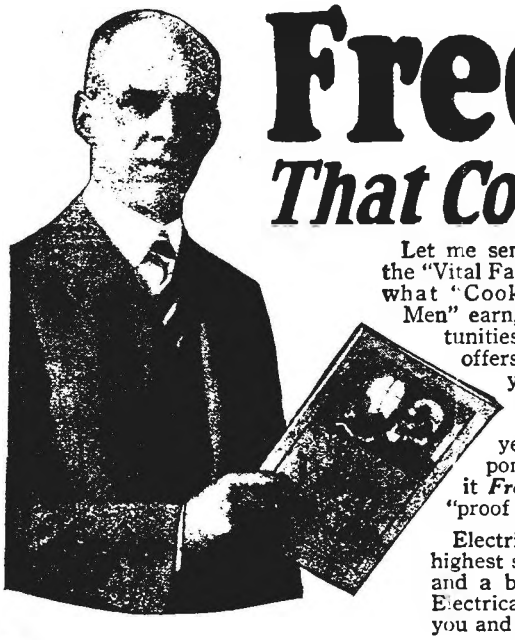
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Florence M. Pettee's

The Mystery of Voodoo Manor

13 The Sign of Bad Luck

10¢ PER COPY JULY 21 BY THE YEAR $4.00



Free Proof

That Cooke Trained Men

Let me send you Free, the "Vital Facts" showing what "Cooke Trained Men" earn, the opportunities Electricity offers and how you, too, can earn $3,500 to $10,000 a year. The coupon will bring it *Free* — a whole "proof package."

DO Earn $3,500 to $10,000 A Year

Electrical Experts — Trained Men are in big demand at the highest salaries ever known. The opportunity for advancement and a big success are unlimited — positively unlimited. The Electrical Industry faces a big shortage of trained men. It needs you and will pay you well.

What's Your Future?

It's a shame for you to earn less than $100.00 a week. You ought to earn more. You can do it too, when you are backed up with my training — the training that makes "Big Pay Men," Don't be content with an ordinary job paying anywhere from $3 to $10.00 a day, with no future to speak of. Strike right out —hold the job you've got and prepare for a better one—prepare for a "he man's job" in the $3500 to $10,000 a year class in the greatest profession in the world. I will show you the way.

Radio Course FREE

My new $45.00 Radio Course, just completed given *Free* when you enroll for the Electrical Course. Two courses for the price of one. Two professions open to you.

Be an Electrical Expert and Get This Big Pay Yourself

Today even the ordinary electrician, the screw driver kind, is making money —big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to boss the ordinary electricians—to boss the big jobs—the jobs that pay $70.00 to $200.00 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big jobs—*Begin Now.*

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough, and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

I Give You A Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to get the best positions at the highest salaries. Hundreds of my students are now earning $3,500 to $10,000 a year. Many are now successful ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed.

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my course you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit—FREE

I give each student a Splendid Outfit of Electrical tools. Materials and Measuring Instruments absolutely FREE. I also supply them with drawing Outfit, examination paper, and many other things that other schools don't furnish. You do PRACTICAL WORK—AT HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way.

Get Started Now—Mail Coupon

I want to send you my package of "Vital Facts" including Electrical Book and Proof Lessons FREE. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Mail the coupon—NOW.

L. L. Cook, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
Dept. 517-B. **2150 Lawrence Ave.**
Chicago, Illinois.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works

Dept. 517-B. **2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.**

Dear Sir:—Send at once the "Vital Facts" containing Sample Lessons, your Big Book and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIII | CONTENTS FOR JULY 21, 1923 | NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

MYSTERY meets mystery and puzzle succeeds puzzle when Arthur Tower, who appears to be a sedate young scientist, answers a peculiarly worded advertisement. Perhaps it all might not have happened had not Arthur stopped on his way to see a girl—but the girl was well worth seeing!

A HATFUL OF TROUBLE

BY FRANK BLIGHTON

a five-part serial full of perplexity and action, starts next week.

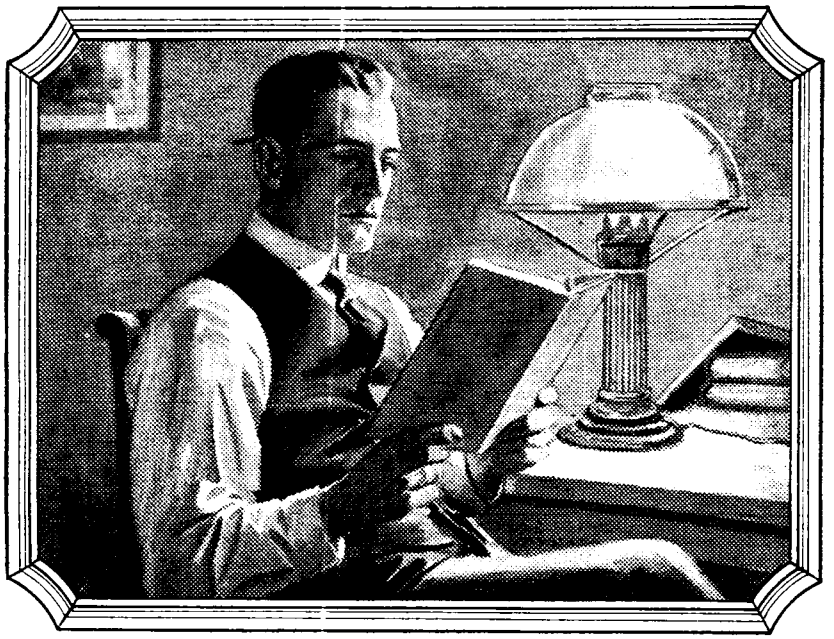
THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



$95 An Hour!

"Every hour I spent on my I. C. S. Course has been worth $95 to me! My position, my $5,000 a year income, my home, my family's happiness—I owe it all to my spare time training with the Scranton Schools!"

Every mail brings letters such as this from some of the thousands of I. C. S. students. For 31 years, in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—men have been winning promotion and increased salaries through spare time study with the I. C. S. Over 180,000 men are getting ready *right now* for bigger jobs ahead.

What are *you* doing with the hours after supper? Can you afford to let them slip by unimproved when you can easily make them mean so much?

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps, or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply written, wonderfully illustrated I. C. S. lessons make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best. Yes, it will! Put it up to *us* to prove it. Mark and mail this coupon *now!*

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2200-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Foreign Trade
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Business Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Blue Print Reading
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Plumbing and Heating
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining	☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines	☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street
Address..... 3-27-23
City..... State.....
Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AT LAST—World's Greatest Adding Machine. Almost human. Retails $15; work equals $300 machine. $500 monthly easily made, demonstrating to stores, offices, garages, factories. Simple, easy; adds, subtracts, multiplies, divides, automatically. Speedy, accurate, durable, handsome. Five year guarantee. Tremendous demand; amazing profits. Liberal trial offer. Protected territory. Write quick. Lightning Calculator Corp., Dept. A, Grand Rapids, Mich.

PORTRAIT AGENTS: Our goods will make you big profits. Delivery guaranteed. Rejects credited. Prompt shipments. Send for latest catalog and prices. ADAM J. KROLL & CO., 600 Blue Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: $60 a week selling guaranteed hosiery for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles and colors, including finest line of silk hose. Mrs. McClure makes over $2000 a year. Mrs. Schurman averages $60 a month working spare time. Geo. Noble made $35 in one day. Write for sample outfit. THOMAS MFG. CO., Class 507, Dayton, Ohio.

SIDELINE SALESMEN WANTED; sell coal to your trade in carload lots. Earn week's pay in an hour. WASHINGTON COAL CO., Stock Yards Station, Dept. T, Chicago.

Men & Women—Everywhere make $3 per hour and more!! Sell Iron Board Covers, Rubber Aprons, Shopping Bags, Embroidered Aprons, Sateen Coverall Dresses. Free Sample offer! American Braiding Co., Dept. A, 329 W. Monroe, Chicago.

"$10 A DAY AND MORE," our new book, shows clearly how you may gain sure success and large profits selling Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear, factory to family. It is Free. Write today. C. & D. CO., 13-E Grand Rapids, Mich.

Agents $60—$200 a week FREE SAMPLES Gold Sign Letters for Store Fronts and Office Windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand everywhere. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427-A North Clark St., Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS. Beginners can make $100.00 weekly with my canvassing spiel, experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN, Dept. A, 673 Madison, Chicago.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

AGENTS. MEN OR WOMEN. Year round position. No layoffs. Take orders for Jennings New Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear and give satisfaction or replaced free. Write for outfit. Jennings Mfg. Co., Dept. 109, Dayton, Ohio.

$45 TO $75 WEEKLY—MEN—WOMEN, business in your home. Attractive new proposition. CLEVELAND SCHOOL OF SALESMANSHIP AND MAIL ORDER GUIDE CO., Zanesville, Ohio.

AGENTS—Send for sworn proof of $5 to $15 daily, introducing new style guaranteed hosiery; 57 styles, 17 colors; no capital or experience required. Just write orders. We deliver and collect. Your pay daily, also monthly bonus. Free auto offer besides. Complete outfit furnished. All colors—grades including silks. Mac-O-Chee Mills Co., Desk 2701, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS:—Stop Wishing, work you can make $10 Daily selling Articles everybody needs. Particulars Free. Write B. & G. RUBBER COMPANY, Dept. 339, Pittsburgh, Pa.

$15.00 A DAY TO AGENTS, taking orders during spare time, from friends and neighbors, for our fine made-to-measure clothes. You get your own clothes at inside wholesale prices. Write today for BIG FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT. Full details will be sent at once FREE. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. U-304, Chicago, Ill.

SELL SOMETHING NINE OUT OF TEN WOMEN WILL BUY because it saves double its cost the day it is bought. 50c each. $2.00 profit on $3.00 sales. PREMIER MFG. CO., Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

SEND ME YOUR SHORT STORIES AND PHOTOPLAY PLOTS. I'll Revise, Typewrite in proper technical form and place on the market. Send manuscript or write H. L. HURSH, Dept. 4, 210 Muench St., Harrisburg, Pa.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy **now!** Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

$10 TO $50 DOWN STARTS YOU ON 20, 40, OR 80 ACRES: NEAR THRIVING CITY IN LOWER MICH; bal. long time. Investigate this opportunity. Write today for big booklet free. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED—Tailoring salesmen, make $60 to $125 per week. Biggest merchants in many towns have started with our lines. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics and guarantee absolute satisfaction, perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sales. Write me for line and all accessories to be sent free. Tell us all about yourself. ADDRESS A. B. AGARD, SALES MANAGER, BOX 483, CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

HERE'S A BUSINESS—Requires only table room. We start and help build business. Work for us painting Landscape photo print pictures. No experience, outfit furnished. Free literature. TANGLEY COMPANY, 193 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

ORANGEADE in Powder—just add cold water—most delicious drink you ever tasted. Fine for home, parties, Picnics, dances, etc. Send dime for ten glass pkg., or 50c for 7 kinds (70 big glassfuls) Cherry, Grape, Strawberry, etc., postpaid with particulars how to make **Big Money.** CHAS. MORRISSEY CO., 4417-29 Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $20.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

WONDERFUL INVENTION—Eliminates all needles for phonographs. Saves time and annoyance. Preserves records. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects. $15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 712, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

SELL GUARANTEED HOSIERY, lowest prices. Samples FREE. New patented demonstrator sample case that guarantees 50 per cent more sales. JOSEPH BROS., 56D Burnside Ave., New York.

HELP WANTED

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LTD., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60, willing to accept Government Positions, $117—$190, traveling or stationary. Write Mr. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITIONS GUARANTEED AFTER 3 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30, STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. LUDWIG, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

$100 TO $300 A WEEK. Men with slight knowledge of motors who can reach car owners can earn $300 weekly without making a single sale. If they can also make sales their profits may reach $25,000 yearly. ONLY PROPOSITION OF ITS KIND EVER OFFERED. T. F. PHILLIPS, 1904 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO $400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID. WE PLACE MEN AND WOMEN; TRAINED IN SPARE TIME AT HOME FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVE POSITIONS. EASY TERMS. FREE BOOKLET. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN $10 TO $15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

What Do *You* Call an Opportunity?

IN my lifetime I have heard many men speak of opportunity. I have read some very fine definitions of this wonder-word. It has been the subject of many splendid speeches; authors have written abundantly about it in prose and poetry.

You have said, "I wish I had an opportunity."

But I am wondering what you call an opportunity.

Do you—as so many do—mistakenly associate it with "good fortune" or "good luck"?

Suppose tomorrow you heard of a $10,000 position seeking a man. Could you fill it? If so, it would be an opportunity. If not, it would be no opportunity at all so far as you are concerned. It would be merely a bit of information from which you could not benefit.

Opportunity, I believe, is usually a recognition of worth.

The biggest opportunity that can ever come to you will never be any bigger than your preparation—your worth-whileness.

If you are not worth considering, Opportunity won't give you a thought.

The biggest job of all the big jobs open and filled in the last twenty-four hours would have been an opportunity for you—

—*if* you had been prepared.

And I am not one who believes that Opportunity knocks but once.

The hundreds of opportunities which are here to-day will come again to-morrow—

—if you are *prepared.*

But you can be sure they will never be found on the door-steps of worthless prospects—men who are not ready.

Opportunity seeks and finds only those who have paid the price of preparation. She does not pick men as you pick a number from a lottery; neither does she cover up what she has to offer. Her gifts are an open book—yours from which to choose.

Pick the thing you want, and get ready for it. Opportunities do not come except as you attract them. LaSalle training offers a sure way to increase your powers of attraction.

Just bear in mind that the biggest opportunity that can ever come to you will never be greater than your *preparation.*

HOME-STUDY COURSES
THAT LEAD TO BUSINESS CAREERS

President LaSalle Extension University of Chicago, Illinois

LaSalle Extension University

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World

—*INQUIRY COUPON*—

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY Dept. 732-R CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your booklet, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

- ☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales and Executive positions.
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for Sales and Advertising Executives, Solicitors, Sales Promotion Managers, Salesmen, Manufacturers' Agents and all those engaged in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for positions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
- ☐ **Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic:** Training for positions as Railroad or Industrial Traffic Manager, etc.
- ☐ **Law:** Training for Bar; LL. B. Degree.
- ☐ **Railway Station Management:** Training for Railway Auditors, Comptrollers, Accountants, Clerks, Station Agents, Members of Railway and Public Utilities Commissions, etc.
- ☐ **Industrial Management Efficiency:** For Executives, Managers, Office and Shop Employes and those desiring practical training in industrial management principles and practice.
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence and Practice:** Training for Sales and Collection Correspondents; Sales Promotion Managers; Credit and Office Managers; Correspondence Supervisors, Secretaries, etc.
- ☐ **Banking and Finance.**
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship and Production Methods:** Training in the direction and handling of industrial forces—for Executives, Managers, Superintendents, Contractors, Foremen, Sub-foremen, etc.
- ☐ **Personnel and Employment Management:** Training for Employers, Employment Managers, Executives, Industrial Engineers.
- ☐ **C. P. A. Coaching for Advanced Accountants.**
- ☐ **Commercial Law.**
- ☐ **Expert Bookkeeping.**
- ☐ **Business English.**
- ☐ **Commercial Spanish.**
- ☐ **Effective Speaking.**

Name ..... *Present Position* ..... *Address* .....

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

The Price

Of pretty teeth—Just film removed

Millions have found a delightful way to beautify the teeth. You see the results now wherever you look—in teeth you envy, maybe.

Perhaps no other creation ever did so much to enhance women's beauty. Or to bring about a better dental era. You owe yourself the test we offer here.

That dingy film

You can feel your teeth now coated with a viscous film. It clings to teeth, gets between the teeth and stays. Food stains, etc., discolor it. Then it forms dingy coats. Tartar is based on film.

Most teeth had film-coats under old methods, for old tooth pastes do not effectively fight film. Tooth troubles were constantly increasing, for film is their major cause.

Film holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay. Germs breed by millions in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea.

Very few people, under old methods, escaped those film-caused troubles.

New methods found

To meet that situation dental science searched for ways to fight film. Two ways were finally discovered. One acts to curdle film, one to remove it, and without any harmful securing.

Able authorities proved these methods effective. Then a new-type tooth paste was created, based on modern research. These two great film combatants were embodied in it.

The name of that tooth paste is Pepsodent. Now careful people of some fifty nations employ it, largely by dental advice.

Found other needs

Modern research also found two other things essential. So Pepsodent multiplies the alkalinity of the saliva. That is there to neutralize mouth acids, the cause of tooth decay.

It multiplies the starch digestant in the saliva. That is there to digest starch deposits which may otherwise ferment and form acids.

Thus every use gives manifold power to these great natural tooth-protecting agents.

A delightful test

You will find a test delightful. And it will probably lead to life-long benefits, both for you and yours.

Send the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coats disappear. The results will amaze and delight you. Cut out the coupon now.

Avoid Harmful Grit

Pepsodent curdles the film and removes it without harmful scouring. Its polishing agent is far softer than enamel. Never use a film combatant which contains harsh grit.

10-Day Tube Free

1171

THE PEPSODENT COMPANY,
Dept. 151, 1104 So. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Mail 10-Day Tube of Pepsodent to

.....

.....

ONLY ONE TUBE TO A FAMILY

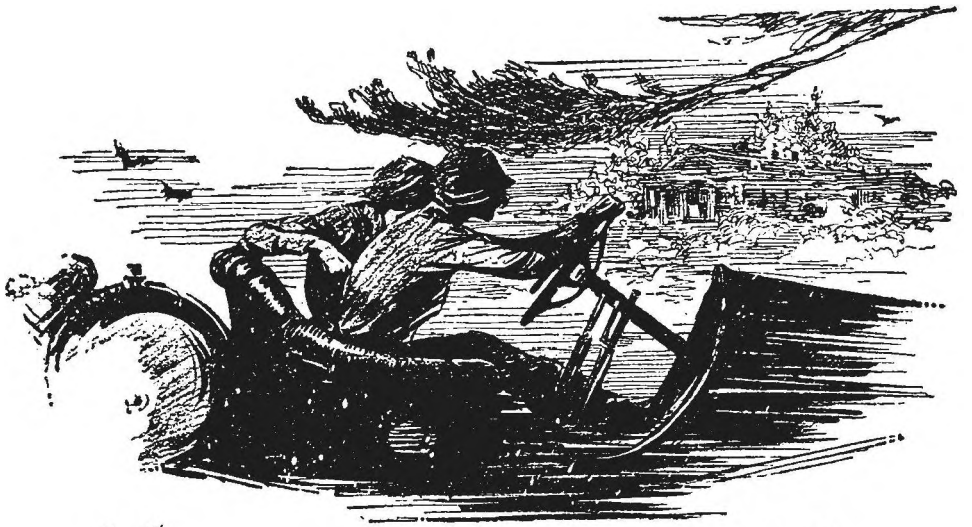
Pepsodent PAT. OFF. REG. U.S.

The New-Day Dentifrice

A scientific film combatant, which whitens, cleans and protects the teeth without the use of harmful grit. Now advised by leading dentists the world over.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLIII SATURDAY, JULY 21, 1923 NUMBER 1



Mystery of Voodoo Manor

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

Author of "Ninety-Eight Degree Murder," "Exploits of Beau Quicksilver," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISTRESS OF VOODOO MANOR.

"AN unusual letter, certainly, Drusilla. Its very suggestiveness adds to my curiosity."

We were lazily lounging in Nancy's fascinating laboratory when the letter arrived which was so to change our carefully laid plans for the next few weeks. She passed over the heavy sheet of paper on which the cramped and crabbed hand intimated that the writer was a person well along in years and of a highly peculiar temperament.

Nancy Dayland watched me under half closed lids. The many holes which chemicals had eaten from her enveloping gray laboratory apron stared at me like black, cabalistic eyes as I eagerly scanned the lines:

Voodoo Manor, Graylands, Friday, 13.

MY DEAR DR. DAYLAND:

Permit an old lady who is neither quite in her dotage nor entirely crazy to express her mind bluntly. For the last three years I have been following some of the amazing records of your extraordinary successes. The sinister case of the Paolo vendetta has pulled me out of my shell of silence. I am delighted with your supercleverness in running down the murderer in this unparalleled case. No Lecoq could have been implicated in a more incredible tangle. All of this is, of course, the merest preamble. As you have long ago sus-

pected, it has nothing to do with the real reason for this letter.

You must need a vacation—any person, however indefatigable, can't come through the Paolo affair without many ragged nerves. Come to Voodoo Manor. The house is at your service. I am a peculiar old woman who enjoys life in her own peculiar way. You will be quite untroubled by visitors, welcome or unwelcome. My house is well out—high walled, and not overrun with a horde of servants. No one is with me but my niece. The people in the village call me crazy, and Voodoo Manor—something worse. So you see, it is a real rest I am promising you.

Last but not least, Voodoo Manor possesses one unique room. It is neither haunted nor has it ever been the scene of any untoward happenings — village gossip notwithstanding. Room No. 13 is merely the pet storehouse of an erratic old woman. But from my knowledge of you, I know that it will interest you. You may possibly consider it flattering when I tell you that no human being other than myself has yet crossed its threshold since I planned it twenty years ago.

Room No. 13 in Voodoo Manor should whet your curiosity. Wire when I may expect you. Julius, my footman, will meet you at Graylands station at your convenience.

Recklessly yours,

FELICIA LORING.

Nancy shrugged whimsically as she held out a slim hand for the queer epistle.

"What do you think?" she hazarded as her lips curved in a tolerant smile, her quick glance sweeping over the pages again.

"She is not crazy," I affirmed. "A maniac never confesses insanity, any more than an inebriate does drunkenness."

Without responding Nancy stepped to the phone and called the telegraph office. In the ensuing pause she turned to me in the most aggravating manner possible.

"Want to go, too?"

"I haven't been invited," I responded.

Paying no heed to my demur, Nancy voiced her message:

Thanks. Miss Deming and I will motor down this afternoon, arriving about six.

NANCY DAYLAND.

"Isn't that rather cheeky?" I objected. "She didn't invite me."

"Why mention her oversight twice, Drusilla? Any one would think you were loath to go. Of course I couldn't go without my little Shadow. I scent an interesting sojourn, for the Lady of Voodoo Manor promises an appealing respite from all our enigmas."

"Humph!" I retorted. "Sounds more like a nest of puzzles than a rest from them."

Despite my protestations, Nancy insisted on packing that black leather case of hers in which reposed her pet appliances for carrying more than one experimental flask, as well as two loaded revolvers and other favorite instruments. She explained that she might want to dabble a bit while enjoying her rest cure at Voodoo Manor.

It was well past lunch when the long, gray roadster whirred out from the big city in quest of the little town of Graylands.

"Miss Loring's voodoo is upon us," laughed Nancy as the loud *bang-g-g* of a blowout sounded when we were only a few miles away from the skyscrapers. She parked the car under a shady, wayside tree and we piled out to don our work aprons. We had the remedy for this sort of road malady down to team work. As I delved in the tool chest for the necessary implements and then proceeded to loosen the lugs of the recalcitrant tire, Nancy prepared one of the two mounted spares. In exactly eight minutes by her wrist watch we were off again.

The delightful suburban villages through which we sauntered put us in high spirits. The neat sign of Graylands welcomed us into the sleepy town without further incident. Nancy slipped out to inquire of the station master for Voodoo Manor.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"W-why, e-er—" he stammered, "nobody ever goes there. Visitors aren't welcome." There was no escaping the innuendo in his tone.

"We are friends of Miss Loring," murmured Nancy, nonchalantly.

"Didn't know she had any," snorted the old man. "But as to *that* house, you go straight through the village and take the first right turn on the paved road leading out. There is a sign there to Black Lake, which is just beyond—her house."

"Our hostess is not overpopular," jested Nancy, as we purred along the cool street with its high, overarching trees.

The quiet and coolness of early evening were on the community and many a wide veranda comfortably sheltered its idle owners. The usual curiosity more or less common to small villages followed our advent. The fact that Graylands was far off any main highway enhanced the value of passing motorists.

Further on we turned the corner with the single sign post pointing to Black Lake.

"It sounds like bats and gnats and all kinds of mysterious things," I muttered, shivering with an apprehension which I couldn't define.

Nancy laughed merrily as the car swung through a whispering screen of cool woods. Just beyond this black thicket the high, gray stone wall of a considerable estate arose. Already the first hints of twilight were approaching, for we had dawdled shamefully after our late start.

Lofty pine trees relieved the landscape within the guarding wall. And away back in a clump of the deepening shadows the gray roof of a great white house peeked out.

"It's—it's just what I have fancied it," I told Nancy as we slowly crept along to a great square opening in the wall.

This entrance to the long drive was literally a hole in the wall large enough for vehicles. Its top was arched till it looked like a fortified gate into some medieval castle. We crunched through and up the sweeping drive.

But the house was not a facsimile of any ancient pile abroad. As we approached it, shimmering out a ghostly white from its soft frame of stately pines, I saw its noble colonial lines, its Corinthian columns and its solid, dark door. I could distinguish fascinating wings spreading out in the shadow with indistinct buildings in the rear.

"Typically Southern," mused Nancy. "I wonder—"

A soft light cut the gloaming behind the high columns bringing out in high relief the door with its ponderous brass knocker. Even before we were opposite, the door swung open and a quaint little figure in lavender tripped out. The overhead gleam turned her hair to shining silver. The scene suggested a Davison print of some Lady of a Southern Manor.

As we stopped opposite the brass knocker, it proved to be cast in the form of a bat—its wings spread, its head forming the knob for sounding. The name Black Lake had suggested the creature, and here was the first one—inanimate, to be sure, but a bat, nevertheless.

Our hostess came hospitably down the steps before we could alight. She was slight, with an aristocratic, high-bred face and piercing, dark, brilliant eyes. The skin still showed the unbelievable freshness of youth, although other indications ungallantly whispered that the little old lady must be near seventy.

In the soft lace at the throat of her pale lavender sprigged gown a great fire opal alternately glowed and paled, seeming to blink at me cryptically in the dusk.

From behind a column a huge black cat, with eyes which blazed like live coals, came down to the side of its mistress.

A little inexplicable chill seized me.

"It was indeed generous of you to humor an old woman's whim."

Her voice was cultured, and the soft slurring of the r's bespoke an early residence in the South. I tried to recall the significance of the voodoo in negro superstitions. Instinctively I was drawn to the little woman. I wondered why the station master had hinted so unfavorably against her.

"I knew you would want Miss Deming," Nancy was saying. "She needs a rest as much as I do. We work together."

The piercing dark eyes of Voodoo Manor's mistress gazed at me. I felt the keen, searching query in that look. Was I mistaken or was her friendly acceptance of my presence forced — the decision to make the best of an unwelcome intruder?

We entered the house behind that bat knocker. I jumped nervously as something soft brushed across my ankles. A second large black cat disappeared behind the portières of a room to the left. The great hall was superb in its rich, foreign looking wood, its indirect lighting. The staircase and the massive newel posts were magnificently carved. Fantastic gargoylelike heads on the top of the latter held in their flaring jaws frosted bulb lights suggesting the proverbial toad and the jewel.

Miss Loring led us up the thickly carpeted stairs. The very soundlessness of our footfalls added an eeriness to the atmosphere.

"These are your rooms," she told us, pointing to two doors on the right.

She opened one door. The same rich elegance showed throughout the furnishings and the high windows faced a long black splotch which glistened and rippled.

"Black Lake," I thought. "How near it is!"

"We will dine when you are ready," intimated our hostess. "Will an hour give you sufficient time? Julius will bring up your luggage directly."

I smiled as Nancy impressively deferred to me. Then we were left to the luxury of our rooms in Voodoo Manor.

"What is a voodoo, Nancy?" I demanded, gazing out across the pine dotted grounds, over the high gray wall to Black Lake beyond.

"U-m!" informed Nancy as she seemed to drink in the inexplicable mystery of the waning light on the lake. "What *isn't* a voodoo you might better ask! But a voodoo sometimes means a certain bad spirit among the negroes, a sort of a negro medicine man skilled in strange and sometimes gruesome rites or arts."

"Ugh!" I commented. "What a pity to give this magnificent house such a name!"

"It is very original, to say the least," meditated Nancy.

Just then a low knock came. When the door was opened a very tall negro entered with our luggage. His livery was of dark green with gold trimmings. And on the collar of his cutaway coat appeared a gold bat above the words "Voodoo Manor."

"Our hostess is very consistent in carrying out her decorative scheme," acknowledged Nancy when the servant had left.

"It seems to me that she rather flies in the face of Providence with such an outlandish symbol and that heathen name."

Nancy was merely gazing, dreaming toward that great somber body of water so fittingly called Black Lake.

"It's a perfect setting," she muttered irrelevantly.

"Perfect for what?"

"For some dark deed," she hinted theatrically.

And although I knew she had meant her words jestingly, yet I couldn't help but feel that there was an undercurrent of somberness, of portent in them.

CHAPTER II.

A WEIRD APPOINTMENT.

SOMETIME later we sat before the fine Haviland, the scintillating cut glass, the heavy silver of Felicia Loring's perfectly appointed table. I was so wild over the beauty of the Mahowa paneling and the superb Spanish tooled leather above it, that I could pay only inadequate tribute to the fine viands with their suggestion of some old Southern mammy. There were three very fine etchings by Whistler on the leather background.

I awoke from my reverie in time to hear Nancy's approving voice.

"What a deft servant!"

"Thomas — Jefferson Johnson Jones," Miss Loring added *sotto voce* upon his disappearing back, "is a family heirloom. We are Southerners. He has learned service by experience."

I gasped at Nancy's next remark.

"I should think the native negro superstition would be fearful of the very mention of the word voodoo."

"Thomas and Julius Cæsar threatened to leave me when I first named the manor here. But long years of security have lulled their childish fears."

"What other servants have you?" queried Nancy.

"Just a cook and a maid. I hate a mob about me."

I wondered at Nancy's personal questions. My eyes roved to the figure at the head of the table. Her heavy satin gown was severely elegant. A bit of cobwebby Bruges lace ornamented the neck. The same great opal seemed to flash malevolent gleams.

"My niece has a severe headache," apologized the little lady, "and begged me to make her excuses to you. But hoity-toity,

aren't we stiff and commonplace! One would think we were already down to ices. And here I have been anticipating this time for months!"

Nancy merely raised her dark brows. She was signally distinguished looking in a pale yellow evening gown with a stunning tiger eye at the throat. I knew the story of the handsome stone—the gift of one of Nancy's grateful patrons. I speculated about the history of the great opal which seemed to exert a hypnotic influence over me. I idly wondered why Miss Loring affected such a gem—opals were proverbially unlucky. Possibly it, too, was an heirloom, and she wore it for association's sake.

"Yes," continued the mistress of Voodoo Manor, "I half resolved to kidnap you if you refused my invitation. I am far more interested in having you here for selfish reasons than for any altruistic ones."

Nancy nodded quickly. "And the reasons?"

"Pooh!" taunted Miss Loring. "Not an astute question from you! I confessed it in my letter. Room No. 13 is the answer."

"To be sure, that is one answer," retorted Nancy, "but it is not the only one."

A constrained note crept into Felicia Loring's laugh. "The villagers say that I am a witch—you see, I have thirteen black cats. They also say that I have some fearful memento in my locked room, some relic of my dark past!"

"How do they get such notions?"

"Oh, my women servants are fairly new. I have been forced to change often, and the discharged help are a bit garrulous. What they can't understand they suspect to be evil."

"To be sure," recognized Nancy. "I am delighted at the prospect before us. Room No. 13 assumes a most inviting aspect. When may we see it?"

A little frown crept over the older face. Her bright black eyes looked at me interrogatively. Doubt, determination and an elusive quality of dread swiftly passed over her face.

"You will both pardon me," she began slowly. "I—I hesitate to enlarge the number who know of its contents. It is a very personal—a very private affair."

There was a dignified, courtly restraint in the apology.

"Please, please," I hastened, "do not think of including me. I couldn't possibly expect such a privilege."

Her face brightened and the opal turned a brilliant fire tone. It had been very pale before.

Nancy's voice held a strangely pleading note. "I don't wish to seem unappreciative of the honor accorded me—" Her very earnestness was making her unnaturally stilted. "Miss Deming is in my entire confidence, has worked with me on all my cases—has relieved me greatly. I can't explain to you, Miss Loring, why I am so—er—anxious to have her accompany us. I can't put it into words, but I feel very strongly that she should come."

A worried look came into the dark eyes of the woman regarding us intently. Her lips whitened and a little tremulous ripple passed over her face. The great stone had turned to a dull lead color.

"I—I—" she murmured. "I don't understand your words, but something in them impresses me strangely. Miss Deming, forgive the vagaries of an old woman. You must, of course, come with us."

It was graciously done, but I felt like a bungling intruder. I couldn't comprehend Nancy's almost rude, fatalistic insistence. The air was surcharged with something portentous. I could hear the pines without, murmuring and whispering. Again I felt cold.

"When shall we go?" asked Nancy again.

A humorous, half apologetic smile curved Miss Loring's lips. She didn't respond immediately, but directed the conversation into other channels until Thomas Jefferson had brought the ices and coffee and disappeared.

"To return now to your question," she stated. "It is one of my whims—an idiosyncrasy—not to enter room No. 13 except at midnight!"

Nancy looked at her in blank amazement. "Why at that hour?"

The mistress of Voodoo Manor delicately toyed with her ice. "Because"—her voice was low—"because the hour of midnight is likewise the witching hour. And you see,

I still have ingrained some of my childhood's superstitions."

"But midnight," objected Nancy, "is the hour of untoward things, when graves are supposed to yawn and the dead arise."

"Precisely," agreed the little lady. "Just so," and she nodded her head vigorously. "Can you suggest any more fitting hour to enter room No. 13 in Voodoo Manor on the edge of Black Lake?"

"You have doubtless forgotten," reminded Nancy, "that to-day is Friday."

"Not at all," confessed Miss Loring. "It is even Friday the thirteenth! I was hoping that you would come to-day. So at a quarter of twelve I will knock at your doors. Meantime you may wish to get a little rest. You will find, Dr. Dayland, some rather interesting old books in the cabinet in your room. One is the 'Memoirs of Lucretia Borgia,' a hand written personal diary. There is no duplicate. There is also a book of some interesting stories of Catherine II of Russia, chronicled by her maid. This is a rare edition."

So the little lady of Voodoo Manor considerately dismissed us until the witching hour should unbar the secret door of the room so fatefully marked 13.

I had half fallen asleep over a magazine, leaving Nancy feverishly loping through the delicately penned lines whose Italian words told of the amazing story behind the life of the infamous Borgia woman. I was aroused by a light touch on my shoulder. Nancy's eyes were very bright and a tinge of pink suffused her cheeks. She pointed to her watch.

I had hardly rubbed the sleep from my eyes enough to discern the position of the hands on the tiny gold face when a rustling knock told us of Miss Loring's readiness. I followed Nancy quickly from the room.

The elderly woman looked curiously fragile in her black gown. I wondered if she had appeared so pale at the dinner table. The baleful gleam of the opal seemed to enhance the whiteness of her face. Feeling strangely subdued, I instinctively tiptoed along. Our guide led us to that side of the house nearest the dense black pine thicket.

At the extreme end of the corridor a sturdy closed door stared at us with the figure 13 in red upon its rich wood. I noted the size of the hinges and the strong lines of the knob.

"We still have a few minutes to spare," observed Miss Loring, glancing at her watch. "Come back into my room and see my queer inmate."

Then she opened the door of her apartments, which were next to room No. 13.

"This is Unlucky," she told us, motioning to a cage covered with black.

With a little gesture she pulled off the cover, disclosing a huge black bat. It spread its wings and whirred about, uttering queer little squeaks in a minor key.

"Then why do you keep it if it is unlucky?" inquired Nancy.

"I meant that its name is Unlucky, although bats are supposed to be ill omened. You see, I laugh at such childish superstitions."

"I see," echoed Nancy.

As our hostess covered the cage and the bat became quiet, she confided: "I have but two keys to room No. 13. These were fashioned in thirteen pieces, each little part being made by a different locksmith. I myself assembled the parts. They were made so perfectly that it was but a simple bit of soldering. The lock was made in a similar way. It positively can't be picked, nor can the key be turned from the outside."

"But how could you put the lock together," demanded Nancy, who had had a good deal of experience with picking locks and knew whereof she spoke. "That requires a skilled expert."

"I am that," affirmed the mistress of Voodoo Manor quietly. There was no hint of boastfulness in her voice. "I learned from Locksmith Joe, a skilled darky we had on our plantation."

"A strange thing for you to learn," mused Nancy. "Had you room No. 13 in mind then?"

"Not exactly," was the slow reply. Then Miss Loring continued: "One key is securely hidden in my room, and the other I always wear."

From within her black dress she brought out a tiny gold chain. On it hung a key.

She unfastened the chain and passed it over to Nancy, who examined the key minutely.

"I should say that this was absolutely unique," judged Nancy. "I know many makes."

Miss Loring nodded briefly as we left the room.

The clock in the hall began to strike. It had a deep, resonant intonation which to my heightened fancy seemed lugubrious—mournful.

With a quick, silent movement Felicia Loring turned the lock of the secret room. There was an indefinable, hesitating expression in the glance which she raised to Nancy's face.

Five, six, seven, continued slowly like a dirge.

She shut the door hastily behind us and relocked it, leaving the key with the gold chain dangling. Not until the twelfth stroke had begun did she flash on the lights. The pale green lighting exaggerated even the shadows in the room. But as I look back on my first glimpse of the fateful room, I wonder if anything could augment its bizarreness—anything, that is, except the impending shadow of disaster.

And the first thing that met my glance was the unmistakable outline of a casket on a dais in the place of honor.

CHAPTER III.

ROOM NO. 13.

I STOOD petrified with horror and fascination at this first gruesome object which I beheld. The fact that it was in the center of the room between the door and the only window made it all the more omnipresent. There was no mistaking the origin of the dais; it was a plain wooden box draped with black. I was conscious of a funereal silence. Only my own heart seemed to thump in the intense stillness.

A little movement from Nancy broke my lethargy. Quite casually she walked up to the long black case. As though drawn by a magnet, I followed her, Miss Loring fluttering close at my heels.

"What is within?" whispered Nancy, staring down at the somber lid.

I caught my breath, vaguely recalling that this was the witching hour when untoward, unspeakable things are reputed to occur. I half suspected that some heathen mummy was incased—or something even more repellent. I was quite unprepared for what followed.

The mistress of Voodoo Manor calmly lifted the black lid and disclosed—a festive black dotted lavender silk lining—nothing else. As I stared, my feelings a tangle of bewilderment and relief, I noted that bats formed the motif for the black spots on the lavender ground.

There was a constrained note in Miss Loring's short laugh. "You see," she explained, "I am somewhat of a jester. I scoff at those things which make the ordinary person run cold with fear or silly superstitious dread. I thoroughly believe that one should familiarize one's self with that habitat which plays such a prominent part in the ultimate environment—and destiny—"

Only the sound of the moaning wind without interrupted her unique explanation.

"—I really found quite a bargain in the silk, as no one would buy it. So I purchased the whole bolt, used it for various things besides a dress, and reserved enough for this made-to-order project. When it was known in the village that a coffin had actually been brought to Voodoo Manor, there were the maddest conjectures rife. And when days followed weeks, weeks turned into months, and it did not emerge from the house, even more dubious surmises busied the villagers. Of course, the cook and the maid whom I had at the time, and subsequently discharged, spread the story of one of the objects in this room."

"But you said," mused Nancy, "that no one but yourself had entered this room before. How did you get it in?"

"Had it left outside the door and brought it in myself."

As she confided this amazing feat to us she carefully replaced the black cover. At last my glance took cognizance of the rest of the room. It contained the weirdest collection I had ever seen. Had not the owner of Voodoo Manor stood before us,

I should have imagined her a fanatic. Certainly this word was too strong for the dignified poise of our hostess, eccentric though she was.

It was a small room, lighted as I have said by a single long window opposite the one solid door with its impregnable lock. At the right end of the room yawned a fireplace and over its mantel hung a long mirror. I rubbed my eyes to see if I were undergoing some peculiar optical illusion. But no—the glass was cracked unmistakably, and even a little piece was broken out of its corner and lay on the shelf below.

"Yes," commented Miss Loring, following my glance, "that's a taunt to the silly rubbish about breaking a mirror. I bought it purposely to break. It has been there eighteen years. 'Seven years of bad luck or a death!' Oh, poof!" she scoffed cynically.

On the fireplace was a handsome stuffed bat, its eyes glimmering like pale opals. Taking a step nearer, I found that the eyes were actually of that precious stone. Over the door three horseshoes had been placed so that the luck proverbial would run out. There were many curious pictures on the wall, one in particular resembling a witch with great hawklike wings.

"Oh," recognized Nancy quizzically, motioning toward this picture, "so you haven't even forgotten the banshee?"

"No, indeed. I have tried to make it a complete collection, though I admit that it is somewhat heterogeneous. Nor have I confined my efforts to our own supposed ill luck charms. You will find some from abroad, all reputed to be covered with a curse. Come over to the table here, and examine this little stiletto."

We followed her to a dull black table under a revolting picture of a voodoo ceremonial. From a motley assortment she handed Nancy a delicate, poniardlike knife about six inches in length, I should say. Its blade shone in the dull green light, and its foreign looking handle was relieved by a single spark.

As I crept closer I was surprised to see a magnificent opal so set that it was literally an eye in the handle. The dark surface had been carefully carved so that the lids and the eyebrow added a lifelike fidelity to the gleaming stone.

"Oho!" breathed Nancy. "If I am not mistaken, it is the notorious Evil Eye of the Piuchis. I believe I am not wrong in supposing that this form of setting an opal is peculiar to them."

Our hostess smiled her admiration. "You have not disappointed me, although but one in many thousands could know the significance of that opal eye."

"With them it certainly is a supersacred emblem, and is supposed to portend the consummation of all evil against the person purloining it," reflected Nancy. "Where did you get it?"

"I bought it on my last trip abroad. You are beginning to see the reason for all the symbols I flaunt. I am a superskeptic of all such childish foolishness. I openly invite all the so-called maledictions to observe my taunts. I laugh at them. I deride them as the ignorance of the puerile."

Her voice was singularly cynical with an undercurrent of hate, strangely pronounced for one who was speaking merely of an eccentric fancy. Nancy regarded her intently.

"I wonder what has made you so bitter against superstitions which are either beneath the wisdom of the wise or the weakness of the weak."

"Come over here and sit down and I'll tell you. That is part of my plan."

So we all seated ourselves among the fantastic shadows of the green room.

"I told you I was reared in the South. As a youngster I recall an unfortunate negro attendant who looked after me and my younger sister. She was far more fanciful, impressionable, than I. The woman held a fund of the strangest superstitions. Her people had actually been voodoos, and I half suspect she was one of those curious fanatics herself.

"She fed us on the wildest, weirdest tales of the power of the voodoo and all the other evil superstitions. She couldn't see a black cat, hear an owl hoot at night, or glimpse a bat, without making the strangest motions. Then she would straightway tell us of some terrible tale of ven-

geance, of death and destruction, which followed in their wake."

"I wonder that your parents permitted such tales," remarked Nancy.

"They didn't know at first. The gaunt negress fascinated us and warned us that if we ever disclosed any of her stories that something dreadful would happen. The truth leaked out in an entirely unexpected way. My sister became ill with brain fever, and in the height of delirium shrieked out the fearful omens on which she had so morbidly dwelt.

"My parents acted promptly and dismissed the woman even before my sister had begun to recover. Then—then, one dreadful night, a great black bat sailed in the window—right into the room where my sister was so ill. The fluttering bird-mouse sent her into paroxysms of terror. She had a relapse and died."

"Was the bat let loose by the revengeful woman?" queried Nancy.

"We couldn't prove it, but we always suspected so. It seemed altogether too fortuitous for a coincidence. But the woman had disappeared as though the earth had swallowed her. Then, young as I was, I began to hate those fancies which could work such evil in sensitive minds. Believe me, I never for an instant considered the appearance of the bat anything but a malicious joke played by the woman with sinister intent. I saw how other simple things could, by constant repetition of hair raising legends, take on the character of malignity.

"I resolved that no other member of my family should become a similar victim. Youthful as I was, I had made my resolutions. Little by little, I hoarded away so-called ill luck charms. I spurned all of the reputed fortunate omens. And if, by some chance, there was anything to the doctrines of fatalism, I would thwart them all by my scoffing at them. Only the weak and the fearful become a prey to such oppressions. I would feed on and surround myself with them all, until, like Rappaccini's daughter, I had become so accustomed to their poisonous fallacies that I should remain immune. And I have lived to be over seventy years of age."

"A strange tale," nodded Nancy. "I can understand what has actuated you." Her half closed eyes glanced tensely about the room. "But I don't understand just why you wished to confide in us, especially since you have proved your point."

Miss Loring spoke with emotion. "With the exception of the house, I have invested most of my fortune in pearls. You know their unfortunate reputation."

Nancy bowed.

"I have not confided them to strong boxes or safes. I have hidden them where they shall remain until my death."

"Yes," encouraged Nancy.

"My only near relative is my niece, Blanche Pembroke, the orphaned daughter of an elder sister who was away at school at the time of my younger sister's death." She hesitated painfully. "Of late I seem to have become the subconscious prey to my own scoffings. I can't explain what I mean, for I don't believe in premonition or presentiments. I cannot help but feel that I may die suddenly."

"What do you mean?" questioned Nancy quickly.

Miss Loring shrugged her shoulders. "I am unable to say, but the very fact that I have had no such intimations before makes me ponder."

"You are in good health, are you not?" interrogated Nancy gently, her eyes dwelling on the plump face. "You are not addicted to heart trouble?"

"I was never in better health, and my heart is thoroughly sound."

"How else, then, could you die suddenly?"

Miss Loring's face paled perceptibly as she stared ahead.

"How else!" she echoed in a whisper. "How else? But—pshaw, how morbid we are!" She forced a little laugh.

I admired her superb control.

"Come over and see my little trunk here in the corner."

In the alcove made by the fireplace she pulled out a sturdy, brass bound, brass nailed trunk of earlier date. I half smiled as I noted the number 13 made by the brass heads on each end.

"My lucky number," she explained fa-

cetiously, "used to help me identify my luggage when I traveled so much. You may be sure no one else has adopted the same device."

"How long since you have used it?" inquired Nancy.

"Not since I put it in this room twenty years ago."

As Nancy bent over it she confided in a whisper that I can yet hear: "If I die sud— When I die you are to have this trunk. It is my special tribute to your infallible cleverness. The trunk and its contents I shall bequeath to you."

Nancy looked at her very tenderly.

"And that was why you invited me here —to inform me of this—and of your strange new feeling?"

"Yes," responded the mistress of Voodoo Manor, stepping lightly to the door. "Along with this reason, which you are to wear night and day."

She extracted the key from the door and handed it with its dangling gold chain to Nancy.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THE SHADOWS.

WHEN Nancy had finally christened her new gift by herself locking the door of room No. 13, our hostess bade us rather an abrupt good night. As I watched Nancy quietly preparing to retire with a little abstracted frown between her speculating eyes, I sat before the open window. I had little inclination for speech, and sleep was as far away as the poles. I marveled at the poise of the little old lady whose unusual story we had heard. I wondered if by some chance those very superstitions which she had so flagrantly ignored were by some unaccountable psychology at length reacting to disturb her tranquillity. I wasn't surprised that the specter of death should ultimately hover in the thoughts of Felicia Loring.

Most people are at best but the products of environment. Imagine the countless midnight vigils she had spent in room No. 13, confronted by her waiting coffin! I shivered, although the night was mildness itself.

"Good night, Drusilla," called Nancy's voice as her lights were turned into darkness. "Don't let your imagination run away with you or you will develop nerves!"

"I am as wide awake as an owl," I retorted tritely. "I'm going to sit here until I am sleepy. Good night."

I rested my chin on my palm and counted the sentineling pines as they marched toward the high gray wall with the patch of Black Lake beyond. A waning moon gave a misty, fantastic shimmer to the landscape which to my heightened fancy seemed spectral, uncanny.

Long after the quiet of Nancy's room told me that she slept I pondered over the strange vagary of the woman whose hospitality sheltered me. And I wondered why Nancy had insisted that I accompany them to the room beyond.

Why had the owner of Voodoo Manor so painstakingly pointed out the little brass studded trunk as her bequest to Nancy? Did that mean that she had left no will? And, strangest of all, why had she intrusted one of the precious keys to Nancy's keeping with such a somber injunction? Truly, Voodoo Manor housed many curious questions.

I wasn't a bit sleepy, although I couldn't tell how long I had sat ruminating in the half light. Again my eyes swept over the solemn swishing pines to Black Lake. Something in the shadow of one of the trees arrested my wandering attention. I wondered why its straight line suddenly seemed to curve.

My speculation was nipped by the stealthy appearance of a cloaked shoulder. As I watched intently, being wholly obscured by the dark room behind me, a figure cautiously emerged. To my amazement the long black cape covered a woman of medium build. I could distinguish her fair hair by the light of the moon. Hesitating irresolutely, she finally moved to a tree a few yards nearer the wall. There she paused in the shadow, apparently to reconnoiter. Again she crept out and proceeded to still another trunk farther on.

I don't know what foolish bravado seized me, but I suddenly found myself eager to follow the stealthy figure. Certainly a

woman within the almost fortified fastness of Voodoo Manor was not terrifying—merely mysterious. Mayhap I should even run down some little mystery to relate to Nancy with great gusto in the morning—something I had fathomed unaided while she peacefully slept.

The idea grew upon me, and I quickly tiptoed down the thickly carpeted stairs to the great front door. I had soon turned the knob of the spring lock, extracted the key and deposited it safely in my pocket.

The air was superb with the fragrance and inimitable charm of pine trees. Full in the shadows of the house I crept silently, glad that I was wearing a nondescript brown dress. Certainly I was quite invisible in the opaque shadows.

Watching carefully, I chose a line of trees at an angle with the course the curious intruder had taken. I intended to cut her off near the wall. Surely she couldn't skirt that before my arrival.

I had successfully reached my third tree and was about to step out for a quick exit to my fourth. Just as I was a foot from my hiding place I stood still with a sudden, unaccountable feeling of fear. Was I becoming a coward to my imagination? Were my fancies playing me false?

Something about the tree before me frightened me. There was a sinister something in its black shadows that seemed to warn me. I fancied I heard a little scraping there.

I knew that the black caped woman had not retraced her course, for I felt positive I should have seen her. Was it possible that another pair of eyes had been malignantly watching my wary approach? I made an imperceptible motion to step backward.

The tall black figure of a man leaped from the shadows before me. In my sudden palsying surprise I numbly noted that a black mask covered his eyes. Above this on the right temple the black of a triangular piece of court plaster caught my attention.

"Sh-h!" he hissed. "Not a word. Put up your hands!"

I wondered how I had the strength to obey. I felt as though I were made of cotton batting which had been frozen stiff with the ice of fear. What he would have done next I do not know.

At this moment another figure stepped out suddenly. I recognized the cloaked woman of the fair hair whom I had so foolishly tried to trap. The terror in her wide open blue eyes told me that in some way her hiding place had screened me. I could see the convulsing working of her small face.

"Why, what—what—"

She slumped down in a black heap, her white face upturned.

Everything had happened so like some incredible dramatic pantomime that I was becoming dizzy. But I was quite unprepared for what followed. The masked man sprang toward the silent figure, absolutely forgetful of my presence.

Like a hunted deer I sped for the front door, with my trembling fingers tightly grasping the precious key. I heard the soft thud of pursuing steps as I frantically fitted it to the lock.

Fortunately this was a simple one, and turned easily. I almost fell into the hall, slamming the spring lock behind me. Weak and shaking, I thought I discerned a little noise outside. Then silence. Now that I was safe I felt what a foolhardy enterprise I had engaged in. And I knew what a sadly unheroic figure I would appear when I had to narrate it to Nancy. Recovering my breath, I flew upstairs.

I gave a quick glance out of my window, but could see no sign of the recent intruders. Then I hurried in to Nancy and roughly shook her by the shoulder. Being a light sleeper, she instantly opened her eyes. As I quickly related my adventure, she was dressing in a twinkling. From the window she pointed out the course I was to follow.

"We must separate," she explained. "The masked man could easily cover both of us if he caught us together. But I feel sure that he won't risk the sound of a shot. I want to know the identity of these two mysterious confederates."

Thrusting one of the faithful revolvers in my hand, she hustled me down to the front door. I was shortly following the

course first pursued by the cloaked woman. Nancy took an angle at my right instead of the left line, which I had essayed. We could watch each other. But I likewise wondered with a thrill how many other pairs of eyes watched us. I had already passed the point opposite which the man had suddenly stepped out. Tree by tree I cautiously made my way. Every whisper, every sound, seemed magnified, and twice I nearly fired at a falling twig. The foggy outline of the gray wall loomed momentarily closer.

