man since the world began ever worked so hard to forget his troubles as father did during that year while mother was in prison.

"I think it was a thrilling, romantic story—him going off desperately into the Andes, working fourteen and fifteen hours a day, as if by sheer physical exertion he could somehow rid himself of that awful scandal. You know that he discovered silver, but I'm sure you never suspected before this the circumstances attached to his discovering it. Did you?"

Gillian shook his head.

"My father sold his claim to the Cerro de Pasco people a few weeks before mother was discharged from prison. As soon as she was released, he put her and me on the first northbound steamer and brought us to America."

Anita Ravanno paused, and her glowing brown eyes searched Gillian's face.

"I'm omitting all unnecessary details, Mr. Hazeltine. You must know the essential facts to understand. We arrived in New York. I was then two years old. We intended to settle down in New York. We hadn't been there a week when a store detective at Balchman's followed mother to the apartment we had taken and accused her of stealing a baby's silk bonnet.

"I don't think any one could imagine what my father went through. He told mother that if she ever stole one thing more he would put her in a sanatorium for the rest of her life. If he hadn't adored her so, it would have been so easy. Any threat he made would have been an empty one. She was simply his life.

"Well, we left New York because father was afraid of having her loose in a large city. It was fate or chance that brought us to Greenboro. Greenboro, to father, was simply an obscure town—where we would not be known

and where he could devote all of his time to mother."

"How," Gillian interrupted, "did you learn all this? Certainly, you were too young to realize what was going on."

"Mother told me the entire story a few months before she died," Anita answered. "Not in the nature of a confession at all, but simply because I had asked questions. I was too young to understand when it happened. But I remembered some queer things. I remembered, particularly, the awful row father had with Jason Firbank."

"Jason Firbank, the jeweler?"

The girl with the great brown eyes nodded.

"Mother did not have, or, at least, did not give in to another attack of kleptomania until we had been in Greenboro three years. Then she gave in to temptation and stole—another string of pearls!"

Anita touched the pearls at her throat with trembling finger tips.

"This string, Mr. Hazeltine."

"She stole them from Jason Firbank?"

"She stole them from the counter. He was showing her strings of pearls. She simply pocketed this string. It was all very complicated and terrible; it amounted to Jason Firbank blackmailing my father.

"Mother stole the pearls in the afternoon. That evening Firbank called on us. I was in bed hours before. It must have been a terrific scene. Mother must have wailed and wept continuously for three hours—while my father and Jason Firbank had it out.

"Firbank demanded fifty thousand dollars. Well, you know Firbank, Mr. Hazeltine. For three solid hours, while mother wailed and wept, my father kept reassuring Jason Firbank that if he told a soul he would follow him through hell for revenge. I think it finally penetrated Firbank's skull, after three hours, that father meant what he said.

"The evening ended with a compromise. The pearls were to remain mother's. Firbank was to keep his mouth shut. And the pearls were to be paid for. I am sure they are the most expensive string of pearls, for their size, in existence. They are worth about five thousand dollars. The check father gave Firbank for them was for twenty-five thousand!"

"The skunk!" growled Gillian.

"Wait until I'm finished!" Anita promised. "That experience had at least one valuable result. It cured mother. She said that the experience didn't cure her, but that I did. I, the cure, after six years—worked!

"I was just six at the time. Until then I had been, so everybody says, a homely baby. My sister had been a beautiful baby. But when I was six I suddenly turned pretty—you know how little girls sometimes do.

"Until then I think mother had always more or less resented me. Anyway, I was no worthy substitute for the beautiful baby who had died. Not until about the time she stole these pearls from Jason Firbank! Then, suddenly, she became interested in me.

"Since the day I was born I was showing for the first time some promise of turning into a pretty girl. That discovery, on mother's part, effected the cure. Her mind was no longer entangled with the dreadful memory of a dead baby; it could be directed upon a living child who held forth some promise of growing into a pretty girl."

"I should say," Gillian dryly interrupted, "that you've fulfilled the promise very adequately."

CHAPTER II.

SOME ONE MUST PAY.

THE beautiful daughter of Dolores Ravanno did not smile. Instead, she said gravely:

"That's the first phase of the story. I'm coming to the part now that isn't

merely interesting ancient history. Shortly before my mother died, Firbank made a trip to South America. Do you remember?"

"I remember," said Gillian.

"The chief purpose of his trip, as far as I can gather, was to find out all he could about mother in Valparaiso. Scandals of that kind blow over, are forgotten quickly. But he found what he wanted to find. He found and bought the court record of her trial.

"He found and bought her prison record. There was, apparently, no other evidence. There was no newspaper evidence, because father had pleaded with the newspaper owners until they gave into him. In short, Jason Firbank bought and has now in his possession the only records of any kind that prove that my mother was once a thief."

"And," Gillian took her up, "he is threatening to tell the world that your mother was a thief—and your pride cannot bear the thought of it."

Anita Ravanno, for some time relaxed, once again became tense. Once again her hands became terrified moths.

"My pride can bear anything," she said in a hard little voice. "It's my whole happiness—my whole future."

"You are certainly brave enough to hold up your chin, even if the world does know," Gillian declared.

"Yes," she agreed, "but I am not brave enough to lose the man I'm in love with."

"If the man you're in love with isn't broad enough—" Gillian indignantly began.

"I will tell you the rest." Anita stopped him, and he detected an infinite weariness in her lovely voice. "To begin with Jason Firbank: he has these two records in his possession now. Do you remember that, shortly after my father and mother died, he made some effort to adopt me and that his petition was denied by the probate court?"

"I remember; yes."

"I was then seventeen. The Fourth National Bank was then and still is the trustee of my father's estate. I don't think Jason Firbank had any designs on my money. I think he was motivated by his old hatred of my father. Somehow, he would harm a Ravanno. I saw a great deal of Mr. Firbank then, and I've seen much more of him than I've cared to since. He has, apparently, fallen madly in love with me.

"And now that he knows I'm in love, and knows the man I'm in love with, he is simply determined to wreck my life. I came to you because I thought you could do something. I know that Firbank is a rascal. I know how well you're acquainted with the pasts of the men in this town. I hoped you'd somehow be able to squash him!"

Gillian thoughtfully gazed at her. He thoughtfully puffed at his cigar. His square, judicial brow became corrugated with the fine horizontal wrinkles of intense concentration.

"Damn it!" he said finally. "I haven't a thing on Jason Firbank I could possibly prove. He's a rascal, as you say, but he's a clever rascal. He covers his tracks. I know he's had his hands up to the elbows in graft and corruption of all kinds. But he's too sly to leave evidence behind. I'll talk to him."

The girl shook her head sadly. She seemed to droop.

"It won't do any good."

"I'll talk to him anyway."

"Mr. Hazeltine, we Ravannos are an obsession with Jason Firbank. You'd be wasting your time."

Gillian's answer was to reach for his desk telephone. He called Jason Firbank's number. He presently was connected with Greenboro's leading jeweler.

"Jason," Gillian purred, "I have a client in my office who has been telling me some interesting things about you. She tells me you have in your possession two extremely important documents you picked up a few years ago in Valparaiso, Chile."

The man at the other end snapped: "What about it?"

"Jason," said Gillian, "I want those records."

"Try and get them!"

"I want those records sent up to this office inside of ten minutes, or I am going to tell Josh Hammerseley, of the Greenboro *Morning Times,* certain facts I happen to know in connection with the sale to the city of certain worthless swamps across the river. I'm going—"

"You can't bluff me!" snarled Jason Firbank. "Tell Josh Hammerseley anything you damned please. Is that all you've got to say? If it is, let me tell *you* something. Keep your hands out of this affair, Gillian Hazeltine, or you'll get them burned! Good-by!"

Gillian hung up the receiver and turned to Anita Ravanno, who was staring at him with terrified eyes.

"I'll get them!" he promised her. "I'll hire a burglar!"

"You can't, Mr. Hazeltine! He keeps them locked in the big safe at the rear of his store. Even a burglar couldn't get them. He's had several burglary scares, and he keeps the store flooded with light all night long, so that policemen and passers-by can see into every corner. He even takes the most elaborate precautions, such as electric fans blowing inside the windows to keep frost from gathering during weather like this."

"There is only one thing for you to do," Gillian said with finality. "Tell the young man you're in love with the truth. He can't be very much of a man or he'll forgive you anything."

Anita was stubbornly shaking her head.

"He wouldn't," she said drearily. "I know him. I know him so well. He is obsessed on the subject of heredity. He believes that we inherit every one of our traits, every single characteristic. I naturally disagree with him.

"But I—well, I simply adore him, Mr. Hazeltine. I'd die without him. And if he learned that my mother had been a thief, it would be all off."

"He must be a nut!" Gillian exclaimed.

"He's absolutely sold on the heredity theory," Anita said. "I'm not. I believe that environment influences us; that heredity is only incidental. We've had terrific arguments, but you can't shake him. I think it's his only weakness—if it is a weakness."

"It is a weakness," Gillian heartily affirmed. "A man who wouldn't accept you on any terms is more than weak—he's idiotic."

"I love him," said the girl. "He has more pure nobility of character than any man I've ever known. He's so upright and clean and—and decent. That's why I love him so. He *is* fine."

"Do I know this paragon?" Gillian murmured.

"I don't think you do. His name is Oliver Wharton Clave."

"Oliver Wharton Clave?" Gillian repeated.

"Yes; Oliver Wharton Clave. Do you know him?"

"I never heard of him. So, Mr. Oliver Wharton Clave is so hypped on heredity that you think he would not marry a girl with the slightest stain on hers?"

"I am absolutely positive. He is, as you say, absolutely hypped on the subject."

"Do you want me to talk to him?"

"No!" Anita wailed.

"All you want me to do," he said dryly, "is somehow to get those records from Jason Firbank?"

"Yes!" she promptly affirmed.

"Look here, Anita; supposing I should, by some hook or crook, secure those records and destroy them. Don't you think that the truth would somehow, some day, leak out? It didn't happen so long ago. Interesting events of that nature aren't so soon forgotten.

"Supposing your Mr. Clave should some day meet some one from Valparaiso who knew the story? Suppos-

ing Jason Firbank should write Oliver a letter, anonymous or otherwise, presenting the facts, urging him to make inquiries of the Valparaiso authorities? Neither of us put such an act above Jason Firbank, do we?"

"No," the girl murmured.

"So," he went on, "even if we secured those records and destroyed them, the facts you're trying to hide can leak out a dozen other ways."

"That is a chance I will have to take," the girl said calmly. "Once we are married; once we have a child—children—well, I'm sure I'll be safe. He can't back down then. Oliver adores children!"

"Will that be playing fair with him?"

Anita Ravanno looked at him with glowing eyes.

"Mr. Hazeltine, there's nothing I wouldn't stoop to to hold Oliver. I tell you, I'm crazy about him. I—I worship him. We—we're just meant for each other. I don't know how to explain it.

"I've never been interested in other men—very. I've always compared them to my father. And, believe me, that's given them something to shoot at! There's no question about Oliver. If my father were alive, he'd be crazy about Oliver, too.

"Father had ideals; Oliver's are just as high. With those records out of the way, I won't worry. You know I have plenty of money." She hesitated.

"You mean you'll pay any price to have them stolen and destroyed?"

"I will, Mr. Hazeltine!"

"Let's not drop Oliver Clave so quickly. I'm always interested—like a curious old woman, perhaps—in knowing how love affairs start. How did yours start?"

"Why! We simply met and *knew*."

"How did you meet?"

"We were in the same classes—biology and French."

"Oh, you met him at the State University."

"Yes. About a year ago. We began talking to each other after classes. I don't know— It just happened. We seemed to have so much to talk about that—that, before long we were seeing each other in the evenings."

"Love at first sight."

"It was! And he was working so hard and he's so *smart*. You have no idea how smart he is!"

"Well, I'm gaining an idea!"

"He has the second highest standing in the senior class! And he has such a wonderful personality

"And I think—well, I'm almost *certain* that he hasn't much money. That's what makes me so happy, in a way. I have plenty. I can smooth the way for him. Don't you really think it's wonderful when a girl with money has a brilliant husband who she can help? I mean, give him a chance to work up in the law, for instance, without those first horrible starving years?"

"I think it's quite romantic," Gillian conceded. "It has been known to work. But the rich girl must have infinite tact and the poor but brilliant husband must have infinite ambition."

"We have," said Anita comfortably. "He is the most ambitious man I ever knew."

"Does he know you are wealthy?"

"No; he thinks I have a little income. He's all the time telling me about the wonderful things he's going to buy me—some day."

"Have you, by any chance," Gillian asked, "ever heard of a man named Billy the Yegg—or Billy Vollmer?"

Anita slowly shook her head.

"Before this night is over," Gillian informed her, "you may have the opportunity of being very, very grateful to Billy the Yegg."

"You're going to hire him to—" she gasped, and stopped.

"I am going to put the problem up to him. He is one of the cleverest safe crackers in America."

"But how can he go into that store, with all the lights on—"

"I'll put it up to Billy. He has ideas."

"What will you offer him, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"We'll settle that later. The chief difficulty will be to make Billy confine himself to the records you want. The temptation of so many precious stones may be too much for him—and I don't hanker to be the silent partner in a jewelry store robbery. Can you describe the package or folder in which those records are kept?"

Anita Ravanno nodded quickly.

"They're in a roll about this long and this big around." She indicated the dimensions with quick gestures of her hands.

"About ten inches long and six in diameter?" Gillian asked.

She nodded again.

"The roll is wrapped in shiny yellow cloth—the kind that slickers are made of. And it's tied with a broad dark-red ribbon."

"When did you see it last?"

"Not two hours ago."

Gillian arose. "My dear girl, you don't know what a tremendous load you have dumped onto these shoulders. In fact, I hope you never will have to know. Run along, darling, and leave your phone number with my secretary. If Billy the Yegg is in town, he'll find some way of getting those records. I'll communicate with you when—and if—we're successful. Robbery is not exactly up my street—but I'll do my best. Because I think you are a fine, charming girl."

Anita Ravanno had risen, too. She now came toward him and, standing on tiptoe, kissed him softly on the mouth.

She then departed with a twinkling of beautiful legs, leaving the famous criminal lawyer with the moist freshness of her kiss upon his lips and a slightly reeling awareness of the alluring scent she used.

"Some one," he growled, "is going to pay for that kiss—and pay and pay!"

He reached for the telephone as Miss Lawrence came briskly into the room, notebook in one hand, pencil in the other.

"Shall we get busy on the Kolster case now?" she heartily wanted to know.

"The Kolster case? The Kolster case?" Gillian reiterated. "Miss Lawrence, will you kindly stop bullying me? Let Dave Kolster worry awhile. A little purgatory will be beneficial to his soul—if he has one.

"Call up Kolster and tell him I won't be ready to see him for, perhaps, a week. I will be busy on certain important matters that Miss Ravanno has brought to my attention. They are imperative."

He looked at his efficient private secretary with defiance, but she made no comment.

"I don't want to be disturbed," he barked. "I am in to no one but a man named Billy Vollmer. I want to see no one else, unless, by chance, a messenger should bring a package from Firbank, the jeweler."

Miss Lawrence looked him squarely in the eyes.

Her voice said: "Very well, Mr. Hazeltine." But her eyes snapped. "I told you so! Let a pretty girl come in here, and the entire office is demoralized for days and days!"

CHAPTER III.

HEREDITY OR ENVIRONMENT.

PERHAPS thirty minutes elapsed between the departure from the Silver Fox's luxurious lair of the beautiful Chilian and the entrance of the man whom Gillian had described to her as "one of the cleverest safe crackers in America."

Billy the Yegg—Billy Vollmer—came breezily in and breezily closed the door behind him.

Now it is vital to our purposes that the gentleman known as Billy the Yegg

be viewed, at the very beginning, through unprejudiced eyes.

We see him, for the first time, as he breezily enters Mr. Hazeltine's office, a tall, athletic, handsome young fellow with clear, fine, steady blue eyes, a crisp, manly chin, a rose-and-tan complexion, and a crop of intriguing curly blond hair.

We do not perceive in him the slightest resemblance to the low-browed, shifty-eyed, waxy-skinned individual who is our favorite mental conception of a safe cracker; a yegg.

We approve of the high sparkle in his blue eyes, which bespeaks youth and reckless courage. We like the boyish respect and deference with which he grasps Mr. Hazeltine's hand. We like his quick, boyish grin.

We find it difficult to believe that this fine looking young American is a safe cracker, a dangerous criminal.

Of all the criminals known intimately by Mr. Hazeltine, Billy the Yegg was the most handsome, the most innocent seeming.

Gillian withdrew his hand from the yegg's firm pressure and looked at him with squinting eyes under brows so ruffled that they resembled agitated caterpillars.

"How," Gillian asked, "is business?"

"Okay!" the young man exclaimed. "How are you, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Very, very puzzled, Billy. I'm puzzled about a piece of dirty work that has to be done. But, particularly, I'm puzzled about you. What have you been up to lately?"

The young man laughed.

"Is this going to be another Sunday school lecture? I haven't been doing much of anything lately."

"Did you pull off that post office job up in Siwassa County last month?"

Billy the Yegg again laughed.

"Did it look like one of my jobs?"

"I'm asking you!"

"I'm not giving away trade secrets," said Billy the Yegg.

"You did rob that little bank in Donovan in April, though, didn't you?"

"Did I?"

"I think you did! Have you gone to see that doctor?"

"I have not."

"Why?" Gillian fairly shouted.

"Because there's nothing in your theory, Mr. Hazeltine. I'm sorry. I know. I've studied the subject. I mean, I've gone into it very thoroughly."

Gillian sighed with impatience.

"Will you get into my car with me now, and let me drive you around to Dr. Lorber's?"

"No," said the young man firmly.

"Why not?"

"Because you're barking up the wrong tree, Mr. Hazeltine. Oh, hell, what's the sense of arguing? We've been over all this so often! I'm a crook because it's in my blood."

Gillian sadly shook his head.

"Look here, do you still feel that strangeness in your head before one of these—these attacks comes on?"

The young man's humor had deserted him. He had seated himself in the chair Anita Ravanno had occupied not many minutes before, and dropped his chin into cupped hands.

"I do," he answered the lawyer's question in a dull, tired voice. "It—it's like spiders gnawing away inside here." He lifted one brown hand to tap his skull.

"And you don't," Gillian sharply took him up, "attach any significance to that?"

"Of course I do! It's the devil in me coming awake."

"Nonsense! If you'll put yourself into Dr. Lorber's hands, that devil will never come awake again. If you had inherited your father's unfortunate weakness, you'd be a crook twenty-four hours a day, thirty-one days a month, and twelve months a year. The very symptoms you describe defeat your argument."

"My father was a crook. I simply inherited his crookedness. I have enough strength of mind to keep that devil where he belongs most of the time. Once in awhile he gets the better of me. When he does, I know it.

"I feel those spiders; then I have to rob. If it doesn't run in the family, how do you explain the fact that my father turned crooked at sixteen—and I turned crooked at exactly the same age? If it isn't in the blood—"

"Heredity of criminal traits has never been proved," Gillian hotly interrupted. "You turned crook when you were sixteen. And when you were fifteen you fell off a freight train you were bumming a ride on, and were knocked unconscious. You dented your skull. Damn it, I know! I've talked to Dr. Lorber.

"There is no connection between your case and your father's," Gillian continued. "Consider the facts in his case, as you've told them to me. He was the only son of wealthy, careless parents. Until he was sixteen he was spoiled and pampered as if he were a prince. He was not taught to work.

"At sixteen, when he was thrown on his own resources, he could do one of two things—beg or steal. He chose to steal. He found it was an easy way to get the things he had been taught to want—foolish luxuries."

"It was in his blood!" Billy cried.

"Who put it there?"

"I don't know! I don't even know who my grandfathers were."

"It doesn't matter, Billy. You are hypped on the subject of heredity. What in the devil does heredity matter? Let me finish what I was saying. The wrong kind of upbringing made your father susceptible to crooked influences.

"You turned crooked when you were sixteen—just one year after you fell from a freight train you were stealing a ride on, and were knocked unconscious. You might have become an epileptic; you might have become totally insane. Instead of which, you became a crook.

"Your periodical fits of crookedness are caused by that old skull scar pressing down on your brain. I'm not arguing theories; I'm talking facts. It has been proved time and again. You are a case for the operating table. Let me take you to Dr. Lorber and have him X-ray your head—"

"Mr. Hazeltine," the tragic young man interrupted, "did you send for me to-day to open up this old argument? Don't you realize I've spent years studying the thing that's wrong with me?"

"It doesn't strike me that you have made much progress with your pet subject! Why do you object to going to Dr. Lorber's? I'll put it as a personal favor. Will you go over to Dr. Lorber's with me now and let him X-ray your head?"

"I will not, because it would be time wasted."

"I'm asking a personal favor, Billy."

The young man's expression was that of one who refuses to argue any longer with an irrational man. He was gazing, as if angry and bored, at the frosted window pane. And Gillian gazed at him with rising irritability.

He was as fond of this stubborn young man as if Billy had been his own son. He had heard of fatally sick men who objected with physical force to visiting a doctor, perhaps because they instinctively realized the awful gravity of what the doctor would say. And he wondered if Billy Vollmer were one of the perverse ones—a man who desperately clung to the malady that was ruining his life rather than submit himself to treatment.

It was one of Gillian's firm beliefs that every man is his own worst enemy; and he was confident that Billy the Yegg was willfully defeating his every hope for happiness.

Gillian brought his fist down angrily

on his desk. He flung out his hand at the window at which Billy was staring.

"You—and that window pane!" he said with the softness of repressed indignation. "Out there is something we are fairly sure of. We know what is beyond that screen of ice. If the screen of ice weren't there, we would see things clearly—the city, the sky, the streets, the houses.

"What you call your bad blood is nothing but a screen of ice on the window that is your personality. I know what's beyond that screen of ice, Billy: one of the cleverest, most promising young men I've ever known. But not with that screen of ice. It distorts, it prevents me from getting close to you. And you have no better idea; you don't, you can't see the truth."

"I do see the truth," the young man denied in a voice so heavy that Gillian feared for a moment he was about to break down and sob. "I got my crookedness directly from my father. Sometimes I have it almost licked. If you knew the hell I've gone through, trying! One of these days I'll have it licked. I will!"

"Not till you've been under a surgeon's knife, Billy. Look here, my boy, do you believe in modern science?"

"I believe thoroughly in the science of heredity," the boy resolutely answered.

"Heredity is not a science," Gillian snapped. "It's nothing but a hit-or-miss philosophy."

"Darwin—" Billy began.

"Did Darwin prove that criminality can be inherited?"

"Mendel—" Billy began again.

"Did Mendel prove that criminal traits can be transmitted from a father to a son?"

"My periodic criminal tendencies—"

"Are the result of a pressure of the skull on the brain, and can be remedied by a simple operation."

The yegg sprang from his chair. He was pale; his eyes were blazing. He got out in a labored voice, as if he were suffering actual physical pain:

"Mr. Hazeltine, I want you to know that I'm grateful for the interest you have taken in my troubles. But my skull is not pressing on my brain."

"You haven't had it X-rayed."

"It isn't necessary. There is good blood in me, from my mother's side; there is bad blood in me, from my father's side. One is fighting the other. I've studied bad breeding in animals and plants. I once traced the genealogy of a race horse that, at a certain age, developed bad tricks. He— But why go into it? You don't believe. You don't understand the importance of good blood and bad blood."

"I've been practicing criminal law for twenty-five years," was Gillian's answer. "In that time I have come to know a great deal about criminology. I know there is such a thing as a born crook. He is a specific type. I've seen dozens of him in the years I have defended criminals. I can point him out invariably in a crowd.

"That man is an inveterate, an incurable criminal. Invariably he has close-set eyes, a long nose, a receding chin. He has a weak, nervous system. He is cruel and vicious. You are none of these things. You are a perfect specimen of manhood, with a flaw—a flaw that can be rooted out."

"Yes," Billy agreed emphatically. "The flaw of inherited bad blood, offset by good blood. And I am confident that the good blood will win."

Gillian sighed: "It sounds like Voodooism to me, Billy."

"I will win!" the desperate young man declared.

Gillian did not pursue the subject any further. He wondered if he could strike Billy Vollmer heavily enough on the head to render him unconscious without killing him.

Apparently he could never deliver the young man to Dr. Lorber in any other condition.

He said gruffly:

"Sit down and try to compose yourself, Billy. How would you like to crack a safe for me?"

CHAPTER IV.

A CRIME OF HONOR.

BILLY THE YEGG seated himself and gazed blankly at the famous criminal lawyer.

"I want a safe opened under very difficult circumstances," Gillian went on. "It's a job for a clever man. You are so clever that no one in the world aside from myself even suspects that you are a yegg—and I wouldn't know if you hadn't blurted it out to me five years ago."

"Where is the safe?" Billy the Yegg quietly asked.

"In Firbank's jewelry store."

"I know the safe," said the young man. "It's in the center of the back of the store, facing the front. It can be seen day and night by people passing on the sidewalk, because Firbank keeps his store brightly lighted all night long. You've picked a tough one, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Could it be done?"

"There isn't a safe in the world that can't somehow be opened, no matter what the circumstances are," said the youthful expert. "Why do you want to rob Firbank?"

"This," Gillian answered, "is going to go against your pet principles. I cannot tell you a little without telling you all. The situation, briefly, is this: A young woman whom we shall call Miss X is in love with a young man whom we shall call Mr. Y. Miss X loves Mr. Y, and from all I can gather Mr. Y adores Miss X. Miss X is one of my clients. I don't know Mr. Y.

"From what she has told me about him, I gather that Mr. Y is a young man of the highest principles. She assures me that he is fine, idealistic, and so on; that he has, in short, the highest nobility of character. This case should interest you, Billy, because Mr. Y has one thing in common with you—he is hypped on the subject of heredity."

He paused. Billy was watching him with eyes that glistened with interest.

"Miss X came to me," Gillian went on, "because she is afraid that Mr. Y may somehow, some time, discover that her heredity is tainted. It is, to me, a very curious situation."

"How is her heredity tainted?" Billy crisply wanted to know.

"Her mother," Gillian answered, "was a thief. In fact, she served a term in prison for a certain theft. Actually she was no more a thief, from a moral standpoint, than I am. She was a kleptomaniac. For several years she suffered from the shock of losing an infant daughter.

"Eventually the mother of Miss X was cured of her kleptomania. Yet Miss X fears that Mr. Y, who is so obsessed with heredity, would cease to love her if he learned the truth. It seems—"

"She is probably right," Billy sharply interrupted. "If the man she loves, this Mr. Y, is as fine an idealist as you say, he would be perfectly justified in breaking off his engagement to her when he learned her mother had been a thief. That thief tendency would be in her blood. If she married Mr. Y, the thief tendency would be in the blood of their children."

"You think so, Billy?" Gillian asked mildly.

"I am positive," the vehement young man declared.

"The thing that amazes me, Billy, is the close parallel between your case and Miss X's. Her mother a thief; your father a thief. Both of you suffering, each in your own way, from what I call this asinine heredity theory.

"Billy, let's pass over the ethics of the case and go on to the material problem. Miss X came to me because Jason Firbank, the jeweler, has in his possession certain documents which prove

her mother was a thief. These documents consist of her mother's court record and her prison record. Jason Firbank is threatening to send these records to Miss X's fiancé, Mr. Y, if she does not give up Mr. Y and marry him."

"Jason Firbank is a rascal," Billy stated, "but it would be the best thing that could happen—if she married Firbank. It would save Mr. Y the disaster of marrying her. Besides, supposing she somehow secured those records from Firbank. What is to prevent Mr. Y from finding out in some other way that her mother was crooked?"

"We went over that," Gillian answered. "Her argument is that, once the records are in her possession—or out of Firbank's hands and destroyed—she would at once marry Mr. Y.

"She believes that, once married, he would love her so much that, when the exposure came, he could not give her up. She intends also to have children as soon as possible and bind Mr. Y to her in that way."

"What a rotten woman she must be!" the yegg exclaimed.

"On the contrary," Gillian argued, "Miss X is a splendid girl with splendid ideals. Her sole ambition is to make Mr. Y happy and successful."

"That makes no difference," Billy argued. "She is loving him, letting him love her, under false pretenses."

"You don't concede, Billy, that their deep and real love for each other makes any difference?"

"It simply makes it unfortunate, Mr. Hazeltine."

"I am glad to have your point of view on this," Gillian purred. "I hate to think of your cracking Firbank's safe if you have any moral objections to doing it. You are saying that you won't crack the safe and get those records for me."

"No, sir, I am not saying that. I will crack the safe, if it can possibly be done, because you are asking me to do it. Incidentally, it will give me real satisfaction to give that scoundrel, Firbank, something to worry about."

"You will do it, then?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

"We come now," said Gillian, "to the question of remuneration. I intimated to Miss X that I would hire a yegg to do the job. Miss X is a wealthy girl. She can afford to pay well. What is your fee going to be?"

"Nothing, Mr. Hazeltine."

"You won't take money?"

"No, sir."

"It would be easy for me to get you two thousand dollars for this job."

"I wouldn't accept a penny for it."

"I am sure," said Gillian, "she will be very grateful."

"I am not doing it for her. I don't care whether she's grateful or not. I am doing it because you want me to."

"You won't collect anything else while you're in there, will you—provided you can get in?"

"Certainly not!" the young man indignantly exclaimed.

"How will you get in?"

"Through the cellar window in back. And skeleton keys."

"How will you open the safe without being seen from the street?"

The amateur cracksman sprang up and paced to the nearest window. With his thumbnail he scratched clear an oblong space on the screen of ice. Through this aperture he could see the lights of Greenboro. The last light of the afternoon was gone. Below him, Chestnut Street was dense with homegoers.

One of the lighted store windows on the other side of the street was Firbank's the jewelers.

Turning about, Billy said: "I don't know."

"You can't turn the lights out in the store."

"No, sir; but I'll find a way. What shall I do with the records when I have them?"

Gillian answered: "Is it still snowing?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"How long will it take you to do the job, once you're inside?"

"Not more than an hour."

"Will you blow the safe?"

"No, sir; I'll use a stethescope."

"Supposing," said Gillian, "that I meet you on the corner of Chestnut and Madison."

"Very well."

"At what time?"

"Eleven."

"That is satisfactory to me. These records are in a roll of yellow oilskin, about ten inches long. The roll is tied with a dark-red ribbon.

Gillian arose and thrust out his hand.

"I wish you luck. I will meet you on the corner of Chestnut and Madison—the northwest corner—at eleven. Don't keep me waiting, because it is a bitterly cold night. I'll be waiting in my Lincoln coupé."

"I won't keep you waiting, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Whether you're successful or not, be there."

"Yes, sir."

"Now," said Gillian, "won't you do me one more great favor, Billy—a favor that means a thousand times as much to me as the other? Won't you let me take you over to Dr. Lorber's?"

"No, sir," the tragic young man said with finality. "It would be an utter waste of time."

CHAPTER V.

A DOUBLE-EDGED IDEA.

WHEN Billy the Yegg descended in the elevator from the Hazeltine law offices to Chestnut Street, it was with the firm intention of devoting his life to crime. There was, it seemed to him, nothing to be gained by carrying on the fight against his criminal tendencies any longer.

He left the elevator and was swept along by the crowd into Chestnut Street and the stinging bitterness of the January wind.

It was howling now, shouting exultantly as it sped through the snow filled streets of the city.

Billy stopped at the curbstone, with his shoulders hunched up against the bite of that wind, and gazed across the street at the windows of Firbank, the jeweler. They sent a misty halation into the slanting fine snow that fell.

A street car intervened, its motors growling as its wheels spun on the icy rails. When it had passed he saw that a clerk, an old man in a black alpaca wearing a black skull cap, was removing various objects of price from the show windows.

Billy watched his chance in the heavy traffic and dashed across the snow-packed pavement.

The elderly clerk was removing trays of rings from the windows.

Billy watched him as he retired to the rear of the store; placed the trays on shelves in the large safe. From him Billy glanced at the large electric fan, mounted on a bracket on the back wall of the show window, slowly oscillating from side to side, keeping any trace of frost from forming on the window.

It was going to be a hard job, all right. Getting inside the store would be easy. Through the back cellar window, up the stairs—a skeleton key—and in the store! But what then? Open the safe in light as brilliant as sunlight?

The weather, it seemed to Billy Vollmer, as he bent his steps in the direction of his rooms, was turning colder. A glance at a thermometer hanging in a drug store doorway confirmed his guess: it was twelve below zero.

Such weather should have driven all pedestrians from the streets; but it had not, and he knew it would not. Chestnut, the main business street of Greenboro, would have its birds of passage all night long. He had often wondered where they came from, these

men and women, singly and in pairs, who scurried along Chestnut Street hours after reputable people were supposed to be in their beds.

He had made the hour of his appointment with Gillian eleven, rather than two or three or four hours later. One pair of eyes watching at Firbank's windows would do him as much harm as a dozen pairs.

Billy secured his stethescope and returned to Firbank's. He sauntered past the jeweler's, covertly glancing in. The store blazed as brightly as it had at nightfall.

A cluster of small floodlights played upon the safe as if it were the central actor in a play, which indeed it was. Its predecessor had played the central part in a drama, some years ago, with results so disastrous to Jason Firbank that he had publicly expressed his contempt for all burglar alarm systems, installed this huge new repository for his treasures, and ever since had kept his store ablaze with light from dusk until dawn.

The floodlights on the safe were connected, as Billy knew, with a special storage battery, charged by day and used by night. If trouble should occur in the city power house, if all the lights in the store went dark, the floodlights would continue to play on the safe.

Switches controlling all lights were ingeniously embedded in concrete and steel. Access to them was to be had only by means of keys.

The most obvious procedure would be that of somehow switching off these lights, working on the safe in the protection of absolute darkness.

This scheme had the equally obvious fault of being—obvious! Firbank's plunged in darkness would create more excitement than a four-alarm fire. That blaze of illumination was too well known; it was expected. Its absence, in its very self, would be in the nature of a tocsin.

Billy walked to the corner, shivering with the cold. His hat pulled down over his eyes, his coat collar pulled up about his ears, gave him an anonymity that would have been assuring had he been in the least apprehensive.

He passed a policeman, red-nosed and puffing, without a qualm of concern. The policeman glanced at him, and Billy glanced at the policeman. Both went their ways.

Reaching the corner, Billy turned about and retraced his steps. A clock in Firbank's window pointed to nine seventeen. He had less than an hour and three-quarters in which to devise some scheme for working on the safe without being observed; for entering the store, for opening the safe, and delivering that oilskin package to Gillian Hazeltine.

How could his movements be obscured? At any moment of the night some one might stop and look in that window. And supposing he were seen on his knees before that safe?

He reached the end of the block and turned about again. He was growing discouraged. Even on this job, was he to be a failure? Gillian Hazeltine's painful, blunt comment of this afternoon recurred to him: "Your real self is hidden behind that screen of ice."

Billy hunched his shoulders against the cutting wind. His nose was tingling. His ears were already numb.

"It's true," he muttered. "My real self *is* hidden behind a screen—of ice. God knows I've tried to clean it away to tear it down! But—he's—crazy! It isn't because of pressure on my brain."

He stopped abruptly.

Once again he was abreast of Firbank's the jeweler's.

His brain seemed to click as if a neatly ordered array of plans had fallen properly into place.

"A screen of ice," he muttered, and stared at the oscillating fan in each window.

His great idea had come to him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

One Man's Brain, Inc.

Wherein it is set forth that a young man may have talent—even genius—but guile is needed to lead him to success

By JOHN WILSTACH

AS the back door of the cottage opened I pushed my foot inside and followed it into the kitchen of the dwelling. Then I swept off my soft hat and bowed low to a middle-aged matron engaged in pushing a pie into the oven. Without invitation I removed my overcoat.

"Madam is cooking, I perceive," I said, taking a seat. "In Paris, recently, a great chef received the Order of the Legion of Honor for preparing dishes that made the president of the republic cry with gratitude."

I picked up my portmanteau from the floor and placed it on the table, after removing a large, important looking volume.

As she gazed at me wonderingly I handed her the book.

"Here, madam, is the only Universal Compendium of Knowledge, which contains every one of that great chef's recipes. Also instruction concerning how to fix the radio, amuse the children with games during the long winter evenings, dye silks or satins with berries found within walking distance of your home, and how to bring jewelry back to its original luster."

I pointed toward the book, which she clutched as if afraid to let go.

"You will notice the tooled Morocco binding and the gold-edged paper. Twelve hundred and fifty sub-divisions of facts and fancies have been ar-

ranged, after forty-five editors ransacked the history of mankind."

The woman regarded me sternly. Now she banged my livelihood down on the table.

"How dare you push your way into my home? Why, you're nothing but a *book agent!*"

She uttered the accursed words with contempt. I did not hang my head, but stood my ground proudly.

"I haven't any dog!" she exclaimed.

"No, I noticed that," I returned, with a smile.

Keeping tab on dog kennels was one of my specialties.

"But if I had I'd sic 'em on you. I'd like you to know, young man, that I have no radio nor any children; I buy my dye at the five and ten cent store, and to bring back my jewelry you'd have to search every hock shop in nearby cities. My husband took it all with him on high-flying bats."

I had arisen as if to go, but it was merely a lost motion.

"Madam," I said humbly, "you take my words wrongly. I merely mentioned a few items listed in this ocean of information where one may dive and bring up a fish for every taste. But, please, my dear woman, do not accuse me of being a book agent. It hurts me, and I am very sensitive."

She stood undecided, open mouthed.

"Then what are you?"

"An author," I stated, with becoming dignity, "working his way through the College of Experience. From here I aim to make New York, where they are going through the exercises of welcome, in preparing to fold me to their arms. By *they* I mean editors, producers and movie magnates. Meantime—"

I pushed the book back into her hands.

"There are two things you lose, at times, madam—beauty and a husband. Look under the letters B and H. Also for drunkenness, if you will turn to the word under D you will see how it can be cured by simple remedies concocted, without tears, in the home."

She sat down on a kitchen chair, smoothed out her apron and spread the book on her lap. I noticed she laid her finger on the little indentation marking B.

"After looking up beauty and its preservation, or recovery," I went on, "turn to Cleopatra and read how she conquered men and made them her slaves. Also to Circe, the enchantress, who charmed fellows who came under her spell into beasts and made 'em like it. Then turn a few pages to Cupid, the Greek god Eros—but you had better read the last in the privacy of the boudoir."

The woman's fingers twitched and an eager light flashed into her eyes.

"I can't read that all at once," she gasped. "Why, I have my housework to do."

That was just what I figured. I had aimed to rouse her curiosity and then rush her.

"You are quite right, madam. That volume contains the wealth of the centuries; you cannot peruse it in a few minutes."