When I reached it, I gave a mighty start as Nancy stepped out lithely from a shadow. A little smile curved her lip and faded quickly as she drew me into the shadow of another tree.

"Not a sight or a sound," she reported in an aggrieved whisper. "Come, let us scour the grounds together."

Nancy's vibrant fearlessness always enheartens me, so we were soon creeping about the entire area encompassed by the protecting wall. The heavy Venetian gates at the front entrance were still padlocked.

"Humph!" scoffed Nancy. "The birds have flown on amazingly swift and sturdy wings. Isn't that disgusting!"

"Never mind," I comforted her. "I could recognize the woman again. But how on earth was a fainting girl hurried over the wall so expeditiously?"

"Why, with wings, of course," she chided. "Probably you shivered down at the front door considerably longer than you thought."

"Yes, and you made rather an elaborate toilet," I defended, as we reëntered Voodoo Manor.

"I don't like it. I don't like it a little bit," remarked Nancy, as we sat peering out of the window. "There is something very unpropitious hanging about Voodoo Manor."

"A bat?" I questioned facetiously.

"I wish it were only that." There was such an earnest significance in her voice that I gazed at her inquiringly. "Either the mistress of Voodoo Manor knows that something is afoot and is fearful, or else she is one of those acutely sensitive beings, possessing — ironically enough — that very premonition she has fought against most of her life."

"But what does she fear?"

"I wish I knew. A person of her character would no more think of inviting me here, showing me her pitiful room upstairs, and then talking as she did unless there was a very great question in her mind. This evening makes me sure that we must take all precaution."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go to bed again and answer you in the morning."

Not another word would she say. I was at last physically weary, and fell into troubled sleep in which great glowing opal eyes seemed to blink at me evilly, while huge bats rustled and whispered outside my window.

When we were dressing Nancy informed me: "I have decided to tell Miss Loring, and suggest that some one act as patrol."

I only shook my head as Nancy went down ahead of me to make a careful search of the lawn before our windows and the wall. But her face told me nothing when our hostess welcomed us in the breakfast room, remarking that Blanche had a bad habit of coming down late, and that we should not wait for her.

Despite an appetizing breakfast spread about a fine jar of roses in the center of the table, I could feel the weary constraint in Miss Loring's forced gayety. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and, between fruit and cereal, had already garnished her words from the four corners of the earth. She was pale, and looked ten years older in the pitiless daylight.

The great eye of the opal seemed nondescript and colorless as it turned from smoky gray to cloudy white. It was a sure barometer of its mistress's moods.

"Blanche has been with me only a few weeks," explained Miss Loring, as the conversation veered back to the tardy niece. "She has always lived in the city, disdaining the slowness of this country town until her health required a change. When she wrote me I none too graciously invited her to spend some time here. She tries very hard to fit in with my whims, however, albeit procrastination is her besetting sin."

My back was toward the door which now swung open.

"Ah, Blanche, good morning. My niece, Miss Pembroke, Dr. Nancy Dayland. Blanche, you are privileged to meet the eminent mystery lady and Miss Deming."

I detest table introductions, particularly those made behind my back. I heard the newcomer approach and murmur, "Charmed, delighted, I'm sure," in the sickening affectation common to certain fashionable circles.

As the niece of Felicia Loring came to view I stared at the masses of her blond hair. The concentration of my gaze drew her eyes to my face. Clumsily I upset my coffee as I recognized in Blanche Pembroke the shadowy lady whom I had last seen in a dead faint.

As Nancy's quick glance noted my mishap her half closed eyes read my face.

"It is nothing—nothing at all," Felicia Loring hastened to help me. "Don't give it an instant's thought."

I devoutly wished that I could dismiss it thus cursorily.

CHAPTER V.

FELICIA LORING'S NIECE.

IT was an edifying situation. Nancy appeared suddenly to acquire a huge appetite and shamelessly allowed herself to be given second helpings. The mistress of Voodoo Manor was guilelessly unconscious of the little drama being enacted at her table. Her whole concern seemed to circle about my silly mishap and her desire to blot out the incident.

Nancy, however, was playing her hastily assumed rôle in dead earnest. And she found an actress worthy of her efforts in Blanche Pembroke. Fascinated, I breathlessly heard the thrust and parry of the word duelists as I dawdled over my coffee.

"I trust your head has quite recovered, Miss Pembroke." Nancy's voice was charmingly solicitous.

The face opposite Miss Loring seemed singularly hard and masklike. The cold blue of the eyes and the thin lines of the lips accentuated these characteristics. With apparent *sang froid* and with a gaze as direct as Nancy's own, Felicia Loring's niece declared that she had quite recovered. Nonchalantly, she turned to her fruit.

In the slight pause I noted the extreme fashion of her early morning attire; the carefully marcelled hair and the nails with their superpolish. To be sure I was already prejudiced against this newcomer, but a near view of her impressed me very unfavorably. There was a loudness, a lack of refinement about her, all the more sharply defined by the contrast to her aristocratic aunt.

Nancy began again. "Miss Loring tells me that you are from the city. Is it X., perchance?"

Very deliberately the blond woman—I know her hair was dyed—casually flecked a tiny seed from her orange spoon before committing her response.

"Oh, I am sort of a wanderer, favoring no particular city."

Felicia Loring looked at her niece in surprise.

"Why, Blanche," she protested, "Dr. Dayland inquires to know where your apartments are, probably. Every one travels nowadays. Of course, you are in X. more than anywhere else."

The faintest shrug passed over Miss Pembroke's graceful shoulders.

"Of course," she admitted with seeming frankness.

"You must find the wide grounds of Voodoo Manor quite a contrast to our acreless city apartments. Possibly you are more fortunate than we, however."

"No, I think not." The answer was cool.

"Why, Blanche," expostulated Felicia Loring for a second time. "Denmore Arms is situated in a charming little park, and it is quite unusual, too."

"Is it? It hadn't impressed me."

Miss Loring was staring at her niece.

"I recall it," hastened Nancy. "You are to be congratulated, Miss Pembroke."

By the narrowing of Nancy's eyes I knew that Blanche Pembroke had better be on her guard. But that lady was seemingly quite impervious—quite at her ease. There was a brazenness about her attitude which

incensed me. If she had only had the decency to show a little perturbation!

"Are you in the habit of walking in your sleep, Miss Pembroke?" flashed Nancy, after a little desultory conversation. There was no ignoring the sarcasm in her tone.

Miss Loring's eyes were wide, startled, perplexed. The trend of the conversation had gone beyond the depth of her understanding.

Blanche Pembroke merely laughed lazily. "Oh, I dare say I still retain that childish habit of mine. Strange you should hit upon it, but I suppose the great detective can deduce something from nothing." There was a hint of scorn in her words.

"To be sure she can, Blanche," warmly championed Felicia Loring. Her niece's response had evidently explained the purport of Nancy's question.

No further questions were asked. Instead Nancy entered into a brilliant, entertaining account of the somnambulistic performances of a certain English woman. The little old lady listened, enthralled, but Blanche Pembroke was positively rude in her calm indifference. Only Nancy and I noted this, for the lady of the house was far too diverted by the sprightly narration to observe her niece.

When we finally escaped to our rooms I demanded: "When are you going to tell Miss Loring?"

"I am not going to tell her," declared Nancy.

"What!" I demanded stupidly.

"Precisely. Miss Loring is hasty, and is none too fond of her niece. It was only because of some fancied duty that she forced herself to invite the woman here. I don't want Blanche Pembroke rashly forbidden the house. I want her where I can observe her, for frankly I think she bears watching.

"She is a type I particularly dislike. And I cannot but feel that the invitation she forced to get here is decidedly suspicious. She is playing a game, a coldly calculated, brazen game. You are quite positive that she was the lady you saw last night, I suppose?"

"Absolutely," I averred. "But why did you admit that I had told you by your open challenges?"

"Humph! She is well aware that you recognized her, and she knows that you would tell me. Why fence with facts?"

"Keep her in the dark—on tenterhooks."

"She is not that kind. Besides, I wanted to warn her that I have Miss Loring's interests very strongly at heart."

I shook my head dubiously.

"Now, Drusilla, we shall have to make a flying trip in the roadster. I want to find out what I can about Blanche Pembroke."

"How can you explain to Miss Loring?"

"Leave that to me."

Sure enough, in half an hour the long gray car was speeding us on to solve the first puzzle as a result of our visit to Voodoo Manor. And we had been there only a night! As I had contended, a vacation was impossible for Nancy.

I voiced only one objection en route. "Why didn't Blanche Pembroke keep out of sight this morning, using as her excuse the same bad head?"

"I suspected her from the moment you mentioned the woman. My suspicions would merely have been confirmed had she prolonged her absence. Probably she considered this outcome."

Arrived at the stylish, although a bit over-decorated Denmore Arms, Nancy's request to see Miss Pembroke elicited the fact that she no longer lived there. Nancy straightway called for the manager.

The stalky person who answered promptly showed his dislike. "Miss Pembroke! Nice society lady she is! Taking swell apartments here, and then forgetting that I have my lease to pay! I had to ask her to go, and a pretty penny she owes me, too!"

"Who are her friends?"

"Oh, a bunch of swells. Mrs. Marmaduke Upton used to come often. That's why I bore with her as long as I did."

The name was familiar to Nancy. The lady in question figured often in the society columns as a devotee to all the latest extreme fads. She was considered very rich.

When we were back in the car I asked,

"How are you going to get Mrs. Upton to talk?"

"Just wait and hear."

We presently slowed down before a large hotel. Nancy left me in the car and entered. A smiling face soon returned.

"It worked!" she exulted. "I called up the lady as an old friend of Miss Pembroke, vouchsafing the thought that, of course, she had often heard Blanche speak of me. The lady didn't want to admit that she had forgotten such an old friend, and readily fell into my trap.

"Then I learned that Blanche had left town for a rest; that she had been spending too much time playing bridge, and that other diversions of hers had been crowded in too thick and fast. 'She is quite a plunger, you know,' my informant told me. Of course, I agreed heartily, baiting her further by declaring 'what a sport Blanche was, and how she used to think nothing of losing her hundreds nightly at the card table.' 'She still does,' declared my unsuspecting lady."

I digested this in silence.

"So," continued Nancy. "I deduce this: Blanche Pembroke has been so flooded with debts from her fast living that she has been forced to give up her apartment. Then the bright idea came to her that she could live on her aunt until"—significantly—"something turned up. Besides, Miss Loring is known to be very wealthy. I don't like it a little bit, for I know that such a woman would not be content with board alone, in a remote and quiet country house. Her clandestine meeting makes me sure that she has something else afoot."

"Do we go back now?"

Nancy pondered thoughtfully. "There are several things I wish to do first. We will have luncheon, and then I must pay a few calls. I fear it will be stupid for you waiting outside, as will be necessary."

I sighed with resignation. "Oh, I'm used to it. But why don't you drop me at our apartments? I've got plenty of things I can be doing there."

"As you wish," agreed Nancy. "Look over my mail, too, please, and bring along anything that looks important."

I had an uneventful afternoon. Well after six I began to wonder. Nancy was inordinately long. At best, we couldn't possibly reach Voodoo Manor before nine. I began to worry. Then a knock interrupted my surmises. At first I thought it was she playing a joke on me, but I opened the door.

A boy with a stack of newspapers handed me a note. I was relieved to recognize Nancy's swinging hand. It read:

DEAR SHADOW:

I have been much delayed. Meet me at Lowell's for dinner. Call a taxi at once.

N. D.

"Goodness," I wondered, "why on earth didn't she either call me by phone or motor down herself?"

Realizing that Nancy's ways are quite her own, I obediently phoned for a taxi.

I found her in front of Lowell's, sitting before the wheel of the car, evidently awaiting my coming. She looked exceedingly tired, and her shoulders had a weary sag in them. She appeared very glad to see me, and hurried me in unceremoniously.

"Why didn't you come for me," I demanded, "instead of waiting in the car?"

"All in due time," she deferred, as she proceeded to remove the dust.

Not until we sat before a refreshing dinner did Nancy deign to satisfy my curiosity.

"I telephoned Miss Loring that I had been unexpectedly delayed, and that we would arrive about ten. At first I suggested that we would return at our leisure tomorrow morning, but she seemed so disappointed and anxious for us to come the moment we could that I hadn't the heart to refuse her."

"Why didn't you phone or come down for me?" I asked again.

"Couldn't," she returned laconically. "The very important information I had been seeking all the afternoon was not obtained until a few moments before your taxi hove in sight. I had barely arrived before you."

"What did you learn?"

"Not here," she refused gravely. "Yet I don't mind saying that the lady in question has in nowise risen in my estimation.

And I'm glad that we are sojourning in Voodoo Manor."

Shortly after seven we paused for a capacity load of gas. We were soon speeding away in the delightful cool of the early evening, the motor car licking up the miles with avidity. In her own good time Nancy vouchsafed me a few tantalizing scraps.

"Miss Pembroke was implicated in a disgraceful scandal in Chicago three years ago. A certain Mme. Louvier was matron at a club where gambling was the rage. Her chief assistant was Blanche Pembroke, then known as Narissa Whitelow."

"Any intimation as to the identity of the masked ally?"

"Not exactly," was all she would say before lapsing into a profound silence.

The infrequent lights of Graylands told us what excellent time we had made, for the clock in the dash stood at quarter past ten. The lights straggled out to intense darkness, and our powerful headlights alone located the Black Lake sign. The brilliancy of our own searchlights augmented the velvet blackness.

The moon was even paler, but the stars were legion. And a long black line ahead pointed out our proximity to the big expanse of pine thicket lying between us and the first sight of the high gray wall.

"It's as dark as Erebus," I reflected, as the nose of the radiator poked into the outskirts of the black woods.

"Almost," Nancy agreed, her face only a shadow in the darkness.

With the exception of the shaft of light ahead I could see nothing. The place was positively oppressive in its silence. Even the soft throb of the motor was hardly noticeable.

"What a place for an ambush," I thought nervously, recalling my unpleasant experience of the night before.

I was just about to ask Nancy to open the throttle wider when a figure, with its hat pulled low and hiding the upper part of its face, stepped out into the middle of the road. He wasn't twenty feet ahead, and our brakes squealed with the suddenness of their application.

But Nancy was as expert at driving as she was at most things she did. The quickness of her move did not kill the motor. We paused expertly not five feet from the figure, the engine still humming ominously.

Like a flash the stranger raised his head and his arm. Across his eyes was a black mask, and in his right hand gleamed a revolver.

"Hands up!" I was sure I could recognize that same steely voice.

As we both complied with alacrity I plainly heard twigs snapping at my right. Nancy couldn't ignore its significance. As the masked man took a step nearer, she stepped full on the accelerator.

With a powerful leap the long car responded nobly, completely surprising the man in front. Before he had time to think even — much less move — he disappeared from sight, knocked flat by the plunging car. At a fifty-mile pace we tore through the woods.

"Ah!" muttered Nancy between her shut teeth. "It was worth another thousand to get a car with such a pick-up!"

"W-w-what will we do?" I stuttered, as we swept through the gates of Voodoo Manor.

"If I hadn't heard others waiting to assist the leader, I should have stopped to see what damage we did—likewise to note the face of this lawless individual for future use. Did you recognize the voice?"

"I thought so."

Leaping out of the car, Nancy found the hall phone, even before Miss Loring was aware of our return. Hurriedly she called the police headquarters in Graylands, told them of the attempted hold-up, and asked that sufficient men make investigations at once. She requested them to come to the house with their report.

As she turned from the telephone we simultaneously noted the noiseless descent of Blanche Pembroke on the thick-carpeted stairs. She was wearing a superb white satin evening gown.

"An unpleasant experience?" she inquired coolly.

"Oh, no," replied Nancy with equal calm. "We just killed a man, that's all!"

Blanche Pembroke caught the banister with both hands. She swayed slightly, then calmly resumed her descent.

"A—a—robber?" Her voice trembled despite the evident control.

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPICIOUS NOCTURNAL WANDERINGS.

BEFORE answering Nancy looked at her keenly as she stood on the lowest step.

"Oh, no, not a robber. Just a masked man—tall and slight with a triangular bit of court plaster on his right temple."

I knew that Nancy couldn't possibly have seen this, but understood the purport of her careful description.

"What's this? Robbers! Highwaymen!" demanded Felicia Loring, coming hurriedly down the stairs. There was no fear in her voice, just a lively curiosity.

Nancy carefully explained our adventure, narrowly watching Blanche Pembroke all the while.

Miss Loring laughed gleefully. "They attempted to hold up the wrong people, didn't they?"

"I'm not so sure." Nancy's meaning reply was lost on the older woman, but her niece could readily understand it.

"It was a pity for both of you to wait up," resumed Nancy. "And particularly considerate of you, Miss Pembroke."

"Yes," nodded the mistress of Voodoo Manor. "Blanche had another headache all the afternoon and couldn't eat any dinner, even though she did sit at the table and make herself agreeable to an old woman."

"If you will excuse me, I think I will retire now," admitted Miss Pembroke. "Aunt Felicia, I should be glad to have you knock at my door when you come upstairs."

After she had rustled away Nancy told Miss Loring: "You really ought to post sufficient guards to insure the safety of Voodoo Manor with such a gang about."

"Huh!" laughed the lady imperturbably. "Our walls and doors could withstand a siege. I have no fears. Plain thugs—afraid of their shadows."

It was not bravado, but the derision of fearlessness.

"Besides," objected Miss Loring further, "I wouldn't have the police snooping about; no, not for a regiment of highwaymen."

"Then post Julius Cæsar," urged Nancy, "alternating with Thomas Jefferson."

Another merry laugh was the answer. "Gracious! Those two darkies haven't as much nerve as one of my black kittens. Our sleep would be interrupted with false alarms as long as it was dark under the table. No, indeed! Those people just wanted your pocketbook and chose a particularly suitable spot."

"Have any other holdups occurred there?"

"N-no, not that I know of," admitted our hostess slowly. "But now that you doubtless killed one and have called in the police, the others will take to their heels and operate in some distant place. A reappearance here would be too foolhardy."

"I wish—" began Nancy.

"Don't," interposed the valiant little lady. "I am no more afraid of common thugs than I am of—bats." The cynical note had returned to her voice.

Finally a loud peal at the bell announced the Graylands police.

At a nod from our hostess Nancy stepped to the door. Two men confronted her while a small car chugged and rattled outside.

"I am Miss Dayland," she said as they stepped inside. "What did you find?"

"Nothing except some trampled bushes and a spot of blood in the road. He had been whisked into thin air by his gang."

"Did you search the woods?"

"Sure. Nothing doing yet. Two of the men are still going through them."

"Couldn't you follow any trail of blood?"

"Nope. They were too careful for that. We don't even know how they made their get-away. Probably had a car off the road in the bushes. That's the way they work it nowadays."

"Have any suspicious persons been seen in the vicinity recently?"

"Haven't heard of any. But we'll inquire and let you know if we find anything."

"Good! And be sure to call up if any clews are found in the woods."

"Can you give us any sort of a description of the man you ran down?"

She responded quickly. "About five feet nine inches in height, slight, with long, slim, well kept hands somewhat browned. He wore a plain black sack suit, a black bow and a turndown collar, a soft black felt hat, and a black mask covering his eyes. The face was pale and smooth shaven, and—" She paused, and during the interval I plainly heard the cautious rustle of a skirt in the second hall. "He wore a triangular bit of black court plaster on his right temple, doubtless covering a recent mishap."

I felt that this bold detail was for the sole benefit of the listening woman in the hall above.

"You certainly managed to see a good deal," one of the officers declared admiringly, "let alone having your wits right with you when you ran him down with your hands over your head!"

"It is my business to observe," returned Nancy simply. "So if anything new develops telephone us."

"We will that," the spokesman declared and disappeared.

"Now," avowed Nancy with celerity, "we must go to bed."

"Of course," approved the lady of the house, "and I have no doubt that an unpleasant incident has been closed. You will hear nothing more, I am sure. They won't dare show their heads in the vicinity and will be only too glad to put many miles between them and here. Shan't I get you a bite?"

"No, indeed, thank you. Now to-morrow is your day. I particularly regret that some important business took me away unexpectedly to-day. I shall be at your service to-morrow."

The dark eyes of the old lady shone as eagerly as a child's, and there was a blitheness in her good night which the new events had magically added. Evidently some of her previous disturbing thoughts, whatever they were, had been temporarily lulled by the coming of this enlivening happening.

Long after I was in bed Nancy sat in the shadows of her window gazing contemplatingly out on Black Lake. Her eager, alert mind was seething with many unanswered questions which she insisted upon revolving from every angle before they were cold. She was still sitting there when I dozed off.

When I awoke in the morning I found this note on my pillow:

> I want to question the servants before the house is astir. Shall pretend to be a crank on birdology and stroll out among the trees.

Even as I dressed, I smiled as I saw Nancy walking about, cocking her ears and peering intently through a pair of opera glasses at the tree tops. She played her part ridiculously well, as if she were really an enthusiast in ornithology. In due time she ambled leisurely toward the house.

I had to curb my impatience through breakfast. Nothing unusual happened during the meal. Miss Loring kept up a rapid fire conversation, and Miss Pembroke didn't arrive until we were leaving the table. She had timed her ingress well, and she did look wretched.

Remarking that she would bring down a few things from her black bag to show Miss Loring, Nancy managed to slip away.

"Well?" I demanded when we were out of earshot.

"Yes, very. I engaged Julius Cæsar in the most roundabout conversation in which he all unsuspectingly told me of Miss Pembroke's remarkable method for curing a bad headache. He explained guilelessly that for hours at a time she paced about under the trees, hoping that the air would relieve her. She kept the band on her forehead and constantly intermingled her smelling salts with her sniffs of air.

"When I asked him if she kept in one place most of the time he said that she was often so uneasy that she just walked all over the entire grounds. She frequently relieves a terrific head by these airings among the trees at night."

"Do you suppose," I asked excitedly, "that she had a headache that night I saw her?"

"A feigned one at least. Undoubtedly this is her clever way of diverting suspicion and taking upon herself the freedom of the grounds for her midnight ambulations. I likewise feel positive that she is in direct communication with the black masked man. She had ample time to inform him of our

intended late return that he might plan to waylay us."

"What did he intend?"

"Of course, I don't know, but I suspect that he and his confederates would have securely gagged us, cloaked us and spirited us away where we could be carefully guarded. Thus they would be free from our unwelcome presence here—and any awkward developments resulting from untimely recognition of their inside assistant."

"Surely you don't think they intended any harm to Miss Loring?"

"I do not. I think all they seek is money—particularly does Blanche Pembroke."

"Why haven't they lifted the silver before?"

"I fear it is more than silver to which they aspire."

"But what?"

Nancy shook her head. "That I confess I do not know. Miss Loring is known to be immensely rich and very erratic. There is a mysterious locked room in the house and many unsavory whispers about it. This is common gossip. They may believe that her fortune is hidden in room No. 13."

"Maybe it is," I reflected.

Nancy didn't respond.

"Still," I asserted, "Miss Pembroke must have long since learned how impossible it would be to enter that room. Suppose she did connive to get the gang in here, what good would it do them?"

"Humph!" derided Nancy. "A desperate bunch would break the panels or dynamite the lock."

"You think—"

"Oh, no," she cut in. "They are afraid now. If I am not mistaken, Miss Pembroke will decide to return to the city shortly. She may realize that she has been effectually checkmated, or she may already have been slightly fortunate," significantly.

"Meaning?"

"Oh, mayhap, Miss Loring hasn't counted all her silver recently. Besides, there are many valuable curios loose. Possibly the bad headaches have been relieved—by the sending adrift of these articles from time to time for a certain consideration."

"But a common thief!"

"Not admirable, but entirely probable."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, entertain Miss Loring for a couple of days and keep my eyes open. We will then return—provided that the lady of the blond locks does nothing further to arouse my suspicions."

Nancy was devotion itself all through the day. Miss Loring was in high spirits, and not once that day did the dull leaden hue appear in the great opal at her throat.

It was during dinner, to which for the first time Blanche Pembroke was prompt, that she calmly announced: "Aunt Felicia, I find that I shall have to cut short my rest here. I really feel much better."

There was a defiant ring in her voice.

Three pairs of eyes were riveted upon her thin, white face.

"So soon?" demurred Miss Loring, politely but eagerly.

"Yes, I plan now to leave in the morning."

Nancy smiled grimly into her soup.

And only the pines outside whispered and rustled ominously.

CHAPTER VII.

BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR.

STRONGLY fatigued from our strenuous début at Voodoo Manor, Nancy and I were only too glad to accept the suggestion from Miss Loring that we retire early. So after a little desultory conversation after dinner we slipped away to our rooms. Miss Loring and her niece remained downstairs only a little longer, for we heard their voices in the corridor as they, too, ascended early.

The night was starless, with a waning moon glimmering fitfully behind the thick, flying scuds. The soft moaning murmur in the pine tops appeared to presage the near arrival of a storm.

Possibly it would prove but another false alarm, however, for the same soughing wind had seemed to prevail the evening of our arrival. Black Lake glowered, a sinister, sullen, black patch, pitting the landscape like a great sprawling scar.

"What a dark, funereal night!" I ex-

claimed, shuddering involuntarily as I pulled down my shades. "Despite the trees it is as bleak as some desolate moor."

"It's the wind and the clouds," explained Nancy, giving a quick appraising glance as she, too, drew her curtains. "It will be soothing, this rustling whisper in the trees, and I am weary. I hadn't realized that we had been rather untiring in our efforts here. Now that the Lady Blanche announces her departure, as I had hoped, she has relieved me."

I shook my head. "I don't like her."

"Nor do I," agreed Nancy, "but I am relieved that we nipped her scheme so expeditiously. I feel that that little incident is closed."

Reassured by Nancy's matter-of-fact explanation, my drowsy thoughts soon heard only the rushing wind without with its intermittent, insinuating whispers. I fell into a troubled but sound sleep.

A thundering knock aroused me. I had scarcely opened my eyes to distinguish the early morning light when the voice of Thomas Jefferson, hoarse with fear, called—in that inimitable Southern accent which I shall not try to reproduce:

"For the Lord's sake, miss, get up! Miss Loring has been kidnaped! I have told Miss Pembroke. Shall I call the police?"

"No, not yet," returned Nancy curtly, throwing on her kimono and slippers.

She stepped out to confront the frightened negro. Being scarcely behind Nancy in my rapid toilet, I noted that Thomas Jefferson kept staring about apprehensively, as if fearful of something unseen.

"Now, do stop shivering and tell me what you mean," Nancy admonished him firmly.

"T-t-the-the—her room hasn't been slept in. I—I just came down from the third hall and noted that her door was ajar. She never leaves it open, so I—I presumed to look in. S-sh-she isn't there. I just rapped at Miss Pembroke's door and then came here."

"Oh," exclaimed Nancy in a reassuring voice, "maybe she arose early and is already downstairs. Doesn't she sometimes attend to her own room?"

"Y-y-yes," he admitted. "But she never gets up so early."

We proceeded to Miss Loring's room after Thomas Jefferson had been dispatched downstairs.

It was as he had said—the room was untouched, with the shades drawn. A book lay open on her reading table and her nightclothes had been carefully placed across the foot of the bed with her slippers beneath.

A queer look whipped across Nancy's face. "If only the shades weren't drawn," she muttered.

She brushed by me brusquely. She didn't even wait for Thomas Jefferson to report. Like a magnetized bit of steel she stepped quickly to the door of room No. 13 and listened intently. A strange presentiment gripped me as I watched her fascinated. My heart skipped a beat and something cold and icy seemed to be running down my spine. But I couldn't distinguish a sound.

Nancy examined the keyhole, only to shake her head. "It is locked on the inside," she whispered. "The key is still in the door."

"Then she is inside, and not k-k-kidnaped," I stuttered.

Nancy knocked firmly on the door. Not a sound answered her. More vehemently she rapped again, calling Miss Loring's name with her lips near the keyhole. But the closed door hid a silent chamber.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Coveted Hand

By MARC EDMUND JONES

Author of "Skin Deep."

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

WANTED, NOT BY THE POLICE.

THE two men were admitted to the Riverside Drive apartment, and they proceeded at once to the handsomely furnished living room in front, where a rather florid individual with iron gray hair awaited them in a chair at a large mahogany table. As they entered he spoke without rising.

"Well?" It was a grunt of authority.

"Silent Frank will be sprung to-morrow afternoon," reported the larger of the two visitors. "Spike Latham got acquainted with him as you ordered, while they were both in stir. Spike tried to get him to promise a meeting here in the city, seeing Spike got out a week ahead; but he's Silent Frank all right, and all he says is he's going straight."

"Going straight, hell!" The man at the table rose. He was of shorter stature than either of the others. Only the hint of hardness at the mouth, of ruthlessness about the eyes, betrayed the mysterious head of the criminal gang that had defied successfully the New York police for nearly three years. Otherwise he might have been mistaken easily for an affluent, rather amiable clubman.

"Going straight, hell!" repeated the gang leader vehemently. He turned to the visitor who had reported. "You, Doc Brewster, get a Packard and go up to Sing Sing and meet him as he comes out. Offer

him a lift and give him a talk. Take some one along if you want."

"Velvet Barnby here?" suggested Doc, indicating his companion.

The leader shook his head. "He knows Velvet; worked with Velvet on that job up State that landed him in the pen. Silent Frank was the only one that got caught and sent up. He didn't squeal, but he may be sore."

"All right, chief," acquiesced the larger of the two visitors.

Then both men turned to leave, but suddenly their chief hurried after them, and at the door lowered his voice with sudden viciousness.

"Velvet," he said, "you are sure of Silent Frank's skill with the pen?"

"Great guns, chief!" exclaimed the second crook. "I watched him do that job up State with my own eyes; and it ain't skill—it's a gift! He could write the ten commandments over again on stone with a feather, and fool old Moses himself. It wasn't Silent Frank's fault he was caught."

The chief's eyes narrowed. "It was his first job," Velvet."

"Hell, chief," sputtered the other—"he had a good time doing that job, and he's got it in his blood. He won't go straight."

The chief nodded. "I need him. I must have him. If he tries to play the honest game we'll hound him out of his jobs—"

"Won't the police do that?" interrupted Doc Brewster.

The chief laughed. "They're too busy trying to find out who I am, and trying to send up some more of my men." Then he sobered. "You two men are my gentlemen lieutenants. Silent Frank is also a gentleman, and the best forger in the country. I need some one like him that can come to the apartment here and work on polite inside stuff for big money. He won't squeal or give away my identity any more than you two. He didn't squeal on his other job when that up State gang ditched him. Then I'll get something on him and I'll own him. He's the only man to plug up the hole in my organization, and I want him. Get that?"

"Gotcha, chief," grinned Doc.

"Surest thing!" added Velvet.

CHAPTER II.

A CLEAN SLATE.

IN one of the smaller cities up State young Frank Waite committed an indiscretion. Under the law his act was forgery. He was caught, tried, and speedily convicted. Of good family from the Middle West, his conviction at once severed all ties with the world he had known, and he became, to his new associates, simply Silent Frank. Because of his youth he had been given a comparatively light sentence; for good behavior a number of months were subtracted from the term. He was accorded liberty again upon the 6th of July of an exceptionally hot midsummer—and life began anew for him.

Theoretically, the slate was wiped clean, for the past was dead.

He stepped from the grim doorway of the bleak gray prison at Ossining, and paused for a moment upon the gravel of the viaduct over the railroad track. Upon this spot not one, but a thousand or more, ex-convicts had paused for a first deep breath of the air of liberation. In the soul of Frank Waite, however, there was no exultation.

His crime had been hastily considered and easily and cleverly executed. There was in his consciousness no bitterness for the carelessness of the men who had led him on—carelessness that had resulted in his arrest. He alone had been punished, but that was small matter. The arrest had come so quickly that there had been no opportunity to dispose of the spoils of the crime, and his victims had been reimbursed—which was well. He had transgressed; and he had paid with a growing cheerfulness and a growing sense that payment for transgression which must always be made sooner or later.

The scorching sun upon the Westchester hills before him reflected a blasting heat upon the face of the young man in the cheap civilian clothes. His gray eyes had the clearness of a soul that had met itself.

About a mouth still youthful and mobile was the first set of maturity. His hands clenched as though he checked an impulse to begrudge the past. Then he smiled. The slate was clean!

He started away from the prison briskly, and noticed, idly, that a car was waiting just outside the wooden watchman's shanty at the boundary of the State property. It was rather to his surprise that a man climbed out leisurely at his approach and stopped him.

" Frank Waite?"

Frank looked at the other curiously and with suspicion.

The stranger was a well set up and powerful man, with pronounced reddish hair and beard. He needed a shave, but otherwise he seemed scrupulously neat in appearance, and he was far from cheaply dressed. His expression was friendly, too, but there was nevertheless the suggestion that the thoughts and personality of the real man were carefully masked.

" I am Frank Waite," the ex-convict admitted slowly.

" My name is Stevens," explained the stranger, putting out a huge paw. " They call me ' Red,' although the proper handle is Bill."

" But—"

Red laughed. " Remember Spike Latham, who got out last week?"

Frank nodded. He had been somewhat friendly with the other convict; they had worked together in the shop.

" Spike knew you would be sprung today. We were driving down. He thought we could give you a lift into the city," Red explained.

Frank still felt ill at ease. And the explanation seemed strange and not wholly convincing.

" I don't see why Spike Latham should have taken so confounded much interest in me," he said. " We worked together, but we were never very thick, and—" Suddenly the ex-convict flushed. " What's the catch in this, anyhow?"

Red Stevens laughed boisterously, but without ill feeling. " That's a hell of a way to greet a friendly invitation, young fellow. We're on our way into the city, and we offer you a chance to come along—that's all."

" You seem to be pretty sure I'm going into the city."

" Where else in the world can a chap just out of Sing Sing go?" Red put a hand on his shoulder. " You haven't any home where you'll be welcomed with open arms, have you? You can't go back to the place they sent you up from, can you? You don't know any place other than New York City big enough to swallow you up and give you a chance, do you?"

Frank shook his head; again he frowned. " None of this explains the gorgeous reception committee," he remarked sarcastically. " I'll ride with you, and thank you politely for the lift, but "—a flash of his eyes—" but I'm going straight. I've had enough of the pen, and I'm going straight!"

Red's eyes narrowed dangerously.

" Who said anything about your not going straight? You—you're the damnedest unappreciative bird I ever met!"

Silently the young ex-convict led the way to the car. Then he noticed that there was another occupant beside the chauffeur, and he stepped back.

" This is Doc Brewster," Red explained; and to the other: " Meet Silent Frank, the fellow Spike told us about."

" Pleased to meet you, young fellow," grumbled the third man.

Frank climbed into the machine and proceeded to study Doc Brewster.

Brewster was immaculately dressed, in contrast to both the others, but in his lean face there was the unmistakable sleekness of the crook, the gentleman of quick wit and slippery conscience. Brewster's features were almost of chiseled regularity. He was strikingly handsome. Yet even when he sought to appear at his friendliest there was something repellent about him.

More and more certain Frank became that his companions were criminals, and that the purpose in meeting him was to enlist him in some new crooked venture. And more determinedly he set himself in his determination that all the past should be put behind, and that the future should be honest.

Nothing was said. The machine, beautifully driven, mounted the hill behind the prison. Once upon the Albany Post Road, their progress was smooth, and there was a grateful movement of the hot midsummer air.

Finally:

"What are you going to do with yourself now, young fellow?" Doc inquired, as though this were the most casual interest in the world.

"Get a job," Frank replied.

"Going straight, in other words?"

"Yes, I'm going straight."

For miles no more was said; then Doc Brewster spoke again.

"Do you suppose you'll be allowed to go straight?" he asked quietly.

The ex-convict clenched his fists angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Don't get excited," soothed the older man. "You have a record now, and you are a known crook, even though you are free. The police will watch you, and your record will follow you about. That fad about giving reformed crooks a chance, and all the rest of the women's club bunk, is a thing of the past. Business men nowadays have come to believe that once a crook always a crook, and perhaps you'll get away with going straight, and perhaps you won't."

"I can make a gloriously good attempt," rejoined Frank.

"You'll get a job," the other went on, "and the police will notify your employer, and right away you'll get the grand bounce."

"I'll get another job, then."

"And get the gate again; and keep up the process until you get tired."

"Or until the police get tired," said Silent Frank doggedly.

"How old are you now?" asked Brewster.

"Twenty-four."

"Listen to him!" The older man slouched back more comfortably into the cushions. There was genuine amusement in his face. "Why, young fellow," he continued, "you haven't even begun to meet yourself face to face, or to know life at all. Twenty-four, eh—and going straight? Wait until you get a real dose of the dirty deal society hands a man. Some folks have it easy. They are born lucky, and can get a lot out of life, and remain honest at the same time. But what is honesty? An ideal in copy books for school children. You've put over some easy money once, and it's in your blood, Mr. Frank Waite. You go straight? Can't do it!"

"What is your interest in all this?" demanded Silent Frank.

"Ah! Now you're talking," remarked Brewster. "If you care to listen to reason we can give you a chance to link up with a set of real gentlemen, young fellow. You showed what you could do with a pen and ink in that—"

But without warning Frank Waite straightened in the seat, face flushed and hands clenched.

"I'll go to thunder before I'll play the crooked game again!" he declared hotly. "I'm taking no more chances with the law!"

"Then go to thunder with my compliments!" rejoined Doc Brewster.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAND OF MAN.

THE first great wave of depression swept over the young man who had determined to go straight. There was the discouraging ring of conviction in the summary of his chances as presented by the crook at his side. No more was said upon the subject on the ride into the city. Within the limits they asked him where he wished to go, and he named the Mills Hotel on Seventh Avenue.

There they left him.

"If you change your mind—" Brewster began.

"I will not change my mind," Waite broke in on him.

"If you want to see Spike Latham, you will find him at the—"

But Red Stevens caught the sudden returning flush of color in the young ex-convict's face, and stopped.

"Damn it, I don't want to see any one!" Frank exclaimed.

Brewster started to say something, but Red Stevens stopped him. Silent Frank hurried on into the hotel. There a thought came to him, and he turned about and left, making sure that neither of the crooks had remained outside.

He took the subway down to Christopher and walked to the Mills Hotel on Bleecker Street, following directions given by the subway guard. There he changed his mind again. This was still a Mills Hotel, and he wished to break all contact with the world that had sent him to Sing Sing. He sauntered up and in the Union Square section, obtained a cheap, dingy bedchamber in a dilapidated rooming house.

There he looked at himself in the mirror carefully. Would he be able to put up a winning fight? Were the handicaps so tremendous?

He laughed.

With morning he started out—and luck was with him. He obtained a job almost at the first place he applied—a small lumber yard on Twenty-Third Street. It was manual work of the simplest sort, but, after the prison routine, he didn't mind—and it was a start.

For two days he found content in his new life, and then, upon leaving the yard on the third evening he discovered a familiar figure waiting at the curb. It only took him a moment to recognize the bulking frame and the ever-in-need-of-a-shave features of the man that had greeted him at Ossining.

"Red Stevens!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"How're things going?" asked the crook, falling into step with him.

"Fine!" smiled Frank.

"Why don't you listen to reason?" remarked Red, changing the subject. "The men that want you are the most powerful criminal gang in New York City; and what is more, the police have nothing on us. I am not mugged, neither is Doc Brewster, in this section of the map. We are able to put over things as neatly as a child in a millionaire's nursery. There's a soft berth for you if you—"

Frank stopped abruptly. He felt hot blood mounting within him. "Didn't I give you my answer the day you brought me in? I'm going straight, I tell you, and I mean it."

Suddenly Red clutched his arm, and both men were silent as a policeman passed, scrutinizing each carefully in turn.

Red laughed.

"Did you see that? The cop looked at me, but I meant nothing in his young life. But he recognized you, Silent Frank Waite, and you can bet your bottom dollar you'll lose your job to-morrow."

Frank acknowledged a little chill within himself as he shook his head in disbelief. "They can't do that. I've changed my name. I'm employed as Frank Daly—"

"Wait and see!" interrupted Stevens, and left him.

Red Stevens proved to be right. The manager of the yard expressed regret at the necessity of "cutting down the force," but Frank could see the real reason for the discharge in the manager's face.

Disheartened, he started in search of another position, and his lack of self-confidence lost him several opportunities. Then it occurred to him that, after all, the trouble might have been that he was seen with Red Stevens. Red might have been lying in saying he was not known to the police, for the cop had looked as searchingly at Red as at him.

That was it! With renewed determination Frank went out, and to avoid discovery by the members of the gang to which Stevens and Brewster belonged he invaded the Bronx and succeeded in obtaining a job in a factory with work akin to his task in the prison up the river.

Again luck seemed to be with him. He moved his lodging to the upper borough, and after several days he struck up an acquaintance with a fellow worker, and by this man was asked home to dinner. Then a new element entered into the proving of Silent Frank.

A third man, invited to the meal by the worker's sister, was introduced to Frank simply as Dick Dorgan. All during the time they sat at table Dorgan seemed puzzled by something in Frank's features, and he looked at the ex-convict frequently, for all that he did so covertly, until Frank be-

came nervous. Within the younger man a growing fear took form.

After dinner Dorgan took him aside.

"Isn't your name Waite? Aren't you Frank Waite, rather than Frank Daly?"

Frank went white. But with dogged stubbornness he admitted it. "I'm going straight," he added. "I'm—"

Dorgan put a hand on his shoulder in friendly fashion.

"So far as I am concerned, you will have every chance. I shall say nothing."

"H-how did you recognize me?" stammered Frank.

"I'm Lieutenant Dorgan, of headquarters," replied the other. "It is my business to remember faces and names."

A comfortable feeling of relief swept through Frank, and he returned to the enjoyment of the evening with zest. If this police lieutenant was willing to have faith in him—

The next day, to his amazement, he was called away from his machine by the foreman and given his discharge, again on a filmy pretext. Hardly able to believe that this could have happened again, he waited outside for his new found friend, but the friend pushed away coldly when Frank stopped him at closing time.

"Cheese it, you jailbird!" muttered the man.

Angered rather than discouraged, Frank started toward his new lodging house, wondering where to look next for a job, and was stopped by a huge hand on his arm. He turned.

Red Stevens! Already the crooks knew he had been discharged.

"You see, you will lose every job as soon as—"

Before Red could finish his sentence, Frank lost all control of himself. It was bad enough to have every position he obtained taken away from him, without having envoys of the criminal gang dogging his footsteps to discourage him. With little care or realization of consequences he started in upon the bigger man with both fists. For a moment the vehemence of the ex-convict gave him the better of the conflict. They were in a side street where there was little chance of interruption, and the scuffle took them up onto a bit of lawn beneath the trees. Slowly, surely, Red Stevens began to get the upper hand.

But Frank was determined and bitter. Taking blows to his head, and face, and body, he finally closed in and managed to get a grasp about the other's waist. Exerting every ounce of strength, he twisted forward and both fell. Landing on top, Frank sought to pummel his tormentor into submission.

It was a short-lived advantage. Red twisted out of Frank's grasp and sprang to his feet. Before Frank could rise he drew a revolver.

"What in hell do you think this is going to get you?" demanded Red. "If it wasn't that the big chief wanted you I'd beat you up within an inch of your life, and the first moment the word goes out that we needn't lay off you I'm going to do it—remember! Meanwhile, when the big chief gets through with you, and the police get through with you—"

Silently the crook melted away into the night.

Hardly able to sleep, feeling that the hand of man was against him from the side of organized society and from the underworld as well, Frank waited for morning, and then went to police headquarters and asked for Dorgan.

To his surprise the lieutenant smiled a welcome, but Frank refused the hand proffered him.

"I'm—I'm trying to go straight, and twice I've obtained a job and done good work only to have the police tell my employer about my record and get me discharged. You said—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Dorgan. He turned to his telephone and made inquiries; then rose to face Frank. "The police are not interested in you, Frank Waite. Headquarters was notified of your release, and that's how I happened to recognize you, but headquarters has not been watching you."

"The precinct policemen—"

"Have never had your picture, since you were not sent up from the city here."

"Then how—" Frank began.

The next moment he stopped. He looked

into Lieutenant Richard Dorgan's face and detected a vague uncertainty in the policeman's expression. It was nothing he could fathom, but he knew that Dorgan was holding something back. It was an imperceptible twinkle in his eyes — a momentary twitch of the mouth—

Frank straightened. Red had been right. Dorgan, he believed, was lying. The ex-convict, more determined than ever to go straight and win out, turned without a word and left the room. It was this ability to keep his tongue and counsel that had won him his name of Silent Frank.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVISIBLE HAND.

FOR lack of better inspiration, Frank returned to his former lodging near Union Square. That move resulted in his next opportunity.

"Say," greeted the elderly clerk at the desk, "didn't you say you were looking for a job on books or something like that?"

Frank smiled. At the close of his first day's work in the lumber yard he had chatted with this old fellow and had remarked that he would prefer work other than manual labor. Now he nodded.

"Look at this ad, then," suggested the other. "It's set in a box, and they say they want a bookkeeper without friends and social connections in the city, so that he can do night work in a good humor—that's an awfully funny ad, don't you think?"

Frank took the paper eagerly, then hurried to the address given. He found an uptown brokerage office presided over by a moderately stout man with ruddy features and iron gray hair. There were many ahead of him, but none seemed to suit, and soon it was his turn. It struck him, when he was shown into the inner office, that he had never known a more nervous and fidgety individual than this prospective employer, but yet the old fellow had a clear glance that seemed to pierce right through him.

He was ill at ease as he gave his name. His story, which he told in lieu of references, was that he had yielded to a desire to wander about, and had been traveling around the country, *et cetera.* To his amazement he was given the position.

His employer turned out, with the passing days, to possess no curiosity about him. In addition to that an increasing amount of responsibility was reposed in him, and when the days became a week, and the weeks nearly a month, a new sense of security stole over the young bookkeeper. The work he did was similar to his work before temptation had made of him a forger, and was pleasant. The thought that the beating he had—to some extent—administered to Red Stevens, might have served to stop the advances of the gang, was comforting. And evidently the police had decided to let him alone.

Then new discoveries began to intrude into his consciousness. The broker for whom he worked was easily the most absentminded and the most careless individual Frank had ever known. Not once, but several times a week the safe would be left open. Once the broker signed thirty or forty blank cheeks ahead and forgot to put the book away. After several days of particularly strenuous operations on the market, the broker confessed to Frank that he had no idea whether he had come out ahead or behind on the deals, and asked Frank to straighten out his figures for him so that he would know how much money he had in the bank.

"Give me a rough total in even thousands," he said nervously.

Three or four times a week Frank worked through the evening, generally alone in the office, straightening out the books. And gradually a new realization came to him.

Hitherto the hand of man had been against him. The mysterious criminal gang that seemed to want him badly had pestered him on the one side, and on the other the police had notified his employers that he was an ex-convict every time they discovered him settled at work.

Now he had a new factor to fight—as though an invisible hand had entered the game in which he was the principal pawn.

For in this brokerage office there was absolutely nothing to prevent his utilizing

his skill with the pen to his profit for thousands of dollars. It would be impossible to catch him. His employer could hardly remember signing a check five minutes after he had done so. There was no other employee that could exercise any sort of oversight upon Frank's accounts. No auditor or auditing company would ever be able to track him down. It was more than invitation. It was the perfect opportuity.

He had determined to go straight. But here was temptation such as he had never known before. More than anything, it was the fascination of the opportunity. One night he actually signed his employer's name on a blank piece of paper, and it was so perfect that it brought the cold chills up and down his spine. Even after he had torn the bit of paper to shreds he found it was ten minutes or more before he could resume work.

Then he made an additional discovery. The brokerage business was something new to him, but in reading the papers he found that his employer was undoubtedly running the sort of fly-by-night concern that down in the financial district was failing by the dozens at this particular period. It seemed that these brokers were simply running a new form of bucket shop, wholly dishonest and crooked, and it took Frank only one day with his eyes open to discover that his suspicions were correct in the case of his own employer.

And the thought that came to him brought the blood rushing to his head at fever heat.

If he robbed this concern he was robbing a crooked concern—he was only stealing from a thief after all.

But he had determined to go straight!

Then came new approaches from the criminal world he had put behind him in the person of a vaguely familiar figure that waited for him one night.

"Don't you remember me, Frank Waite?" asked the stranger.

Frank studied him. He was slender and dark, much smaller than Doc Brewster, buit with the same never-to-be-mistaken criminal sleekness. Finally his identity dawned upon Frank. He had been a member of the gang up-State, had been associated with Frank in that young man's one crime.

"Velvet Barnby!" exclaimed the latter. "What are you doing down here?"

"Old-timer," he said, with a chuckle, "it hands me a laugh every time I think how slick you put it over up-State. The hell of it is that old Bordon messed the beans, and that you had to get that kick into stir. If they'd let you flip your own pancakes you'd be in sweet to-day."

"Right-o!" grinned Frank, reminiscently. He had been lonely in the days since his release from Sing Sing, and to resist temptation in the brokerage office had been strenuous work—he was glad to talk. "I tried to tell them that, but they didn't seem to think I was out of knee pants." He sobered. "Damn old Bordon!" he added with a flash of fire.

"I think I'd have squealed in your place, Frank," confessed Velvet with a covert glance that might have revealed his careful approach if Frank had caught it. "Why in hell should you cover guys that treat you dirt?"

For an instant there was a flush of red about the eyes of Silent Frank. But he covered his real feelings. "I played the game," he said.

Then Velvet struck home. "You were a damn fool to keep quiet. You of all the gang to do a stretch! Hell! There ain't a man in America to-day with your knack with a pen or brush, old-timer! There never was as beautiful a job as that bit of pen pushing you did, Frank!"

Suddenly Frank understood. He realized that here was another subtle manifestation of the invisible hand that seemed to have taken up the job of oppressing him. Flattery! Velvet had almost brought Silent Frank to the point of viewing his forgery as a legitimate and proper enterprise, something to be proud of—even something to be emulated.

"You know, old-timer"—Velvet broke the silence—"you ought to do a little clean-up at that brokerage office. How about it?"

The other was conscious of the chill that swept over him. Here it was again, the direct temptation.

"I'm straight," he affirmed vehemently. "I'm through with crooked work and all the long chances—"

"Easy, easy!" soothed the other. "If you don't want to do a job there are no hard feelings. I want you and me to be friends, Frank, and there's Spike Latham who likes you—"

Quick suspicion came to Frank. "Are you mixed up with that gang that Red Stevens and Doc Brewster have told me about?"

Again Velvet demonstrated his tact, and his ability to use flattery in the right place.

"Poor Red Stevens!" he chuckled. "He could beat you up easy, but that one little set-to with you gave him a distaste for the job of trying to convert you, so the job's handed to me because I knew you before your term up river."

Frank smiled in spite of himself, but sobered.

"There's nothing doing, Velvet," he said. "I—I'm willing to be friendly, but I've settled the other matter for all time; I'm going straight! One stretch is enough for me."

"This is your last chance, Frank, to nick the brokerage office."

Frank stopped with a start. "What do you mean?"

"The gang—the gang where you belong, Frank—has inside tips on some of the moves of the police and to-morrow morning that broker will be tipped off that you are a jailbird and then—to hell goes the job!"

For just an instant real temptation besieged the soul of Frank Waite.

"Nope!" he replied at length. "I—I'm going straight!"

Velvet Barnby left him in disgust. The next noon he was discharged summarily upon some slim excuse through which he saw very easily.

With smoldering anger within he went down to police headquarters and asked for Lieutenant Dorgan again. Again he refused the policeman's proffered hand. When he spoke he spoke surlily.

"I've been discharged because some one from the police told my employer that I am an ex-convict. You said the police—"

Again Dorgan went to his telephone and made inquiries and again he turned to Frank, but apparently somewhat puzzled now. "It is not the police. I told you that before."

"But certainly some one—"

"Have you any enemies? Is there any one with a real motive for getting you discharged? Have any approaches been made you of any sort?"

Sulkily Frank replied. "There's a gang of crooks that want me to go in with them. They've asked me several times to do so."

Dorgan brightened. "That's it! I tell you what you do, Waite. You accept their advances next time and if you want to try to get another job in the meantime all right, but I'll put you on the pay roll of the police department right away and you can keep us posted on what you learn—"

"Like hell!" Coloring riotously the moment he understood, Silent Frank jumped to his feet. It seemed perfectly clear to him. This all was a game of Dorgan's, and of the police, after all. He had suspected Dorgan of insincerity before. He even started for the lieutenant, but checked himself as the policeman put his hand to his hip.

Rushing to the door, still angry, he turned.

"Dorgan, I'll turn crook again first before I'll turn stool pigeon!"

In his soul he knew he would do neither. He was going straight!

CHAPTER V.

INTO A CORNER.

At his room near Union Square a man was waiting for him, and with mixed feelings he recognized Spike Latham. His early intention had been to put all past associates out of his life altogether. Yet he had been unable to make new friends. Life to the man just out of prison had proved disappointingly dull and drab. After all human companionship is necessary to every man—and he perhaps could keep some degree of acquaintance with former friends and still maintain his purpose of seeking an honest living.

"I've a job for you," was Spike's greet-

ing. "Velvet told me you've got the bounce again."

"I'm going straight," Frank affirmed, almost wearily.

"This is an honest job, Frank," explained the other, putting out a hand. "I'm not here to worry you about coming in with the gang. You'll come around in time and meanwhile we might as well be friends."

Frank ignored the last remark. "What sort of a job?"

"Just an ordinary factory job, where I work myself. I'm lying low, now that there's the crime wave round-up. I know the foreman, and I can get you in, too. Will you take it?"

"Thanks—thanks a lot," was Frank's heartfelt reply.

For several weeks, a grateful period that seemed much longer, Silent Frank enjoyed his new work and its freedom from a sense of persecution. Several times the foreman stopped for a pleasant word, either with Spike or with himself, and it seemed that the troubles of the ex-convict were over.

Then one day the foreman summoned the two men to a corner of the yard during their lunch period, and Frank noticed that there was a strained and different expression upon the man's face.

"I know that you two men are jailbirds," he began without preamble, "and I've kept you on here in spite of the fact. What's more"—he studied the face of each in turn—"I can keep you working here forever if I want to, because I'm strong in the front office."

"What's eating you, anyhow?" interrupted Spike curiously.

"Just this!" The foreman lowered his voice. "There's going to be a hell of a lot of money in the office safe to-night because the big boss is leaving with it early in the morning for the Bentwood branch and—"

"You want help to crack the box?" Spike's voice was carelessly matter of fact in making the query.

The foreman wet his lips. "It 'll be a three-way divvy and—and no one will ever suspect it's an inside job because I've doped out how we all three can frame an alibi at that molding department's benefit to-night—"

Spike grinned. "Count me in! If you're risking it, with the job you hold here and the chance to put the screws on you if they suspect anything, well—it must be good, and I'm out of spending money."

The foreman turned to Frank.

Silent Frank colored. Was this another temptation maneuvered by the invisible hand he had fancied had taken a grip in his affairs, or could the gang to which Spike belonged be concerned in this in any way? The new dilemma in which he found himself was that he was under distinct obligations to both these men, and the very code that had kept him from squealing at the time of his trial now made it almost impossible for him to refuse to share in this enterprise. Yet there was his determination—

"I—I can't!" he stammered. "I—I've gone straight!"

The foreman laughed. "You don't mean that you'll pass up an opportunity like this? Why, there'll be fifteen or twenty thousand apiece."

Spike colored. "Listen, Frank," he muttered, "that's a hell of a way to act after I got you the job here and after my friend has made a place for you and kept you on all these weeks."

"But I told you I was going straight."

"That's all right, but this is just one little job on the side—"

"I won't do it!" declared Frank, suddenly angry in turn.

"Then you're canned!" exclaimed the foreman. "Get out of here, now; and if you squeal I'll see that you get the blame for the robbery!"

Something seemed to snap within the consciousness of Silent Frank Waite. It was as though he felt he had fought the last battle which he could fight and win. The police would make of him a stool pigeon because this mysterious gang coveted the skill of his writing hand, and if it were not the gang or the police it seemed as though Fate stepped in to dog him.

On impulse he fled from the city. Because he was not sure but that the gang, even the police, might take an interest in his departure, he resorted to the way of

the tramp and partly paid and partly beat his way westward over the mountains into Ohio, by devious routes.

After a week he found that upon several occasions another denizen of the open road crossed his path and seemed to be bound in the same general direction, and he struck up an acquaintanceship.

Then the inevitable happened, just outside Cincinnati.

"Say, buddy," remarked the new friend as they dozed through the noon hour in a grove near the top of a small rise, "I've been rummaging around and there's a crib we can crack down the line—a humdinger—"

"Why the devil do you think that would interest me?" demanded Frank.

The other sized him up shrewdly. "I've got your number, buddy!"

"I'm damned if you have!" rejoined Frank. Then a sudden odd flash of inspiration came to him. "You're not from New York, are you?"

"I've been there," evaded the other.

"You never knew Doc Brewster or Spike Latham or Velvet Barnby or Red Stevens—"

Frank's companion, no artist, promptly dropped his mask. "You're a good guesser, buddy! Now let me slip you a little info. You'd better turn right back and tell one of those guys you've named that you're the big chief's little man Friday for"—a grin—"you'll never get away from the big chief, and—and he wants you damn bad!"

"When the Styx has an ice jam I'll be there!" retorted Silent Frank.

To escape his shadow he turned south, and at night redoubled on his tracks, and at length turned west again and made his way into Indiana. Redoubling his precautions against further shadowing he felt sure at last that he had escaped the surveillance of the mysterious gang leader and the police.

Then for a week or so he allowed himself the luxury of work in the open, taking odd jobs here and there, enjoying the summer while it lasted and attempting to formulate definite plans for his future.

Finally he decided to make his way to Chicago. His money was exhausted and he was in appearance and fact a knight of the road. In this condition he napped one day in a haystack and awoke with the feeling that the sun was setting and that it was cool enough to invite another stretch of hike before seeking lodging for the evening. Emerging from the stack he gazed into the west. All at once he was conscious of a curious phenomenon.

His eyes were still heavy lidded and he was looking directly into the sun, so that he could not be sure. But it seemed to him as if the top of the haystack was different—more yellow, and more silken, and that the sun shone through the strands of yellow and created a golden halo—and this part of the stack was very close to him—

Suddenly the bit of gold turned and it was revealed as a girl's head. She was very young, and she had dark eyes with her blond coloring, and she was very surprised. And then, upon second glance, very frightened.

Silent Frank Waite gazed at her fascinated. A slow warmth took birth within him and glowed through his being. Never before had a girl had this effect upon him.

And his appearance frightened her! That was the irony of fate; ever the irony of fate—

But fate fooled Silent Frank for once. For there was a farmhand that had not noticed the tramp. He had stolen up to press unwelcome attentions upon the girl, and all at once she needed a champion, and when the ex-convict was through with the little job with his fists he was a hero.

"Are—are you really a tramp?" she asked, regretfully, no longer afraid.

"Not when I can get work to do," he explained soberly.

She beamed. "Dad needs help with the harvest," she said.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLDEN RESPITE.

SIX all too short and golden months passed before Silent Frank's past caught up with him and identified him as Frank Waite, ex-convict.

Because Frank expected such, sooner or

later, he had held himself in check with little Dorothy Ware. But Dot had been his guiding angel and his inspiration and now that certain softnesses began to be evident in her face whenever she looked at him he wondered how he could avoid hurting her—by leaving without explanation, by lying to her or else telling of his criminal record, by taking a chance that the past would never come up.

And such was his first thought when he saw Red Stevens alight from the noon train, the sole passenger to arrive in the little Indiana metropolis on the day of Dot's twenty-first birthday.

As Frank Daly he had prospered mightily in this new world. He had helped Farmer Ware with the harvest; then he had obtained a clerical position in the local bank; and from that he had moved over to the insurance office where there was every promise of an eventual junior partnership with bluff Merton Sterling, an Indiana politician of note and a man of distinct local importance.

It was to get off some special delivery mail for Sterling that Frank had gone to the station and witnessed the arrival of Red Stevens without being seen by that criminally inclined gentleman.

Thereafter the day was a Gethsemane for Frank. And somehow he determined that Dot's party should not be ruined.

For unexplainable reasons Red Stevens kept out of sight. Frank thought he might appear at the office, but there was no sign of him, and at closing time the harassed clerk of Merton Sterling hurried out to the Ware farm to assist in the preparations for the evening.

"You look as though you've been through a sieve," remarked Gladys, an older sister. "What's the matter, Frank?"

"He ought to look worried, now that I've reached my majority," broke in Dot with the proprietary air of one who has had consistent attentions from a man for more than half a year.

Inwardly Frank groaned. Would Red Stevens appear? When would he appear? What would he do?

Precisely in the middle of the evening the crook arrived in a car driven from the best garage in town and it was a changed Red. He did not need a shave and his clothes fitted well and he was actually good looking; even honest looking as Frank was surprised into admitting to himself.

"Introduce me as an old friend from the East," said Red, *sotto voce*.

"What's the game?" demanded Frank.

"Do what I tell you and I'll spoil nothing," returned the other.

"I could—" began Frank, eyes flashing for an instant.

Red smiled. "I've no hard feelings toward you, Silent Frank Waite, even if you did pick a fight with me. Now don't start another before you have to. Introduce me!"

Frank complied with the other's wishes and soon discovered that Red intended to monopolize Dorothy's older sister. At that he flushed with anger not so well concealed, but what could he do to protect the older girl without betraying his own past to the younger sister and thereby spoiling her day?

After some time Red sought him out.

"The gang has learned you are here, Frank, and the big chief still wants you, bad! He sent me out here. He cannot find an expert penman with your skill—wait!"

He stopped Frank as Frank clenched his fists. "I'm not here to urge you to join the gang. I've been looking around a bit to-day and I've seen how well you are getting on and"—was it possible that there was a sudden softness in Red's voice?—"and when I can see all that younger girl means to you and more than that all you mean to her I haven't the heart to go ahead with my orders."

He put a hand on Frank's shoulder. "For the first time in my life the thought of going straight has got me, Waite. You have a little Eden here and I cannot bring myself to break it up. And that little visit I have just had with that other sister has given me a taste of how worth while it is to do as you have done—" His voice trailed off.

Frank could hardly believe his eras. "You mean you will let me alone, that I need have no fear—"

"I mean that so far as I am concerned you will be let alone, but the gang and the

big chief will hardly be satisfied with my report, and so you had better be prepared for trouble."

"What can I do?"

"I don't know!" Then Red stiffened suddenly and unaccountably. "Good-by and good luck," he said coldly, without offering his hand.

Frank, following him with his eyes, thought he could detect a lurking figure in the darkness of the trees beyond the Japanese lanterns. Was it imagination? Would he now be plagued with fears and fear born illusions?

He found it hard to respond to Dot's mood of joyousness, and no sleep came to him during the night.

With morning he hurried to the office and to his surprise he heard voices in the private room of Merton Sterling. He glanced in, and as he did so his heart stopped, for there was Doc Brewster talking to the politician.

"His real name is Silent Frank Waite," Brewster was saying, "and he served a term for forgery in Sing Sing Prison, New York State."

"What is your interest in telling me this?" demanded Sterling.

Brewster evidently was surprised at Sterling's attitude. "Why, none at all," he answered slowly. "I thought you ought to know, that's all."

"Who and what are you?" went on Sterling. "Why are you in town?"

"Why, I'm—uh—representing a new line of shoes, and—"

Suddenly Sterling rose. "Mr. Brewster," he stormed, "I've no use for a man who peddles information of that sort, no matter how good your intentions may be. And now let me tell you that you are mistaken. Frank Daly was born and raised in this town and I've known him since he was knee high to a grasshopper. Now get out of my office quietly, if you will."

Almost uncomprehending Frank watched Brewster leave and was quite oblivious of that gentleman's sour glance. Frank hurried in to Sterling.

"What he said was perfectly true," the younger man confessed.

"I didn't doubt that," said the politician. "Nevertheless, I don't like his breed and I like to judge men for myself, and I think you're O. K."

With a feeling of relief almost beyond comprehension Frank sank into a chair. "Now—now they can do nothing to me! Or the police, either!"

Sterling studied him. "My visitor seemed vindictive, Daly. Is there any other way in which he can strike at you?"

Suddenly, very suddenly, a distinct premonition of trouble came to Frank. "Dot!" he exclaimed. "Had I better tell Dorothy Ware?"

Sterling nodded, and as soon as Frank could break away in the afternoon he drove out to the Ware farm to confess to the girl he loved.

She listened seriously, but without great concern. When he was through she slipped a hand in his. "Is that why you have never—never said something else to me that I have—have expected?" She dropped her eyes.

"Can't you see that it was, that it is a barrier?"

"Say it!" she commanded.

"Will you marry me, Dot?"

With the girl in his arms, with her slim form held convulsively to his, Frank suddenly realized, however, that sense of premonition was still with him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PINCHERS.

ALL during the second night of sleeplessness the disturbing feeling of premonition refused to leave Frank.

How far would the gang of New York criminals go to hurt him? He was able to comprehend the opposition of the police, and to understand their heartless philosophy of once a crook always a crook. But now the power of the police to hurt him was gone because Merton Sterling had accepted him at his demonstrated value in this new life; and he had confessed his past life to Dot and had become engaged to her practically in consequence.

But how far would the gang go?

Was it possible that he was unusually

skillful in his use of the pen? Could it be that he was actually a phenomenal forger, and that he had demonstrated the fact in just one youthful and unconsidered crime?

It seemed out of the question otherwise to account for the fact that the mysterious and unknown head of the gang would send two of his men out to Indiana for the purpose of renewing attempts to get an ex-convict gone straight to join the gang.

And it meant that the criminals might go to any additional lengths to gain his services.

How far would they go?

Because reflection upon it seemed useless he turned over finally and gained about an hour of sleep. Then he was wide awake again, and at length he rose. Because the sense of premonition remained he hurried through an early breakfast, and was at the office more than an hour and a half before his usual time.

When he opened the great outer door and looked within he understood.

The place was a scene of utter confusion. The door to the private office of the politician stood open and there even greater disorder prevailed. With odd chills about his spine Frank stepped on in and found that Sterling's safe had been wrenched open and its interior ransacked. Still almost unable to believe the evidence of his eyes Frank went to the safe and leaned over to examine it. In doing that he put several very perfect sets of finger-prints upon the iron with nervously moist hands, and they were the only finger-prints found by the experts called in later in the day.

The next instant Frank heard a gasp behind him and straightened to face his employer.

"Well," remarked Sterling with almost statesmanlike calmness, "it's a good thing I followed my hunch and came down to the office before breakfast."

"Was—was there anything of value in the safe?" inquired Frank.

"Ho!" snorted the larger man. "Didn't you know that I had the cash there to settle old Horton's claim, and that unexpectedly he couldn't come in yesterday to get it?"

"Why, no!" Frank's eyes went very wide. "How much?"

"Twelve thousand dollars, young man!"

"Good Heavens!" Then suddenly Frank saw and understood something in the other's face. "You—you don't think I had anything to do with it!"

For just an instant Sterling was troubled. "I hate to confess, Daly, that I am wrong in my estimation of a man—"

Frank felt fright gaining control of his faculties. "But I couldn't have done it, don't you see? And look at the way the office has been mussed up. If I knew about the money and wanted to steal it I would know it was in the safe and wouldn't ransack the whole place—"

Sterling's was the mind of a politician. "But mussing the office would be exactly what you would do, Daly, to throw suspicion from yourself, and make it seem like an outside job."

"An outside job," Frank pleaded, desperately, "would be neat and professional, wouldn't it? A real safe man would study out the lay of his land and go about it quickly and with dispatch—"

"Which," Sterling affirmed grimly, "proves that it isn't really an outside job, but instead some one's attempt to make it seem an outside job."

The blood was throbbing through Frank's head painfully. He felt sure that all this had been the final attempt of the gang to get at him and it would seem they were succeeding.

"You can't—you can't believe I did it, Mr. Sterling—you can't!"

"I don't know, Daly!" Sterling hesitated. "Will you give me your word of honor that you will not leave this office until I return?"

Frank nodded despairingly, and the politician left.

In the little metropolis life was just beginning to bestir itself, and with bitter hopelessness and absolute inertia Frank watched the figures passing in either direction past the window—figures of people he had known, many by their given names and their nicknames; figures of people whose respect he had won and who had accepted him as a worth while member of the community.

After a bit he managed to whip himself

to a measure of determination to fight his way out of this hole. If only it had come when he had been in a fighting mood, before the false security of his stay here had lulled his faculties and had made the return of the old struggle seem so fearsome in contrast with the new-found happiness.

With dragging feet he forced himself to examine the inner office and the large outer room for evidence that might serve to remove suspicion from himself. His heart was not in the task and his movements were slow. Outside the morning sun bathed the street slantwise; then mounted and feebly began its daily task of baking pavement and sidewalk and building in the early spring heat which was promise of a hotter summer.

The promise of heat reminded Frank of the day he had been discharged from prison, but he was oblivious of the passing of the moments.

Then he thought of Dot. With the thought he went to the telephone.

It was Gladys, the older sister, who answered.

"No, Mr. Daly!" Her voice was frigid. "You cannot speak to Dot. She is heartbroken to think that you have gone back to your old sinful way and"—a sob upon her own account—"and I'm surprised you would have the gall to telephone us. Dot doesn't ever want to hear from you again!"

With that she hung up on him; and at the click something snapped in Frank's inner being.

In the moment of surrender he did not stop for any sort of self-analysis. He did not realize that it was a moment of surrender. He knew that he cared little whether people thought him guilty of this robbery or not. He half wished that he might have been guilty, so that he would have the twelve thousand for use in his flight.

Squaring his shoulders he promised himself that these people would never have the satisfaction of bringing him to trial, of accusing him of the robbery formally in a court room. He would remain in the office until Sterling returned, because he had given his word of honor. But from that moment he would be a fugitive from justice. Had not life and fate and society made of him a fugitive despite all his efforts and hard work? To hell with going straight! To hell with society!

Almost immediately after the telephone call Sterling returned with the sleepy local captain of police in tow. Frank waited until they were in the door, then he turned on Sterling.

"I gave my word of honor, and I have remained here until you came back."

The next word was a straight blow to the jaw that knocked the unsuspecting politician unconscious and sent him crumpling but unharmed against the counter. In another instant Frank tackled the policeman, and that individual was too surprised and too sleepy to display any real resistance.

From the distance came the whistle of the early morning express at the station. Some of the respectable citizens of the metropolis were just turning over in bed preparatory to the first summoning of energy sufficient to arise. It was only five minutes after nine, but it seemed more like late afternoon.

Those that were abroad witnessed the sprint of the young man from the insurance office to the depot, and it occurred to no one to stop him.

He just managed to catch the retreating end of the train on the fly. Walking forward into the coach he paid his fare to a flag stop. Leaving the train he started walking in one direction until the train was out of sight; then he doubled on his tracks and strode as briskly as he could in the opposite direction.

This was country he knew from his rambles with Dot. There was another railroad within six miles at this point, and formerly there had been a morning freight train headed eastward that stopped for water just about the time he could make the distance. Apparently luck was with him, for the train was there, and none of the crew saw him crawl into the empty car near the front.

A week later found him in his old room near Union Square. And there Red Stevens came to see him, on a chance he would so locate himself.

"They don't seem to be looking for you in this burg," volunteered the crook.

"Red!" Silent Frank Waite faced the other with narrowed eyes. "I am tired of trying to buck—"

But even as Frank started to tell of his surrender his expression changed, and all unconsciously he straightened.

"Like hell I'm tired of bucking the game," he said with a new note in his voice. "Red! Red, I'm still going straight—and damn the world!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

AN odd eagerness came into the face of the other man. "Frank," he whispered, "do you remember what I said to you out in Indiana?"

Frank nodded. "You mean about laying off me?"

"Yep!" Red in turn straightened. He needed a shave as usual, but nevertheless he was the Red of the evening at the Ware farm. "But I want to go further than that, Frank. I want to chuck the gang. I want to go straight, too!"

Silently the men clasped hands. Then Frank frowned.

"Can you do it, Red? Will they let you cut loose?"

"That's the point! And we're both in the same boat."

"The same boat?" Frank was puzzled.

"Yes! They will kill me very cheerfully if they think there is any chance of my turning against them and you have had proof of their determination to have your services. It's not a case of just deciding to cut loose. For nearly a year you've been unable to escape them."

"Then what is there to do?"

Red clenched his fists. "Fight them! Put them out of business!"

Frank laughed. "How can two of us do that, Red? You don't mean to start squealing. I—I'm not a squealer, no matter what happens."

"Squealing is no good, because a squeal isn't evidence."

"Then what do you mean?"

Red lowered his voice. "The way to put this gang out of business is to lop off its head. The big chief is a cautious and mysterious individual. He keeps out of sight, and is not known either to the gang members or the police. Probably he is some business man, or some wealthy individual with a clever head and a beautiful alibi in case he is ever suspected. Velvet Barnby and Doc Brewster I think are in his confidence and know who he is, but those gentlemen are not the sort to loosen up. We—we've got to lop off the head."

"How?"

"You can do it with my help. I never can get to him because I'm not in your class as a crook, but only a sort of second class handy man," Red grinned, deprecatingly. "I'm the sort that might squeal if I get caught, and I would squeal right now if I thought squealing would send the lot of them up so that the gang would be busted and I could go straight."

Frank, watching Red's face, said nothing.

"They're not afraid of you," Red went on, "once you go in with them. You proved your nerve when you were sent up on that one job of yours, and when you acquired your name of Silent Frank, and they know you'll keep your mouth shut again, and they'll be willing to trust you. Besides, you're high class, as against my low class"—again the grin—"and the big chief without question will handle you direct as he does Velvet and Doc."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Yield to them. Join the gang. Get evidence, and when we get evidence we'll turn it over to the police."

Frank flushed. "Isn't that squealing? Isn't that becoming a sort of unofficial stool pigeon? What's the difference?"

Red for once became angry. "Isn't that what every detective has to do? Isn't that society's legitimate way of combating crime? You've got me talking like an honored member of society." Red's good humor returned suddenly. "But the difference, Frank, old boy, is that in the case of squealing and stool pigeoning you are betraying confidences which you invite in sincerity—you're not square with yourself—while in the other case you're searching for evidence deliberately, and you're play-

ing a game as squarely as you play the criminal game when you try to outwit the law and the police. Get me?"

Still Frank hesitated. And an odd suspicion came to him. "This is not another scheme to enlist me in the gang, Red? This is not a subtle way to get me tied up, so that I can't back out?"

Red Stevens chuckled aloud. "Look at me! Do I look subtle? Am I the double of Velvet, or Doc—"

Suddenly the crook stopped with a signal for silence. After a moment of listening he made a motion for caution to Frank and then slipped behind an old fashioned wardrobe in the room, pulling it slightly closer to the wall so that he was wholly hidden.

The next instant there was a knock, and Frank went to the door. In surprise he stepped back to admit the visitor. He had not seen Doc Brewster since the day of his release from Sing Sing, but there was no mistaking his identity.

"Well, young fellow," remarked Doc, dropping to a comfortable position on the bed, "what are you going to do with yourself now?"

It was the same remark Doc had made that afternoon leaving Ossining, and Frank smiled. "Last time I said I was going straight."

"What do you say now?" snapped the other sharply.

"Uh—" Frank hesitated, then plunged. "I guess I know where my bread is buttered. You—you fellows win!"

At once Doc brightened. He rose and put out a hand. "That's the way to talk, young fellow. It took you long enough to listen to reason, but we've seen the stuff you're made of, and it will be big things for you from now on. Put on your hat and come along."

"But—" Frank wanted to delay, to confer with Red. Sudden qualms began to beset him, for if he failed—and it was a long chance—

"Come on," reiterated Doc. "The big chief wants you, and it's precious few of the gang that ever get to see him. But he knows you didn't squeal before, and that you refused to stool pigeon for Lieutenant Dorgan, the only man with brains in the police department, and that you won't reveal his identity, so it's all jake for you, kid! Big time stuff!"

Still unhappily ill at ease, Frank accompanied the crook to Union Square. There they took a taxi to Thirty-Seventh Street, and dismissed it at the corner of Park Avenue. Halfway up the side street a handsome limousine was waiting, and this they entered and were driven to a huge apartment house on Riverside Drive. Doc Brewster entered first, and muttered a few words to the attendant at the switchboard. Then they were taken up in the elevator and admitted to a luxuriously furnished suite. Again the crook led the way, seemingly perfectly at home. In the front library a figure sat at a table.

"Chief," remarked Doc deferentially, "here's your man!"

The one addressed as chief was obviously middle aged, well set up, and pink with health. His gray hair became him. There was poise mixed with unscrupulous and inordinate ambition in the face he turned to Frank.

But Frank saw none of these things at first in the amazing shock of discovery. Except for the lack of nervousness and fussiness, and except that now the keen, searching eyes which before had seemed out of place, were framed in an appropriate somberness of feature, there was no difference in the individual since Frank had met him before.

The head of the gang of crooks was the broker who had employed Frank shortly after his release from prison!

"Surprised you, eh!" exclaimed the chief. "Well"—with self-satisfaction—"I've surprised a lot of people. Sit down! Here!"

Frank obeyed, taking a chair at the end of the large table which served the arch-criminal as a desk.

"Let's see," resumed the chief, picking up some memoranda; "it has taken quite a lot to bring you around." He laughed. "You know it hasn't been the police at all, but my agents that have lost you all your jobs."

Frank grinned, to cover his feelings; and

said nothing. He knew now he had made a fool of himself with Lieutenant Dorgan.

"Yes," the broker went on, "I thought I could discourage you that way, but it didn't work. You were stubborn. Then I decided to get something on you, and I put that ad in the paper and used a little influence with the people at the place where you stayed in the Bronx and also where you had been and might return down by Union Square, to make sure it was called to your attention. You bit and I hired you."

The chief smiled with pleasure at his own cleverness. "One thing you must learn, though, is that I am not absent-minded, and that my memory is very good, indeed, so don't let your impressions of the brokerage office influence you. That was in large part to tempt you to dishonesty—only you didn't fall for it. Well, I fixed it then with Spike Latham through Doc here to get you mixed up so that your own sense of playing the game — which has seemed so damn keen with you — would force you in on a little safe cracking job, which would give me something on you that way, but you didn't even fall for that.

"So we worked out the stunt that has been successful at last in letting you have your six or seven months of soft going before we showed you up and let you see how little real faith people would have in your honesty—how little worth while it really is to play the honest game."

The chief grinned. "That bull-headed politician out there nearly upset the scheme, but the artistically planned robbery did the trick, and netted us a nice cool unexpected twelve thousand to boot!"

"What — what do you want of me?" Frank inquired.

"Now don't be impatient, my young friend," chided the broker. "You must never ask questions, but just obey orders."

Beneath the soft and almost foolishly vainglorious exterior of the iron-gray man before him, Frank caught a glimpse, in the flash of the eyes, of the steel-hard ruthlessness beneath. A quiver of apprehension went through him. He realized the danger of the game he was playing.

The chief took up another sheaf of papers. Carefully he tore up the envelope that had contained them and laid out a new envelope to address. First he opened the papers.

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, my young Mr. Silent Frank Waite, and I wish you to understand what happens if any member of my gang might foolishly decide to rid the concern of its head. Here"—showing the sheets—"is my own confession. Attached is a summary of sufficient facts about each member of the gang to assure his conviction upon a charge that means a penitentiary term. These papers are in the hands of a down town firm of attorneys that do not know I am the head of a gang, but do know that my life is seriously threatened—and they are kept in a big bank safety deposit vault where robbery and destruction is impossible.

"I have just added in the facts about your little escapade out in Indiana. Perhaps you do not know that your finger-prints were found, and that it is a pretty open and shut case because of your flight and prison record. But"—a grin—"to make assurance doubly sure, I shall add in later the facts in the first little job of forgery I have for you, and just to play safe you shall remain in the custody of Mr. Brewster here until that job of forgery is completed in case you change your mind about joining the gang."

"I shall play the game," affirmed Frank, an honest lie.

The broker folded the papers in the envelope, sealed the flap with wax and his own thumb prints, and then turned it over and wrote upon the face. Frank, from where he sat, could see what was written. First came the name of a well-known firm of down town lawyers. Then:

"To be opened in the event of my disappearance six days after I have disappeared, or upon receipt of order signed by me." Followed the signature.

"This I shall take down to the vault personally immediately I am through giving you your assignment, Silent Frank. Now I want to see if you are as clever as I have been told you are."

"Give me a pen, please, and push over your inkwell," requested Frank.

The other did so. Frank looked about him. Brewster had gone to the window, and there was no one else in the room. Bending to his work, Frank took a blank sheet of paper from the table, selected a hand-written letter at random, and with exasperating slowness copied the first two lines.

Burning in his mind and consciousness was a daring scheme, and it was with difficulty that he could control his fingers, so that the excitement within him would not be communicated to his pen.

Then he picked up his work and the other letter. "Take them to the light and compare them," he suggested. "Of course," he added, "I am out of practice and will need time."

With all the eagerness of a schoolboy the master criminal hurried over to the window, and there he and Brewster compared the work of the forger with the original, holding them together against the light and expressing their admiration at the cleverness of the work.

Meanwhile, with daring openness, desperate coolness and the deft swiftness which was his real way of working, Frank took another sheet of paper and wrote upon it briefly. Then he added, very carefully, a signature.

Before he could pick up the sheet the others had turned, and so he rose to join them. Taking up his own work again he called their attention to some imperfections which he explained he could eliminate. While that held their interest he picked up the other sheet, folded, and pocketed it.

"The work I have for you, Silent Frank," the chief began, returning to business, "is the rewriting of a will. Doc Brewster will bring the original and a duplicate of the paper it is written on and the copy for the changes I want made, and he will arrange that you are kept under surveillance until your work is done. You will work at your own lodging, or you can move if you wish."

Suddenly a vicious expression crept across his ruddy face. "Let me remind you again, Silent Frank, that it will be dangerous to change your mind or try to go straight now. The man who is supposed to write this will probably will die very shortly, and if my confession goes to the police, the charge against you will be murder. Now go!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROUND-UP.

"DO you want to change your lodging?" asked Brewster.

Frank shook his head.

"Then we'll stop in a drug store and telephone, and I'll have you at work on that will in three-quarters of an hour."

Actually it was a cigar store.

"Stand where I can see you through the glass door," directed Doc, in a low voice. "It will only take a moment."

Obeying, Frank was suddenly aware that some one had stolen up behind him, and he turned. Red Stevens! Quickly he moved, so that half of him, his pocket and one arm, was out of range of Brewster in the booth. In a flash he had handed the slip of paper from his pocket to Red. Turning so that his mouth could not be seen, he whispered, but it seemed almost like a shout to him.

"Take that to Lieutenant Dorgan, quietly."

Then he faced back in time to greet Brewster naturally enough as the latter emerged from the booth. Red was well out of sight.

"The papers will be down right after supper. Do you want to go to a movie first, and then eat?"

"Surest thing," grinned Frank, at ease again.

But when the papers and material were ready for him, and when Doc Brewster stretched out on his bed to smoke interminable cigarettes and to watch him work, Frank began to be impatient for action. He was forced to start work on the forgery of the will, and though he worked tremendously slow, it would not take a great deal of time, because the will was short and to the point. And he did not wish, actually, to commit another crime.

Midnight arrived and passed.

Then came action in the person of Vel-

vet Barnby, who burst in. "Hell, Doc!" he exclaimed. "They're rounding up the gang, and somehow or other this bird has spilled the beans!"

Without waiting for further explanation, Velvet jumped Frank, while Doc, scrambling to his feet, joined the fracas. The younger man had no real chance against the two, especially in the tiny room.

Slowly, surely, they forced him against the bed and then bent him back. Velvet drew his knife.

The knife descended, then paused for deliberate aim. In that moment there came a reverberating shot in the tiny room, and the command, "Hands up!" Frank scrambled to his feet and recognized Lieutenant Dorgan with the revolver, while several policemen were behind. Dorgan beckoned to Frank.

"I want you with me, down at headquarters!"

Here, in the large room occupied by the lieutenant, were those members of the gang that had been found. Among them was the head.

When Dorgan entered the broker sputtered up to him. "For what reason and on what grounds am I dragged down here?" he demanded.

Dorgan smiled. "On your own confession, as head of the gang."

"My own confession! How—how did you get that?"

"*With your own written order in your own handwriting.*"

Smiling still, Dorgan took it from his pocket and showed it to the chief.

It was the slip of paper Frank had written while the chief and Brewster had been examining his work at the window.

Slowly the chief understood, and his eyes traveled around to Frank with hatred. Frank had indeed proved himself one of the country's cleverest forgers.

But the latter had suddenly cultivated a new worry. Red Stevens had wanted to go straight, and Red had helped him in this turning the tables upon the gang, and now he had reciprocated by handing Red an assured prison sentence. Was there anything he could do? Would he be sent back to Indiana for the theft of the twelve thousand, or would some confession—

But Dorgan seemed to have no intention of holding Silent Frank Waite for arrest, neither was Red Stevens, although handcuffed, taken away with the others. As soon as the three were alone, Dorgan, with his own key, took the handcuffs from Red's wrists.

"Waite," he said, turning to the younger man, "your aid has been invaluable."

"I don't understand," interrupted Frank.

"Oh!" The lieutenant laughed. "You didn't know, of course. Stevens here is one of my best men, and he's been on this for months."

"I guess Frank," Red interrupted, "will never forgive me for what I did out in Indiana. That politician really thought Frank was innocent in spite of appearances the time his safe was broken into and I persuaded him to the contrary to help the game along, not thinking Frank would attempt flight."

"How—how about Dot?" It was out before Frank thought.

Red smiled. "I have a letter for you from her. Brewster telephoned the farm and did the damage, but I fixed it for you before I left."

THE END.

LOVE'S ALCHEMY

O LOVE, a master alchemist thou art;
An empty life of dross and dull alloy
You turn into a golden dream of joy,
Your only crucible a woman's heart.

Margaret Rohe.

Without Gloves

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Snowdrift," "Prairie Flowers," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

SHIRLY LEONARD, truck driver, knocks out Bull Larrigan in the prize ring, and thus attracts the attention of Lefty Klingermann, crooked boss of an East Side district. Klingermann aspires to manage a champion, even if he has to buy the championship, and Leonard, who fights under the name of Duffy, is looking for "easy money."

At a dance Duffy runs into "Dago Lottie" Rivoli, a shoplifter, who wants to be the wife of a champion. She has already fascinated Kid Morowitz, a strong aspirant to the title, but his heart is bad, so she plans to "vamp" Duffy as well. She succeeds. Red Casey, trainer, warns Duffy against Lottie, but he will not listen. Lottie, playing a double game, tells Duffy about Morowitz's bad heart.

CHAPTER VI.

"IF I LOSE?"

IT was four o'clock in the morning when, in a little all night restaurant on Rivington Street, Duffy found Lefty Klingermann seated at a table with the cashier of a certain East Side bank. Unlike many of its counterparts, this particular restaurant did actually serve meals, although an observer, had one been present, must have wondered at the fact that most of the patrons, ignoring the white clothed tables, passed to the rear and disappeared through the door of an enormous refrigerator. From this proceeding the uninitiated observer would have erroneously deduced that said refrigerator was kept and maintained for the illicit purveying of liquor. As a matter of fact, the refrigerator concealed the entrance to a stairway which led to the floor above, where flourished a stuss bank in which Lefty Klingermann held a half interest.

Advancing directly to the table, Duffy drew up a chair, seated himself close beside Klingermann, and drew the folded Philadelphia newspaper from his pocket.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 14.

" Did you see that?" he asked, indicating the news story from St. Paul.

Klingermann adjusted his eyeglasses and carefully read the lines.

" No," he answered. " I didn't see it. What about it?"

His tone was coldly deprecating, but behind the words Duffy detected a certain restrained eagerness.

" What we want to do," he answered, " is to step in an' take Morowitz on while the takin's good."

" What d'you mean—while the takin's good?" asked Klingermann quickly. " I figured on fightin' him this fall."

" I mean, I saw him fight over to Trenton, an' so did Red, an' both of us knows that if it would of be'n me in the ring with him that night I'd of got me a knockout. He'd ought to handle this here Frisco Wonder easy, an' the best he gits is a decision. If we wait till fall maybe he'll be in shape agin."

Klingermann grinned. " What's the difference? I ain't takin' no chances on that bout. When the time comes I'll have it all sewed up before she starts."

" Yes, but you won't have to pay so high fer your sewin'. He knows an' Keen knows he's 'way off."

" Chances are they won't talk now. They'll wait till fall when they kin make a better deal."

" Not on your life! I've got the inside stuff on Kid Morowitz. Never mind where I got it, but it's the goods all right. Morowitz is on the rocks. He needs the jack. He's got to fight."

" What 'll Red say? I had a hell of a time to talk him into takin' Morowitz on this fall. He wanted to wait till next year. An' besides, I've lined up a string of fights fer the summer."

" Bust 'em, then. There ain't nothin' much in 'em, anyhow. An' you needn't worry none about Red. He seen the Trenton fight."

Klingermann turned abruptly upon his companion, who had been an interested listener. " You're in on this—fifty-fifty. It is goin' to take quite a piece of change to swing it. I know Keen, an' he'll hold out fer a big bunch of cash. But we'll clean up at that. There'll be plenty of Morowitz money, an' they'll give odds. Maybe Duffy's right. Anyways, I'm goin' to slip over to Philly this mornin' an' see Keen."

" What 'll it cost?" asked the cashier doubtfully.

" Oh, three, four, maybe five years' pay," grinned Klingermann. " But think of it! It's the chance of a lifetime. The sports fallin' all over theirselves to give odds on Morowitz, an' the fight all sewed up beforehand, an' only us on the inside. All you got to do is hustle around an' get your mitts on every cent you can beg, borrow or steal, an' put it on Duffy. Lord, what a clean-up!"

" Yes, an' Lord what a clean-up, if somethin' goes wrong!" foreboded the other lugubriously.

Klingermann shot the speaker a scornful glance. " Didn't I jest git through tellin' you I was goin' to slip over an' see Keen myself? Well, when Little Lefty takes holt of a deal, it don't go wrong—you'd ought to know."

" Oh, sure!" the cashier hastened to reply. " It looks good—so damn good I'm goin' to do just like you said an' bet everything I can get holt of. That's why I was thinkin' that if—"

" They ain't no ifs about it. They ain't no one goin' to try to put nothin' over on me—not what you'd notice. They's boys within three blocks of right where we're settin' that would follow a man clean to hell if I winked my little finger at 'em—an' they'd git him, too. Keen knows that, an' so does Morowitz."

Klingermann pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

" I need a little sleep if I'm goin' to jump over to Philly this mornin'." He turned to Duffy. " So do you, kid. 'Cause if your dope's right, you'll be steppin' into the ring with Morowitz about a month from now, an' it's up to you to make a hell of a show of trainin'."

The three left the restaurant and turned into Avenue A, where Duffy parted with them at the door of his hotel. Ten minutes later he drew on a pair of blue silk pyjamas and grinned at himself in the mirror.

" I didn't say nothin' to Lefty about Kid Morowitz's bum heart, or he might of figgered I'd ought to handle him without buyin' the fight. I ain't takin' no chances—me. But, believe me, when the Kid gives me the openin' for the fake knockout, it ain't goin' to be no fake that I hand him. Damn him! If she was handin' it to me straight, he's got it comin'! An' if she's lyin' to me—he's got it comin' all the more."

After which outburst he turned out his light and slipped into bed.

Later that same morning Lotta Rivoli, alias Dago Lottie, arrayed in a neat traveling suit, drew swiftly aside as the bulky form of Lefty Klingermann joined the crowd that awaited the opening of the train gate in the Pennsylvania Station. When finally the throng trickled through she trailed and watched him enter the vestibule of the club car. As she passed on to the chair car she smiled a trifle grimly.

" Lefty ain't losin' any time," she muttered. " Big fat kike! They think he's a hell of a fixer down in Union Market. I gypped him once, an' he ain't forgot it, an' I'll gyp him again too, when I get the chance. The dirty crook! If he tries to put anything over on me on account of me throwing in with Mike, I'll show him I start in figuring where he leaves off."

Among the first to leave the train at Philadelphia, the girl stepped into a taxi, and a few minutes later let herself into an apartment with a latchkey. Going straight to the telephone, she called up Kid Morowitz, and hinted at a matter of importance.

" Well, what luck?" he asked when she admitted him into the apartment shortly afterward.

" Rotten luck," answered the girl peevishly. " They wouldn't only ten of 'em come acrost. The rest of 'em stalled along with a line of bull about reducin' their force of detectives. Meaning that they ain't afraid of me no more. Some of 'em even dared me to try to work their stores. That's what I get for coming over here and living till they forget I'm alive."

Morowitz frowningly regarded the girl.

" Don't start in on that!" he growled. " Ain't I told you a hundred times that I couldn't of got nowheres if I'd stayed in Noo York?"

" That's all right for you, but how about me? And I don't see as you've got such a long ways. You're on the rocks, ain't you?"

" Damn near it," admitted Morowitz. " But at that, I've got up to where I stood to challenge the champ next winter. An' if Gibson hadn't gone an' got hisself busted up in his auto we'd of drug down enough off that fight to put us all to the mustard. An' as fer the jack, I spent it when I had it, an' I spent it on you, didn't I?"

The girl smiled.

" Sure you did, Kid. There ain't nothing in us two quarreling. I was a little sore on account of them guys turning me down. But I'll show 'em. Damn 'em, they'll be lucky if they've got their counters left when I get through with 'em. But at that, I've got a hunch things ain't so bad as they look."

" What d'you mean, ain't so bad? I don't make you."

" You know there's been quite a little talk in the papers lately about a guy named Duffy that's comin' strong over in the big burg?"

" Yup. Mike Duffy. I seen a piece in the paper the other day where he win a fight an' made his brag he was goin' after the winner of the Morowitz-Gibson fight."

" Do you know who's his manager?"

" Lefty Klingermann, the damn crook," snarled Morowitz.

The girl nodded. " That's what I was thinking. Well, Lefty Klingermann was on the train this morning coming to Philadelphia. Of course I don't know, but I just got a hunch that maybe he'd saw in the papers where your fight with Gibson was off, and was coming over to talk business."

" The hell you say!" exclaimed Morowitz, his eyes lighting with real interest. For six months he had known that his fighting days were numbered. His heart was bad, and getting worse. His physician had insisted that he quit the game. He tried another physician, and another, until he found one that agreed to undertake the responsibility of keeping him in the ring

until after his fights with the Frisco Wonder and with Gibson.

About that time Klingermann, knowing nothing of the failing heart, had intimated that after the Gibson fight he would like to make a deal—a proposition to which both he and Keen had willingly assented. They knew that Klingermann had money, and that the arrangement would afford a profitable windup to a ring career already foredoomed.

Morowitz's main concern had been the girl. He loved this girl with a brutish, passionate man love that amounted almost to a mania. Knowing as he did her championship ambitions, the thought of losing her maddened him and caused him to conceal from her all knowledge regarding the weakening heart. Quite by accident she had learned the truth, and with a cunning and finesse that far exceeded his she kept Morowitz in ignorance of this fact, and straightway sought out Duffy.

The supreme egotism of Morowitz, together with the superb ability of the girl to live the part she played, had of late convinced him that when the time came for him to quit the game she would, despite her championship aspirations, cast her lot with his. Klingermann's visit to Philadelphia could mean but one thing. The time had come for him to sound the girl out.

The telephone bell rang sharply. The girl answered the ring and motioned for Morowitz. With the receiver to his ear he listened to the voice of Keen.

"Hello, Kid! Say, Lefty's in town; had me on the wire a minute ago. Says how he seen that the Gibson fight was off, an' he didn't know but what we'd consider takin' on Duffy. I stalled along an' told him we would drop around to his hotel 'long about three this afternoon. Me an' you better get together first—see?"

Morowitz turned to the girl. "You're a pretty good guesser," he said. "That was Keen, an' he says Klingermann wants to make us a proposition. We're to meet him this afternoon."

"How good is Duffy, Kid?" asked the girl abruptly.

Morowitz hesitated a moment before replying. "Pretty good, I guess. The dope looks like he's about the best there is, next to me, now Gibson's out of it."

"But, can you handle him, Kid?"

Morowitz laughed shortly. "Oh, hell! I've always handled 'em, ain't I?"

"Sure you have. And you could handle the champ, too!"

"I figured on challengin' him some time this winter." The voice held a rather evasive, groping note that the girl was quick to catch.

"Good!" she cried with just the right touch of enthusiasm. "And then, Kid—think of it—then you'll be the champ! The best fighter in all the world! I'll marry you then, and just think of the fun we'll have—the easy money in the big time vaudeville. We can stall along for a couple of years and be the main scream wherever we go."

"Sure we can," he agreed. But the words came with a visible effort. "But, s'posin'—you know, you can't never tell what's goin' to happen in the ring—s'posin' somethin' happened, an' I lose?"

The girl laughed, a silvery, tinkling laugh of pure merriment.

"Quit your kiddin', Kid! Who's this Duffy guy, anyhow? What's he ever done? If he lasts five rounds with you, it 'll be because you want the sports to get their money's worth. But, you're only kidding."

"Maybe I'm kiddin', an' maybe I ain't," answered Morowitz, his eyes still on the rug. "I'm askin' you—s'pose I lose?"

Instantly the girl's pose changed, and, dropping to her knees beside him, she looked up into his face, her eyes wide with solicitude.

"What do you mean, Kid—if you lose?"

"I mean this!" he cried, siezing her wrists in his two hands. "I mean if I lose this fight, where do you stand? You've told me a thousan' times you love me. Do you? Do you love me enough to stick by me if I lose? Or, do you love me like you loved Bull Larrigan?"

The color left the girl's face. The man's fingers were biting into the soft flesh of her wrists, hurting her, and his voice rang harsh with a half concealed sneer.

"Don't! Don't, Kid, you're hurting me! Of course I love you! You've made me love

you! I couldn't love no one else if I tried. And if you lose, we lose together."

The man's grip relaxed. "I'm sorry I hurt you; but, God, Lottie, I see red when I think of losing you! It's my heart—on the bum. You seen what I done at Trenton. If I'd of be'n right, I'd of et that guy up. I'm on the toboggan. I got a hunch that this here Duffy will put me away. But I don't give a damn, now I know how you feel. I'd liked to of gone to the top, fer your sake—but, we won't need to worry none. I've got a proposition that's got the fight game faded a mile. We'll drag down more jack in a month than a champ does in a year—an' not half the work?"

"What is it?" asked the girl, with a show of unfeigned eagerness.

"Tug boating."

"Tug boating! What do you mean? Running one of these here dirty little boats that goes tooting and snorting around the harbor?"

"That's the kind of boat I mean. Only this here boat don't do no tootin' an' snortin', an' she makes most of her trips at night."

"At night?"

"Yes, at night, an' without no lights. Runnin' hop."

"Running hop! And have the whole gov'ment after you! Say, Kid, I've been outguessing cops and dicks all my life, and I've got away with it, so far. But I never fooled with the gov'ment. They'll get you. And when they do get you they'll put you away right! They'll take your boat, and then where'll your money be?"

Morowitz laughed. "Let me run in a batch or two first, an' they can have the boat. Listen, the profits is so big that every trip pays more'n the boat's worth. Some of them boats has made more than a hundred times what they cost, an' they're still goin'."

The girl shrugged. "Maybe—I'll think it over. But don't you worry, Kid. We'll find some way. Of course, I wanted you to be the champ—but it don't make no difference. You better run along now and see Keen. I've got to pack three or four trunks, and I don't want you hanging around in the way."

"Pack trunks! What for?"

Lotta laughed. "Foolish one! What should I be doing while you are training for your fight? I want some money to bet. I'm going to put up every cent I can get hold of—"

The man interrupted her almost savagely. "Bet, hell! Didn't I jest git through tellin' you I'd maybe lose?"

"That's just what you've got to do—lose. My money's goin' down on Duffy. Silly one! Can't you see? If you go in to lose, my money's got to win."

Morowitz grinned sheepishly. "Sure, kid. I'd of thought of that first off, if it hadn't be'n your money. You see, I never figgered to see you bettin' *ag'in'* me. You got the right hunch, all right. Put up all you can git holt of, an' you ought to git in on the short end too. But—where you goin'?"

"Why, back to the big burg, of course. Back to where there's something worth while to lift, and where I can get a decent price for it when I get it. And besides, there's a string of stores that's got to be showed they made a mistake in cutting down their detective force."

"They's plenty of stores here," answered the kid sulkily. "Why can't you stay here?"

"What—stay in this rube town?" she sneered. "This ain't a city—it just thinks it is. It's an insult to my work to pull anything here. Work like mine ain't appreciated in this burg. If goods ain't marked down to a dollar seventy-nine, there ain't no crowd around the counters—and I need the crowd.

"And besides, when I do busines with a fence, I want one that knows a diamond brooch from a hod of coal. The best dealer here had the nerve to offer me three hundred for that black fox piece, and when I took it to New York Rosenbloom slipped me twelve hundred for it without batting an eye."

"When you goin'?" asked Morowitz, only half mollified.

"To-morrow. No use wasting time. To-night we'll celebrate—you and I. And to-morrow we'll both get to work."

The girl accompanied him to the door,

where, standing on tiptoe, she kissed him on the lips. And as the door closed behind him she smiled.

CHAPTER VII.

BULL LARRIGAN COMES BACK.

WITH the Morowitz-Duffy fight only a week off, the sport sheets were devoting space to the event commensurate with the importance of the only major heavyweight contest of the year. Daily news stories appeared, and daily interviews from one camp or the other with principals, trainers or managers.

Each contestant had publicly boasted that in the event of winning the fight he would challenge the title holder, and having thus aroused the public interest, the managers deftly kept it alive by daily bulletins from the camps. Sparring partners were knocked out. Mysterious new lines of offense and defense were being developed—until the speed of Duffy and the terrific punch poundage of Morowitz were topics of daily conversation wherever men foregathered.

It was the concensus among the sport writers and the dopesters that Morowitz would win. Odds of five to three, seven to four, and nine to five drew out a little Duffy money, but on the whole the backers of the New York boy seemed extremely cautious.

These were halcyon days for Lefty Klingermann. He had returned from Philadelphia three weeks before with a decidedly bad taste in his mouth, and a profound respect for the bargaining ability of the Keen-Morowitz Company. For the sum demanded, which he was forced to pay, was an amount so far in excess of what he had figured that it caused him some concern, and nearly brought on the bank cashier, who had been drawn into the deal, a fit of apoplexy. But now, with the pain of the extraction dulled, Lefty Klingermann fairly wallowed in the newspaper notoriety he had paid for so dearly.

As the time for the fight drew nearer, the scarcity of Duffy money emboldened the Morowitz fans to offer two to one, and at that figure those on the inside began to cover big bets. Keen succeeded by devious methods in placing his share of the amount paid over by Klingermann. Duffy placed all he could rake and scrape together. And Klingerman wagered large sums for himself and the cashier. Dago Lottie, too, plied her trade with a vim, and as fast as she cashed her plunder, put the money up on Duffy. It was a beautifully simple scheme. The fight fans betting on Morowitz, and all those on the inside, taking the short end.

Only three people in the two camps were not betting. Morowitz, held out in hope that his widely advertised training, and his bombastic statements of "no chanst to lose," and "dead sure thing," would force the odds to five to two. Red Casey, the old trainer, despite the sneers and gibes of both Klingermann and Duffy, absolutely refused to bet on a fixed fight. And Bull Larrigan, who had been hired as a sparring partner for Duffy, was suspicious.

Bull had been taken on by Klingermann upon the same terms as Casey had been employed. "One drink, and you're through," Klingermann had told him. For the cause of Larrigan's downfall from high estate in the prize ring was well known on the East Side. So also was known his abysmal hatred of Kid Morowitz—not because Morowitz had knocked him out in the ring the year before, but because after knocking him out, he had robbed him of his girl.

For three weeks now, Larrigan had worked with Duffy—had taught him much, for Larrigan, in his prime, had been a real fighter. The thing that Larrigan could not fathom was that Duffy was willing to work hard in preparation for a fight that was already his. Then, one week before the fight, he found out.

The three weeks of gruelling grind and strict observance of training had done wonders for Bull Larrigan. His muscles had hardened, his eyes had cleared, and his old speed was fast returning. Red Casey noted the change even before Larrigan himself was conscious of it. Then Bull discovered it—discovered suddenly that Duffy was at his mercy. All at once it dawned on him that he could knock Duffy out any time he chose. And if Duffy, why not Morowitz? The old

fighting spirit suddenly awakened, and that night, alone in his room, Bull Larrigan fought the fight of his life.

The first impulse that leaped into his brain at the discovery, was to fittingly celebrate the event—and with Larrigan, to celebrate, ment to get drunk. For three weeks he had kept away from the booze because he needed the money that Klingermann was paying him. It had been fairly easy. His days had been taken up in Duffy's training quarters, and so faithfully did he perform his work that at night he went to his room dog tired. But now the pent-up desire for drink surged upon him with his new found strength.

Bull Larrigan was no fool. He shared the East Side's knowledge of his own downfall. He had disregarded the warnings of trainers and managers in his ring days, and had continued to flirt with whisky until whisky got him. Then it was too late. He accepted the fact of his defeat, and drank more heavily than before. They all had told him he was done—and he believed it. But now, suddenly, he had found out they were wrong. He *could* come back! He *had* come back! He knew this—and by morning the whole East Side would know.

Snatching up his cap, he paused with a hand on the door knob and allowed his eyes to sweep the confines of the shabby room that was his home. The cheap wooden dresser, with its cracked and distorted mirror. The iron bedstead, with its enamel scaled off in spots and splotches. The washbowl in the corner, stained with the rust of chronically dripping faucets. The bare floor. The filthy wall paper that sagged and bulged from the wall. And the unpainted board, with its row of hooks from which depended a battered hat, a dejected sweater with raveled elbows, and a limp suit of serge.