I pulled a contract out of my pocket.

"Two dollars down—and a mere dollar a month—for a short space—and this is yours, all yours. But I wouldn't let your husband see it if I were you. There are pages of which no mere man should be allowed even a startled glimpse."

Whipping a fountain pen from a vest pocket I showed her where to sign. After that there's no trouble collecting the two-spot.

She departed into a front room, holding the book firmly to her bosom, and then I heard the stairs creaking beneath her weight. I sat there patiently. Shortly she returned with two crumpled one-dollar bills, her cheeks red from having purchased what she imagined was the scandalous secrets of the ages.

As I bowed myself out I reflected

that I must have a different line of talk for every possible customer. It all depended upon what would arouse a particular curiosity.

I walked down the street a few paces before I tried another back door. It did not open. Instead I was waved away from behind a window by a jaundiced-faced old party. It is a fact that some folks have a sixth sense and can smell book agents.

The next house was guarded by two vicious, hungry looking dogs. They were chained, but appeared capable of breaking the chains. I passed it up. Followed several examples of American bad manners; doors were slammed in my face.

It was half an hour before I lit upon another prospect. This was a young woman, recently married, with not all of the rice combed out of her hair. Her husband was out at work. I never solicited men. The sporting page was as far as most of them went or wanted to go.

This charming matron I sold on the idea of how valuable the Universal Compendium of Knowledge would be to her hubby in getting higher and further in his work. I hoped that wouldn't mean going after me. I found he was an automobile salesman—may we never meet.

After getting that two bucks and another contract signed, I called it a day. This was my tenth sale. Not so bad, I told myself, and felt a call for an early dinner. Talking tires one—sometimes two!

In case you've never been a book agent, I may explain that the first payment I collected belonged to me. The firm I represented received the dollar a month until weariness set in on the part of the buyer, and considered itself lucky.

As I sauntered, whistling, down the residential avenue of Hazelton toward my hotel, I reflected with pride that I had finished quite a profitable summer. I'd worked my way down the coast from my home in Elton, Maine, always seeking the shady side of the street, lived well, and yet would arrive in New York the following morning with a bank roll of four hundred and fifty smackers.

What I had told that housewife, in my exuberance, wasn't my usual tale—that of a young college boy working his way to graduation. Instead I had really committed a book agent's blunder—I had told the truth. I was a promising author, if an unknown one, with a trunk tray full of masterpieces, and my next hop would be New York, where I hoped to thaw out the frozen faces I'd heard about.

Of course I didn't really expect that welcome stuff all of a sudden—but I did think I might work the word, letter by letter, into the door mat of the Big City.

II.

As the train pulled into the Grand Central Station the next day I alighted with my suitcase in one hand. The other was minus the book agent's portmanteau. I had sent it back to the publishing firm with my resignation.

"Send on another boy," I wrote. "I'm going to the metropolis to make Montgomery Jones famous. Thanks for the cash and experience."

I knew only one person in the city, a boy cousin who was alleged to be a painter. My little red book showed me he lived near Sheridan Square, in the heart of Greenwich Village—if it had a heart. Anyway he was worth looking up.

I hopped into a taxi and gave the address to the driver. After one good look at him I was glad most of my bank roll was in express money orders.

We did a sprint and stop, sprint and stop, down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, crossed it, and several blocks farther on turned off into a foreign looking section that smelled a trifle of the last immigration quota.

The driver finally stopped in front

of a dilapidated three-story building once painted white, to be sure, but not in our time.

"Here you are," he growled, "and the clock says a dollar ten."

I tendered him a bill and a quarter, but received no thanks. Maybe that bandit frown generally brought forth a bigger tip?

I skipped to the hallway and found Royce Jones written on a card over a doorbell. So I gave it a good push.

Two minutes afterward I was being escorted to a studio on the top floor by a sleepy looking individual in a bathrobe. My cousin's hair was long, and two days' growth of beard didn't add to his manly beauty.

"Waking up a guy in the middle of the night," he grumbled, giving me a wicked look.

"Why, it is afternoon," I retorted.

"Artists keep no track of time," he said, scoffingly.

Nor of much else, I thought, as I stumbled into a big barn of a room that might be called Bohemian. An unmade bed was half concealed by a Japanese screen; another had been drawn aside from a two-burner gas stove.

In the center of the chamber stood a huge easel; a half finished canvas rested on it, the picture looking as if all the primary colors had had a mixup and gone to the conflict hot and heavy. A half dozen or so of chairs, whole and broken, stood in dispirited positions.

Royce yawned.

"I was dancing until after dawn at the Art Students' League annual ball," he explained. "You woke me up just as I was tearing off a simply wonderful sleep. What brings you to town, anyway?"

"I'm going to write," I said simply.

"Humph. I thought there were enough typewriters banging away already."

"Mine will get results," I assured him.

He grunted, and the expression on his face was anything but encouraging.

"How are things going with you?" I queried. "Making much money?"

His lips curled disdainfully.

"Bah! Painters never make money unless they commercialize and debase their art. I won't stoop to such a method of artistic prostitution—if I have to starve."

"Then how do you live?"

His face turned furtive and shy.

"Well, mother sends me a little money every week, and then I—"

"Borrow, eh? Whenever you get a chance, from fellows not too proud to work for a living?"

"What the devil business is it of yours, Montgomery?"

"None, as long as you don't try to touch me. I did think you might show me a few ropes."

"I can," Royce replied, a bit ashamed, maybe, "since you say you want to write."

"Yes, I already have some results—both a play and a movie synopsis up my sleeve."

"Ah, I know the editor of the *Greenwich Village Quilt*. It comes out every month—when it doesn't miss an issue. They print poems and—er—things."

"Fine, and do they pay for them?"

"You're very lower middle class, Montgomery, I must say, Doesn't your artistic soul yearn to express itself without stooping to dollars and cents?"

"Reaching—you mean," I corrected. "No, Royce, I want fame—but I want fortune, too."

"Try and get it," he murmured bitterly.

"I will!" I exclaimed. "First of all I'm a business man—being a writer comes second. This starving in the attic thing went out with Edgar Allan Poe. How much do you pay for this floor—when you pay?"

"A hundred a month."

I grunted. "I'll take a look around. This dust is a trifle too thick to suit me."

My cousin pushed back some tumbling locks.

"My vision is above such things," he said.

I glanced out of the window at lines of waving laundry.

"No accounting for taste," I told him. "I'll see you later."

"Sorry I can't ask you to stay for breakfast, but I have only tea and one egg."

"I'm on a diet, too," I retorted, with a grin, and waved Royce farewell.

He did not conduct me to the door, but sat hunched in his chair, pale about the gills, the reverse of the healthy lad who had descended upon New York a year and a half previous, all life and enthusiasm. If my cousin was an example of what leading a Bohemian existence produced, I decided that I wouldn't follow in his footsteps.

III.

"YES, this will suit you nicely, I am sure," crooned the landlord.

A comfortable living room overlooked Sheridan Square and the Greenwich Village Theater; it was bright, with long French windows; adjoining was a bath and a tiny kitchenette. With wicker furniture, a big library table, and a mock fireplace, the layout appealed to me, but—

"You ask a lot of money," I commented.

"Only ninety-five a month. A few years back suites were much higher. Indeed rents were so expensive the real artists had to move away from the Village. After a time the wealthy artistic pretenders who boosted prices followed. My price is rock bottom. Of course you can look farther."

But I had already done so.

"Very well," I replied, reluctantly, "I might as well start at the top of the toboggan."

I planked down a month's rent to Mr. Greenton and he said he'd make arrangements for my trunk to be sent down from the station. When he left me I unpacked my suitcase, depositing on the table typewritten copies of my play "The Audience Pays," and a movie synopsis, "Love Forgives All."

These were, I hoped, to be the groundwork of my fortune.

Losing no time, that afternoon I hied me uptown and proceeded directly to the office of Selton Brothers on West Forty-Second Street. I had once seen a fifth company of one of their comedy successes in Elton, Maine, and knew they had a record for hitting the bull's-eye of popular approval.

So I wanted to make friends. I felt we needed each other.

"No," drawled a languid office boy, "neither Del Selton or Robert is in. Del's in London and Robert is down listenin' to the ice tinkle in Havana."

"But the firm has a regular play reader?"

He yawned without putting his hand to his mouth.

"Sure, Miss Thompson, third door to your left."

I walked down the hall and blundered in on a young lady intent on a complicated toilet.

"Miss Thompson?"

"What of it?" she snapped.

"I have a play—"

"Who hasn't?" was the tart return.

Things weren't starting well.

"But this is something unusual," I urged.

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said,'" the play reader quoted with a little laugh.

I tendered her the MS. of "The Audience Pays" in my old book agent manner. She took it cautiously, as if it might bite.

"I can't say whether or not the Selton's have all their season's productions laid out or not," she remarked. "But I will read it—when I get the time."

The young lady placed my play on top of a host of others gathering dust on a long table.

"Miss Thompson," I murmured appealingly, "can you give me any hints on how to get a play accepted?"

Now the play reader sat back in her chair for a good laugh.

"You must be new to the game," she tittered. "Most big hits get turned down by everybody—and get produced through some mistake. Any old time the reader, director, producer and star are crazy about a script you can figure it'll expire in a week—with the dramatic critics acting as pall bearers."

"But how does a dramatist go about getting production?" I pleaded.

"I wish I knew—I have a play of my own," she replied, with a mischievous twinkle of brown eyes. "Seriously, however, some authors get stock companies to put on their plays for a week—sometimes pay 'em to do so—say in Union Hill, New Jersey, or Paterson—and then invite the big theatrical bugs to attend. A producer generally responds by sending his office boy, or a friend or relative living in the vicinity; any report is accepted, particularly if it is adverse."

"You are very cynical," I commented.

"Find a play reader who isn't. Why, a success, most times, is actually forced on a manager by a star or director. Again, a manager never welcomes anything new or novel—bis idea is to have a copy of some play that has made a hit. Bedroom, crook, back stage, and night club dramas all get put on in droves by the copy-cats. Producers are only enterprising in interviews written by their press agents."

I must have looked depressed.

"Cheer up, young man. You've only been listening to the truth, pure and simple. But, as Wilde said, the truth is never pure and seldom simple. You may reach production—who knows? But get a regular job while you're waiting."

Her glance hovered longingly on the tiny toilet set before her.

"Thank you very much for your kindness," I said. "Might I drop back in a few weeks from now and have you tell me what you think of my opus?"

"People seldom care what I think," she returned, dryly. "They merely want me to pass stuff on to Del with all the praise adjectives in the dictionary. But do return—I'll gladly give you the lowdown on your effort."

I thanked Miss Thompson again, little realizing that I had been treated with more than usual courtesy.

At the office of Martin Burton I saw no one of any importance, but was curtly informed that I might leave my script if I desired. The producer sometimes took plays down to his home on Long Island over the week end.

I wanted to ask if he ever brought them back? But I didn't, for I think the young man in the outer office would have hurled the play at my head, first taking a puff of the cigarette that miraculously clung to his lower lip.

At Richard Jennings's office, where things were done in something of a businesslike manner, I was given a receipt for the copy of the play I left, and told I would hear from them. When? Oh, the girl couldn't exactly say, but the manuscript would be filed.

My imagination pictured a morgue for neglected plays where, hidden from the light of day, the characters evolved from dramatists' brains struggled in oppressive darkness.

Crashing the back door of a home as a book agent, and the inner sanctorum of a producer in the guise of a dramatist was something different again. At the time I didn't know anything about play agents who represented authors and peddled their product on a commission basis.

If I had been informed of their existence I might not have gone to one of them. I had the confidence of inexperience, a flower, alas, so easily crushed to earth by the cruel wind of failure.

During the day that followed I ventured forth with copies of my movie synopsis, visiting the Eastern headquarters of the great film companies. There I did meet assistants from scenario departments, but they weren't much more than promoted office boys.

It appeared that, aside from the cases of famous books and dramas, all the buying was done in Hollywood. But I was given permission to leave my scenario! You'd have thought that being allowed to do this was a privilege. No time was mentioned when I'd get a report—if ever.

Several weeks passed—and part of my cash and hopefulness. Except for a few letters from my folks in Maine my mail box was empty. Then it was I summoned up what remained of my courage and returned to meet Miss Thompson.

She, indeed, greeted me with a cordial smile.

"I'll find your manuscript," was her opening remark.

My heart sank while I watched her rummage through a pile of MMS.

"Ah, here it is—thought it might be lost."

I accepted the bound pages gingerly.

"What do you think of 'The Audience Pays'?" I queried, ruefully.

"A little too original, I'm afraid," Miss Thompson replied, without a smile. "That plot of yours about the stage crew joining hands with the girl ushers and driving the actors and actresses off the stage and out of the theater—in the middle of the first act—and continuing the play themselves—is darn new. Yet I'm sure neither Del nor Robert would take a chance on it. You see, *no one has ever done it.* That's the biggest damn they've got on anything."

"Why, you'd think it would work just the other way around?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Not down Managers' Alley. Of course if you had enough money to finance the thing yourself—"

"No, I'm poor," I admitted, "and poverty, according to Shaw, is a crime for which people should be sent to jail. Well, I'll keep right on trying. You can't be arrested for that."

"You have the right spirit," murmured the play reader, as I trailed out, but her expression wasn't even one fourth of one per cent encouraging.

Maybe you guessed it. In three more weeks I had back my other copies of the play, without comment. And had heard nothing from my movie synopsis. Still on the Coast, I was told—very still, I guess.

A tiny voice suggested that I might better have stuck to the book agent game. I didn't seem to be able to edge into this dramatic racket.

For four years I'd been making a study of the printed drama—Fitch, Thomas, O'Neill and Galsworthy—and of the "blah" that reaches the screen—and I felt I had struck a new note—several of them, in fact. It was one thing, however, to have the goods—equally important, I could see, to find the ways and means to market 'em.

IV.

THERE'S more than one way to reach that wonderful goal—success!

I didn't know it then, but the new magic word in modern business is—contact! This really means having a friendly connection with the proper persons in order to advance yourself.

Does it sound cold blooded? Maybe, but one cannot climb by one's own effort in this world of overwhelming competition. They say a man has "good contacts," implying he has ready means of communication with the right people to help him put his proposition over.

The first time you get stopped by an important office boy, or curtly asked your business with the boss by a bob haired secretary, you'll understand what I mean. Contact is the 1928 Open Sesame.

However, spare your tears, gentle reader, if you have any on tap. This narrative of mine is not one of the starving genius who, step by step, in shoes that need half soling, descends to a flop house on the Bowery and thence to a bench in Battery Park. Here he is always found by the kindly philanthropic old gent while clutching a batch of dog eared masterpieces and contemplating a plunge in the harbor.

That sort of thing is as outdated as a George Ade fable. These events took place in the last year of the reign of Coolidge the Silent.

That I felt a natural depression I will admit. My advent into the big city hadn't created even a tiny ripple. The play and movie synopsis I had brought to the metropolis were the result of two years' work, and I couldn't produce anything more original. If they failed to make a hit, I had no heart to go further.

In the morning, after a bath and breakfast, I was in the habit of strolling through Washington Square and up Fifth Avenue. Nothing unusual interfered with my constitutional until —I remember—on the Monday following my landlord's second rental call.

I was watching an old lady feed the pigeons in the square when I heard my name called from a big red touring car, and then it nearly knocked me down in swinging before me.

It was with difficulty that I recognized an old schoolmate of mine, Dick Worthington, who hopped out, all cane, spats and gloves, to shake me warmly by the hand.

"Well, if it isn't Montgomery Jones, with two feet on the last stand of Bohemia," he exclaimed. "Jump in, old pal, I'm going to my office."

"You look like Mr. Prosperity himself," I said enviously, as I stepped into the seat beside him at the wheel. "The last I saw of you, Dick, you were a poor, struggling lawyer, with bags at the knees of your pants big as babies' balloons."

He chuckled as he started the car.

"I'm a promoter now, Monty. Anything from oil wells to reclaiming gold out of the sea, or starting a corner on elks' teeth. I'm making so much money I keep it in four different banks and let my accounts play tag with one another."

"I wish you could promote me," I murmured, ruefully. "My prospects look like a blank wall with a 'Post No Bills' sign."

"Promote you, eh? Maybe I can, maybe I can. You can incorporate and sell stock in anything now, my boy, so long as you have exhibit A—the land or body that *may* produce the dividends. Always just inside the law, though, that's my racket. I don't think Atlanta would agree with my health."

I laughed. His good nature was contagious.

"When we get to my offices—note the plural—you may tell me your story. But don't make it sad. I've become one of those high pressure salesmen deaf to anything except good news."

We stopped in front of an imposing building on a Fifth Avenue corner. I allowed myself to be conducted to the tenth floor and thence to a suite of offices dotted with a decorative girl here and there, until we reached the throne room, where Dick seated himself behind a massive cherry colored desk. On it stood a pad and inkstand and a rose in a slim silver vase.

"Now, Monty, go into your dance," he commanded.

"To begin," I quavered, "my cash on hand is hardly worth mentioning; but I have a great play I can't find a producer for, and an unsold movie synopsis that would fit Greta Garbo like a pearl necklace."

"Not so bad," he replied, reflectively; "something to build on at any rate —open a vista for the imagination. Let me see—there's those three speculators who only want about five hundred per cent on their money. They had a chance to buy in on 'Abie's Irish Rose'

but waited too long. They've been crazy about the theater ever since, and because I know a lot of near managers in the Roaring Forties, have been waiting for a good tip from me."

He sat for a minute lost in contemplation of the shining surface of his desk.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "I get an inspiration as often as Lindbergh receives another medal. You need a manager, Monty, just as much as a prize fighter or a musical comedy star. You must have applied to you modern methods of grabbing Old Man Success by his slippery neck. I'll make a corporation out of you—call the company 'One Man's Brains, Inc.' You and I will share two-thirds of the stock—of course, I shall be president—and my friends will finance us by taking the other third."

"Is that legal?" I faltered.

"Surest thing you know. Several artists have been incorporated and the investors stand to make a lot of money. Leave this all to me, and in the meantime, until I say the word, make no further attempt to sell either your play or movie plot.

"I'll incorporate the company at fifteen thousand dollars—fifteen thousand shares at one dollar a share. That will give you five thousand dollars—and a year for you to live comfortably and for me to work out my plan. But I expect the value of the stock to go up like a sky-rocket before the winter is over and the first birdie sings."

"What do I do?" I asked.

"Never mind. Better that you are not informed of my scheme. It is possible you wouldn't comprehend—promotion ideas of to-day are a trifle tricky, till they prove themselves."

"How long will it take to do this incorporating?"

"A short time, under the laws of Delaware. I'll have my three men here to meet you in the morning—say at this time, eleven-thirty. I'll get them together for a Scotch tea this afternoon at my club. I may assure you that they're just panting to go."

"But you haven't read my play and movie plot," I blurted out.

"Never mind," said Dick, "I wouldn't know anyway if the stuff was there, and it's all a gamble in any case."

He pressed a button and a dream of a stenographer drifted in, pale and languid, as if nourished on the aroma of attar of roses.

"Leave all details to me," said Dick, as he waved me away, "you can't go wrong under my wing. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Gertrude, were you the sweet thing who put that flower in my silver vase?"

The stenographer moistened the tip of her pencil with ruby lips.

"Yes, she sighed sweetly. "Do you wish me to take any dictation?"

"Lots of it," he said firmly, leaning toward her, and I backed out of the room.

This was no place for a new corporation like me!

V.

THE following morning at eleven-thirty I was introduced to three quiet, dark-complexioned gentlemen, garbed in rich but inconspicuous attire, who were courteous, but had very little to say. I was spoken of as Montgomery Jones, a promising young dramatist, and Messrs. Gordon, Benning and Rosenthal took Dick's words quite seriously.

But the promoter didn't stop there.

"Here, my friends," he said, nodding toward me, "is a young man with a future and a fortune lying just ahead of him. Already he has a great play and a movie idea that would get Pola Negri up early in the morning. And his brain fairly teems with plots that will click.

"Do I ask you to undertake production of his play? Do I? No, I reply before you can answer, I'm going to have others attend to that. I merely let you in on the ground floor. I'm in-

corporating Mr. Jones at fifteen thousand dollars as a starter—fifteen thousand shares at a par value of one dollar each. You fellows will be allowed to take five thousand shares among you."

"Is that all?" remarked Mr. Gordon, who seemed to speak for the others.

"For now," said Dick, with finality. "I just want to *show* you first, then we shall go further. This will be a test of confidence. You are aware that I can sally forth any afternoon and dispose of five thousand dollars worth of oil stock. I'm starting this deal by giving you a profitable flyer before we do really big things."

"I represent my partners," returned Mr. Gordon.

He pulled out a leather folder, removed a sheet, and wrote a check for five thousand dollars.

"You must be on the level, Mr. Worthington, since you might as readily have nicked us for more. I am sure you wouldn't lose three good prospects for a mere five grand. We know you are too good a business man for that."

Gordon smiled. The thought of being so under estimated amused him. As if that was all there was to it, the three made cordial adieus and stalked out.

Dick chuckled.

"They know I'm honest or I'd take 'em for more. And these men are right. There's nothing phony about the deal, and gamblers of this type are the kind to have with you. They don't ask for eight per cent a year on their money—they want to clean up big or kiss their cash good-by."

I sat as one in a dream.

"Doesn't appear very businesslike to me," I remarked; "there's something rather causal about it all."

"You'll get used to that in this man's town," Dick assured me. "From now on, Monty, you'll do just as you are told. Understand?"

I nodded.

"You're going to act the rich young bachelor, who writes on the side merely for amusement—about to start on a tour around the world in your private yacht. Get your things," added Dick, "and move to my apartment on Park Avenue. Then visit my tailor. I'll phone him to provide you with a line of street, afternoon and evening attire."

"What's the matter with this suit I have on?" I wanted to know.

"I hate to tell you!" said Dick bitterly.

What use to reply to that? My future was in his hands. Well, it hadn't looked very rosy in my own.

Several evenings later you might have seen me entertaining on a lavish scale in Dick's spacious apartment. Several well known actresses and their boy friends were on hand, and a well-known dramatist, Beverley Carter.

Of course, Dick was really master of ceremonies. But as I was supposed to be wealthy enough to have an ocean-going boat, on which I'd soon depart for a world tour, I was important enough to let others do most of the talking.

I noticed Dick take Carter aside and show the famous dramatist a copy of my play, "The Audience Pays." I watched him as he strolled to the hallway and stuffed the script in his overcoat pocket.

"He's interested," whispered Dick to me when he had a chance, "and it's possible he might collaborate with you. Give you a good push forward, eh?"

"Well," I replied, "anything that looks like production would be a help."

But I'm not going to buoy up your hopes. In two weeks my play was returned to me by messenger with a note which read:

> MY DEAR MR. JONES:
> I find your play unimpressive and dramaturgically unsound. Better stick to your yacht—that hasn't any holes in it. Hope you enjoy your world tour.
> Sincerely,
> BEVERLEY CARTER.

One evening Dick introduced me to a pale young lady named Florence

Savoy, who was scenario editor of the Maddox Film Company.

"I've told Miss Maddox you have a huge fortune," said Dick, a bit vulgarly, "but that you've written a movie synopsis, just for fun, that you'd like to see on the screen. She says she'll be pleased to look it over."

I thanked Miss Savoy as I pressed the typewritten pages into her hands. She certainly seemed interested, and that was an event in my career.

Of course, I wondered why I was posing as a rich young bachelor, about to give far places on the globe a peek from the deck of my yacht, but all that was up to Dick—I was in his hands. This imposture was costing money and I figured it couldn't be laid entirely to caprice.

VI.

It was the middle of January and Dick and I had just finished a dinner prepared and served in his apartment by his French chef, Alphonse Megnont, whom he had to bribe anew every time Al heard of a boat sailing back to that dear France.

The meal was a work of art, of which one showed appreciation by demolishing.

"I have two tickets for the opening night of 'The Rebels,' by Beverley Carter, at the Grandton," said Dick. "You must promise to be a good audience, for he's a friend I count on for a lot."

"Isn't he the bird who told me I had better stick to the deep blue sea?" I commented bitterly.

"The very same. But you must learn never to take a high hat seriously—unless you can get a chance to heave a brick at it," returned my chum, with a chuckle.

We finished our coffee and cigars and dressed for the performance.

You will probably never experience the combined feeling of shock and fury, mixed with surprise and suspense, that gripped me that evening. It is impossible to describe the emotions that tossed me like a toy, so I won't try.

Sufficient to tell you that "The Rebels," listed on the program as by Beverley Carter, was a straight steal from my drama "The Audience Pays!" A few scenes had been turned around and several unimportant characters added.

But the novelty of the piece, the stage hands and ushers driving the players off the stage during the middle of a rotten first act and continuing with the play themselves, was there—and much, much more. The heart had been taken out of my play, and there it was on the stage, beating for Carter's benefit. The dirty crook!

I writhed with anger throughout the three acts, and when the final curtain fell I nearly got up from my seat in answer to cries for "Author." Dick had to restrain me from making a scene. Fortunately Carter remained in the background and didn't even come out for a bow.

Personally I had blood in my eye and scanned the lobby for him, but Dick dragged me to his car and paid scant attention to my incoherent exclamations about the theft of my beloved brain child.

"Don't you understand," I cried, "I have been robbed—robbed of my play. Isn't there anything we can do?"

"Yes," said Dick, curtly, "wait until to-morrow and see if the critics pronounce the show a hit. If it is—just watch my smoke."

I could get nothing more out of him, and secretly envied the cool way he was able to take events as they came without surprise or flurry.

The following day I read columns of dramatic comment on "The Rebels" and realized that it was a knockout, one of those freaks that play on and on after catching the fancy of the theatergoers at the start. The afternoon papers advertised seats on sale ten weeks in advance.

You may be sure I nearly deviled Dick to the verge of insanity. He was pretty severe with me.

"I'm your lawyer as well as manager," he told me. "Your affairs are in my hands, so you might as well act like a good boy. Anyway, you're a corporation, and as you only have one-third of the stock, your voting power amounts to nothing at all; so you might as well keep your trap closed."

This wasn't much satisfaction, but I had to be content with it. Of course, I trusted Dick. Still I did want the satisfaction of making some kind of a protest.

Toward the end of the week I had another shock. Dick took me to a picture palace to see a movie called "After Youth," which was produced by the Maddox Film Corporation. It didn't take half an eye, or five titles, to tell me that I was beholding a steal from my movie synopsis "Love Forgives All."

As I turned to Dick he silenced me with upraised hand.

"I'm attending to this, too," he said briefly.

VII.

On Saturday evening there was a business meeting in Dick's apartment, attended by our three backers, all as courteous and close-mouthed as ever.

As president of One Man's Brain, Inc., Dick asked permission to take the chair and make a report.

"Gentlemen," he began at once, "when we incorporated Mr. Montgomery Jones, I wondered how I might get his work on the market profitably without risking any of our own money.

"No producer on the Rialto wishes to take a chance on an unknown dramatist from the sticks. So I figured the most practical plan was to have Mr. Jones's scripts *stolen* from him!"

"What! You planned these thefts?" I exclaimed.

"Certainly. I knew Beverley Carter was an uncommon crook. In the last five years he's had to settle for two plays he had pilfered. The man has no originality of his own. But we have his letter of acknowledging reading your play and—pending settlement—his producers are holding up his royalties. With stock and movie rights we should all clean up a nice bit of change on the piece.

"As regards the picture, Miss Florence Savoy, as a scenario editor, never looked so good to me. I figured she held the job for the benefit of her expensively gowned self. So I allowed her to take Mr. Jones's movie script.

"She stole the idea in it, just as I figured she would. I will admit my plan to have both the play and the movie plot stolen was helped by the impersonation Mr. Jones made of a wealthy young idler about to take a trip around the world. They never feared his appearance on the scene with a squawk, as they might that of a needy scribbler. There is no question but that the Maddox Film Corporation will come across nicely—we have the goods on them—and I have discovered the big officials never thought for an instant they were buying, through Miss Savoy, a stolen story."

Mr. Gordon arose, a little flush of excitement on his cheeks.

"I think a vote of thanks is due our president," he said cordially.

Everybody rushed forward to congratulate Dick and I almost embraced him.

"I have another play in mind," I managed to say.

"You can have all the money you want for production now," exclaimed Gordon, and his partners beamed on us.

"No need of it," drawled Dick. "We can go ahead with the money that will be dumped in our laps by that couple of unsuspicious thieves!"

THE END

Now We're Rich

Every one wants money and imagines what he'd do with it. Do you think you would act like this husband or the wife or the children?

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

CHAPTER I.

FROM ALL SIDES.

"WELL, *are* we going to get a new car this year?" William persisted, and gazed across the dinner table, almost sternly, at his father.

More, he planted his elbows on the cloth. And Henry Morrow, with the gesture—long since grown purely mechanical—which he had been making for at least sixteen of William's twenty years, waved the elbows off again, and considered his only son.

A smart boy this, you understand, and personable, winning higher appreciation here from mother and father and two admiring sisters than he was likely to find elsewhere in the great world, perhaps; but a smart boy notwithstanding. Only, when it came to money matters, Willie was—well, a bit thoughtless.

"We are," said Henry Morrow, and paused and then smiled brightly as he added, "*not!*"

"Ah!" William submitted. "Why, dad, we've had that car for five years now!"

"I know. I remember buying it."

"Yes, and I remember when we bought it. I was just a little boy then—just out of short pants, wasn't I? And she was a good car in those days, too. And now the poor old thing rattles—"

"Oh, and how!" sighed Margery, who was Henry's youngest child and sat at his right.

"Well, possibly, Bill," the father of the family said cheerily, "when you find time to take a couple of wrenches and get underneath for a few hours, most of the rattles can be cured."

"Not these rattles," said William. "These are the chronic rattles of old age, dad. Pete Henderson said he thought the rattles were mostly in her throat. I took him home yesterday, you know."

Even Pete Henderson's whimsical comment seemed not to impress Henry with the shortcomings of the family car. Indeed, he was rather preoccupied to-night, and for no particular reason. He glanced at Laura, his wife—Laura, little and dark and very lovely, who was, absurdly enough, the mother of twenty-three-year-old Ina, there beside her, and who looked much more like Ina's slightly elder sister.

Laura was giving no great heed to the troubles of her only son; with the hint of a frown she was gazing just then at the empty chair beside the table. Henry glanced at it too.

"Burgesses have a new car, you know," William said thinly, dreamily.

"I didn't know it," Henry confessed.

"The Donaldsons have a new car, too," Marge contributed.

Henry sat up.

"Really?" he said. "According to such statistics as I've been reading lately, several millions of people in the United States must have new cars just about now. It's splendid to know that this wave of prosperity has hit our beautiful suburb of Wellmont, too, but what has it to do with us?"

"Nothing at all, I guess, from the sound of that," William murmured drearily, and his smile was small and bleak. "That means we're not getting any new car?"

"Bill," his father said lightly, "buy yourself a nice black robe and have a few business cards printed, and you'll be all ready to set up as a seer."

William's hands went out despairingly; even at twenty there was much of the little boy left in him.

"But why?" he cried. "When everybody else has a decent car, why do we have to clatter around in—"

"Candidly," Henry interrupted, "because we haven't the price of anything else just at present. Now, suppose we drop the subject?"

William nodded slowly; his smile was bitter now and his eyes rather stricken.

"All right, dad," he sighed. "It's—it's always like that, isn't it?"

"What's always like what?"

"When we want anything, I mean. We're just—poor, aren't we? We have always been poor, and we always will be poor!"

"We are certainly not in the millionaire class," Henry said sharply. "On the other hand, William, do you recall missing a meal at any time?"

"Oh, food—sure. And a roof to cover us and some clothes to wear. All that. I didn't mean that. Everybody has that. What I meant—"

Laura awoke rather suddenly from her contemplation of the empty chair. "Never mind what you meant, Willie. Don't be ridiculous, dear."

"Is it ridiculous for us to want a new car when the old one rattles so that people a block away jump out of their skins and start climbing trees and—"

"It is distinctly ridiculous to feel as you do about money and luxuries—yes!" Henry put in with some warmth. "There are a great many things in life more important than money."

Margery held up her pretty little pink hands and opened wide her beautiful blue eyes, ostensibly in amazed admiration.

"At last! At last, an absolutely original thought!" she breathed. "Oh, I wonder why nobody ever said that before?"

"Well, for the love o' tripe, *what are they?*" William inquired blankly.

Just a second or two, Henry Mor-

row paused and stared at his children, almost uncomprehendingly.

It was sweeping down on him again, just as it had been sweeping down, off and on, these several years: how incredibly different things were nowadays! Forty years ago the little Henry had been taught to feel that when addressing his own father there was little to choose, in the way of sheer reprehensibility, between hurling mud at that rather majestic parent and omitting the "sir."

Whereas Henry's offspring—well, well, times go right on changing, of course. He gathered himself anew and resumed quite briskly:

"Health, for one thing, whether you appreciate it or not, William. We are all sound and well, thank fortune, and that alone is worth more than all the money in the world!"

"It is?" William muttered.

"And we have a nice home and peace and happiness in it. There might not be so much of either, if I were rich."

"Why not?" William asked, more blankly. "There's nothing about a couple of million dollars that 'd ever make me unhappy."

"Besides, we're all getting on well enough, and that counts for a lot. Ina has her gift shop down near the station, and if it isn't making a fortune for her, at least it's yielding a nice little income. You have your job, Will, and—"

"Yes! Twenty-five berries a week!" William sneered.

"Well? That's two dollars a week more than I was drawing when I was married, but we managed very nicely."

"But, my soul! Away back there when *you* were married, things didn't cost—" the son of the house began, and stopped short and flushed unaccountably.

Henry stared hard at him.

"I say! *You're* not contemplating matrimony just yet, are you?"

"Doing—doing what?" William stuttered, and stiffened. "Er—plenty of things you can contemplate, even if you are poor, aren't there? What I mean, I'm not—well, crazy. But at that I don't say that some day maybe Joy and I might not—er—"

His words faded out.

Henry sighed.

"Joy? Which one is Joy?" he asked.

"What?" his son cried in utter astonishment. "Why, Joy Harrison, of course."

"The pretty girl with the smooth black hair, Harry," Laura explained quietly. "Willie had Marge ask her over here for dinner last week."

"Not that painted little runt I caught smoking a cigarette up in Marge's room?" the father of the family gasped. "*That* isn't your Joy?"

"See here, father!" William Morrow shouted. "I won't permit—"

"See here, William! Don't tell me what you'll permit or what you'll not permit! I said—"

"See here, both of you!" Mrs. Henry Morrow said firmly. "Stop that nonsense before it goes one word further. Joy's smoking really isn't important one way or the other, you know. She and Willie and Marge and all the rest of them will seem just as silly and out of date to their children as we seem to them. And be good enough not to use that tone to dad, Willie. I don't like it at all."

"I'm—sorry, mother," William muttered, and mastered the strong man's anger that was in him. "I—I apologize. But all the same, we'll leave Miss Harrison's name out of this conversation."

"Agreed!" Henry said acidly. "What were we talking about when the disturbance started?"

"You were telling about the joys and the beauties of poverty, father," his son said meekly.

Henry stifled another sigh.

He had begun what should have been a perfectly good and telling pero-

ration upon blessings beyond the price of gold—the very sort of talk indeed which his father had been able to deliver with such subduing effect. Yet even to himself every word of it had sounded hollow and hackneyed and stereotyped. Why?

He did not know. Surely the fundamentals themselves were just as sound as they had been in his boyhood days. But the slightly disconcerting fact remained that every time he tried a discourse of this kind, here in his own family circle, the several trite sequences of thought seemed to have a little less authority, a little more futility, than the time before.

"Car—that was it," Henry said rather hopelessly. "Well, that matter's easily settled. We're buying no new car this year, Will. Next year, maybe."

"Next year," William reflected brightly, "we may all be dead."

This, Mr. Morrow ignored altogether. He folded his napkin and turned from Willie, indicating that the subject was closed. Briefly he glanced toward the living room, where the jazz orchestra was hammering on and on from the radio speaker, and winced. Then his gaze wandered again to the empty chair for a moment. He looked straight at Laura, with brows raised in uneasy inquiry.

"Jim didn't turn up for dinner, after all?"

"No," Laura said simply, in that curiously quiet and assured tone which seemed inevitable these days whenever she spoke of her brother James.

"Know where he is, Laura?"

"Oh! Speaking of where things are," Marge put in, and craned her neck for a bootless survey of the sideboard top. "What became of that letter for dad?"

"Letter?"

"Just a real-estate advertisement, Harry," said his wife. "It's somewhere around."

"But it might not be an ad. It might be something of vast importance," the youngest child submitted.

"It isn't, darling," her mother said impatiently.

Marge shrugged resignedly. Distractingly pretty, full eighteen years old, firm in the faith that she would finally fight her way out of Wellmont High School next spring, she still seemed to be the baby of this household. The letter wasn't visible on the serving table, either. Marge's eyes roved on.

"Jim didn't go down to the city, Laura?" Henry asked nervously.

"There were several things he wanted to do in Wellmont; I'm sure he did not go down to New York."

"Well—hope not," Henry grunted, and caught the eye of his only son and grinned:

"What's on your mind now, Bill?"

"If it isn't impertinent or unfilial, or anything, might I whisper a question?"

"Nothing to do with cars or poverty?"

"Not a thing. What I want to know—what's the mystery about Uncle Jim?"

"Mystery?" Henry said, and started a little. "He's—ah—visiting us for awhile. That's not mysterious, is it?"

"Well, no, not the visit itself, of course; but that wasn't what I meant, dad. You see, all of a sudden Uncle Jim is out of the job he has been holding down since infancy, and he isn't looking for another," explained William, who was really nobody's fool. "And he acts queer and so do you and mother whenever you speak of him—like just now."

"Queer?" Henry echoed.

"Queer, Willie?" said Laura also, with a perplexed rising inflection, and dimpled—which she could do very charmingly—and gazed at her only son with the lovely innocence of a child.

"Jumpy, I mean—nervous—I don't know. I can't just put it into words, but I can feel it, sort of. Whenever

anything's said about Uncle Jim you both look—"

He paused and stared wonderingly at his sister Ina. This young woman, who was far from a neurotic type, had bounced out of her chair with much the effect invented by the late St. Vitus; and now, although as a rule she spoke very quietly, she was all but bawling out:

"Well, I—I think we'd better get the table cleared and the dishes done and—"

"Oh, don't get excited, Ina," Uncle Jim himself said, from the doorway. "I heard it, but it's all right."

Perturbed eyes darted in his direction; lips smiled with difficulty and a rather weird effect. Mr. James Brantree tossed his hat to the hall seat and advanced, slowly and thoughtfully.

He was a reasonably good looking, rather small man, still under thirty, sufficiently well dressed, wholly conventional. His features were sharper and less pleasing than those of his elder sister and his eyes, perhaps, lacked that wide open, fearless effect of Laura's.

And then again, Henry Morrow reflected, perhaps they didn't lack it at all. He at least had observed no difference until—well, lately.

Very evidently, however, he had heard too much. His lips were pursed as he sauntered to the empty chair beside Laura.

"No, not a thing. I've had dinner. Yes, honest, sis. I got something down town when I knew I'd be late." He grinned, a rather wan and tired grin and for an instant a hunted light flickered in his eyes. "Well—"

"Now, Jimmy!" Henry exploded. "If you heard anything when you came in there a minute ago—"

"I heard everything." Brantree laughed easily enough. "In fact, I had just closed the door when Willie asked what the mystery was, and I was low enough to stand still and listen to the rest of it. And if you want my candid opinion, I think we made a big mistake in keeping it from the kids in the first place."

"Bosh!"

"Oh, no. They're not children any longer. There's no reason on earth why they shouldn't be told."

"Jimmy," Laura said shortly, "it is not necessary."

"Well, I think it is. Confound it, I'm *not* guilty, you know!" Mr. Brantree blazed quite savagely. "I have nothing to hide and I'd a darned sight rather the young ones knew the truth than have them go on imagining all sorts of things. So let's go! My children, sit tight and prepare for the shock: your old Uncle James is a fugitive from justice!"

Mr. Brantree selected a cigarette and lighted it with elaborate ease. Had he been seeking an effect, he was rewarded. William's mouth hung open; Marge was smiling eager, astounded inquiry at her uncle. Ina turned pale.

"You're no more a fugitive from justice than I am!" Laura said angrily.

"I don't know about that. If they're not actually after me now, they will be shortly."

"Yes, but—but who'd you kill?" William gasped.

"Nobody yet; I'm just a budding criminal, Bill," said Brantree. "The fact is, somebody in the Salton Company office, where I used to work, stole forty-five hundred dollars and they pinned the job on me!"

"But you didn't do it?" William inquired.

"Thanking you for the vote of confidence, no, I didn't," his uncle said sourly. "And I have no idea who did, which makes it rather more unpleasant. It was cash money, and I was alone in the office with the safe. It was there when I sat down at my desk, because I looked at it. Pretty soon Peter Salton—that's the young brother, the junior partner—came in for it and there was only a bunch of folded letterheads in the envelope where the money had been."

"But — but somebody took it," Marge murmured.

"I'd figured that out for myself, kid, but it must have been a spook. Unless I went into a trance without knowing it, not a soul entered that office. I insisted on being searched, of course, and having everything connected with me searched—rooms, trunks, everything.

"I'm afraid it didn't prove very much; old man Salton pointed out that the office was on the ground floor and the window open and it would 've been simple for me to have passed it out to a confederate. Pleasant idea, but I had no means of showing that it wasn't right. Every last employee of the beastly concern had a perfect alibi, except me."

"Well? Go on!" William urged, as Brantree paused.

"There's not much farther to go. Old man Salton wanted to have me pinched right away, when he couldn't make me confess. His kid brother, Peter, staved that off for awhile at least. I'm dead certain he thinks I took it and he's waiting for me to repent and hand it back.

"So I came up here for a time, since Wellmont is out of the city and the county and out of sight generally, and Peter Salton's the only one down there who knows where I am."

He sighed and crushed the cigarette. Ina smiled queerly.

"Aren't *you* doing anything at all about it, Jim?"

"There's not much that I can do. I've never been very saving with money and what little I'd laid aside I'm paying out now to private detectives. That's my one and only bet, of course, but they seem to be learning absolutely nothing. Sooner or later the elder Salton is going to insist upon my arrest and prosecution—and that, I presume, will be that!"

Brantree spread his palms and shrugged, with what was intended for a whimsical smile. Some seconds he waited, still smiling at the younger Morrow children; then the smile died out and he regarded them with mild astonishment. It is entirely possible that he had been expecting an outburst of hotly sympathetic protest; instead, since never before had they viewed a suspected felon at such close range, they were even now only gaping at him!

"Prison!" William said, with throaty effect. "Gosh!"

"They can't send him to prison!" Laura cried passionately. "They can't convict an innocent man!"

"Why can't they? If it's all as bad as he says—"

"But you know quite well he's not guilty," Ina put in.

"Oh, but that doesn't always count for so much," Marge submitted. "They sent Mr. Halliday to prison—father's friend, you know—and nobody ever thought he was guilty."

"And he wasn't!" Henry snapped. "They framed poor old Ned so—"

"Well, without reviewing Ned Halliday's case again," Laura interrupted, "your Uncle Jim knows no more about this wretched money than we do. He was very silly to tell you anything."

"No, I wasn't, Laura," Brantree sighed. "For days I've felt these kids looking at me and wondering why the Sam Hill I was hanging around the house, day and night, when they'd never seen me oftener than once a month for dinner before. There may have been some selfish motives floating around in my subconscious; perhaps I hoped that they'd clamber to their old uncle's knees and assure him that he couldn't possibly have done such a thing. But they know now, anyway."

"Well, sure!" William said heartily. "And now if you'll make a clean breast —no, that's not what I wanted to say. If you'll tell me all the ins and outs of this, all the little details, I'll bet I can guess who—"

"Don't try, Willie," his mother advised, and rose with a dry and somewhat dangerous little smile. "I think

that this is another discussion we may well consider closed."

A strange hush had descended upon the household.

Ina, still thunderstruck, was gathering dishes. William remained in his chair, head shaking; and Henry noted with a start that his son's thoughts were his own: there *was* something infernally glib about that recital of Brantree's.

Not that Jim actually had stolen the money; the fact alone that he was Laura's brother made that impossible. But nevertheless if Henry Morrow had found himself in a pickle like this, he'd have been moving heaven and earth to establish his innocence; he'd never have been sitting around in a suburb, trying to treat the matter jauntily!

Marge, humming meditatively, moved to the serving table and took to turning things over and rummaging. Henry himself trudged gloomily into the living room, paused and stared darkly at the energetic radio speaker for a moment, as if yearning for a sturdy, red-painted fireman's ax; and then, with a furtive glance toward the dining room, softened the music considerably and moved quickly from the set.

Before now he had learned that jazz in general had the right of way over old-fashioned nerves in this household and that one did not cut off the radio completely.

His pet chair beckoned and he dropped into it with a discouraged thud and picked up the evening paper.

He was tired to-night. If he craved one thing, it was quiet peace unbroken by further discussion of his brother-in-law's odd plight or by any other disturbing elements. Now, unless he was still unacquainted with his own family, Willie would drift in presently for a whispered conference on the Salton Company's disaster; and Marge, whose brain was lively, would follow with several comments and speculations of her own; and after that—unless Donald Gray, her *fiancé*, arrived early and took her off to the pictures—Ina would arrive and ask a few sober questions.

News of the world ignored, irritability rising, Henry Morrow considered Mr. Brantree, who whistled mournfully as he helped carry out the dishes. He was nervous as a cat about that chap and had been for a week, ever since the trouble started—nervous when Jim was out of sight and unaccounted for, wondering whether he had gone down to the city and been taken unexpectedly.

All else aside, there'd be some pretty rotten notoriety for the family about the time Jim was arrested, if it came to that!

Henry's frown grew heavier. He had never been very fond of Brantree. From a very pert little boy he had grown into an unpleasantly assured big boy, and from that into a man who had, to Henry's mind, a few tricky and unreliable streaks and—oh, hell, what an asinine train of thought it was!

The plain fact, as Henry conceded, was that he found himself enraged at his own helplessness just now, rather than at Jim's possible guilt. Had he been a rich man, Morrow would have taken his lawyer and opened negotiations with the Salton firm, paying them their accursed forty-five hundred dollars and obtaining from them a cast iron agreement securing its return when the real criminal was apprehended.

Well—he wasn't rich. Without being quite poverty-stricken, he was still poor. Every dollar counted and every cent in every dollar. To be sure, if it came to the very last ditch and the choice lay between finding forty-five hundred dollars and seeing Laura's brother taken away to the penitentiary—

"Yes, honey?" Henry smiled.

"Well, here it is, anyhow!" his younger daughter advised him triumphantly.

"Oh, the letter you were talking about?"

"Yes, it was on top of the china closet."

Morrow considered the envelope with no solitary flicker of interest. King & King, eh?—the firm that was putting over this new Wellmont Terrace development. Well, if all their chances were as slim as their chance of selling Henry Morrow a building lot, they'd do well to lease their land to a truck gardener and stop spending money on postage.

And still, since his child had trailed the silly thing down for him, he'd have to make some pretense of reading the form letter. Henry slit the envelope and drew out the sheet; indifferently he stared at it and then frowned slightly. It wasn't a form letter; it was typewritten and short and—

"Well, hell's bells!" Morrow roared suddenly, quite forgetting that he was in his own chaste home.

"What is it? What's the matter?" Marge gasped.

"What's the matter? What—" her father sputtered, and then controlled himself to some extent and sat back, red faced and furious. "Well, I guess this is a bad night, kid! *They've raised the rent!*"

CHAPTER II.

ADVICE FROM THE AIR.

MARGERY'S left hand went to her heart; with the right she fanned herself.

"My soul!" she breathed. "I thought—I thought it was about—you know—Uncle Jim! I thought they were coming for him!"

Henry Morrow, breathing heavily, glared at her.

"As if this infernal dump was worth the hundred and ten I'm giving up for it every month now!"

"Well, I know, daddy, but *I* didn't raise the rent; don't look at *me* like that," his daughter laughed. "How much do they want?"

"Twenty dollars more!"

"Oh, that's not so much, is it?" Marge said cheerily.

"It isn't, eh?" Morrow asked furiously. "Pay one hundred and thirty dollars for a shack that's falling to pieces and wouldn't be worth eighty if it was in good condition? Well, I can see myself doing it! I can—"

He paused, rather astonished, and mastered his emotion still further. Indeed, he was smiling flittingly, fiercely, upon his entire family—aye, even to Donald Cray, who seemed also to have arrived unheard—for they were all present now, all hurrying toward him, round-eyed.

"What happened, Harry?" Laura asked quickly. "Why were you shouting just then?"

"Somebody up and raised the rent, mother, and pop got sore," the younger daughter sighed.

"Our rent here?" Mrs. Morrow frowned incredulously.

"Twenty dollars!" said Henry's thick tone.

"But that's perfectly ridiculous! Why, Mr. Dunham assured you—"

"Well, ridiculous or not, I guess Dunham double crossed me," Henry said, less vehemently, and spread out the letter. "Here it is, anyway—listen:

"DEAR SIR:

"We beg to advise that we have taken over full management of all the Charles F. Dunham properties, and to advise further that monthly rental of house occupied by you at 18 Fenley Place will hereafter be one hundred and thirty dollars. We shall require a two-year lease at this figure, dating from the first of the coming month.

"Yours truly,

"KING & KING.

"And that's the most barefaced hold-up I ever— Say! *Can* you beat that?"

"You should have insisted upon a lease when the other one ran out last year, Mr. Morrow. I said that at the

time, you may remember," mused Donald Cray, who was a sedate young man, a rising factory superintendent and the very mate for Ina.

"I remember," Henry grunted. "I didn't want to be tied down by a lease."

"And now you're not," William grinned, "and still you're not satisfied!"

His father glowered. His mother tapped William's shoulder.

"You've no idea of paying it, Harry?"

"I should say not! I *can't* pay it! We'll move."

"Where?"

"To another house, of course."

"I don't believe there are a dozen of them to rent in Wellmont just now, and they're all more expensive than this—the nice ones."

"Then we'll get out of the filthy burg altogether!"

"We can't very well do that either, with Marge in school and Ina's shop just running nicely," Laura reflected.

"And anyhow, *I* wouldn't live anywhere but in Wellmont!" William declaimed, rather surprisingly. "This town's plenty good enough for us! It's the best town I ever saw and, whatever the rest of the family does, I'm staying right here!"

"Young man, you will do exactly—" Henry began sternly, and he flinched, paused, and his voice broke to a thin shriek of: "Say! Shut off that devilish radio! I can't hear myself think!"

"Stop this band, father?" William asked, in dismay that verged on horror. "Why, this is the swellest band on the air. This is the one Joy calls the red-hot—" He caught his father's eye just then and hurried to the set. "Maybe some other station," William mumbled, as he twisted the dials lovingly.

"Shut it off, I tell you!" Henry Morrow roared.

"—and Mr. Strathway Cole, who has spoken to you from this station before, will give another of his ten-minute talks, through the courtesy of Bonnybelle Estates, Incorporated. Bonnybelle Estates, Incorporated, as you know, is that beautiful and exclusive residential colony just twenty-nine minutes from Times Square, with one hundred trains a day. Their slogan is: 'Bonnybelle—Where Homes are Happier.' The subject of Mr. Cole's talk this evening will be, 'Why Not Be Your Own Landlord?' Mr. Cole," said the radio speaker.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried William Morrow. "Who says this is a bum set? You're wondering what to do next, dad, and this guy hands you the straight tip, right out of the air!"

"Will you shut that off?" Henry demanded.

"It's off," his son chuckled. "But at that, I'd say Cole has the right dope, father. Why not buy a house somewhere and can this stuff of having the rent raised every few minutes?"

Briefly, almost malevolently, Henry glanced at Donald Cray. That nearly perfect young man, who would unquestionably die worth a million or more, was not yet actually a member of the family. But he would be very soon. Small use, then, of equivocation just now as to finances.

"For much the same reason," Henry said, with a smile of deadly sweetness, "that I'm not buying a new car this season."

"Oh, but this is different, dad. You're not actually *broke*, you know, and you don't have to pay all the cash down for a house. You see—"

"Yes, I'm fairly familiar with the way residential property is sold, thank you," his father rasped. "I don't feel warranted in taking on a house, with business what it is just now."

Laura was sitting on the arm of his chair, cheek against his head, one hand playing with Henry's refractory forelock, just as she had been wont to sit a quarter of a century ago. Laura smiled wistfully.

"There's the old Prindle house, Harry. That hasn't been sold yet."

As if a pin had been thrust into him William started.

"The what, mother? The Prindle house up on March Avenue?"

"Of course, dear."

"But they want thirty or forty thousand dollars for that, don't they?" William cried, in the most remarkably breathless fashion. "That's the—the swellest neighborhood in town."

"The old man wants nine thousand, but he wants it all in cash," Henry sighed.

"Nine—what?" gasped his son. "Nine thousand dollars? You mean to tell me you can buy that house for *nine thousand dollars* and you're not buying it? Well, that—that *is* hot!"

He stared unbelievingly at Henry, unable to credit such immeasurable stupidity, even in a parent. Brantree grinned inquiringly at them and for the moment drifted out of his own despond.

"It's worth every penny of fifteen thousand, Harry," Laura suggested, softly.

"Yes, and the Woolworth Building would be quite a buy at fifty thousand cash—but it wouldn't interest me any," Henry Morrow replied, with a small and rather miserable smile.

"Well, what's it all about?" Brantree asked. "What is this Prindle place?"

"Why, it's the most wonderful house you ever laid eyes on!" William cried. "You never saw a house like it, uncle! It's three or four hundred years old—"

"It's just one hundred and forty years old," Marge corrected.

"That's old enough, isn't it?" William snapped impatiently. "And it's all solid stone, Uncle Jim—gray stone, with ivy on three of the walls. All the windows have those dinky little old-fashioned panes, with the original glass in a few of them. You feel as if you'd gone batty when you try to look out through them, they twist everything up so. Going from most of the rooms, you go up a step and down a step and—"

"Have you been examining the house, too?" Henry inquired, with a puzzled little smile.

"Sure thing—week ago Sunday," his son hurried on. "There's boards up there in the floor that are a foot wide and haven't warped a thousandth of an inch in all these years—can you tie that? And on the doors all over the house there are iron latches—er—hand wrought and perfect examples of the period!" William concluded.

"*What?*" said Morrow.

"Why, Bill, I never knew that you were a student of these things," his uncle murmured.

"Huh? I—I certainly am, sort of. Anyway, let me tell you about the house. There's six little bedrooms, and they all have low ceilings, away down low so you think you're going to bang your head on them when you stand up, only you don't and—"

"And there is a stone fireplace in that living room I'd just about give my head to own!" Laura added, as he paused.

"Well, I wish I could buy it for you, kid," Henry said bitterly. "But as things stand now—"

"And all this is going begging?"

"Not just begging—no," William explained, at the same peculiarly high speed. "You see, it belongs to a poor old crab who's dying down in the hospital. He's a nut. He's an inventor or something. Old Jonas Prindle. Been in his family for five or six generations, the house has, and he'd never even thought of selling until he was taken sick and getting ready to pass out. Then he decided to let go and—and the place is a jewel! A treasure!"

He waved his loose young hands and smiled widely, blinking fast, and Henry Morrow watched him with burning interest and glowing eye.

Privately, Henry had known a cumulative hopelessness this last year or two, when pondering the progress of his

only son. Too idiotically modern, too blatantly superficial, having little or no interest in the serious, worth-while things of life.

But, by Jove! if the boy could take this lively interest in a valuable but rather grubby antique like the Prindle homestead, there must be something in him after all! His bright young countenance was radiating an exalted enthusiasm which dumfounded Henry Morrow.

Henry leaned forward and prepared to deliver a light remark or two, commendatory, encouraging—the sort of remark that should draw out more of William's long-concealed powers of artistic appreciation.

"And it's right next door to Joy's house!" William added, with a reverential quiver in his tone. "Right plumb the very next house to where Joy Harrison lives!"

"Oh, my—goodness!" Henry muttered disgustedly, and slumped down again.

Brantree laughed heartlessly; Laura patted her husband's head in soothing sympathy. Ina returned to the dishes and Donald trailed after, to dry them and whisper meanwhile presumably grave and cautiously sweet nothings.

"Well, you're not going to buy it then?" William asked severely.

"No!" Henry barked.

"Just because Joy lives next door and you don't like Joy, I suppose?"

"No, Willie, that is not entirely the reason," said the sad, almost broken voice of a man sore with the new wounds of a great disappointment. And he wondered hazily, too, did Henry, just why a person of his physique did not reach out for Willie and, spreading him across able knees, spank Willie soundly. His own father would have done that with greatest gusto and salutary effect.

"Well, all I have to say is that you're passing up a big thing, dad!" William informed him and shrugged, plainly washing his hands of the whole affair.

"You could make some kind of dicker with the old bird. Why don't you try?"

Laura gazed at her son in her level way.

"Mr. Prindle wanted us to have the house, Willie; he spoke to dad about it several times before he was taken to the hospital. Dad did not feel that he could afford it. That's really all."

"Well, if he wants him to have it so bad—" William began, and shrugged once more before the level gaze. Then, having looked with cold and somewhat pitying disapproval at his male parent for an instant, softened his voice to: "Can I take the car, dad?"

"Where are you going?"

"Just around to see Joy for a few minutes; she's expecting me. It looks like rain and I don't want to get soaked coming home."

Henry yawned and nodded drearily.

"Don't do any joy riding with your Joy," he said. "That back left tire doesn't look as if it was going to last forever."

The son of the house found hat and coat and, with a wave of the hand and a foolish smile, fled wildly into the night. Marge grew more pensive.

"That old house *is* the kitten's whiskers, isn't it, moms?"

"Oh, it's adorable!" Laura sighed.

The youngest child clasped her hands and rested her dimpled chin upon them.

"How old is Mr. Prindle now, anyway?"

"Oh, seventy-four or five at least. Why?"

"I was just wondering. Maybe *I* could do something with him. Get him to take half cash or something like that. Would that be all right?"

"What do you mean?" Henry frowned.

"Well, they tell me that I don't hurt the eyes a single bit and I *know* I have a good line!" Marge laughed. "He might listen to me where he wouldn't to you."

"Are you—are you suggesting that

you go and try to vamp that poor old man?" Morrow gasped in utter horror.

"Why not, if it got us the house?" Marge asked blandly.

"Well—well, God bless my soul!" breathed her father. "Er—what have you got to do to-night, young one?"

"Only study, worse luck! Gerald has to stick around and act pretty for the grandfather they named him after," Marge sighed. "He came on from Chicago, you know, and he always—"

"You go upstairs, then, and do your studying, and high time you did some of it, too!" Henry Morrow thundered, and pointed to the stairs in the most unnecessary way, since they were perfectly visible. "And don't let me hear any more of that sort of talk from you, either, young lady!"

Marge threw out her hands melodramatically.

"But, father! Father!" she cried. "I haven't gone and went and disgraced the family, have I? I haven't brought your gray hairs in sorrow to the grave, have I? Gee! there are a couple of gray ones, too, right there over your left ear! Don't say I've—"

"Upstairs, darling," Laura said.

The youngest child beamed upon the father whom she loved, as the saying goes, to distraction; she also blew a kiss to him.

"Don't you care, pops!" she giggled. "Maybe I can still be saved."

Only when the door above had closed did Mr. Morrow cease his outraged snorting and turn warm eyes up to his wife.

"Say, what the heck have we been slaving to raise here anyway?" he demanded. "A couple of ribald, frivolous—"

"Why, Ina—"

"Ina be hanged! I'm not talking about Ina. Ina was eighty years old when she was born. Ina's nothing to worry about. I mean these other two."

"You're tired to-night, and you're taking them much too seriously."

"Pardon me, Laura, but I am not! When a child like that—a schoolgirl—can even think such things, it's— See here! Is Margey running around with Gerald Burtis too much?"

"Oh, no. I keep an eye on her," Laura smiled.

"Because I have darned little use for that boy, as a companion for Marge, you know."

"What's wrong with him, Hank?" Brantree asked.

Morrow's worried eyes grew darker.

"His family has too much money, Jim. They've always been wealthy and there's no question in my mind that that boy's head is full of ideas that aren't going to benefit Margey at all."

"But you don't really know anything of the kind," Laura said. "Gerald has always seemed like a decent kid to me."

"Very possibly. He's the curly-haired type that appeals to any woman of any age, I suppose. But all the same, I've a pretty definite notion of how friendships of that kind work out as a rule. I'd like to have Marge see a great deal less of him."

"Tell her so, Harry, and don't get angry when you try it," Mrs. Morrow advised, and moved restlessly to a chair of her own. "Harry!"

"Yes?"

"It would be lovely if we could buy that old Prindle home, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know," sighed Henry. "Would it be much of a scheme to settle Willie right next door to that tough little hussy?"

"Four or five blocks aren't going to make much difference. He's over there every night now. We couldn't possibly swing the money end of it, could we?"

"I don't see how. Prindle offered it to me for nine thousand because he has always liked me; he made a point of telling me that it was worth double—and it is, very nearly. He was madder than hops when I turned it down."

Brantree flipped his cigarette into the

empty fireplace, which was of brick and distressingly ugly. Laura gazed at the floor, which was of an inferior grade of pine, and also ugly. Henry glanced at them and glanced away again.

"I'm sorry," he said bitterly. "The kid was right—Willie, you know. Whenever I want to buy a thing of more consequence than a collar button, I don't buy it because I haven't the price. I'm one of those people who were born to be poor, I suppose. I always have been poor and I'll always be poor.

"Six or seven years ago I got the family bankroll boosted a little and that was plain good luck, and I lost most of it through plain bad luck. You married the wrong man, Laura."

"I'd marry him all over again," said Laura.

Out in the kitchen dishes had ceased their clinking and clattering. Other clinkings indicated that they were being stowed away in perfectly methodical little piles in the dish closet. Gloomy silence persisted in the living room until Ina and her Donald appeared in the doorway.

"We're going down to the movies for awhile, dears," Ina said, just as she had said it dozens and dozens of times before; and she kissed her mother and her father and smiled brightly at her Uncle James. Again the outer door of the Morrow home closed.

"I say, Harry!" said Brantree.

"Eh?"

"Er—well, I'm not trying to nose into your private affairs or anything of that sort. I hope you understand that? Only, just here among ourselves, you really haven't nine thousand ready cash to handle this house proposition?"

"I've tried to indicate that once or twice."

"Then why not do as the all-wise Willie suggested, Harry? Why not take what you have and see if you can't make some sort of deal with Prindle. You two should have had your own home long ago."

"We know that—now," Laura said briefly.

Henry shook his head.

"You don't know Prindle!"

"Hard-boiled?"

"He's a peculiar old cuss at least."

"Is he really dying?"

"I believe so."

"Does he know it, Harry?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I suspect that he's not very different from any other man in the same state. I can't say, of course, never having died myself; but I fancy that when a gentleman is about to shuffle off his sense of values is likely to alter somewhat. Why not try?"

Henry's smile was odd.

"Use up my very last spare cent, you mean?"

"Be worth it, would it not?"

"In many ways—yes. But suppose something of the sort were feasible, Jim," Morrow went on, interest in the other rising, "I'd still have to leave our tiny household account in the Wellmont Bank untouched; we have to eat and keep the price of an occasional pair of shoes on hand. And I couldn't take a penny out of the business, little as that means. In short, if some kind of emergency came along and demanded two or three thousand dollars, they wouldn't be there."

"Well, my word! What of it?" Brantree cried impatiently. "Even if the whole thing flopped, once you bought it, what of it? You're not senile! You're forty-five years old and sound as nails. Your two-by-four export business is bound to grow, if you ever work around to the job of making it grow. Why not take a chance?"

Morrow's smile grew softer.

"I suppose I'll have to be hideously frank with you, Jim."

"Eh?"

"You're in the devil's own mess, kid, just now. It may take money to get you out of it. You've nobody else to call on, I believe. If the worst should come to the worst, I don't want to be

standing around strapped and utterly helpless."

Mr. Brantree's eyes opened wide for an instant and narrowed, in another, to angry little slits. He flushed darkly.

"What's that?" he snapped. "You are not suggesting that *you* might refund that Salton money?"

"Why not?"

"Listen, Hank, and I'll tell you why not!" Brantree cried, and fury shook his words. "For one thing, that would be equivalent to a confession, and I'm *not* guilty, and I'm damned if any word or act of yours or mine or anybody else's is ever going to make me look guilty!

"For another, do you suppose for one second that I'd let you spend what little you and Laura have tucked away for any such purpose as that? Well, I would not. Get that, Hank! I'm much obliged and I appreciate it and all that, but I'd rather go to jail and rot there for a million years than walk around loose, feeling that I'd picked your pockets that way.

"And still more," Brantree added grimly, "it may be a dumb way to look at it, but I'd see the last Salton frizzling in hell before I'd ever let any one hand 'em a penny I didn't steal!"

"But—" Laura began.

"Nothing doing—nothing like that!" her brother said. "Count me and my troubles out of your figuring, sis."

Henry, doubtless, should have hurried over to him, should have wrung his hand and commended these worthy sentiments; but Henry sat quite still and shook his head and smiled sadly. In forty-five years one sees a good deal.

"That's how you feel about it now, Jim, when you're not even certain that they'll try to arrest you," he said. "But serving a term in prison is absolute ruin for a man. You know that as well as I do; and if it came to the last ditch and the jail door was open and waiting for you, you might be darned glad of a helping hand!"

Brantree's eyes darted at him for a moment, glinting genuine terror. His righteous anger was gone and he seemed smaller.

"Lord, Henry!" he muttered. "I wonder if you're right about that?"

"Well, I may be right and I may be wrong," said Morrow, and his old, good-humored grin was back, "but that's one of several reasons why we'll have to pass up the house and—"

"Here! Can't you borrow enough from the bank to make up the nine thousand?" Brantree asked.

"Not from the local bank. They've got a bushel or so of mortgage applications down there now. I've thought of all that," Henry said impatiently. "And I can't get it from my bank in town, because they don't make that kind of loans."

"So we just stay here and pay the increase, do we?" Laura asked, with a crooked little smile.

"By no means. We can't afford that. We'll have to buy a house and we'll look for—well, there's a lot of new building in Wellmont."

"Yes, and it's awful, all of it!" Laura said harshly. "Flimsy and ramshackle!"

"Well, if it's the best we can afford, it'll have to be awful—that's the long and the short of the matter!" Morrow said testily. "We can find something pretty nice that can be bought for two or three thousand down, I should think, and later on, when the kids are married and gone, we can—er—sell it at a profit, of course."

"Maybe," breathed Laura.

Her crooked little smile grew more crooked and more cynical. Mr. Morrow stared at his preposterously young wife rather wonderingly. Disagreements between these two were few and far between, largely, as Henry well knew, because Laura fell in gayly and heartily with most of his suggestions and boosted and tugged and helped, until success—or something else—came to crown that particular matter.

It was unlike Laura to sit there with one corner of her mouth twisted up in that silly way, just because he had decided to buy the sort of home they could buy. She didn't even look like herself!

She looked more like Willie, five minutes after hearing the positive and irrevocable decision that last year's Tuxedo, shiny spots and allegedly prehistoric lines notwithstanding, would have to do for another season.

Henry grunted.

"I don't see why you say that in just that way, dear. Other people buy houses and manage to sell them when—" Henry began argumentatively, and then paused, for the telephone beside the stairs was jingling suddenly. Nor could the telephone have picked a happier moment for its ringing. Unfamiliar defiance and a fine, rare battle lust were just flickering up into Laura's soft eyes.

"I'll answer it; it's only some of the devilish brats!" said Morrow, who seemed a bit out of tune with the younger generation this night. And now he was adding in a terrifying, leonine snarl: "*Hel*-lo!" And "Oh?" said Henry then, and much less energetically. "Oh, yes? Yes, this is Mr. Morrow speaking."

The receiver chattered for a little.

"Is that so? Well, that—that's too bad," said Henry.

The receiver chattered further. Henry laughed mirthlessly.

"That's funny! I beg pardon? Why, no, there wouldn't be much use in that. You see—"

This time the chattering was longer.

"Well, of course, if you think it would make him any happier or—what was that? All right; I'll try to get down within the next half hour if possible."

When he reappeared his smile was almost as crooked as Laura's had been a few minutes ago.

"That was a queer one!" he muttered.

"Who was it?"

"Prindle's night nurse, Laura. She says the old man is pretty nearly through and he's anxious to see me about selling me his house before he does go."

Laura's lips parted. Brantree scowled his lack of comprehension.

"And you're just standing there?" he gasped.

"Well, you see, Jim, you don't know Prindle," Henry smiled. "A little matter like impending death isn't likely to change him much. I—"

His brother-in-law laid a hand upon his arm.

"Say, Henry, what do you want him to do—bring it down here himself and hand it to you, free?"

"Not quite."

"Well, don't you know a hunch when it comes up and socks you right between the eyes?" Brantree inquired further, and shook the arm. "Henry, wake up! Hank, why don't you start?"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE GATES.

HENRY MORROW scratched his head and stared, meditatively and rather gloomily, at the radio set across the room.

"Well, as a matter of fact," Laura said sharply, "why *don't* you start?"

"Mostly, I suppose," said Henry, who was honest if not inordinately brilliant, "because hospitals always give me the horrors, and sitting there and talking to a man who's going to be—somewhere else pretty soon, is likely to make them worse. That and the fact that there's really no more use—"

"But that's nonsense! Why should he send for you if—"

"And anyhow, Hank," Brantree interrupted in turn, "the hunch itself is enough to bet on. Start, doggone you! Start and don't let the grass grow under your feet, either. He may be weaker than they think."

Morrow grinned resignedly.

"All right, then. If you both feel that way about it, I will start!" he said.

Not that he had any stomach for the errand. Not that he wanted to leave the house at all to-night. As has been noted, Henry was tired out this evening. For a business of its limited size, this one of Henry's had treated him to a day little less than terrific, beginning as it had with the defection of a particularly promising office boy and ending with the glad news that a shipment of almost priceless art glass, gone astray on the way to Copenhagen, had finally wound up at Cape Town, South Africa, and would be at least another month in getting to Europe.

The American representatives of the Copenhagen firm had spoken of this matter with some emphasis to Henry Morrow, and, blameless though he might be, had cast him out entirely and forever. He had counted on doing a lot of business along that new line, too.

He yawned drearily as he found his hat.

At the moment he craved just one solitary boon of life, which was to stretch out in the good old soft bed upstairs in the front room. His perceptions—of real-estate opportunity, of modern youth's finer qualities, of everything on earth save that pathway to the floor above—were distinctly dulled. He'd be hanged if he could see anything more than some additional depression to be gained by this trip to the Community Hospital.

With thoroughly hostile eyes he surveyed the individual in the mirror—a well favored six-footer, broad of shoulder, deep of chest, with a shock of brown hair and clear eyes, and a splendid chin. Looked every inch the prosperous, big executive, that person did. And was *not!*

At this point it may be said that Henry sniffed his contempt; he knew that not unimpressive humbug in the mirror, you see. That was just a dub of a tenth-rate exporter, who had been plodding along for twenty-odd years now, and, with forty-six right ahead, had not accumulated even enough to buy a decent home for his family. Mr. Morrow turned from the creature in disgust.

"Oh, pshaw, it's raining!" Laura called from the living room.

"Oh, is it really?" Henry muttered. "Willie knew what he was about when he took the car."

"Put on your rubbers, dear."

"No!" dear replied perfunctorily as he dragged them out and pulled them on. "Where's the big umbrella, Laura? Did Willie take that, too?"

"Here it is," said Laura; and out there in the hallway she looked up at her husband, very fondly and still rather oddly.

"Harry, I've never asked you to do very many things for me, have I?"

"Too darned few, kid."

"Then I'm asking one thing new: if there's any way of getting the Prindle house, any way at all, buy it."

"If there is, I'll—"

"Because I have the—the funniest feeling about that house, Hal. I've had it—oh, yes, I know how silly it sounds—but I've had it ever since I went through the dear old place again two weeks ago. I think if it was ours and we lived in it, our luck would change. I think we wouldn't be poor any more."

"Why?" Henry inquired, with reason.

"Don't ask me why. I can't tell you. Woman's intuition, or incipient insanity, I guess," Laura laughed. "I just feel it! And—oh, I *do* want that fireplace so badly!" she ended in a wistful little wail.

There was a choke in Henry's voice as he held her very close.

"You poor kid, you've done without an awful lot, first and last," he said, with an uncertain laugh of his own. "If you're sure the house is as good

as all that, I'll—dammit, I'll get it, one way or another!"

Raining? It was not merely raining, Morrow discovered as he turned up his collar and spread the big umbrella. This was a regular tropical storm, sent north for his discomfort.

Water pounded down on the umbrella and water splashed up from the pavements, drenching his weary legs. Fitfully wind whistled through new-leaved trees.

A little car sloshed by dismally, sending a small Niagara over the curb and drawing a rumble from Henry; and there were bright windows everywhere, comfortable people beyond them. Briefly Henry grew warm at the thought of his car, standing empty up there on March Avenue, but proper resignation returned, and he slopped on.

Nice night for a nice errand! He dreaded the interview with the dread of a small boy. Oh, yes, cowardly, if you like; but many years ago, with Henry in smallest knickers, an old, old uncle of his father's had been dying in the room upstairs; dying for weeks and weeks, while the family tiptoed and carried broths and the doctor with the gray beard came every day, and shook his head on leaving.

And then one morning the shades were drawn at the windows, and people cried, and the day after that four men had brought down the still, awful thing that had been a living, talking human —and to save his fool head, to this very day Henry Morrow couldn't think of it without turning cold and scared.

Not so much the idea of death, you know; that's bad enough, but we know it's coming. Nope, the thing that froze his blood was the idea of that old man, going out.

Well, here! Henry shook himself together and laughed, giving out a sound that merged nicely with the moaning of the wind. Have to buck up and be a little man about this and— Lord, was that the hospital so soon?

Poise returned as he stood before the self-contained lady at the reception desk. She ran a finger down a long white card and then looked up, unsmiling.

"Oh, you're Mr. Morrow?"

"Yes."

"Miss Harron's case. Room three-nine, please. I'll phone up that you're on the way."

Smells that did nothing to hearten one, even here in the elevator, Henry noted; clean, faint, druggy odors that suggested surgery and suffering. And the devilishly calm young woman in white who was approaching so soundlessly; Henry swallowed just once as he looked into the sober blue eyes.

"Mr. Morrow? Of course. I'm Miss Harron. Er—Mr. Morrow, Mr. Prindle seemed so anxious to see you about—his house, was it? He really shouldn't see a soul at present, you know. You'll make the interview as brief as possible, won't you?"

"Of course!" Henry said, and sincerity rang in his voice.

"This way, please."

Now she was opening a door and—well, thank fortune he wasn't an utter ass, anyhow! He hadn't obeyed that impulse to turn around and run. Indeed, he was conscious only of a sharp pang of compassion as the door closed and he faced the man in the bed.

Poor old dreamer, so thin and so white! His hawk nose was leaner and sharper than ever; his light eyes were tired, but still harbored that fanatic, dogged gleam; the irascible lines about his mouth had not been softened by illness, either.

Henry laid aside his hat and his wet overcoat, and gazed on.

Here was a man who had taken an odd liking to him fifteen years ago, when they first came to Wellmont—a peculiar man of peculiar ideas. They had never seen very much of each other, to be sure, and Henry had never even been allowed inside the workshop, two or three blocks from the stone

house, which had burned down several months ago and, according to some, had broken Prindle's heart by burning.

Tools and patterns and many queer contraptions had gone in that blaze which never could be replaced. He did know, though, that Prindle was a mechanical genius of rarest order, that he had made one or two modest fortunes from his patents, and spent them in further experimentation, and that was about all.

"Well? What the devil's the matter with you, Henry?" the old man asked. "Paralyzed?"

"Er—no! No!" Henry said quite boisterously. "I—"

"All right. Come over here, will you? Sit down there! Hello, Henry!" Prindle smiled weakly and offered his hand. "How are you, anyway?"

"Me? Oh, I'm fine—fine!" Henry answered.

"Well—wish I could say as much. Henry!"

"Yes?"

"I'm going to die pretty soon now," the sick man sighed. "They tell me I'm likely to move on 'most any day now."

"Oh, see here, Mr. Prindle!" Henry protested. "Don't talk like that. You are good for many a long—"

"I probably know what I'm good for," the other broke in tartly. "No false alarm about it this time, I guess. Damned thing inside me's been chawing away for years, and it's licked me at last."

"But—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter much. Some things I'd like to have worked out, but the world 'll probably worry on without 'em. And there's nobody to mourn when I'm gone, and that's just as well." He turned and looked directly at Henry.

"Morrow, I haven't a single relative in the whole world—blood, marriage, any kind. Not one. If you want to pray for something, some time, pray you don't die like that," he mumbled, and his eyes closed. "It's an awful lonesome job."

"Yes, I—I guess it must be," Henry said rather thickly.

"An awful lonesome job—lonesome—" the remote voice continued, so faintly that Henry's heart took to hammering, and he looked around for the absent nurse.