Mentally he contrasted the room wtih Duffy's apartment in the Avenue Hotel. Bright colored rugs, glittering brass bedstead, clean white bathroom, mahogany dresser, with its array of monogrammed toilet articles, and whole closets hanging full of expensive clothing.

"An' I'm a better man now dan he is!" The words formed themselves in a growl from between clenched teeth. With an oath he jerked the cap from his head, hurled it into a corner, turned the key in the lock, and threw himself fully dressed upon the bed. Bull Larrigan slept little that night. He dozed fitfully, awakening at frequent intervals to battle with his desire for liquor. He drank quantities of tepid water from the tap, and planned ring battles, round by round. Always it was Kid Morowitz that he fought. And always the fight ended with Kid Morowitz lying limp on the canvas while he himself stood over him, as his own name roared from a thousand throats.

In the morning he bolted a huge breakfast, and went to work, and that day he learned a little thing that changed the course of prize ring history.

"Got some special work for you to-day, Bull," informed Duffy, approaching him in the locker room an hour before the regular daily workout.

"Dat short left chop I was—"

"No. I got the hang of that chop, all right." Duffy glanced around to make sure they were alone, and stepped closer. "You know Lefty fixed things up with Morowitz and Keen."

Larrigan nodded and waited for the other to proceed.

"Well, Morowitz slipped into town last night—just him an' Keen. They kept it quiet, an' got into my rooms without any one catchin' on. Lefty was there, and Red Casey, an' we rehearsed the finish. It's in the seventh, an' it goes like this. Morowitz leads off strong, an' forces me to the ropes. I clinch. We break, an' in the break I leave an opening—like this. Morowitz slams in a swing for the jaw that misses by an inch, which leaves him wide open. I come in quick with a right an' left to the jaw. He's clawin' the air, an' I follow up, crowdin' him close an' smotherin' him with hooks an' chops till he goes down for the count. We went through it a dozen times, an' it looks like the real stuff."

"Well, what's dis here special work about den?"

"That's all right as far as it goes. But what I want is a real knockout."

"You mean you want to *gyp* him?"

"Yes, damn him! That's just what I

want to do! When he misses my jaw and leaves me the opening, instead of swinging to his jaw I want to land heavy on his heart."

Larrigan considered. His hatred for Morowitz caused a slow grin to curl his lips, but he shook his head.

"Nix. It's like dis: You already got dis fight on ice. W'at's de use takin' a chanst. S'pose you don't git him wit' de swing to de heart? S'pose you miss, or s'pose you don't land heavy enough? Dis here Morowitz ain't no cinch fer you. W'en he finds out yer tryin' to gyp him, he'll jest nach'lly jump in an' tear hell out of you!"

It was Duffy's turn to grin. "Never you mind that. It ain't goin' to take much of a rap on the heart to stop Kid Morowitz. His pump's on the bum—he's done."

"W'ere'n hell did you git dat dope?"

"I got it straight enough," answered Duffy easily. "From the only one that knows it except Keen an' his doc. I got it from a girl."

"Dago Lottie!" the name exploded from Larrigan's lips, and his fists clenched till the knuckles whitened. "Where'd you see Dago Lottie?"

Duffy smiled cavalierly. "How'd you guess it?" he asked, easily. "Yes, Dago Lottie told me."

"But where'd you see her? An' how'd she come to tell you about—him?"

"See her!" laughed Duffy. "Why, I see her most every night. You see, we're goin' to get married the day I knock out the champ. She put me wise so I could win. She don't know the fight is framed."

The color that had leaped into Bull Larrigan's face slowly receded. His fists relaxed, and he spoke with a slight trace of huskiness in his voice, more to himself than to Duffy: "So Kid Morowitz's heart is on the fritz, eh? An' w'en she found out he was t-rough she switched over to you, did she? An'—w'ere does she go from here?"

"What?" cried Duffy sharply. "What the hell do you mean? You' been talkin' to Red Casey. Listen: You birds has got that skirt all wrong. She never had nothin' to do with Kid Morowitz. She jest happened to be in Philly to see Jack Keen on business, an' she happened to hear him an' Morowitz talkin' about his heart, an' she slips me the tip—see? Where the hell do you get that stuff about her an' Morowitz? She hates his guts! She's mine!"

"Oh," answered Bull Larrigan slowly. "Well—maybe—I—got—her—wrong."

"I'll say you did! Believe me, there's one moll that's all to the good. I suppose Casey's handed you that line of bull. It's a damned lie. 'Course, Lottie, she—works the stores. An' she so damn good that they're afraid of her. But, other ways—you know—she's as square as hell."

Larrigan nodded. "Yes," he answered, "I know." He swung the door of his locker open and pulled off his sweater. "An' she's bettin' on you to win?" he asked casually.

"I'll tell the world she is. She'll cop off a nice bunch of jack, too."

"What do you want to hand Morowitz a knockout fer, when you win anyhow?" persisted Larrigan, as he unlaced his shoes.

"There's a couple of reasons. First off, I hate him 'cause she does—see? Then I don't want her to know the fight was framed. I want to put him damn good an' out."

"An' what is it you want me to do now?" asked Larrigan, drawing on his trunks.

"I want you to go through this rehearsal like I told you—like Morowitz went through it with me last night. I'll give you the openin' when we break, an' you slam a right to the jaw that misses, then instead of tryin' fer your jaw, I'll shoot in a right an' left to the heart. I want to get the range, an' I want you to try an' block. You're faster than Morowitz, so if you can't block quick enough to cover, it's a cinch he can't. If you can, we've got to dope out a way to land those punches faster, that's all."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOUBLE DOUBLE-CROSS.

WITH the big fight that was to determine the challenger of the heavyweight title only two days off, Bull Larrigan slipped quietly into a smoking

car and landed late in the evening in Philadelphia. Stepping into a telephone booth, he called Morowitz's number, and a few moments later got a sleepy answer.

"Hello, Kid, dat you?"

"Yes, it's me. Who are you, an' what in hell do you want?"

"I got to see you. I got a message—"

"Who from?"

"Dago Lottie."

"Well, spit it out," the voice came more sharply.

Larrigan laughed. "Nix on dat. I got to see you. How do I know it's you dat's talkin'?"

"All right," growled the voice. "Take a taxi. I'll pay for it." He gave Larrigan a street and number. "Third floor front. The door'll be open."

Ten minutes later, as Kid Morowitz drew back with a start, a man with a sweater collar drawn high stepped across his threshold.

"Bull Larrigan!" he exclaimed and instinctively stepped behind a table in the drawer of which lay a loaded automatic pistol.

Larrigan carefully closed the door behind him, and faced the other with a grin.

"No chanst fer a gun-play, Kid. I ain't heeled. An' besides I came here fer yer own good."

"What do you mean?" asked Morowitz, ignoring the reference to the gun.

"I be'n in Duffy's camp for a mont'—sparrin' pardner."

A thin smile twisted Morowitz's lips. "An' you want to sell me somethin'? Lottie's name was only a stall to get in here!"

"No," answered Larrigan, "I'll leave it to you if I'm stallin'. An'—I wouldn't try an' sell a man back a fight he'd already sold, would I? What I'm here fer is to hand you somethin'. If it ain't wort' nothin' to you, all right. If it is, all right agin—see?

"No," answered Morowitz coldly, "I don't see. How long since you be'n such a good friend of mine that you'd make a trip over here from New York to hand me somethin'? What's yer game?"

Larrigan scowled, and glared at the other across the table. "Fer more'n a year, I've hated yer guts, on account of—you know—on account of *her*. I'd of croaked you any day if I t'ought it would of got her back—but it wouldn't."

Morowitz glanced toward the table drawer, and Larrigan divined the intent. "I told you I wasn't heeled," he said harshly. "An' I'm tellin' you now I don't hate you no more. Long as I figgered she was goin' to you I hated you, but now you've lost her, I hate de man dat's goin' to git her, same as I hated you."

"Lost her!" Morowitz, forgetting the gun, stepped swiftly around the table, and clutched the other's arm. In the light of the electric chandelier Larrigan saw that his face had gone suddenly white. "What do you mean—lost her?"

Larrigan glanced about the apartment, "She ain't in Philly, is she?"

"No! Damn you! She's in New York—"

"Yes. An' goin' to marry Mike Duffy de day he wins de belt."

Morowitz's grip relaxed. He sank into a chair, and motioned Larrigan into another.

"Prove it, damn you! If you're lyin' I'll croak you right here. What's yer game? What did you come here for?"

"I come because dat damn dirty double-crossin' yeller dog is goin' to git de girl I love—yes, I love her! I don't give a damn who knows it. I'd go t'rough hell to git her back—right now! If croakin' him would do it, he'd be planted by now—but it wouldn't. Dere's jest one chanst—an' dat's you."

"Me!" exclaimed Morowitz, in surprise.

"Yes, you. It's like dis." He paused and fumbled in his pocket, drew out a rumbled newspaper clipping which he handed to Morowitz.

Several days before, an old sport reporter had stood for a long time and watched Bull Larrigan and Mike Duffy at their work in Duffy's training quarters. He was a reporter who had known Larrigan in his better days—had known Red Casey, too. When the workout was over he hunted up Casey. Then he went back to the office and sat down at his typewriter and wrote a

story. It was a story which was also a prophecy. It began and ended with an *if*.

It recited Bull Larrigan's ring record and his bar record, also. It was to the effect that if Bull Larrigan, the forgotten, the down-and-outer, would let booze alone, he could come back with a rush that would carry him to the top in a year's time. Many people read the story. Many who knew Larrigan laughed. Others scoffed. The old sport reporter came in for much kidding, in and out of print. Red Casey read it, and believed it. Bull Larrigan read it, and knew it was true. Dago Lottie read it, and wondered. Morowitz read it, and handed it back with a grin.

"Have a drink?" he asked, "I've got a bottle here."

"I'll cut my t'roat first," answered Bull, gruffly. "I'm goin' to de top!"

"An' where do I come in?" smiled Morowitz patronizingly.

Larrigan leaned forward, his voice tense: "Don't go tryin' dat on wit' me. You knocked me out, wunst. You got my girl away. You've got a swell flat, an' swell clothes, an' you eat swell grub. An' I'm a bum. I live in a dirty hole, an' de clothes I got on my back is de best I own.

"But, by God, I'm a better man dan you are right now! An' I'll have all de t'ings you got now w'en you ain't got a nickle left! I told you I come up here to hand you somethin'. I did. But it ain't altogedder on your account. It's 'cause I kin use you in hittin' a lick fer myself."

The man paused, and the other waited for him to proceed. "It's like dis: De way you an' Duffy has got de sevent' round framed, you open fast an' crowd him to de ropes. He clinches. In de break, he leaves a openin' an' you slam in wit' a right to de jaw dat misses, leavin' him a openin', an' he come in wit' a right an' left to de jaw, an' follers up wit' hooks an' jabs dat smother you before you kin come back from de jolt on de jaw. You take de count. Am I right or wrong?"

"That's right," admitted Morowitz.

"Well, git dis: Duffy ain't goin' to swing on yer jaw w'en you give him de openin'. He's goin' to come in wit' two damn swift swings to de heart—"

"The heart!" cried Morowitz quickly.

"Yes, de heart. He's be'n tryin' it out on me fer two days, an' believe me, he's dere wit' de stuff!"

"But—why in hell should he do that? The fight's framed to go the way we rehearsed it. What's the big idea?"

"De girl," answered Larrigan. "She's got him fooled. She's told him somethin' dat's made him hate you an' he's goin' to make it a real knockout. Den besides, he don't want her to know de fight's framed."

"There you go with the girl again. Damn you, you ain't proved nothin' yet. You ain't proved she even knows Duffy."

"I ain't, eh? Well, maybe you'll tell me what a couple of good stiff jolts on de heart would do to you."

Morowitz stared, hesitated, and tried to bluff: "Anyone knows a stiff enough jolt on the heart'll stop any man. But he couldn't hit hard enough to hurt me, even if he landed."

Larrigan grinned. "'Taint no use, Kid. Listen: Yer heart's on de bum. You had to change docs to stay in de game fer dis fight. You're done. Dat's why she quit you—like she quit me when I was done. How would I know dis if she hadn't told Duffy, an' Duffy told me? She's double-crossed you, Kid. An' Duffy's goin' to double-cross you agin."

Morowitz leaped from his chair and paced up and down the room cursing like a mad man. He cursed his doctor, his heart, the girl, Keen, Klingermann, and Larrigan, but most of all he cursed Duffy. "Damn him to hell! I'll fix him! I'll tear into the dirty pup the first round an' I'll butcher him! I'll show him! I'll kill him!"

Larrigan listened until the other had worn himself out, and settled again into his chair.

"Dat's one way," he admitted, half scornfully. "But, w'ats de use of takin' chances? Dis here Duffy ain't no baby —w'at I'm tellin' you. An' if I had a bum heart I wouldn't take no chances in de ring wit' him. He's dere wit' de punch, an' he's got science an' speed. He's got everyt'ing he needs, but de guts."

"What the hell am I goin' to do then? Stand up to him an' let him gyp me! Let

him swing on me, when a good stiff punch on the heart would prob'ly croak me!"

"No, I wouldn't do dat. An' if I had everyt'ing comin' my own way I wouldn't make no fool play like tearin' in to kill him de first round, neither."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean, I'd play de game wit' his own chips till it comes to de sevent'. W'en de sevent' starts you bore in an' crowd him to de ropes, like it's doped out fer you to, den he'll clinch, den on de break, he'll give you de openin' to swing fer his jaw—*an' miss*. S'pose you *don't* miss? S'pose you land on his jaw w'en he ain't lookin' fer it, wit' everyt'ing you got, an' den foller it up wit' another?"

Morowitz leaped to his feet excitedly.

"That's the dope!" he cried. "Damn him! I'll learn him to try to gyp me! An' I'll learn her, too!"

Larrigan grinned. "She's bettin' every cent she can git holt of on Duffy," he said. "I should worry. De buster she is, de quicker she'll come back to me—"

"To you!"

"Yes, Kid—to *me!* It's a pug she wants—a champ. She's t'rough wit' you. She don't want no broken down sport wit' a bum heart. Dey ain' no chanst fer you to git her back, no matter which way de cat jumps. You're done. An' here's another t'ing. Believe me, w'en you knock Duffy fer a gool you got to hunt yer hole an' lay clost. De girl ain't de only one dat's playin' Duffy to win. An' she ain't de only one dat's bust de minute de referee counts ten over Duffy. Dere's Lefty—an' he's got a dozen gun-men dat jumps w'en he pulls de string. An' besides, dere's Keen. He's got his jack up on Duffy, too. W'at's he goin' to say w'en he finds out you've gypped him?"

"Damn Keen! And damn Lefty! I'd gyp the world to knock that dirty double-crosser cold! I don't owe them birds nothin'! Keen made all the jack he ever owned off me. Now he can lose it where he got it."

"How about you?" asked Larrigan, "ain't you got de jack Lefty paid over, bet on Duffy, too?"

A twisted grin was Morowitz's answer, and reaching into his pocket, he drew out a thick roll of yellow bills.

"I was waitin' fer the odds to go up," he said, unrolling the bills and fingering their edges. "Here's jack enough fer a git-away, an' some to spare. An' I can get half agin as much by bettin' on myself."

Larrigan, his eyes on the roll of bills, forced a look of indifference.

"You got to be damn careful, bettin' on yourself," he suggested. "S'pose Keen, or Lefty got wise to it? An' even if you got de jack down wit'out dem findin' it out, you dastn't show yer mug to collect it. Believe me, Kid, yer goin' to be on de run w'en de referee says 'ten.' You don't even dast go back to yer dressin' room. Keen'll be layin' fer you, an' yer trainer, too, wit' a water bottle, an' a couple of Lefty's gunmen will finish up de job."

"What am I goin' to do?" asked Morowitz, growing a shade paler.

"Leave it to me," answered Bull Larrigan reassuringly.

"But, you—"

"Sure, I know. I hated you ever since you grabbed de skirt offen me. But, you ain't got her no more, so w'at de hell! I show'd you I'm right, didn't I—w'en I put you wise dat Duffy was goin' to gyp you, an' land on yer heart hard enough to maybe croak you? Come heads er tails, yer in a hell of a fix anyways. If you go t'rough wit' it de way it's doped, Duffy croaks you wit' a smash on de heart. If you knock Duffy out, an' gyp Lefty an' Keen, Lefty's' gunmen croaks you.

"I'm de only chanst you got. Listen: Dis fight's pulled off in de Bon Ton. De minute you slip t'rough de ropes after it's over you make fer de locker room, but don't go on t'rough to yer dressin' room. Turn left behind de first row of lockers an' you'll find a door. Go t'rough dat door into de little hallway at de head of de stairs dat goes to Dreyfus's office. I'll be dere wit' a suit of clothes. You crawl into 'em an' beat it to a taxi I got waitin,' an' slip over to my room. It ain't no swell joint like dis, but it'll do fer a hide-out. Lefty'll be combin' Noo York wit' a fine toot' comb to find you, but dey won't never look fer you dere."

"But how about this?" asked Morowitz, fingering the bills. "That don't give me no chanst to get my money down."

Larrigan shrugged: "Well, you might take a chanst on gittin' it down without dem findin' it out. An' another chanst on showin' up to collect it after de fight. But, believe me—" he finished the sentence with an expressive grimace.

"If I was sure you wouldn t gyp me," muttered Morowitz, after a pause during which his fingers riffled the edges of the bills, "I'd get you to put this down along with yours."

Larrigan laughed: "A guy can't never tell what's goin' to happen to him till it does. An' some guys is funny, at dat. Here's you willin' to take a chanst on me keepin' you from gittin' croaked, an' wonderin' if you dast take a chanst on me wit yer roll. De quicker you make a getaway, an' de furder you go, de easier it is fer me to git Dago Lottie back. She's all I want—to hell wit' you!"

Without a word, Morowitz handed over the roll, and Larrigan stuffed it into his pocket.

"Remember de dope, now, an' don't fergit it." He paused, grinning. "You knocks out Duffy, an' den you beats it. Dat leaves de skirt fer me. I got what I come after—an' you'll git your's. So long."

As he descended the stairs, his fingers tightly clutching the roll of yellow bills, he grinned again.

"I'll say he will!" he muttered savagely. "I'll say so!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT.

AS the day of the Morowitz-Duffy fight approached, New York's underworld felt more and more Lefty Klingermann's urgent need of cash. Under threat of police interference and vague hints of gun-man activities, he gouged and extorted right and left; and the crooks and keepers of dives, gambling houses, hide-out joints and fences paid. They whined, and squawked, and cursed, and threatened dire vengeance—but they paid.

With his uncanny intuition as to the whereabouts of dishonest dollars, Klingermann ferreted them out and appropriated them. Playing a sure thing, he levied upon his own stuss banks until the reserve held against a run of adverse luck was shaved to a dangerous minimum. And on top of this, he borrowed prodigiously among the petty merchants of his precinct. On ten day notes he obtained thousands of dollars at an interest of ten, and even twenty-five per-cent for the ten days.

The result of this eleventh hour flood of Duffy money was to force down the odds. Morowitz money became hard to find, and when found was offered at one-and-a-half and at one-and-a-quarter-to-one, until on the day of the fight bets were laid at even money and plenty of Duffy money in sight.

It was on that day that Bull Larrigan, in an uptown pool room, whose management knew nothing of his connections with the camp of Duffy, succeeded in placing his roll—his own money, and the money entrusted to him by Morowitz.

"It's a funny old world, take it up an' down an' crossways, w'en you come to t'ink about it," he soliloquized, as he crossed over and walked down Fifth Avenue. "Take Lefty, now, an' Kid Morowitz, an' Duffy, an' Keen, an' Lottie. Gawd! All of 'em sittin' in de big game togedder—an' not a damn one of 'em hep to w'at's comin' off. De deck's stacked, an' no one knows who stacked it—only me, an I'm jest lookin' on!"

The Bon Ton club blazed with light. The seating capacity had been trebled by the removal of a partition wall between its gymnasium and an adjoining loft building. The usual price of admission, also, had been trebled, and Dreyfus smiled as he stood near the doorway and watched the fight fans file in and noisily take their places.

At the ringside sat the bank cashier. A close observer would have noted that his face was many shades paler than was its wont, and that his lips were tightly drawn about the butt of an unlighted cigar, held stiffly between clamped teeth. The room was not uncomfortably warm, but at short

intervals he ran an uneasy finger around the inside of his collar. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but sat with his eyes on the newly canvased ring, with its ropes wound with red, white, and blue bunting. But the cashier took no note of the details of the ring, nor of the crowd that was rapidly filling the seats. Before his eyes passed a long procession of false entries, of sealed packages of big bills stealthily removed from the bank's vaults —and of iron bars—the black iron bars of a prison.

Suppose something should go wrong! There was an icy chill at his feet. His head and neck felt hot, and for the twentieth time he ran his finger around the rim of his collar. An acquaintance greeted him jovially, and he returned the greeting with a grunt, as his eyes sought the bulky form of Lefty Klingermann for moral support.

In sharp contrast with the cashier's fit of doldrums, Klingermann's manner was hilariously exuberant. Moving along the aisles and about the ringside, he called noisy greetings to acquaintances, shaking a hand here, slapping a shoulder there, laughing loudly at some quip or joke, and stooping low to whisper confidentially to some fan of wide importance in the pugilistic world. He fairly radiated nervous geniality. His little eyes glittered, and he was incessantly on the move.

A notorious race track plunger known as Parley Smith took his seat at the ringside, and Klingermann greeted him banteringly: "Hello, Parley! Bring your roll along?"

The man grinned, and held up a thick wad of bills. "Want to make a hole in it?" he challenged. "You don't figure that selling plater you're backing has got a show to win, do you?"

Klingermann laughed uproariously. "S-a-y! That's pretty good! Tell you what I'll do—seein' it's you. You'd bet me even money, wouldn't you? Sure you would—a week ago you was bettin' two to one!" Klingermann plunged his hand into his pocket and drew out a roll of hundred-dollar bills, which he flattened out and counted with a flourish. "Twenty of 'em!" he announced loudly. "Twenty centuries! Two thousand of the good old iron men!"

He slapped the packet of crisp bills loudly against the palm of his hand. "But I ain't a goin' to let you bet even. I'm a goin' to give *you* odds of two to one! Yes, sir, two to one on that boy! It's costin' me a cold thousand to do it. But it's worth that in advertisin' to these folks just what I think of him. There's a boy, gents, that's goin' to be the next champ! An' don't you fergit it! Who says so? Little Lefty says so! Little Lefty Klingermann! You'll all be comin' to Lefty fer the fight dope after to-night!"

He paused abruptly and thrust the bills toward the other. "Want it? All right, cover it with a grand, an' let your friend there hold the stakes, or hold 'em yourself, if you want to. That's the last bet made—two to one on Duffy!"

Cheers and catcalls broke out in a pandemonium of noise as the man covered the money. Shouts filled the air, and Klingermann was besieged with offers at the same odds. For answer he thrust both hands into his trouser pockets and turned them inside out.

"Busted!" he roared. "Busted, an' mortgaged to the ears! But I won't be long!"

And with his pockets adangle, he took his seat beside his friend, the bank cashier, just as the official announcer stepped through the ropes.

The preliminaries were exceptionally good, and the big crowd showed noisy appreciation. With a tremendous ovation of noise, it greeted the two contestants of the main bout as they were formally introduced from the ring. It was no secret that the winner of this fight would challenge the champ, and excitement ran high.

At Morowitz's appearance the sold trainload of Philadelphia rooters threatened to raise the roof with their din, which was drowned a few moments later, as Duffy stepped through the ropes, by the mighty roar that surged from the throats of the New Yorkers.

Duffy walked to his corner and sat down. His glance swept the sea of faces about him, and he smiled complacently, as

his thoughts carried him back to his first appearance in that selfsame corner, and of the alternate waves of icy chill and burning heat that shot through his body as the minutes dragged by while he waited for the dilatory Bull Larrigan to take his place.

Much water had passed under the bridge since that evening when Thunderbolt Leonard, the truck driver, his blood turned to water in his veins, had nervously awaited the arrival of his first professional antagonist. Measured in days and months, the time that intervened had not been long. Measured in worldly experience it was a far, far cry back to that night.

In the interim the unsophisticated truck driver had learned many things. Through the untiring efforts of honest old Red Casey, he had learned that he was a good boxer—not a good fighter—for despite his victories over the fighters that were the best the city afforded, he knew, and Red Casey knew, of the fear that was always at his heart—the yellow streak that would not down. Physically he was a superb athlete, a clever boxer, and a hard hitter. But his wholesome association with Red Casey had been more than offset by his unwholesome association with Lefty Klingermann, and with those about him whose cunning brains permitted them to live opulently in more or less open defiance of the law.

The suspicion that "a man is a fool to work," that had come with the fruits of his first professional battle, had been cemented into a firm conviction by his daily contact with the wolves of society. It was this twist in his mental complex that made him leap at Klingermann's offer to buy the Morowitz fight. To Duffy, money meant everything; personal achievement nothing. No pride of victory swelled his breast. He fought hard to win, not for the sake of winning, but because the winner drew down the lion's share of the proceeds.

And for the same reason he wanted to be the champ. With envious eyes he read of the easy money to be derived from vaudeville and cinema engagements, and, until Lotta Rivoli had come to loom large in his scheme of things, his desire to win the heavy weight championship had rested wholly upon the acquisition of this easy money. But Lotta Rivoli was ambitious. The prestige of championship meant as much to her as the emoluments of championship, and in the weeks of her association with Duffy she had succeeded in instilling into the fighter a little of her own enthusiasm, so that he actually thrilled as the storm of applause broke over his entrance to the ring. And so, as he sat in his corner, his eyes roving over the massed humanity about him, he smiled complacently. In his mind's eye he was already the champ. With Morowitz out of the way it would be easy. Duffy shared the general opinion that the holder of the belt was nothing more than a pugilistic joke, who would go down before the first real fighter who faced him.

Some one had been haranguing the crowd from the ring, announcing weight and conditions. The man ceased speaking, and Duffy found himself upon his feet in the center of the ring, with Morowitz, his trainer, Red Casey, and the referee, perfunctorily examining gloves and bandages. Then he was again in his corner and Casey was tying on the gloves.

At the sound of the gong he faced Morowitz, who led off with a stiff right to the jaw which Duffy easily blocked, and countered with a left whipped to the stomach. The round became a fast exchange of hooks and jabs, and ended, so far as apparent result showed, in a draw.

The second round saw some heavier hitting, some clever blocking, and equally clever foot work. This was clearly Morowitz's round, as it ended with Duffy on the defensive, his back to the ropes.

Morowitz obtained a shade the best of the third, although Duffy seemed to be coming stronger, and the round ended with both contestants, toe to toe, in the center of the ring.

It was in the fourth that Duffy first noted the sinister gleam in Morowitz's eyes. The man's blows came thick and fast, and behind each blow was a stab of hate from the narrowed eyes of the fighter. The yellow streak showed. A sudden fear gripped his heart, and his attention diverted, Morowitz rushed him viciously into the ropes for a clinch. The round ended with

the Morowitz rooters on their feet yelling their heads off.

Duffy pulled himself together during the intermission, and with the knowledge that the fight was his anyway, he led out strongly and forced the fighting to the end of the round. It was his own rooters who were on their feet this time, and he attributed Morowitz's ferocity to his desire to give the fans their money's worth, and to allay all suspicion of the fight's having been framed. It was during the intermission after this round that Duffy discovered that Lotta Rivoli occupied a ringside seat close under his corner, and that next to her sat Bull Larrigan, whose loudly bellowed approbation of the round drowned all voices about him.

The close proximity of the girl nerved him, and Duffy leaped from his corner at the sound of the gong, and met Morowitz in his own corner. This, too, was Duffy's round. Twice he forced Morowitz to the ropes, and with a thrill of exultation, he noted that the man was weakening.

More hateful, more sinister than before his eyes flashed, but his blows had lost much of their punch, and he hung heavily in the clinches. In the opinion of many fans the gong saved Morowitz. And as Duffy went to his corner he wondered whether the man had been stalling, paving the way for the knockout that would come in the seventh.

Through the ropes he caught a glimpse of the face of the bank cashier whom he had met that night in the restaurant with Klingermann. It was white as the tightly twisted newspaper that he gripped with his two hands. Beside him sat Lefty Klingermann, who leaned forward with tightly clenched lips, his low collar open at the throat, the ends of his gaudy necktie adangle.

The room rang with crys of "Duffy!" "Duffy!" "Eat him up!" "Oh, you Duffy!" "Polish him off!" "Knock him through the ropes!"

Duffy glanced down. Close beside him, looking up at him, her eyes like stars, Lotta Rivoli flashed him a smile of encouragement. Even the face of Bull Larrigan appeared drawn—tense. Of all the faces about him, only the face of the girl showed no trace of excitement—the girl and Red Casey.

Duffy glanced across the ring where Morowitz's trainer was whispering frantically. Duffy could see his lips move rapidly as he fanned the fighter who lay back with his arms stretched along the ropes. A wave of resentment shot through him as he glanced into the face of Red Casey who was plying his towel in silence. The face of the old trainer was impassive as a mask. He performed his work with automatic precision. He had scarcely spoken a word since the fight started, a fact that conveyed to Duffy plainer than many words, the older man's disgust at being a party to a framed fight.

"Old fool," thought the fighter. "I'll ditch him." The gong rang for the seventh.

The two men met in the center of the ring. Morowitz opened the attack, and exactly as in rehearsal, Duffy began to retreat slowly before the rain of blows. Inch by inch he gave backward, blocking, countering, furiously exchanging blow for blow. The narrowed, bloodshot eyes of Morowitz seemed to blaze with hate, and as his own eyes met them momentarily a sudden premonition of evil struck a chill to Duffy's heart. He felt the ropes pressing into his back, and with his brain a whirl of panic, he clinched. Directly below him the face of the cashier showed like the face of a dead man, paper white, the eyes staring and glassy.

Morowitz's lips were against his ear, and his words came with a hiss of hot breath: "Break! Damn you! Git it over! I'm all in!" Duffy broke. Letter perfect in his rôle, he allowed his foot to slip just enough to throw him momentarily out of balance—the move that left the opening for Morowitz's long swing that should miss his jaw by an inch. He caught the flash of a glove as the swing was launched. Eyes on his opponent's breast, he tensed his muscles for the blow that would land on the weakened heart, the Judas blow that would rid him of the glare of those fateful eyes.

Something happened. There was a blinding flash of light. A crushing, stunning

weight crashed against his jaw. His muscles went limp. The ropes were swaying with his weight. His gloved hands were open. There was a terrible din of voices that blended into a roar of thunder. Another crashing blow reached his jaw, and for a single instant he caught the gleam of hate in Morowitz's eyes. He felt no pain —only a terrible numbness. He felt his body slipping along the ropes — he must gather himself for that swing to the heart.

But—something was wrong. His muscles refused to obey the order of his numbed brain. His open right hand, dangling uselessly from his limp arm, was almost touching the canvas as he slipped slowly down the ropes. Another crashing blow, and he was lying on the deck of a boat that rocked fearfully. Somewhere, close beside him, a man was counting—" six—seven—eight—" Suddenly the numbed brain awoke. He was in the ring—down—and the referee was counting him out. Him—Mike Duffy! Double crossed! Gypped! " Nine—" With a mighty heaving of muscles he gathered himself together, raised himself on one knee, and sprawled his length on the canvas.

Boom! Instead of the fatal " ten " the voice of the gong sounded above the thunderous uproar of voices.

With Red Casey's arms under his shoulders, he was half-dragged to his corner, where he sprawled against the ropes. Fumes from a bottle held close against his nose cleared his brain. Dashes of ice water upon his skin revived his flaccid muscles, and the cold air of the fanning towels was beginning to dispel the deadly numbness that gripped him.

Red Casey was whispering, and he saw that the old man's eyes were flashing.

" Go get him! Boy—he double crossed ye! Ye can do it yet! He's weakened. His heart's gone bad."

A surge of rage welled up within him, and Duffy glanced wildly about him. The face of the girl was deadly white. And between the ropes the cashier, with his glassy-eyed stare, had not moved. Lefty Klingermann was not in his seat, and Bull Larrigan, too, had disappeared. The sound of the gong brought him to his feet automatically, and Casey just shoved him into the ring.

Instinctively Duffy raised his gloves to meet the man who leaped at him like a wild beast. Rage blazed from Morowitz's eyes, and his lips writhed in a snarl of hate. The gong had cheated him by a second, but—

Sudden fear gripped the heart of Duffy —stupefying, abysmal fear. With a gurgling sound in his throat, he raised his crooked arms about his face, and turning, ran to the ropes, with Morowitz's gloves thudding his back, his shoulders, and the back of his head. Far out over the ropes he leaned to avoid the thumping blows.

A flash of white caught his eye, as Red Casey, his face a thundercloud, tossed a towel into the ring. The blows ceased. A pandemonium of noise broke loose, but different from the thunderous applause that had greeted the finish of the rounds.

Cries of " Yellow dog!" " Quitter!" " Piker!" " Yellow!" " Drag him out!" " Kill him!" coupled with catcalls and hisses, mingled with the shouts of applause for Morowitz. Cries of " Morowitz!" " Morowitz!" filled the air.

After what seemed a long time, Duffy turned from the ropes. But for himself and the referee the ring was empty. Even Red Casey had departed, and Morowitz was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER X.

THE GET-AWAY.

HIS brain in a whirl, Duffy stood and stared out over the seething sea of faces that swirled and eddied about the ringside. Amid the wild cheers and applause for Morowitz, he caught, now and then, the sound of his own name coupled with obscene words of disapprobation.

Gradually his wits cleared. It was all over. The fight was over—and Morowitz had won! With a shudder he glanced back over his shoulder half expecting to meet those glaring eyes and snarling lips. He couldn't stand—he wouldn't stand another of those terrible smashing blows that drove to his jaw—the sickening flash of light—

and the stupefying numbness that left him limp and lifeless upon the heaving canvas of the ring.

Everywhere sneering faces looked up into his own. Damn them—they didn't understand. Morowitz had gypped him! If they knew they wouldn't be yelling for Morowitz! He wet his lips with his tongue and glanced down straight into the face of Lefty Klingermann. Close behind him stood Bull Larrigan. The beefy face of Lefty was crimson. Duffy noticed that the thick neck overbulged the band of the silk shirt. Then the narrowed, bloodshot eyes met his, as Klingermann raised a shaking forefinger:

"You yellow dog! You dirty welsher! He was all in! If you'd stood up to him one minute—handed him one punch, you'd of got him! But, damn you! You'll get yours!"

The man's voice was thick with passion, and the words came jerkily from between the thick lips.

Two men reached Klingermann's side. They were squat, dark men, who wore caps, and Duffy recognized them as gunmen—killers. Klingermann bent low and whispered into their ears, and as he listened the black eyes of one of them raised and met Duffy's squarely. The man nodded—and disappeared in the crowd. Icy chills crept up and down Duffy's spine. A new terror gripped him. On trembling legs he turned toward his corner, the motion chilling the clammy sweat that had started on his forehead and chest.

His bathrobe lay on the floor where it had dropped when Red Casey pushed him into the ring for that last fatal round. There should have been no eighth round! Morowitz had gypped him! He stooped to recover the robe, and found himself staring straight into the eyes of Lotta Rivoli. The girl had not moved. And the black eyes flashed and the red lips twisted in scorn.

"You piker!" she hissed. "You yellow pig! If you'd have fought instead of bought you'd have won! I know you now! Bull Larrigan told me—right here at the ringside. You dirty double-crosser! You got what was coming to you! The tip I handed you was straight. If you'd have played it you'd won!"

"But—listen—girl—I—"

"Listen—*hell!*"

The withering scorn of that last word silenced Duffy and he stared stupidly as the girl turned to Bull Larrigan, who had gained her side through the rapidly thinning crowd.

She laid a hand familiarly upon Larrigan's arm, and Duffy saw that the dark eyes glowed softly as the red lips, curved now in a wondrously ravishing smile, spoke words that came distinctly to his ears.

"Come on, Bully, boy, take me home. This place stinks!"

As Larrigan led her down an aisle at the heels of the crowd, she whispered to him: "I'm broke, Bull. I bet all I had on that lemon, and he dogged it!"

The fighter's big hand squeezed her arm, and he grinned.

"Never mind, kid," he answered. "I ain't."

Deftly he piloted her down the stairs, across the sidewalk, and into a waiting taxi, which, at a word, drew away from the curb and headed uptown. Fifteen minutes later the car stopped. Bidding the girl stay where she was, Larrigan disappeared into a narrow hallway. A few moments later he reappeared, and the girl heard him give the chauffeur the number of her own apartment. The next moment he was seated beside her, and thrusting a hand into either side pocket he withdrew two huge rolls of yellow bills. The girl stared.

"Where—where did you get them?" she managed to gasp. "They told me you was down and out—living like a rat in a hole."

The man laughed. "It's a funny world, ain't it, kid? I've come back, an' we're goin' clean to de top dis time. Nix on de booze fer me! It was de strong stuff dat put me where I was at. But I come back."

"Sure, Bull, I know. And I'm with you, Bull. I was a fool ever to quit you. But you know—"

"Sure, kid—I know. I was on de rocks right. I ain't blamin' you—"

"But—where did you get all the jack? You ain't fought since—since Duffy knocked you out."

"He can't do it now! I could have

knocked him fer a gool a dozen times in de las' two weeks—"

"Sure, I know—but the jack?"

"Part of it's wages," answered the man. "An' part of it's Kid Morowitz's share of de jack Lefty Klingermann slipped him an' Keen fer to buy de fight, an' de rest of it's w'at some one else bet on Duffy."

"But—how'd you get it?"

"Me? Oh, de Kid wanted I should bet it fer him. You see, he dassen't let Keen find out he was bettin' on hisself."

"But, where's Kid now?"

"He won't be needn' it no more. You see, de Kid double-crossed Lefty, an' I slips Lefty de word dat de Kid's hidin' out in my room, an' Lefty, he passes de word on to Stiletto John Serbelloni, an' de Sicily Ape, along wit' some orders."

Involuntarily the girl shuddered and shrank close against the man's side at the mention of the names. And in the light of the passing street lamps Larrigan saw that her face was very white.

Gathering his bathrobe about him, Duffy slipped through the ropes and made his way hurriedly to the locker room. The room, with its single electric light suspended from the ceiling by a cord, seemed dark in comparison with the brilliantly lighted ring. Voices sounded from the shower room, and glancing fearfully toward the open doorway, he gathered his clothing in his arms and passed around behind the lockers.

Klingermann's threat rang in his ears, and in his mind's eye he could see the venomous glitter of the piglike eyes and the appraising glance of the gunman who had slipped quietly from Klingermann's side and merged with the departing crowd. Footsteps sounded on the wooden floor, and he drew into the blackest shadow at the extreme end of the narrow passage, where he cowered against the wall.

Cold sweat dampened his forehead as he listened to the approaching footsteps, his eyes fixed upon the light that showed at the opening of his alley. If Stiletto John Serbelloni, or the Sicily Ape should suddenly appear framed in that square of light it would be all off. Cornered like a rat in a trap his body would be perforated like a sieve by the bullets from the gunman's automatic. A shadow darkened the mouth of the passage, and every muscle tense, Duffy strained his body against the wall. The shadow was gone, and the sound of the opening and closing of a door told the cowering man that some one had passed on into Dreyfus's private office.

In feverish haste he tore at his gloves, breaking the lacings by hooking them over a nail that protruded from the wall. Without removing his trunks he drew on his clothing with trembling fingers, cursing himself for the conspicuously loud checked suit of clothing he had selected for the occasion. With fumbling fingers he succeeded in lacing his shoes, and the next moment was stealing swiftly toward the square of light at the mouth of the alley.

An inspiration seized him as his shoulder brushed a pair of overalls that hung where some workman had left them, and pausing he drew them on over his checked trousers. At the mouth of the passage he stopped to glance fearfully about him. A discarded sweater and a dilapidated cap that hung on the opposite wall of the room caught his eye, and hurling his hat into the shadow he crossed the room and lifted the garments from their nails. Voices still sounded from the shower room through which he must pass to gain the door by which he had been accustomed to enter and leave the training quarters.

One glance toward the door that led to Dreyfus's office sent a shudder through his frame, and hastily drawing the sweater on over his coat, he pulled the cap low over his eyes and dashed through the gymnasium with its deserted aisles and its tiers of empty seats, and two at a time, descended the broad steps that led to the main entrance.

Crowds of fight fans blocked the sidewalk, talking, gesticulating among themselves. Duffy heard his own name mentioned, coupled with oaths and angry threats. For these were men who, following Klingermann's lead, had bet heavily on him and lost. Holding his breath, he slunk unnoticed through the crowd, and with sweater collar turned up and cap pulled low, hastened along the street.

Mechanically he turned into Avenue A, and proceeded in the direction of his hotel.

Then, abruptly, he paused, and drew into the shadow of a doorway. A taxi rolled slowly along the street, and as it passed him Duffy caught sight of the dark face of Stiletto John Serbelloni. The car drew up to the curb in the next block and he saw two men alight, cross the sidewalk, and disappear through the lighted doorway of a building. The building was the Avenue Hotel!

Duffy turned and fled. On and on he ran, turning from one half deserted street into another, the one obsession of his brain being to place distance between himself and Union Market precinct. Once a policeman called to him to halt, but instead of complying, he redoubled his speed, and turning into a side street, hopelessly outdistanced the officer who made a bluff at a half hearted chase.

After that Duffy slowed his pace to a walk, and a half hour later descended the stairs to the subway and took an uptown train. At Grand Central Station he got out and wandered around for a while, his eyes darting swift glances here and there, half expecting that some sinister minion of Lefty Klingermann had penetrated his disguise and was dogging his footsteps.

Duffy had left the train at Grand Central Station, not with any idea of departing from the city, but merely because most of the passengers on that particular car disembarked at that point, and he followed the crowd which separated and subdivided in the labyrinth of the underground city. After a time he found himself in a great room where people stood about in little groups, while others hurried to and fro across the tiled floor, and still others, carrying hand baggage, walked slowly toward a grilled gate, beside which stood a uniformed official.

Having lived all his life within the precincts of Greater New York, the trolley, the Elevated, and the subway had sufficed his need of travel. His trip to Trenton with Red Casey had been his sole excursion on a railway train. Sight of the iron grilled gate and the uniformed guard brought that journey vividly to his mind.

Here was his chance—his get-away. If he stayed in New York Lefty Klingermann would get him. He might hide out for a day, a week, a year—but sooner or later he would come face to face with one of Lefty's gunmen, and then—the roar of an automatic, stabs of hot pain, the rap of an officer's night stick, the little crowd of curious, the sound of the ambulance gong, and —Duffy shuddered, and made his way toward the open gate to the train shed.

"Ticket!" The guard extended his hand, and Duffy stared at him blankly. "Where you goin' to? Where's yer ticket?"

"Trenton," said Duffy, speaking the name of the only city outside New York he could remember.

"Get along with you! This is the Chicago train."

"Well, Chicago, I meant. It don't make no difference."

The guard eyed him sharply. "Where's yer ticket?"

"I ain't got none," answered Duffy. "Where do I get it?"

The man pointed toward a window across the room.

As the train purred smoothly over the rails, Duffy stared out at the tiny lights that twinkled along the Hudson. Up to this point the one thought in his mind had been to get away—to put distance between himself and Lefty Klingermann's paid assassins. That he would be shot down on sight he never for an instant doubted. He knew Klingermann—knew it was his boast that no one had ever gyped him and got away with it. No one except Dago Lottie. She was too smart, even for Klingermann.

As the miles slipped behind in the darkness, and fear gave place to a certain sense of security, a mighty rage against the perfidious Morowitz welled up within him.

"The dirty dog double-crossed me!" he thought. "An' he double-crossed Lefty, an'—Gawd! He must of double-crossed Keen, 'cause Keen had his money up on me! An' Bull Larrigan, he double-crossed me, 'cause he told Lottie about us buyin' the fight, an' she was gyping me all the time, makin' me think she loved me, an' the minute things goes against me, she switches over to Bull. I wonder if old Red was right—about her an' Kid Morowitz, an' was she double-crossin' him, too?

"Ain't it a hell of a world, every one gypin' every one else? They ain't no one on the level but old Red Casey, an' what's he got?"

For a long time he stared out into the darkness. "I ain't no better'n the rest. I hadn't ought to stood fer Lefty buyin' the fight. I'd ought to took Lottie's tip, an' gone in an' won. It was a crooked game all the way through. I was goin' to gyp Morowitz, an' he beat me to it. An' now I'm broke, all but fourteen dollars, an' Lefty's broke, an' dat bank guy. Gee, he looked like a dead man! He's hit hard. Looks like Morowitz is the only one that wins on the deal. Him, an' Bull Larrigan—he gits Lottie—but, damn her—he can have her!

"She'll git him yet. She gits every one. Damn women, a guy better leave 'em alone if he knows what's good fer him! So that leaves Kid Morowitz the only winner—an', believe me, he's goin' to have to do some swell hidin' out or Lefty 'll get him.

"I wonder what old Red Casey 'll think when I don't show up no more? Old Red, he wouldn't bet on a framed fight—" He paused abruptly, and a slow grin twisted his lips. "Why, damn it! He's got his money in his pocket. Maybe he's the only one that win, after all. Anyway, he's only one that ain't on the run, or busted, or mixed up with a skirt. Maybe Red's right. I guess most of the big ones in the ring has been on the level at that."

Next day, as the train neared Chicago, Duffy bought a newspaper, and turned at once to the sport page. There it was in glaring headlines: "Duffy Quits Cold." And beneath the story of his miserable defeat. He read it all, to the last scathing word. His cheeks burned as he saw himself panned as no fighter had ever been panned before. Why couldn't he have seen what everybody else saw, that had he stood up to Morowitz in that fatal eighth round he could have won easily.

He had seen no signs of weakening, only those blazing eyes and the gloves that had so terribly battered his jaw. Oh, well, he was yellow. He had known it, and Red Casey had known it, and now all the world knew it. He would never fight again, could never fight again. The mere thought of standing up to an opponent made him shudder. Other headlines met his eyes. Three columns wide they seemed to leap from the page. And again he read his own name.

MOROWITZ FOUND MURDERED IN ROOM ON RIVINGTON STREET.

Fight Was Framed.

Bank Cashier Suicides.

Feverishly Duffy read the whole sordid story as told to the reporters by the disgruntled Keen. He read of his own disappearance, and the theory that he, too, had been mysteriously murdered. And he read the attempts of the newspapermen to correlate the murder and suicide with the crooked prize fight.

When he had finished he laid down the paper and stared out of the window at the endless succession of freight cars and factories and the back doors of cheap dwelling houses that lined the right of way.

"So the Kid got his," he breathed with a shudder as he pictured in his mind's eye the scene in that room on Rivington Street. "An' I'd got mine, too, if I'd stayed. An' old Red's the only guy in the whole bunch that was on the level. He was the only one that worked for his jack. An' he's the only guy that ain't busted or dead.

"Maybe a man ain't such a fool to work, after all. If you git the jack crooked, you always got to keep one jump ahead of the pack of crooks that's tryin' to git it away from you—an' mostly, you can't do it. Maybe you don't git so much jack workin', but what's the use gittin' a lot of jack together an' gittin' gyped out of it? The higher you git, the further you fall, an' the further you fall the harder you hit, an' there y'are."

The train slowed to a stand. Most of the passengers were already in the aisle.

In his hasty flight from the locker room of the Bon Ton Club, Duffy had not stopped to put on his collar. The car was warm, and picking the loud checked coat, and the dilapidated gray sweater from the seat beside him, he drew them on over his gaudily striped silk shirt. The coach was slowly emptying, and as he slipped from

his seat and took his place at the end of the procession, his eyes dropped once more to the printed page of the newspaper that lay where he had dropped it.

"They think Mike Duffy is dead," he thought to himself. "An' he is. I never even heard of the guy. I'm Shirly Leonard —me. I'm a truck driver. An' I'm lookin' fer a job."

Three or four blocks from the station he entered an unpretentious restaurant, and seating himself at a stained table, ordered a steak and a cup of coffee. At a small table ranged against the side wall of the room a man sat smoking a cigar. He was a young man of a type that had become familiar to Leonard since his residence on Avenue A. Before the man sat an empty plate, a handful of alleged silverware, and a glass of water. He was evidently waiting to be served. The waiter brought Leonard's order, and as he busied himself with the food, he noted that two or three others had entered the room, and after exchanging glances with the man at the table, had passed on and disappeared through a door in the rear.

Leonard finished his meal and paid his check. The man at the wall table grinned as their eyes met, and modulating his voice to an undertone, asked: "Lookin' fer a little action?"

Leonard shook his head.

"No. Lookin' fer a job. I'm a truck driver."

The man winked knowingly.

"Sure thing. I'm hep. But, say, bo, them there sweater an' overalls rig is nix. Make me? A blind dick could spot them classy clothes in under 'em."

Leonard nodded, returned the wink and rose from the table.

"See you later," he whispered, and drawing on his cap, hurried out the door.

As he walked rapidly down the street he frowned.

"If I ever see that guy again it 'll be 'cause I can't help it. This here Chicago's too much like New York to suit me. Lefty, he's got friends in Chicago. Coxy Wesson went clean to Denver, an' they got him. But Coxy showed up around the hangouts. I'm goin' to keep right on goin' till my jack runs out—me."

A few blocks farther on he entered the door of a dealer in second hand clothing, and easily effected an exchange that netted him a suit of blue serge, a couple of cotton shirts, and a soft hat. When he again reached the street he breathed easier. He knew that he had been unmercifully cheated in the trade, but he was happy.

From the clothier's he made straight for the railway station and approached the ticket seller.

"When does yer next train start?" he demanded.

The man smiled. "Well, there's one due to pull out in about four minutes."

"Where to?"

"St. Paul-Minneapolis."

"Give me a ticket!"

Payment for the ticket reduced his funds alarmingly, but he hurried for the train, pausing only long enough to buy a later edition.

Not until the train was well under way did Leonard turn to his newspaper. The big display headlines brought him up with a jolt.

POLICE SEEK DUFFY IN PRIZE FIGHT MURDER.

Fear chills alternated with hot waves of anger as he read that, upon certain information furnished by Klingermann, the police had abandoned the theory that Duffy had been murdered and his body disposed of. Klingermann pointed out that there was a woman in the case. In this he was substantiated by Bull Larrigan, and later by the woman herself, who was none other than Lotta Rivoli, alias Dago Lottie, a notorious character of the underworld.

"Ain't it hell?" he muttered between clenched teeth. "If they got holt of me, they'd frame me an' send me to the chair, an' when the guy touched the buzzer, they'd laugh. An' Lottie's the worst of the bunch! Believe me, Bull an' Lefty's playin' with fire! I've learnt somethin', I'll tell the world! I'd drive a truckload of dynamite through hell, but I'll be damned if I'll ever fool with another skirt!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Off-Shore Breeze

By MURRAY LEINSTER

A STRETCH of gently shelving beach that reached on endlessly ahead. Breakers that rolled in from beyond the horizon, to curve wearily at the end of their long journey and come to rest upon the sand in a smother of white foam. A sky of infinite blueness overhead. Inland, the sun was setting in a glory of gold and crimson. The sand reared up in dunes that shifted slowly but without ceasing. The sea grass thrust up its wiry staffs in sparse and straggly clumps, perpetually half buried in the same dunes on which they found a foothold.

The offshore breeze came in, unresting, from somewhere far beyond imagining. It bent the grass. It hurried the tired breakers to their ending. It made a constant little whispering on the sand, through the top particles that it shifted and rolled upon their fellows without rest or pausing. Now and then some bit of sea foam that lay expiring upon the beach was picked up and rolled madly—an unsubstantial ball—across the white shelf that was the space between sea and land. The offshore breeze blew steadily from the wide and open sea.

The coast guard bent a little against its force, hands buried in his pockets, striding steadily along the crunching sand. Now and then he looked up and out to where darkness was rising from the ocean's farther edge. The waste was empty. No steamer, no sail, no bobbing speck broke up the monotonous space of darkening water.

He was not humming, as many men do when alone on the rim of the sea. He did not pit himself against the vast, soft voice of the wind. His eyes were clear and wide, and his features unlined. He looked out of blue eyes that held the curiously unstrained expression that comes of gazing constantly at a thing pleasant to see.

The wind tugged at his tarpaulin hat and thut-thut-thuttered in his ears when he faced it. He smiled slowly at a fancy that came to him.

It always seemed to him that the offshore

breeze was impatient. Always it hurried. Always it beat in from the immensity that was beyond the horizon with a strange intensity, as if it would tell of all it had seen and heard; as if it would find a confidant for its tales of ships that plowed sturdily through unending space; of sailing boats, rail-under, sailing, sailing eagerly toward the sea's edge that dropped away always before them.