"Not a child—not a sister or a brother on the face of the earth to care a hang whether— Y' know, I was on the track of a brand-new mechanical principle," he said, as the eyes opened again and kindled enthusiastically. "A new one! If I could have stuck it out another year— Oh, well. Wanted to talk business to you, didn't I?" Mr. Pringle muttered, with his vague smile.

"About the house?"

"Yes, about the house. Morrow, my great-grandfather built that place, and I got a kind of sentimental feeling about it and who lives in it. Pretty dumb, as they say nowadays, but I refused fifteen thousand for it last year because I—I didn't think the fellow fitted, somehow. You or Walter Spellman; you're about the only two I'd want in there. They tell me Walter's out of town?"

"Europe."

Mr. Prindle nodded comfortably.

"You got to buy it then, Henry. For cash, and to-night. It isn't likely that woman 'll let you in to see me again; she raised ructions this time. Friendly little house that is, Henry; furniture in it isn't worth anything, because I had to sell the good pieces from time to time this last year. But the house—"

His smile grew even more vague and contented; he nodded again, and Henry sighed and squared his shoulders.

"There's nothing I'd like better than to buy it," he said, "and Lord knows I'm not trying to beat you down, Mr. Prindle, but the fact is—"

"You just haven't got the nine thou-

sand dollars I asked you for it before I was too sick?" the old man inquired curiously.

"Frankly, no."

Prindle gazed steadily at him—and reading Prindle's thoughts was really no task at all. He knew quite well that Henry was not lying, because he knew Henry. But he was wondering why under the sun a man of Henry's age and personality and presumed capability found himself without even that sum. Absurdly or otherwise, Morrow felt himself growing smaller and smaller.

"How much cash can you pay, Henry?" the old man asked.

"Well—er—I jotted it down the other day when Laura was talking about the house," Henry confessed. "Just seven thousand two hundred dollars—and some odd dollars of interest, I suppose."

"Umum. Seventy-two hundred, eh? Well, lemme see. Sixty-one hundred and eighty-three dollars and forty-two cents—and then about—" The thin hand scratched at the thin hair. "All right, Henry. Looks like we might have to make a special price to get that nice little family of yours in there," he chuckled. "Will you see if that woman's outside the door? She probably is."

"Well, do—do you mean—"

"Get her in here and tell her I want her fountain pen and some paper," the old man said impatiently. "Go get her."

Miss Harron was indeed not four yards from the door; she frowned at Henry Morrow, who had evidently visited too long as it was; she frowned again at his message. However, a glance at Prindle assured her that the old gentleman was all primed for exhausting argument on the subject, and with a sigh she propped him up on another pillow and gave him paper and her fountain pen.

"You won't try to write too much, Mr. Prindle?"

"This is short," the invalid said briefly. "You stay, will you? You got to witness this when I get it written."

He poised the pen and hesitated, murmuring. Perplexed eyes roved to Henry for a little—and to Miss Harron—and finally to the bare opposite wall, where they rested for many seconds. Then, with a sigh of relief, Prindle jabbed at the paper.

"I got it!" he grunted. "This 'll do fine."

The pen scratched on and on, while rain pounded the panes, and Miss Harron stood, watching concernedly.

Presently Prindle beckoned her.

"You sign here where I wrote 'witness,'" he ordered; and when she had signed obediently, he waved the paper for a moment and then passed it to Morrow with a contented: "Here y' are! Let's have your money!"

"But—what's this?"

"Receipt for the house, of course. Covers everything, doesn't it?" Prindle asked irascibly. "Read it—don't look at me. If there's anything needs to be put in, I'll put it in."

Morrow's eyes dropped to the lines of fine, old-fashioned penmanship; amazedly enough he read:

> Received from Henry Morrow seven thousand two hundred dollars in full payment for my house at 64 March Avenue, Wellmont, and everything in it.

Henry laughed outright.

"Well—er—of course, it's mighty nice of you to be willing to sell me the house at any such price," he said. "But I don't believe that I could record this at the county clerk's office."

"Why not?"

"It isn't exactly a formal deed, you know."

"Heaven above! Why ain't it?" Prindle demanded petulantly. "You think you have to have a lot of 'whereases' and 'parties of the first part' to make it legal, Henry?"

"Something of the kind, I am afraid."

"Well, you get Joe Bennett to fix it up any way you like, later on," said the thin, impatient voice; and Mr. Prindle held out his hand. "Let's have your money. There's things I have to attend to."

"My—*what?*" Henry cried. "Why, I don't carry it with me?"

Prindle turned over and stared weak ferocity at Morrow.

"Why don't you, when you come to talk business?"

"But, don't you see? It's in the bank. In the safe-deposit box, I mean to say—not money, but bonds. It will take a couple of days to sell them, I suppose, and in that time—"

"Well, but I haven't got a couple of days to wait, I tell you!" the old man shrilled. "For all I know, I haven't got a couple of hours ahead of me; and I sent for you to-night—"

"There, there, there, Mr. Prindle!" the nurse put in, and forced him back, ever so gently, to the pillows. "There, there! You mustn't excite yourself. You must not—"

"Say, look here, woman! I ain't crazy!" the invalid protested. "I tell you, I got to get things arranged *to-night!*"

"Well, this—this Mr. Bennett? That's your lawyer, isn't it, Mr. Prindle? Couldn't he arrange them, or—or—"

Prindle sighed long and shudderingly and relaxed.

"Joe can, if anybody can," he said huskily. "You go see Joe, Henry. He is mostly in his office evenings."

"Yes, *go,* Mr. Morrow!" the nurse echoed.

And here was the drowning rain again, spattering up on Henry as he stood in the hospital doorway and reflected upon an interview as queer as falls to the lot of the average man. And over there—why, there *were* lights in Bennett's office. Henry put up the umbrella and stepped out quickly. He was not infatuated with Bennett, as lawyer or as man; yet Henry's smile was sufficiently amiable when Bennett looked up two minutes later with a surprised:

"Hello! Just shutting up here. Anything I can do for you?"

"You can give me some advice."

"Umum!" said Bennett, and sat down again behind his desk. "Some one suing you?"

"No. I want to buy the old Prindle house, Bennett."

"Do you? So do I. He won't sell. I offered him twelve thousand, and he turned it down. Said he felt—er—sentimental, I believe it was, about it. You can't buy it."

Morrow tossed his receipt to the desk. Mr. Bennett scowled.

"Seventy-two—*what?*" he gasped. "Well, damn him anyway! You've already bought it, eh?"

Henry Morrow sighed and explained.

Bennett listened, and grunted now and then.

"Well, buy it, you sap!" he cried. "It's worth fifteen, you know. I'll give you eleven thousand for it tomorrow."

"If I get it, I'll keep it," Morrow smiled. "Title's all clear?"

"Clear as a bell. Insure it if you want to, but you'll be wasting money. I have all the dope here."

"Fine," sighed Henry and crossed his legs and prepared for an interview that might involve a bit of fencing. "Now, as to handing him the actual check to-night. He insists on that."

"I know. He wants money for something. He hasn't told me just what."

"But he insists on it, and I haven't it in my account. Bennett, coming right down to cases, how much will it cost me to borrow seventy-two hundred dollars from you for a few days?"

"Why do you want to borrow it?" the lawyer asked blankly. "You say you have it in bonds?"

"But it will take a day or two—"

"No reason why it should. You can get at them to-night, and Carter is usually decent about such things. The bank's open till nine o'clock Mondays now. Didn't you know that?"

Henry Morrow was on his feet, vibrating.

"No! I thought they were going to begin that next month!" he cried. "Say, Bennett, can you get that deed fixed up while I'm at the bank?"

"I—yes, I guess so!"

"Good-by," said Morrow from the doorway.

He was on his way to the Wellmont National Bank, merely walking briskly, but still panting as if at the end of a Marathon race, for at about this time emotions were running high within Henry. There actually seemed to be a chance that he might go back home with the big news!

A chance that, for once in a way, he might gratify one of Laura's more important wishes and so atone for the thousand or so she had been forced to relinquish with that ready, cheery smile which had been cutting more and more into Henry of late years. Red-faced, he thumped wetly into the bank and hurried to the cashier's office.

Lane Carter, cashier, was distressingly calm about the whole business. Looking at him as he sat there listening, tapping the desk with his pencil, nodding now and then, one might have thought that things like the purchase of the Prindle house happened every day in the week.

The bank, Mr. Morrow was led to believe, regarded United States securities as fairly safe; indeed, the character of the emergency taken into consideration, it would be possible to arrange matters to his satisfaction about five minutes after he had concluded the raid on his safe-deposit box.

Henry reappeared at the Bennett office just as the lawyer was closing his typewriter desk.

"All set!" he cried gayly. "Deed ready?"

"Deed's ready," said Bennett. "Is it still raining?"

No light of welcome shone in the eye of Miss Harron, as she met them again in the corridor.

"I've been hoping that you wouldn't come back—and hoping that you would," she said. "You excited him terribly, Mr. Morrow. He has been asking every two or thee minutes why you were not back. We don't dare give him any powerful sedatives, you know, and I've been trying to soothe him with words and—"

"We won't be long," Bennett advised her.

"Don't be, please. And another thing, gentlemen: whatever it is that he wants, tell him that it has been settled to his satisfaction. Lie if you must; it isn't going to matter to-morrow or next day, you know—poor old chap."

Prindle, head up, was peering toward the door when it opened. Now the head dropped relievedly.

"Hello—Joe!" the old man mumbled. "Glad to see you. I thought maybe this woman wouldn't—let you in. You got it all fixed up for Morrow, Joe?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"You go get your money, Henry?"

"That's all fixed too," Morrow said, with a strange, shaky feeling that there was something hideously heartless about the whole transaction. "I can write you a check now."

"Well, wait—wait! I don't want one check. I want two."

"Eh?"

"Yep. I want one for sixty-one hundred and eighty-three dollars and forty-two cents, Henry. You write that first, will you?"

He watched, while Morrow wrote with hand none too steady. "Now, turn it over, Henry, and write on the back, 'Pay to the order of George T. Donner,' and give it here and I'll indorse it."

"Donner? D-o-n-n-e-r?"

"That's him," Prindle smiled. "A fellow in Springfield, Ohio, that backed me with a little money year before last when I started after my new—new principle, Henry.

"He's been getting kind of fussed, lately, not seeing any chance of getting his money back, and that's every cent I owe him with interest, near as I can figure it. Thanks, Henry. Now, will you get that envelope and letter I directed to Springfield, Ohio, Miss—Miss—woman?"

She was getting it. Henry sighed heavily as he watched the worn, fumbling fingers indorse the check and lay it out carefully in the opened letter and then methodically smooth down the flap of the envelope.

"That gets him out of—the way," Prindle said with satisfaction. "No more hollering from him about what he lost through me! Will you mail that for me, Joe? Thanks. Now, this—this check for the balance, Henry. You might just as well—make that out to the Wellmont Community Hospital. They're the ones that 'll be using it."

Henry avoided his eye as he wrote. Oh, Bennett was offering the deed for the old man's signature now, and Prindle, with a sour protest or two over the needless form, was scribbling his name. Bennett winked as he extended the folded document to Mr. Morrow.

"There you are—house is yours! Better get that recorded as soon as possible."

Henry merely nodded. The home indeed did seem to be his—but, in grasping that fact, he experienced not a solitary thrill.

Fifteen or twenty minutes hence, when he carried the news to Laura and watched her pleasure, there would be several enjoyable thrills, no doubt. But just at the moment, just here, buying a house impressed Henry as a rather sickening procedure all around. He pushed the deed into his pocket with fingers that fumbled badly.

"Well, there—there now—" the old man was muttering. "I guess that covers pretty near everything. I got my bills paid, and my care and funeral paid for too. I got my house sold and a nice family moving in to live there. There's a lot—a lot more to that house than you realize," he said, and turned to beam on Henry.

"Old bird always had a crush on you, Morrow," Bennett said, very softly, from the corner of his mouth. "You're a nut. You could have bought that house for a grand less than what you paid."

"Oh, my—" Henry began disgustedly, and bit off the words.

"More than you realize," Prindle repeated, and closed his weary eyes and nodded mechanically again and again. "More than you—know till you have lived there awhile. Um. Bills paid; not a soul to fight over—my money. Not a penny for 'em to fight over if there was, either."

The eyes were forced open. The smile had grown very drawn now and Miss Harron advanced with determined tread, obviously ready to lay down the law.

Prindle spoke first:

"Looks almost as if—as if I could just die in peace now, eh?"

Which he did two mornings later, while Laura sang happily in the Fenley Place house and thought of her beloved fireplace while she packed the dinner set.

CHAPTER IV.

POORER STILL.

HENRY MORROW'S business was—and, for that matter, always had been—more or less of a conundrum. As an establishment it lacked impressiveness—one large and one small office on the third floor of a low, ancient building, far down town and near to West Street, with the visitor's choice lying between the rickety

freight elevator and hollowed stairs that might thinkably have known the tread of Washington.

On the floor below, these latter years, the produce commission firm had been replaced, and very noisily, by a little printing shop of low degree.

Upstairs—Baskin & Lowe used to be there before they moved to better quarters near Broadway—held forth a dealer in such novelties as are sold along the curbs. And every day queer human derelicts, some of them rather dapper and shifty, some of them shabby and forsaken, tramped up past Henry's doors, and presently tramped down again laden with little tin automobiles in pasteboard boxes and tiny airplanes and miniature wrestlers and fountain pens that were fountain pens in name only.

Oh, yes, as a commercial site this one was away shy on real distinction; Henry admitted that. Whole works had gone to the dogs, especially since Baskin & Lowe moved out. On the other hand, for Henry's purposes, it probably did as well as any other location—and the rent was mighty merciful.

He had not even started this business himself.

Once, in the dark ages, " B. Haines, Exporter," had been painted on the door where " H. Morrow, Exporter," now greeted the eye. Henry had gone to work for B. Haines to learn the game; and only a little later B. Haines, who was a trencherman of parts and a judge of fine liquors, had fought his fight with apoplexy and lost in the very first round.

Thus Henry, a very young and diffident man, had found the executor offering him the whole business at a highly attractive figure and on the easiest terms—since it was that or let the secondhand man have the fittings for fifteen or twenty dollars. Henry, terrified at the time, had purchased.

It had been just a little business in those days; it was just a little business now. If B. Haines had wandered back, he would have had no trouble in finding his way around. The same furniture was in the same places, the same employees in the same chairs.

Miss Flint, who had been a mere slip of a girl then, and was forty-two now; Martin Lohman, who kept the books and wrote the bills and really knew more about the concern than did Henry himself. Lohman, very bald this last decade, growing steadily fatter and less energetic, had just passed sixty-five, and wished to retire.

This pair had never seen Saturday roll around without bringing pay envelopes, but it had happened more than once that Henry Morrow had been able to take for himself rather less than their combined salaries.

Of course, like any other business, this one was amenable to expansion. One can take a peanut stand and, given sufficient acumen and determination, grow to a profitable chain of neanut stands. Or even, having overcome the sales resistance of non-peanut-eating hordes, eventually turn oneself into a millionaire peanut-stand monopoly.

But expansion costs money and involves risks, and Henry's business, just as it stood, was yielding a living income.

When the 8.06 out of Wellmont was on time, Henry arrived at 9.05, bade his limited staff a good morning, and passed on to the dingy golden-oak rolltop. At 4.50 he left, to catch the 5.19. At 8.06 next morning it began all over again.

Had he been of a brooding cast, blackest melancholia must now and then have engulfed Henry, as he sat in his sanctum and considered the red brick structure across the way through the bars of his rusty iron fire-escape. But he was not.

There were discouraged moments, to be sure, but in the main he smiled at life, kept afloat by the strain of mild, incurable optimism that had been in him since childhood.

Miss Flint, who was very plain and supported an aged mother, occasionally fancied in a lifeless, properly repressed way that she worshiped her equable employer—and forgot it again while marketing on the way home to the Brooklyn flat. Lohman regarded Henry with a fatherly interest, born on the day he had given Henry his first lesson in practical commerce.

He had been puzzling Lohman for several days now.

He had been coming in later than usual—to-day, at noon!—and neglecting many little things about the place. He had been frowning more frequently than usual and doing a lot of figuring on his scratch pad, which in itself was queer. There was nothing hereabout that demanded any figuring; any one of them could have conducted the office routine while sound asleep.

Perhaps the only fixed rule of the establishment was that the privacy of Henry's private office must not be invaded without just cause, so Lohman cast about for an excuse to open conversation, and hit upon one that had served the same purpose repeatedly for the best part of a year now.

"Um—now, Henry," he said as he entered, for Mr. Morrow was still "Henry" to Lohman.

"Yes?" Morrow looked up absently from his figuring.

"About that there desk of mine."

"Oh—Lord, that isn't fixed yet, is it?" the head of the firm muttered with a sigh.

"That loose piece on the side seems to be gettin' considerably looser lately."

"Yes, I know. I—I don't mean to be slipshod about it, but—ah—I'll get you a new desk as soon as possible, Lohman. I know I've said that before, but I—er—will presently."

"It don't need a new desk, Henry," the other advised him stubbornly. "It just needs some one to cut a new piece to fit where that loose one's broke. If I was handy with tools I could do it myself. I ain't. I never was."

"Well, you don't have to play carpenter," Henry smiled. "I'll get you a new one—pretty soon. Matter of fact," he added rather bitterly, "it wouldn't do the old place any harm to dump all this wreckage in the gutter and put in new fittings. But not just now. I'm under pretty heavy expense at home."

"What's that?" cried Lohman, whose memory survived. "Another child, Henry?"

"Hardly. I've been buying a house."

Lohman's eyes opened. "Why, Henry, you don't say!"

"Yep. Moving in to-day, Lohman. That's what made me so late. I stayed up to get the vans started."

"Umum! House you built yourself?"

"Oh, no."

"New house, I take it?" Lohman prodded on.

"Old one," Henry smiled.

"Real old?"

"Pretty aged, Lohman—about one hundred and fifty years."

"Law!" cried Lohman. "Whatever possessed you to do a thing like that?"

"Oh, my wife liked it. I do too."

"You can't tell about women," the other muttered. "Get it cheap?"

"I bought it from an old chap who died a couple of weeks ago," Morrow said shortly. "Anything you wished to see me about?"

"Just the desk. Um. Hundred and fifty years; that's pretty old, Henry. You'll be sorry," said Lohman, who had no incurable strain of optimism. "Old houses take a lot of fixing. My son bought one—around forty years old, I'd say, and before he was done paying carpenter bills, and painting bills, and so on, he was ready to sell for what he had paid in the first place; and that's what he did when he got the chance, and bought himself a chicken farm out in the country, Henry."

"Yes, you told me," Henry said.

"Wants me to quit and come and

help him run it, and so does Hester, my daughter-in-law, and—well, I just run on, don't I?" he said catching Henry's eye. "Well, I'm glad you got your own home, but I'm sure sorry you bought an old house, Henry. An old house takes a powerful lot of fixin'!"

The faint, grittin' sound, as the door closed, came from Henry's teeth. If that old fool hadn't been cluttering the place for thirty years, he'd have gone after him and fired him and—although why? This wasn't the first or the hundredth time Lohman had told of his family affairs. No, it were better to look the thing in the eye and admit that for several seconds he had been loathing Lohman solely because he spoke the cold truth.

Fixin'! "Fixing" was no word to use in connection with the Prindle house; that was too much like calling Niagara "cute," or the Rocky Mountains "adorable."

Plumbing? One expected that it might need some tinkering. One had *not* expected that a porcelain sink would have to go into the kitchen immediately, and that sooner or later sunken tubs would have to be installed in both bathrooms. The doors worked nicely; but the walls!

Henry cursed aloud. Why hadn't Prindle's ancestors done them up in imperishable cement or paneled them in wood that might have gained value with the years? Had Henry been a rich man, nothing would have delighted him more than thorough renovation. But there was hardly a dollar to spare, with the house paid for.

What if something awful happened suddenly demanding ready cash—somebody's appendix kicking up? the car going to smash? What if Jim's late employers came down hard and forced him literally to choose between restitution and jail? There was no one else to hand him forty-five hundred dollars.

But abruptly Henry ceased his head shaking. There was a bright side. They owned their own home now, which meant much. A house without a mortgage really belongs to one! When he went back there to-night, if he knew Laura, the lower part of the place would have a settled look.

And Laura was enraptured with her fireplace and with the whole darned old shack, and the kids were tickled too. New dignity and importance clothed young William Morrow these days; he had been keeping the car much more carefully polished and giving unusual attention to his personal appearance.

Several times lately, when a boy friend had dropped in, Henry had heard his son mentioning in the most elaborately casual way: "Our new place; the one dad bought up on March Avenue, you know." Even Marge seemed highly elated, which rather puzzled Henry. He had fancied the child too immature and too frothy of mind to have cared much one way or the other.

So at least they were pleased, one and all of them; and if he had made his family a little happier, what mattered the taking of a chance or two to Henry Morrow, who could do most of his worrying in private?

What, to be sure, if he came through it eventually with a whole skin? Even so, Henry felt wonderfully able to appreciate the painful mental state of the gentleman who stands on chilly corners of an evening and jingles a copper or two in his tin cup!

His guess about the settled appearance of things in general had been accurate to a degree. That dinner table, when he glanced into the dining room with the low, beamed ceiling, might have been standing right there for twenty years.

Upstairs the amazing orderliness was not nearly so marked, for Laura was only human and the scrubwoman's assistant had not been particularly efficient. But at least the moving men had put up the beds and the men from the carpet cleaners had laid the rugs; and

even with all the mess the place *did* look homy!

Henry warmed through and through as he looked it over and then, coming downstairs again, sighed slightly; they were even going to have Ina's Donald for dinner this first night, which made everything complete. Henry always felt vaguely weak and inadequate when he looked at that perfect young man.

They sat long over a meal of—for moving day—surprising excellence. They still sat when Ina, ever so tidily, had cleared the table, and Donald Cray went so far as to smoke one of Brantree's cigarettes, which was an astounding concession to conviviality. And Laura, most of the time, gazed into the living room and gloated over her fireplace and its immediate surroundings.

"It would be lovely to do that wall in just the proper stucco, wouldn't it?" she reflected aloud.

"Oh, lovely," Henry agreed. "Did they get the new sink in all right?"

"Yes, indeed."

"How much was it when they were through, Laura? I couldn't get an exact figure from Dunn."

"Why, the—ah—bill's around somewhere, Harry. I'll find it later."

"I was afraid it was going to cost about that much," Morrow sighed. "They didn't have to put in a new hot-water boiler, did they? Got the old one fixed up all right?"

"Well, no, they couldn't," Laura smiled disarmingly. "It was too far gone, dear. And they couldn't fit the new heating coil to it, anyway: I wanted one of those coils while they were at it."

"And you have it now?"

"Didn't you see it when you were in the kitchen?"

"I haven't been in the kitchen," Henry said. "But I think it might have been as well to postpone that—"

"Oh, pops!" Margey interrupted happily. "I'm going to have my room done in light blue!"

"Really?" said Henry with polite interest. "When?"

"When my darling daddy can afford it! Is that the right answer?"

"You bet it is. And—"

"Because they have the dearest paper down in Fiske's, dad! The dearest thing you ever saw, Light blue—imported. It looks rather like damask, with just a tiny raised figure running all through it. Oh, it is simply a *wow!*"

"Well, I'm afraid it'll have to wow unseen for a while!" the father of the family said flatly, and turned to his son. "What is it, Bill? Are you trying to speak to me?"

"Well—while we're on the subject of decorations, of course," William murmured, with some slight diffidence.

"Of course. Proceed."

"Well, what I thought—be better to attend to it while they're doing the brat's room, wouldn't it, father? Get the mess all over with at once and it would probably be cheaper that way, too. I—I thought I'd like to have my room done up in something pretty dark, dad. It's a man's room, you know. I've taken what used to be the old boy's den, from the looks of it; his old desk's in there, at least. The south room."

Henry's smile was utterly sweet as he nodded.

"I see. And have you, too, found time to stop at Fiske's, Bill, and make your selection from the imported grades?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Harry," Laura laughed. "They're only planning."

"Oh, it's not sarcasm. It's just an earnest desire to learn the wishes of all hands. Ina?"

"My room's rather nice just as it is, dad," Ina laughed. "Don and I thought we'd do the woodwork in a light cream-color. It will not take more than two or three evenings."

"That's something!" Henry said. "Now, as to—"

"Well, but Harry!" Laura put in anxiously. "Whatever we do, now or

later, in the way of decorating, we'll finish downstairs first. We can wait a while for the bedrooms, but people coming in—?"

Henry Morrow cleared his throat and leaned forward, surveying them all rather sternly. He was hardly a ponderous parent; in fact, having owned one, he secretly detested ponderous parents, but the time had come to jam on the brakes.

"Laura—and everybody," he said firmly, "we can wait for the whole blamed shooting match! We not only can wait, but we have to wait. And since we have to, believe me, we're *going* to wait!"

"Oh, but Hal!" Laura protested, and this particular frown was unusual. "That living room, just as he left it! And this dining room—"

"If the whole population of Wellmont files through here, each one turning up her nose higher than the one before, we still have to wait!" announced Morrow. "I'm all through spending money for the present. I haven't any more money to spend!"

Momentary silence greeted this speech. That was encouraging.

"Old Lohman held up his hands in holy horror to-day when I told him I'd bought an old house," he continued, more gently. "He said—"

"What does that fossil know about it?" escaped William.

"Why, he hasn't even seen the house!" Laura cried indignantly.

"He's seen enough in sixty or seventy years to know what he's talking about most of the time. He said—"

Donald smiled slightly.

"There is such a thing as credit, Mr. Morrow."

"So they tell me," Henry said, shortly. "I don't use it in the household end of my affairs. I pay my bills."

"Well, you're dead right, sir!" young Mr. Cray informed him.

William cleared his throat.

"And then there is such a thing as raising a couple of dollars when you own a house," he explained. "Pete Henderson and I were talking it over—not just this house; any house, you know. His father's in the real estate business."

"You're suggesting a mortgage?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, you have an old-fashioned father, William," said Henry, sourly. "If it's a matter of life or death—yes. But until it is, and since we have our own home at last, we'll keep it free and clear; and if I should shuffle off suddenly you'll have a roof over your heads. I believe that's an out-of-date idea, but it's one of my fixed convictions!"

"Well, by George, sir! There's nothing out of date about it! It's sound, Mr. Morrow! Absolutely sound!" Donald cried, and went so far as to thump the table.

Morrow stared at him almost uncomprehendingly. Yes, the perfect young man was beaming unqualified approval at his father-in-law elect, and this, so far as Henry recalled, for the very first time. It was an experience. Yet Henry must needs ruin the effect.

"Anyhow, I couldn't get a mortgage if I wanted one," he murmured. "City banks don't want to lend on property away up here. They tell me down at the Wellmont National that it'll be five years or so before they catch up with their applications.

"The only thing—in a pinch, of course—would be to gun around for a private loan, and that would take weeks, if not months, and cost as much in bonuses and so on, as it would be worth. And then, as I say, I'm unalterably opposed to that sort of thing in any case."

He looked them over again. Laura, he observed with some slight dismay, had not yet given up the fight by any means. William had reverted to the condition of a broken flower; the stricken effect was once more in William's eye and his smile was small and sickened.

"Always boils down to the same old thing, dad, doesn't it?" he said, with a discouraged snicker.

"What's that?"

"I mean, we're poor. Just as we always are whenever we want to do anything like—like buying a car or doing a little fixing here. We never have the money. We're just—well, what we always have been and always will be—*poor!*"

Henry Morrow's lips tightened angrily; his eyes also narrowed, as he looked at his son and sought for words. They'd be real words this time, too. He had heard about enough of this poor stuff! He glanced at Laura for support and inspiration and—well, dammit! Laura wasn't looking proper condemnation at her son. More than anything else, Laura suggested a meditative, disappointed child just now. What was the matter with her, anyway? Had the fireplace gone to her head?

"Well, I say!" remarked the intelligent Donald, and his words were as soothing oil. "Perhaps we're all taking this decorating business too seriously. Maybe it's not so formidable as it seems. I mean, perhaps, there's a lot of it we can do ourselves at very small expense."

"You?" Henry asked.

"I'll help, of course. Let's see now. We'd have to get at the walls first. There seems to be a million cracks that need cutting out and pointing up. I should think Will could do most of that in the evenings."

"Not me, Don!" William said hastily. "My evenings are pretty well dated up. And it'd look rotten if I did it. I'm no plasterer; I'm in the wholesale paper business."

Donald's well-bred laugh rippled out pleasingly as he rose.

"You may be able to learn, Bill. It won't kill Joy if she doesn't see you one or two evenings a week. We'll look things over and see just what is ahead."

Henry glanced at him almost fondly. A prig, to Henry's mind; but at that he had a lot of good ideas.

"Well, but Don, I hardly think we could do the living room so that it would look well—do you?" Laura was asking, as she followed him.

"The living room? Perhaps not; that's a professional job," Donald answered, and the affection left Henry's glance. "And the dining room, too. Still, we'll look around."

Now they were trailing after the paragon. Henry sat still and smoked. Could they have examined his bank balance they must have laughed at their own absurdity! Decorating, sooner or later, would have to be done; but why go on as if the men could be called in to-morrow morning?

They seemed hardly to know that Henry was not with them. They were going upstairs now. Henry grunted and followed. Ah, they had decided upon what, some time or other, should be done to Margey's room, and they were moving on to William's room, and, to tell the truth, it did look bad! Henry gazed at the ceiling and noted gratefully that the loose appearing section was in the corner opposite the bed. Donald Cray's attention was on the south wall, where yawned a crack into which one might almost have laid one's hand. Donald shook his head.

"Phew! That's a terror," he muttered. "Runs all the way from the ceiling to the floor behind the desk, I guess. Here, Bill! Give me a hand and we'll move it and look."

"That—a—walnut desk isn't worth anything as an antique, is it, Donald?" Henry asked hopefully.

"About a dollar, if anybody wanted it!" Donald puffed, as he tugged. "There! Yes, she runs clear down to —well, what's this?"

"Why, it's a rusty iron door!" Marge cried.

"It's a wall-safe, sure as you're born," said Cray, and pulled at it in vain. "Lock's broken, apparently, and

the door's held in place by solid rust. Um—that's a funny one, eh?"

"*What's inside?*" said William Morrow.

"Dirt," said his father.

"All the same, there *might* be—"

"Yes, my son, but there isn't," Henry laughed. "Old Pringle didn't leave a ten cent piece behind him. I happen to know that. He died without a penny."

"I'm afraid there's no fortune hidden there," Donald laughed also, as his attention went back to the giant crack. "Well—I don't know. That one looks as if it would have to have some professional attention, too, Mr. Morrow. You'll have to have plasterers for the ceiling, anyway."

"Yes, I—guess so," Henry agreed colorlessly.

"Where's the screwdriver?" William asked.

"Oh, it's packed, dear," said Laura. "You can pry that open some other time and—"

"Never mind, I have my knife," said the son of the house. "I thought it was in my other pants."

"Well, here, kid!" Henry said warningly. "Just remember, I paid four dollars and a half for that knife last birthday, and don't—"

"Oh, I'm not going to bust it," William muttered.

"Well, let's see that main bedroom," said practical Donald.

He led the way and Henry followed morosely, with Laura and Ina and Brantree, while Marge squatted beside her brother and watched with sparkling eyes as he scraped away at rust. Kids! And weren't they lucky to be kids! Weren't they lucky to be able to think that there might be something beyond that door? Henry sighed enviously and gave heed to Donald, who was just beginning his opinion on this room with the expensive:

"Hum! *These* walls'll have to be stripped clean first."

And then, from William's quarters:

"Oh!" cried Margey loudly, peculiarly.

"*Wow!*" screamed William Morrow.

"Oh, my—oh, Harry!" Laura gasped, and turned snow white and wheeled toward the door. "Willie's cut himself with that wretched knife at last! I knew it! I knew he'd do that! I knew—"

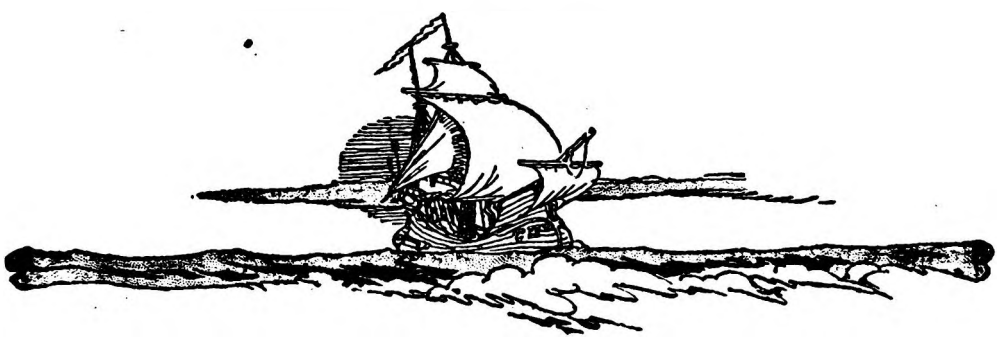
And, about to dash to the rescue, she halted suddenly. William was with them—a William from whom flowed no visible blood, yet the strangest William they had ever viewed. His hair seemed to be standing on end with excitement; his eyes were popping and his hands waving.

"Hey! Hey—everybody!" he gasped out. "Say—listen! We're not poor any more!"

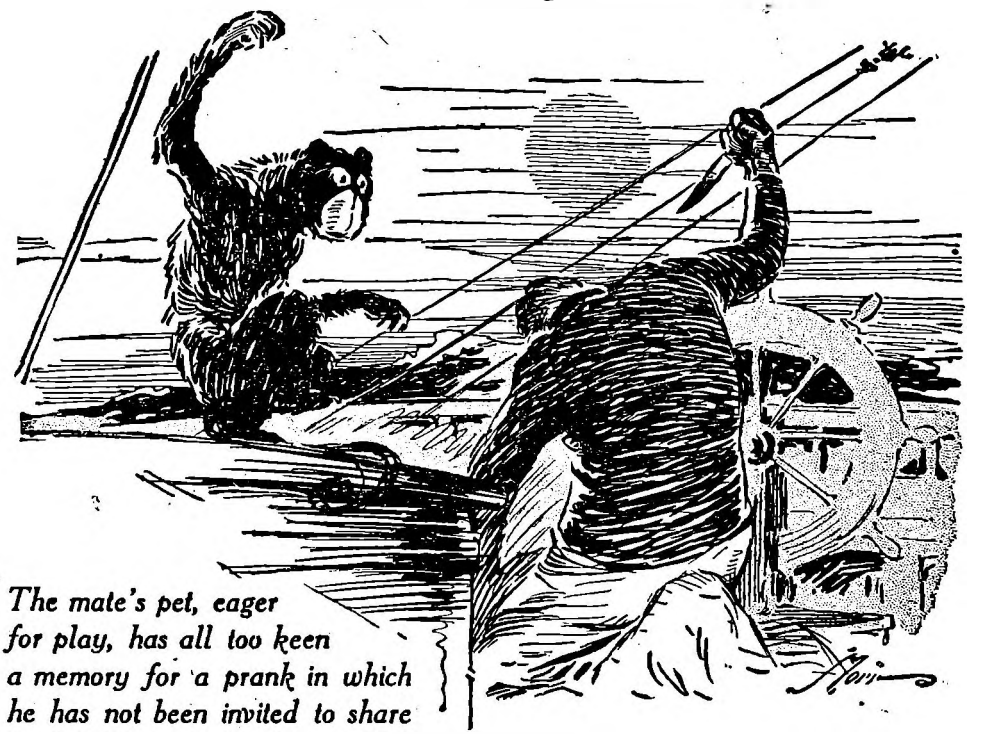
"*What?*" rasped his father.

"No! No, on the level, dad!" William laughed hysterically. "We just *were* poor—see? Now—*now we're rich!*"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Monkey's Mate



The mate's pet, eager for play, has all too keen a memory for a prank in which he has not been invited to share

By ROBERT BEITH

BAKSE, the pet monkey aboard the four-masted schooner Wheeler, perched on a hatch sunning himself. He blinked sleepily and seemed to nod like some old man who has missed his bedtime. His body swayed as the squat vessel dipped gently with a springy motion to the long swells.

The Wheeler was alone in a great expanse of tepid water off the coast of Senegal. Monotonously she rose and fell with the waves; only the creaking of the butt of the mast and the soft sighing of the wind through the rigging disturbed the quiet. Peacefully the Wheeler swam the sea.

The four great lower sails swelled to the breeze and the black prow plunged through a roll of greenish-white foam. The hot sun gleamed on the varnished masts and radiated upward from the deck.

Bakse was bored. He dozed and dreamed of days long ago in the cool wilds of Africa where monkeys can freely swing from tree to tree and eat all they care to whenever they want. He was as large as a collie dog, he had large, yellow, caninelike teeth, unproportionately long arms and legs, a powerful tail, and active, intelligent eyes.

Suddenly, as a heavy cloud of blue tobacco smoke drifted about him, he opened those eyes, blinked in the bright sunlight and began coughing. Affectionately he regarded the man standing before him.

He liked big Steve, the mate, the one man aboard who paid any attention to him. The others avoided him timid of his ugliness and his powerful, menacing physique.

Steve blew another puff of strong smoke at Bakse and chuckled at the

animal's discomfiture. Then he wiped his hands on his high-necked, faded blue jersey and began searching in the pockets of his shrunken, dirty white canvas pants.

At last he produced a plug of tobacco and offered it to the monkey. After Bakse had taken a liberal helping he bit into it himself. The animal and the man, minds idle, only their jaws working, surrendered to drowsiness.

When Steve lazily but accurately directed a stream of brown liquid to a spot just beyond his canvas shoes, from which his toes generously protruded, Bakse efficiently followed suit. His bright little eyes watched Steve's every move.

Each motion the man made he imitated, his tiny, wrinkled face serious. When Steve rubbed his eyes as if he were sleepy, Bakse copied him much as a small child mimics the actions of his elders.

The mate enjoyed the play, for it was an escape from the monotony of the voyage. He laughed now as he entered the game. He wriggled his thumbs from his ears and was boyishly delighted when Bakse perfectly imitated him.

Unseen by the objects of his obvious contempt, Oram Dunn, the Wheeler's captain, leaned against the cabin and sneeringly watched the scene.

"Well," he said, sarcastically, "be the brute imitating you or be you imitating the brute?"

His laugh sounded like the sea pounding against the rocks of a rugged coast.

Steve scowled and rubbed his hand across his hairy chin. His brutal and coarse face was always covered with a short crop of whiskers, as if he shaved with scissors instead of a razor. When he was puzzled or angry or hating some one he always rubbed his hand over them.

The two men glared at each other. Except for the battered old officer's hat cocked on the captain's head one would have been hard put to it to identify either one.

For Captain Dunn also wore canvas shoes and pants and a faded blue jersey. And both had massive shoulders, powerful physiques and brown, cruel, hairy faces, from which blood-flecked eyes pierced.

The captain broke the silence. "You shoulda bin a animal trainer 'stead o' a sailor."

Steve smiled, but there was hate in his narrowed eyes as he retorted: "I wisht I had 'n' then I'd never of seen yer dirty mug."

The captain's face purpled as he stiffened and snorted. "Lay off the monkey bizness an' help run this ship. This tub ain't no Noah's ark."

"I'll do as I damn please, Dunn," Steve replied coolly.

"Captain Dunn, to you," the other roared, glaring angrily. "Captain Dunn. D'ye git me?"

"An' who the hell might Captain Dunn be?" the mate asked innocently. "I ain't never heard o' no cap like him."

"Well, yer gonna one o' these days, an' ye'll wish ye never did neither. Yer no damn good. Yer jes' a wuthless rat hangin' roun' an' foolin' with that brute. Every morning since we started this voyage you has wasted on him. It's gotta stop. You two is so close anybody 'd think as ye was brothers."

Steve laughed. "Even so, even so, Dunn, he'd make a damn sight better brother as you fer a guy."

The captain's eyes darkened beneath his shaggy brows and his lips trembled with suppressed rage. He spoke threateningly.

"The next hole we stops at fer more rubber an' iv'ry I'm gonna fire ye offen here."

Steve stroked his chin. He had no desire to be stranded in Africa, but more particularly it irritated him even to contemplate being discharged from his berth by this man he hated. His

chin jutted before him like a crag from a mountainside and he stroked it again.

"Lissen, Dunn. You ain't gonna fire nobody. Get this straight. You ain't man enough. Yer a drunken bum an' ef it wasn't fer me you an' the whole mess o' us 'ud be layin' on the ocean bottom. Ef you was any good, an old man like you wouldn't be trampin' roun' in this rotten barge. Ef you fires me ye'll never git back home. Was you to skipper a girl's canoe ye'd sink it."

Captain Dunn sputtered, unable to speak. His fists opened and clenched spasmodically and his purple face began to look apoplectic.

"You mut'nous swine," he managed to shout at last. "Git to hell outa here afore I kill ye."

"When there's killin' done on this ship it 'll be me a doin' it," Steve snarled dangerously, stepping closer.

Both men faced each other, hating, tense, each waiting for the other to make the first move. The fight that had been brewing since the voyage started, months ago, would have come to the climax then had not Brint, the cook, conveniently interrupted.

"Beg pardon, captain, but I figgered as how I better tell ye there ain't nary a spec' o' sugar left. I cal'late rats got next to the bags an' et it all up."

He stood respectfully watching the captain, ignoring Steve, his hat twirling in his hands. The mate was amused and grinned frankly.

"Don't you fuss a mite, Brint, 'cause lack o' sugar won't hurt Dunn none. Nobody don't use sich stuff in liquor an' he ain't got much use fer tea er coffee." Steve laughed tauntingly and swaggered away.

Captain Dunn swore. The cook bowed respectfully and twirled his hat faster.

"Say, I don't like that feller," he whispered, hoping to win the captain's approval.

But the captain remained silent, watching Steve until he disappeared. His eyes were thoughtful and rather worried and grim.

II.

THE next day the sky was leaden and resembled the inside of a huge bowl clamped down over the sea. The water was choppy, a mass of white-capped waves that tumbled in all directions. The air was cool and suggested rain.

From all outward appearances this day, aside from weather conditions, was little different from any other. Each day the Wheeler had roamed the lonely seas bringing her assorted cargo to Africa and touching at numerous ports to pick up cacao, rubber, ivory or whatever products were obtainable.

Each day Steve and Bakse had played together; Captain Dunn and Steve had quarreled and hated each other; the crew, dissatisfied with harsh treatment and inspired by the lax discipline of their officers, hovered on the brink of rebellion, and Brint, the cook, made bold attempts to ingratiate himself in the captain's favor.

But to-day there were sinister indications that the hate seething beneath the apparent calm of the ship was about to explode. The captain and the mate openly glared at each other. Brint hovered about the captain, his beady eyes watching Steve's actions.

Both the mate and the captain carried revolvers. The crew, products of the water fronts of the world, watched the show being enacted before them and whispered. Mutiny and bloodshed hung just off-stage awaiting their cue to enter.

As the day wore on the leaden sky changed to a dark and ominous mass of rapidly moving clouds. The wind increased, and Steve knew a storm was in the offing.

The waves became larger and crashed heavily against the quivering sides of the rolling Wheeler. Now and then a few drops of wind-driven rain fell.

Captain Dunn drank heavily all day and as evening drew near, bleary-eyed and staggering, he came out on deck and stared at the horizon.

"Looks like gonna have storm," he commented, sniffing the air. "Blesh my soul an' body ef it don't smell like it, too."

"The sun ain't shinin'," Steve snarled disgustedly. "Git below an' drink yersef t' death. Y' ain't needed, so's ye might as well finish gittin' soused."

For once Captain Dunn agreed with the mate and went to his cabin to obey orders.

III.

THE storm broke just before night plunged the wild ocean into an empty blackness. The waves tossed angrily about the Wheeler, now lifting her upon their crests, now dropping her into the deep valleys that seemed to have no bottom.

The wind tore through the masts and shrieked mournfully. The decks were constantly awash and movement about the ship was almost impossible.

A furiously lashing rain and the darkness made vision out of the question, and the schooner pitched and rolled blindly through the unknown.

While Captain Dunn lay hopelessly drunk below, Steve and a sailor clung to the wheel. At times even their combined strength proved futile against the might of the storm and the wheel was wrested from their grasp.

As Steve struggled, his face running water, eyes smarting from the salt spray, he cursed the captain. For two hours he fought the storm before it slightly abated.

But gradually the wind decreased, and the rain ceased. The Wheeler, veteran of worse storms, weathered this one in good shape.

Steve remained on deck for the watch. He felt no desire to sleep, for the strain of fighting the elements had made him restless and wide awake.

He went below and brought Bakse up for company. Standing, staring into the blackness, he talked to the animal of the captain.

The more he thought of his superior getting drunk just before a storm when a skipper is needed most, the more angry he became. The remainder of the night he nursed hatred.

The sky began to turn gray and the early morning chill made him shiver. The hectic night was over and he could see that the cold looking gray ocean was quieter.

Watching the sky grow lighter, he loudly cursed the captain, his oaths vainly uttered, snatched away and hurled into the sea by the swirling wind. He felt restless and stiff and ordered the sailor hunched over the wheel to take to his bunk, grasping the spokes himself.

"We gotta helluva captain aboard, monk," he shouted to Bakse. "The drunken rat gets soused when he's s'posed to be takin' care o' his ship. When ye come right down to it I'm the real skipper here, but when we gets home it 'll be him as 'll git the praise and the extra jack, damn 'em. It ain't right. It oughta be me, be rights, 'ud be captain, Bakse."

As Steve stood fiercely gripping the spokes, appreciating this idea and wishing he were in command of the Wheeler, the door of the after cabin burst open and Captain Dunn, wild-eyed, stood tottering on the threshold, wabbling with the uncertain movement of the schooner. His cap was pulled down over one eye and his feet lacked shoes.

"You scum o' the sea," he roared. "I heard ye damnin' me. Who d'ye think y'are—cussin' me an' sayin' what I should do an' shouldn't?"

Steve, regarding the almost sober captain, felt a desire to spring at his beefy, red, pulsing throat. One hand left the wheel and stroked his whiskers.

"G'wan back an' sleep the rest off, ye dirty soak," he snarled.

The captain's head jerked backward, as if he had been struck. He raged violently as he moved unsteadily toward Steve, separated from him by the wheel.

"Who's a dirty soak? Who're ye callin' a dirty soak?" he screamed as he advanced.

An instant later they were threshing about the deck like two famished wild animals, primitively thirsting for the other's blood. As the captain had neared Steve, a knife suddenly appeared in his hand, and the mate, forgetting the wheel, the ship and its course, flung himself at his enemy and the shiny weapon.

When his body crashed against the captain's Steve saw little spots before the eyes and felt an insane urge to deal death, feel warm blood on his hands and a lifeless body beneath him.

Steve twisted Captain Dunn's wrist as they fell violently to the deck, and the knife clattered harmlessly near them. Straining, tearing and clawing frantically at each other, both scrambled after it in a rush.

In the excitement of the struggle the captain was completely sobered. He crushed Steve's neck in a powerful embrace with one arm and reached for the knife with his free hand. Silently, save for their hard breathing, the enemies battled for their lives in the gray light of dawn. Death awaited the first to weaken, to make a slip. And both knew it.

Bakse jumped excitedly about as he watched the battle. He made queer little sounds incessantly and moved to points of vantage the better to view the fierce combat.

The primitive thrill of death struggles surged under him. His tiny roving eyes followed the swift movements of the battlers, but mostly he watched Steve and unconsciously swayed with his body, and imitated his actions.

With a mighty effort Steve finally succeeded in breaking the crushing embrace and summoning all his remaining strength, crashed the other's head to the deck, temporarily stunning him. The mate was blind with rage now and swept by the desire to kill.

He reached quickly for the knife and his fumbling hand grasped its hilt. Leaning over the prone figure he raised the blade toward the brightening sky and brought it down with a powerful sweep, plunging it deep into Captain Dunn's back.

The murderous fire that burned within Steve was fed by the sight of the rapid spread of the dark stain on the captain's jersey and twice, three times and many more the blade rose and fell.

While life was being stabbed from Captain Dunn, Bakse chattered excitedly and jumped about delightedly. To him, this was the best part of the whole performance.

He wondered why Steve had never taught him such antics before during their many mornings of play together. This was decidedly better than finger wiggling and the other foolish motions demonstrated to him.

Leaning over an imaginary figure on the deck, he raised his hand and brought it downward rapidly many times as Steve was doing. Bakse repeated the process and his own cleverness pleased him.

The only trouble was, he thought, he didn't have anything in his hand as Steve did.

His energy and wrath spent, Steve arose, dazed, from the lifeless body with the sudden realization of what he had done. Although he had lived a villainous life, murder had never before been one of his accomplishments and now he shuddered and flinched from the bleeding thing before him.

Streams of blood moved slowly in the gullies formed by the planks of the deck. He heard Bakse's chattering and shivered with momentary apprehension.

Everything was silent, save for the swish of the sea by the sides of the Wheeler and the whine of the wind

through the rigging. Steve felt sick, nauseated, and leaned against the cabin to keep himself from falling.

His head whirled, and he had the feeling of spinning about on a pivot. When he had partially recovered he looked hurriedly about the deck, but it appeared deserted. Then shivering and recoiling with revulsion, he lifted the body in his arms and hove it overboard.

The blood he washed away with water. When every trace of the recent death struggle was removed to his satisfaction it occurred to him that the wheel had been abandoned during the battle, and that the Wheeler had probably drifted far off her course.

The compass confirmed his belief, and he labored to set the ship back. The sails were still reefed, and the little breeze there was passed impotently through the rigging. The Wheeler scarcely moved.

Steve was about to ring the bell to summon back to the wheel the sailor he had relieved, when he started and stared unbelievingly forward. Opposite the galley door, Brint leaned over the rail, peacefully smoking his pipe and gazing at the red globe that was the sun as it seemed to perch upon the horizon.

The mate rubbed his whiskers nervously and wondered fearfully if the cook's beady eyes had witnessed the murder. Then he reassured himself that the deck was deserted when he had looked immediately after the killing. Brint couldn't have been there, he told himself. He must have just stepped outside the galley for air while breakfast was cooking.

When the mate rang the bell for the sailor, Brint turned his head indifferently and gazed in Steve's direction, but rather at the horizon beyond than directly at him. Then he spat overboard and vanished into the galley.

The sailor appeared and Steve, after giving him some orders, took Bakse's hand and led him below. Once in the privacy of his own quarters he trembled and felt as if a chill wind blew directly upon his spine.

As he tore off his outer clothing and lay on his bed, hoping to sleep, the fear that Brint had witnessed the crime tormented him. He tried to assure himself that no one had been about; but in vain. The fear could not be dispelled.

At last he slept for a short time, to be awakened by a horrible dream. He sat up in bed, wide-eyed, perspiring, and then ran to see that the door was locked. Several large gulps of liquor failed to quiet his apprehension.

IV.

When Steve came on deck the afternoon following the murder, he was nervous and felt that the crew eyed him suspiciously. Even the weight and pressure of the pistol in his pocket did not restore his confidence.

The reaction after the strain of fighting the storm and Captain Dunn, together with the worrying about Brint, had unnerved him. He jumped when Bakse lumbered up to him and tugged at his hand.

With misgivings he called the crew about him near the wheel, so that the helmsman could hear him too. The men gathered in a group before him, sullen, concealing their curiosity.

"Dunn ain't nowheres aroun', an' I can't seem to find him," he announced. "Has anybody seen him?"

Except for Brint and Tom Peer, the carpenter, who looked at each other, the men did not move. Their rough features remained expressionless. No one answered the question.

Steve began to regain his confidence. "Dunn was drunk las' night, an' he must 'a' got washed overboard durin' the storm," he went on. "Anyways, he ain't nowheres about to-day. That makes me in command."

Again Brint and Tom Peer looked at each other.

Steve noticed their glances, and wondered just how much they knew. But now his confidence was partially returning, the reassuring sound of his own voice dispelling fear.

He continued, his voice more natural:

"I bin captain anyways sence we first pulled anker, so you guys knows I wants obed'ence an' respeck, an' gets it. From now on this tub is gonna get run like a ship. Git back ter yer wuk."

The men walked slowly away, silent and glum looking. The situation would be discussed later where Steve could not hear them, but now each man maintained a discreet silence.

Not one of the coarse crew approved the change of authority, for already, more than once, they had tasted Steve's brand of leadership. Captain Dunn's drunken, incompetent, neglectful authority had been bad enough, but Steve's rough and harsh treatment was even less desirable.

As Steve watched them go, he told himself there was no reason in the world why he shouldn't get away with the crime. Even had Brint witnessed the murder, he could prove nothing. The cook's word was no better than his own.

Steve reckoned that the hold would be filled to capacity at the next port, and that the homeward voyage could be begun. When the Wheeler arrived back in New York he'd explain Captain Dunn's absence easily and probably be rewarded himself for bringing the ship safely to port.

V.

AFTER the final stop had been made and the hold filled with money making cargo, the Wheeler put out to sea for the homeward voyage. Steve proudly walked the deck and gave fierce commands. He ruled the crew with an iron hand, mistaking their passivity for humble acknowledgment of his authority as captain.

The new captain drove the ship as she had never been driven before. He was anxious to complete the voyage, now that the last leg was begun. He ordered all sail crowded on, and was happy as he saw the water sliding by and the long wake weaving behind.

The wind held out, and the Wheeler raced along, cordage taut and sails full.

Tom Peer was Steve's choice for second mate, and the aged carpenter was glad enough to accept the appointment. He disliked the added, inevitable companionship with Steve, but then the promotion was worth certain drawbacks. The new captain selected Peer because he knew that the crew liked him and would work for him.

Pacing the deck during his watch, just before the fiery sun dipped into the sea and went out, Steve decided to play safe and get rid of Brint. At least separate him from the rest of the crew until the voyage was over. He feared that the cook would cause trouble. If he had witnessed the murder—

Steve began to seek a quarrel with Brint, sending food back to the galley with complaints before the steward had even placed it on the table. He swaggered into the galley without pretext, domineeringly ordering the little cook about, issuing unreasonable instructions and reprimands.

Brint seethed inwardly and longed to plunge his long bread knife into Steve's back. But the cook wasn't quite man enough, contenting himself with the vow that some day he would do it.

Yet, Steve persevered, nagging, cursing, goading Brint into rebellion, and at last his chance came.

One day as he was passing the galley he heard Bakse shrieking within. He rushed in and saw an infuriated Brint throwing tin cans, plates, knives, bread and any missive that came handy at a frightened monkey who frantically dashed about seeking safety.

Steve seized the cook by the collar and lifted the little man from his feet,

holding him dangling in the air, his arms waving madly. Then he shook him and gave him a toss.

Brint crashed against the wall and lay where he had fallen, quivering and cringing.

"Whadda ya mean, hurtin' my monk?" Steve growled.

Brint retorted passionately: "He can't keep coming in here stealing grub, I'll kill him if he does, by gad. I'd 'a' done it now but for you."

"Lissen, you Brint. Me an' you ain't hittin' it up so good at all. One o' us is gotta clear out, an' I figures as how it ain't gonna be me."

He stared into Brint's wavering eyes and that individual paled in spite of his best efforts to appear unafraid. "Ef Bakse wants to eat up everything you got, he can—see? I'm runnin' this tub, an' it ain't fer you to boss nobody, let alone my monk. An' to make sure ye get me drift, I'm gonna stick ye in irons awhile till ye think over who *is* boss."

The hapless Brint looked at Steve hopelessly.

"It weren't so much him stealing the grub, captain, sir, as it were him grabbing my knives and cutting the air with them. He skeered me and I fired up. I didn't mean no harm, sir. Please don't iron me."

The cook was a pitiful object as he slumped against the greasy galley wall, pleading with the man he hated.

Steve had felt a chill go through him when Brint had spoken of Bakse slashing knives through the air. It revived unpleasant memories. He wondered if Brint were hinting that he knew, threatening him? And so the cook was quickly put in irons.

"There ain't nobody as can cook, captain," Tom Peer said when informed of Brint's confinement. "The crew won't like getting bum feed."

"Damn the crew an' mind yer own bizness," Steve fired back. "Put somebody in the galley an' see to it he cooks."

He felt as if a weight had been removed from him. The only other man aboard who knew what had become of Captain Dunn was out of the way.

By way of celebrating, Steve drank considerable liquor that night, and when he went on deck shortly after midnight to look around before turning in he was far from sober.

He was trying to fill his pipe with tobacco, but only succeeded in spilling the contents of his pouch on the deck, when he suddenly gave a frightened scream and buried his head in his arm.

"Gawd!" he groaned.

Out of the darknesss had appeared a ball of moving, white fog. It had suddenly been transformed into a ghostly apparition, a pale, realistic Captain Dunn, smiling sardonically from the sky.

Steve blinked his eyes and cursed himself for drinking. His body trembled and he had no control over his limbs.

Minutes passed, and when he dared look again only a black void met his gaze. But even before his sigh of relief was complete the ball reappeared, and, as if a moving picture had begun to focus and flicker on a screen, the image of the dead captain formed and did not disappear.

The ball moved to the right and to the left as if some unseen hand guided its placement, and Steve, horrified, fascinated, gripped the weather rail, and stared.

He was helpless; he could not run away, nor could he close his eyes. The thing had come so suddenly and was so relentless Steve believed he was insane, and cried aloud at the thought. As suddenly as it had come, the ball vanished, and Steve, released from the spell, staggered weakly, blindly for his quarters.

When he entered his room he threw his arms across his face and cried out again. For his tortured mind pictured to him the bloody figure of Captain Dunn inert on the bed.

Fear gave way to passionate rage, and Steve ripped his bedding apart and tore it into shreds until his strength was exhausted and he collapsed on the floor, sobbing.

The next day as he stared at a cloudless sky and felt the wind against his face and in his hair, it was difficult to believe the night's experience was true. He attributed the phantom to the liquor he had drunk, and determined to leave the stuff alone.

Cheerfully he pursued the tasks of the day, taking every advantage of the favorable winds. He knew that they might cease at any time.

That night the apparition reappeared and nearly drove him into a frenzy. He desperately fought the urge to throw himself into the sea to escape such torture.

A week of this and he became a terror to the crew. Naturally a disagreeable tyrant, he now developed into an unbearable slave driver. He ordered the men about with curses, sent them to their work with violent pushes, and lost his temper at the slightest provocation.

Desperately and successfully, during the day, he sought to free his memory of that night of murder, frighten away old Dunn's dead face from his vision by loud oaths, blatant authority and ruthless temper. But each night, when he was alone and it was dark, the ghostly picture appeared in the black sky.

Boisterousness during the day could not prevent the dead man from haunting him at night.

The crew began to rebel at the treatment accorded them. Not openly, but secretly; a far worse form of rebellion than that which frankly bursts into flame and flares up.

This kind can be extinguished, but the quiet rebellion which smolders secretly cannot be met, and when it does burst forth has reached such proportions that it cannot be prevented from consuming all in its path.

Poor food did not improve the crew's humor, and since Brint's confinement the food had been ill prepared. Brint's substitute was a better sailor than cook.

Murmuring became growls, and sullen glances looks of hatred. Steve was not as conscious of his crew's dangerous mood as he would have been had he not been so busily occupied in attempting to defend himself from a horrible nightly visitant that tormented him and made it impossible to sleep or rest.

VI.

THEN suddenly the winds ceased and the Wheeler just drifted idly as if she had no destination. The sails flapped uselessly, and the sun beat mercilessly down upon the ship, burning into every part of her until she seemed to whiten as an ash.

Not a breath of air relieved the suffering of the humans aboard, and the crew became restless and ugly. Steve endured agony these days, glaring at the sky and cursing Heaven for holding back the wind. He wanted to get away from the wretched ship and its memories.

He sought solace by playing with Bakse, but always the thought of that night was coming would cause him to shudder. He cursed himself for being a fool, for permitting imaginary faces in the dark to torture him.

The fifth day of the calm Tom Peer, solemn-faced and grim, walked up to him as he played with Bakse. He was no longer the quiet, easy-going carpenter and his voice held no respect.

"Captain, the young lad Pinsky just died of fever helped along by rotten grub. Two others in bed sick. The crew wants Brint back in the galley."

"An' ef I don' want 'im back—" Steve replied curtly.

"We means to see to it that he gets back. We want no trouble. Come on now and leave Brint go. He's been punished long enough for whatever he

did. You ain't got no right to keep a man locked up so long. The crew needs him, so come across with the keys peaceable like."

"Lissen, you." Steve faced Peer and crossed his arms. "I'm runnin' this ship, an' I didn't ask fer no advice from nobody. Git back ter yer bums an' tell 'em from me 'at Brint stays where he's at ef they all dies."

He closed his mouth with a snap and rubbed his chin.

But Peer did not move.

"Mebbe you didn't ask for no advice, but you need it, and so I'm going to give you plenty."

He reached for the automatic in his back pocket, but Steve was quicker.

"Hold it!" he roared. "Jes' leave that gun where it is. Mutiny, eh? Well, Mr. Peer, you are gonna make rotten comp'ny fer Brint an' the rats. Start marchin' ahead an' don't fergit I'm right behind ye."

Peer had taken but two steps, when a shot rang out and a bullet sped by Steve's head. A cloud of smoke hung in the still air over the forward cabin, and, firing hastily in that direction, Steve ran for the protection of the after cabin.

The man at the wheel, seeing him coming, abandoned his post and fled for safety. Peer yanked out his gun and darted for cover.

For several minutes all was quiet; then a fusillade of bullets skimmed over the after cabin. Steve peered cautiously around the side of his protection in time to see one of the crew creeping toward him.

He fired quickly, and the man crumpled up, clutching his side as he fell. The battle was on.

Steve realized that his predicament was serious. He had little ammunition with him, and he supposed his enemies, greatly outnumbering him, had an almost unlimited supply.

He glanced at the knife in his belt and grimly determined that they would never get him without a struggle.

The battle was a hide-and-seek affair. No one dared show himself very long. The fatal experience of the first man to attempt to cross the deck to Steve intimidated the crew.

They decided the best plan was to try to pot him when he showed himself.

Steve conserved his ammunition, keeping a watch on the deck before him, content with forcing his enemies to remain under cover. He was kept too busy to think about the approach of night and the horror it brought to him.

Except for sporadic bursts of firing, the afternoon passed without further developments. Steve whistled to himself and cursed when he smelled the odors of food cooking forward.

He was hungry, and the sun beating down on him had made him thirsty. Bakse had come up from below and played unconcernedly at his feet, flinching and looking terror-stricken, however, when the shots rang out.

The sun took to the edge of the sky and turned a fiery red. The far portion of the horizon became a dark band that was night. The crew only fired a few shots after darkness descended, for they realized that the little spurts of flame revealed their positions.

When it was after midnight and there had been no signs of the activities of his enemies, Steve began to worry. It was strange that they should remain so quiet. He wondered what they were planning.

He stared unseeingly into the darkness ahead of him, and held his breath, straining to hear sounds. But all seemed quiet. The uncertainty, the silence and darkness, the momentary expectation of death, tore away his confidence, and he was terribly afraid.

But Steve was not a coward. He had faced death many times, and never once trembled in its presence. He had been shipwrecked, attacked by shanghaiers, shot at by a drunken sailor, bitten by jungle animals and stabbed

by a woman in an evil water-front rooming house. But he had never been afraid until now.

This danger that threatened but remained unknown penetrated the armor of his bravery. He wished that they would come for him, shouting, shooting, wanting to kill. Then he wouldn't be afraid; then he could stand up and fight back and give as good as was given.

He crept on his knees to one side of the cabin and peered around its side. But it was as if a bandage covered his eyes. As he stared into the blackness, trembling, hearing sounds that were not made and seeing things that were not, Captain Dunn's image appeared plainly before him, making its nightly visit.

The apparition's arms were raised as if signaling men to advance. Steve stiffened, trembled. His nerves suddenly snapped, and he screamed with horror and fright.

He staggered to his feet, hands pressed to his eyes, all thoughts of physical danger gone.

Scarcely had his scream died away when a series of shots rang out. Bullets hummed in the darkness, and one found its mark, lodging in Steve's right shoulder.

The sudden shock, the hot, searing pain, the warm wetness covering his side, brought back realization of his grave peril and made him fighting mad. He fired one of his few remaining shells, so that his enemies would believe none of their shots had taken effect, and then hurriedly set about improvising a dressing for his freely bleeding wound.

The pain and his empty stomach made him feel dizzy and nauseated, but he chuckled and cursed the men hidden behind the curtain of darkness. He wanted to fight, to kill, to inflict wounds. He wanted to be killed rather than lie helpless in the dark.

"C'mon, ye damn cowards—c'mon an' fight!" he shouted recklessly.

Tom Peer commanded the crew, and he ordered them to refrain from an attack. It was much better to sit pretty and let Steve worry, he said.

"We are safe and sound, and he is worrying something terrible, not knowing what to expect nor nothing," he told them. "We're fed, and he ain't had nothing nor can't get nothing. Why should we risk ourselves on him, when he'll have to give in anyways in the end? Let's leave a few guys on guard and the rest get some sleep.

"To-morrow or the next day I think we'll see him crying for mercy. We can do what we want to with him then, so let's don't start nothing to-night. In the meantime I'm goin' to get to Brint and saw off his irons somehow."

While Tom Peer was talking to the crew, Steve was feeling faint and trying to stanch the flow of blood from the hole in his shoulder.

He was weak and could scarcely manage to stand up. But he was still strong enough to shake his fist in the direction of the crew.

"Damn yer damn luck. I'm coming to smash yez!"

He tried to shout, but his voice was only a hoarse whisper.

Bravely he raised himself and forced his legs to hold him up. He raved now, mumbling to himself, cheering himself, cursing his enemies, threatening them, boasting.

He moved a little, staggering, groaning with pain, clutching his shoulder and dripping saliva from his mouth. But his strength failed and he collapsed weakly to the deck.

He wanted water and some one to take that damned hot iron from his shoulder; he wanted to murder the man that fired the shot; he wanted air and rest; and then, finally, he wanted most of all to sleep, sleep forever.

VII.

WHEN dawn came and the sky, the waves, and the ship were the color of

steel, Steve still lay in a little heap. A fly played about his face.

Bakse awakened, looked about, and, when he saw Steve, went over to him. He prodded the man's inert body with his hand and shook Steve's limp arm. Then his roving eyes noted the knife in Steve's belt, and he cautiously extracted it, his eyes shining mischievously. He wanted to play; not wiggle his fingers at his ears, nor pretend to pray or sleep, but to play as he remembered Steve had played one dawn near this very spot.

Grasping the unfamiliar hilt, he chattered rapidly as he made several preliminary practice swings through the air. Then he vainly prodded and poked Steve again. Bakse felt offended that this friend ignored him, for most monkeys are instinctively sensitive; he screamed for attention.

But Steve lay still, unconscious from the great loss of blood. Clumsily and uttering merry little sounds, Bakse sat astride the man, bent on waking him and coaxing him to play.

Suddenly, swiftly he brought the knife down in a forceful, wild sweep. He had no control over the blow, but powerful muscles, intended to carry their owner from limb to limb through the jungles, propelled it downward. The blade, unluckily, entered Steve's neck deep enough to sever the jugular vein.

Steve's body moved ever so slightly, his eyelids fluttered, and a tiny sigh, like that of an unhappy child, escaped his lips.

At the entrance of the knife and Steve's slight movement Bakse had been delighted, giving little shrieks of pleasure. He believed he had been successful in arousing his friend, and expected that the man was about to begin to play.

But when the body beneath him so quickly relaxed and the red wetness suddenly welled about the knife protruding from Steve's neck, he sensed trouble and was sobered. He peered anxiously into the still face before him, chattering steadily, like some savage helplessly muttering after a catastrophe has stricken him.

He continued to stare into his friend's face for a long time, and then timidly touched the dark stain at Steve's throat. He drew back hastily, then lifted his wet finger to his mouth and licked it.

He sat still a moment, whimpering like a sick dog, the blood of his friend smeared on the hair about his mouth and staining his finger.

Suddenly the full significance of his deed dawned on him and he screamed hideously.

He scampered away as fast as he could, swinging himself rapidly high up in the rigging, where he perched, dazed, moaning, silhouetted against the crimson sky.

Scarcely had he disappeared from the deck when the barrel of a revolver was poked around the corner of the cabin and a nervous, quaking command to " Put 'em up!" came hoarsely.

After a minute of waiting and receiving no answer or hearing no sounds, Brint, looking pale from his confinement, appeared behind the gun. His eyes widened when he saw Steve lying on the deck, apparently asleep, and some of the fright left them.

He rushed over to the still body, his gun clenched tightly in his trembling hand and held in readiness, as if he expected the deathlike figure to rise and attack him. But Steve did not move, and Brint breathed easier.

Then he saw the knife sticking in Steve's neck and his eyes gleamed cunningly. He knelt beside the dead man, placed a hand over the still heart, and saw that breath no longer entered or left the stiffening body.

Then, smiling, he went to tell the news, manufacturing his own story as he walked.

Bakse was chattering mournfully when Tom Peer and the crew returned with Brint and grouped themselves

about Steve. They stood silently looking a the big mate lying still and blood-covered on the deck.

Tom Peer bent over and examined Steve's body. He scratched his head perplexedly and swore.

"What you say, Brint, may be true. But jes' bend down and take a look at him. It's a funny thing, but—"

Every man whirled about and stared upward.

Bakse had interrupted with a terrible scream, a scream that was mournful, reproachful, horribly hideous.

Brint repressed his desire to shiver and turned to Peer.

"When you let me loose from the hold I swore I was gonna get the man that put me there." He waited for a moment to permit the men fully to grasp the significance of his words. "I wasn't afeard. I couldn't see sittin' around doin' nuthin'. I got me a knife and crept up on him without waitin' like you fellers. He wasn't lookin', and I waded into 'im."

Again Bakse screamed, cutting off Brint's lying words. The cry gripped the hearts of the humans grouped below and made them shudder. It resembled a human laugh except that it ended with a pitiful, unearthly moan.

Two of the crew crossed themselves, but several others sneered at Brint.

THE END

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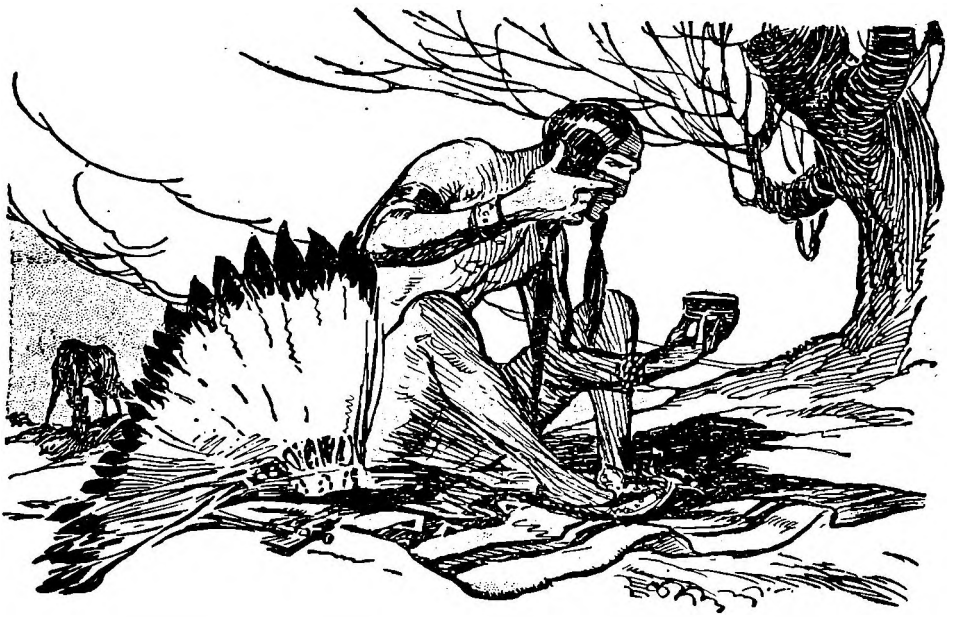
Jealousy

MY neighbor, Jones, across the way,
(A first-class boob he is),
Somehow induces folks to say
Fine things of him. Gee whiz!
They say that Jones is this and that,
All sorts of maudlin guff;
The public lifts to him its hat—
Where do they get that stuff?

Why, I knew Jones when he was just
As poor as I am now!
But *he* had *luck*, and got the dust
Some way—the Lord knows how—
Mind, I don't say that he's not *straight*,
But I know well enough
He never *earned* a name so great—
Where do they get that stuff?

Now, I'm a better man than Jones,
But bad luck kept *me* down;
He got the meat—*I* got the bones!
So he owns half the town;
While I'm dog-poor—and people say:
"Poor Smith, it *does* seem tough,
But then, he threw his chance away—"
Where do they get that stuff?

Will Thomas Withrow.



The Apache Devil*

This great Burroughs serial makes the reader wonder what he himself would be like if he were raised as an Indian

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
Author of "The War Chief," "Tarzan Tales," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ONE of the most risky places in the world to live in, during the 1880's was the mountain region which extended from Arizona and New Mexico down into the states of Sonora and Chihuahua in old Mexico. For the Apache Indians who lived there were still fighting out a three-hundred-year argument with the white men over who was to own that land.

And the leader of the Apaches was one of the ablest chiefs they ever had; of a nation of great warriors, he was the greatest—Geronimo.

In his middle age, one day when he was out on a raid, a baby boy happened to strike Geronimo's fancy; so he took him home, and he and Morning Star, his wife, raised the boy, and named him Black Bear.

The boy followed so skillfully in his foster-father's footsteps that by the time he had grown to full manhood he was known all through the hundreds of square miles of mountains as the "Apache Devil." He killed white men with all the hate of three hundred years of resentment of a people who were being forced ever backward by the sheer numbers of white people.

Black Bear had the peculiarity of not killing women and children; and these survivors reported that the Apache Devil always wore blue war-paint with

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a single band of white across his eyes. But though his design of paint was well known, Black Bear managed for a long time to keep the fact that he was the Apache Devil unknown to the white people who were acquainted with him during the short armistices which interrupted the Apache warfare.

Beside the secret that he was the dreaded Apache Devil, Black Bear had a sorrow which he kept as secret as possible; he was hopelessly in love with Wichita Billings, daughter of a rancher, whom he cared for in spite of his strong will and his lifelong hatred.

Wichita felt herself equally attracted by the young Apache war-chief, and reproached herself for liking him, though she was quick to scold her father when he once had unfriendly words with Black Bear.

The young chief managed to save Wichita a couple of times from kidnaping at the hands of a villainous white man named "Dirty" Cheetim, and from death during an Indian raid; but usually he stayed away from her for many months at a time.

However, during one disastrous campaign in which United States troops came down into Mexico at the invitation of the Mexicans to help hunt Geronimo, the warring Apaches slipped up across the border and were back in the United States for weeks, while the soldiers who were after them were still looking for them in Mexico. That was Black Bear's saddest campaign, for in it, Jinto, his best friend, was killed.

Disconsolately, he wandered near the Billings ranch, and happened to meet Wichita; and she made him happy by telling him that his pet horse, which he had set free when the Apaches had been forced to eat their horses, had been brought to her father's ranch by Lieutenant King.

Black Bear met Luke Jensen, one of his few white friends, when he went into the Billings pasture for his pony. Jensen was one of Billings's cowpunchers.

Luke was the man who came back leading Billings's saddle horse, the next morning, when Wichita turned out her whole outfit to look for her father, because he had been missing for many hours.

As Luke rode up, he reported something, in a very low voice, to "Smooth" Kreff, the ranch foreman.

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*).

BACK TO SONORA.

LUKE JENSEN, leading the cowboys, rode at a run down through the pasture, scattering the "cavvy," and into the dense willows, emerging upon the opposite side, climbing the steep bank of the draw, and away again at top speed toward the east gate.

There, just beyond the fence, they found Billings, where Luke had found him. Wichita knelt beside her father and felt of his hands and face. She did not cry.

Dry-eyed, she arose and for the first time saw that one of the men who had brought up the rear had led Scar Foot back with them; but even had she known it when they started she would not have been surprised, for almost from the moment that she had seen Jensen leading the horse back toward the corrals and had seen him whisper to Kreff she had expected to find just what she had found.

Tenderly the rough men lifted all that was mortal of Jefferson Billings across the saddle in which he had ridden to his death, and many were the muttered curses that would have been vented vehemently and aloud had it not been for the presence of the girl, for Billings had been shot in the back, and—scalped.

On walking horses the cortege filed slowly toward the ranch house, the men deferentially falling in behind the led horse that bore the body of the "boss" directly in rear of the girl who could not cry.

"He never had a chance," growled one of the men. "Plugged right in the back between the shoulders!"

"Damned dirty Siwashes!" muttered another.

"I seen an Injun here yestiddy evenin'," said Luke.

"Why the hell didn't you say so before?" demanded Kreff.

"I told Miss Chita," replied the young man; "but, Lor', it warn't him did it."

"Wot makes you-all think it warn't?" asked Kreff.

"He's a friend of hern. He wouldn't have hurted her old man."