Or perhaps it would tell of mysteries, of a waterlogged thing that floated soggily, upon which seagulls alighted to rest, with a stump of a mast pointing futilely toward the wind that had been once its ally. All the mysteries of the sea were known to the offshore breeze, and it seemed always to be seeking to tell them.

Many, indeed, it told, but in a cryptic language all its own that no man had ever deciphered. The coast guard could see phrases of the breeze's speech, scattered upon the sand before him. There was a bottle, empty, even its label washed off. There was a bit of plank. Men's hands had hewed it out, and men had taken it far to sea. Who, or why, or where, only the sea breeze knew.

Every small thing that the sea contained the sea breeze brought to shore. The coast guard had seen dollars and even golden coins washed up among the sands, worn bright and smooth by the waves, but brought ashore reluctantly by the sea at the urge of the offshore breeze. The sea was secretive. Its enigmas it wished to keep forever unsolved, but the breeze urged on the currents and tides and dragged out the hidden things slowly, until they saw the sun again between the thundering, strangling, foaming breaks of the waves at the edge of the shore.

With his long, steady strides the coast guard kept on his way. He was nearing the end of his patrol, but there was no need of haste The beach and the wind were companions enough. A seagull flapped overhead, squeaking unmusically. Far down the line of white surf its comrades flapped and squawked over some morsel that had been brought in by the waves. A huge fish, worsted in an unknown tragedy of the open sea, was being thrown upon the sand. The offshore breeze wished to tell a story, but could narrate no more than the ending.

On, on down the long white reach of the sand went the coast guard, his footprints dark and dry as he left them, growing light and glistening as the water found them again, or being lapped away by the outstretched tongue of a dying breaker. There was but one more bend in the shoreline, and the station would be before him.

The sunlight perished, and dusk was borne shoreward on the wind. The coast guard neared the last headland of his long patrol. He raised his head for a last survey of the sea and land, and his eyes fixed themselves upon a figure that stood upon a dune.

It was a woman's figure, lean and lanky, sunbonneted and curiously puppetlike. No face was visible. It might have been a lay figure standing there, save for its pose. But the pose was tragedy itself. The offshore breeze beat upon it, pressing the calico dress into the form of lean limbs outlined by the flapping cloth. The sunbonnet quivered in the reiterant gusts. The figure was gazing out across the ocean, motionless, staring at the blurring line of sea and sky, and there was something of infinite, inarticulate yearning in the attitude. In such a manner women have stood for centuries, gazing out to sea, looking always for some one man to come over the edge of the world to them.

The coast guard was again subject to a fancy, and the fancy was of the strange and perpetual conflict that goes on ever between women and the ocean, the women calling to the men to come back from the vast green, secretive sea; and the ocean luring them with its own peculiar wiles. Always there is such a scene as this, where the woman waits upon a headland, sending out her voiceless, yearning call, and the sea rolls slumberously beneath her, meditating obscurely upon its mysteries and its lures.

The coast guard drew steadily nearer, and the yearning and the pain in the still figure grew more visible. Still no face was to be seen. But suddenly the woman bent her head a little and turned. When the coast guard reached the place where she had been, he saw only the flash of faded

calico through the dusk as the figure made its way inland with long, mannish strides. The departure held some suggestion of flight.

The coast guard's face broke into another smile. He looked out to sea, and the offshore breeze roared hollowly in his ears.

" There's a story for the breeze to tell," he murmured to the beach and the waves and the gulls. " There's a yarn for the offshore breeze. What's she lookin' for now?"

He rounded the headland and saw the lights of the station, where the lifeboat lay drawn up out of the water, a cluster of rough boarded shacks, half buried in sand, with a lookout mast and a thin thread of wire to connect it with the outer world. He made his way toward it, his long patrol done.

But even as he went the offshore breeze beat upon him steadily, and rolled a little ball of seafoam in his path as if to halt him while it poured a tale of mysteries into his ear.

He listened, smiling, but the tale was inarticulate.

II.

THE roof of the station was low, but that made the room all the warmer. A wood burning stove in the center sent out a blistering heat that kept the place comfortable in spite of the cold, biting wind from the ocean. The whole building throbbed a little to the pressure of the breeze. It was like some deep, unceasing note that formed a prepetual monotonous accompaniment to the talk that went on within.

There were four or five men in the room. Two of them played checkers near one wall. Another, just returned form patrol, rested his huge frame in a rickety chair, his knees spread wide apart, facing the stove. A fourth was reading a much thumbed magazine; while a fifth drifted in and out, restlessly.

" Say," said the restless one uneasily, " Tom, want to play checkers?"

" Readin'," answered the student absently.

The restless one surveyed the room unhappily.

" This heah life," he commented gloomily, " ain't all it's cracked up to be. I like a lil action, I do."

" You'll get it, in the winter," one of the checker players assured him. " You'll get plenty, and more besides."

The man just in from patrol looked up. " Saw Hatty Leason just now. She ducked when I came near her."

" She's queerer than ever since her husband come back." One of the checker enthusiasts capped a king and jumped twice. " I don't know's I blame her, though."

His opponent surveyed the wreckage of his board.

" Darn it," he complained, " you busted me wide open."

The restless one seized upon a subject for conversation.

" Who's Hatty Leason?" he demanded. " Somebody talk to me before I go nutty."

" Woman," replied one of the checker players, casually laying a deep pitfall for his adversary. " She lives over in Bee Tree. Married a feller 'bout twenty years ago. Used to come over and watch the ocean for him to come back."

His pitfall was discovered and frustrated by a red king.

" Used to think she was cracked," said the player handling the reds. " I guess she is. They lived together about a year. The feller—his name was Pete Something or Other—he used to beat her."

The man by the fire spoke again.

" He acted about half crazy," he commented. " Used to go into great rages. Beat up a negro with a club once. He always picked a smaller man to fight with, though."

Silence fell again. The throbbing monotone of the wind went on. There was a curious eagerness about it, like something lonesome in quest of a companion to whom it could talk. The man by the fire listened, half smiling.

" Keep on talkin'," said the restless one, coaxing. " You fellows are used to holdin' conversations with seagulls an' sandcrabs. I ain't, yet."

" There's nothing particular to tell about Hatty," observed the man by the fire. His voice was deep and full. He would be

able to make himself heard above any gale, but for all that his tones had something of the same timbre as the surf. He moved a little, to relax more fully. "She was always a homely sort of girl, they tell me, an' never had any beaus. She was along about twenty-five—vergin' on bein' an old maid—when an uncle of hers died. He left her about five or six thousand dollars. An' Pete Leason, he came courtin'."

A window rattled from the wind. One of the checker players made a triple jump and chuckled.

"Got you that time, old boy," he commented in an undertone.

The man by the fire pulled out an ancient cuddy pipe and began to fill it deliberately, ramming down the black tobacco with his thumb.

"She married him after a while, an' made him buy her a house with her money. He wouldn't work while there was any of it left, an' he used to beat her when she tried to stop givin' it to him. I reckon she must 've been in love with him. He got in trouble finally an' went away on a boat. She loved him, but she wouldn't go with him."

The checkers were being placed for a new game. The man with the magazine turned a page and looked up.

"Talkin' about Hatty?" he asked. "She's just a darned fool woman. Used to come an' look out over th' ocean, waitin' fo' him to come back. He wouldn't run a boat up on th' beach, would he?"

He settled down to the perusal of a new story.

The man by the fire watched his smoke curl slowly up to the unpainted rafters beneath the roof. A tiny finger of the wind reached in through some minor crack and shattered the symmetrical wisp.

"Funny, though," he said reminiscently. "She shore loved that feller. I reckon because he was th' only one who'd ever bothered with her, an' he only wanted her because of that money. When he went away there weren't much of it left."

The restless one feared the conversation would die.

"But y' said he come back?"

"He did. 'Nother uncle died."

A checker player threw the remark over his shoulder and scanned the board before him warily.

"It wa'n't her uncle—it was a cousin. Left her near ten thousand dollars this time. She needed it."

The speaker put a horny finger on a black checker man, debated a moment, and moved it.

The man by the fire took up the tale.

"He come back," he agreed, "an' she was out lookin' over the water. He went out there an' found her. Her face was sort o' shinin' an' sort o' bitter when she went in to Bee Tree with him. I was in there, at the store. She knew why he'd come back. It was th' money, of course, but she loved him in that funny way women have.

"She took him back, but she meant to keep him this time. Wouldn't let him have more'n a dollar or two at a time. He raged. For a couple o' days he was scared to beat her. It was damn funny. There she was, old an' skinny—an' flat-chested. She bought herself some new clothes, though, an' she spent a lot o' time cookin'. She was tryin' hard to keep him, an' all he cared about was th' money. He kep' tryin' to get her to go away with him. She wouldn't do it. Then he flew into one of his mad spells an' started to beat her. What happened then, Tom?"

The man with the magazine looked up. "What happened? Oh—" He grunted. "I seen him. Just twisted his wrist a little, an' he got down on his knees to her. Didn't even put up a fight. A yaller livered son-of-a-gun he was. He was scared—scared stiff. Had a knife in his belt, foreign fashion, an' didn't dare try t' use it."

The offshore breeze, outside the station, whined a little in its eagerness to come within and tell its tale.

The man with the magazine put his finger on the page.

"I was 'shamed," he said distastefully. "I was 'shamed to see a man so yaller. An' Hatty, she was 'shamed too. She mus' be forty an' more, an' there was that feller beatin' her. She'd been waitin' twenty years fo' him, an' she sorter loved him, I guess. Never was much for fancy things, but—she'd put some lace on her calico

dress. Get that? She'd put some lace on her calico dress. Her face was all red when she seen me lookin' at it—all but a white place where he'd hit her."

The checker game went on in desultory fashion. The stove made queer noises as it licked up the wood within it. Save for the occasional tap of a checker man on the board, there was no other sound than the persistent dull note of the wind, that formed a perpetual accompaniment to the talk inside.

"He lef' a couple of weeks ago," said the man by the fire suddenly. "I sorter wonder how it was he left. Th' neighbors heard 'em quarrelin', an' heard him roarin' that he wouldn't stay, that she'd got to give him th' money. He would roar at a woman, but he wouldn't look cross-eyed at a man.

"They heard her scream once, durin' th' night, but that was all. Nex' mornin' he was gone. Nobody saw him go. He jus' went, an' Hatty's goin' around since then like there weren't no spirit left in her. She won't see or talk to anybody. She runs away an' hides. She's 'shamed. I guess."

The restless one meditated.

"How d'you suppose he lef'?" he asked. "Th' only way is up th' beach to Munden, an' train from there, or else by boat."

"Didn't go neither way," said a checker player. "Didn't pass th' next station, or go into Munden, an' nobody saw him take a boat either. Nobody would ha' loaned him one."

He placed a king deliberately in a position that assured him of two captures in any event, and waited triumphantly for his antagonist to move.

"It's sort o' funny, though," contributed the man by the fire, rising and stretching his huge limbs lazily. "She's standin' now, lookin' out over th' ocean, like she did for twenty years an' more. She runs an' hides if you go near her, like she was a dog that somebody 'd hurt. I reckon she keeps thinkin' about that lace an' stuff. But she's watchin' over th' ocean, jus' like she was waitin' fo' him to come back again. I wonder if she is?"

"Maybe," said the restless one thoughtfully. "Women are funny things. Nobody knows what they mean or think."

"Th' offshore breeze, it knows," said the man by the fire, and reddened a little. "I mean," he explained, "all th' secrets in th' ocean get brought to land some time or other by th' offshore breeze, an' it seems like there's somethin' or other that dredges up all th' secrets on' th' land too. If this here is a secret in th' ocean, it 'll come to shore sooner or later."

He moved toward the door. "I'm goin' to turn in."

The man with the magazine looked up. "You an' your offshore breezes," he commented. "If Pete's down at th' bottom of th' ocean, I'm hopin' th' breeze lets him stay there. A man with a knife in his belt, foreign fashion, an' scared to use it!" He made a sound of disgust.

As the coast guard who had sat by the fire made ready to turn in, he listened to the wind outside the station. It was pressing eagerly, insistently, upon the flimsy building, as if trying to come inside and tell a secret that it wished to impart. The coast guard rolled under his blankets, but twice during the night he was wakened by the shaking of the shutters.

The offshore breeze was impatient.

III.

AGAIN the long and narrow stretch of sand, reaching out infinite distances, with the dunes on one side and the breakers on the other. Again the screaming gulls, flapping in the wind, hovering above the waves, gathering in disputatious groups about some attractive morsel. Again the breeze. It came over the ocean's rim, like some gossip full of news, tugging at the passer-by to halt him and bid him listen, muttering to itself when none would attend.

It was a busybody, the offshore breeze. It was impatient, yet persistent. It beat ceaselessly upon the slumbering sea and stirred that slothful water into slow and reluctant action, dragging up from its depths all manner of hidden things to be spread out upon the shore. A plank, a bit of seaweed, a curious shell—all were strewn

along the strip of sand that was between the land and sea.

The coast guard, making his way along the beach with his long, steady strides, dallied with the fancy that always came to him. The breakers were booming hollowly, advancing by solemn ranks and companies to make their bows and disappear in a perpetual salute to the desolate sand dunes they had built and could not conquer. They brought gifts in offering to the shore —curious and inconsequential gifts of secret and mysterious things, shells of creatures no man had seen, and bits of seaweed festooned timber, sometimes with rotten cordage clinging still. Sometimes a piece of rusted metal, of unguessable use. Sometimes a rotted bit of cork, on which a steamer's stenciled name might yet be puzzled out. All of the gifts were mysteries, and all were of the secrets of the sea, brought to the beach by the insistent urge of the offshore breeze.

The coast guard noted a sail, hull down, and a wisp of smoke that meant a steamer well out of sight of land. He heard the squeaking of the gulls. Twice their restless shadows passed but a little before him. A dark thing cringing from the breakers made him pause to look.

It was a twisted mass of wreckage, perhaps once the deck house of an unknown ship. Now the paint was flecked away and the wood was darkened by long soaking. The paneling was crushed by waves and the timber shredded by abrasion on the sands beneath the water. It was merely a bit of jetsam on the beach.

The coast guard surveyed it. There were places here and there, where fresh fractures showed. There were nails projecting jaggedly, unrusted, in sharp contrast to the reddish splinters of the rest.

He kicked at it with his foot and a crab scuttled from beneath and disappeared down a tiny hole. The coast guard frowned a little.

"Planks," he said perplexedly, as if to the sea breeze. "Somebody's been knocking off planks. What for?"

He went on his way, while the wind from off shore whispered insistently at his elbow. The off-shore breeze was anxious to confide in him. It tugged at him as if to seize upon his attention. He faced the ocean, and the thut-thut-thutter in his ears rose almost to an eager roar.

He frowned and went on.

A little later he saw a sea gull hovering fretfully above a spot where something tiny and black rolled wearily in the lap of the surf. He picked it up while the gull flapped overhead, and then made a gesture as if to cast it aside. It was merely a shoe—an old, water-soaked, stiffened shoe. A woman's shoe.

"Hatty wears shoes like this," he said absently. "What'd she throw it away for?"

He cast it down upon the beach and trod on. Then he saw a wisp of cloth coiled intricately in the mass of a frond of seaweed growing dry upon the sand. He did not pick it up. He merely looked down at it. Faded gingham, draggled, tangled in weeds from the sea bottom.

It was a long time later that he saw her. She was standing as always upon the headland that looked out to sea. She was motionless as always, a tragic, grotesque figure gazing over the ocean that had taken from her the man she could not hold for her own. There was unutterable pathos in her attitude. The coast guard had a fancy that he saw longing beyond words, and fear, and terror in her pose. She was looking across the uneasily slumbering water as if there were an ache past easing in her heart, and a yearning beyond all phrase. But there was fear, too; deadly fear; almost the panic of a cornered hare. It puzzled the coast guard.

She disappeared before he reached her.

He went on upon his lonely patrol, revolving many things in his mind.

IV.

THE storekeeper from Bee Tree had driven over to the station with a load of supplies, and sat puffed out in a chair, drinking a mug of steaming coffee. His ancient, weary horse waited outside, head drooping between the shafts, as if seeking shelter from the stinging sand that the wind picked up and blew inward from the sea.

Inside the station the storekeeper held forth, his crimson face bulging out with fat.

"Darn' if she didn't put one over on us," he was saying in a mixture of amusement and vexation. "Said she'd been left ten thousan' dollars by a cousin. Never spent none of it until Pete come home, an' then she didn't spend much. He hung around, tryin' to get her to give it to him, coaxin', then beggin' for it, an' finally beatin' her to make her fork over. When he come, she got some laces an' ribbons an' things. Fixed herself up pretty. Didn't do no good, though."

He gulped down a mouthful of the hot coffee. The newest man of the station crew was restless and curious.

"What happened?" he asked.

"He must ha' found her out," said the storekeeper, blowing out his cheeks after swallowing the coffee. "Most of us tho't she'd got th' money in cash an' was hidin' it. That 'ud be like her. I re'k'n Pete, he thought so, too. But we just found out, over to Bee Tree, that she never inherited no money at all. It was jus' a bluff, prob'ly to get Pete to come back. We been figurin', an' we re'k'n she's been savin' right along so's she'd have some money to give her man when he come back. She done it, an' he was hangin' aroun', hopin' to get hold of th' rest of it. An' all she was doin' was cook him fancy meals an' dress up with lace an' such, tryin' to make him stay. It was jus' a trick to get him t' come back."

There was silence for a time. One of the men had just returned from his long patrol. He was listening intently, but now he put in a question.

"Y' say y' thought she hid her money?"

"Shore we tho't so," said the storekeeper indignantly. "She acted like it. But she ain't got it. Buyin' laces, huh! She'd ought to be 'shamed. She ain't talked to nobody since th' night he went away agin. Comes in my store sometimes, hidin' her face in that sunbonnet. Won't even speak to me. Jus' p'ints out what she wants. She ain't even been payin' for it. She owes me forty dollars! An' if anybody tries t' go to her house, she runs away an' hides. Won't speak to nobody. She's 'shamed."

"Say," said the restless one, rising and pacing to and fro, "how did he get away, anyhow?"

"I don't know," said the storekeeper aggrievedly. "We heard them quarrelin', an' he was roarin' that he wa'n't goin' to stay, an' she'd got t' give him th' money. He was ragin' mad. He tho't, like all of us, she had it hid out in th' shack. An' in th' middle of th' night we heard her holler. He was beatin' her, I re'k'n. He must ha' found out she was foolin' all of us that night, 'cause he lit out. He just went. I don't know, an' nobody knows, how he went. He jus' did. An' she's been 'shamed ever since."

The dull, persistent note of the wind was broken as the sea breeze struggled to enter and tell its secret; but those in the station paid no heed. The man just returned from patrol smoked thoughtfully. The restless one lost interest.

Presently the storekeeper hauled himself up into his wagon and his weary horse plodded off, its head turned a little from the shore line, because the offshore breeze flung spiteful pellets of stinging sand against its hide. The wagon crunched away. The station became again an isolated clump of rough board shacks, half buried in the sand, with a signal mast, a lifeboat, and a single thread of thin wire to connect it with the outer world.

The man who had come back from patrol sat down where he could stare out to sea. Somewhere, he knew, the lanky, flat breasted figure of a woman was staring out as he stared, but there was pain and yearning and terror in the pose of that other figure. His eyes were wide and blue, with the curiously unstrained expression of eyes that look constantly upon a thing that is pleasant to see. He sat quite still, while the offshore breeze whispered and muttered in his ears. And for once it seemed to speak a language he could understand.

V.

A GULL screamed raucously when the coast guard swerved from his appointed course. It seemed to be crying out in harsh astonishment at his breach of the conven-

tions that govern all coast guards. He left the beach and the breakers behind. His footprints swerved abruptly, up from the damp line of the water's highest reach, across the virgin sand to the high-tide mark, and then in among the dunes. The waves were coming in solemnly by troops and battalions, advancing upon the shore in martial array, only to growl viciously as they broke, and, dying, struggle feebly in a smother of foam to conquer the barrier they forever besieged. The sea gulls, as ever, flapped above the waves. Flotsam and jetsam, as ever, came in soggily to be caught upon the shore. The offshore breeze came in from places beyond imagining.

It was excited, to-day, and talking loudly and incoherently of the secrets it knew and the mysteries it had solved. It muttered in the ear of the coast guard until he dipped behind a tall dune and was free from it. But even there it whispered overhead, slithering through the wiry sea grass, tumbling down a hail of fine sand particles upon him as he made his way parallel to the ocean's edge.

He moved more slowly among this loose and wind-blown sand than upon the firmer footing of the beach. He sank almost ankle deep in the powdery stuff, but forged steadily ahead. Now and then he paused and looked carefully about him, then crept up the outer edge of a grass-topped hillock and gazed about him secretively. For a long time he did no other thing. But at last he remained quite still for a matter of minutes, and when he descended it was to pass through tortuous minor valleys until he came to a curious, triangular object half hidden and half buried beneath a yellow load of sand. He poked it tentatively with his boot.

"Boat," he commented to the offshore breeze, that blew anxiously overhead. "That's what those planks were for, knocked off the wreckage. Bad sea boat. Wouldn't even get through the breakers."

He bent over it reflectively for a moment, his brows knitted in thought. Then he began to make his way toward the beach again. The wind changed his intention. It cast a handful of sand in his face in a furious gust, and urged him along another path, going more gradually to the edge of the booming waves. He followed it, still thinking. And he suddenly saw the figure before him.

He had never been so near before, nor had the skinny outlines been made so clear. Long, lanky limbs, a flat chest, big, raw-boned hands and mannish shoes. A sunbonnet that hid the face completely. A wrapper-like dress that flapped dismally about the lean shanks. It stood upon a headland not thirty yards away, and stared out to sea with a mixture of such unutterable yearning and pitiable terror that the coast guard felt almost ashamed to be watching.

And then the offshore breeze flung itself upon the coast guard, roaring in his ears with excited eagerness, bidding him watch while yet another secret of the sea was told. And he bent against the force of the wind and watched.

The figure might have been a tortured puppet, standing upon the dune. It was motionless, despairing, terrified, though no face could be seen beneath the sunbonnet.

But the offshore breeze came with a sudden gust. The bonnet was lifted and thrown back for an instant before nervous, clumsy fingers recaptured it. And in that small instant the offshore breeze had told a story and a secret, and danced excitedly while the coast guard moved forward.

His hand came down upon the figure's shoulder with the same certainty and firmness with which it would seize upon an escaping rope or oar in the surf. The figure made no sound beyond a curious gasp, and struggled madly to get away. The coast guard broke its strength ruthlessly, and snatched off the faded bonnet. He nodded at the yellowed face that confronted him.

"I ain't never seen you," he said slowly, in his deep voice that had something of the surf in its timbre. "I ain't never seen you before. But I re'k'n you're Pete Leason, an' I re'k'n you been lookin' all through Hatty's cottage fo' her money, an' I re'k'n you been buildin' yourself a boat to try t' get off down th' coast in."

He paused for an instant while the face that was sickly with fear grew more sickly

still, and more like the countenance of a dead man.

"Y' killed her that night you beat her," went on the coast guard slowly. "She'd been watchin' for you for twenty years, an' you come back because you heard she had some more money fo' you to spend. An' then you beat her, an' she wouldn' tell you where it was, an' you knifed her. An' you couldn't find no money. So you put on that there faded wrapper an' th' sunbonnet, an' you hid from her friends an' kin, an' you stayed an' tried to find th' money you thought she'd hid. You was scared t' try to get away, anyhow. You been hangin' around for a couple o' weeks, tryin' to find her fortune. There wa'n't none. She never had no money but what she saved. She jus' wanted you back."

The figure in his grasp uttered a sound that was more like a groan than anything else. The coast guard faced him about.

"We goin' back to th' station," he said quietly. "They'll telephone for th' sheriff an' such, there. Y' know, Pete Leason, I'm thinkin' you'll hang."

And as the two made their way toward the coast guard station, one erect and thoughtful, and one cringing in despair, the offshore breeze came swiftly in from over the edge of the world, and thut-thut-thuttered in the coast guard's ears, telling him inarticulately of mysteries and secrets that it longed to communicate.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

GOD'S COUNTRY

I HAVE ridden in the sun and in the rain,
I have ridden in the moon and in the dawn,
Climbed the dizzy mountain height
Where the eagle spins its flight
And the red deer leaps and gambols with her fawn.

I have ridden o'er the desert's burning sand
Where the lizard and the serpent seek command,
Where the horned toad's little feet
Stumble in the blinding heat,
And the lone wolf makes the music in the land.

I have pushed my way through everlasting snows
Where the spreading dawn spills pink and gold and rose,
Where the cold screams at the stars
Past Aurora's glittering bars,
And the Yukon's blood is frozen as it flows.

Now I've left my restless, roving days behind,
A woman's tender love is all I find,
With a rose vine o'er my door
Dimpled baby on the floor,
Found God's country in contentment of the mind.

Georgia M. McNally.

Pit of the Golden Dragon

By WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

Author of "February-Third Joe," "Watch the Yankee," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

GONE!

JACK COOPER stood behind the lace draperies of a window on the eighth floor of a great San Francisco hotel. Rigid against the twilight darkness of the room behind, he watched a figure on the opposite side of the street, down where the first lamps of evening were glowing.

It was the silent figure of a dusky man who paced leisurely up and down—a man who attracted little attention because he appeared to be legitimately waiting for some one, yet who from time to time cast significant glances up toward Cooper's window as though he knew the younger man were there.

Cooper's nerves were rapidly slipping out of control again. He recognized that subtle, sinister, significant foe, consuming endless cigarettes as he waited and keeping a persistent eye on the younger man's every movement. That flavor of mystery and Oriental fatalism was transformed now to San Francisco; Nemesis could not be shaken off—retribution was waiting, waiting, waiting. If the man intended to strike, why did he not do so and be done with it? Anything but this soft-footed, relentless, nerve racking dogging!

To add to Cooper's discomfiture the moment was rapidly approaching when he must make a decision regarding the course of his conduct if the girl was pronounced permanently blinded. The famous Nipponese specialist had made an examination and declared a cure possible. But a guarantee that she would see again as clearly as before was something he was not prepared to furnish.

The girl had gone this afternoon for the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 7.

operation. He had returned to the hotel to wait. In any event it would be ten days before he could take action, either to protect the girl and himself from the Indian or to drop from sight and abandon her, for the bandages could not be removed from her eyes until such a time had expired. For ten days the suspense must continue and the agony of conjecture whether the treatment was to be successful or a failure. Meanwhile—that damnable brown man was dogging, dogging, dogging.

Cooper drew back away from the window and paced the darkening room. The afterglow of the sunset died on the Pacific. The city lamps grew brighter. Dully the clash of the traffic arose to his aerie, paragraphed by the delicate click of the elevator doors far down the outside carpeted hall.

He saw three courses of action open to him. As he turned them over and over in his mind they became clearer and clearer.

If at the end of the ten days, Gertie's sight was determined permanently lost, he must silence his heart and his conscience and drop from sight. Leaving her to her blindness forever might be temporarily painful, but it was better than a lifetime of incompatibility and dissatisfaction, shackled to a helpless woman. That meant either shipping for some foreign country clandestinely, without even the Indian knowing—or losing himself in the great seaport city until the affair had become only a memory.

If Gertie's sight was restored, his second course was to go to the San Francisco police, lay his predicament before the authorities, convince them of the danger to the woman, if not to himself, and have the Nemesis taken into custody. He felt he had a right to that. When he had left India he had left his indiscretion behind him. In coming back to America, he had come back to Aryan protection—the laws and customs which altered circumstances and penalties.

Retribution and vendetta which might be justified in the exotic atmosphere of a distant country, had no place in enlightened, prosaic America in the twentieth century. Yes, if Gertie's sight were restored, his second course would be to seek the protection of the law and with the help of an attorney, have the Indian deported.

His third course of action constituted something of which he shrank from thinking. Yet he must think of it. If the second course failed and the Indian could not be restrained, then it was Cooper's life or the brown man's. It was a plain case of self-preservation. If the authorities were unable to protect him and this dogging went on indefinitely, he would have license to take the law into his own hands.

Somewhere in this dark and devious seaport must be men who, for a consideration, would permanently remove this Oriental hound from his track.

This was primal—the alternative of an unnerved, desperate man. It was murder—premeditated murder. Yet it also came under the head of self-preservation.

Everything depended on whether the girl's sight could be restored.

It grew very dark as Cooper waited. He had been waiting since half past two o'clock. Five o'clock came; half past five; quarter to six. Up and down the floor he paced, going over to the front windows often.

The figure outside was always there—smoking, watching, waiting. He wondered if the Indian—providing it was the Indian—would remain there all through the night.

Then at five minutes to six, his telephone bell rang sharply. Cooper's heart pummeled disturbingly. He crossed to the wall and took down the receiver.

"Hello?" he demanded hoarsely.

It was the voice of the girl at the switchboard downstairs who answered him.

"A Mr. Dilling is down here to see you. Shall I send him up?"

"Dilling!"

"Mr. Wilson Dilling, of Galesburg, Kansas. He says he must see you. It's very important."

That crippled telegraph operator! Why should he have come to Frisco?

"Send him up," ordered Cooper, perplexed.

Wilse came up. Cooper had drawn the heavy window shades and snapped on the lamps before the cripple knocked. The latter's features were grim as Cooper opened the door.

"What's the big idea?" demanded the young salesman.

"I want to talk with you," Wilse Dilling answered. "I've followed you from Kansas to do it."

And before Cooper could prevent, Wilse had swung in on his crutches and dexterously closed the door behind him.

Cooper had come in contact with the cripple many times back in Galesburg, but mostly in the routine of business. In a vague way he had heard that Dilling had tried to compete with him in an unequal, handicapped way for the affections of the Hadley girl, but he had never taken the rivalry seriously. Something on Dilling's face now, however, in the expression of his eyes or the set of his jaw, conveyed effectively that there was much he should begin to take seriously.

"You've followed from Kansas to talk to *me?* About what?"

"Gertrude Hadley. Where is she?"

"At the doctor's. He's operating to-day on her eyes."

"You're sure?"

"Certainly, I'm sure. Her father and mother are with her. I ought to know."

"Why aren't you there, too?"

"There's nothing I could do to help. I simply didn't happen to go. Is that any of your business? Just what is it you want?"

"Information. Information about a lot of things. Information about *that,* for instance."

Wilse Dilling held out before the staring eyes of the other the slip of paper that had been pinned to the bureau scarf the night the detectives had been holding the bank investigation down in the Galesburg House sample room.

"Where did you get that?"

"Annie MacArthur found it in your room after you left. She came to the station next day to send Gertie's father some sort of a telegram to warn him that Gertie might be in danger. Before she was finished she told me enough so that I know she wasn't drunk or crazy about a stranger being in your room that night she snooped through the keyhole. Something's on foot. I'm here to know what it is. You're going to tell me."

"Am I? A fine wild-goose chase you've come on!"

"Don't fool yourself. There's more I may know than this note suggests."

"What's it your business? Why are you shoving in an oar—in an affair that doesn't concern you in the least?"

"The girl's safety concerns me, and don't you forget it!"

"Why? What's she to you?"

"The woman I'd have made my wife—if I'd had a sound pair of legs!"

"You mean, don't you, the woman who wouldn't have you because you didn't have a sound pair of legs?"

"We won't discuss that! It's only a play on words. You've won the girl's love, but that doesn't stop her from being the biggest thing in my life. That's my business, so long as it isn't offensive to her. If she's in any danger, however, there's nothing can stop me from defending her if I choose to do so, and see my way. There's a lot of unexplained things happened in Galesburg during the past week. Some of them I know a lot about. Some of them I'm going to know more about. The sooner you and I understand one another, the better for us both and for the girl."

Powerful emotions were making it difficult for Wilse to control himself. But he did it. He looked Cooper squarely in the eye—and waited.

"And what do you get out of it?" Cooper demanded.

"Something I'm beginning to think it isn't in you to understand."

"You mean you want me to believe you're interested in my lady through altruism and nothing else?"

"Altruism is as good a term as any—yes."

"I don't believe it."

"I don't give a damn what you believe. I've tried to do more for Gertie than any one will ever know anything about. And I'm not stopping yet. I'm coming to you with the promise that I'm not trying to steal her away from you; you've got good legs and I haven't. She can probably be happier with you than with me on that account. I'm here because I've learned there's a lot of queer business going on and I'm determined, if I can prevent it, that the girl isn't compromised. Now, then, do we

work for her interest as enemies or friends? If it's friends, tell me why there's an Oriental following you and what it is he expects to get in the end?"

"Why do you suspect that?"

"Because I'm not a fool. Remember, I live next door to the Hadleys back home. My landlady learned all about the face in the window next day from Gertie's mother. Then comes Annie with her stories told too straight to originate in her imagination. Next this note turns up to furnish another link. Finally, two hours after you left town on your way here, *the Oriental himself comes in and questions me as to where you'd gone, not knowing I'm interested in Gertie myself.*"

"You've seen him?"

"He buys tickets for the same city and follows on the next train!"

Silence ensued. The cripple leaned forward in his chair while Cooper stared. The will power depicted on Dilling's face was terrific. Cooper quailed before it.

Yet how could he confess? How could he admit that while engaged to a beautiful, trusting girl of his own race at home, he had been base enough to lower his honor and self-respect to an alliance with a brown woman in a distant land?

Dilling, in possession of the truth, would have a perfect right to protect the girl not alone from the Indian, but from the white man also. Being honorable and fearfully in earnest himself, he would probably do it. Cooper looked in his face, realized the soul strength of the man before him and wanted his help mightily. But he dared not speak.

And while he hesitated, the phone bell rang sharply again.

Cooper stumbled across to the wall, while Wilse waited tensely.

"Hello!" he choked incoherently.

"Mr. Cooper?"

"Yes."

"Wait a moment, please."

A series of tick-tacks over the wire followed; connections were made. A male voice at the other end of the line spoke so loudly that even the cripple heard.

"Mr. Cooper?"

"Yes."

"This is the police department, Mr. Cooper. Do you know a Mr. and Mrs. Hadley?"

"Yes."

"Are you engaged to their daughter?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better come down to headquarters and get them. They're a pair of crazy people and the old man's near collapse."

Cooper's knees turned to soft tallow and began to buckle.

"What for?"

"They're in here with a story about their girl being kidnaped. Did she have an operation on her eyes this afternoon? Was she blind?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Well, according to what they say, they started home with her from the doctor's office in a cab. It turned out that the man driving the cab was either a Chinaman or a negro. They were driven suddenly into an old barn, the girl pulled out and carried off. They finally escaped when the father climbed through a window. We've got a bunch of our men investigating already, but these old people need attention."

"The girl's gone?"

"For the time being—yes. Hurry down here. We want to ask you some questions."

"I'll be right down."

Cooper fumbled the receiver on the hook.

"Gertie's *gone!*" he choked blankly.

"I heard," Wilse answered. His face was ashen.

"They want me down at headquarters."

"But you're not going. Not for a minute. You're going to tell me the truth of this whole business and you're going to tell me quick!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BEHIND THE SHUTTERS.

IN one of San Francisco's most exclusive streets, at a point where a wide panorama of the lower city and bay was available, there once stood a tall, dark, three-story house of brown stucco behind a high street wall of stone, surmounted by a hedge.

The shutters were always closed. Few

lights ever pried out beneath the heavy draperies which muffled each window. Occasionally in the evening a closed cab drove up before the iron gateway and the driver alighted and rang a bell. A servant always appeared quickly and opened the gate. The cab drove in on the asphalt driveway and up under a Victorian *porte cochère* at the side while the gate closed behind and the view from the street was screened. There were no other signs of life, and the occupants strictly minded their own business.

The house was known to the department of police as the residence of a wealthy East Indian importer. His connections in the city, in Chicago, New York, and London were considered impeccable. No untoward event ever occurred on the premises and the owner had the right to live his life in his own way—after his own native customs and etiquette—so long as no infringement of his neighbors' rights and interests was attempted. No complaint of any nature had ever been lodged, however, and in that city where the meeting of East with West was of too common daily occurrence to cause comment except in the most spectacular of racial episodes, the place remained shuttered from year to year and a thousand people passed daily who never glanced up twice.

On this particular spring evening, following the alarming intelligence which had reached Cooper and Dilling from police headquarters, a cab, with curtains drawn, drove up to this mysterious residence about half past six o'clock, and sought admittance behind the high wall in the customary manner. Under the *porte cochère* a tall, dusky man alighted, and the side door opened to admit him apparently of its own volition. He passed into inner darkness and it closed behind him.

A cat footed servant maneuvered deftly in the half light beside him and opened an inner door. Instantly he paused on the threshold of a room of light. It was a stupendous room. Gorgeous hangings, draperies, and divans smothered walls and corners. The bizarre and exotic from the farthermost jungle city of the East cast an instant necromantic spell upon whoever entered. It *was* the East—a palace called up as from Aladdin's lamp in the strangest page of the Arabian Nights, reached by traversing a hundred feet from the prosaic brick walks of an American metropolis.

The tall, dark man advanced to the center of the room as the servant salaamed.

He spoke in his native tongue imperatively:

" Your master, my brother—has he returned?"

" He has returned, most august one. He awaits above. I will lead you to him."

Out into the high center hallway the servant and visitor went and mounted a broad flight of stairs on carpeting that gave not the slightest sound. At the door of the room on the right, at the top, the servant salaamed again. The visitor passed in.

Seated in an exquisitely carved chair before a massive teakwood desk was an elderly man with coal black beard. He wore afternoon clothes, with a heavy golden chain about his neck. His fingers were crusted with gems. Only his headdress gave indication of his race. Incongruously—because of the Occidental apparel—he wore a heavy purple turban in which a gorgeous jewel glinted.

This man arose as the other entered, and greeted him.

A moment was given to that ceremonial of greeting in a tongue of the Indian hills. Then the visitor accepted the proffered seat, and lighted a cigarette with the hands of a woman.

" My journey," he announced, " draws to a close. Soon I bid thee farewell and depart, my brother. To-day I have watched, and the white woman did not return with her people. The despoiler of our house came out with one who was crippled. In great distress he went deeper into the city. I knew then that you had fulfilled your promise."

" The woman," returned the other stoically, " is beneath our roof. There are those who can be safely trusted with such a commission for ample sums of gold."

" The woman is beneath our roof? That is well. Tell me, my brother, what has taken place."

" I made the bargain and paid the gold. The woman went with her people to the man of medical skill from Japan. It was

not so difficult. During all the afternoon the servants of Leo waited. And when they emerged, the woman being blindfolded, a cab was necessary—our cab. The father and mother were disposed of; the woman brought here.

"At once went the father and mother to the officers of the police. Therein lies our danger. But we are guarded well. I have no fear. Even if we were suspected, there are ways and means of moving her to make us appear blameless. Your pleasure is now awaited, my brother. Would you see the woman?"

"Yes, I would see the woman."

They arose. Out in the main upper hallway they turned upstairs to the third story. So much depth of front yard and lawn was given to the house that it backed sheer in the rear on a back street. In a room whose barred window opened on this blind thoroughfare the two Indians entered. The only illumination came from a mystic lantern holding an electric bulb, suspended in front of a wall divan. The divan was empty.

With an exclamation, the owner of the place glanced around. And then they saw. Huddled in a corner, toward which she had groped her way and then collapsed, the blinded Hadley girl from a mediocre little town in Kansas shrank in stark terror and sobbed in her helplessness. Her traveling suit was torn and rumpled. Her hat had been lost. Her golden hair, loosened, had fallen in a flood about her shoulders. But most of all, the bandages about her eyes had slipped from place, and she kept one hand across them, for the pain was terrible.

The two brown men regarded her without comment, no softening of expression on their dusky faces.

"Well?" asked the owner of the house.

"She cannot escape?"

"It is impossible. She will be well guarded."

"That is good. I shall soon bring the white man. Then as I have planned, the debt to our house will be paid."

The girl heard their voices, though they conversed in an unfamiliar tongue. She started up hysterically.

"Father! Mother! Jack! Who is it?" she cried hysterically. "Where am I? What has happened? My eyes—oh, they hurt so terribly!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Your eyes do not matter," the second man finally answered in English. "You have no use for eyes. Soon we shall bring the one for whom you call. He shall see you and be unable to help you. Only so shall the honor of my house be satisfied."

"Who are you? What do you mean? What have I done? There must be some terrible mistake!"

She came toward the man on her knees, one hand over her eyes still, the other groping to touch, to find the one who addressed her. Both backed away out of her reach.

"There is no mistake," returned the first man in English again, unmoved. "Of old it has been written; the sins of the guilty shall fall upon the innocent. In the city of Bakir, in my country far away, the one whom you would call husband defiled the honor of our house. Therefore she whom we joyed to call sister perished by our hand. It is written: 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, honor for honor, a woman for a woman.' A white man drew the screen of dishonor upon our morning star. By you he pays. We take the one he cherishes in turn. You will stay here until we bring him, and your cries are useless."

"Oh, oh, oh!" moaned the girl. "Where am I? What awful thing has happened? Whoever you are, I haven't done anything to you. Can't you see? I'm blind! I'm ill! I came here to have an operation on my eyes, and the doctor said I was to rest quietly for ten days. Then I might take the bandages off and perhaps I'd see again."

"You may rest *very* quietly here. We will bring your lover to you."

"You'll bring Jack here? But why can't I go back to the hotel? And father, mother—where are they?"

Her cry was piteous. She was like a little child in the dark, groping out for kindly protecting arms which were not.

"Peace! We will talk no more. Make no outcry. Try not to escape. It is all useless. We shall see that which we shall see."

He gave a suggestive nod of his head to his brother, and they withdrew.

Down in the lavish office room on the second floor the man from Bakir paced the rug, while the other waited suggestively.

" Perhaps in view of what she has told us it would be well to delay my going," he said, " until the ten days have ended. If she regains her sight we may make his punishment the more severe."

Fifteen minutes later he paused at the door.

" Let her be kept inviolate until the time is ended," he pronounced. Then he repeated what he had so ominously told the girl:

" We shall see what we shall see!"

The brother nodded.

The man from Bakir left.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILSE'S FAITH.

WILSE sank down beside the police sergeant's desk. " No word yet?" he asked anxiously.

The sergeant's face was grave. He shook his head. Although hardened to the seamy side of life, he was genuinely sorry for the cripple.

" Do you really think anything terrible has happened to her?"

" If you want the truth, I'm afraid—"

" Something has happened?"

" I can't see any other answer. This is the eleventh day."

" Maybe those who abducted her are trying to find Cooper and haven't been any more successful than ourselves."

" Maybe. There's nothing to do but hope. We're doing our level best. We've got out a dozen extra men. We've got stool pigeons who'd report instantly if they got any trace of where she might be held. But the trail's growing cold. How are the old folks taking it?"

" Badly. The old man and the old lady sit all day side by side up there in the hotel like a couple of children. I hate to go back to them. It tears out my heart. The old man lost everything when his bank was wrecked last month. That was bad enough. But now that the girl's gone, he's just turned—foolish. The mother was high-strung and somewhat snobbish. She's gotten over that. She's a broken little old lady, crying for her lost little girl."

" It's tough, but it's life. Your girl isn't the first who's disappeared without leaving a trace."

" What becomes of the most of them?"

" Sold to Chinamen—or worse."

It was very quiet in the sergeant's office. The simple statement was terrible in its import. Yet when Wilse looked up he was smiling.

" Somehow I feel she will be found, sergeant."

" That's the proper mental attitude to take; and you can bet we're doing all we can. Things like this don't add any to our own glory, to say nothing of the name of the city. But—"

" It's something I *feel,* sergeant. I can't say exactly why. And yet I can. It's because so much that has gone before has turned out so fortunately for all concerned, that I can't believe everything's gone to chaos now. There's a reason in it somewhere, although some of us can't see it just at present when everything is dark. It's a strange sort of faith I'm beginning to feel, and I can't attempt to explain it. But it's there, and it's keeping me going. The girl will be found. I'm sure of it."

The policeman shrugged his shoulders.

" Stranger things have happened," he admitted.

Another silence.

Wilse arose painfully.

" There's something that won't let me lose heart. There's a purpose behind all this. I've got a queer feeling that the moment anything terrible and irreparable happened to the girl I'd know it and lose faith. Call it telepathy; call it God; call it anything you wish. I haven't had it yet. She's alive and needs us terribly; but nothing unspeakable has happened yet. If we could find Cooper I'm thinking we might get a key."

" From what you say, I think he's left town."

" I *don't!* I think he's hiding, right here

in the city. When he and I started to come here, that afternoon Gertie disappeared, he simply turned down a side street, saying he would rejoin me in a moment. He had no baggage, and I don't think he was overburdened with cash. He lacked the nerve to come here and tell what he knew—to meet Gertie's parents, to face what he might find if the girl was discovered.

"He was just weak. His nerve deserted him. He'd done something to a woman somewhere abroad, and was being hounded for it. That much I'm sure of. Perhaps we're not giving him as much credit as we might. Perhaps he reasoned that if he eliminated himself it might fare better with the girl. She would be released. Anyhow, I don't think he's left the city, and if I could find him the mystery would begin to unravel."

"Then he's clever in keeping under cover. My men have his description. They'd pick him up at once if he showed his face."

The officer threw a paper cutter philosophically on his desk and whirled around toward the window. His glance held for a long time as he looked out. Then he turned his head.

"You'll be disappearing next," he bantered grimly. "If a gang of crooks have swiped the girl and tumble to the fact that you're hunting her, you won't last long. Better be careful."

"I'm willing to take that chance."

"You're clever on the make-up, I'll say that. I saw you peddling your pencils down on the water front last night, and I'll swear if I hadn't been in the know—knew who you really were—I wouldn't have recognized you myself."

The compliment pleased the cripple. He said thickly:

"It's little enough I can contribute. But something tells me all this horrible business is coming out right. I can't say how. But it's coming. I won't bother you any more. You're more than kind. But if anything turns up, you'll call the hotel, won't you?"

The officer promised—as he had promised for the past ten days. Wilse swung out as a station house man came in.

"There goes a damn queer case," the sergeant commented as the sound of Dilling's crutches gradually drew fainter down the hall. "There's something about that crippled chap that *gets* me. The Hadley case, you know. The girl's fellow has vamosed, and the cripple's here tryin' in his broken way to find her and protect her. And I'll be a son-of-a-gun if I'm not almost convinced that his faith may yet win out!"

"She's a gone gosling," decided the other curtly. "I'll bet her body is floating out in the middle of the Pacific, right this minute, thrown off some tramp."

"I'm not convinced of that. If that guy keeps up, damned if I'm not sure but what he may hand me some of his faith, too!"

"Rot!" snapped the station house man. "Don't get maudlin."

CHAPTER XV.

SEVEN DOLLARS.

WILSE left the station and took a cab to the disreputable house in the poor part of the city down near the waterfront where he had rented a cheap room.

Arriving, he hobbled inside. An hour later he emerged. As the sergeant had said, no one would recognize in the physically twisted peddler of pencils, in his filth and his rags, the telegrapher who had worked the night wire for five years in the mediocre little town of Galesburg, Kansas.

The search went on again as it had gone on many other nights since the sight of a beggar afflicted like himself had given him the genesis of a great idea. Off into the foul spring wet of the harbor front he dragged himself, and the mist enveloped him.

The Gold Coast, the water front, dives in Chinatown, and the various foreign quarters—everywhere his search and inquiries came to naught. Again and again his heart was torn and his faith faltered when he thought of the girl he loved—blinded, friendless—sucked down in such a maelstrom.

Yet he kept on and on. There was nothing else to do.

Cold, hungry, heartbroken, drenched with the wet, yet clinging desperately to his faith that right would prevail in the end, Wilse found himself three nights later following a line of tatterdemalions into a Salvation Army lodging house.

They were holding services in there—singing a hymn. Sweetly the music fell on his torn spirit—carried him back over the weeks and the months to a quiet little midwestern community before all this hideous nightmare descended. It was a hymn which the girl he had loved and lost had played on the cottage organ on many Sunday nights next door:

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless—oh, abide with me!"

Amid the moldy-breathed gathering the tears ran down his haggard cheeks afresh. Where was he to go next? What was he to do?

He was grateful for the warmth, the sanctuary. He counted his money. Steadily he was exhausting his resources. He had a mere seven dollars left—seven dollars in bills and a handful of change. When it was gone—as it would be gone presently—what would he do?

The Salvation Army captain was talking—preaching a sermon to the flotsam and jetsam of life gathered before him. He had taken faith as his text—the faith which removes mountains. It almost seemed as though Kismet had sent Wilse into that place that night.

"No matter how far down you have fallen—no matter how black your future or how heavy the load which you are called upon to carry—if your faith is strong enough that all is coming out right—all *will* come out right," he declaimed, and he read verse after verse in his Bible in proof.

It was exactly the sort of solace the cripple wanted and needed most at the moment.

"I wonder," he asked himself mutely, "if I haven't found her because my faith hasn't been strong enough that I *would* find her?"

Beside Wilse sat an old moth-eaten derelict with bleary eyes and bulbous nose, swaying slightly from side to side.

"Wish I could believe that, 'bo," he sighed lugubriously.

There was despair in the statement. Wilse turned and glanced at the poor old fish cast up from the great sea of city life into this port of bass-drum salvation. The man was weeping.

"What's the matter?" the cripple demanded compassionately.

"Nothin' nobody cares about—but me," he announced.

"Have hard luck or somethin'?"

"Never had nothin' else. Just born to hard luck, sort of!"

It was good for the moment for Wilse to learn that others besides himself had troubles. And the captain's preachment was coming to him as a rebuke. Having trusted thus far, was he to give up now when the future was darkest? He swallowed with difficulty and said to the derelict huskily:

"It's true."

"What's true?"

"What the captain's saying."

"About this faith thing?"

"Yes."

"But that don't buy no bread or beer nor pay no rent."

"What is it troubles you—work?"

"Naw—lack of it. I gotta have seven dollars to-night, and I gotta have it quick. Say!" He leaned over so close that his moldy breath almost asphyxiated the other. "Do you suppose, on the strength of that faith thing, the captain would lend me the jack?"

"What do you want of seven dollars?"

"To keep my girl from bein' set out in the street in the mornin'. It 'll do for her," the old man continued with a hitch in his voice. "She's—sick!"

"Your girl?"

"Daughter. We ain't had the best o' luck lately—me bein' laid up with my old army trouble most o' the winter. Now she's took down and—she ain't strong. I make all I can, but sometimes, with the nag costing so much to keep and all, it's perty hard scrapin'. We fell behind with

the rent and with the medicines costin' so much, it ain't been easy to catch up."

"The nag costin' money! What do you mean?"

"I drive a cab, mister, and the pickin' is sometimes poor. There's too many in the business lately, and unless a man lets his cab to dirty work—oh, well! When the old nag gets run down or needs shoein', and the tires and bolts gets loose on the rig—kind o' fussy it makes some folks about ridin' with me. I just—got kind o' blue to-night. Come in here to set a spell and get cheered up. He talks about faith, the captain does. But I wonder if faith could raise me seven dollars. I wonder!"

"Unless a man lends his cab to dirty work? What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, there's plenty o' chances—you'd be surprised. You oughta come out with me after midnight and see what goes on sometimes—drunks and Chinks and kidnapin's and wild parties and all. Yes, you'd be surprised."

"I know," returned the cripple despondently. "I've lost my girl, too, in some such way as that."

"Daughter?"

"No. Sweetheart."

"How come?"

"She was brought here from a little town out in Kansas to have her sight restored. She was kidnaped, by Chinamen, I think—somewhere between the surgeon's office and her hotel."

"Blind girl?"

"Yes!" The way the cabby asked it made Wilse turn on him with a throttled heart. "Do you know anything about one? You haven't heard—"

"No, no! I was just actin'. Don't give my cab to that sort o' thing. Maybe—that's why I'm poor. Damitall! Had plenty o' chances. Lord, don't I, though! Blind girl, you say? What made her blind?"

It was the companionship of the old man, battered though he was, that appealed to the torn souled cripple at the moment. The hall was warm and comfortable. He told the old man the salient details of his Golgotha, omitting that part about his participation in the bank accident.

"Probably gone for good," the cabby lamented. "Lots o' such work goes on here between Chinatown and the wharves. Lord, don't it, though! You oughta be in this work to find out."

But despite the Job's comfort, it was plain the old fellow was visibly affected by Wilse's tale. "Guess we all have our troubles," he added. "Only some has worse'n others. Captain talks about faith. Funny! Seems as if folks who shout that loudest is them that don't very often have the need to use it—same like you and me."

"There's no telling. The captain, too, may have problems and troubles of which you and I know nothing."

"You believe the faith stuff?"

"I believe it. Yes."

"Then don't you ever drive a cab. No, *sir!* Don't you ever drive a cab—not after midnight. You'll see things as would shatter your faith all to smithereens. Sixteen years I been a-drivin', and I know." He sighed. "Lot's o' dirty work I could give my bus, too. That's what hurts, too. Dirty work, and maybe I could help my girl get cured and save her place for her. No dirty work, and I have to come in here and get fed up on faith. Oh, Lord, don't I, though!"

"What's your story?" asked Wilse.

Wilse finally left the Army Hall. How far he traveled, what direction he took before he realized he was moving out of that part of the city where the girl he had loved and lost was most likely to be held prisoner, he had no recollection. But finally down a blind alley, in the shadows of a high house wall, he stopped. No one came in here. The place was choked in mist. The rain dripped groggily.

"God guide me!" he cried hoarsely. But somehow his despair was gone. A great, overwhelming assurance had taken possession of him. His belief in the ultimate triumph of right had slipped from the conscious to the subconscious. Despite the time which had elapsed since the girl's disappearance, he knew he would win out yet.

That great, overwhelming self-assurance had come to him strangely. It had been born, full winged and strong, with the giving of his last seven dollars to an unknown

cabby to keep a sick girl off the streets and help another's faith—a woman he probably never would see. Perhaps Wilse himself could not have told why he had done it—only that those who have suffered are quickest to detect suffering in others and—well, he was that kind of man. What difference could seven dollars make?

"Where are you, dear heart?" he cried aloud as his thoughts returned again to her. "How long must it be before I find you?"

Somewhere—was it high overhead?—the only answer which came back was the noise of a pane of broken glass. He knew a pane of glass had been broken because a ragged fragment fell upon him, making a tiny gash on the back of his right hand. Then quiet again—and the drip of rain.

He wondered for a moment why the glass should have been broken. But when no further evidence of any disturbance followed, he decided that the decayed putty in some old sash had given away and allowed the light of glass to fall. He went on his way—back out of the alley—down the hill again.

It was months before he learned how close he had been to the girl at that moment. It happened the night she recovered her sight. But instead of looking into the faces of loved ones about her, she had looked into the ghastly faces of three leering Orientals. Frenzied with terror, she had tried to break a window and call for rescue. She had been overpowered before she could utter an audible cry. But the glass had fallen outside.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLACK CAT.

THERE was consternation in the shuttered, darkened residence of Runjeet Singh—consternation and a consultation. The white girl had recovered her sight. Maddened by a visual realization of her predicament, she had shown that she could be kept in the present house and neighborhood only at great risk to the men from India themselves. The residence of Runjeet Singh was neither intended nor equipped for this sort of thing.

Moreover, Runjeet Singh himself did not wholly approve of it. In other ways he was a law-abiding American citizen, a man of honor and integrity, with pride in his house, his business and his wealth. Abducting white women beneath the noses of the police and holding them at great jeopardy to himself in order to execute revenge on a man who could not be found, was not the Singh's method of exercising retribution.

If it was to be an eye and a tooth for an eye and a tooth, let a knife be run in the girl's heart at once and her life taken in payment for the indiscreet sister's. Dallying along, holding the white woman prisoner until she made her imprisonment known, hoping to burn with the fire of helplessness and remorse the vitals of an enemy who had vanished, to Runjeet Singh was foolishness. He had suddenly voiced his opinion, courteously, but in a manner not to be misinterpreted.

For Cooper had vanished. There was no longer any doubt about it. Nearly a fortnight had passed, and from the moment he had left Dilling's side as the two hurried toward the police station, not a trace of him had been reported. He had not returned to Galesburg. The hotel management was forced to clear his room and pack his possessions in storage. Though both the police and retainers of the city's great underworld, as it then existed, were on the outlook for him, their vigilance came to nothing.

Perhaps Cooper had been keener than he had been given credit. The elimination of himself would do more to save the innocent, jeopardized girl than all the explanations and effort he might put forth in a twelvemonth. At any rate, because he could not be seized, because he had vanished so inexplicably, the Indian was balked in his vendetta — the whole conspiracy stood checkmate.

What Cooper could not have counted upon was the alternative contained now in the words of Runjeet Singh—or else by his flight he wished to dodge all knowledge of how the abduction ended and thus salve his conscience. For across the corner of the big teakwood desk in the luxurious second-floor apartment of the Indian's residence,

Runjeet Singh glared at his vindictive brother and said:

"No longer may the white woman remain beneath my roof, my brother. For with her sight, she has exhibited the bitter fury of the leopard. Something must be done. I have lent my roof to you and the honor of my house. But the honor of my house could be satisfied as well by her death at once, since blood must be shed for blood as is written. Let us have the business ended before the men of the police descend and wreak their vengeance on us."

"But she is not of his blood," the other objected angrily. "She is but to him betrothed."

"Suppose he has gone because he does not care? We have but let ourselves become fools. Her blood is white. It shall be enough."

The brother arose and paced the floor. Finally he stopped abruptly.

"I will take her from your house," he said. "Fear nothing. No danger shall come."

"And what will you do with her?"

"The Chinese will buy her. She is not without beauty. And what is it to us, if we cannot find him, that he may look upon her suffering? If she never appears again, wherever he may be, he will always have it to dwell upon. Give it no more thought, my brother. Let there be no enmity between us. To-night I take her away. Too long I have stayed, perhaps. With the dawn I go back to our people."

Fifteen minutes later a black cab, with all curtains drawn, waited beneath the murky *porte cochère*.

A half hour later it was on its way down into Chinatown.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONFESSION AND A DISCOVERY.

THAT divine spark called Conscience, born within the least of us—what is it?

Why should a man who has transgressed the moral law never be able to flee away from himself?

What is the voice within which whispers and pleads and begs, which gives no peace, which taunts and mocks and entreats and heckles—until in agony of spirit the one who has sinned throws up frenzied hands and surrenders?

Who can say?

Day after day Jack Cooper kept to the confinement of his obscure, three-room apartment on Telegraph Hill. Each morning he paid the slavey to bring him up a paper with his breakfast. Sometimes he found long articles about the disappearance of Gertie and the search going forward. Sometimes it was reported in a paragraph. Sometimes there was nothing. Yet so long as the fate of the girl was unknown, just so long did he suspect the search was still going on for himself. And he tried to justify his silence and his hiding by the argument that thus was he balking the plans of those who had abducted her for a horrible, inhuman purpose. As a week went by, and then ten days, it was a sorry business.

Physical inactivity began to tell on his nerves. He smoked too much. Such exercise as he took at night, he restricted to dark thoroughfares. Here every shadow quickly became an enemy in waiting. There is a queer toll gnawed in normal mentality by a constant presentiment of impending physical danger. Cooper felt that whether Gertie were released or rescued or went to a fate worse than death, he was only prolonging the day of reckoning for himself. A hundred times a day he cursed that liason with the alluring Indian girl. But little good cursing did him.

Finally he began to wonder if he were going crazy with the worry and suspense. His own imagination became his worst enemy. When he finally slept at night, it was the slumber of exhaustion. The ninth day his money began to give out. He wondered at what moment his presence and behavior in the house might cause suspicion, talk, discovery.

There was something else that aggravated that tearing down process. Frail, perhaps, but no less effective, it was—

Music!

Somewhere in that neighborhood was a

home with a cottage organ. Frequently in the late afternoon or early evening some one opened the organ and played upon it. And they always played hymns.

Imprisoned, shut off from all communication with his people, heckled by an ominous sense of coming misfortune that could not be much longer averted, night after night the man had to suffer the sound of those hymns—hymns such as Wilse Dilling also had remembered that the lost girl had played back home before all this miserable business began.

He closed the windows, placed his palms over his ears to shut out the sound of them. But he could not get the appeal, the preachment, the rebuke of them from his heart.

One hymn raised especial havoc. It seemed a favorite with the unknown organist. Tears welled to Cooper's eyes. He cried out involuntarily as she played it:

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh—abide with me!"

"God!" wailed the man in his misery. He sank down on the floor, his face buried in his arms upon the seat of a chair.

It was after midnight, long after midnight, nearly another morning, when Captain Royle, of the San Francisco police, heard a step in the corridor at headquarters and a sharp rap upon his door.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened. A young man whom he had never seen before stood there—a young man with great circles beneath his eyes, clothing rumpled, weak mouth set in lines so grim as to draw attention.

"You're Captain Royle?"

"Yes."

"The sergeant down the hall sent me—told me to come up and see you. I'm Cooper!"

"You're *who?*"

"Cooper! The man who was engaged to that Hadley girl who was kidnaped."

The captain dropped the sheaf of papers in his hand and took the steel-rimmed eyeglasses from his nose.

"Come in!" he ordered gravely. "Close the door. You're the man we've wanted to talk with ever since the day the girl disappeared. Where have you been?"

"Hiding."

"From whom? What for?"

"That's just what I've come to tell you. I couldn't stand it any longer. I don't care what happens to me or who knows what I've done—I've got to make a clean breast of everything or go crazy."

"Do you know what became of the Hadley girl?"

"I think I do. Yes."

"Wait a minute. I want some one else to hear this. Sit down in that chair. Where have you been hiding?"

"In a room up on Telegraph Hill."

"But who's after you that you should hide?"

"A man who followed me from India. I got in a scrape with his sister out there and he's carrying out a revenge that has something to do with his religion."

Two other police officials came in. And Cooper broke down and poured out his story.

"Why didn't you come to us and tell us this in the first place?" Captain Royle demanded angrily.

"I didn't know what to do. I've been all twisted up. At times I couldn't think straight. But I couldn't put out of my mind what might have happened to Miss Hadley—all through my weakness. The remorse began to sap every ounce of strength I had. I saw it was only going to grow worse as time went on. I had to have relief."

"This gives us the clew we've wanted ever since the girl was kidnaped. East Indians! Hindu vendetta! It's nothing new to us. We've had a couple of such cases before. Sweeney, tell Bill Byrnes I want him."

Bill Byrnes was summoned—a big bodied plainsclothesman with a hawklike face and eyes like gray slate.

"Bill," said the captain, "this fellow is Cooper, fiancé of the missing Kansas girl the papers are panning us about. He's just come out of hiding—couldn't stand the suspense any longer. He tells us he's got reason to believe a Hindu is after him for a

woman scrape he got into in the Orient. Thinks that to satisfy their honor, they've stolen his girl, to punish him through her. Do you know of any nest of Hindu natives, high, low or any other old caste, who might have the girl in hiding?"

The detective fixed Cooper with a baleful eye for an instant, then turned to his chief.

"There's a residence up on—"

But he never finished his sentence. A running step was heard in the corridor and a man in uniform burst in at the door.

"Cap! We just got a telephone from that cripple who's been hunting the Hadley girl through Chinatown! He's found her—at least, he's seen her! She was transferred from a closed cab a few minutes ago, through the back door of Lee Lung's place—the Golden Dragon. He thinks she's still in there in great danger and wants a bunch of men down there in a rush!"

The group around Cooper leaped to their feet.

"You come along," Royle commanded the young man. "You may be needed before this business is ended."

A great fear cut sharply through Cooper. His face whitened as he nodded.

A few moments later a squad of policemen rushed out the rear entrance of the station and climbed into a waiting patrol. They started at a mad gallop for one of the most notorious places in old Chinatown.

At the same moment they quitted the station house yard, Wilse Dilling—still concealing his identity behind the disguise of a crippled pencil beggar—watched his opportunity and quit the telephone closet in a corner of the Dragon saloon.

Dilling's haste to get the use of the phone a few moments before, however, had aroused the suspicion of one of Lee Lung's Oriental "pigeons" and spies. A Chinaman outside had overheard.

Through the main room of the place he raced madly, leaping a table to get to Lee Lung's lieutenant, who conducted the business of the Dragon—at least, that business which took place above the street.

"The crippled one who sells the pencils!" cried the spy. "He is not seller of pencils—he is police. I have watched and overheard. Reward thy servant, for thy servant knows he has called many police by the telephone and they come directly."

The keeper of the Golden Dragon sprang to his feet and squalled out orders in his native tongue. So swiftly and efficiently did the organization work that Wilse Dilling had not made the outer door of the room before his enemies were loosed upon him.

Four Chinamen and two Latin ruffians sprang for him to keep him from making that door. Back into the room they dragged him. Then started one of the most unequal but spectacular scenes the main room of the Golden Dragon had ever witnessed.

Wilse Dilling, cripple, started fighting six iron thewed thugs for his life!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

BOOKS

WHEN we get a book that's new,
Father reads the whole thing through,
Not a sentence missing;
Sister, on the other hand,
Skips around to beat the band,
Looking for some kissing.

Mother reads the last page first,
Says she wants to learn the worst,
If the ending's happy!
Brother simply shakes his head
Till it's time to go to bed,
Then says "Is it snappy?"

James A. Sanaker.

The City Smiles

By WINIFRED DUNCAN WARD

LITTLE Mrs. John B. Eldridge, well under the lee of a huge policeman, stood still in the middle of Fifth Avenue, where it crosses Forty-Second Street, and consulted her list. Around her hummed the monotonous roar of New York on a Saturday afternoon—myriads of faces, myriads of voices, a million hurrying footsteps, and upon all this shuffling, scuffling mass the rain poured down out of a leaden sky.

Return cut glass bowl.
Return library book.
Buy toothpaste.
Phone Leland.

—read Mrs. Eldridge's list.

" Right across, miss," said the huge policeman; and it was no wonder he called her " miss," for as she scurried on, in front of the purring nozzles of ten dripping automobiles, everything about her looked young —from her eager green eyes and gray brown hair to the slight forward bend against the wind of her lithe body.

She gained the opposite curb with a little gasp of relief, and as she wove her way in and out the crowds to the nearest drug store her thoughts scurried and dodged along with her feet.

" Toothpaste," chanted her mind. " Ugh—what a dreary Saturday. Rain—rain. How sad the people look—no adventure in their eyes—no sparkle—nor in mine." Her mind paused as she dodged a huge woman with umbrella lapping hers. Then it went on again.

" I'm glad they took back that ugly bowl. Toothpaste—and then I'll be free—*free,* with the whole evening to myself. And I'm going to phone—"

Her husband, John Eldridge, had given her the cut glass bowl for her birthday. So like him. Always the stupid, heavy thing. Now, if it had been Leland— Again her mind stopped short, startled at its own waywardness.

For Mrs. Eldridge, happily wrapped in her expensive furs, had no cause for way-

wardness, and knew it. She was married to the man of her own choosing—a kind, substantial and successful man compared to whom Leland and the other phantoms of her past life were like a mirage of no importance.

But John was dining at the club to-night, and, despite reasoning, her still young heart leaped at the thought of an evening free. What a shame it had to rain! She wanted adventure—adventure—and on her one free night it had to go and rain.

She entered the drug store and approached the counter.

"Toothpaste, please," she said; "and have you—"

"A box of Murads," said a hoarse voice, cutting off her own. "No—I've changed my mind. A cigar."

Mrs. Eldridge glanced, indignant, at the man who had so rudely interrupted—a small, dingy man, with a big mole on his cheek and a pasty complexion.

The imperturbable clerk, taking no sides, for or against, pushed out toothpaste and cigar simultaneously. The man pocketed the cigar and went out; and Mrs. Eldridge paid for the toothpaste and stepped into the telephone booth, suddenly oppressed anew by the dullness and rudeness of people—by the dreariness of the rain—and the monotony of life.

She hesitated, hand on receiver. Spring 1-0-0-6-2—Leland's telephone number. It hummed in her mind like a bee—and brought back to her their last meeting, almost a year ago, when he had run into her by accident on the street. She had left her car and was walking; he was on top of the bus, and, seeing her, had leaped off and rushed to her with the same old boyish, laughing impetuosity—and the avenue had been suddenly touched with golden light.

"Spring 1-0-0-6-2," sang her gay young heart, stifled beneath its conventional furs, and clamoring for adventure despite the rain. "Go on—telephone him."

"Certainly not," said her well trained mind. "What would John think? You know he'd be annoyed."

Loyalty to her taciturn, busy, prosaic husband won.

After all, just because she had an evening free was no reason why Mrs. John Eldridge should make a fool of herself. She phoned the wife of a business friend of her husband's, and accepted an invitation to dine with them at seven.

"Library book," prompted her mind as she stepped out of the drug store.

"Pshaw!" said her still young heart; and it lay quiet beneath her furs and said no more. It was used to defeat. Hesitating on the curb, she realized suddenly that the umbrella she was carrying was not her own.

The same square knob at the end had deceived her for a moment—but this was of wood, and the umbrella part was cheap cotton, while hers had been silk, with a square knob of plated gold, with her initial on the top.

Annoyed, she went back to the drug store.

The clerk, imperturbable as Buddha, showed no interest. No, no umbrella had been returned. She went down the line of telephone booths, trying to remember which one she had used—vaguely irritated and disappointed in herself and this dull, wasted day.

And then, all of a sudden, adventure reached out and touched her.

As she turned to leave the last booth, where she had been groping for her umbrella, there were shouts outside. The next instant the quiet drug store was filled with excited men, and two policemen, accompanied by a shrill newsboy, who shouted over and over:

"He come in here—he come in here—I seen 'im."

"That's right—I saw him, too," said a thick-set, well dressed man.

"What's up?" asked the Buddha behind the counter, emerging slightly from his trance.

"Man murdered," said the policemen, both talking at once. "Not three minutes ago—right around here on Forty-Third Street. Shot in the back as he was walking along. And by George, the fellow got away—pistol and all. No one saw him except the kid—"

"He come in here!" shrieked the boy. "I saw 'im—"

"There's been ten in here," said the clerk, losing interest.

"Had a gray coat on," added the boy shrilly. "I saw him plain. He had a spot on his cheek and a gray coat."

"Didn't notice any such," said the clerk.

"Put the detectives on him," shouted a man.

"He can't be three blocks off yet," said another.

They rushed out on to the street again, and there was sudden silence in the drug store. Mrs. Eldridge, with a pounding heart, slipped out of the telephone booth, where she had shrunk at the unexpected onslaught.

"Say, *you* was in here before, wasn't you? Did *you* notice any one?" the clerk asked her.

"No," said Mrs. Eldridge, "I didn't notice," and she went out into the street.

The rain still poured—a steady downfall. Twilight had gathered. The Bush Terminal gleamed through the mist, and the traffic lights, up and down the avenue, changed from white to green to red, with monotonous regularity. Half a block off she could hear the pursuers of the murderer—a black crowd, growing momentarily denser. Traffic on the avenue had to stop to let them through. Everybody was explaining to everybody else how they had seen the man begin to run.

On Forty-Third Street, west, there was another crowd gathered, less noisy, and, approaching it, the *clang clang* of an ambulance.

Mrs. Eldridge's heart beat gratefully. In spite of her, life had splotched her cold, dull afternoon with sudden crimson. A murderer! And she had stood close to him—seen his face—noted the nervousness with which he had interrupted her—bought the wrong thing—exchanged it—and then hurried out, escaping by a hair's breadth. Her mind played, fascinated, with the episode. She had been shoulder to shoulder with intense, silent drama—and she hadn't even seen it—she had just been annoyed by his rudeness. Of course he would choose a cigar instead of cigarettes; more quieting to nerves on edge, less fuss of lighting and relighting.

"Why did I lie? Why didn't I tell that I saw him?" she wondered to herself, half scandalized; and in the next breath: "Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

She choked back the hope he would escape. After all, he oughtn't to—and yet those policemen, in their brass buttons, those stolid passers-by, and the screaming newsboy—all baying after their prey like determined hounds! Ugh! She shuddered: and, realizing that she stood on the curb deflecting traffic where it was thickest, she let the tide of pedestrians sweep her on across the street.

"Return book," prompted her dutiful mind, and with a last shuddering glance at the shouting and receding mob, she slipped into the marble portals of the Public Library.

The library rather bored Mrs. Eldridge. It was so cold and hushed and austere. But this time she was grateful for its sudden quiet.

In the circulation room was a rustle of leaves and feet.

Round shouldered youths edged along the shelves. Portly ladies with weakening arches sat on the hard marble benches, back to back, and perused whatever novels they had been able to find; others studied the index cards earnestly, silently.

Mrs. Eldridge, looking like a particularly well dressed fairy, in this atmosphere of heavy thought, returned her book, and looked at the clock. Just six. Half an hour yet, before she need even start for her dinner engagement. She shrank from going out into the streets, where she knew a murderer lurked, and yet she wanted to go out. Forty-Second Street, which had been so dull an hour before, was now a place of enchanted horror. She turned to go—and then came back. No—she could not—not right away, at least.

So she wandered along the bookshelves, her eye reading titles, but her mind busy with the events of the last few minutes.

Napoleon Bonaparte; Life of.
Nature for Its Own Sake.
Nantucket from a Motor Boat.
Needlework; Bavarian.

Her eyes, lifting idly from the dingy bindings, became fixed in a frightened stare.

Sitting on one of the marble benches, not ten feet from her, was the man with the mole. His still unlighted cigar stuck out of his pocket, and between his knees stood Mrs. Eldridge's umbrella.

Her last quarrel with life's uneventfulness was silenced now. The dull library—like the drug store, a moment before—was turned suddenly from drab reality into a stage set with all lights on.

Beside the man on the bench were a pile of books. He held one on his knee, and was reading it, hunched over, and leaning slightly on the umbrella. Apparently he had not noticed that it was not his own.

So intent was his position that for a moment Mrs. Eldridge decided she was mistaken; there must be two men with moles, incredible as that seemed. But as she stood there watching him her hushed excitement crept back again, for she saw that the man was not reading; his eyes moved across the page once in so often, to be sure, but they did not stop with the print—they slipped each time farther, in a stealthy, hurried glance over his shoulder. And the hand that held her umbrella was clenched like a vise.

At first she decided that he was merely nervous—self-conscious. But, no—he was watching somebody.

At first she could not follow his quick, furtive glances—then she saw that they were directed toward a tall, slouching man who stood at the card index files, turning the cards over one by one.

She observed that this man, in his turn, was not watching the cards. He was not even pretending to look at them; his eyes were wandering about the room, resting now on this man, now on that. Once he turned sharply and watched a man all the way across the room—watched him get his book stamped—watched him go out—made a gesture to go after him, then thought better of it, and continued quietly to turn the cards and to look.

Once or twice his eyes rested for a moment on the man on the bench. Mrs. Eldridge's heart contracted; some feminine instinct, unaccompanied by logic, told her that this man was a detective. She stood fascinated by the silent drama.

To every one else in the room these three people were just part of the routine of life in a library. She felt like a woman who sits alone in a darkened theater, watching the last rehearsal of some play. An unreasoning sympathy for the man on the bench swept through her insurgent heart. There was something hurt, patient, dumbly resigned in the way he tried to control his twitching hand, the turn of his watchful eyes.

What moment would the detective get some clew, and pounce upon him? With a gasp of relief she saw that the identifying mole was turned away from the detective. From where he stood he could not see it. And the man gave him no other clew. After those first few cowering glances he kept his eyes glued on his book; once in so often the pages turned.

How long would this duel of wits continue? The detective evidently had some reason to think the man he sought might be in that room. Quarter to six. Still the man on the bench sat motionless, turning pages. Still the man at the index file watched and watched; and still Mrs. John Eldridge stood clutching the "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte."

Much as she dreaded the possible finale of this scene, she could not tear herself away. Twice the murderer's eyes met hers—blue eyes that were dilated with blank, silent dread. They stared through her—as though she were not there.

Suddenly the detective left the file and began to stroll around. He sauntered toward the stone bench; turned on his heel and examined one of the cases; strolled across to the other side and back again. Had he raised his eyes at the precise moment that he was turning on his heel, he would have seen the mole upon the cheek of the man on the bench; but he did not.

He only wavered uncertainly, looking the man over and examining with equal interest the occupant of the next bench but one. Then he continued his walk.

It was only a question of time before he would get his man. There was something terribly quiet and persistent in his casual glances.

As he approached the danger zone again

the man on the bench stiffened into tenseness. She saw him raise his coat collar. Futile gesture, and a foolish one—the mole still showed, and he had by this odd movement attracted the attention of the detective. The latter sauntered closer to the stone bench; and Mrs. Eldridge moved at the same moment.

She hadn't meant to. Something inside rose up suddenly and prodded her into action—something rebellious, something that cried out in answer to the spectacle of a human being trapped.

Going straight to the bench where the murderer sat hunched and silent, she put her hand on his shoulder and said calmly: "Alfred, it's nearly six. I think we'd better start for home, don't you?"

The detective stopped where he was.

The man on the bench turned a white, blank face to hers.

"Say something—quick!" she whispered.

But he wasn't equal to it. He flashed her a look of dumb gratitude, and held out a hand for the book she carried.

She took his cue at once.

"It's that 'Life of Napoleon,'" she said brightly. "The one you said you could not find. Let's take it home."

The man looked at her again, wet his lips, and said aloud:

"All right, dear. I'm ready."

The detective turned on his heel and strolled away.

II.

At the top of the long flight of steps which leads down from the library to Forty-Second Street they paused.

"How did you—know?" said the man.

"I saw my umbrella," she replied under her breath. "And then I saw you—and remembered you in the drug store."

Murmuring apologies, he stared at the umbrella—unconscious till this moment that it wasn't his—and pressed it on her. But she had left his in the library. It was pouring now, a dismal, steady downpour.

"You'd better go," said the man huskily. "He may be watching yet—and there'll be others too. You'd better go."

She hesitated. Six thirty. Time for her to keep that dinner engagement. She could see her host and hostess, smug, rich, waiting in their beautiful apartment on Riverside Drive, the gleaming dinner table heaped with silver and set for five.

"I'm not going to leave you," she told him. "As long as you're with me, you're safe. Will you hold the umbrella, please?"

The man turned and looked at her.

"Thanks," he said simply. "Will you take my arm?"

The arm of a murderer! She shrank—then took it, and a moment later they were swallowed up in the hurrying throng on Forty-Second Street.

"Keep with the crowds," he said in his hoarse, patient voice. "It's safer that way."

She wanted to go in somewhere and telephone her hosts that they were not to wait, but she was too nervous to suggest it—too sure that once she was inside the booth this stricken man would disappear and face his fate alone. And there was that about him which would make escape improbable.

So turning into Broadway, they walked back and forth, back and forth, where the lights were brightest, through the rain, and the crowds most dense; and haltingly, eagerly, stumbling over every word, he told her all about it.

"Two years after we were married," he said, "the baby came. I had the same job then I have now—accountant in a bank. We'd calculated my salary would see us through; but we calculated wrong. The hospital was three hundred dollars—and Amy was sick for a month after that. The baby she was sick, too—a weak little thing, at first. Well, what with the doctors' bills and the hospital—I couldn't make it, quite—so Amy took a job.

"I was against it from the first—but, once in, she liked it. We were happy. There was money and to spare after that. We got a nurse for the baby; that was fine for Amy. Then she bought me a talking machine. She got home before I did every night; she used to turn my favorite piece on—it was called 'Yaka Hula Hikey Doola.' I liked that piece. Well, she'd

turn it on and open the front door—it was summer then—and I could hear it half way down the block, and see the light— *We're being followed.*"

He clutched her arm, and they moved on in silence; but it turned out to be only a woman with a bundle, who walked close at their heels for a while and then passed them without a glance.

He went on:

" She seemed to like her job. At first she talked a lot about it—a stenographer's job, it was—down in a law office on Wall Street. Then after the first year she began to complain because it kept her so late at night. Sometimes she'd stay till seven or eight—but she always got extra money for it, so I didn't like to say anything. She'd telephone on those nights and beg me not to keep supper, and after a while it got so regular that I didn't worry when she was late.

" Then one night she didn't come—no telephone message—nothing. It got to be eight o'clock—then nine. I was worried. I took the subway and went down to bring her home. The elevator was still running; I went up; the office was dark and locked. I thought I must have missed her. I asked the elevator man how long ago she'd left; described her—I knew what she had on. He knew too—seemed to know a lot about her—and looked at me sort of queer. He said she hadn't been there that evening at all. Not since five. I was worried then, in earnest. I guess I showed it. I kept on asking him questions. He was a jolly old fellow—Irish. When he saw how seriously I was taking it he slapped me on the back and winked.

" ' I wouldn't be wurryin' mysilf too much,' he said to me. ' She's not walking the streets alone. She's got company, she has.'

" I wanted to know what he meant.

" ' There's another sweet on her,' he said. ' Dinners and taxis—oh, boy! Some competition you've got,' he said.

" I guess he saw then he'd made a slip. He sobered up. I'm not much on acting, but I pretended to be very knowing. I nodded my head and said I was disappointed—or something.

" Then he got confidential. ' You want to get in the game,' he said to me. ' See how he does it, and go him one better. I'll tell you where you'll find 'em too, like as not—up at the Rosemount; that's where he takes her, they say—sometimes in a taxi, oftener in his own car."

" The restaurant he mentioned was one I guess you know—clear uptown—sort of a roadhouse—like a little fairy palace at night, all lit up; and just two blocks from our apartment over on Amsterdam Avenue. Why, Amy and I have walked past it a hundred times and planned how we'd eat there when the kid had grown up and there was extra cash.

" I got on the subway and went back. I didn't know what I was doing. If I'd have found them sitting there together I don't know to this day what I'd have done. But as luck would have it, they were coming out just as I got there. They went right past me on the steps and didn't see me. I saw the man plain; it was her employer. They were laughing and talking. She got into his car—it was a big one, with a chauffeur—and they drove right past the block where she should have got off to come home. But she didn't get out.

" I couldn't believe it. I went home and waited. She came in at half past three—very stealthy and quiet. When she saw me up she was frightened. She denied everything, of course. I said all right; there was one easy way to prove it: give up her job and stay home with the kid. I blamed myself for ever letting her start working. She cried; said she'd be ' lost ' without her work, and we needed the money—and all the rest of it. I said I'd work at night for a change. More than once they'd asked me to do extra work at the bank.

" She agreed to that; kissed me and said everything would be all right. The next morning she went to work as usual. She never came back. Just disappeared, without ever saying good-by to the kid or sending for her things.

" At first I didn't seem to care. I heard he was supporting her. I thought she'd soon get sick of that. But when a month went by—and three—and five—it began to eat into me somehow.

" One night, on the way home from work, it came to me all of a sudden that she wasn't ever coming back. She'd left, for good and all.

" Next day I sold the phonograph and bought a revolver. Oh, you needn't jump! Why, I carried it around for months, and didn't do a thing with it. Down underneath I kept saying to myself: ' If Amy don't come back by Christmas—' *Who's that following us?"*

They hurried on in silence, terrified, but it was only a passer-by, who turned off three streets farther on.

Mrs. Eldridge, with nerves on edge, felt the lights of Broadway reeling about her head.

" Let's go into a movie," she suggested. " We'd be hidden there."

He seemed grateful at this idea. They went on up to Forty-Seventh Street. Outside the theater in huge letters of flame was posted the bill for the week:

THE MURDER OF THE MOULIN ROUGE

She felt him cringe. They passed the place in silence. He began again of his own accord to talk.

" It was just accident I got 'im to-night. He passed me in the crowd—there on Forty-Third Street. I was on my way home from work."

" What made you do it?" she almost whispered.

His answer was matter of fact.

" Something in the way he was hurrying —head down—with a bundle in his pocket —that was the way I used to hurry home to Amy. Well, so I did it—and I'd do it again, too, damn him!"

He turned his burning blue eyes on her suddenly.

" Did you hear," he asked huskily, " if he died right off?"

Mrs. Eldridge tried to steady her voice. " I heard them say he was dead when they brought the ambulance."

" Good," said the man. " Let's get something to eat." He laughed, then clutched her arm. " We're followed," he whispered. " I'm sure of it this time. Go—go. I can't let you in for this."

But she stuck bravely to him; and it turned out to be nothing after all. They stopped at a refreshment stand, and he bought her hot coffee and sandwiches. He couldn't eat himself, he said, and the drawn, lonely look on his face, when he thought she wasn't looking, nearly choked her. When they were safe back in the crowd again she forced a ten dollar bill into his hand.

" You must get away to-night—at once," she said. " I'm going to help you. We'll get you to a train somewhere."

The thought of escape seemed to confuse him, and her gift still more. He returned it, stammering. He had plenty at home. If it hadn't been he was just leaving the office—

" I didn't expect to kill any one, you see, on the way home," he blurted out.

She coaxed and begged him to take it. " Don't you see," she cried under her breath, " you mustn't go home! It's too dangerous. You must leave the city at once—to-night."

He looked at her, with the ten dollar bill crumpled in his hand.

" Do you know," he said, " that if they nab me, you could be arrested as accessory to the crime—if you help me to get away?"

It was the bank accountant speaking now —how well she recognized the type, the steady, patient nobodies behind their windows—reliable, uninteresting men—" uninteresting!"

She brought her mind back with a jerk to the flaming reality of their danger.

" I will never leave you until I see you on the train," she said with her firm little chin raised out of her furs. " Have you any family?"

Yes; he had a married sister on a farm up State. She had been dependent on him once, and would do anything for him.

" But I'm not going," he said dully, " except you leave me. You oughtn't to be seen in a railway station—with a—murderer." He swallowed hard on the word.

" Don't—don't!" she cried. " I don't blame you for what you did. A man like that ought to be shot—he ought." A sense of passionate sympathy surged through her. A murderer! So this was what they could be like—just caged, unhappy, disappointed

human beings—" like you—like you—like you," her heart kept saying, beating insistently beneath her expensive furs. But her mind refused to listen; it concentrated on the man at her side.

With gentle persuasion she maneuvered him along Forty-Second Street to the Grand Central Station. They talked about his little girl all the way. She could see he was sick with worry about that. They arranged that she should get the child herself the next day—to stop any talk or inquiries. She would take the child to the station and put her on this very train; and he would be at the other end to meet her.

Together they went to the window while he bought his ticket; together they paced up and down before the iron gates, waiting for his train. It flashed into her mind more than once how embarrassed this man would have been under ordinary circumstances, at the very fact of being with her, and how bored she would have been—kind, of course, but very condescending. His drama had curiously enough turned the tables—it was she who was eager, solicitous, terribly afraid of doing or saying something to startle him.

" Don't worry to-night," she said as they hurried to the lower level. " I'll bring the little girl to the train myself—this same one, remember."

" Thanks—thanks!" he muttered. " I'll be there to meet her."

Too late for anything more. The gates were open. They shook hands in silence. He tried to speak and failed; she smiled and wrung his hand and stood watching as he passed through the gate.

When she thought he had gone he came stumbling back again.

" Your umbrella!" he cried and ran for the train.

It was eight o'clock. Four hours of hushed, tense danger; four hours, walking back and forth, back and forth under the blazing lights of Broadway. Mrs. Eldridge felt suddenly weak and tired; but her mind was alive as it hadn't been alive for years. She burned to continue this night of vivid living—at least to confide in some one—before the splendid sense of romance and reality should begin to fade.

What would John say to this adventure? And then she realized that she could never tell John a word about it. His wife walking the streets arm in arm with a bank clerk? The fact that he was also a murderer would not, she realized, add any romance to John's view of this performance. She could hear, already, exactly what he would say with a stern, kind, and slightly patronizing air:

" Nice women, my dear, do not *do* such things. Now, if you had any consideration for *me*—"

No, she could not tell her husband of this glorious adventure. The very thought of it made the glory fade.

" Spring 1-0-0-6-2," urged her heart.

Opposite her were a row of station telephone booths. She could see Leland's eyes —glowing with interest—sympathy—understanding.

She turned from the booths sharply.

John had told her he might be home early. Well, she had had her fun. She would be there when he came.

As she crossed the lower level of the waiting room a newsboy ran by, crying: " Extry—extry! All about the murder."

Her heart jumped and missed a beat.

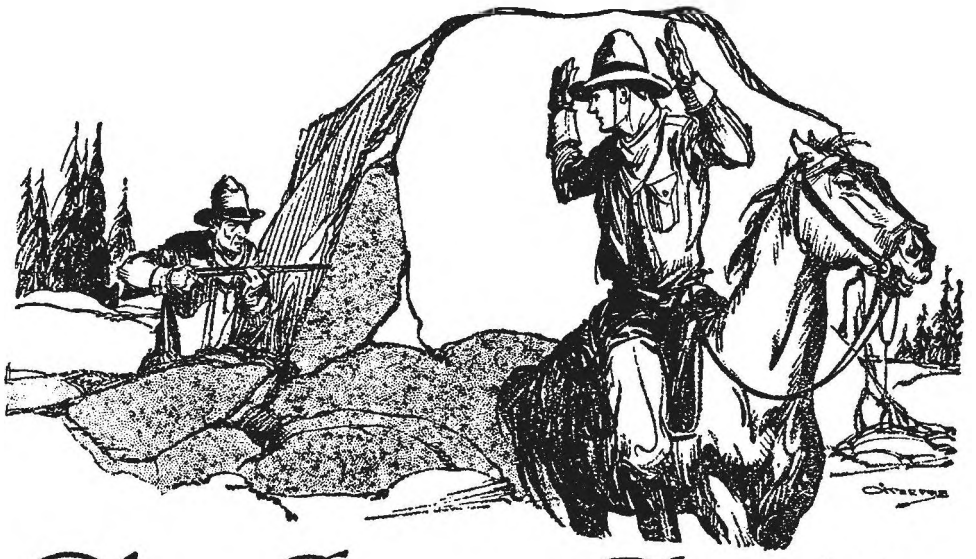
As she hurriedly, timidly bought the evening edition she felt like some phantom movie actress playing a part.

She whipped the paper open nervously, expecting to see the murder in huge letters all across the page. But at first she could not find it at all, and it was a shock to realize how little a murder more or less meant to the city. Here it was—a fair sized headline, over at one side:

MAN SHOT TO-NIGHT CORNER OF 43D ST. AND 5TH AVE.

Criminal Escaped—Body Identified as That of John B. Eldridge, a Well Known—

Mrs. Eldridge walked slowly, quietly down the long, narrow passage leading out of the station. The rain had stopped when she reached the pavement. The rain cloud, which had hung like lead over the tired city, was parting; and as she looked up at it the moon slid out into the open sky and smiled at her.



Dan Barry's Daughter

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Black Jack," "The Seventh Man," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE UNCONQUERABLE CAPTAIN.

CHARLIE PURVIS donated his big corral for the show. It contained nearly an acre, surrounded with a lofty and solid fence. On the outside of that fence leaned the men and the women; the youngsters were perched on the top rail; for the entire population had turned out to witness the contest. For the quality of the combatants was known.

Now and again eyes turned to a rear window of the Purvis house. Stretched in agony on his bed, with three ribs smashed in, a great scalp wound furrowing his head, and his left arm fractured in three places, Charlie Purvis could still turn his head and see the battle through his window. It was for that reason that he had donated the corral, as every one knew. He had tried to ride the Captain the day before, and now he wanted to see some other hero conquer where he had failed—or fail and perhaps pay a penalty almost as grim as his own.

The picked riders of the county had gathered for the testing. There were a score who had courage enough to make an attempt to conquer the great black stallion. And there were three famous horsemen who were believed to have an excellent chance of riding the big devil. These were Lefty Gilmore, Sam Ricks, and Champ Hudson, men of genius, every one, when it came to the governing of a pitching horse.

Now entered the great antagonist, dragged along by a half dozen ropes twisted over the saddle horns of tugging cow ponies. He came raging and rearing, already dripping with sweat so that the sun glittered and shimmered and washed in waves of blinding

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 30.

light along his sides. He had done a day's work in the passage from the stable behind the hotel to the field of action, and yet it was plain to see that his mettle had simply been aroused by what he had already done.

" He's ready to go!" cried a chorus of the spectators. And there was a little shivering cry of admiration and fear from the women, old and young, for there was enough fiend in the huge animal to thrill them with wonder and with terror at the same time.

It was said that after Lee Haines died, the stallion had been suddenly changed, so that from perfect docility he passed at a step into the most demoniacal temper. It might have been explained that he simply was ill at ease in the hands of a stranger and that he naturally expressed his nervousness with his heels and his teeth.

But no one cared to have a commonplace explanation of an extraordinary thing. It was believed that there was an unearthly connection between the mind of the horse and the mind of the dead master so that the moment the latter passed away the rebellious soul of the stallion arose in a struggle for freedom.

And the horse gained the more significance when the town came to know more about the identity of this Lee Haines. They had found him dead in a little shack among the trees, laid out with his eyes closed, his weary face composed, and his hands folded calmly upon his breast. Some one had been with him when he passed away. Who could it have been? No one could guess. And that was another added element of the mystery.

But that was not all. When they examined his effects, it was found that he carried a wallet, on the inside of which were the half obliterated initials of a farmer who had been one of the victims in a celebrated train robbery three years before, who had resisted being plundered and who had been killed. It started people on a new train of thought.

The authorities sent out a flood of telegrams and very soon they began to learn startling things—that this man was no other than the same Lee Haines who had, seventeen or eighteen years before, ridden in the outlaw gang of Jim Silent; and they gathered additional information to the effect that he was one of a famous band which, for a number of years, had been operating up and down the mountains. It was even believed that he was the leader of the outfit.

What desperate considerations could have led him to take his life in his hands and appear in open daylight in the center of a town was another mystery. His reason must have been good or else the value which he placed upon his life must have been small.

There was still another conclusion. Harry Gloster must have been an ally or even a member of Haines's gang. That was why Haines had thrown himself away in the effort to rescue the younger man. What other explanation could there have been? And was it not known that solemn vows of mutual fidelity held outlaws one to another?

So that, in the days following the death of Haines, his name began to acquire greater and greater significance. And when the posse returned from the long and fruitless pursuit of Gloster, a work which had been taken up by the sheriff of the adjoining county, they found the home town humming with excitement, as if the jail delivery were only a day old.

And some of the significance of Haines himself was passed on to his very horse. They had identified Lee with a long life of successful crime, and here was his horse, a king of beasts as his master had been a king among men. Was it not natural to graft the qualities of the one upon the other?

And when the Captain came plunging into the corral, looking so mighty and so swift and terrible that the strong ropes which held him appeared no more than intangible spider threads, another picture darted into the minds of those who beheld the sight. They saw Lee Haines, outlaw and gunfighter, raging through a battle.

Only to Joan it suggested something else. She had come among the last. She did not actually advance to the fence until the Captain entered the lists and every eye was so fastened upon him that she ran small risk of being closely observed. But then, having found her place behind the bars, she looked through and saw a thing which was

more terrible and wonderful to her than had been even the spectacle of Lee Haines and Harry Gloster breaking out of the crowd and smashing their way through the night to freedom.

She did not think of the Captain as a mere horse when he first entered. Peter was her idea of a horse, gentle, sweet tempered, faithful. She could rule him with a whisper. The least pressure of her knee would swerve him. But, after all, Peter was a born servant. He would obey any other man or woman in the world almost as well as he would obey her. And he could have lived happily enough in the stall of a purchaser.

But here was quite another story. To see the Captain, one wondered how he could have ever been controlled by mere bridle and saddle. For he was a giant. By actual rule he might not have stood more than sixteen hands and two inches. But he seemed a full hand taller; he dwarfed the cow horses to puny insignificance; for his soul was greater than his body.

One could not conceive and remember him in such a background, tied with ropes and surrounded by gaping people in a fenced inclosure; for seeing him, one thought of windy mountains, of far ridges thrown like waves against the sky, or of vast deserts which his matchless speed and endurance turned into a pasture lot. One saw him as a king should be, the wild, free leader of a herd of his own kind.

A dozen men now attacked him, moving behind a screen of their own trained but frightened saddle horses. They pressed close. Then they darted out. He was snared with new ropes. Men clung to his writhing, pitching body like dangling ants.

One went down with a yell of pain, twisted over and over in the dust, and was then dragged away by helping hands. They carried him off the field. His shoulder had been horribly crushed by a tap of those flying forehoofs.

And Joan remembered what Haines had told her of her father and Satan. It seemed to her that she could see Dan Barry seated on the back of that struggling giant of a horse, could watch the Captain quieted and subdued by the strange touches of her father's hand, the stranger touches of his voice.

Ah, for such a power as he had had! To sit like a king on a throne with this indomitable soul at one's command! Not a slave like mild mannered Peter beneath the saddle, but a free companion. There was the great difference. To own the confidence of the Captain meant the taking on of wings, the collapsing of distances.

And an ache of desire entered her heart. Not a passing hurt of longing, but an irresistible passion took hold on her. She looked down to her hands, slender, childish, and the small, round wrists. Truly, she was impotent. It would need Hercules himself to conquer the Captain.

She watched the progress of the work not as a fair contest but as a picture, terrible and beautiful beyond words. There was no hope for the men. She knew that. Vaguely she heard, here and there, voices of men calling out wagers that Lefty or Champ or Sam would stick in the saddle so many minutes; or that one of them would ride the black to a finish. She heard them, but she regarded them not.

They were strong men and dexterous men, but there was not strength or skill enough in all three were they rolled into one man to subdue the stallion. It took forty minutes to snub the nose of the horse to a saddle horn and then to saddle and to bridle him, though experts were doing the work. But eventually Sam Ricks was thrown up into the saddle, the hood was jerked from the eyes of the Captain, and he was gone!

Not uncontrolled by others, however. Three ropes were still fastened to him. He had to tug against those ropes and buck at the same time. And he managed it!

Sam Ricks had appeared a famous man when he first settled onto the leather. But he began to shrink and shrink as the black horse struggled. He became a little child clinging to the straps. His hat had blown off. His long hair was lifted and shaken by the wind. And even across the corral, Joan saw the terror in his face.

It could not last long. The Captain was not a horse. He was ten black panthers compacted in one. And bounding like a

rubber ball, twisting like a flashing snake of light, he shook one of Sam's feet out of a stirrup. In vain the cow-puncher sank his spur in the thick cinch.

Another buck, a yell from Sam, and he was snapped out of his seat as a child squeezes out a watermelon seed between thumb and forefinger. He landed far off in the dirt. And at him went the Captain with a rush, his mouth gaping, his mane flying above his flattened ears.

The yell of horror from the crowd crashed against her ears, but she felt no horror herself. It all was a natural thing. If men will venture into the den of the tiger, they must expect the tiger's teeth and claws.

Then the ropes drew taut, the great horse was stopped, staggered. And, of an instant, he ceased fighting and let men drag away the senseless form of Sam Ricks.

The Captain drew himself up with that blown mane and arching tail, his beautiful head high, his ears pricking, his eyes fixed far off where the play of the heat waves turned the distant mountains into nebulous, half living things.

CHAPTER XX.

SPIRIT OF THE HEIGHTS.

JOAN followed the direction of that stare, and a door opened somewhere in her heart. She understood now what she would not have understood that morning a half hour earlier. All was as clear to her as if the stallion had spoken words.

And by that understanding a bond was established between them. Watching him half in worship, half in sympathy, she found her fear diminishing. He drew her with a great power of which she was half afraid, from time to time, as though there were a black magic in it.

Now they were at him again in a worrying cloud, and he sprang into action, fighting back desperately, magnificently. But that lasted only a moment. He seemed to realize that hopeless odds were against him and became perfectly docile.

She watched him being led back to the waiting horses. She saw his nose snubbed against the pommel of another saddle. She saw the celebrated Lefty Gilmore hobble out to mount, for his legs had been broken so many times that they were twisted out of shape. They seemed like mechanical pieces.

His feet were fixed in the stirrups now. The hood was snatched from the head of the Captain and, instead of the burst of pitching, he remained quiet, looking curiously about him as if he did not even know that there was a man on his back.

It brought a gasp of wonder from the crowd. And beside Joan a man began to sing out: "Good boy, Lefty! You're better than coin in the pocket—"

Here his voice was cut away, and the Captain was seen to leave the ground without visible crouching and preparation. He simply shot away into the air, landed on stiff legs, a shock that swayed Lefty to the side, swaying far out, and before he had recovered his position the stallion was in the air again. When he landed, Lefty kept on traveling. He struck a dozen feet away and, like Sam Ricks, he did not stir to rise.

This time, however, there was apparently no need of ropes to hold back the Captain. He became oblivious of his rider the instant the man was out of the saddle.

And as patiently as before, he allowed himself to be led back and held while Champ Hudson flung himself into the saddle. The other two had been good riders. But Champ Hudson was one of those poetic figures who raise riding to a sort of chivalric height. He was desperate, now.

Joan could see his mouth set in a straight line and could imagine the glare of his eyes as he told them to turn the stallion loose. But she watched what followed with a calm unconcern. They could not tame the Captain.

Even Lee Haines had dreaded the horse to the last, and he was a man of a greater force than any of these. But force was not what could beat the Captain. He must be won, not conquered.

In the meantime this battle gave her a chance to see him in action, and it was a picture worth a year of waiting. It was longer this time. Some of the furious power was gone from the Captain. The long struggle against the ropes and then against the

two previous riders had sapped some of his strength.

For two long minutes Champ Hudson sat the saddle " straight up "; for another minute he remained pulling leather with might and main. And then he was catapulted from his place. The fight was over, and man was defeated for the moment. He would come back to the assault later on.

Joan knew well enough that a brute beast could not win in the end. They might starve him to weakness and then ride him—there were a dozen tricks which they might try. They might in the end even break his spirit. But as she watched him being led away she felt that he would break his heart first in revolt against all tyranny.

How had Lee Haines managed it, she wondered? In the first place he had caught the big fellow when he was only a yearling colt. And doubtless he had consumed an immense amount of time and patience. Even so, his conquest, by his own confession, had been incomplete and he had felt that the great brute would murder him sooner or later.

The crowd streamed on behind to watch the Captain after he had been unsaddled and restored to the little corral behind the hotel stable, where he was kept as county property. There they stayed for half an hour or so.

But the Captain stood like a statue and paid no attention to them. Not even a portion of hay could win a glance from him, but with his head raised high he looked over their heads and at the distant peaks.

Men cannot bear to be snubbed; not even by a dumb beast. And in a half hour the watchers had their fill of it. They broke up suddenly, as if a command had been given, and in another moment they were gone.

Joan alone remained leaning against the big gate post. She was perfectly content. For, watching the stallion, she was seeing the mountains with his eyes, and seeing the mountains, she was guessing at a thousand unborn happinesses which might be found there if one could see and know.

Presently the Captain put down his head to the hay, but with the first wisp gathered into his teeth he jerked up with a snort and bounded back across half the breadth of the small inclosure. He had seen her after having forgotten that there was a human being.

Now he came rapidly toward her for a few steps, paused, came closer, halted again. His eyes were on fire. And whether with anger or fear, all his big body was trembling.

It filled Joan with awe. He had been huge enough in the distance; but as he drew nearer, his great nostrils expanded and quivering, and with his ears pricked and his head high, he seemed to loom like a mountain above her—a mountain of beauty and strength.

She put out her hand. He was instantly across the corral and, turning in a whirl of dust, looked defiance and fear back at her. Yes, it was manifestly fear. All in all, it was a marvelously strange thing that he should have endured the scrutiny of a whole crowd without flinching, and then should have become as skittish as a mustang colt that has never seen a human being, simply because a harmless girl was standing at the gate of his inclosure.

But she remained there with her hand extended, and she spoke to him. He snorted, shook his head with an almost human semblance of denial, and backed still farther away until his rump came against the barn wall and he could retreat no farther. It was as if a fawn should make a lion crawl growling back to his den.

Joan smiled a little, but there was something deeper than smiles could express in her heart, for between the brute mind and the woman mind a current of electric communication was in operation.

Now he deliberately turned his back on her and approached the hay to eat. But it was only a semblance of eating. That prehensile upper lip had not gathered a single wisp when he whirled and confronted her with a snort. One would have thought that he had heard the whistle of the cowpuncher's rope over his back.

She spoke to him again, and once more it was as though she had touched him with fire. This time he plunged around the corral at full speed, bucking and dancing and shaking his head, and snapping an imagi-

nary rider from his back, then whirling like a tiger and tearing the victim to shreds.

When he had demonstrated his powers and when the white dust cloud of his raising had dissipated somewhat, he began to stalk her. There was no other word for it. His long and soundless steps were taken with a sinister care, like those of a great cat which crouches to its belly and works through the grass. More than once he stopped.

As he came closer he flattened his ears, and she saw the upper lip twitching back over white teeth. And for all his size and beauty, he made her think of a wolf. But she could not turn away, even when he was so close that a rush forward would bring him unescapably upon her.

It was a danger which she could not fail to appreciate, seeing what she had seen in the Purvis corral not long before. Yet it was a sweet pleasure to take fire in her hand and watch it burn.

Moreover, greater than her fear was a joy in her knowledge of what passed in the mind of the brute. She knew it as by revelation. She could judge all the cunning which was used to disarm her by a gentle approach. She could guess at the savage hatred of man which was in the stallion; she could guess at it so perfectly that she shook from head to foot with an intense sympathy.

Now, towering close before her, his nose came to her hand. There he paused for a few long seconds, and Joan began to talk. She had no idea of what she said, but she knew that she must keep on saying something, anything, in a certain voice which she had never used before but which came to her by inspiration.

New chords in her throat were touched by those low tones. The quality of the speech affected all her body with a sort of physical pleasure and sense of power.