"What Injun was it?"

"Thet Black Bear fellow what saved me thet time I was hurt an' lost. I know he wouldn't hev done it. They must hev been some others around, too."

Kreff snorted. "Fer a bloke wot's supposed to hail from Texas you-all shore are simple about Injuns. Thet Siwash is a Cheeracow Apache an' a Cheeracow Apache'd kill his grandmother fer a lead nickel."

"I don't believe thet Injun would. Why didn't he plug me, when he had the chanst?" demanded Jensen.

"Say!" exclaimed Kreff. "Thet there pinto stallion thet there greaser brung up from Chihuahua fer King warn't with the cavvy this mornin'. By gum! There's the answer. Thet pony belonged to Black Bear. He was a-gettin' it when the boss rode up."

"They had words last time the Siwash was around here," volunteered another.

"Sure! The boss said he'd plug him if he ever seen him hangin' around here again," recalled one of the men.

At the ranch house they laid Jefferson Billings on his bed and covered him with a sheet, and then Smooth Kreff went to Wichita and told her of his deductions and the premises upon which they were based.

"I don't believe it," said the girl. "Black Bear has always been friendly to us. I ran across him by accident in the hills yesterday and he rode home with me because, he said, there were other renegades around and it might not be safe for me to ride alone. It must have been some other Indian who did it."

"But his cayuse is gone," insisted Kreff.

"He may have taken his pony," admitted the girl. "I don't say that he didn't do that. It was his and he had a right to take it; but I don't believe that he killed dad."

"Your paw didn't have no use fer Injuns," Kreff reminded her. "He might have taken a shot at this Siwash."

"No; his guns were both in their holsters and his rifle was in its boot. He never saw the man that shot him."

Kreff scratched his head. "I reckon that's right," he admitted. "It shore was a dirty trick. Thet's what makes me know it was a Siwash."

The girl turned away sadly.

"Don't you worry none, miss," said Kreff. "I'll look after things fer you, jes' like your paw was here."

"Thanks, Smooth," replied Wichita. "You boys have been wonderful."

After the man had left the room the girl sat staring fixedly at the opposite wall. A calendar hung there and a colored print in a cheap frame; but these she did not see. What she saw was the tall, straight figure of a bronzed man; an almost naked savage. He sat upon his war pony and looked into her eyes.

"Black Bear does not kill any one that you love," he said to her.

The girl dropped her face into her hands, stifling a dry sob. "Oh, Black Bear, how could you?" she cried.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. Her lips were set in a straight, hard line: her eyes flashed.

"Oh, God," she cried. "You gave me love and I threw it away upon an Indian, upon an enemy of my people; and now, in Your anger, You have punished me. I was blind, but You have

made me to see again. Forgive me, God, and You will see that I have learned my lesson well."

Stepping through the doorway onto the porch, Wichita seized a short piece of iron pipe and struck a triangle of iron that hung suspended from a roof joist. Three times she struck it and in answer to the signal the men came from bunk house and corrals until all that had been within hearing were gathered before her.

Dry-eyed she faced them and upon her countenance was an expression that none ever had seen there before. It awed them into silence as they waited for her to speak. They were rough, uncouth men, little able to put their inmost thoughts into words, and none of them ever had looked upon an avenging angel; otherwise they would have found a fitting description for the daughter of their dead boss as she faced them now.

"I have something to say to you," she commenced in a level voice. "My father lies in here, murdered. He was shot in the back. He never had a chance. As far as we know no one saw him killed; but I guess we all know who did it. There doesn't seem to be any chance for a doubt; it was the Apache war chief, Black Bear.

"If it takes all the rest of my life, and every acre and every critter that I own, I'm going to get the man that killed my father, and I'm starting now by offering a thousand dollars to the man who brings in Black Bear—dead!"

When she had ceased speaking she turned and walked back into the house.

The men, moving slowly toward the bunk house, talked together in low tones, discussing the girl's offer.

Inside the house, Wichita Billings threw herself face down upon a sofa and burst into tears.

Black Bear slid from the back of his pet pinto war-pony, in the camp of Geronimo, and stood before the great war chief of the Apaches.

"Seven times, my son," said the old chief, "have I cast medicine dust to the four winds at evening since you rode away; and seven times at dawn; twice seven times have I prayed to the spirits whose especial duty it is to watch over you to bring you back in safety. My prayers have been answered. What word do you bring?"

"Black Bear went to the reservation at San Carlos," replied the young man. "None of our friends or relatives who went out upon the war trail with us are there. I heard many stories, but I do not speak of anything that I did not see with my own eyes, or hear with my own ears.

"There are many soldiers scouting everywhere. There are so many that I think all the soldiers that were sent to Mexico after us must have been called back to hunt for us here.

"The reservation Indians say that now that Miles is after us we shall all be killed. They advise us to lay down our arms and surrender. I think that very soon the soldiers will find our camp here."

"You are a war chief, my son," said Geronimo. "Already you are very wise. At the councils even the old men listen to you with respect. What would you advise?"

"We are very few," replied Black Bear thoughtfully. "We cannot take the war trail successfully against the whites in this country where we are. Sooner or later they will kill us, or capture us. This is no longer a good country for the Apache.

"Black Bear does not wish to live here any more. Let us go to Mexico. Perhaps the white soldiers will not again follow us into Mexico. There we may live as we would wish to live and not as the whites want us to live."

"And we can punish the Mexicans for inviting the white soldiers to come down to their country and kill us," added Geronimo. "I think you have spoken true words. I think we should go to Mexico. Perhaps there we shall

find all of our friends and relatives from whom we became separated when the soldiers were hunting us in Sonora and Chihuahua. Perhaps we can even be happy again. Who knows?"

And so it was that when the men of B Troop rode into the camp of Geronimo a week later they found nothing but cold ashes where the cooking fires had been and the débris of a deserted Indian village that the Apaches had not taken their usual precautions to hide, since they expected never again to return to their own beloved mountains.

Far to the south, below the line, frightened peons burned many candles and said many prayers, for they had heard stories. A man had found the bodies of three cowmen and he had seen the print of an Apache moccasin in the camp where they had been killed. They had not been tortured nor mutilated.

"The Apache Devil again!" whispered the peons.

A terrified freighter, a bullet through his shoulder, galloped an exhausted mule into a little hamlet. The wagon train that he had been with had been attacked by Apaches and all had been slain save he, and with his own eyes he had recognized Geronimo.

"Holy Mother, preserve us! Geronimo and the Apache Devil, both!"

Leaving a trail of blood and ashes behind them the renegades headed for the mountains near Casa Grande. Having committed no depredations north of the line they felt confident that the United States soldiers would not follow them into Sonora. Why should they? There was nothing for the soldiers of the whites to avenge.

Thus the Apaches reasoned, since, in common with white men, they possessed the very human trait of easily forgetting the wrongs that they committed against others, even though they might always harbor those that were committed against them.

So now they either forgot or ignored what the whites still considered just causes for righteous anger, burned ranches, stolen stock, tortured men, women and children, mutilated corpses, that had emblazoned their trail through Arizona from San Carlos to the border over a year before; but the whites had no intention of permitting these occurrences to go brown in their memories.

From one end of the country to the other Geronimo and his bloody deeds occupied more front-page newspaper space than any other topic, and to the readers of the newspapers of all the civilized world his name was a household word. For over a year the armies of two nations had been unsuccessfully engaged in an attempt to capture or kill a handful of men, women, and children.

Geronimo and his renegades had outwitted, outgeneraled, and outfought them and now, after again outwitting the army of the United States, they had come back to Mexico and were meting out punishment to those who they mistakenly believed were responsible for bringing United States troops below the border to fight them, and in carrying out this policy they attacked every Mexican they saw after they crossed the border, all the way to Casa Grande. Nor did they desist then.

South of Casa Grande, near a place which the Apaches called Gosoda, a road wound out of the town through a mountain pass. Many were the freight wagon-trains that lumbered through the dust along this road and near there Geronimo, the Apache Devil, and their followers hid.

Here the renegades remained for some time, killing freighters, taking what supplies they desired and destroying the balance; but the reputation that they made for the road achieved was such as to discourage freighters for the time being though it attracted Mexican soldiers in embarrassing numbers.

Geronimo then led his followers into the Antunez Mountains, where they found all that now remained of their tribe and learned that the United States

soldiers had not left the mountains of Mexico, but, on the contrary, were becoming more active than ever.

Geronimo was disheartened when he learned of this, for he had banked wholly on the belief that he would be rid of the menace of United States troops if he returned to Mexico without committing more depredations in the United States.

"What are we to do?" he demanded at the council fire. "If we return to the reservation we shall be put in prison and killed; if we stay in Mexico they will continue to send more and more soldiers to fight us."

"There is but one thing to do," replied Black Bear when Geronimo had finished. "We must continue fighting until we are all killed. Already we are reckless of our lives; let us be more so; let us give no quarter to any one and ask no favors. It is better to die on the war trail than to be put in prison and choked to death with a rope about the neck. I, Black Bear, shall continue to fight the enemies of my people until I am killed."

"You are a young man," said Geronimo. "Your words are the words of a young man. When I was young I wanted nothing better than to fight, but now that I am getting old I should like a little peace and quiet, although I should not object to fighting to obtain them if I thought that I might win peace thus.

"But now," he continued sadly, "I cannot see any hope of winning anything by fighting longer against the whites. There are too many of them and they will not let us rest. I would make a peace treaty with them, if I could."

"They do not want to make a peace treaty with us," said Black Bear. "They want only to kill us all, that there may be no more Apaches left to dispute the ownership of the land they have stolen from us. Let the old men and the women and the children make a peace treaty with the whites. I will never make peace if it means that I must return to San Carlos and be a reservation Indian."

"I think that we should make peace with them," said Nachita, "if they will promise that we shall not be killed."

"But the promises of the whites are valueless," growled a warrior.

Thus they spoke around their council fires at night, and though most of them wanted peace and none of them saw any other alternative than death, they clung doggedly to the war trail.

During three months they had many skirmishes with the white soldiers and five times their camps were surprised; yet never were the troops able either to capture or defeat them; never was there a decisive victory for the trained soldiers who so greatly outnumbered them.

In July, 1886, Geronimo's force numbered about twenty-five fighting men, a few women, and a couple of boys. Outside of their weapons and the clothing that they wore, they had a few hundred pounds of dried meat and nineteen ponies, their sole physical resources to wage a campaign against a great nation that already had spent a million dollars during the preceding fourteen months in futile efforts to subjugate them and had enlisted as allies the armed forces of another civilized power.

Moving farther and farther into old Mexico as the troops pressed them, the renegades were camped on the Yongi River, nearly three hundred miles south of the boundary, late in July. They believed that they had temporarily thrown their pursuers off the track and, war weary, were taking advantage of the brief rest they had earned.

Peace and quiet lay upon the camp beside the Yongi. The braves squatted, smoking, or lay stretched in sleep. The squaws patched war-worn moccasins. There was little conversation and no laughter. The remnant of a once

powerful nation was making its last stand bravely, without even the sustaining influence of hope.

A rifle cracked. War whoops burst upon their ears. Leaping to their feet, seizing the weapons that lay always ready at hand, the renegades fell back as the soldiers and scouts of Lawton's command charged their camp.

The surprise had been complete, and in their swift retreat the Apaches lost three killed, whom they carried off with them, as they abandoned their supply of dried meat and their nineteen ponies to the enemy. Now they had nothing left but their weapons and their courage.

Clambering to inaccessible places among the rocks, where mounted men could not follow, they waited until the soldiers withdrew. Black Bear got up and started down toward the camp.

"Where are you going?" demanded Geronimo.

"The whites have taken my horse," replied the war chief. "I'm going to take my war pony from them."

"Good!" exclaimed Geronimo. "I go with you."

He turned and looked inquiringly at the other warriors before he followed Black Bear down the steep declivity. After the two came the balance of the grim warriors.

Keeping to the hills, unseen, they followed Lawton's command, in the rear of which they saw their ponies being driven. As the hours passed, Geronimo saw that the distance between the main body of troopers and the pony herd was increasing.

CHAPTER XIV.

SKELETON CAÑON.

A FEW miles ahead was a small meadow, just beyond which the trail made a sharp turn around the shoulder of a hill. Geronimo whispered to Black Bear, who nodded understanding and assent. The word was passed among the other warriors, and at the same time the young war chief turned to the left to make a detour through the hills, while a single warrior remained upon the trail of the troops.

At a smart trot the Apache Devil led his fellows through the rough mountains. For an hour they pushed rapidly on until he dropped flat near the summit of a low hill and commenced to worm his way slowly upward. Behind him came twenty painted savages. In the rear of concealing shrubbery at the hilltop he stopped, and behind him stopped the twenty.

Below Black Bear was a little meadow. It lay very quiet and peaceful in the afternoon sun, deserted; but the young chief knew that it would not be deserted long. Already he could hear the approach of armed men.

Presently they came into sight. Captain Lawton rode in advance. At his side was Lieutenant Gatewood. Behind them were the scouts and the soldiers. The formation was careless, because they all knew that the renegades, surprised and defeated, had been left far behind them.

Black Bear watched them pass. In the rear of the column he saw Lieutenant King, who had been temporarily detached from his own troop to serve with this emergency command of Lawton's. The length of the meadow they rode. The head of the column disappeared where the trail turned the shoulder of a hill, and still the twenty-one lay quietly waiting.

Now half the column was out of sight. Presently the Apache Devil watched King disappear from view and once again the little meadow was deserted. But not for long.

A little pinto stallion trotted into view, stopped, pricked dainty ears, and looked about. Behind him came other ponies, nineteen of them altogether, and behind the ponies three sun-parched troopers in dusty, faded blue.

Silently Black Bear arose, and be-

hind him arose twenty other painted warriors. They uttered no war whoops as they raced silently down into the meadow in front of the ponies. There would be noise enough in a moment, but they wished to delay the inevitable as long as possible lest the main body of the command, warned by the sounds of combat, should return to the meadow before the mission of the Apaches was completed.

The first trooper to see them vented his surprise in lurid profanity and spurred forward in an attempt to stampede the ponies across the meadow before the renegades could turn them. His companions joined him in the effort.

Black Bear and six other warriors raced swiftly to intercept the ponies, while the other renegades moved down to the turn in the trail where they could hold up the troop should it return too soon.

The Apache Devil whistled sharply as he ran, and the pinto stallion stopped, wheeled, and ran toward him. Three ponies, frightened by the shouts of the soldiers, raced swiftly ahead, passing Black Bear and his six, and the balance of the twenty, who had not yet reached their position, and disappeared around the turn.

Black Bear leaped to his pony's back and headed the remaining horses in a circle, back in the direction from which they had come and toward the six warriors who had accompanied him.

It was then that one of the three soldiers opened fire, but the Apaches did not reply. They were too busy catching mounts from the frightened herd, and they had not come primarily to fight. When they had recaptured their ponies, there would still be time enough for that, perhaps; but it was certain that there was no time for it now.

They had their hands full for a few seconds, but eventually seven warriors were mounted, and Geronimo and the remainder of the renegades were coming down the meadow at a run as the seven drove the herd along the back trail.

Hopelessly outnumbered, cut off from their fellows, the three troopers looked for some avenue of escape, and fell back in front of the herd, firing. It was then that the Apaches opened fire, and at the first volley one of the soldiers fell and the other two turned and raced for safety; rounding the side of the herd, they spurred their mounts along the flank of the renegades.

A few hasty shots were sent after them, but the Apaches wasted no time upon them, and they won through in safety, while Black Bear and the six urged the ponies at a run along the back trail toward camp as those on foot took to the hills and disappeared just as Lawton's command came charging to the rescue, too late.

Lawton followed the Apaches, but, being fearful of ambush, he moved cautiously, and long before he could overtake them the renegades had made good their escape.

The weeks dragged on—lean and hungry weeks of slinking through the mountains with an implacable enemy always on their heels. The renegades had little food and little rest. Their cause seemed hopeless even to the most warlike and the most sanguine of their number. Only Black Bear held out for war. That was because he had nothing to live for. He courted death, but no bullet found him.

At last the others determined to give up, and Geronimo sent a messenger to the commander of a body of Mexican troops that was camped near them, asking for a parley.

All that the Mexicans asked was that Geronimo should take his band out of Mexico, and this the old chieftain said he would do, both sides agreeing not to fight any more against the other.

Moving northward toward the border, Geronimo made no effort to elude American troops, as he was really anxious to arrange for a parley with them,

but by chance they did not come into contact with any, and at last the renegades went into camp near the big bend of the Bivaspe River, in Sonora.

"How can you remain here?" demanded Black Bear. "You have promised the Mexicans that you will leave their country, and you cannot go into Arizona or New Mexico because the soldiers of the whites will not let you. Where are you going? You should not have promised the Mexicans that you would leave. Now they will attack you, when they find that you have not left, for they know that you have had time enough to get out of Mexico."

"We cannot remain here," replied Geronimo, "and we cannot go elsewhere, as long as we are at war with the whites. There remains nothing but to make the best peace with them that we can."

"It is right that you should do so," said Black Bear. "For that is to the best interest of the tribe; but for me there can be no peace. I shall not go back to the reservation with you."

"That is the right of every Apache, to choose for himself," said Nachita. "But for the welfare of the tribe it is better that we make peace and go back to the reservation. Nachita will vote for peace if the whites will promise not to kill any of us."

"I shall send White Horse, my brother, to arrange for a parley with the white chiefs," said Geronimo.

The day after White Horse left upon his mission the renegades sent two squaws into Fronteras to purchase food and mescal, and as they returned to camp they were followed to the last hiding place of the great war chief of all the Apaches.

Scarcely had the squaws laid aside their burdens when one of Geromino's scouts hurried into the camp and reported to the war chief that two Government scouts had come, bringing a message to Geronimo.

"I will talk with them," said the old chief, and a few minutes later Kayitah and Marteen stood before him, the red headbands of their service alone differentiating them from the warriors who crowded about them.

"You bring a message from the white chiefs to Geronimo?" demanded the war chief.

"With Lieutenant Gatewood, we have brought a message from General Miles, the war chief of the white soldiers," replied Kayitah.

"Speak!" commanded Geronimo.

"The message is that if you will surrender you will not be killed, but will be taken some place to the East, you and your families, all of you who are now upon the war trail and who will surrender."

"How many soldiers has Gatewood with him?" demanded Geronimo.

"There are no soldiers with Gatewood," replied Kayitah, "but Lawton's soldiers are not far away."

"Geronimo will talk with Gatewood," announced the old chief, "but with no one else. Gatewood does not tell lies to the Apache. Tell them not to let any soldiers come near my camp and I shall talk with Gatewood. Go!"

And so it was that through the confidence that Geronimo felt in Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, Sixth United States Cavalry, arrangements were made for a parley with General Miles, and on September 4, 1886, Geronimo and Nachita surrendered at Skeleton Cañon, Arizona.

Black Bear did not accompany the other chiefs to the parley. With only his own sad thoughts as company, he remained in camp, and there Geronimo found him when the conference was over. He arose and faced the old chieftain.

"I do not need to ask Geronimo what has happened," said the young chief. "I see sorrow in his eyes. It is the end of the Apaches."

"Yes," replied Geronimo, "it is the end."

"What talk passed between Geronimo and the white war chief?"

"We shook hands and then we sat down and the white war chief said to Geronimo: 'The President of the United States has sent me to speak to you. He has heard of your trouble with the white men, and says that if you will make a treaty we need have no more trouble. Geronimo, if you will agree to a few words of treaty all will be satisfactorily arranged.'

"He told me how we could be brothers to each other. We raised our hands to heaven and said that the treaty was not to be broken. We took an oath not to do any wrong to each other, or to scheme against each other."

"And you believed the whites?" demanded Black Bear. "Each time that we go upon the war trail they promise us many things to induce us to lay down our arms—and do they keep their promises? No! Nor will they keep this promise."

"I do not know. All that I can do is hope, for no longer can we fight against them," answered Geronimo wearily.

"What else did the white war chief say?" asked the Apache Devil.

"He talked with me for a long time and told me what he would do for me in the future if I would agree to the treaty. I did not greatly believe him, but because the President of the United States had sent me word I agreed to make the treaty, and to keep it.

"He said to me: 'I will take you under Government protection; I will build you a house; I will fence you much land; I will give you cattle, horses, mules, and farming implements. You will be furnished with men to work the farm; for you yourself will not have to work. In the fall I will send you blankets and clothing so that you will not suffer from cold in the winter time.

"'There is plenty of timber, water, and grass in the land to which I shall send you,' he told me. He said that I should live with my tribe and with my family, and that if I agreed to the treaty I should be with my family within five days.

"Then I said to General Miles: 'All the officers that have been in charge of the Indians have talked that way, and it sounds like a story to me; I hardly believe you.'

"'This time,' he said, 'it is the truth,' and he swept a spot of ground clear with his hand and said: 'Your past deeds shall be wiped out like this and you will start a new life.'

"All this talk was translated from English into Spanish and from Spanish into Apache and *vice versa*. It took a long time. Perhaps the interpreters did not make any mistakes. I do not know."

"Are you going to live on the reservation at San Carlos?" asked Black Bear.

"No. They are going to send us out of Arizona, because they say that the white men whose families and friends we have killed would always be making a lot of trouble for us, that they would try to kill us."

"Where are they going to send you?"

"To Fort Marion in a country called Florida." The old man bowed his head. Could it be that there were tears in those cold blue eyes?

Black Bear placed a hand on his father's shoulder. "I know now that I shall never see you again," he said. "The whites, who have never kept a promise that they have made to the Indians, will not keep this one.

"It is not too late even now to turn back," continued the young man. "We have ponies, we have arms, we have ammunition, and there are places in the mountains of Sonora where a few men could elude the whites forever. Do not let them take you to a strange country where they will either kill you or make a slave of you."

Geronimo shook his head. "No, my son," he said, "that cannot be. The war chief of the whites and the war chief of all the Apaches stood be-

tween his troopers and my warriors. We placed a large stone on the blanket before us. Our treaty was made by this stone and it was to last until the stone should crumble to dust. So we made the treaty and bound each other with an oath. Geronimo will keep that treaty."

Slowly Black Bear turned and walked away. Far up among the rocks above the camp he went, and there he remained all night praying to the Great Spirit.

When morning came he returned to the camp of the renegades and there he found his people, sullen and morose, preparing to lay down their weapons and give themselves up as prisoners of war to the enemy that they feared, hated and mistrusted.

He went to the pony herd and caught his pet and brought him back to camp. Then he squatted beside a rock and with a bronzed forefinger laid the war paint of the Apache Devil across his face.

Upon his head he placed his war bonnet of buckskin, with its crest of feathers; about his neck he hung a single strand of turquoise and silver beads; in his ears were small silver rings, and covering his feet and legs were stout Apache war moccasins.

A belt of ammunition encircled his slim waist, and from it hung two pistols and a great butcher knife. He carried a rifle, and bow and arrows.

The others saw his preparations, but they made no comment. When he was done he mounted his pony—an Apache war chief tricked out in all the panoply of the war trail.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST OF THE RENEGADES.

HE rode to where Geronimo sat stolidly upon a pony, waiting for the preparations for departure to be completed. The old war chief looked up as the younger man approached, but the expression upon his inscrutable face did not change as he saw the war paint and the weapons.

"My father," said Black Bear, "all night I have prayed to the Great Spirit asking Him to give me some sign if He wished me to give myself up to the enemy and go into bondage with you and our people.

"But He gave me no sign and so I know that He does not wish me to do these things.

"Therefore I ride out alone, the last of the Apaches, upon the war trail against the enemies of my people. While I live I shall devote my life to killing whites. I, Black Bear, war chief of the Apaches, have spoken."

"Wait," said Geronimo. "Wait until you have heard the words of Geronimo before you bind yourself to such an oath.

"We go into bondage. We shall never take the war trail again. Had it been otherwise, I should never have told you what I am going to tell you now.

"All your life you have been as a son to me. I have loved you. I have been proud of you. It is because I love you that I am going to tell you this thing now. When I have told you, you will know that you need not throw away your life fighting the whites, fighting the battles of the Apaches.

"You are not an Apache. You are not an Indian. You are white."

The eyes of the Apache Devil narrowed. "You are my father," he said, "but not even you may call Black Bear a white man and live. That, Juh learned."

Geronimo shook his head sadly. "Juh knew," he said. "He was with me when we killed your father and mother in a pass in the Stein's Peak Range. It was Juh who dragged you from the wagon and would have killed you but for Geronimo."

"It is a lie!" growled Black Bear.

"Has Geronimo ever lied to you?" asked the old war chief.

"Cochise swore before the council fire that I was as much an Apache as he," cried the young man.

"Cochise did not lie," said Geronimo. "You are as much an Apache as any of us in heart and spirit; but in your veins flows the blood of your white father.

"Twenty-three times have the rains come since the day that I killed him, and I have kept my lips sealed because I loved you and because you were as much my son to me as though you were flesh of my own flesh; but now the time has come that you should know, for as an Apache every man's hand will be turned against you, but as a white man you will have a chance that no Apache ever may have."

For a few moments Black Bear sat in brooding silence. Presently he spoke.

"A white! A white man!" he cried contemptuously, almost spitting the words from his mouth. "Had you told me that I am a coyote I could have carried my shame and faced the world; but to be a white man!" He shuddered.

"My son," said Geronimo. "It is not the color of our skin, nor the blood that runs in our veins that make us good men or bad men. There are bad Apaches and there are good white men.

"It is good to be a good Apache. It is not bad to be a good white man. Now, perhaps, it is better to be a good white man than even a good Apache. Times have changed. The Great Spirit does not look with favor upon the Indians. Time will heal your wound. Go and live among your own people and some day you will thank Geronimo because he told you."

"Never!" cried Black Bear. "Good-by, Geronimo. You have been a good father. Now Black Bear has no father, and no mother. He has no people, for he is not an Apache and he will not be a white man. But he is still a war chief of the Apaches. He is the only war-chief that goes upon the war trail.

"Now, I think, he is the only Apache left in the world. All the rest of you are whites, for do you not go to live with the whites? Only Black Bear lives like an Apache."

He wheeled his pony about and then turned on his blanket and faced Geronimo again.

"Good-by! Black Bear, last of the Apaches, war chief of all the Apaches, rides out upon the last war trail."

Down the rocky hillside toward the south the pinto war pony bore his gorgeous master, while an old man, seeing dimly through eyes that were clouded by unaccustomed tears, watched the last martial gesture of his once powerful people until pinto stallion and painted war chief disappeared into the blue haze that lay upon the early morning trail that wound southward toward Sonora.

Geronimo had surrendered! For the first time in three hundred years the white invaders of Apacheland slept in peace. All of the renegades were prisoners of war in Florida. Right, at last, had prevailed; once more a civilized nation had exterminated a primitive people who had dared defend its homeland against a greedy and ruthless invader.

Imprisoned with the renegades, and equally prisoners of war, were Apaches who had long been loyal and faithful servants to the government, but what of that! Who was there to defend a friendless people? — friendless and voteless.

Transported from the hot, dry uplands of their native country to the low, damp, malarial surroundings of their prison, the Apaches sickened and died; others, unable to endure confinement, suffering the pangs of homesickness, took their own lives.

And down in Sonora, in the inaccessible depths of the Mother of Mountains, the Apache Devil and his pet horse shared the hunting and the pasture with the cougar and the mountain sheep. They trod in the footsteps of

God, where man and horse had never walked before. No man saw them and, for months on end they saw no man.

Long since Black Bear had washed the war paint from his face. He was a hunter now, and upon the rare occasions when he saw other human beings he experienced no urge to kill them.

He had thought it all out during the long, lonely days and nights. Geronimo had made treaties with the Mexicans and with the whites. He had promised that the Apaches would fight no more against them. That treaty, he felt, bound him, for there were no other Apaches than he. He could not, as yet, think of himself as a white. He was an Apache—the last of the Apaches.

He promised himself that he would not kill again, except in self-defense. He would show them that it was not the Apaches who broke treaties, but experience warned him that the only way to keep peace was to keep hidden from the eyes of man. He knew that the first one who saw him would shoot at him, if he dared, and that thereafter he would be hunted like the coyote and the cougar.

"Only we shall know that we are keeping the treaty," he said to his horse, and the pinto stallion nuzzled his shoulder in complete accord with this, or any other view that his beloved master might hold.

Accustomed to being much alone though he was, yet the man often longed for the companionship of his kind. He conjured pictures of camps beneath the pines and cedars of his beloved Arizona hills, of little fires before rude huts of boughs and skins. He saw Geronimo and Morning Star squatting there, and with them was Black Bear, son of the war chief. These three were always laughing and happy.

Jinto came to the fire, and Black Bear's sweetheart. Sometimes these were little children, and again they were grown to young man and womanhood. He saw many others, squat, grim warriors; slender youths; lovely maidens, whose great, dark eyes looked coquettishly at him.

Most of these were dead. The others, bitter, sullen, had marched away into captivity.

Another figure came, but not to the camp fires of the Indians. This one came, always, riding a pony over sun-scorched hills. Black Bear took her in his arms, but she drew away, striking at him. He saw in her eyes, then, a look that he called the snake look. It made him sad, and yet this picture came most often to his mind.

He wondered if the snake look would come if she knew that he was white like herself. Perhaps she would not believe it. It was difficult for him to believe it himself. Had any other than Geronimo told him, he would not have believed it; but he knew that Geronimo would not lie to him.

Well, she would never know it. It was a shame and a disgrace that he would hide from the knowledge of all men as long as he lived. A white man! Great Spirit! What had Black Bear done to deserve this?

But, after all, he *was* white, he mused. From that fact he could never escape, and it was very lonely living in the mountains forever with only his war pony. Perhaps the white girl would believe him, and if she did would it not be better to go and live among the whites as one of them?

He recalled how he used to pity any who had been born white. It would not have been quite so bad had he been born a Mexican, for he knew that there was Indian blood in many of the Mexicans he had known.

It would have comforted him had he known that the grandfather of his mother had been a full-blooded Cherokee; but he did not know that. He was never to know it, for he was never to know even the names of his father and mother.

He tried to argue with himself that it was no disgrace to be white. Wichita Billings was white and he thought none

the less of her; Lieutenant King was white, and he knew that he was a fine, brave warrior, and there had been Captain Crawford, and there was Lieutenant Gatewood. These men he admired and respected.

Yes, it was all right for them to be white; but still the thought that Black Bear, war chief of the Apaches, was white seemed all wrong. He could not forget the pride that had always filled his heart because of the fact that he was an Apache.

He had been a great Apache warrior. As a white man he would be nothing. If he went to live among them he would have to wear their hideous clothing and live in their stuffy houses, and he would have to live like the poorest of them, for he would have no money. No, he could not do it.

He thought about the matter a great deal. The lonelier he became the more he thought about it. Wichita Billings was constantly the center of his thoughts. His mind also dwelled upon memories of happy camping places of the past, and it seemed that the sweetest memories hung about the home camps of Arizona.

His lonely heart yearned not only for human companionship, but for the grim country that was home to him. Something was happening to Black Bear. He thought that he was sick and that he was going to die. He was homesick.

"I could go back and die in my own mountains," he thought. The idea made him almost happy. He stroked his pony's soft muzzle and his sleek, arched neck. "How would you like to go home?" asked Black Bear. The pony, after the manner of stallions, nipped the bronze shoulder of his master; but whether it was to signify approbation of the suggestion, or was merely in the nature of a caress, only the horse knew.

Lieutenant Samuel Adams King sat beneath one of the cottonwood trees that stands in front of the ranch house of the Crazy B ranch, his chair tilted back against the bole of the tree.

Near him sat Wichita Billings, her fingers busily engaged in the work that was commanding their attention. She might have been embroidering her initials upon a pillow slip or fashioning some dainty bit of lingerie, but she was not. She was cleaning a six-shooter.

"It sure seems tame around these parts now," she remarked. "Do you know I almost miss being scared out of seven years' growth every once in awhile since the 'bronchos' were rounded up and shipped to Florida."

"I suppose you are cleaning that pistol, then, just as a sentimental reminder of the happy days that are gone," laughed King.

"Not entirely," she replied. "There are still plenty of bad hombres left; all the bad ones weren't Indians, not by a jugful."

"I suppose not," agreed King. "As a matter of fact, I doubt if the Apaches were responsible for half the killings that have been laid at their door and, do you know, Chita, I can't bring myself to believe even yet that it was an Apache that killed your father. We got it pretty straight from some of the renegades themselves that at the time they were all with Geronimo in the mountains near Hot Springs, except those that were still in Sonora, and Black Bear."

"Well, that narrows it down pretty close to one man, doesn't it?" demanded the girl bitterly.

"Yes, Chita," replied King, "but I can't bring myself to believe that he did it. He spared my life twice merely because I was your friend. If he could do that, how could he have killed your father?"

"I know, Ad. I've argued it out a hundred times," said the girl wearily, "but—that thousand dollars reward still stands."

"The chances are that it will stand forever then," said King. "Black Bear

didn't come in with the other renegades and, of course, you can't get anything out of them; but it is better than an even bet that he was killed in Sonora during one of the last engagements. I know several bucks were killed, but they usually got them away and buried them and they never like to talk about their dead."

"I hope to heaven that he is dead," said the girl.

King shook his head. He knew how bitterly she must feel—more bitterly, perhaps, because the man she suspected was one to whom she had given her friendship and her aid when he was bearing arms against her country.

He had not told her of his belief that Black Bear and the dread Apache Devil were one and the same, and he did not tell her, for he knew that it would but tend to further assure her of the guilt of the Apache.

There were two reasons why he did not tell her. One was his loyalty to the savage enemy who had befriended him and who might still be living. The other was his belief that Wichita Billings had harbored a warmer feeling than friendship for the war chief, and King was not the type of man who takes an unfair advantage of a rival.

Perhaps it galled this scion of an aristocratic Boston family to admit, even to himself, that an untutored savage might have been his rival in seeking the hand of a girl, but he did not permit the suspicion to lessen his sense of gratitude to Black Bear, or dim the genuine respect he felt for the courage and honor of that savage warrior.

For a time the two sat in silence, Wichita busy with her revolver; King feasting his eyes upon her regular profile.

"Things on the ranch running smoothly?" he asked presently.

Wichita shook her head. "Not like they did when dad was here," she admitted. "The boys are good to me, but it's not like having a man at the head of the outfit.

"Some of them don't like 'Smooth,' and I've lost several of my best men on that account. A couple of them quit and Smooth fired some.

"I can't interfere. As long as he's foreman he's got to be foreman. The minute the boys think I've lost confidence in him he won't have any more authority over them than a jack rabbit."

"Are you satisfied with him?" asked King.

"Well, he sure knows his business," she replied. "You'd have to hunt a month of Sundays before you found a better cowman; but he can't get the work out of his men. They don't feel any loyalty toward him.

"They used to cuss dad, and I've seen more than one of them pull a gun on him, but they'd work their fool heads off for him. They'd get sore as pups and quit, but they always came back—if he'd take them—and when he died, Ad, I saw men crying that I bet hadn't cried before since they were babies."

"That is like the Old Man," said King, thinking of his troop commander. "Gosh! How I have hated that fellow—and while I'm hating him I can't help but love him. There are men like that, you know."

"They are the real men, I guess," mused Wichita. "They don't grow on every sage bush."

"Why don't you sell out, Chita?" King asked her. "This is no job for a girl; it's a man's job, and you haven't the man for it."

"Lord, I wouldn't know what to do, Ad," she cried. "I'd be plumb lost. Why, this is my life—I don't know anything else. I belong here on a cow ranch in Arizona, and here I'm going to stay."

"But you don't belong here, Chita," he insisted. "You belong on a throne, with a retinue of slaves and retainers waiting on you."

She leaned back and laughed merrily. "And the first thing I'd know

the king would catch me eating peas with my knife and pull the throne out from under me."

"I'm serious, Chita," urged King. "Come with me; let me take you away from this. The only throne I can offer you is in my heart, but it will be all yours—forever."

"I'd like to, Ad," she replied. "You don't know how great the temptation is, but—"

"Then why not?" he exclaimed, rising and approaching her. "We could be married at the post and I could get a short leave, I'm sure, even though I haven't been in the service very long. All your worries about the ranch would be over. You wouldn't have anything to do, Chita, but be happy."

"It wouldn't be fair, Ad," she said.

"Fair? What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It wouldn't be fair to you."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know whether I love you enough or not."

"I'll take the chance," he told her. "I'll make you love me."

She shook her head. "If I was going to marry a man and face a life that I was sure was going to be worse than the one I was leaving, I'd know that I loved him and I wouldn't hesitate a minute; but if I marry you it might just be because what you have to offer me looks like heaven compared to the life I've been leading since dad died.

"I think too much of you, and of my self-respect, to take the chance of waking up to the fact some day that I don't love you. That would be hell for us both, Ad, and you don't deserve it; you're too white."

"I tell you that I'm perfectly willing to take the chance, Chita."

"Yes, but I won't let you. Wait awhile. If I really love you I'll find it out somehow; and you'll know it—if you don't, I'll tell you—but I'm not sure now."

"Is there some one else, Chita?"

"No!" she cried, and her vehemence startled him.

"I'll wait, then, because I have to wait," he said, "and in the meantime, if there is any way in which I can help you, let me do it."

"Well," she said, laughing, "you might teach the cows how to drill. I can't think of anything else around a cow outfit, right offhand, that you could do.

"Sometimes it seems to me like they didn't have any cows back where you came from."

King laughed. "They used to. All the streets in Boston were laid out by cows, they say."

"Out here," said Chita, "we drive our cows; we don't follow them."

"Perhaps that's the difference between the East and the West," said King. "Out here you blaze your own trails. I guess that's where you get your self-confidence and initiative."

"And it may account for some of our shortcomings, too," she replied. "When you're just following cows you have lots of time to think of other things and improve yourself; but when you're driving them you haven't time to think of anything except just cows. That's the fix I'm in now."

"When you have discovered that you might learn to love me, you will have time for other things," he reminded her.

"Time to improve myself?" she teased.

"Nothing could improve you in my eyes, Chita," he said honestly. "To me you are perfect."

"If Margaret Cullis hadn't taught me that it was vulgar I should say 'Rats' to that."

"Please don't."

"I won't," she promised. "And now you must run along. You know your orders never said anything about spending two hours at the Billings ranch this afternoon. What will your detachment think?"

"They'll think I'm a fool if I don't

stay all afternoon and ride back to the post in the cool of the night."

"And get court-martialed when you get there. Spurs and saddle for you, Lieutenant Samuel Adams King!"

"Yes, sir!" he cried, clicking his heels together and saluting. Then he seized her hand and kissed it.

"Don't!" she whispered, snatching it away. "Here comes Luke."

"I don't care if the world's coming."