It was affecting the stallion in the same way, she knew, even before he gave a sign. But at last one ear pricked, and the other wavered forward. He sniffed cautiously at the extended hand—and then she left him. It was very hard to do, but she knew that it was wisest to go away before the great horse should be wearied by the strain of that peculiar war which had been going on between them. She went back to the side of the stable, sat down on a box, and remained there for a whole long hour with her arms locked around her knees, holding a sort of holy pleasure in her heart so that it kept her smiling for reasons which she knew not.

After a time she would go back to him. And presently she noticed an oddly shaped shadow stealing along the ground toward her as the sun sloped west and westward. She looked up, and there stood the Captain watching her around the corner of the barn. She arose and went to him, and although he flinched back, he did not retreat. Not even from her extended hand did he flee, but let it touch his nose—let it stroke him —let it wander higher and higher up his head until the slender brown fingers lay squarely between his eyes.

Not that he was entirely passive. She read a constantly changing story of suspicion, hatred, wonder, shuddering fear and joy in his eyes. He shrank away by fits and starts, and came back gingerly to her touch and to the sound of her voice. For the hand alone was almost powerless, but hand and voice together seemed to be two great magnets whose power he could not resist.

It was the happiest moment of Joan's life. The touch of that silken coat was more to her than the flowing of gold coins through the fingers of a miser.

She looked past him to the pile of hay. It was undisturbed. He had not touched it after she went, as she thought, out of his sight, but following to the corner of the corral he had been watching her from the very first until the sun brought his shadow beside her.

It was wise to let well enough alone. She knew that the stallion would never forget her. She needed no one to tell her that she had already gained far more impression upon him than ever Lee Haines had done. And now it would be wisdom to go; and so, of course, she stayed.

The temptation of the contrast was too great. She had seen him raging like a lion among strong men not so very long before. Now, if she should dare to stand inside his

corral, and if he did not attack her with teeth and hoofs—

If she had waited to think it over, she would never have found the courage. But the first strong impulse made her bend over and slip between the heavy bars of the fence. There she stood at last on the farther side of the corral, to be sure, but with nothing but thin air between her and the man-killer.

But there was no danger. There was not an instant of doubt in her mind the moment she faced him, and presently he came shrinking forward, stopped in the middle of the corral, and raising his head toward those distant mountains, now growing blue with the afternoon shadows. he neighed a soft complaint.

CHAPTER XXI

FREE PINIONS.

SHE did not think of it at the time, for her mind was filled brim full of delight, and there was no place for thought. And, all the time she was in the corral until she watched the Captain begin eating the hay with as little fear of her as if she had not been one of the human species, she was too busy with his beauty and his pride and his grace, and above all else with the sense of overwhelming power which had drawn him to her and drawn her to him with a telepathy as subtle as that which draws together two humans.

If any other ideas came to her at that time, they were of her father. For her father's horse had sired this stallion; and such a horse as the Captain had Satan been, less gigantic of body but fully as great of soul. He would have known how to handle the big black, that father of hers. With his voice alone he had ruled Satan; with his voice alone he could have ruled the Captain. From him came her own authority over the black; and so the stallion was the bond which allied her to the ghost of Dan Barry.

All of this was in her mind, but when the afternoon shadows slanted sharply and the night wind began to move in cool and quiet from the desert, she went back to the place where she had tethered Peter, and mounted him for the return to the ranch.

The glory was gone from poor Peter. Never had he galloped more smoothly or fleetly. Never had his temper been so kind. Never had he borne his fine head so jauntily, canting it a little to the side as if to watch her and his road at the same time. And yet for all that, he had no interest for her, except a sort of sadness which began to ache in her heart, like that lonely sorrow that comes to a man who returns from the city to the village of his youth.

Peter had shrunk away to a tame shadow of a horse. The reality was the raging black plunging hither and thither in the Purvis corral and making foolish and ineffective shams of the men who strove to battle with him.

She was barely home in time to cook supper for Buck Daniels. He was unchanged since she had seen him last that morning. The silence which had descended on him since she had revealed what Lee Haines told her had continued unbroken. He was an older and a sadder man. Once or twice during the meal he tried to make conversation. He told of an old cow of crossed Durham and Hereford blood, a mighty mother of nine children, which had been bogged down at a water hole, and how he had dragged her back to a safe footing, and how she had afterward followed him toward home for more than a mile, following after him as if she wished to express her gratitude. He told her of how a long section of barbed wire on the fence had fallen.

Each time Joan strove to answer him cheerfully and take up the burden of the talk. Yet in spite of herself the silences would come as her mind rambled far off to the scenes of the day. And sometimes she felt a smile starting on her lips as she remembered how she had faced the Captain, and how, at last, he had come to her hand.

She was trembling with eagerness. She was like a child who had received a toy beyond even the highest hopes at Christmas and can sleep only with the treasure in its arms. So Joan felt. She wondered if she could close her eyes that night. And when

she went back the next day, would the Captain remember her?

"Might it be that you've been to town to-day?" Buck asked with some hesitation.

Remembering the fiercely dictatorial Buck Daniels of other days, tears started to her eyes. She jumped up from her place and ran around the table to him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with her arms around his neck and her cheek beside his cheek. "Is there such a terrible distance as this between us? Don't you see that I love you more than ever? Is there another man in all the world who would have done for the child of his friend what you have done for me? I never forget it. It follows me through the day. And if I don't do just as you want me to—"

"Hush, Joan!" he said, seeming more startled than pleased by the outbreak of affection. "Hush, honey! You don't have to do no explaining to me!"

He patted her hands in a perfunctory fashion, and she returned slowly to her place. Truly she had not dreamed that the gap was as great as this. And when she sat down again and dropped her chin on her hand, even though her eyes were lowered, she knew that he was staring half frightened at her while he stirred his sugar into his coffee.

What had come into her that had made Buck Daniels afraid? She considered it carefully, biting her lower lip.

"Ain't you going to eat?" she heard Buck saying softly at last.

Glancing up, she saw him rolling a cigarette with uncertain fingers, staring at her the while with an intolerable concern. And for a moment she almost wished that she had learned nothing of the truth, but that she could have gone on as before, looking upon honest Buck Daniels as her father. He began to take up the conversation at the point where it had been left off.

"I asked if you'd been to town?" he said.

She nodded.

"It was considerable of a fight they had with that black hoss, the Captain?" he suggested.

"He's a lion of a horse!" she said.

"He's a man-killer," observed Buck. "I hear they ain't even going to try to sell him."

"What in the world will they do with him, then? Give him away?"

"The sheriff don't see it that way," said Buck. "He's going to take no more chances of having gents busted up. He's going to put a chunk of lead into the Captain's head.

It struck Joan dumb. It was impossible for her to talk any more, and the supper was finished in a still more wretched silence. But when she was doing the dishes, a little later, a determination began to grow up in her mind.

The Captain, at all odds, must be saved. She could not beg him from Sim Hargess. She had seen that man, and his thin, hard features were still vivid in her mind. He would treat her request as a foolish child's desire. How could he possibly understand? And yet the Captain must be saved!

When she finished her work she opened the back door and went outside. Buck Daniels was pacing solemnly to and fro in the darkness, with a cloud of fragrance from his pipe following him. The sight of his solitary figure stirred her with pity. Those evenings were ended when she had read to him out of her books and when he had stopped her here and there to ask the meanings of the rarer words. Those cheerful hours were ended, she knew.

And though she wanted to go out to him and take his arm for a while, she was held back by a feeling that he would be ill at ease. She did not wish to hear that new diffidence in his voice and guess at that settled look in his eyes.

As she climbed the stairs to her room she strove to explain it, and what she decided was that he was attaching to her all the awe which he must have once felt for her father. Now that she knew her blood, he was afraid and he could not help but show it.

In her room she threw herself on the bed without undressing and waited a long age until Buck came upstairs. He did not pause at her door this evening to say good night, but with a loud, stamping step went on to his own room. She listened to the creaking of the floor until he was in bed.

Then she was up at once and down the stairs, all silently, not in dread lest Buck should hear her now, but in pity lest he should wake and worry for her until her return.

In the pasture she found and saddled honest Peter, and a few moments later they were bound for the town at a gallop. She cut around behind the houses, according to the plan which she had worked out before, tethered Peter at a little distance, and then, carrying a halter and lead rope, she started through the trees toward the hotel stable and the corral behind it. Voices in the darkness stopped her.

"This is where Haines was hit," one of two men was saying. "This is where they picked up the blood trail. If him and this Harry Gloster had ever got together again with that gang of theirs up in the mountains, they'd of been hard to beat, eh?"

Joan slipped away to the side and passed in a circle around the pair. But she was deeply grateful for the thought which they had given to her. Harry Gloster had been one of the gang of Lee Haines. Of course that was selfevident, for otherwise why should Haines have risked his life and lost it to save Gloster?

That point having been settled, it was clear that Gloster himself must have spurred across country and driven on the camp of the outlaws, that same place, no doubt, toward which the Captain had been looking when he stared far off at the mountains. And if he were given his head, would he not fly to it as an eagle flies?

She hurried on until she reached the corral. There were many voices near it. Two or three men were busy in the stable behind the hotel. And in a back yard adjoining, two youngsters were talking in shrill voices.

The Captain himself, lighted by the stars, seemed more formidable than ever. His black body was half swallowed among the shadows. Only a ghostly high light was struck out here and there, so that all his pride and his beauty were rather to be guessed at than seen.

She called to him in a whisper. There was a snort of fear and anger from the great horse, and some one thundered from the barn:

"Darn you, Jimmy, if you bother that Captain hoss again I'll come out there and wring your confounded little neck!"

There was no answer from "Jimmy." She waited again for a moment and then spoke not in a whisper, but in a low pitched voice. There was an instant effect on the stallion. He had crowded away to the farther corner of the corral. Now he came forward in that stealthy way of his until he was in the middle of the inclosure, paused, then moved straight on to her at the gate.

He had not forgotten! He even stretched out his nose as if to find her hand, and he did not stir when she slipped the halter over his head!

But that was not all. When she opened the gate he came meekly forth at the first twitch of the lead rope, and when she started on he followed obediently. Peter himself was not more docile, except that he always walked behind, and this great fellow strode up beside her and forged a little ahead. And again there was that strange feeling that he was a companion rather than a servant, that he was obeying her mind rather than her signals.

She brought him into the open behind the village, and there she took off the halter. It was the hardest thing she had ever done in her life. How simple it would have been to take him back to the ranch!

But that would have meant the coming of stern Sim Hargess to claim the property of the county, and the coming of Sim Hargess meant a bullet through the head of the black horse. And if she could not have him, better—far better that the mountains should claim him once more.

So she unbuckled the halter and let it drop. She waved it above her head, and the Captain, with a snort of alarm, vanished as if on wings into the night. She stared after him for a while with a heavy heart and then looked up to the northern and western horizon where the mountains blocked away the stars in shadowy pyramids and low running lines. Yonder was his goal, and how soon he would be among them, bathed in freedom!

After that, she went back to Peter. She had been hoping, a little before, that she

might be able to follow the drifting form of the black horse through the night, but a moment of reflection told her how impossible this would be. It would be easier to follow a dead star through the sky. And she must surrender the vague belief that the Captain would lead her back to the mountains and to Harry Gloster himself.

She mounted Peter, therefore, and started sadly away toward the ranch. Three mighty influences had poured into her life one after another. Of these, Lee Haines was dead and Gloster and the Captain were gone forever. What remained to her was the dreadful monotony of the ranch life and the long, sad silences of Buck Daniels.

Peter, swinging on at his smooth canter, started sharply to the side and doubled his pace. Out of a hole straight before them swept a shadow. And, although she could not make it out, the sudden fear of Peter caught hold on Joan. She sent him on at a racing gait, and leaning close to his neck, jockeyed him ahead.

Now hoofbeats sounded behind her and began to thunder past. She looked over in astonishment. It was not possible that any horse could pass Peter so easily.

And then she saw a great black horse sweeping away into the night before her without a rider on his back. It was the Captain!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GYPSY TRAIL.

IF some of her fear left her, her wonder increased many fold. She shot Peter straight on, and the good horse worked at top speed with his ears flagging back, so great was his effort.

Yet, blinking through the wind which that gallop raised, she saw the Captain swing back again into view, coming past on her right; then, a moment later, he walked up on her left—and she understood. He was using that matchless speed of his literally to run circles around Peter.

She drew up the gelding and waited. It was only a pause of a few seconds. Then the Captain came flying out of the night with his mane combed back and his tail drawn straight out by the arrowy speed of his coming.

He shot at poor Peter with gaping mouth and eyes which, it seemed to Joan, were devilishly bright. Peter whirled away, and the great stallion went by, missing them narrowly. Joan dropped to the ground as Peter, mastered by terror, darted away with a flying pair of bridle reins. He was not pursued.

The Captain, after catapulting past, swept around in a short circle, sent after the flying Peter a triumphant neigh, and then brought up before Joan. He had an advantage of ground which added to his lofty stature so that he blocked away the stars, and like stars were his great eyes, half shadowed under a brush of forelock.

Joan, loking up to the giant animal, laughed joyously. It was more beautiful than a dream to her. He had followed her through the night as a dog might have followed, and now he let her take him by the mane and lead him after panicky Peter.

For yonder stood Peter on a swale of sand, neighing his dread which drew him one way and his love of his mistress which urged him in the oposite direction. So she halted the Captain, then ran on to Peter.

When she had the reins of the gelding again, looking back with speechless anxiety, she saw that the Captain had not left the spot where she had stationed him. He was watching her with a high head, and Joan knew now that she could never abandon him.

With fingers trembling with her haste, she tore the saddle from Peter and then his bridle. Then, with a wave of the hand, she sent him on his way. He, at least, would not misunderstand that signal. He would never stop running until he was outside the gate to his corral at home and there he would wait until Buck Daniels came out in the morning.

Dragging the trappings with her, she went back to the Captain. Under his head she dropped them in a pile and let him investigate. He was not at all pleased, it was plain to see.

First he sniffed at the saddle and bridle, rank with the sweat of Peter. He even pawed at them disdainfully, tumbling them

over and over in the sand. Then he went to Joan and, swinging around behind her, he looked down over her shoulder at the gear she had brought.

What would happen when she attempted to put that saddle on his back? She was agreebly surprised. He did not stir when she lifted it high to swing it up to his withers.

And although he swung his head around to watch the proceedings, he did not object when she drew up the cinches. They had to be lengthened, of course, for having been set for the deerlike body of Peter, they could not encompass the ample girth of the Captain.

It was done, at last, and the head strap of the bridle having been lengthened, it was fitted to the head of the stallion. And so, finally, her foot was in the stirrup and she drew herself up to her place.

It was the crucial test. She had heard of many a horse which a child could mount barebacked, but which turned into a fury when a saddle was used. But the Captain made not the slightest trouble about it. He only twisted his head around until he had sniffed at her foot in the stirrup. Then, as she loosed the reins, he straightened away at a flying gallop.

Peter was no common horse, but how different was this from the stride of Peter. Between the beat of the Captain's hoofs, he seemed to float away on wings, a long and rolling gait which made her think of the lift and the swing of waves in the deep ocean. And yet it was all as effortless as the motion of the waves.

She could only tell the speed at which she was traveling by the rate at which the ground shot past beneath her and the fanning of the wind in her face. As for the jerk of laboring muscles, there was none of that.

She made no attempt to guide him. But when they came to a stretch where the footing was firm, she sent him away at full speed with a cry.

Full speed? She had not dreamed what speed could be. As his stride lengthened he appeared to flaten toward the earth. The long roll came out of his gallop. It was like the dart of water down a long smooth flume of rock. And it increased steadily to such a point that she began to gasp for breath and then drew back on the reins.

Instantly he returned to his former pace, rocking along as before without effort, and with no wheezing or laboring for breath in spite of all his work. But here was enough of play and it was high time for her to go home. She swung him about and headed him for the ranch.

There was an instant change in the manner of the stallion. He fell at once to a jerky, high headed trot, and when she strove to urge him ahead faster, he shook his head in a very human denial and cut down his gait still further. Presently he was walking. She struck him with the flat of her hand on the flank, but at that he came to a halt, and twisting halfway around, he turned his head toward those western mountains which were his goal.

Here was a new feature. To be sure, he was docile as a lamb at times, but that was only when she chose a way which was his way also. She struck him again with the flat of her hand on the silk of his flank. This time he shuddered under the blow and his ears flattened. He was angry now. Another moment, for all she could tell, and he would be pitching as she had seen him pitch in the Purvis corral.

So, with her heart hammering in her throat, she began to consider what she could do. She must leave him where he was if she hoped to get back to the ranch before the morning, and if she did not arrive there, poor Buck Daniels would go half mad with anxiety.

A tinkling dissonance began to fall toward her from the sky. She raised her head and looked up. There was nothing to be seen, but now the crying grew stronger and stronger as some unseen wedge of wild geese flowed north through the upper darkness.

The thought of Buck Daniels grew dim in her mind. Still watching the stars above her, she became aware that the stallion was in motion again, that he was turning, that he was heading north again at a trot and then at a canter and then at the mile devouring gallop. But she had no power to resist.

Every moment her happiness was increasing, and she had a feeling that she had been cut away, at last, from restraints which she hated and that she was being launched on the road which was truly her road because her father had traveled it before her. Where it would lead her she could not guess; and because she could not guess it was a double delight.

Conscience was not a small power in her, but when once one has turned one's back on conscience the chase is long before it overtakes one. So it was with Joan. Although she knew that duty led her back toward Buck Daniels there was something far stronger than duty which carried her toward the mountains.

Hour after hour the desert flowed beneath them. They began to wind among low foothills. At last a dim scent of pines began to blow toward her from the upper reaches of the slopes and, as the dawn began to grow gray, they came to a pleasant spot. Here a stream trickled around the shoulder of a hill, dropped away in a musical cascade, and formed beneath in a deep pool, still black with night, although the upper peaks were beginning to grow out into the day.

Around the little lake there was a small meadow rich with grass, and the meadow was bordered in turn with shrubs and little stunted evergreens. Here she stopped.

The Captain had no objection. When the saddle was removed he went down to the water and drank before she could prevent him. But he took only a few swallows and turned away to the grass. Peter, she knew, if he had been as hot, would have buried his head to the eyes and drunk enough to make himself sick, but the Captain needed no human wisdom to teach him how best to care for himself.

In the meantime she must prepare for her own breakfast, and it was a simple matter. Buck Daniels himself had taught her to carry fishing tackle always with her when she rode out, as well as the meager roll of a blanket wrapped in the slicker behind her saddle.

So she rigged a hook and line on a straight stick which she cut, and sat down on a stone by the pool to try her luck. She had a bite almost at once, and then another.

And in her excitement she quite forgot that she was fishing for food and not for sport until a shadow fell across the water before her, and she looked up to find that the Captain had left his grass and come over to watch the game.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"YOU AIN'T NO KILLER!"

THREE times the pursuers came again upon the trail of Harry Gloster. And then they lost it, but not until the sheriffs of four counties, with their posses, had taken their fling at him, singly and united.

For one thing, it would have been a feather in any man's cap to have taken him. His record included a double killing; the suggestion, which was believed far and wide, that he was a member of the old Haines gang, and a jail break at the expense of so famous a custodian of the law as Sim Hargess. But fame was not all that would be gained by his capture.

His career had caught the public eye. He had been near to destruction so many times that men began to feel that he enjoyed a charmed life. And, all in the space of a comparatively few hours, the reward which was offered for his apprehension dead or alive grew by leaps and by bounds.

Any rancher who numbered his cattle by the thousand could afford to bring his name to attention by adding a few hundreds to the reward. It passed ten thousand dollars. The entire section of desert and mountains went wild with the man hunt fever.

A slug of lead which cost a few cents would make some lucky man the possessor of a small fortune, to say nothing of reputation which might easily lead him into office as sheriff of some unquiet county. Crack shots mounted upon their best horses literally swarmed out by the score. There was no trail too obscure for their notice. They combed the nooks and crannies.

And yet Gloster shook them off. He managed it by a clever move, although he did not at all consider it as a wise measure

when he took it. He had to see Joan again, no matter at what a risk, and so he doubled straight back into the region of his jail break!

He felt that it was like putting his head into the lion's mouth. And every one else seemed to feel that such a march would be the same thing. They hunted with increasing fury, but they hunted in a growing circle, the activity being on the rim while the center of the circle was the town of Sim Hargess and the jail break. That center was quiet, and near it, toward the ranch of Buck Daniels, came the outlaw.

The town itself was humming this morning with a new excitement of which Gloster could know nothing. For, at dawn, it was found that the big black stallion had been turned out of his corral—the gate had been deliberately unbarred, and it was the opinion of all that some member of the Haines gang had come down to claim the great horse.

That so much should have been ventured was considered a double insult—to Sim Hargess and to the prowess of every gun bearing man in the whole town. There were angry little conclaves at the hotel and the general merchandise store. There was gritting of teeth and a looking to weapons.

None of this was known to Gloster himself, for he came shortly after the dawn in sight of the little ranch house, installed his horse near the cottonwoods, and stalked the house itself. He had hardly taken covert in a shed when Buck Daniels appeared, and uttered a shout of surprise at the sight of a trim built gelding standing near the gate of the corral and touching noses with the horses within.

After that the rancher acted like a man possessed with fear. In another moment he had thrown a saddle and bridle on a horse and was riding north and east, leaning far from the saddle and studying a trail. He dipped into a swale, and as soon as he had disappeared Gloster came from his hiding and ran to examine the marks in the sand.

It was at once apparent that Daniels was following the back trail of a horse, and it was not hard to put two and two together. Yonder was the gelding with the saddle mark still showing on his back; and Daniels had left with such haste that he had not even turned the beautiful animal into the corral.

And Gloster remembered the outline of the horse which he had seen Joan riding the night of the jail break. He could not recognize it, of course, having only seen it by starlight, but there was enough similarity to make him feel reasonably sure. Joan's horse had come back to the ranch without saddle or bridle, and now the rancher was following the back trail to find what had become of his girl.

So Gloster returned to the cottonwoods and took up the pursuit. It was not easy work. All day he lay in the rear trying to keep Daniels in sight without being seen himself, and although in the beginning there was some shelter behind which he could ride from point to point, yet it was always difficult to remain unseen.

In two hours of the slow journey, he saw Daniels change his direction to north and west, and start riding with increased vigor. He himself soon came to the spot, although he was not an expert trailsman, yet it was easy enough to read the sign here. Yonder the marks of the gelding's hoofs crossed the sign of a much larger horse, as was shown by the size of the prints and the depths to which they had sunk. Here, too, was a place where the sand was raked, as if the saddle had been brushed across it.

What had happened, Gloster could not dream, unless at this point Joan had caught a fresh horse which might have been wandering loose. Yet what horse could it have been for which she would have given up the fine gelding he had seen at the ranch?

He went on, pondering these things, and finding his trailing problem more and more difficult. Daniels was showing the way. But now they were climbing into the foothills, giving the rancher a chance to look back and down and discover his pursuer. However, the roughness of the country was an aid to Gloster, and by keeping a sharp lookout before him, he felt reasonably secure. The afternoon wore on. The sun was westering rapidly when the blow came.

He had rounded a little pyramid of jumbled rocks as large as a cabin when a dry, unhurried voice said behind him: " This is

my turn to say 'tag,' Gloster. Just shove up your hands, will you?"

And over his shoulder he saw the deep-lined, solemn face of Buck Daniels appearing over a bowlder with a rifle leveled steadily upon him. He hesitated. To be taken prisoner meant death just as surely as it meant death if he trifled with the steady hands which had now drawn a bead upon him. And yet, if he surrendered now, there might be a possibility of taking Daniels unawares later on.

"Well, Daniels," he said, turning his horse with a twist of his knees so that he could face his captor, and pushing his big hands above his head, "it looks like you're about ten thousand dolars richer right now than you were five minutes ago."

The rancher arose to full view and stepped from behind the rocks. His horse followed him out.

He dropped his rifle now into the crook of his arm. Now, thought Gloster, was the time to whip out a gun and try a snap-shot. But he was held back by the consideration that it would be poor work to dodge hanging on account of a double killing of which he was innocent, by murdering another man. Besides, the calmness of Daniels bespoke an infinite sureness in himself.

"Ten thousand?" said Daniels. "Man, they ain't put that price on *you*, have they?"

"I saw a handbill that was posted up on a fence post this morning," said Gloster. "Ten thousand it is. It may be raised to fifteen thousand by the time you get to town."

"Ten thousand!" echoed Daniels in more disgust than triumph, so far as Gloster could see. "Ten thousand for a gent that done nothing but murder a couple of harmless old sourdoughs that couldn't get a gun out of leather under five minutes of work. Ten thousand for that? What's the country coming to?"

"It is getting sort of low," Gloster nodned.

"In my day," went on Daniels, "they didn't put that much on the head of a man that would of turned and shot the rifle out of my hands before I could of pulled the trigger on him!"

"Was there ever a man as fast and sure as that?"

"There was, son. There was. Just slip off that hoss, and without letting your hands come down. Thanks!"

The last word was as he drew the revolver from Gloster's holster, patted him for other weapons, and stepped back.

"You can put your hands down. I suppose that the gent that brings you in will be made a hero out of."

"Sure, you'll be famous by night, Daniels."

"Bah!" snorted the other in the most profound disgust. "A yaller livered skunk like you can't make nobody famous; ain't worth nothing but to feed to the buzzards!"

"I kind of wish," said Gloster slowly, "that I'd taken a chance on that gun of yours."

"A murdering hound like you don't take no chances at all," said Daniels. "He wants a sure thing like the killing of two old, stiff handed miners. But the next thing I want to know is why you been trailing me all day?"

"All day?" echoed Gloster.

"Sure. I seen you coming this morning. But I didn't figure that you'd stay after me all through the trail. Now, what's in your head?"

"The same thing, take it by and large, that's in your head."

"What d'ye mean by that? And, mind you, Gloster, I want to hear you talk short and sweet. I'd mind sinking a chunk of lead into you no more'n I'd mind sinking it into a fence post. You ain't a man. You got the heart of a dog wrapped up in a man's skin!"

There was no doubt that he meant what he said. Honest and fierce scorn glared out of his eyes at Gloster.

"What I mean," explained the big man, "is that I'm looking for what you're looking for—Joan."

The rancher started violently. And it appeared that he was about to execute the threat of a moment before, for his hand clutched the stock of his rifle hard and the forefinger curled around the trigger. His jaw set and his face blackened with his emotion.

"I know how she tried to bail you out," he said at last. "I know that you'd been sneaking around seeing her by night. But how come you to be trailing her now instead of running hell-bent north or south to save your rotten hide?"

"Look here," said Gloster, "did it ever pop into your head that maybe I *didn't* kill my two old partners up there at the mine, but that I come home from hunting and found 'em lying there dead, and then cut and run for it because I knew that the blame would be sure to fall on me?"

"What?" growled Daniels. "D'you figure me for a downright fool, Gloster?"

"If I'd been out to kill, would I have wasted time working with my fists to get out of the mess Haines and I tumbled into when we broke out of the jail?"

Buck Daniels started to answer, changed his mind, and finally said:

"Put down your hands. I got to think things over. It ain't nothing that you've said that makes me want time for considering. It's just—what would I do with you if I took you along?"

"Maybe that reward sort of bothers you—wouldn't know what to do with it?" Gloster grinned.

But there was no mirth in the eyes of Daniels. He was staring at Harry Gloster with a sort of wistful wonder.

"Gloster," he said at last, "there ain't nobody in the world that I got so much cause for hating. But somehow when I'm here looking at you, I can't keep on hating. I suppose that you're crooked as a snake—but you *look* straight."

"The only crooked things I've ever done was swiping the horses that I had to have to save my hide once I started running," said his captive. "That was where I was a fool—in running like that!"

"Maybe you were right, though. It would of looked black against you."

"No. If I'd stood my ground everybody would of remembered that I couldn't shoot straight enough with a revolver to scare a jackrabbit twenty yards away."

For a long moment Daniels bit his lip and studied his captive, staring steadily at his feet and then flashing quick glances up to his face. Suddenly he tossed across the revolver which he had taken from the big man.

"There's your gun," he said.

And then he watched, catlike, and saw Gloster deliberately shoving the revolver down into the holster. A man who knows horses will judge another's ability to ride by the very way he swings into the saddle. A man who knows how to handle a revolver for a quick draw can tell one of his peers by the way he handles the weapon even in the most insignificant motions. For a heavy weapon runs lightly over the very finger tips of the expert. Buck Daniels had been an expert in his day. He watched closely the manner in which that gun was restored to the holster. Then he stepped forward with arm outstretched.

"Gloster," he said, "you're straight. You ain't no killer. And I'm mighty sorry for the cussing I give you a while back."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FORCES OF EVIL.

IT had been a stiff climb upward, and Joe Macarthur halted his horse at the mouth of the crevice which cut the mountainside. It was a long raw gash which divided the mountain to its top, some four hundred or five hundred feet above, and apparently water could not have cut the gorge, for the sides were a mass of squared bowlders and great rising steps almost as inaccessible as the face of a cliff.

It appeared that here the rock fold had yawned asunder and had remained in this fashion unchanged since the day of its making. Half a dozen mountain sheep were feeding in the scant pasture at the bottom of the cañon. When Macarthur appeared the wild things apparently showed that there was no interior exit to the gorge, for, instead of running in, they began to mount the cliff face itself with great dexterity. They attacked it with a rush and sprang up its perpendicular front as if the rocks were iron and their feet strong magnets. Neither did their strength give out, but they went up the five hundred foot ascent as though they were being jerked along by great cables strung from above.

Macarthur had reached for his revolver, but before he could fire they were already up so high and pursuing such a dodging course that it was almost impossible to hit a target. So he merely watched the four legged acrobats out of sight and then turned to continue his way.

He found, however, that a man had appeared as if by magic from among the rocks and now, leaning upon a long rifle, was rolling a cigarette. Apparently he was quite unaware of Macarthur's presence.

He was a singular figure. He wore a silk shirt whose hue was a violent blue, with lower sleeves which had been scuffed away to rags. His hands were covered with gauntlet gloves which, however, did not impede the rolling of the cigarette, for the good reason that the tips of the fingers were completely missing.

He did not wear overalls, but a pair of what had once been very good whipcord riding breeches. These, however, had been worn out and rent in many places, and every hole was covered with a patch of overall material sewed on in great stitches with twine for thread.

His boots were those of a man who spends most of his time on horseback. They fitted the foot with shop made care and rose halfway up the calf of his leg. A crimson silk bandanna of immense size and a Mexican sombrero richly ornamented with silver medallions completed his attire.

He was a very fat little man. He did not stand more than two or three inches over five feet and yet his weight could not have been much short of two hundred pounds. That weight was not concentrated in a great paunch, but it was spread over all his body in an equal layer of fat. It bulged over the tops of his boots; it wrinkled on his neck; it stuffed out his shirt so that his upper arm was as large as a man's thigh.

He had pushed his sombrero onto the back of his head, bringing out from shadow a pug nosed, round cheeked, good humored face which was powerfully reminiscent of a prize Poland China pig. To show his nonchalance, or else to call attention to the silver quality of his whistle, he was trilling out a sentimental ballad with all the quavers and sharp runs of a professional musician.

"By God!" cried Macarthur. "It's good old Fatty himself!"

The other removed his hat and bowed so that a wrinkle formed heavily across his waist.

"How are things, Joe?" he asked. "I ain't seen you this long time."

"Who's the leader now that Haines is bumped off?" asked Macarthur.

"I dunno what you mean," said Fatty.

"Come clean, Fatty. Tell me the straight of it. I'm back here to join the gang."

"What gang?"

"All right," said Macarthur. "I can't *make* you talk."

"What made you think that there was any gang up here?"

"I knew that you'd left the old hangout. And once when I was ducking for cover, about five years back, I run onto the hollow inside the mountain, here. Thinking things over, and the queer way that the Haines boys have been melting into the rocks up here, I figured that this must be the new hangout. Am I right?"

"Hangout for what?" asked Fatty innocently.

"I'll ride through the passage and take a look for myself, then."

He urged his mustang forward, but he was stopped by a sharp word from the fat man, who had pitched his rifle across the crook of his arm and laid his finger on the trigger.

"Everything slow and easy, Joe," he said.

"Sure, Fatty. I don't want to do no rushing. But I claim that my place is back with the gang. It was Haines that threw me out, not the rest of you; and I've got a plant laid, Fatty, that 'll give us all enough to retire on. The Wickson Bank, Fatty!"

The little round eyes of Fatty shone as greed took hold upon him. The Wickson Valley rolled before his eyes, beautiful little Wickson Valley, green and filled with growing things from the network of irrigating canals which trenched its flat bottom lands.

The Wickson Bank! Of course, they

had thought of that before, but the thought of a retreat through so thickly populated a region was not encouraging. They might blow the safe to smithereens, but as for a get-away, with hundreds of angry farmers taking rifles and blocking the way to the moutains—that put a very sad face to the affair. However, if Joe Macarthur had really been able to arrange a " plant," that was quite another matter.

" It 'll be the last job you'll ever have to do, Fatty," Macarthur continued coolly. He had touched Fatty at another sensitive point. For as flesh grew upon him, a pound a month, Fatty had realized long since that he must not hope to continue a roving life forever. And he had a favorite dream tucked away into a corner of his heart of buying a small ranch somewhere—somewhere farther north than the noise of his fame had ever spread, say, and there settling down to peace and plenty.

Ah, how his tender flesh ached at the thought of soft feather beds and a wide armed easy chair! His dream was still misty in his eyes as he looked up into the face of Macarthur again.

Come on in, Joe. All you got to do is to make the boys feel pretty sure that you mean what you say, and that you ain't trying to double cross 'em for a reward."

" Double cross? Listen, Fatty, what sort of a life do I figure to fit into except one with a gang of boys like you and the rest?"

And Fatty, looking up, could not but agree.

The gorge narrowed as they went, but now opened into a strange hollow chopped out of the head of the mountain. It was a basin of some seven or eight acres surrounded by five hundred feet cliffs to the east and other walls sloping down until, to the west, the barrier was hardly ten paces high. There were clusters of pines here and there, a little stream running from a spring to a pool against the western cliff without visible outlet, and several acres of rich pasture.

What Macarthur saw last in the hollow was a cabin among the trees, built at random of squared logs and unsquared, of piled rocks and of rocks laid in courses. It was a mysterious hodgepodge such as might have been thrown together by a madman with a giant's strength. For in spite of its singular mixture of building materials, it appeared strong and lasting, and although every wind that stooped into the hollow was sure to send a hundred drafts through a hundred chinks in the crazy walls, yet the strongest of winds could not knock it over like the house of cards it appeared.

The interior was as strange as the exterior. It had been used always as a temporary residence, and yet it had been used very often and sometimes for extended periods so that the upper timbers and wall surfaces of the big room—for one large chamber occupied the majority of the floor space—were blackened with many coatings of soot which had drifted up to them from the fire which smoked in the exact center of the room.

There was no chimney except an irregular hole which had been broken through the roof as if at the last moment those who had built the house remembered that it must have a fire in it, and had made this preparation. There was no stove, no oven. Instead, a circle of fire blackened stones of many sizes surrounded the smoking coals. Some of these stones, heated by the fire, had been touched by a fall of cold water and had split apart; the white belly of one showed like a streak of paint among the sooty rocks.

As for furniture, there was little in the house save the saddles and bridles which hung from pegs along the wall or had been thrown aside carelessly in the corner. There was, however, what seemed to be the bottom of a wrecked buckboard—though it was strange indeed that the most durable buckboard in the world could ever have been driven to this point in the wilderness. This fragment now served as the top to a table, the legs of which were four great rocks, each a burden for two men to lift.

Around this table, on other stones, sat four solemn men. Their faces and characters were so unusual that one might have skimmed all the villainy in the wild West without finding a more dangerous quartet, and justice should be done to each in turn.

Foremost in avoirdupois was Babe

Cooney, a swarthy skinned man so smoothly shaven, always, that in some lights his face seemed to have the texture and luster of youth. He was not more than thirty, perhaps, at the most, but the double battering of years and a hard life had reduced him. The lines around his mouth and eyes would have done credit to his elder by twenty years. And there was a cynical lifelessness in his eyes such as usually does not come until later middle age, at the earliest—not a scorn of the world and the people he found in it, so much as profound weariness with what he had met.

He was a bulky fellow and it could be seen that he had put his strength, at one period in his life, to an effective use. His nose was hammered out of shape and appeared to be spongy, as if there were no bone in it, his grin was made horrible by the absence of several of his front teeth, and his right ear was that mass of fleshy convolutions which has adorned so many of the heroes of the ring and which is called a " cauliflower."

There were other signs, also, that he had been of the profession of the squared circle. His body was a great wedge of which the spreading shoulders were the base and the feet the apex. He tapered sharply to the hips and still more sharply from the hips to the feet, so that the lower part of his legs were comparatively as meager as the legs of a goat. And yet above the waist he was a giant.

However long it had been since he stood on the canvas and scuffed the rosin under the soles of his fighting shoes, he still had a certain dexterity of hand which showed in his gestures. And he had a way of looking people searchingly squarely in the eye which is learned by pugilists; for the good warrior with the gloves looks into the eyes of his foe and sees all the rest by intuition and from the corners of his eyes.

Such was Babe Cooney. If he had been carved in two, each half would have been as large as his left-hand neighbor at the table. This was " Sliver " Martin. The Sliver was so named because the word was most appropriate. All of his body was shrunken skin and bone. When he lowered his eyes, his face was the face of a cadaver. There was purple of cold under his cheek bones. His eyelids were puffy and red, and all the flesh around his mouth was sunken. To make his leanness more ominous, his hands and feet were of huge size. Even the bulky fist of Babe Cooney would have been lost inside the claws of the Sliver.

To the left of Sliver appeared Lew Cambridge. Lew made a strange appearance with an abnormally small head and a large body. The face had one large feature, which was the enormous nose, overshadowing all else, the childish mouth, the dwarfed and slanted forehead. In the expanse of those wide shoulders the head seemed like that of an infant.

The huge body of Lew Cambridge was his chief interest in life. He was a self-conscious athlete. His setting-up exercises were gone through religiously night and morning. He studied the growth of his biceps as another studies the growth of his millions.

He was one of those omnipotent men who can do anything. He could pitch horseshoes, walk on his hands, chin himself with one hand, run, climb, fight, wrestle, throw a knife, do gun tricks—in fact, anything which asked for steady nerves or strong muscles or both he felt to be in his special province. Now and then he arose from the chair and walked about the room, stretching himself to keep deadly cramps and chills out of his muscles.

The fourth and last member of the group was quite different from the other three. Although each of these was remarkable enough, and each was formidable in mind and appearance, one felt that Dud Rainey was most distinctly out of place. He was such a man, in appearance, as one finds about a university, seated in study rooms, delving into postgraduate courses, heaping up degrees for no purpose and constantly gathering materials for constantly unwritten books.

He had a towering and nobly formed forehead, beneath which his bloodshot eyes blinked behind strong glasses. His cheeks were thin and pale to match the deep furrows of thought that creased his forehead. The weight of his head was poorly supported by a scrawny neck and a hollow

chest. When he spoke his voice was low and monotonous and his diction pure.

This was the group which had gathered about the table. They were playing poker. And ragged as were their clothes and poor as was the room in which they sat, their stakes consisted of stacks of gold pieces, fives and tens and broad faced twenties. The ante was five dollars. The bets on the smallest hands were apt to run into a few hundreds. Moreover, they one and all handled the yellow coin as if it were so much dirt.

They were betting now before the draw, Lew Cambridge forcing up the draw on the strength of three jacks, and Babe Cooney still more confident because of a straight, and when the stack of gold in the center of the table had grown high, and when the other two had been forced out of the hand, Cooney suddenly stood up, agape, and pointed through the door. The beautiful straight fluttered from his hand and strewed the floor. The others crowded about him.

"It's Joe Macarthur come back to us—now hell will be popping again!" cried Dud Rainey.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DOVE IN THE HAWK'S EERIE.

WHAT the black, sharp eyes of Macarthur saw first, as he passed through the door of the cabin, was the yellow gleam of the gold which was scattered upon the table. But he did not give it a second glance.

One wild evening at cards had stripped him of the gold he stole from Springer and Nichols and Gloster. His purse was as flat as a punctured balloon, and that gold spoke to him with a welcome voice. However, he centered his attention upon the men immediately before him, and he saw at once that all was not going to pass off smoothly. They shook hands with him, but there was an obvious restraint.

"He's come up with a 'plant' on the Wickson Bank!" Fatty called out cheerfully, entering behind Macarthur. "I guess we're glad to see him, boys?"

"The Wickson Bank!" shouted Lew Cambridge, and smote Cooney heavily upon the shoulder.

But the other three showed no enthusiasm. Indeed, a little silence fell upon the group.

"It's all worked out," said Macarthur. "I got an inside man on the job. He's cheap and safe. And that's what we want. All I need is some men that can be depended on. Of course, I could of picked 'em up anywhere. But I looked back to the old days with the gang. And I figured it was worth while to give you all a split to show you that my heart was in the right place."

The gloom of three of the men had spread to the other two. Fatty and Lew were waiting to see in what direction the wind would blow. It was Dud Rainey who spoke, first arranging his glasses so that he could fix his mild eyes more directly upon Macarthur.

"Joe," he said, "the upshot of this is that you want to be back with us?"

"Of course. What threw me out before was that I had trouble with Haines. Him and me never did get on. You all know that. He always hated me. Hated me from the first minute he laid eyes on me."

"He had reasons," answered Rainey.

Big Macarthur flushed.

"Reasons?" he echoed gloomily.

"What did he say when he told you that you had to leave?"

"Are you going to remember that against me, Dud?"

"Haines was a square man," said Dud. "He had a heart as big as a mountain. I remember what he said in front of all of us. He said that you'd made trouble from the first day you came in with us. He said you were a killer, Macarthur. And he named the men you'd killed. I agreed with Haines then and I agree with him still. I don't think you're the right sort of a man to have in with us, Joe."

The anger of Macarthur turned his face purple. But he bit his lip and then managed to smile at a great cost of effort.

"In the old days Haines and you may have been right," he said. "But things have changed since then. In the old days, if a gent had said to me what you've just

said now, I'd of had my gun out and working. But I'm changed, Dud. Have you heard of any killings being chalked up against my account lately?"

"You were always a smooth, quiet worker," answered Rainey.

But the others seemed to have been much impressed by the speech of Macahthur. Indeed, when Dud had at first denounced the gunfighter, the others had stepped back a little as if to get from the path of bullets which they expected to fly. When they heard Macarthur answering with words instead of his revolver, they were plainly astonished.

"Don't do your thinking too quick, Dud," remarked Lew Cambridge. "Anybody can change, can't he?"

And he wagged his little head wisely upon his immense shoulders.

"But they don't when they developed along certain lines," replied Dud, blinking behind his glasses. "You can make a pet out of a mountain lion. But let him taste a man's blood and no amount of petting will ever make him tame again; the devil is inside him to stay.

"And when a man finds out that there's fun in taking a chance with his own life in order to gamble at the life of another man, he never changes. If he likes excitement, there's no excitement to equal it.

"Why, the rest of you ought to know it! There's not one of us that hasn't had to use his gun now and then. But we use it because we have to, not because it's a game with us. Macarthur is different. If he smells a fight ten miles away, he rides for it."

"Son," said Sliver Martin, "them words sound pretty wise. But I dunno that I understand just what they mean. What's plain to me is that there's a difference here. Some of the boys want Joe back. Some don't. We'll throw a coin to decide. Is that square?"

They agreed that it was eminently just. And Sliver, producing a broad silver dollar from his pocket, spun it in the air as high as the roof. There it hung an instant at the top if its rise, a glittering point of light, then swooped. It did not strike the floor at once, however. With the oily ease of long practice, Macarthur slipped his weapon from its holster and fired. The dollar disappeared, clanged against the farther wall, and dropped heavily. One side of it was torn away.

There was a general uproar, not of anger, but of admiration. Then followed a scramble to get the coin, which Babe Cooney, by dint of tearing the others away, managed to capture as a souvenir.

"By God, Joe!" cried Fatty Guiness, "you have been practicing!"

"Boys," said Macarthur, keeping back a smile of pride with an effort, "this here thing means too much to me. I can't leave it to chance. I ask you again: will you take me in?"

There was no doubt now. The eye of every man had kindled, and still, with a courtesy far more profound than many a circle of clubmen could have shown, they held back and suspended their own opinions until they had heard the final voice of their companion, Rainey.

Perhaps Dud had been swept off his feet, like the others, by this timely exhibition of skill, or perhaps he had noted the change in the faces of his friends. At any rate, he now stepped to Macarthur and offered his hand. It was accepted at once.

"Joe," said Rainey, "you know that I always say what I think. I said it in the first place. I suppose the rest of the boys will think that if you come back into the gang I'd better get out if I care to keep a whole skin. But they're wrong. I've taken the privilege of changing my mind. We need men with an eye and a hand as fast as yours. Besides, you learned when Haines was with us, poor devil, that you couldn't bully the gang, and I don't think that you'll ever try it again. I'm with you, for one!"

After that, there was not a dissentient voice, and when the clamor ended, Rainey spoke again.

"But there's only one way, partners," he said, "that Macarthur can fit in with the scheme of things. He can't play number two. Haines was a cleverer and bigger man than any I've ever met. Joe couldn't even play second to him. If Joe is back with us, I say that he's got to be first. He

gets what Haines got: two shares in every deal we push through. He gets what Haines got: our obedience whenever he gives an order. How does that sound to you?"

It caused an argument, but only a brief one. There was no one who did not have to admit that they stood on a precarious basis so long as every man voted on every course of action. They could not be successful without a head to direct them. And, no matter what faults could be found with Macarthur in other respects, they were all agreed that he had the brains for such a position.

In ten minutes, from being a candidate with dubious probability of being elected, the big fellow was installed as chief, had received the grip of every one of the other five, and had their solemn promise to follow his orders as if he were a general and they privates in an army. The rule of Lee Haines had been as absolute as that of a captain on a ship at sea; it was agreed that Macarthur should have the same powers.

He lost no time in taking up his duties. At the table where the poker game had been interrupted by his arrival, he sat down and planned for them the robbery of the Wickson Bank. With little piles of gold pieces he checked off the positions of the houses along the main street. With a greater pile he indicated the bank itself.

Then he told them what he had done. It was the old story. He had known of the cashier's need for money. He had approached the man diplomatically, and in a single interview he had gained what he wanted—the combination of the safe, the promise that the watchman should be discharged on the day of the robbery, and that a new one should not be hired in his place, and in return for this delivery of his honor, Samuel Carney had received in exchange a promise that he should have fifteen per cent of the profits, and those profits promised to be large. A full hundred thousand dollars in cash should be gained from the safe of the bank.

Such figures made the gang sit up. They glanced at one another with bright eyes and then openly complimented their new commander. He proceeded with the details. There was a stretch of thirty miles between them and the town of Wickson. But the trail was entirely, or almost entirely downhill. They could cover that distance easily in four or four and a half hours.

Therefore they would leave the camp at midnight and arrive in the heart of the little valley in the dark of the early morning, that dead time of the night when men sleep most soundly. After that it would be a simple thing to do their work. There was not even the need of "soup" to blow the safe. They had the combination and could simply "talk to it" and have the door to the safe open.

There was nothing, in fact, which required more than one man for the job except that there might be an accident—a chance passer—and in that case there might be a call for guns that would shoot straight, and several of them, for the farmers of the Wickson Valley were a fighting strain.

It was at the conclusion of this talk that they first heard the singing. It came with echoes through the narrow gorge which opened into the hollow, and it was silver thin and high:

"Que viva la rumba;
Que viva, que viva placer;
Que viva las niñas, chulitas, bonitas,
Y guapas que saben querer."

Lew Cambridge was the first to reach the door.

"By the Great Horn Spoon!" he cried, for he was somewhat old-fashioned in his oaths. "It's a girl riding the Captain, and she's coming into the hollow!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Partners

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

YOUNG Mr. Kendrick Gardiner looked gloomily out through the front window of his store. "About two weeks more," he mused in bitterness of spirit, "the sheriff will be tacking his little notice on the door, and I'll be hunting a new job. I guess working for some one else is about my speed; I don't seem to have made a shining success at working for Ken Gardiner."

The frown on his brow deepened. He didn't mind so very much on his own account, though that was bad enough; but it was going to be mighty hard on Loris. She and Ken had been married nearly two years, and at thought of the delirious happiness crowded into those two short twelvemonths the frown was momentarily wiped away; but it reappeared instantly.

Yes, it would be tough on Loris. Out of the modest salary he might hope to earn in whatever job he was lucky enough to secure there would be precious little money for the numerous dainty luxuries in which she took such delight and which seemed so necessary a part of her charming personality.

Ken sighed. After all, Loris was little more than a kid, he reflected. Yet she did have expensive tastes—mighty expensive tastes. And he had always gratified them because he couldn't bear to disappoint her in any way. He had been foolish, of course, inexcusably so. Ken was willing to concede that, but the facts remained.

The first year it was comparatively easy, for the store showed a handsome profit. Ken had bought it with a little stake left him by the will of a doting aunt. It was in a good location, catering to high class trade, and there had seemed no reason to suppose that this same satisfactory state of affairs would not continue. Now Kent could look back and see his mistakes. He had been living in a fool's paradise. He had spent

too much time playing about with Loris, leaving the management of the store to his help. Meanwhile another grocery and meat market opened up about two blocks away. The decline in trade had come so gradually that he hardly realized it, and at the same time his living expenses had increased tremendously.

Things had gone from bad to worse, and now came the final straw—a chain store, of the cash and carry type, had just opened up across the street. Every penny that store would take in—and it had started off with a bang—meant so much less business for Kendrick Gardiner, high grade meats and groceries.

Ken's face lighted with pleasure as a sport model roadster pulled up at the curb. It was Loris's car, which Ken had bought her a year and a half before, when he felt that he was sitting pretty on the top of the world. The girl slipped gracefully out from behind the steering wheel, blowing a kiss to her husband as she caught sight of him watching her.

Then she entered the store, which somehow seemed brighter for her presence, just as if a ray of blessed sunlight had suddenly popped through a rift in the clouds on a gloomy day. Mort Thomas, Ken's clerk, cast an appreciative glance at his boss's wife.

"Class!" he muttered under his breath. "Nothing but class!"

"Well, Loris!" Ken cried. "This is a pleasant surprise. You look sweet enough to—" He broke off, twitching his head in the clerk's direction. "Darned shame Mort's hanging around! I'd demonstrate what I mean."

"I'm glad you like me, Ken." she replied softly, a bewitching dimple flashing into view on her cheek. "I always want to look my best—for you. Nobody else counts."

"You're going shopping, I bet!" Kendrick grinned.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" she laughed. "How did you ever guess it?"

"It's a gift. your highness! How much will it be this time?"

"I only want to get two or three little things. Ten dollars will be enough."

Ken went back of the counter, plugged the cash register for two crisp fives, penciling a note on a slip of paper, and returned to give his wife the money. Her glance swept the shelves, with their rows of canned goods and the like arranged in neat order, and went on to the spotless meat counter at the rear.

"Good old store!" she remarked. "Isn't it wonderful, Ken, the way the money keeps rolling in for me to spend! You're a dear; and I'm the luckiest girl in the world! I could just dance, I'm so happy." Her voice lowered still more as she leaned toward Ken to whisper: "I'm sorry Mort's here, too."

Ken's arms involuntarily opened, but her glance took in the obvious fact that Mort was watching in keen anticipation. With a quick turn on one slim heel Loris eluded her husband and gained the safety of the front door.

"Good-by," she called tantalizingly. "Don't be late for supper, Ken."

A few seconds later the low, musical whine of the self-starter announced her departure. The store darkened as she left, and Ken found himself glancing out at the sky to see if the sun had actually stopped shining.

The afternoon mail brought a couple of letters from two jobbing houses, one curtly informing Mr. Kendrick Gardiner that his last order would not be filled until they had received payment for the goods in advance, the other a sharp reminder that the writer must have an immediate settlement of an account long overdue.

"Which is another way of saying that my credit has flitted where the woodbine twineth," Ken muttered as he stuffed the letters into a drawer of his desk. "The grand bust up is on its way. Gosh, how I hate to break the news to Loris!"

For the next hour he busied himself in a careful analysis of his exact financial condition—a task he had long been dreading. One of his troubles lay in the fact that he had been too ready to extend credit. That was all right as far as those customers who paid up promptly on the first of each month were concerned, but many did not pay promptly, and some did not pay at all. In other words, Ken's books showed a rath-

er alarming amount of what had to be classed as bad debts.

His total assets, including stock, fixtures and bills receivable, failed to meet the liabilities by about a thousand dollars, and after allowing for outstanding accounts that would probably never be collected, the balance against him went up several hundred dollars more. To be added to that were several other hundred dollars of sundry house bills unpaid. On the whole, therefore, young Mr. Kendrick Gardiner had little cause to feel encouraged over the results of his figuring.