"That's because you don't know what it is to be joshed by a bunch of cow-punchers," she told him. "Say, why, when it comes to torture, Victorio and Geronimo and old Whoa could have gone to school to some of these red-necks from the Pan-Handle."

"All right, I won't embarrass you. Good-by and good luck, and don't forget the message I brought from Mrs. Cullis. She wants you to come and spend a week or so with her."

"Tell her I thank her heaps, and that I'll come the first chance I get. Good-by!"

She watched him walk away, tall, erect, soldierly; trim in his blue blouse, his yellow-striped breeches, his cavalry boots and campaign hat, a soldier, every inch of him, and, though still a boy, a veteran already.

And she sighed—sighed because she did not love him, sighed because she was afraid that she would never love him. Lines of bitterness touched the corners of her mouth and her eyes as she thought of the beautiful and priceless thing that she had thrown away, wasted upon a murdering savage, and a flush of shame tinged her cheeks.

Her painful reveries were interrupted by the voice of Luke Jensen.

"I jest been ridin' the east range, miss," he said.

"Yes? Everything all right?"

"I wouldn't say thet it was an' I wouldn't say thet it wasn't," he replied.

"What's wrong?"

"You recollect thet bunch thet always hung out near the head o' the coulee where them cedars grows out o' the rocks?"

"Yes, what about them?"

"They's about half of 'em gone. If they was all gone I'd think they might have drifted to some other part o' the range; but they was calves, yearlin's, and some two an' three-year-olds still follerin' their mothers in thet bunch, an' a bunch like thet don't scatter fer no good reason."

"No. What do you make of it, Luke?"

"If the renegades warn't all c'ralled, I'd say Apaches."

"'Kansas' reported another bunch broken up that ranges around the Little Mesa," said Wichita Billings thoughtfully. "Do you reckon it's rustlers, Luke?"

"I wouldn't say it was an' I wouldn't say it wasn't."

"What does 'Smooth' say?"

"He allows they just natch'rally drifted."

"Are you riding the east range every day, Luke?"

"Most days. Course it takes me nigh onto a week to cover it, an' wunst in awhile 'Smooth' sends me som'eres else. Yistiddy he sent me plumb down to the south ranch, me an' Kansas."

"Well, keep your eyes open for that bunch, Luke; they might have drifted."

"Well, I wouldn't say they would of and I wouldn't say they wouldn't of."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JACK OF SPADES.

LUIS MARIEL, profiting by the example of the Americanos, stood up to "Dirty" Cheetim's bar and drank cheap whisky.

"Wot you doin', Kid?" asked Cheetim.

"Nothing," replied Luis.

"Want a job, or hev you still got some dinero left?"

"I want a job," replied Luis. "I am broke."

"You got a hoss, ain't you?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Come 'ere." He motioned Luis to follow him into the back room.

There Luis saw a tall man with sandy hair sitting at a table, drinking.

"Here's a good kid fer us," said Cheetim to the sandy-haired man. "He ain't been up here long, an' nobody don't know him an' he don't know nobody."

"Does he savvy U. S.?" demanded the man.

"*Si, señor,*" spoke up Luis. "I understand pretty good. I speak it pretty good, too."

"Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"If you don't, somebody'll shut it for you," said the man, drawing his forefinger across his throat meaningly. "You savvy?"

"What is this job?" demanded Luis.

"You ain't got nothin' to do but herd a little bunch o' cattle an' keep your trap closed. If any one asks you any questions in United States you don't savvy, and if they talk Greaser to you, why you don't know nothin' about the cattle except that a kind old gentleman hired you to ride herd on 'em."

"*Si, señor.*"

"You get thirty-five a month an' your grub, twenty-five fer ridin' herd an' the rest fer not knowin' nothin'. How about it?"

"Sure, *señor,* I do it."

"All right, you come along with me. We'll ride out an' I'll show you where the bunch is," and the sandy-haired man gulped down another drink and arose.

He led Luis north into the reservation and at last they came to a bunch of about fifty head grazing contentedly on rather good pasture.

"They ain't so hard to hold," said the sandy-haired man, "but they get a hell of a itch to drift east some times. They's a c'ral up thet draw a ways. You puts 'em in there nights and lets 'em graze durin' the day. You won't hev to hold 'em long." He took a playing card from his pocket—the jack of spades—and tore it in two. One-half he handed to Luis. "When a feller comes with t'other half o' this card, kid, you kin let him hev the cattle. Savvy?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Wunst in a while they may a couple fellers come up with some more critters fer you. You jest let 'em drive 'em in with your bunch. You don't hev to say nothin' nor ask no questions. Savvy?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"All right. Let 'em graze till sundown; then c'ral 'em and come down to the Hog Ranch for the night. You kin make down your bed back o' the barn. The Chink 'll feed you. So long, kid."

"*Adios, señor.*"

Luis Mariel, watching the tall, sandy-haired man ride away, tucked his half of the jack of spades into the breast pocket of his shirt, rolled a cigarette, and then rode leisurely among the grazing cattle, inspecting his charges.

He noted the marks and brands and, discovering that several were represented, concluded that Cheetim and the sandy-haired man were collecting a bunch for sale or shipment. Impressed by the injunctions to silence laid upon him, and being no fool, Luis opined that the cattle had come into their possession through no lawful processes.

But that they had been stolen was no affair of his. He had not stolen them. He was merely employed to herd them. It interested him to note that fully ninety per cent of the animals bore the Crazy B brand on the left hip, a slit in the right ear and a half crop off the left, the remainder being marked by various other brands, some of which he recognized and some of which he did not.

The Crazy B brand he knew quite well, as it was one of the foremost brands in that section of Arizona. He had tried to get work with that outfit when he had brought the pinto stallion up from the border for El Teniente King.

At that time he had talked with Señor Billings, who had since been killed by Apaches, but he had been unable to secure employment with him. Later he had learned that the Billings ranch never employed Mexicans, and while knowledge of this fact aroused no animosity within him, neither did it impose upon him any sentiment of obligation to apprise the owners of the brand of his suspicion that some one was stealing their cattle.

Luis Mariel was far from being either a criminal or vicious young man. He would not have stolen cattle himself, but it was none of his business how his employers obtained the cattle that he, Luis Mariel, was hired to herd for them.

Since he had come up from Mexico he had found means of livelihood through many and various odd jobs, sometimes as laborer, sometimes as chore boy, occasionally in riding for some small cow outfit, which was the thing of all others that he liked best to do. It was the thing that Luis Mariel loved best and did best.

More recently he had been reduced to the expedience of performing the duties of porter around the bar of "Dirty" Cheetim's Hog Ranch in order that he might eat to live and live to eat. Here, his estimate of the Gringoes had not been materially raised.

Pedro Mariel, the wood-chopper of Casa Grande, was a poor man in worldly goods, but in qualities of heart and conscience he had been rich, and he had raised his children to fear God and do right.

Luis often thought of his father as he watched the Gringoes around Dirty Cheetim's place, and at night he would kneel down and thank God that he was a Mexican.

Many of the Gringoes that he saw were not bad, only fools; but there were many others who were very bad indeed. El Teniente King was the best Americano he had ever seen. Luis was sorry that El Teniente had no riding job for him. These were some of the thoughts that passed through the mind of the Mexican youth as he rode herd on the stolen cattle.

Up from the south rode Black Bear. From the moment that he crossed the border into Arizona his spirits rose. The sight of familiar and beloved scenes, the scent of the cedars and the pines, the sunlight and the moonlight were like wine in his veins. The Black Bear was almost happy again.

Where there were no trails he went, unseen. No longer were the old water holes guarded by the white soldiers. Peace lay upon the battleground of three hundred years. He saw prospectors and cowboys occasionally, but they did not see Black Bear. The young war chief knew that the safety of peace was for white men only; he was still a renegade, an outlaw, a hunted beast, fair target for the rifle of the first white man who saw him.

He moved slowly, and often by night, drinking to the full the joys of the homeland; but he moved toward a definite goal and with a well-defined purpose. It had taken days and weeks and months of meditation and introspection to lay the foundation for the decision he had finally reached; it had necessitated trampling under foot a lifetime of race consciousness and pride; it had required the sacrifice of every cherished ideal; but the incentive was more powerful than any of these things, perhaps the greatest single moral force for good or evil that exists to govern the shape and destinies of man—love.

Love was driving this Apache war chief to the object of his devotion and

to the public avowal that he was no Apache, but, in reality, a member of the race that he had always looked upon with the arrogant contempt of a savage chieftain.

In his return through Arizona he found his loved friend, his pony, an obstacle to safe or rapid progress. A pinto pony, while perhaps camouflaged by nature, is not, at best, an easy thing to conceal, nor can it follow the trackless steeps of rugged mountains as a lone Apache warrior can; but, none the less, Black Bear would not abandon his last remaining friend, the sole and final tie that bound him to the beloved past, and so the two came at last to an upland country, hallowed by sacred memories that were sweet and memories that were bitter.

Luke Jensen was riding the east range. What does a lone cowboy think about? There is usually an old bull that younger bulls have run out of the herd.

He is always wandering off, and if he be of any value it is necessary to hunt him up and explain to him the error of his ways in profane and uncomplimentary language while endeavoring to persuade him to return. He occupies the thoughts of the lone cowboy to some extent.

Then there is the question of the expenditure of accumulated wages, if any have accumulated. There are roulette and faro and stud at the Hog Ranch, but if one has recently emerged from any of these one is virtuous and has renounced them all for life, along with wine and women.

A hand-made, silver-mounted bit would look well and arouse envy, as would sheepskin chaps and a heavy silver hatband. A new and more brilliant bandanna is also in order.

Then there are the perennial plans for breaking into the cattle business on one's own hook, based on starting modestly with a few feeders, to which second thought may add a maverick or two that nobody would miss, and from these all the way up to rustling an entire herd.

Thoughts of Apaches had formerly impinged persistently upon the minds of lone cowboys. Luke Jensen was mighty glad, as he rode the east range, that he didn't have to bother his head any more about renegades.

He was riding up a coulee flanked by low hills. Below the brow of one that lay ahead of him an Apache war chief watched his approach. Below and behind the warrior a pinto stallion lay stretched upon its side, obedient to the command of its master.

Black Bear, endowed by nature with keen eyes and a retentive memory, both of which had been elevated by constant lifelong exercise to approximate perfection, recognized Luke long before the cowboy came opposite his position.

"Hey, you!" the warrior called, without exposing himself to the view of the youth.

Luke reined in and looked about. Mechanically his hand went to the butt of his six-shooter.

"No shoot," said Black Bear. "I am friend."

"How do I know that?" demanded Jensen. "I can't see you an' I ain't takin' no chances."

"I got you covered with rifle," the war chief announced. "You better be friend and put away gun. I no shoot. I am Black Bear.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jensen. The one thousand dollars reward instantly dominated his thoughts.

"You no shoot?" demanded the Indian.

Luke returned his revolver to its holster. "Come on down," he said. "I remember you."

Black Bear spoke to his horse, who scrambled to his feet, and a moment later the pinto stallion and its rider were coming down the hillside.

"We thought you was dead," said Luke.

"No. Black Bear been long time in Sonora."

"Still on the warpath?" asked the cowboy.

"Geronimo make treaty with the Mexicans and with your General Miles," explained the Apache. "He promise we never fight again against the Mexicans or the Americans. I keep the treaty Geronimo made. I will not fight unless they make him. Even the coyote will fight for his life."

"What you come back here for?" asked Luke.

"I come to see Wichita Billings. Mebby so I get job here. What you think?"

Many thoughts crowded themselves rapidly through the mind of Luke Jensen in the instant before he replied, and foremost among them was the conviction that this man could not be the murderer of Jefferson Billings.

Had he been, he would have known that suspicion would instantly attach to him from the fact that Wichita had seen him near the ranch the day her father was killed, and that on that same day the pony he now rode had been stolen from the east pasture.

"Well, what do you think about it?" parried Luke.

"I think mebby so she give me job, but I not so damn sure about her father. He no like me."

"Don't you know that her ol' man's dead?" demanded Luke.

"Dead? No, I not know that. I been down in Sonora long time. How he die?"

"He was murdered jest outside the east pasture and—scalped," said Luke.

"You mean by Apaches?"

"No one knows, but it looks damn suspicious."

"When this happen?" demanded Black Bear.

"We found him the mornin' after you took thet there pony out of the east pasture."

Black Bear sat in silence for a moment, his inscrutable face masking whatever emotions were stirring within his breast.

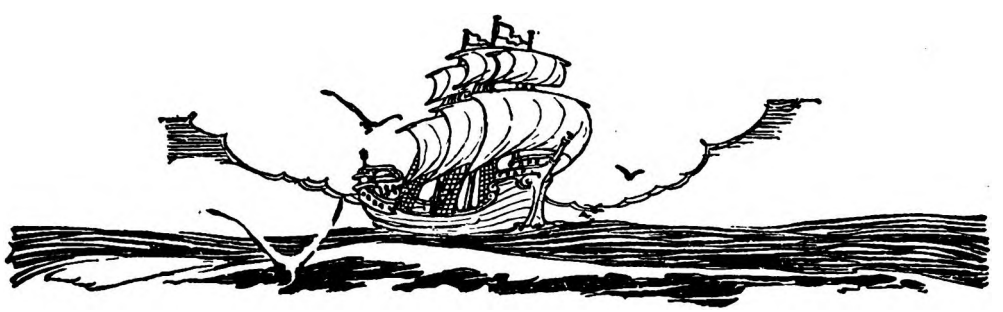
"You mean they think I kill Billings? Does Chita think that, too?"

"Look here," said Jensen kindly. "You done me a good turn wunst thet I ain't a-never goin' to forgit. I don't mind tellin' you I ain't never thought you killed the ol' man, but every one else thinks so."

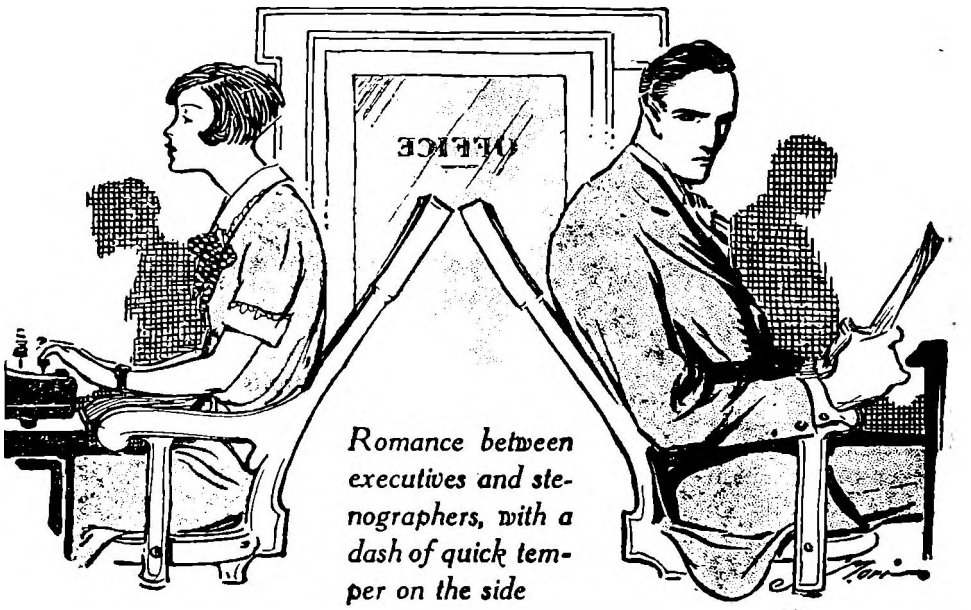
"Even Chita?" asked Black Bear.

"I wouldn't say she does and I wouldn't say she doesn't, but she ain't never took off the thousand dollar reward she offered to any hombre what would bring you in dead."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



Who's in Love?



Romance between executives and stenographers, with a dash of quick temper on the side

By CHARLES DIVINE

KEN STANLEY felt a slow flush mounting to his cheeks, and he squirmed uneasily on his chair. If it weren't for Phil Wainwright he would be enjoying this lunch completely!

Ordinarily, he preferred coming here to the Forty-Fifth Street Inn for the noonday meal. He liked the English muffins, he liked the napkins—not those paper ones that flew off your lap with cafeteria velocity, but tangible, capacious squares of linen that were perfectly stable—and he also liked meeting the other junior executives of Ainsworth & Co. around the festive ninety-cent *table d'hôte*—all except Wainwright, who was consistently superior to him.

What made Ken feel so desperately uneasy to-day was the turn of the conversation again to the girls in the office, directed into that channel by Wainwright.

"I haven't any use for stenographers who fall in love with their bosses," remarked Frank Hinchcliff scathingly.

Wainwright grinned and glanced pointedly at Ken.

"How about bosses who fall in love with their stenographers?"

"That's worse!"

Ken said nothing. He thought of Emily Hill, his secretary, and he couldn't keep that flush from mounting to his cheeks.

"How about it, Stanley?" demanded Wainwright. "If your secretary isn't in love with you, I'm no judge."

"Really!" exclaimed Hinchcliff, staring at Ken.

"I'll be darned!" remarked Dick Talbott.

The three of them were all gazing at Ken now.

"Don't be ridiculous!" he retorted.

He glared across the table at Wainwright and tried to put in his glances a

severity unnatural to him—a boy scout might as well have tried to look like a Bolshevik general. Ken's face was too youthful for murder, his eyes too candid. "Wainwright, I could poison you with pleasure at this moment."

The others laughed.

"I know the symptoms," went on Wainwright nevertheless. "Business woman? Bah! Every time I hear that phrase I want to laugh. A woman goes into business for just one reason—to push some man ahead and then marry him. Sometimes they marry him first and push afterward."

Ken knew that all Wainwright's remarks along this line were pointed at him, and that Wainwright's purpose was to indicate to the other men that Ken was an executive who didn't keep as clear a head as the others, as Phil Wainwright himself, for example.

Still, Ken felt powerless to defend himself. What could he do? He and Emily were *friends*. She was a girl any man might be glad to marry.

"She's no more in love with me than she is with—with a wooden Indian," he declared, but without the conclusive effect he wanted. "Of course, there aren't any wooden Indians any more, but you know what I mean."

Talbott smiled sympathetically and said:

"Well, when you promoted her from the ranks of stenographers to be your own secretary, you certainly picked the best looker in the office. That wasn't accidental, was it?"

"Because she's intelligent—that's why I did it."

Wainwright leaned forward to demand:

"Would she still be as intelligent to you, a bachelor, if she looked like Ben Turpin?"

"Yes, she would!" retorted Ken hotly. "I knew Emily Hill before she came to Ainsworth & Co. She's a college graduate, and I knew her brother in the army—he was in the Twenty-Seventh Division. I know something about her background. She's not like a regular stenographer."

Wainwright burst into laughter.

"No! They never are." And he laughed again.

Ken was furious. He would have liked to plant the plate of muffins in Wainwright's face. But, instead, his fists clenched tight around the napkin in his lap and he said nothing.

Inside, he was seething. He knew what Wainwright would do now. He would start the story going, and in no time it would be all over the office. It might even reach the ears of Mr. Ainsworth—and that would do nobody any good.

Later, parting from Wainwright, Talbott and Hinchcliff in the corridor outside their private rooms, Ken recalled how he had got into a mess with the Brazil leases just before lunch, and how Emily had offered to look them over. As he went to his desk he was aware of her white fingers gleaming on the keys of her typewriter, but for some reason he avoided looking at her.

What Wainwright had said still rankled in his mind. "Trying to make an office romance out of me! Let him try and do it!"

He caught a glimpse of Emily's determined little chin bent low as she watched the typewriter, but he was equally determined not to watch her. He wrenched his gaze away from that corner of the room, though more conscious than ever of Emily's neat blue serge suit and white collar.

He sank into his chair.

"You've finished them?" he asked with surprise, as he discovered the completed leases lying on his desk. "That's—"

He started to say "That's fine" in a natural burst of enthusiasm, but, remembering Wainwright's words, he changed it to: "That's all right, I guess," in a casual tone of voice.

A look of disappointment came into Emily's face. She glanced over her

shoulder at Ken's back and returned her gaze to her typewriter, brooding.

Ken didn't even ask her where she had got her information for the leases! If he had inquired he would have discovered that she skipped her lunch in order to go to the Graham National Bank and interview their South American representative. Bankers often had useful information on these foreign fields in which Ainsworth & Co. conducted their exploitations.

But no, Ken never gave a thought apparently to the trouble she had taken to get the information for him. He took it as a matter of course!

Emily tried to tell herself that she didn't mind ordinarily; his pleased expression was enough. And when he smiled at her in a certain whole-hearted way her heart always began to beat so fast that her breath caught in her throat.

Again she glanced over her shoulder at Ken's back and her eyes kindled warmly. The feeling she had for him was so overwhelmingly tender at times that it almost brought the tears to her eyes.

In his new position of general manager Ken now and then blundered with an energy that fascinated her; at the same time it caused her to take unusual steps to safeguard him from error.

She knew the senior officers were watching him. And one of the juniors, Mr. Wainwright, would like to get his job away from him. Wainwright played office politics pretty consistently.

"But he won't succeed if I have anything to do with it!" she told herself resolutely.

The telephone on Ken's desk jingled. It was Mr. Ainsworth, the president.

At once Ken clapped his hand over the mouthpiece and sent Emily an urgent stage whisper:

"He wants to know the South American exchange to-day!"

"Eleven in Brazil and thirty-two in Argentina," she replied.

"Eleven in Brazil, Mr. Ainsworth," repeated Ken, "and thirty-two in Argentina. You're very welcome." Ken hung up the receiver and breathed easier. "Good heavens, Emily! How did you happen to know them?"

"I get them every morning from the Graham National Bank. I call up as soon as I get in."

"That's—that's lucky."

Emily stared at his back again. Was that all the tribute he paid to her foresight!

II.

It wasn't the only time she came to his rescue in a critical moment during the next two weeks. One day he left the office, without warning her, at four o'clock, and at five he called up on the telephone to inquire if Mr. Ainsworth had been looking for him.

"No," replied Emily, "but how about the Whitney leases? They ought to go out by to-morrow's mail boat without fail."

The Whitney properties were the most important they had to deal with.

"Oh, the devil! I forgot. I'm playing tennis at the Seventy-Third Armory. I'll come right over."

"You needn't bother, Ken. I'll attend to it if you want me to."

It meant that she had to stay long after the others had left.

At another time she was alone in his office when his brokers called up to say that White Oil had taken a sudden rise and they would advise Mr. Stanley to sell. In a hurry!

But it was impossible for Emily to know in which of the adjoining counties Ken was chasing a golf ball this afternoon. So she told the brokers she would try to reach him—which she knew was impossible—and then called the brokers back and said: "Mr. Stanley wants you to sell his three hundred."

That night White Oil lost eight points. The next morning Ken came glumly into the office with Talbott,

who remained in the doorway to sympathize with him.

Ken seized the telephone.

"You needn't call the brokers," said Emily. "I attended to White Oil yesterday."

He paused with the telephone in his hand.

"What did you do?"

"I sold it at twenty-one and an eighth before it dropped."

In the doorway Talbott let out a laugh.

"Congratulations! Some people have all the luck in the world." He disappeared down the corridor.

Ken sank into his chair, relieved at receiving the good news.

"Emily, you're a wonder!"

She flushed. Her heart began to beat fast again. But his next words checked her.

"Did Miss Miles call me up yesterday?"

"Yes," replied Emily without animation. "She wants you to take tea with her at the Claymore Hotel today."

"I don't see it here on my pad," he remarked, staring in front of him on his desk. "Did you make a note of it?"

"No, you'll wear out your eyes before you find it there."

He wheeled around to face her, struck by her tone. When he saw her tense expression he was suddenly startled.

It was only a momentary look on her face, and then it vanished when she averted her head, but it was enough to make him think: "She's jealous of Katherine Miles!"

The thought leaped into place beside the recollection of what Wainwright had said about Emily being in love with him.

"What do you mean, 'I'll wear out my eyes before I find it'?"

Now, when Emily faced him again she returned his glance evenly, with a kind of provocative malice.

"I simply mean that I forgot to write her name down."

"You don't often forget engagements, do you?"

"No, Ken," she said, and added nothing more.

He saw her go back to her own desk and slip into the chair without another word. The line of her neck and shoulder caught his gaze, and he felt a curious excitement, just watching her.

He remembered all the days she had been sitting there, and how comforting the thought had been. Now, why in the devil did Emily disturb him so? She didn't use to.

Sometimes, lately, she made all his thoughts race madly through his mind.

"I'm not in love with her!" he insisted to himself, and resisted the thought violently. "Wainwright's crazy."

The telephone jingled, and he answered it, and found himself summoned to Mr. Ainsworth's office.

When Emily saw him go out, with certain papers in his hands, she told herself that it was about time he was getting them ready! Why did he waste any of his precious hours on an empty, affected person like Katherine Miles?

She was such a blah person. To Emily "blah" was the epitome of sickening pretension.

Again the telephone rang.

"No," answered Emily, and knew she was talking to Katherine Miles. "Mr. Stanley is busy at the moment. I'm sorry you can't talk to him." To herself she was saying, elated: "I'm not sorry at all!"

"Is this his secretary?" pursued Miss Miles's voice with a patronizing intonation. "This is Miss Miles. If you can't let me talk to him perhaps you'll be good enough to ask him if I left my cigarette case in his car the other evening. If not, I shall be obliged to put an advertisement in the papers."

Emily's hand tightened around the receiver.

"But I can't even ask him that now. He's in conference."

"Then will you write the message down and give it to him as soon as you can? You're Miss Hill, aren't you? I've heard Mr. Stanley speak of you. It was a silver cigarette case with a gold lining, and the monogram on the—"

"I'm sorry, Miss Miles, but we're so busy to-day that I can't bother to do that."

"You can't bother!"

"No, I'm sorry," said Emily, and hung up the receiver.

She was furious at the thought of Miss Miles dragging Ken off to tea every afternoon she could. In another hour she would be cooing at him again in the Claymore tea-room!

When Ken returned he flung down the papers on his desk.

"There are the leases. Mr. Ainsworth has gone out. When he comes in put them on his desk, will you? I've got to rush for the barber shop. If anything comes up I'll be having tea later at the Claymore. You can page me there if you need to."

He paused at the hat-tree near the door and looked down at Emily. "The name is Stanley. You'll remember it, won't you?"

The color swept into her cheeks.

"Oh, go to blazes!" she said impulsively.

Ken laughed at her and went out.

As soon as Emily picked up the leases she saw to her surprise that there were only two of them when there should have been three. Moreover, one of the two was not properly made out. It would be ruinous to let them pass in that condition.

Emily smiled grimly. Ken had run away to play with Miss Miles—and this was the result!

If she put the leases on Mr. Ainsworth's desk in this condition the president would raise a howl that could be heard for blocks! If she did this it would serve Ken right!

For an hour the temptation to make Ken suffer for his haste—and his interest in Miss Miles—came and went in Emily's mind, and just before five o'clock she took the leases in her hand and went to Mr. Ainsworth's office. The president was gone for the day.

A red spot burned in each of her cheeks as she stood at his desk, hesitating, with the leases in her hand. If she dropped them there Mr. Ainsworth would see them the first thing in the morning. Suddenly she let them fall on the desk, and turned abruptly away.

But when she went out into the street the air of the late October afternoon had a cooling effect on her. Fifth Avenue was briskly crowded with bright-cheeked faces, topcoats, and fur pieces.

The shadows of coming evening were falling from the rooftops. Emily slackened her steps. Her resolution to make Ken suffer weakened.

She was sorry she had left the leases on Mr. Ainsworth's desk now. She had been hurt, but why should she hurt Ken? He might lose his job.

The thought frightened her. She determined to find Ken at once and warn him about the leases, and since he had a key to the office, he could return at once, or any time during the evening, and correct his errors.

Perhaps he would take her back with him, and after the muddle was over he might ask her to have dinner with him, as he had more than once when they had worked late together at the office. The thought sent a glow of pleasure through her.

She turned and crossed Fifth Avenue and headed for the Claymore Hotel. This would mean dragging him away from his tea date with Katherine Miles!

She pushed through the revolving door and was immediately conscious of being received in an atmosphere redolent of thick rugs, orange-colored lights

in lofty chandeliers, and the coming and going of an opulent, indoor populace.

It was always like a stage world to her, this existence inside the marble walls of a great hotel like the Claymore. On one of the upholstered benches in a corridor, swarming with expectant men and women, she sat down and waited.

She tapped her foot nervously on the floor. Ken would have to pass here.

She could see past the mirror-screen into the hazily lighted tea-room where the parquet dancing floor glimmered—it was like a Venetian canal.

She waited with a feeling of growing excitement, and at length was rewarded by the sight of Ken's tall figure far down the corridor. Katherine Miles was already with him, and her doll-like face looked up at him eagerly.

The movement of people in the corridor, shifting, pausing, talking in low voices, suddenly formed a barrier of backs between Ken and the bench where Emily sat. She was hidden from him, and the next moment Ken and Miss Miles halted their footsteps close to her.

She could have reached out, between two fat buyers from Chicago, and tugged at Ken's coat. But instead she sat still, arrested by the words that floated from Miss Miles's rouged lips.

"Your stenographer was positively insolent! Why do you keep her, Ken? I think she's in love with you, or else you're in love with her. Both, maybe."

"That gives me a laugh," replied Ken, and an annoyed note came into his voice as he went on, while Emily sat suddenly tense on the upholstered bench.

Ken would never have dreamed of looking for her here; she was as safely surrounded by a mass of protective coloring as if she had been a tree moth in a virgin forest.

Ken looked only at Katherine Miles, and his look was not exactly a pleased one at the moment.

"Listen, Katherine," he said, "that's one erroneous idea that a lot of people get about offices—that business men and executives fall in love with their stenographers. They don't. They've got too much pride. I heard another man say only the other day that certain girls go into offices in order to push a man ahead and then marry him. But how often do you think it happens? I've never heard of it once." He laughed. "They may push. But they don't marry."

Emily's face was furiously white. She watched Ken move on, guiding his companion into the tea-room.

The orchestra began to play, crashing into its opening bars, and the jazz tune with its thump-umping of drums was like a series of percussion sounds beating painfully against Emily's brain.

She rose with her lips set tight. "I'll leave the leases right where they are!"

And she turned away to go home.

III.

THE next morning Emily was aware of a change in Ken's manner the moment he entered the office and jabbed his fedora on the hat-tree.

"Emily, I wish you wouldn't snap at my friends when they call me up during office hours—even though it's only about a cigarette case."

Emily sat stiffly in her chair.

"Did I do that?"

"So it seems."

"Well, how about my side of the story. I don't like to be patronized, even though it's only about a cigarette case."

"That's silly. Nobody was patronizing you."

Emily reddened.

"Is anything more silly than—" She broke up abruptly and left the sentence unfinished.

Ken stood over her, waiting.

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing."

Before he could speak again the

blond head of Anna Hastings appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Ainsworth wants to see you right away, Mr. Stanley."

"All right." He followed her out, his brows still knit.

Emily sprang to her feet and walked nervously to the window. The blow was about to fall—in Mr. Ainsworth's office.

She returned to her chair and tried in vain to sit calmly. Five minutes later, when Ken returned, she saw at once that he was angry.

"You were not only nasty to my friends over the telephone yesterday," he began—

"Friend," she corrected.

"But you were downright devilish to me—letting those leases go to Mr. Ainsworth when you must have known they'd get me in wrong. Why in Heaven's name did you do it!"

She stood up, trembling.

"To teach you a lesson."

He stared at her, dumfounded. Then the color mounted hotly in his cheeks.

"Why don't you take over the running of the whole company? And give everybody lessons in how to do their jobs! Do you think you're the boss here?"

"If I were, I'd pay more attention to business, and not try to run it from the Claymore tea-room."

"What I do at the Claymore is nobody's business but my own!"

Emily felt a choking sensation in her throat.

"Y-yes, you're right, I suppose," she faltered. "But what you do here is my business, and when it's affected by the other—"

"Oh, you business women! You women who go into an office and think you have to push some man ahead, and when you can't push him as far as you like, you turn against him." He strode to the door and back. "God, you must have had a fine hate on me to do a thing like that!"

"Hate you?" she echoed, gazing at him steadily, while she felt the blood pounding at her temples. "I—I've loved you!" and suddenly she burst into tears.

Ken stood stunned.

"You—you—"

He couldn't get any farther. He watched Emily's back and her trembling shoulders.

She was struggling to check her tears. When she succeeded she turned to him angrily.

"You men get funny ideas. You let your secretaries to do all the work, and you skip off to play golf or amuse yourself elsewhere, and because some woman in your office is conscientious, or—or fond of you, she keeps your work from suffering. You"—she hesitated, and caught her breath—"you're probably right about me: I *have* been trying to push you ahead. But you don't appreciate it."

"I don't need to be pushed."

"No, you need to be punched!"

She whirled about and closed the drawers in her desk.

"After that you'd better resign."

"That's what I'm doing."

He stood aside to let her pass, her lips set tightly, her head held high.

As soon as she reached the coat-room the line of her lips sagged again. Anna Hastings discovered her leaning against the wall, dabbing at her eyes.

"I knew you had a run-in with him," she said sympathetically. "I heard your voices. But don't let it spoil your beauty, deary. Men are terrible. Tell me, did he get fresh?"

"No—nothing like that."

Emily went out into the street, dejected. Her career at Ainsworth & Company was finished, and her dream of Ken Stanley at an end.

A week later she was settling herself in a new job at the Graham National Bank, where she had become known through her dealings with them on behalf of Ainsworth & Company, when she had interested herself in South American exchange.

The head of that department, a nice Mr. Simms, was glad to have her as his assistant. She soon became well enough acquainted with the details of her job to be intrusted with responsible matters.

Mr. Simms was polite, friendly, and appreciative, and he invited her out to lunch occasionally. As a boss he was an improvement on Ken, but as a man, somehow. he couldn't appeal to her as Ken had. Nobody could!

IV.

KEN was reminded of Emily in more ways than one. Things went bad since the day she left, and the other officers were quick to notice any change in his work.

But it was Dick Talbott who talked to him frankly about it one day at lunch at the Forty-Fifth Street Inn, when they were alone together at a table for two, and Wainwright and Hinchcliff were ensconced at a safe distance at another.

"Good heavens, Ken, you were a fool to let Miss Hill go!"

Ken lit a cigarette coolly.

"You don't think you're overestimating a woman's value in an office?"

"Not a bit! Don't fool yourself, old boy; those girls who take dictation and go through the files save us the necessity of getting a lot of detail information we couldn't do without. Get a girl interested in your job—which, incidentally, means getting her interested in you!—and you can let the job slide."

Ken bit his lip.

"That was the trouble," he finally confessed; "I did let the job slide."

"And you didn't have the girl interested?"

Ken shook his head.

"No, she was interested," he returned, and added thoughtfully: "Too interested!"

"Aha! Wainwright was right. She was in love with you."

"Now, for Heaven's sake, don't tell him!"

"I won't, Ken; don't worry. But you surprise me, what you say about Miss Hill. She was an extraordinary girl, I thought." He smiled. "It's very complimentary to you."

Ken wasn't smiling; he was troubled by a tangle of thoughts, by his failure to judge women, for one thing, particularly Katherine Miles, who had proved but recently to be a selfish, inane person.

Why hadn't he seen through her before? As a human being she was a complete flop! When he thought of all the time he had wasted upon her it pained him.

"By the way, Ken," came Talbott's voice out of a clear sky, "are you ever going to get married? You are the only junior officer who isn't a family man."

"Oh, for the love of Mike," protested Ken, "don't bother me with that problem now. I've got enough on my mind!"

"Yes, I guess you're right. I hope you don't have to take any more call-downs from Ainsworth this week."

"One more, and he'll probably fire me," Ken groaned.

"Well, just pull yourself together," advised Dick. "That's all you need."

"Easy enough to say," replied Ken, and got up to go out with him.

V.

EMILY was working at her desk in the corner of Mr. Simms's office at the bank one day when Anna Hastings stopped in for a moment, "bringing her the gossip from Ainsworth's," as she explained. It had to do chiefly with Ken, and Emily suddenly felt sorry for him.

"He hasn't taken an hour off in two weeks," said Anna. "He's the last one to leave the office now."

Emily's eyes brightened.

"Just what he needs!"

"Does he know you're working here?" asked Anna.

"No, but some day he'll find it out, I suppose." She knew that it was inevitable that the Graham National Bank, and especially Mr. Simms's department, would receive a visit from Ken some time. Their South American department had too much valuable information for Ken not to take advantage of it.

She wondered, after Anna had gone, if her real reason for having come here to work was the chance of meeting Ken again. She rejected the thought.

No, she told herself, she came here because it was a job, it kept body and soul together in a city in which they were frequently rent asunder, and she didn't care if she never saw Ken again! She was getting over that.

She didn't love him any more now. If he walked into this office this minute she could gaze on him with a cool eye.

And when he did walk into her office, a week later, she kept her word about the cool eye; she greeted him in a way so detached that her emotional nature might as well have been miles away! She was elated at her own offhand manner.

At first Ken revealed a look of chagrin; he had inquired, outside, for Mr. Simms, and had been told that he was out, but his assistant was in and would handle any inquiries in the meantime.

"I was looking for Mr. Simms's assistant," explained Ken, looking around the room, embarrassed.

"I'm it!" said Emily. She enjoyed Ken's discomfiture. "You've come to inquire about certain financial practices in South America in order to get your leases straight. That's it, isn't it?"

"Y-yes," he admitted.

"Sit down, Ken. I'll attend to them for you."

He found, however, that the matter could not be attended to unless he showed her the leases themselves.

"But I left them at my office," he explained lamely. "And I have to send them out by to-night's mail."

"You *would*," she said tersely, and reflected. "Let's see, I don't mind helping you; I have no ill feelings against you, nor any particular feeling *for* you any more." She saw Ken wince. "So I can help you without any obligation on either side. Let's see, to-day is Saturday, and it's already eleven thirty; we close in a few minutes."

"Yes, I know." He wasn't overjoyed at the knowledge.

"If you want to bring the leases to me this afternoon, you can meet me somewhere and I'll look them over. It won't take long for me to set them right."

"That would be fine of you, Emily—really wonderful!" he said gratefully. "What I'd like to do is to learn how to make these alterations myself."

She gave him a level glance.

"I see. You don't want to have to be dependent on a woman in the future?"

He flushed. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Let's see." She considered. "Somewhere around Grand Central, because I'm catching a train for a week-end at four. How about the Claymore Hotel? You know where it is, don't you?"

His color deepened still more. Suddenly he thrust his hands in his pockets violently.

"Can't we meet somewhere else? I hate that place!"

She glanced at him, surprised. What did this mean? That Miss Miles was no longer cooing at him?

Emily's heart began to beat quicker.

"All right. The Marlborough-Ritz then!"

"Can't we have lunch together first?"

"Sorry, but I have a date with the

hair-dresser. I'm skimping my lunch to-day."

He gazed at her, frankly disappointed, and his eyes seemed to say that her hair looked all right; how could it be any more beautiful?

VI.

When he met her at the Marlborough-Ritz Emily noted still further the change in him since she had left Ainsworth's, a change chiefly marked in a sobering anxiety. They sat in a lounge room, with two cups of tea in front of them, undrunk but as payment for the privilege of sitting there while they discussed business and turned the pages of the leases and made several alterations in them according to Emily's instructions.

For each alteration Ken wanted to know the reason, and stored it up in his mind for future use. He was alert to grasp every detail.

Emily saw, and at the end told herself: "He's going to make good!" It gave her a buoyant feeling.

He folded the leases and returned them to his pocket.

"Do you think I'll get away with this work? Am I improving at all, Emily?"

"Why ask me?"

He grew nervous, a new thing for him. When she picked up her gloves and said she would have to run along, he felt more disturbed than he ever had before; he wanted desperately to keep her from going, and yet he felt helpless to prevent her.

"Can't I see you again some time?"

"What's the use?"

"I suppose I was a terrible boss to work for, wasn't I?"

"Oh, well, I wouldn't admit it if I were you."

Her very casualness goaded him the more. Suddenly he was unable to keep back the thoughts that raced wildly through his mind.

He gazed at Emily and was aware of a curious and tender excitement. It made his hand grip the edge of the table tight.

"I *will* admit it!" he insisted. "I'll admit everything. I was an idiot, a blithe idiot."

"I'm glad you admitted the 'blithe.' That was a nice quality—if it modified the right thing."

"Don't laugh at me, Emily," he begged. "I've been going around in circles ever since you left me, and—and—" his eyes hovered over her appealingly—"every circle came back to you. I see now all you did for me, and I appreciate it at last. I said I was going to admit everything, and I am," and he seized her hands impulsively.

Emily felt the color rush into her cheeks, and knew that her heart was pounding again as it used to do when Ken was near her at Ainsworth's and she thought tenderly about him.

"Everything!" she echoed, and felt a little dizzy.

"Yes, everything—how I've loved you, and how I fought against it; I wouldn't admit it, Emily, even to myself.

"I thought it was silly and somehow unworthy—Phil Wainwright put that theory into my head, with his supercilious opinions; he didn't have any use, he said, for stenographers who fell in love with their bosses, or—or vice-versa!" concluded Ken fiercely.

Emily smiled happily.

"Which are we? Vice-versa?"

"I'm still in love with you, Emily—more so than ever. But now I'm willing to admit it—are you?"

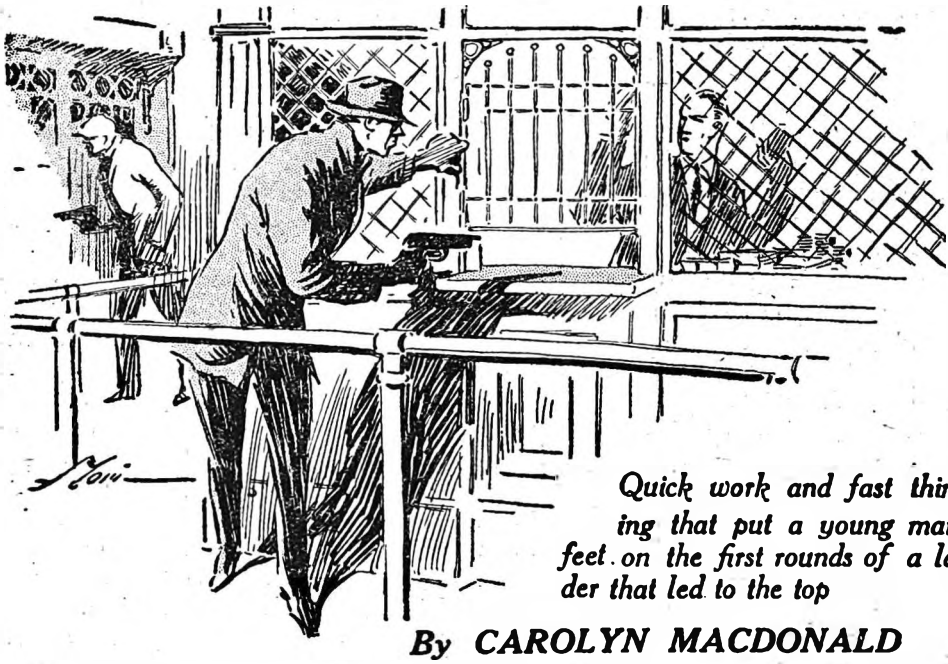
"Am I in love with you?" she pressed his hands tightly. "I thought I could get over it, but I can't. I've always been in love with you, Ken. That's the reason why I pushed you so hard."

He smiled back at her.

"You can keep on pushing."

THE END

The First Step



Quick work and fast thinking that put a young man's feet on the first rounds of a ladder that led to the top

By CAROLYN MACDONALD

"LOOKS like you're the big man in Rondout," Cousin Jim from off the farm remarked.

"Oh, bank presidents mostly hold their own in small towns," Mr. Rowley replied.

"How'd you get that way?" asked Jim.

"Evolution."

"Well, tell me about it," Jim suggested.

"Getting to be president is a long climb," Mr. Rowley told him. "It isn't the last step that counts, it's the first one."

"What was the first step that counted with you?"

"That's a story of my youth. I had been here a couple years as assistant cashier when something happened that put me in the limelight. Here's the story:

I had a wife and children and I wanted to have money enough to show them a good time, all of which presupposed a raise in salary.

Bert Dunlop was cashier at that time. Later, he switched off to the Bergen bank, thus leaving space for somebody else. But before that happened, I had a little experience that put my feet on the first rung of the ladder.

One afternoon, I was headed for the basement to empty the waste basket. It was closing time, and Bert was counting cash and waiting for the clock to strike three before locking the doors.

Returning from the basement, I stopped in the lavatory, off the directors' room for a few puffs on a cigarette. I could wet it under the faucet when I finished, and so avoid danger of fire.

As I stood smoking and looking through a window of the directors' room, a car drove into the back yard. This yard consisted of an alley connecting two streets, and beside it were

many piles of stove wood. Two men jumped from the car and disappeared around the corner of the bank. I paid no attention. I was thinking of my girl and the movies that evening.

Just then I heard a window shade being drawn, and a key turning in a lock. I knew it was the front door being locked. Thinking it was Bert closing the bank, I continued to smoke.

Presently, the door from the hall into the directors' room opened, then closed, and was locked. This was strange, as Bert never locked that door. I stood still and listened. In the banking room, a man's voice said:

"Push it across there, and keep your hands right where they are."

I heard the sound of money being shoved across the counter, then a snap of metal.

"I'll keep my gun on you on this side," the man went on, "and my partner'll meet you at the door of your cage."

I heard Bert cross the cashier's cage and unlock the door. Then, I judged by the sound, that Bert was escorted to the lobby in front of the cashier's window.

I hesitated. I had no weapon, and if I went where Bert was, I, too, would be handcuffed, for I concluded that was the snap of metal I had heard. Then the voice continued:

"There, I guess that 'll hold you for awhile, and this gag will keep your mouth shut. You'll be comfortable enough in that chair." He paused. "What'd you find?" evidently addressing his companion, whom I had heard come up the stairs from the basement.

"There's a door out of the cellar with the key in the lock, so we can go back that way, but we'll have to watch out, because it's right beside the main street."

I had an inspiration. I concluded that whoever had locked the directors' room had considered it vacant. I crept silently across the room to the open window, dropped to the woodpile below, then jumped to the ground. I hot-footed it to the car of the bank looters.

I had no time to puncture the tires or damage the car otherwise, for I knew the robbers would be on their way through the basement. I raised the cover of the baggage compartment on the back of the roadster, hopped in, and closed it, all but a crack for air. The woodpile covered the basement window, so they could not see me from there.

After a brief wait, I heard rapid footsteps, then the two men boarded the car and it started. Through the crack, I watched their route around the near-by drug store, then down Main Street. They turned by the river and headed for the State road.

I was doing some thinking. I had conjured up wild and perilous happenings since my work in the bank had begun, but I had never imagined a ten-thousand-dollar ride at the close of a day's work, instead of the usual waste basket emptying, for I knew Bert had closed with ten thousand dollars cash that day.

Out on the State road, their speed spoiled, for me, an otherwise good-looking landscape. Also, I was not so comfortable as the people in the front seat.

I was bareheaded and pillows were scarce in my berth. In fact, I had discovered that my head was pillowed on the tool kit. But I comforted myself with the thought that I was following the robbers and the ten thousand.

I would have them arrested and searched when they stopped—providing they did not bust a tire and come back for the tool kit. Well, even so, I would say I was just taking a ride. They had never seen me and they would not know who I was.

It seemed we had been traveling days when a sudden lurch told me they had left the main highway and were on a rougher road. I peered through the crack and saw they were in the woods.

They bumped along for perhaps a mile, then the car stopped and the two men got out. I watched cautiously.

"Got your knife?" one asked.

I shivered. Were they worse than bank robbers? Perhaps they knew I was there and were going to kill me. Instead, they took two suitcases from the car, and each carrying one, left the road and went off into the woods.

"We'll blaze both sides, so Red can't make any mistake," I heard one of them remark.

The other was carrying a strong box like I had often seen safe deposit box users bring to the bank. The ten thousand must be in this box. They would bury it and mark the hiding place.

They had spoken of Red. They were blazing a trail for him. These deductions passed through my mind as I watched the men.

They walked straight north, chipping the bark from the trees on each side of their path as they went. After a little they disappeared and I climbed from the car.

I was sore and lame from being doubled up so long, but I hobbled around to the south side of the machine and hurried through the trees in the opposite direction from that taken by the robbers. Not far away, I lay down in a clump of bushes where I was hidden, yet could see the car.

The men would return and drive away. I would stay to look for the ten thousand. I stretched out on the ground to rest and wait.

After a time, the men came out of the woods. They carried the packages they had taken with them, but no strong box. Instead of the presentable business clothes they had worn when they went into the woods, they now had on old working clothes, and walked and looked like workmen. They hurried to the roadster.

"We can't lock it, because Red ain't got a key an' he'll be in a hurry," the man who had carried the metal box remarked.

"Oh, I don't think anybody ever comes here," the other replied. "Road's closed at the other end. They closed it when the State road went through. Say, bo, when d'you figger Red 'll get here?"

"About daylight," was the answer as they started toward the main highway.

I watched as they disappeared along the wood road. I lay still until I figured they would be some distance away. It was getting dark, so I got to my feet and approached the car.

I went around to the north side of it and followed the blazed trail into the woods. I was going to find that ten thousand and return it to the bank. They would surely raise my pay for that.

I followed the trail as fast as I could for about half a mile. There it ended in a small windfall. In this open space, several small fir trees were trying industriously to fill up the gap.

I circled around the edge of the windfall, but no marks appeared on the trees. Next I examined the firs. They appeared innocent of any complicity in the robbery until I reached the center.

This one held in its arms, concealed by branches and needles, the strong box that had been carried from the car—but the box lay open and empty.

I was disappointed and discouraged. I examined the box closely, then stood with my hands in my pants pockets and stared at it.

The men must have taken the money with them—but they had said Red would be there at daylight. If the money were gone, what would he be after? The Ford, maybe.

On the other hand, their talk about a blazed trail and Red might be just a ruse to throw me off the track. Maybe they had known I was in the car after all.

However, somebody would come for the machine, and I decided to wait around and see what happened. It was

a long time until daylight, but then it was a long way home.

Again I looked for a continuation of the trail. There was none. It was now dark and I was not enjoying the woods, but I wanted a raise in salary. I went in among the trees far enough to be out of sight, then sat down to watch. After a time, I fell asleep and slept peacefully.

II.

MEANWHILE, when Bert Dunlop neither came home to supper nor answered the telephone, his wife insisted that the bank be opened. Entrance was finally effected through the basement door where the robbers had escaped.

Mrs. Dunlop, the bank president and Bert's brother, found Bert on the floor outside the cashier's cage, gagged, handcuffed, chained to the grating and unconscious. His brother knelt beside him and tore off the gag.

"He's alive, but unconscious," he told the others. "Phone the doctor, and somebody get the locksmith; I can't stir this chain or the handcuffs."

Several neighbors, who had been attracted by the excitement, went out the back door for this purpose.

"Where's Perce Rowley?" asked a bystander. "The vault's wide open, so the money must be gone."

"Perce wouldn't do that," the bank president said. "Look in the basement. Maybe they knocked him out too."

They searched, but found no sign of me except my hat.

At this point both doctor and locksmith arrived, and, amid much excitement, the latter freed Bert from chain and handcuffs. The doctor, unable to rouse Bert, had him carried to his car and started with him for the hospital.

When they had gone, the president made an examination of the bank to determine the loss, then telephoned the sheriff. After reporting what had occurred, he added:

"The doctor is taking Bert to the hospital at the county seat now. As soon as he's conscious, you'll have to get the details from him, because we can't find Perce Rowley to get any information from him. The robbers must have knocked him out or something.

III.

BACK in the woods, a sound awoke me and, rising quickly, I looked across the windfall. A disreputable looking man with a heavy shock of red hair was bending over the empty strong box. I concluded it had probably been the crackling of twigs under this man's feet that had awakened me.

From the box, Red went to the blazed trees, examining each one carefully. One after another he passed them. Suddenly, he stopped by a particular tree.

I could not see across the windfall, but I judged the blaze on this tree showed some mark, for all of Red's attention became centred in it. Buttoning his coat, he reached for the lowest limb and swung himself up. From there he climbed, hanging to the branches, until he was quickly lost to sight.

I edged quietly around the windfall, toward the car, keeping out of sight behind the trees, yet watching the tree where Red had disappeared. Presently I saw the man's feet, then his body descending the tree.

In his hand was a strong box, much smaller than the one in the branches of the fir tree. Evidently it had been carried inside the other. Red stopped on a large limb and put this box in his pocket. Noting this, I disappeared rapidly in the direction of the Ford.

Red came through the blazed trail, stepped into the car, turned it around and started toward the State road. When he reached it, he went faster; in fact, very fast. At the end of two hours, he entered a city and drove in beside a house. Here he was met by his confederates.

"Got it?" one asked anxiously.

"You bet I have," Red replied, as he climbed out of the flivver.

The three went inside, and again I lifted the cover of the baggage compartment and jumped out. Cautiously, I hurried out to the street and looked for a policeman.

I saw one at the corner, walking leisurely toward me. I rushed to meet him.

"There's three thieves in that house back there next to the store with ten thousand dollars they stole from the bank where I work," I said.

"What bank?" asked the cop. "Tell me about it."

Briefly, I related the details.

The officer got busy.

"Stick around," he said to me, "and we'll get some help."

We hurried to a police telephone at the next corner, and the cop reported to headquarters that I had run down the Rondout robbers. Then he turned to me.

"Just stand still and keep your eye on the house without looking at it. Don't let 'em think we're watching," he told me.

I straightened my hair industriously.

"Left my hat hanging on a nail," I explained.

After a few minutes, a car drove up and stopped. Six men got out.

"Detectives from headquarters," the policeman told me. Then, to the chief, he added: "The boy'll tell you about it," and continued on his beat, leaving me with the detectives.

Their inquiries were anything but brief. I had to relate every detail of the robbery from start to finish, including a minute description of the three men I had followed.

"That house," the chief detective told his men, "has no door at the back, as it is against that factory there. The only outside doors are the one in front and the one where the flivver stands."

He detailed three men to take positions just within the rear side entrance of the store next the house. With the two remaining officers and me, he loitered around outside the store in front.

For at least an hour, we waited and watched. Then the side door opened, and the three men came out.

Before they could get into the Ford, the detectives had them surrounded and handcuffed. In response to the chief's whistle, the patrolman on the beat arrived.

"Wagon?" he asked.

"Yes," the chief said, with satisfaction in his voice.

He searched the prisoners and three thousand three hundred and thirty-three dollars were taken from each. When the wagon arrived, he ordered it driven to the nearest bank.

"Thanks. That's just where we was going," Red remarked.

"You're going farther than that," the chief reminded him.

Then he turned toward me. I was standing on the walk.

"I'm going to deposit this money to the credit of the Rondout bank. Want to come along as witness?"

"You bet," I replied. "I was going to follow that ten thousand anyway, one way or another, and riding with these chaps seems to be my specialty," I added, climbing into the wagon.

"You're a cheerful youngster," the chief commented.

"Why not?" I remarked. "That ten thousand means a raise in pay."

At the first National Bank of Prattsville, the chief and I, accompanied by the two of the other detectives, got out of the wagon and entered, while the rest went on to the station.

Inside the bank, the chief made himself known to the president, Mr. Stacy, by showing his badge. Then he deposited the money to the credit of the Rondout bank, after telling the story and introducing me.

"When you get tired of Rondout, let us know," Mr. Stacy told me. "We like young men of your kind and would

be glad to put your name on file for a future opening."

"Thank you," I replied. "You can do that right now, if you pay more than Rondout raises me."

Mr. Stacy smiled.

"They'll raise you, but let me know if it isn't enough."

IV.

WITH the receipt for the Rondout bank deposited in my pocket, I arrived home that evening. I was met at the station by the band, and the whole population. I was carried on their shoulders to the bank.

"What's it all about?" I asked, enjoying it hugely.

"Ask Rondout investors," I was told. "It was their ten thousand you saved, and the directors and president are awaiting you at the bank."

"Where's Bert?" I asked.

"At the bank with his arm in a sling instead of handcuffs."

They deposited me on the bank steps with three cheers. Inside, I shook hands until my arm felt sprained.

"How did everybody know I found the money?" I asked.

"Prattsville telephoned us," the president explained. "The president of the Prattsville bank asked what you were getting here, and when I said two thousand, he said they would give you twenty-five hundred. So we hereby offer you twenty-five hundred. Is that all right?"

"Yes. I'd rather live where the band is on the job."

Everybody laughed.

"All true, nevertheless," the president said. "It's better to be a big toad in a small puddle than a small toad in a big puddle."

THE END

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How Safe is a Train?

"HAVE you ever killed a man?" a veteran railroad engineer was asked.

The engineer was climbing down from the cab of his locomotive to look her over in the terminal station, at the end of a run. The questioner was one of the passengers who had just got off the train.

The old "eagle-eye" glanced at his interlocutor. "Well, son," he replied, "I've killed them when they got on the track—but I've never killed anybody on my own train."

Then he looked affectionately at the famous express train he had just driven into the station.

The passenger happened to ask his question because he had just finished reading a newspaper, back in his Pullman seat, in which a railroad publicity board announced that only two passengers lost their lives in train accidents during the first six months of last year. That's a remarkable record considering the number of people transported every year by railway.

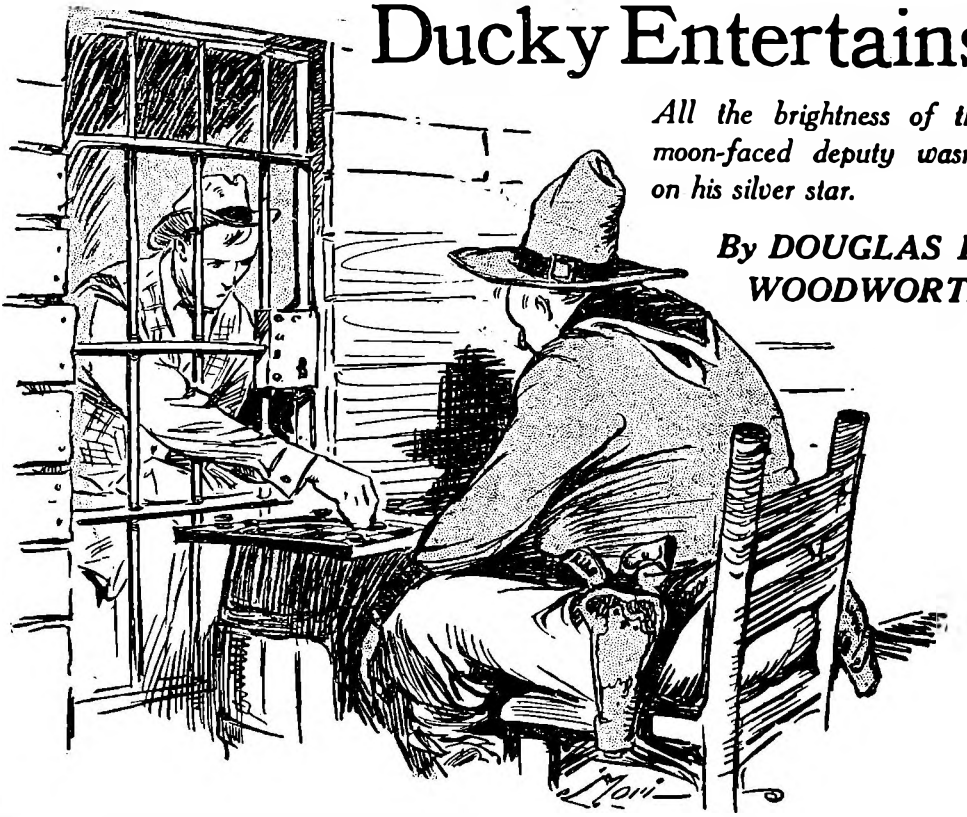
And it made the passenger remember, young though he was, that when he was a youngster, before the World War, the newspapers used to blossom out frequently with reports of ghastly train accidents which forced even the most notorious murder stories of the day off the front pages, by their horror.

In fact, some of the railroads became so widely censured for their carelessness of riders' safety, that two men who wrote a good war play had one of their characters who had been a locomotive engineer in civilian life claim that the hottest drive of the World War felt like a vacation period; it was so much safer than driving an engine back on the road he came from.

Ducky Entertains

All the brightness of this moon-faced deputy wasn't on his silver star.

By DOUGLAS H. WOODWORTH



"HELLO, Ducky, what's yours?" The moon-faced deputy of Silver Springs waddled to the bar, hitched up his trousers, laid a sweat-stained sombrero upon the battered wood, and wiped his perspiring face before replying.

No one looking at Ducky Drake's pink and white features and well-padded form would have guessed him to be fifty-two years old, still less would they have imagined that here was the shrewdest and most feared man hunter in the region.

His indolent, complacent manner masked a brain as keen and sure as a finely tempered blade, and his corpulent, slow appearing body gave no indication of the surprising strength and agility the man possessed.

Ducky returned his bandanna to his pocket and regarded the barkeeper in the Colorado mournfully.

"Jimmy," he said pleadingly, "I hankers fer somethin' tuh take my mind offen the cares an' troubles of my exactin' duties. I craves some hard likker, the kind that falls with a clatter an' lands with a bang. I'm plumb melancholic, that's what. Don't keep me in expense no longer."

The grinning bartender slid a bottle and glass across the battered "mahogany" and leaned his elbows upon the bar as he watched the fat deputy pour himself a drink.

"I'll betcha business is rushin'," he agreed facetiously. "What all yuh been pesterin' around at this bright mornin'?"

"Collectin' tacks."

"Collectin' taxes? You? Say, Silver Springs ain't needed a tax collector like you since Sittin' Bull was a calf. Quit stringin'."

The only other occupant of the room

—a tall, quiet, keen-eyed man dressed in "Eastern" clothes, standing at the other end of the bar—set down his glass and looked at the bartender.

"I wonder now—perhaps this gentleman could—"

"My mistake," declared Jimmy. "This here's Napoleon Drake—we calls him Ducky because he toes in an' waddles when he walks—an' this, Ducky, is Mr. Armstrong, of Milwaukee. That's some place back East. He is honin' to invest some dollars in more or less real estate in our fair parts. Gents, there yuh are."

Ducky had unobtrusively scrutinized the other upon entering, but now his moon face beamed full upon the Easterner as he held out a moist, limp hand.

"Perhaps I'm in luck," Armstrong said with a slightly superior air. "I heard you speak of taxes, and I thought perhaps, having access to the rolls, you could—"

"Mister, yuh got me wrong," broke in Ducky. "I ain't no Fairy-see goin' round collectin' any tax. It was tacks I got—t-a-k-s, see?"

Ducky, after a short struggle, withdrew from his pocket a box of carpet tacks and tossed it on the bar. "No, sir," he corrected, shaking his head dolefully. "Me, I'm only a pore paperhanger, but buh-leeve me, gents, if I ever gits the chance I'm gonna be a printer."

"Oh, I see," the stranger murmured politely. "My mistake."

"Paper-hanger?" Jimmy lifted an incredulous eyebrow.

"By cripes, yes! All the mail we gits is reward notices of hombres what never poke their snoots within a hundred mile of Silver Springs, an' I've plastered them up so thick in the office I tremble every time I go there fer fear the walls 'll cave in on me. I was jest thinkin' the printer what makes all of them notices must be some wealthy."

"I neglected tuh mention, Mr. Armstrong," the bartender bowed in mock gravity, "that Ducky here is our prized an' cherished deputy sheriff. One of the biggest in the glorious West, if I do say it."

The stranger seemed taken aback for a moment, but there was no doubt of his interest.

"Let's all have another, bartender," he suggested easily. "I am still certain that Mr. Drake can give me good advice about the purchase of land in this region. I suppose," he continued, turning to Ducky, "that you make quite a bit now and then, cashing in on those rewards, don't you?"

The fat deputy waxed sarcastic. "Yeah, we shore do. If I'd 'a' got the five hundred that was offered fer 'Squint' Sanborn last summer and jest five hundred more, I'd have a cold thousand now, I would. Who in heck would come out here in the open tuh hide, I asks yuh?"

"Who indeed?" agreed Jimmy sympathetically.

"On the other hand," went on Ducky, "there's what yuh might call fittin' e-mollyments. Them reward notices is the only funny readin' that comes tuh the office. Here, lissen tuh this one that come yesterday."

Ducky reached into the inside pocket of his vest, and his face went blank. One by one every pocket was explored without result.

"Guess I lost it," he sighed. "Well, it 'll save me the trouble of tackin' it up, an' I can remember what it said pretty well. Goes somethin' like this: One thousand dollars reward will be paid fer information leadin' tuh the arrest of Clarence B. 'Dandy Claire' Winslow, formerly of Chicago. This man is wanted fer the theft of diamonds worth over two hundred thousand dollars from a Chicago jewelry salesman. Believed to have headed West. Possibly the coast. Notify somebody or other at Chicago.

"Course they was other information included, sech as this Winslow feller had two legs an' a pair of arms, an'

he was a des'prit critter, an' so on. But if he was plumb foolish enough tuh come tuh Silver Springs, who would know him anyhow?"

"I have heard of this man Winslow," nodded the newcomer. "I understand he is a very dangerous rascal and would not hesitate to shoot at sight."

Ducky held up a restraining hand.

"Don't make it no worse," he begged, gulping down another glass of whisky. "By cripes, I'm so nervous right now betcha I won't sleep a wink tuh-night. I shore hopes none of them critters invade this here vale of peace an' plenty of heat. One more snifter, mister, an' I'll be on my way back tuh barricade myself in the office. Here's how!"

Armstrong barely sipped at his glass and set it down quickly as Ducky picked up his package of tacks and slapped his limp hat upon his thinning locks.

"About the land, now—"

"Come over tuh the office any time," suggested Ducky. "Come over right now, if yuh wanta. I ain't got much tuh do, now I lost that notice an' won't have to nail her up."

"Are you certain it's lost?" inquired Armstrong as he retrieved his satchel from the end of the bar and followed the deputy outside. "You see, I am locating land for a party back in Milwaukee, and I carry quite a bit of cash on my person. I would like to read an accurate description of this Winslow. Who knows, I might meet him some day?"

"If yuh did," declared Ducky, "yuh prob'ly wouldn't have a lot of time tuh bury no dust. Yeah, it's lost, all right. Must 'a' dropped it on the way up from the post office, an' with this wind she's halfway tuh Californy by now. Here's the office. Right tidy place, huh?"

The stranger surveyed the weather-beaten little jail building without enthusiasm. It was a one-story structure, standing alone in the hot sun a few yards back from the board sidewalk. Behind it was the stable where Sheriff Frank Parker kept the horses.

"It looks hot," he decided, "but I guess it's hot everywhere to-day."

Ducky nodded and sank down into an old swivel chair that creaked protestingly and threatened to emulate the end of the wonderful one-hoss shay. Waving a fat hand toward another chair by the wall, Ducky leaned back, placed both feet upon the sheriff's desk, and started to roll a cigarette.

"The sheriff, I take it, isn't in?" remarked Armstrong.

"Nope," grunted Ducky, searching for a match. "Frank and Nate Rossman—Nate is the other deputy—they went down toward Rosalie tuh serve some papers, an' left me plumb lonesome."

"Well, well. Only the prisoners for company, eh?"

"Nope. Nary a prisoner. Gittin' so dang peaceful hereabouts the jack rabbits make love tuh the coyotes. But a few year ago!" Ducky rolled his eyes dramatically and pointed to the wall behind Armstrong. "Mister, looka-there. Purty near every one of them lead slingers was took from des'prit bad men."

The entire side wall of the room was literally covered with firearms of all sizes and shapes. The stranger stared at the array in silence, while Ducky chuckled to himself.

The collecting of guns was Drake's only weakness. Almost every cent of extra cash he had scraped together had been put into these firearms, and Ducky knew as well as any one that the collection was now worth far more than it had cost him.

Guns, rifles, and pistols of every description were represented, from long-barreled flintlock Kentucky rifles to the latest model Winchesters, and from engraved dueling pistols to modern double-action Colts. If ever a man loved guns, it was Ducky Drake.

Now as the stranger stared at the wall the deputy unblushingly began the recital of the history of some of them.

"That there flintlock at the top, now," he declared, "that's the gun Dan'l Boone shot the coon with. Davy Crockett had the one next to it. Jim Bridger had that there hand cannon next tuh the corner, an' that six-gun with all the notches belonged tuh Sam Bass. Them two-hand guns with the rosewood stocks was old 'Chilled' Steele's, what lived down on the Diamond S south of here a piece. See that funny shaped Evans rifle there? Holds twenty-six ca'triges in the magazine. Dick Brownlee down in Arizony shot twenty-seven 'Paches with that one day without reloadin'. Yuh see, two got in line wunst."

Armstrong shook his head with proper awe, and behind his back the grinning Ducky continued:

"Yes, sir, I'm right proud of them guns. Jest one thing I lack. I never see one of them newfangled automatics I've heerd about. I'd give a pretty penny fer one of them."

The stranger turned to look into Ducky's innocent eyes, then smiled coaxingly.

"You're a collector all right," he declared admiringly. "Tell you what I'll do. Lead me to a good ranch near here that I can buy cheap, and I'll see that you get an automatic. How's that?"

Ducky's blue eyes opened wide.

"By cripes, will ya? Got her with yuh? Le's see it?"

"Yes, I have one with me," Armstrong admitted. "My brother gave it to me when I started out here. Silly thing to do, of course, but I did it for his sake. Here."

A little too smoothly for a novice, Armstrong's hand slipped under the lapel of his coat and withdrew a .38 army style automatic. This was tendered to the delighted deputy.

"Look at her!" Ducky gloated, turning the shiny blue pistol over and over in his hands. "Say, I'll take yuh down tuh the Steele place this very afternoon. Betcha could git that ranch cheap, now the old cuss is dead."

Drake started to return the weapon, then suddenly drew his hand back as if in afterthought, and glared at the Eastern man.

"Well, I'll be danged! 'Most fergot it. Don'tcha know it's against the law tuh carry concealed weapons in this here town? By cripes, I'll have tuh lock yuh up till Frank gits back."

Armstrong studied the fat deputy coldly for a moment.

"Don't be so anxious to complete that collection," he sneered. "Did you steal all the rest of them?"

Ducky looked peeved.

"Let me tell yuh, mister, I know the law, an' it says no concealed irons goes."

For several minutes the stranger sat thinking deeply, then looked up with a pleasant smile.

"I'll tell you what I'll do." Armstrong's tone was placating. "I could not give you that pistol, for it was a present. How about shipping it back to my brother and asking him to send another for you?"

"Can yuh play checkers good?" Ducky asked irrelevantly.

"Can I— Say, what's the idea? Of course I can play checkers. What's that got to do with it?"

"That settles it," Ducky declared, dropping his feet to the floor with a bang. "Gotta lock yuh up till Frank gits back. Ain't had a decent game of checkers since old man Ambrose died last winter."

Armstrong sprang to his feet, his face white with righteous indignation.

"What kind of a damn fool are you?" he roared. "Think for a minute you can put that kind of a game over on me?"

"There, there," soothed Ducky. "'Twon't be but fer a little while, an' I got orders tuh lock up every gazabo that's packin' concealed weapons till

the sheriff looks into the case. Yuh'll jest git a dinner on the county an' have a chanst to rest up some from yore travels."

The fat deputy drew his long .45, and waved Armstrong toward the open door that led to the back room, where two empty cells were waiting.

The stranger looked at the weaving gun muzzle and remembered the generous libations Ducky had been enjoying. Then he turned sullenly and headed for the indicated doorway.

Might as well humor this half-baked old fool; no telling what he might do. When the sheriff came he could get even easily enough.

Ducky picked up the Easterner's bag, opened it, glanced casually at the contents, and slid it along the cell floor after his prisoner. The door clanged shut.

"There," said Ducky. "Now I'll git the checker board."

"Wait a minute," called Armstrong. "You aren't going to steal that automatic, are you? Let me send it home, and honest to God I'll have my brother send you another. Give me a box and let me wrap it up."

Ducky chuckled silently to himself as he turned his back and searched diligently through a cupboard in the corner.

Presently he returned with a cigar box and an old piece of wrapping paper. Dropping the pistol into the box, he slid it between the bars and turned to leave.

"Fix it up yoreself," he called over his shoulder. "I can't be bothered with yore troubles. Gotta find the checker board."

Armstrong looked at him curiously.

"Did you ever stop to think," he said softly, "that with this gun I could shoot you where you stand?"

Ducky paused and looked back.

"Nope," he admitted, "I never did, but wouldn't the sheriff be mighty peeved if he come back an' saw his best deputy shot an' the killer behind the bars waitin' fer him? Besides, I took all the ca'triges out?"

With that parting shot Ducky strolled into the office and began rummaging in the cupboard again. When he returned it was with a stool, a chair and the checkers.

The stool he placed next the cell door, upon it he laid the checker board, then waved for his prisoner to draw up his chair.

"Give me yore package first," he advised. "Dassent let Frank come back an' find it in the cell with yuh."

"I haven't a pen to put on the address," Armstrong objected.

"Tha's all right. Yuh can put that on at the post office when we go out fer dinner. I'll take the blacks 'cause I'm used to 'em. They're one short, an' I hafta use a pants button. You move first."

Ducky left his opponent arranging the checkers and carried the box into the office. Then he returned, and the two men settled down to their game. Armstrong caught something of the humor of the situation, and smiled as he pitted his skill against the wily Ducky.

What a story this would make when he got back and told the bunch! He was wearing a puzzled frown after Ducky had beaten him three straight games, but the fat deputy laughed happily and laid out his men again.

"I'm getting hungry," Armstrong said suddenly. "Can't we go and get some dinner?"

Ducky looked at his great silver watch. "By cripes, that's right. Almost noon. Wait till I go feed the horses an' I'll take you down tuh the Chink's."

The Easterner waited with what patience he could, but he would have been more than surprised if he could have watched Ducky as the deputy gave the horses their noon meal.

"Was kinda expectin' Frank back before dinner," Ducky remarked as he reëntered.

"Then let's hurry," Armstrong said with a nervous grin. "I'd like to make the county buy at least one meal before I'm let go, just to pay for this foolishness."

As they passed through the little office Armstrong retrieved his box from the desk.

"Let's mail this first," he suggested. "Won't have to carry it all around."

"All right," agreed Ducky. "But buh-leeve me, mister, it 'll take a lot of cash tuh mail that heavy box. Better leave it in the office safe till Frank gits here."

"And have you steal that automatic? I guess not!"

Ducky chuckled again as he led the way to the musty post office.

"What time does the next train leave Silver Springs?" Armstrong asked of the dour old postmaster as the latter stamped and registered the package."

"'Bout fifteen minutes. Yuh shore got here jest under the wire. This 'll cost yuh three seventy-five. What's the value?"

"Fifty dollars," answered the Milwaukee man promptly; and Ducky grinned.

"Do them dang things cost that much?" he asked, round-eyed. "By cripes. Betcha yore brother won't send me one after all. Well, let's hunt up the Chink an' crawl around a snack."

After a generous meal the two men returned to the jail, and Ducky insisted that Armstrong be locked up again.

"I take a nap every afternoon," he explained, "an' I don't want yuh runnin' out on me."

"Then let's play checkers," growled the Easterner. "I'm going to skunk you if it takes all the afternoon."

They were in the middle of their fifth game and Armstrong was still seeking revenge, when Sheriff Parker and his other deputy entered the office.

"How are yuh, travelers?" Ducky called over his shoulder. "Take off yore hats an' rest yore faces an' hands."

"Whatcha doin'?" asked the sheriff, entering the cell room. Then his glance fell upon Armstrong, and he paused, staring at the prisoner.

"Well, I'll be—" he breathed, drawing a reward notice from his pocket and comparing the printed picture with the man in front of him. Armstrong had leaped to his feet, his face twisted with rage.

"Good Lord, Ducky!" Parker cried. "Do you know who you've got? That is Dandy Claire Winslow, shore as I'm a foot high!"

"Kinda figgered it was," admitted Ducky calmly. "Don't git excited in this heat, Frank. He's safe, ain't he?"

"You dirty skunk!" Winslow bellowed, shaking his fist at the placid deputy. "You said you lost that notice. You tricked me into—"

Anger choked the prisoner into speechlessness.

"Up tuh yore old tricks again, eh, Ducky?" Parker grinned. "Now, what was it?"

"Aw, shucks!" the fat deputy defended himself. "If I'd 'a' let on, where'd our checker games been?"

"One thing," snarled the prisoner, coming close to the bars and pointing a triumphant finger at Ducky. "You missed out on the best part of it, you cheap crook. They can't do much to me if they can't find the swag. Know where it is? In that box I mailed! The train is gone. Know the address on the box? Try and git it, damn you!"

"Nope, I don't know the address yuh put on that box," admitted Ducky, packing the checkers away. "But I was honin' tuh git that gun fer my collection, so I rung in a cold deck on yuh. Yore stuff is safe in the cupboard, an' yuh paid three dollars and seventy-five cents tuh send a box of pebbles back East!"

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