" I'm a rotten business man," he conceded bitterly. " I'm just a plain darned fool—to start with a paying proposition like this, and let it get away from me without even a decent struggle. Wonder what Loris will think? I might as well tell her to-night and get the agony over with. The longer I put it off, the harder it will be on me—and on her, too."

Ken was not himself that evening at dinner; very decidedly off form, unnerved as he was by the thought of the unpleasant interview that must soon take place. Loris, of course, noticed this, and was puzzled—perhaps even a little hurt. She had tried to have an extra good meal, and Ken, contrary to his usual custom, hardly seemed aware of what he was eating.

" What's the matter, Ken?" she asked anxiously. " You're not ill, are you, dear?"

" I'm not sick, Loris, but there's plenty the matter," he replied soberly, pushing away his plate. " I'm sorry to have spoiled your wonderful dinner, and I could kick myself that I must make you unhappy. But the thing has got to be faced."

" What is it, Ken?" she cried, her blue eyes opening wide in alarm.

" Come on in the living room with me—I don't want any dessert—and I'll tell you," he said. " I'm afraid you'll hate me when I've finished."

" Nothing could make me do anything but love you, Ken," Loris whispered gently, and her arms went up around his neck. " But come along, dear. I—I'm terribly worried."

They went into the living room, where Loris pushed her husband into a big chair, perching on the arm beside him.

" Start in, Ken," she prompted, running her fingers affectionately through his hair.

" Well, to make a long story short—I'm a failure," he confessed miserably.

" What do you mean?" was her quick demand; and thereupon Ken proceeded to make the short story long, not omitting any of the gory details.

She listened attentively, with no questions or comments.

" So you see, Loris," he concluded glumly, " I'm a total loss as a business man."

Loris said nothing, until finally the silence became unbearable.

" Well?" Ken ventured. " Of course, I wouldn't expect you to understand much about it—credit, and all that—but you can probably get enough of an idea to appreciate that I'm in the hole. Why don't you say something?"

" You must have a perfectly splendid opinion of me, Kendrick," she spoke up at length—almost harshly. That and her use of the full edition of his name showed Ken that she was angry. " So you've thought all the time that I was nothing but an empty headed, fluffy ruffles butterfly! No brains at all—just a fondness for luxuries and pretty clothes where my brains ought to be!"

Her voice fairly curled in scorn as the words dripped out. Then Loris leaped from the arm of the chair to face him.

" You never said a word about the business," she declared accusingly. " Whenever I've been to the store it always looked prosperous, and anyway the times I was there were when no one would expect a rush of trade. Why didn't you tell me? Do you think I could have gone on spending money if I knew that you had financial difficulties to worry about?

" Look at those pumps!" She thrust forward a daintily shod foot for Ken's inspection. " Twelve dollars—and I could have found a pair that would look almost as nice for six fifty. Five dollars for the silk stockings, instead of one seventy-five. Eight dollars for this silk blouse. And last week I spent ten dollars for a—a "—Loris broke off, blushing; she had not been mar-

ried so *very* long—" *something* I could have got for three.

" It's been the same way with everything," she wailed. " Of course I enjoyed buying the best—any girl would, but not if she had any idea that her husband couldn't afford it. Oh, I'm so ashamed to think of the brazen way I pranced in on you for money this afternoon! I could just die! Mort Thomas knows how your business is going—he *must*, if he has eyes, and what you say is true.

" What kind of an opinion do you suppose he has of your little fool of a wife, whose only care is to doll herself up, regardless of whether hubby's business piles on the rocks or not? Kendrick Gardiner, I'm awfully mad at you!" And then Loris, who had been winking hard to keep back the tears, broke down completely.

" Why didn't you tell me, Ken?" she sobbed in a way that cut through to Ken's heart like a keen edged knife. " I want to be a h-help to you, not a d-drag."

" I only wish I had, Loris," he said brokenly. " But it was because I loved you so much; I wanted you to have everything. It was wrong of me, and I'm sorry."

Loris wiped her eyes, having recovered a measure of self-control.

" I know you love me, Ken," she said, speaking in sober quietness; " but you did not show your love in the best way. It's a poor sort of wife who doesn't want to know anything about her husband's troubles. That's the kind who is always taking and never giving. I know you don't really believe I'm like that. From now on you and I are partners. I'm going to have some say in the running of that store. Perhaps it's not too late to make a fresh start."

" But you don't know anything about the business," Kendrick protested unwisely.

" Be careful, or I'll get mad at you again," Loris warned him. " I admit I don't know anything about it, yet—but I'm going to learn. And anyway—forgive me for saying it, dear—I don't see how I could do much worse than you say you've done."

Ken winced at her words, but he was a good sport.

" I guess you're right at that, Loris," he admitted.

" Let's get right down to brass tacks," she went on. " What's the worst aspect of the situation?"

" Loss of credit—which means that I can't get goods from the jobbers except C. O. D.—and a couple of big outstanding bills: Andrews & Co., $1200, and J. M. Fowler & Sons, $1750; which I haven't the cash to pay. Some smaller bills, too, but these are the most pressing. Then the chain store competition; they're underselling me and getting my trade."

" Anything else?"

" Charge accounts. It would give me enough to get going again after a fashion at least, if I could collect what's due. It's hard work, though, getting money for old bills."

" Have you any big accounts due?"

" Plenty. For instance, your friend Mrs. Grace Hanscomb owes me a trifle over two hundred dollars."

Loris's blue eyes flashed dangerously.

" Of all the nerve!" she gasped. " And only yesterday Grace was bragging about having just paid a hundred and fifty for a new wrap. If that's the sort she is, she's no friend of mine. Believe me, I'll get that money, and I'll get it from a lot of other cheerful dead beats besides. Whatever made you trust her so far, Ken?"

" Well, she was a friend of yours," he stated defensively, " and they're probably good for the money some time. I didn't like to press 'em for it, because Grace was so intimate with you."

" Friendship and business don't mix, I guess. We'll go into that further later on. The first thing now is to plan a general reorganization. To begin with, we've got to cut down expenses. Store first. Give Mort a week's notice."

" But I've simply got to have a clerk." Ken protested.

" You've got one."

" What are you talking about, Loris?"

" Behold your new clerk!" and she swept him a mocking little bow. " Please, sir, I'll try my best to give satisfaction. All I ask is a chance to make good. I'm honest, and I'm not afraid to work, mister."

" I won't listen to any such nonsense!" Ken stormed.

"Please don't be stubborn, dear," she pleaded, dropping her flippant tone in an instant. "I don't mean that I expect to keep on working forever; but things are pretty desperate now, aren't they?"

He nodded, silent.

"Then desperate measures are necessary. It's all settled. You and I are partners, Ken dear, and we're going to work together."

"But what will your friends say—what will they think?"

"They'll think more and better of me than if I continue playing the rôle of a helpless doll while my husband fails in business. And any friends I lose that way aren't worth the bother of saving. No more arguments, please!"

"I don't like it, just the same," he grumbled.

"I'll stop as soon as we once get on our feet. That's a promise. Now the next item of saving will be to cut out deliveries.

"But I can't do that. We'll lose all our trade."

"I thought we'd lost most of it already. You said your customers were flocking to the new chain store over the way. That doesn't deliver, does it?"

"No," Ken answered. "You win. No deliveries it is." He spoke almost humbly.

"How much saving is that a week?"

"Twenty dollars on Mort and about thirty-five on the delivery end. I'll sell the horse and wagon. That will be something to apply on the bills."

"We can't save any more at the store. But we can cut down a lot right here at home. I'll look for a cheaper rent."

"Please, Loris!" Ken begged in such abject misery that she relented.

"We'll keep the house then," she said, "but you'll be surprised at the difference in running expenses. I'm going to work every penny till it's worn smooth. I won't need any new clothes for months and months. Honest, Ken, I could weep when I think of the money I've been throwing away on glad rags."

"Forget it," Ken advised.

"I can't very well, but there's no use worrying about that now; it's ancient history. This credit business next. We'll shut down on that absolutely, beginning to-morrow."

"Gosh!" Ken gulped.

"What are you goshing about?" his wife demanded.

"Takes a lot of nerve to pull a stunt like that—especially the way I—we, I mean—are fixed."

"People have to pay cash at the chain store, don't they? Well, if that place can get away with it, we can. Why not?"

"But their prices are lower than ours."

"We'll have to meet their prices. I think we can afford to with the saving from clerk hire and the delivery system. However, perhaps it would be best to wait a little before going on a cash basis, long enough to have some notices printed, explaining why it is necessary to make the change, and stating that the saving on delivery as well as bad bills is to be passed on to our customers in lower prices. If all of them can be made to realize that they have to settle not only for themselves but for the deadbeats that crop up from time to time wherever credit is extended, they'll be glad to pay cash. I don't believe that any good customers would take offense, do you? But remember that beginning to-morrow, even before we start our cash system, no one who owes any back bills is to be trusted—not a single penny. We might better lose that kind of trade than keep it."

"Some little business woman!" Ken ejaculated. He was feeling better already; much of that load of depression that had steadily been growing heavier during the past months vanished, now that he had unburdened his soul to Loris. "You're a peach!" he told her feelingly. "I don't deserve to have such a wonderful girl for a wife."

"I'm no peach!" she declared primly. "I'm your business partner. Honest, Ken, I'm getting all excited. I think it's going to be oodles of fun."

"You'll find it will be oodles of hard work," Ken informed her grimly.

II.

THE following morning Ken opened his store himself, arriving at seven o'clock; too

often he had been in the habit of drifting in about eight or even nine. It was with some embarrassment that he told Mort and Jimmy Andrews, the boy who drove the delivery wagon, that he would not need their services after the following week. Neither was surprised, being fully aware of the fact that the store was a losing proposition as things were going. Loris came in about eleven, driving up in a disreputable Ford roadster.

"I've sold my car," she told her astonished husband in a stage whisper. "The agency gave me the flivver and five hundred dollars cash for it. I know the Ford looks like something the cat brought in, but Mr. Burroughs guaranteed it to be in first class mechanical condition. I've been learning to run the thing, and that's why I'm so late. I'm going to start in on that collecting right away. Have you some bills ready?"

Ken gaped at her helplessly.

"My word, Loris!" he managed to say at last. "You certainly are showing action! Yes, I've got some bills ready."

Rapidly she sorted them through.

"I'm going to tackle Grace first," was her verdict. "I know Ralph Hanscomb allows her plenty of money to run the house. If she dosn't pay me at least a reasonable amount of the bill I'll go to him. Believe me. I expect to start something in this neck of the woods."

It was the middle of the afternoon before Loris returned, obviously tired, but her eyes shining with the joy of conquest. Including checks and cash she had a total of two hundred and seventy-one dollars to show for her half day's work.

"How did you do it?" Ken demanded.

"It's a gift," she answered, smiling, using one of his favorite expressions. "I think we can get most of that money in time.

"Now I want you to make out a list of all the goods we're running low on. Take this money I've collected, add as much more to it as you can spare, and send Andrews & Co. a check on account. I'll take your list and run into the city to-morrow to pay J. M. Fowler & Sons a visit. armed with the five hundred I got for my car. We've got to keep up our stock of goods."

"But we owe 'em all of seventeen hundred and fifty dollars," Ken protested. "Five hundred won't restore our credit. Why not use it to start buying from a new house?"

"And have Fowler & Sons slap a receiver on us? They'd be justified, Ken. We must play the game fairly with them—all the cards on the table."

Young Mr. Gardiner glanced at his wife in surprise—and considerable respect. He was learning a lot of things, in particular that the brain cavity under her bobbed curls contained an abundant supply of level headed common sense.

"Good luck to you, Loris," he said. "If you can put that thing over, you're a better business man than I am. I'm beginning to think you are, anyway."

And Loris put it over. She had an interview with old J. M. himself. She told him the whole story of Ken's business troubles, for which she loyally took full blame, and of the planned reorganization in their methods. She even told him where the five hundred dollars she had brought came from. Loris didn't know it, but she made a very appealing picture as she sat in the dingy office opposite the grizzled old merchant, and pleaded with him for the credit which would mean success or failure to her husband.

"I'm glad you came to see me personally, my dear," he told her kindly, after Loris had stated her case. "Frankness always goes a long distance toward smoothing out business wrinkles. However, Kendrick Gardiner has made a failure of his store; the fault was his, not yours, in spite of what you have said in condemnation of yourself. Credit is a precious thing, and Kendrick Gardiner has forfeited his right to any further extension at the present time."

Loris's eyes flooded with tears of disappointment, and she started to speak, but old Mr. Fowler checked her with his uplifted hand.

"Just a moment," said he. "I was speaking of *Mr.* Kendrick Gardiner. Now *Mrs.* Kendrick Gardiner, his new partner, is a wholly different person. I might say that with her addition to the firm our confidence in it is vastly increased. We shall

be glad to extend to the new firm of Gardiner & Gardiner any reasonable amount of further credit."

Loris leaped to her feet and impulsively printed a hearty kiss on old Mr. Fowler's cheek.

"You're a darling!" she exclaimed, and then blushed. "I don't know how to thank you," she added.

"You have already thanked me in the nicest possible way, my dear," he assured her, smiling, "I hope you'll come and see me again some time."

"Indeed I will, Mr. Fowler," Loris rejoined, and then she left.

"I wonder if Kendrick Gardiner realizes what a prize he has in that girl?" the good hearted old gentleman mused. He drew a sheet of paper toward him and began a rather lengthy letter, which made Ken quite thoughtful when he read it.

"I know it now, even if I didn't before," he told himself.

But Loris had returned a whole day in advance of the letter, and had raved to her proud and deeply gratified husband over what a nice old man Mr. Fowler was.

"He couldn't help being nice to you, Loris," Ken asserted positively. "This firm consists of brains and beauty; you're both of 'em."

But in spite of the encouraging start the reorganized store had many difficulties to face. Some business came back, as a result of the changed policy and lowered prices, but other trade was lost because of giving up deliveries. For the first time in her life Loris learned what it meant to be tired, not merely one night, but every night in the week. Yet she never let Ken know how deadly weary she was.

The fact of the case was that the neighborhood had too many stores—to be exact, one too many. There was no cut rate war between the chain store and the Gardiner establishment, as the company running the chain stores didn't do business that way: they had a fixed price list, and stuck to it under all conditions. Ken met every one of those prices, but he was handicapped, since the chain store company got better figures through large quantity buying, and also had the capital necessary to take every advantage of changing market conditions. It was tight sailing.

There was where Loris began showing her ingenuity. She arranged an endless variety of weekly specials, particularly in the case of slow moving goods. She tried out on their own table every single article they were offering for sale, so that she was in position to give her personal recommendation to a certain product—or withhold it. Customers learned more and more to rely upon her judgment. Gradually she and Ken began to get away from the cheaper brands—such as the chain store specialized in—save where those brands proved on test to be of unquestionable quality.

Slowly the trade came drifting back, but the process was at times discouragingly slow. Yet, even with the small per cent of profit that they were making, the turnover was sufficiently large to enable them to make a big inroad on that accumulated indebtedness. Furthermore, Ken was now meeting current bills promptly, and thus not losing his discount. Despite this showing, however, he was subject to periodic fits of discouragement.

"We're not getting very far," he sighed one day, "and it's just about killing me to have you work in the store, Loris. If I only had the volume of trade they get across the street to go with ours, we'd be on Easy Street. But—oh—I don't know—"

"What's the matter with you, Ken?" she demanded sharply. "Things are bound to break sooner or later."

"Yes, and in the meantime you'll be working yourself to death."

"Nonsense! I get tired, of course, but it's not doing me any harm. And you know as well as I do that we're not quite yet in a position to take on any outside help."

"I'd like to know when we will be," he grumbled.

"That's something we can't tell till the time arrives. The chain store across the street can't be making much profit, and I know it's against the company's policy to maintain a place that doesn't come up to their requirements. How do you know that they're not all ready to move out?"

"Fat chance!" he growled. "They'll stick till the cows come home."

" Ken, you're not getting ready to quit, are you? Not when success is really headed our way at last?"

" It's you I'm worried about, Loris," he said. " Personally, I'd stick forever and never peep."

" Can't you see that we've *got* to hang on, Ken?" she cried. " Quitting now would mean that all our work has been practically wasted. If the chain store gives up first, we'll be back where you were at the start, only better off, for the business is now firmly established on a cash basis. And nobody else will ever dare try that location after a chain store has been there and given up. We've just got to stick.

" Yes, I see, Loris," he agreed soberly. " You're right, just as you're always right. We can't quit—and we won't quit. But I want to tell you one thing, partner. Just as soon as that chain store hauls down the flag in token of surrender, you're fired from this job. I've learned my lesson, thanks to you; there's no more danger of my ever messing things up again—and I want my wife back. Anybody can be a clerk in my store, but there's only one person in the whole wide world I'll take for a wife. And she's going to have all the pretty clothes, and silk stockings, and spiffy shoes, and everything that she can crowd on her precious body."

" You can't make me mad that way, Ken," Loris told him softly.

After that things went on much as before, except that there was no more talk of even the possibility of quitting and except that Ken hustled all the harder in an effort to make things easier for Loris, under whose eyes dark rings were now beginning to show; faintly, but they were there.

One Monday morning Ken was feeling especially blue as he came down early to open up and get ready for another week of the grind. Idly he glanced across the street; then rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. Blank windows stared at him like huge sightless eyes; the chain store was gone, lock, stock and barrel—goods and fixtures transported overnight to some other location which might make a more favorable showing on the company's books.

Ken gave a second look; then he turned and sprinted madly up the street home, bursting in on Loris, who was washing the breakfast dishes, like a Texas tornado.

" Three rousing cheers, Loris!" he yelped, swinging her madly around the kitchen. " The chain shop's gone. We—no, I mean *you*, win!"

" I told you we'd win if we only kept on," cried Loris, her eyes shining.

" And you're not going to work again in the store, beginning to-day! I know where I can get a good man on short notice."

" All right, Ken," and Loris nestled comfortably against his shoulder, " I'm ready to stay home now. But there's one thing you've got to remember."

" What's that?" asked Ken.

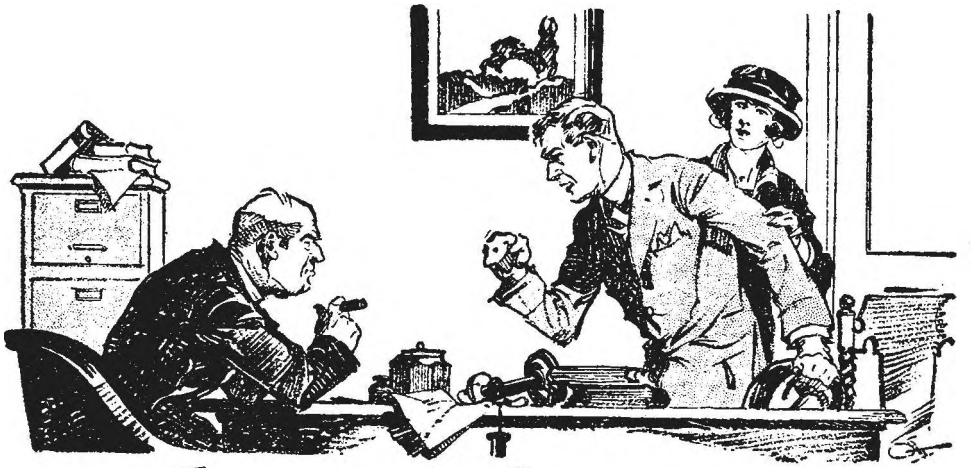
" That whether I come to the store or not, we're partners just the same."

" You bet we are, Loris!" Ken assured her. " Partners always and in everything!"

MY HEART'S SINGIN'

BUDDY mine, the wind is blowin'
And my heart is singin' mad;
I can feel my cheeks a tinglin'
And my eyes a sparklin' glad.
I just saw your face a shinin'
And a laughin' through the crowd;
Though you didn't even see me,
I can't help but feelin' proud
You're my buddy, and I love you,
And my heart is singin' mad,
Like the spring wind blew right through me,
Buddy, I'm just glad, glad, glad!

Mary Ann Dell.



A Gentleman in Pajamas

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

Author of "The Battle Cry," "When Bearcat Went Dry," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITH CLEAN HANDS.

THE door had closed upon the emissary whose brief entrance and exit had explained more to the mystified Pettigrew than many words.

Behind, in the room, the two men sat in the early morning hours as they had faced each other on that night when Barrows arrived to take up his coercing habitation.

"So—after all," ejaculated the elder bitterly, "he was *your* Man Friday while he pretended to be going the limit for me."

Barrows raised his brows.

"But, surely, my dear old tarantula, you can hardly find fault with that. I learned the art of double crossing at your knee. You wouldn't want your disciple to prove unworthy of his *maestro?*"

"I don't understand it," wailed the man whose nerves had been so racked and shredded that his thought processes were now like the guttering of a burned-out candle. "The coincidences bewilder me. After he drifted in from the street that day. How you could have arranged it with him. How you could have felt sure of him. I offered him good enough pay to hold him in line."

Barrows laughed.

"Such charming innocence enchants me," he exclaimed. "Of course, there was no coincidence at any time. He didn't drift in that day—he came at my signal, which he was dutifully awaiting outside. He had been instructed and rehearsed from A to izzard—until he was letter perfect. It was for that that I moved your chair to the window and suggested your looking out."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 16.

"But his getting the room in the house next door — his suggesting the roof — his holding me up for more money!"

"He had the room next door engaged before you ever saw him. He called you up on the night of my arrival when he told you he was Provost's ghost." Barrows was speaking with evident enjoyment of the discomfiture produced by each clearly enunciated word.

"As for the roof, you seemed to fancy you had discovered roofs, yet every finished house in New York has one. On this particular one, he and I had met as often as seemed advisable."

After a moment's pause he supplemented, "The holding you up for a higher wage was thrown in for good measure. I was afraid too gullible a readiness on his part might excite your premature suspicion."

"It's most extraordinary," almost sobbed the frustrated conspirator. "Why — in God's name, why did you resort to such savage, elaborate theatricality? Where was the point or sense of it?"

"There was in it," came the grave response, "the soundest sense and the most pragmatic usefulness. You say it was extraordinary. I promised you when I came that it should be. You had open to you two possible escapes from my domination. One lay in confession, but that hardly counted, because you could open that door only to pass from this servitude to that of the penitentiary. For that alternative you'd evinced a strong distaste."

The speaker again paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, what was the second way? Obviously it was plotting to get rid of me and to confiscate the injurious evidence which you credulously supposed I carried on my person. You believed that I did so carry it, for no better reason than because I occasionally allluded to it as a fact and let you glimpse the counterfeit envelope.

"Therefore, it was wise to encourage you in your hope. Otherwise there was always the possibility that through hopelessness you might be stampeded into a recklessness which would be for you, abnormal."

"And so—"

"And so, since I knew you had to occupy your mind with plotting my murder, I helped you do it. Without your suspecting it, I gave you the advantage of my ingenuity. If I hadn't you might have succeeded for yourself by brute force and awkwardness.

"By affording the 'makings' and letting you suppose that you were 'rolling your own,' I kept your mind occupied and I could watch its wheels go round. It was a simple device and it saved me considerable uncertainty."

"And you who pose as a clever crook, shared our secret with an accomplice!"

Again Barrows shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes and no," he answered. "I had a confederate, but he knew only what I wanted him to know—plus what you told him, of course. I have never taken much stock in the clever super-villain of fiction who always plays a lone hand."

Pettigrew sat with his head drooping on his chest and groaned.

"Did you ever see a good mason," inquired his companion in vivacious defense of his tenets, "who didn't have a helper? I lay my own brick, but it's a waste of the craftsman's time to mix his own mortar."

"And now," asked Pettigrew desolately, "what next?"

"Our recent sales to Morton and to the smaller fry," responded the younger man energetically, "come close to effecting the dispersal of the Pettigrew collection. From now on the assets of our estate may be regarded as liquid. The mortar is mixed for my brick laying. The job itself won't take long.

"You can still call on the police, of course, and I dare say you will continue to plot my assassination, but a spirit of discouragement will attend you and discount your energy. One does not press on so buoyantly to victory when one also looks back on a succession of mortifying defeats."

"And if I do make a new attempt," Pettigrew's eyes flashed in a brief and gusty wrath, "do you suppose I'll let you guide my hand again?"

"That we shall see," was the smiling response. "You didn't recognize my col-

laboration before, you know. But now, like the faithful Diston, let us hit the hay. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

It was once more with a sense of relief that Pettigrew, who had believed himself driven by desperation to plotting a murder, lay down in his bed with the realization that he had failed. In the knowledge that the nightmare, through which he had agonized, had proved a phantasy rather than a fact, was a balm which outweighed even the sense of material loss, although that loss should run its course to ruin. He even made a virtuous resolution to try no more —and fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

The next day passed with the quiet that succeeds a storm. In the house were no bargainers after treasures that beget covetous desire, and Barrows was put to it in his effort to keep the march of events rapid. This situation he met by the irritating device of raising the salaries of Miss Page and Yates, the cook and the parlor maid, and of bringing them all in to express their gratitude to the unenthusiastic donor of those emoluments.

But Edith Page, as she put on her hat and coat that afternoon, failed to attain exaltation of spirit even though she had, in a few days, achieved a financial recognition for which her predecessor had vainly toiled a year. She was brooding on the dream that had blossomed in her life only to be winter-killed short of its fulfillment.

She was in that dejection of spirit to which every instrument of the city's roaring orchestration contributed its note of loneliness and solitary wretchedness. She felt small and helpless, and life was, to her thinking, an imprisonment that barred her from the freedom of skies which stretched in flawless invitation to happier wings.

So when she reached the door of the house where she lived and found George Eldoras standing there with a hopeless sort of supplication on his face, it did not lie in her heart to send him away with the spirit of fine resolution.

"I've come again," he said, speaking with such a haste as men sometimes employ to get something said before it can be cut short, "to tell you the rest of my story. I've come to explain what the obstacle was that I begged you to accept on faith—and, after that, to say good-by."

Perhaps because in this new guise of humbleness and acceptance of defeat there was an answering echo to her own hopeless mood, the girl only nodded in silent assent and let him follow her into the cheerless house.

When they were inside and she had taken off her hat and wraps she came back into the dreary living room and found him standing there with a face that she did not know. It was a face stamped with the grim resolution to go through with a bad half hour, and it was unlit by any hope that the future held much beyond that half hour.

The girl nodded, but the inscrutable smile was no longer on her lips. When they essayed to smile at all, they succeeded only in the wistful lifting of one corner—and suddenly Eldoras realized that there was no fight left in her.

To-night she stood near the end of her courage, and instinct told him that should he attack with the abandon of ardor, she would have no defenses to interpose. Her reserves were spent.

That realization made his own purpose a harder one of adherence, but he squared his shoulders and said resolutely: "I tried to explain things to you the other night—without giving you the true key to the situation at all. It was really only evasion. I tried to keep secrets from you that you had to know, and of course you could give me only one answer."

Again she inclined her head, but she seemed suddenly too tired to talk. She had been longing for him all day, but now she was conscious only of the wish that he would go away and let her crawl into some corner and be alone.

"I told you," he went on, "that the reason I couldn't ask you to marry me was because, though I lived like a lord, I was actually a pauper. I was a sort of beggar in purple, and what money came to me had to go into a vague sort of sinking fund.

"I said, too, that when I turned my corner I could come back and ask you to marry me"—he hesitated, then forced out

the rest—" and that nothing would stand between us any more. I believed that, then, but I know now that I lied."

" I knew," she said faintly, " that it was all just a dream. That it couldn't come true."

" I've almost turned my corner," he said, " only to find that there are other more dangerous corners still ahead. So I've come to say good-by. It's the only decent thing I can say to you. I find I love you too much to do anything else."

" You found "—she broke off, and in her heart a sudden flooding up of sympathy for him momentarily drowned out her own bleak loneliness — " you found that after all it was ruin?"

Eldoras shook his head.

" No," he answered, " I've almost done the thing I undertook, but it's only to realize that it's not enough. I'm about to discharge a debt. That was what I was hinting at all along. That discharge will strip me to the last farthing; but that's not the point. There are dollars enough where the other dollars came from.

" I've tried my financial wings, and starting debt free I shouldn't fear the future—except for one thing. That's the thing that makes it necessary to tell you good-by—to try to live without you."

" The mysterious obstacle?" she questioned with a puzzled attentiveness, and he nodded his head slowly.

He met her eyes so directly and unflinchingly that his gaze held her own and then he said: " I'm an escaped convict, and until things happen, which may never happen—until a pardon clears my future—I have, ahead of me, the endless possibility of recapture—and of being a convict again."

Edith Page flinched back as if a giant wave had broken its weight of water against her. Slowly her eyes dilated while they gazed into his, and as she read what she saw there she felt suddenly sure that this self-accusation was a matter of words—of technical definitions, perhaps, but not of moral uncleanness. Somehow she was definitely sure, that though he might be a convicted felon he was essentially straight.

A sense of wonderment overcame her as she realized that she fully trusted this man now, for the first time, when he stood there declaring himself a convicted criminal, and that she had never been able to give him her whole faith before when every outward seeming was that of rectitude.

What the process was she could not say. It did not matter. Intuition—revelation—or whatever else it might be, it carried its certainty with it.

She waited for words of self-justification and excuse, and when none came, she found herself making the declaration for him.

" You are innocent," she said simply, but the man shook his head.

" No, I was guilty," he corrected her. " But it was like a seizure of delirium—in my early youth—and as I look back on it now the boy who did it seems a stranger. That's no excuse. It's purely academic, of course. I was sent to prison. The two older accessories who used me as their cat's-paw escaped with the sixty thousand dollars I had stolen."

" You — stole sixty thousand dollars?" It was an incredulous whisper.

" I stole it—and I got not one cent of it. Not even enough to hire a cheap lawyer for my preliminary hearing; but that wasn't all. The corner I spoke of turning was the repayment — anonymously, of course—of every cent of that defalcation, principal and interest, from that day to this.

" I have reached the corner. In a few days more I shall have not one cent in the world—but also I shall not owe a cent.

" They—the other two—got the money and enjoyed it—and you went to prison and paid it back!" she exclaimed in a low voice burdened with sympathy, appearing to lose all sight of his confessed guilt. " But when you have paid it back, isn't the thing cancelled?"

He shook his head.

" No," he told her. " The only crime of which I was guilty—though God knows that was enough—was robbery, and for the robbery I am about ready to make full restitution. But the crime for which I was convicted was—" He paused, then said harshly—" was manslaughter—and of that I was as innocent as you are."

"Who—who—" Her voice faltered, but her eyes held his gaze steadily.

"The chauffeur of the taxicab in which we planned to make way with the money. An accidental shot from my weapon killed him."

"What"—she hesitated, and then her voice gained confidence—"what dependents did he have?"

"A mother only. I'm glad you asked. The first thing I did after escaping from prison was to try to find her, but I found she had died. People living in the same tenement said that after her son's death she lived even better than before, so she couldn't have been entirely dependent on him."

"Oh, I knew you would think first of that old woman! And it was an accidental shot—"

"Yes; and for an offense which I really never committed I am still officially a convict in Sing Sing. I mean that's my legal status, and that would be my actual status if any one, whom I couldn't trust with my life, knew the story I'm telling you now."

"Your story," she said, as she came over and laid a light hand on his arm, "is safe with me. You know that?"

"Yes, I know that. Moreover I know that the chance of discovery has become more and more remote until it's no longer likely. I lived through torture until I reached the point where I felt that ghost was laid—but at last it seemed laid. It didn't haunt me any more. Now that ghost has risen again. Now it *does* haunt me."

"Why?" gasped Edith Page, and the man's eyes narrowed with suffering because he knew that in this guise of the unfortunate he had come back unchallenged into her heart—and he must wrench himself out of it again.

"From the days when I first dared move about openly," he said, "from the days when I stopped skulking like a hunted beast, I've had and held to a clear-cut plan. There was nothing self-righteous about it, because it was only common sense. I knew that I was convicted because I was too poor and too broken in spirit to fight for fairness.

"A man was killed; a company was robbed, and I, who was guilty of one of those felonies, stood there easy to convict of both. It was as if the district attorney were singing a tune, 'We really must jail some one, and it might as well be you.' So they jailed me—for the more serious crime of which I was innocent, and dropped the lesser, of which I was guilty."

"And you didn't even have a confidant!"

"There was no one to take up the cudgels for me. The company believed in my guilt—as was natural enough. So when I made my get-away—"

He paused and the girl shuddered.

"When I made my get-away," he continued, "I resolved to earn enough to pay back in full the stolen funds. That would not clear my record in any legal sense, but it would clear my conscience. That was the corner I had to turn. I have just reached its accomplishment."

"And until you could tell me that," she whispered softly, "you kept your secret. Until you could bring me a slate washed clean!"

George Eldoras closed his eyes for an instant as if he dared not trust them to remain open on the sudden enveloping tenderness of her own. Then with brows drawn into a scowl of difficult mental focus, he went on almost harshly:

"Even yet, dearest, you don't quite understand. I haven't come to offer you a cleaned slate, but to say good-by—because I have no other course. For God's sake, let me finish the wretched story. It's one I've been rehearsing myself all night and all day to tell you—and Heaven only knows whether I can ever work myself up to the point of attempting it again."

"Go on," she murmured, "I'm listening—"

"I'm not going to try to make you understand the inferno of those prison days," he declared. "I don't want you to know its miasma even at second hand. I don't want you to see the twisted working of a boy's mind, warped by bitterness into prison melancholia.

"You see, a delusion went with me. It happened that the exact thing that caused my arrest and conviction was an effort to pull out of the crime—a belated effort that

went wrong. As chance decreed, if I'd gone through to the end with the felonious undertaking, I'd have escaped as the other two did. No matter.

"I went to prison and saw myself punished, not for crime, but for repentance. Day and night I plotted to escape. I became a trusty in the course of time—what is known as an outside trusty—and for six months I collaborated with a fellow who was 'doing it all' on a plan of escape."

"A fellow who was doing it all?" she repeated in a puzzled voice, and Eldoras jerked his head.

"It's the prison phrase for a man who's serving a life term—and I think it's expressive," he explained. "We worked together along an infinitely tedious trail of heartbreaking, petty details. At the end we lay huddled outside the walls in the decorative shrubbery of a country house, with our hearts hammering against our ribs.

"We heard that hideous siren at the prison shrieking out the signal that every man and woman within hearing knows—the warning that human wild beasts have broken out of their cages and must be hunted down and brought back—for a reward."

Edith Page shuddered, and the man went on:

"But we'd expected that—and we were of the elect few that get away with it. We both escaped. I don't know what became of the man who was 'doing it all.'

"As for me, I found that the air outside the walls made me breathe in a different conception of life. It seemed clear that I had before me one plain course, to pay off the amount of that theft in full, principal and interest, and then to go forward with an unburdened conscience. It had to be done cautiously and through intermediaries, of course—but first of all the money had to be earned."

The girl nodded her head.

"I was nearing the accomplishment when I met you. I was close to it the other night, when you accused me of having money and not giving you my confidence—and I came near kicking over the whole resolution."

"Why?"

"Why? Don't you see? I had something over sixty thousand dollars in the bank—and you were living here in this dingy tenement. After all, I had paid some price in punishment, and the other two had paid nothing.

"Why should I follow out a course which most men would call quixotic instead of taking what I had earned to make you comfortable and myself happy? Why should I devote to swelling a conscience fund the dollars that would make life easy for us both?"

"Because," she answered for him, "it was what you had resolved to do."

"No," he broke out vehemently, "you come first. In novels men may hold to an abstraction of principle like that, though they die for it. Some may be able to do it in life. To me the principle can go hang if it costs you too much. But there was another reason—a stronger one."

"What was it?" she asked.

"It was this. I've gone far enough toward rehabilitating my life to have outgrown the constant fear of recapture—yet I know that it's not an impossible thing. Around any corner may come a man with handcuffs to clap on my wrists—and if he comes his blow mustn't fall on you as well as me.

"That chance is slight. The contagion of leprosy is slight, too, but we don't take those we love best into its zone. Now it's not enough to clear the past.

"Before I can come to you again I must clear the future, too. That's why the only decent thing I can say to you is good-by."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE UNEXPECTED RESCUERS.

HAVING reached the end of his recital in what he believed to be a final avowal of renunciation, the man broke off, and to the resolve which had carried him through succeeded the inertia of despair.

But with the girl it was otherwise. Once more the color had flooded back into her cheeks.

Like the switching on of a bright incandescence came that kindling to her eyes

which gave them a flamelike vividness of beauty. Animation transfigured her to the glory of an Amazon or a Valkyrie.

She came over to him as he stood with drooping shoulders and caught his arms in her hands.

"You are two men," she declared tensely, "and I don't even know the name of one of them. That first man committed a crime and paid for it. He went his way.

"The other has proved, with every chance against him, that he can take back and hold his lost place in the world. He's my man and I mean to hold that place with him!"

"The second man," he interrupted, struggling to keep his arms rigid at his sides, "may at any moment become the first again. Anything that his finger tips touch may register the recorded signature of the felon."

"I know your history," she said, "and what chances you take are mine to take, too. I told you I couldn't carry my life into the betting ring. That was because you seemed to me a trifler."

"And now," he reminded her grimly, "I stand self-confessed, a criminal."

She waved aside the logic of that declaration with a magnificent disdain.

"Not a trifler, though," she insisted. "I couldn't play with infatuation when something else seemed more important to you than I did. But the dangers that lie before you now are dangers I mean to face with you. This fight is not just yours—it's ours. The one thing you shall never say to me is 'Good-by.'"

Eldoras kept his arms rigid for a moment which he thought was an hour. He could feel her breath faintly on his face as she looked up into it.

Then his brain became dizzy in a haze of joy. He clasped her close and felt her lips meet his.

He seemed to hear orchestrations that came from the vast distances of the stars set to her whispered words: "We fight together, you and I."

Perhaps it was some time later or perhaps it was immediately. He did not know. But their feet were on the ground again and she was once more steady eyed.

"You will go ahead with your plan of restitution," she was saying. "You and I don't need the sixty thousand in the bank. You're still the man who earned it and you can earn another sixty thousand. But through those same intermediaries that you use in paying it back you must work for a pardon for that other man—what was his name?"

"His name," he informed her gravely, "was Challon—George Challon."

"We must clear George Challon's reputation," she announced with a charming unreason of confidence, "but that we will do together."

"Sometimes," he said with a break in his voice, "a man gets a glimpse through the fog and sees the goodness of God—and I think it's generally in a woman's face."

He drew himself away after that and shook his head. "You said that when I first took you in my arms you couldn't think—that only your heart could be heard. What chance have I to keep my brain on guard and my resolution awake when you kiss me?"

His mouth twisted itself into a wry smile.

"Still," he went on, "my determination must stand. Only when the ghosts of the past are laid beyond chance of resurrection—only when the danger of meeting some one round the corner is ended can I let you marry me. I can work for that, fight for that, with no secrets between us—but until then—"

"Until then, dear," she interrupted, "I can wait, too, if that's your edict. But we wait and work together."

Prescott Barrows was whistling blithely as he dressed. P. B. Pettigrew, whose toilet was simpler and more quickly accomplished since it involved only bathing and changing from night pajamas to day pajamas, sat morosely regarding him.

The younger man had given more than his wonted scrupulous care to his attire this morning and now he appeared almost youthfully debonnair, with a flower in his lapel. Breakfast was served as had become customary under the new dispensation, in the study upstairs, and when it had been cleared away and Yates had disappeared

Barrows lighted a cigarette and leaned back contentedly in his chair.

"It seemed almost hare brained at first, didn't it, Pro Bono?" he made observation in the reflective vein of reminiscence, and the other man glowered without response.

"I mean," went on Barrows amiably, "the whole undertaking when I came: to burglarize a house—to take up my residence in it and to carry the confiscation through to its unhurried culmination—a culmination which seemed beset with impossibilities."

Pettigrew lifted his lips to bare his teeth in a silent snarl, and Barrows nodded and continued.

"Silence is assent," he asserted. "Yet look at the final result. The collection is dispersed. I hold a power of attorney which puts me securely within the law. What misfortunes you suffer from my depredations now are legally the result of your own bad judgment in the selection of your factotum. All that remains is the indorsing over to me of checks aggregating a neat fortune and the converting of them into readily negotiable securities."

"That indorsement," Pettigrew ventured to object, "isn't accomplished yet."

"It will be in the next half hour," smiled his tormentor. "I have them all here," and he tapped a brief case which lay on the table. Then his smile faded slowly and his features took on that flinty inflexibility which the other had come to know and to fear.

"That final detail stands on the order of its accomplishment now, Pro Bono," he made emphatic reassertion, "unless you mean to commit the war weary pair of us to a fresh beginning. I haven't built my bridge nine-tenths of the way across the water to leave the final span gaping open.

"If you have acquired overnight an improved position for defying me I should be glad to learn of it. If some disarming power has come abruptly into your hands, of course you are privileged to use it. If you have an ace in the hole, by all means play it—"

The speaker paused, then leaning suddenly forward, he succumbed to one of those rare gusts of passion from which he was ordinarily immune. His eyes flared menacingly and his lips set themselves in stiff cruelty.

"But unless such is the case," he commanded in a voice that ripped through the room like tearing canvas, "obey me and obey me quick—or bite on me and break your teeth!"

He opened the brief case and began spreading papers on the table. "The curtain is up on the last act now," he announced. "There are the checks to be indorsed and there is the telephone. Choose between them. By the way, in the afternoon papers I'm advertising this house for sale."

The older man stiffened in his chair. That very vacillation which failed whenever he resolved on desperate methods, required also of him that he see-saw endlessly between surrender and self-destroying vengeance. Now his right hand went out and took up the pen, but his left also went out and clutched the telephone.

Barrows looked ironically on. He had more than once analyzed Pettigrew to Pettigrew's self with a convincing aptness. He had pointed out that the weasel spirit must always fail at the chill breath of mortal crisis—but of that he had never been quite sure himself. He was not sure now. The destructive impulse flared and died fitfully in such a man, as he knew—but there was always the chance that before its dying it might ignite a conflagration.

Chance was an ironical deity, at best, and it might be that an impossible enterprise carried to the verge of success might collapse in its final stage. It is when bubbles grow large and iridescent that they burst.

"Choose," he enjoined, "and choose at once. Fool that I was," he added scornfully, "I was just on the point of offering you a slight abatement of punishment—a sort of rebate for good behavior."

Pettigrew's hand ceame suddenly away from the telephone. There was surprise, and surprise threw him off his guard into the naïve curiosity of a child.

"What was it?" he demanded with an avaricious eagerness; and Barrows laughed.

"I was going to offer it," he said dryly, "for good behavior, not as a compromise. I was going to suggest it when you had been

ridden to my destination—not until you reached it in docility. With those checks unindorsed, I have nothing to say. Use your telephone or use your pen."

Slowly the man began indorsing the checks, and while he did so Edith Page came in, received some casual instructions, and went quietly out again.

At last the old man laid down his pen and shoved the papers across.

"There," he said bleakly. "I'm ruined—and God knows I'm tired! I wish I'd had the temperament to defy you and go to prison. I'd rather see that money thrown out on the streets for the mob to scramble after than to let you enjoy it; but I couldn't choose my robber, and I couldn't change my nature."

"I wonder," suggested Barrows musingly, "whether you would have found it any easier if the profit had gone to the other pal you bilked—the one who had to sweat it out in jail."

"At least," declared Pettigrew wearily, "he'd have been entitled to it; to some of it, anyhow."

"That is precisely the point I have sought more than once to impress upon you," observed the other. "As for me, I practiced the art of infamy in various aspects in the old days, but only once did I fail to keep my faith with a fellow crook. That was when you made it impossible."

"And so," sneered Pettigrew, "you have collected in his stead—in manifold increase—and have kept it all for your conscience smitten self."

"It is you, not I, Pro Bono," came the calm rejoinder, "who has boasted of an awakening to the higher things of life. It is you who have given your moral support to civic reform—and who have contributed in infinitely smaller degree your financial support."

"It is you," flared back the target of this sarcasm, "who has reiterated maudlin sentimentalities about the young degenerate who wasn't shrewd enough to escape the consequences of his act."

Prescott Barrows held the cigarette in his long fingers and sat regarding its smoke. It was an attitude which Pettigrew had by this time come to know. It was like an underscoring of written words, and it meant that his next speech, couched in casual blandness, would carry some particular and trenchant significance.

"It is I," said Barrows, "who undertook the most bizarre robbery New York has yet seen. It is I who was ready to pay what the venture cost, if you ever summoned up courage enough to go down with me into ruin.

"It is I who gambled my liberty and even my life—who stood ready to kill you if need be to accomplish this mad object. And I did it, not for my own profit, as you have assumed wrongly, but as the agent for that boy who got a raw deal and who has the right to some substantial recompense."

"As the agent—for that boy!"

"Yes, as his agent. Unauthorized, of course, and without his knowledge. I have my own slightly soiled code of ethics, and its one inviolable commandment is that a man shall stick by his own crew. That boy blocked my efforts to inquire about him—but that was natural enough. He made me so investigation shy that I don't even know, at this moment, whether he is alive or dead—but I assume that he is still living, if you call it living—with a number instead of a name. Perhaps it's safe now to inaugurate fresh inquiries. If I find he's dead—and that it's too late to help him—"

He broke off there and fell into such introspective engrossment that Pettigrew had to prompt him.

"What if you do find that?"

"Then two-thirds of what is realized from your estate shall go into a fund for the assistance of like cases—and the other third shall go back to you. I myself shan't touch a filthy cent of it."

Pettigrew was sitting up straight now and gasping in astonishment.

"And if you find he's alive?" he demanded tensely.

"Then every cent shall be put at his disposal—through attorneys who can conduct such a proceeding under cover of confidential privilege. It shall be applied first to wiping out the debt to the company he robbed—then to working for his pardon—

and after that to his own uses when he's free."

"And you yourself?"

"I myself shall have no part in it. I act as an agent without remuneration."

"Why? Why? Why?"

"I suppose," said Barrows curtly, "it is inevitable that a vulture like you should croak that question. You and I debauched that boy, throwing the weight of our cleverness and maturity against his adolescent weakness—then we stood from under. It was anticipated that he should, at least, emerge with money, and with the chance thereafter to choose his own free road. All the pages that life gives magic to—the pages of youth before disillusion comes, the pages of superabundant strength, vitality and romance—were torn ruthlessly out of his book by us.

"Instead of it he had the drab, asphyxiating chapters of a living death. When he emerges at last, he emerges a furtive and broken man past his prime, a branded and skulking thing with blistered memories."

Barrows was leaning forward and his voice had taken on a quality that seemed totally foreign to his usual impassiveness of composure.

"He comes out, a man who has known no youth. The eyes of hostile watchers will follow him. And why? Is he essentially worse than you, who have for years sat here with the respect and alliance of egotistical meddlers who infringe on human liberty in the abused name of reform? I think he's better!"

Pettigrew offered no response.

"But let us suppose another situation," went on Barrows. "Suppose he emerges from his prison sepulcher to find that he doesn't have to struggle and pant for a livelihood? Suppose from the security of wealth he can laugh at the prying eyes and the insolent questioning of watchful busybodies? The police don't dog a man very hard when that man doesn't have to seek employment. They can't.

"Then he can at least hope for some solace out of life. I think he's entitled to all that. I think he's entitled not only to life and liberty, but to a belated pursuit of happiness. He's entitled to his chance to find compensation for the years of youth that he lost.

"After all, he lost them paying the penalties for that crime of which he was the least guilty of three accomplices. He's entitled to enough color to paint out the drab neutrality that he has known.

"That's my idea of practical philanthropy—and to its end I mean to devote the receipts from your art collection and your stolen wealth. To that end I've undertaken and carried through a purpose which smacked of impossibility and savored of lunacy."

Barrows halted in his declaration and tossed away his cigarette. He stood before the other man and with cold directness announced briefly:

"Now I offer you a chance to come into this matter with me as a full and voluntary partner. My plan is to work for a pardon and to turn over to the man when he finally stands free all that you have mendaciously called yours."

"And what do I get out of it?" demanded Pettigrew.

"You get out of it," came the curt response, "a belated opportunity to hold your infamous head up again; and if you decline coöperation you get nothing at all."

"When you've made this quixotic restitution," whined Pettigrew, "you and I go out and walk the streets penniless, I suppose? We'll get a deal of satisfaction out of holding up our heads with our stomachs empty."

"When we've accounted in full for our stewardship," suggested Barrows almost pensively, "it's possible that Challon will see fit to remit some portion as commission for its handling. That will rest entirely with him. If he does, what comes back is yours. If he does not, I won't let you starve. I wasn't penniless when I came here and my stomach wasn't empty. I mean to share with you."

"How," inquired Pettigrew, "will we go about this business?"

"The aid of the company that was robbed will be powerful—and once they are fully reimbursed I hope we can enlist that aid. You with your righteous associates ought to be able to help. I dare say some

of your pet holy rollers and uplifters are close to the Governor. And then—"

"Then what?"

"Then if need be I can confess—as to how the taxicab driver was really killed."

"You confess!"

Barrows smiled. "Not in the person of Prescott Barrows, of course, but as Catewell, who has been dead ever since he was lost off the ocean liner by accident or suicide."

"How can a man confess a decade and more after death?"

"Perhaps," suggested Barrows, speaking thoughtfully as if lost in reminiscence, "since it was always a moot question whether it was an accident or a suicide, it may be reasonably concluded that it was the latter. Perhaps that unfortunate man, feeling the police net of two continents was drawing close about him, resolved on the escape of self-destruction and, having reached that melancholy determination, wished to clear his less guilty comrade."

"Then why didn't that confession turn up years ago?"

"It is conceivable," went on the other still absently, "that the thing was turned over, with other less important papers, to a friend who failed to discover it until now. Leave that to me. The point, Pro Bono, is this: are you with me as a sharer in my plan—and my own small, individual competency; or are you against me—with nothing at all?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

RIVAL RESTITUTIONS.

THE office of Jacob Reiter is finished in Circassian walnut, and one entering it has the impression of such elegant surroundings as might fittingly pertain to a royal council chamber or the sanctum of a motion picture magnate. In this spacious cubicle Mr. Reiter presides over a concern of financial rating as impressive as himself and his background. On this morning he was figuring the card sent in from one of the anterooms and waiting for the arrival of the gentleman whom the card announced.

As that personage appeared Mr. Reiter arose from his seat before the Circassian walnut desk, for the visitor was as august a figure at the local bar as was his present host in local finance—and when one uses the word "local" with reference to New York, one might almost substitute national or international.

"Ah, Mr. Dubois," greeted Mr. Reiter affably, "I believe you had something to say to me in person? Have that chair and won't you light a cigar?"

Mr. Dubois smiled and sat down.

"I've come to you on a mission which is rather beyond the scope of the ordinary," he admitted, "and I represent clients who, for the time being, prefer to remain unnamed."

"Whatever your mission," replied the manager of the concern, meeting smile with smile, "your welcome is assured."

"Thank you. I believe, some years back, you had in your employ a youth by the name of Challon?"

"We had. We used the youngster as a pay roll messenger, and he decamped with sixty thousand dollars, incidentally killing a taxicab driver in the course of the operation. He was subsequently sent up for manslaughter."

Mr. Dubois nodded. "The description fits," he affirmed. "There can be no doubt that he's the employee I had in mind. I've come to see you, on behalf of clients who have grown interested in that boy—for he was a boy then at least. I am empowered to make full restitution for that theft. My instructions are to pay not only the principal of the defalcation, but also its accrued interest to date, but to those instructions attaches one proviso."

"And that is?" inquired Mr. Reiter suavely.

"Inasmuch as the defendant was at that time of tender age, and evidently overpersuaded by vicious confederates of a greater maturity, his turpitude is to be somewhat discounted. Also he has served many years of punishment in prison—and for these reasons we ask that when you are entirely reimbursed, you use your influence in pressing a plea for his pardon."

Mr. Reiter frowned and sat noncommit-

tally studying the blotter on his desk. At length he looked up to inquire crisply:

"Am I to understand, Mr. Dubois, that these clients, whom you do not care to name, are actuated solely by motives of humanity?"

"Entirely so. I can further assure you that I believe them to be gentlemen of standing as unimpeachable as our own."

"I find myself wondering," mused the corporation's manager, "what has stirred that interest at so late a date."

"These things, sir," the attorney reminded him plausibly, "come to one's attention in many ways, often belatedly, and stir the sympathy at the time of their coming. While I am not prepared to state unequivocally that such is the fact, I think it likely that the attention of my clients was called to this case by some member of the unfortunate man's family."

"That would seem logical," admitted Mr. Reiter. "Yet there is a feature which puzzles me. One would suppose that friends who were prepared to go so far in generosity would have gone as far in investigation."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you, sir."

"I should think that before they offered to pay sixty thousand dollars and accrued interest for more than ten years, they would have ascertained the fact that the man whose freedom they sought to secure had not been in prison for a long while; that he escaped after two years of confinement and has never been recaptured."

The distinguished counsel permitted an unwonted blankness of amazement to betray itself in his face. He gazed at the man from whom he had just heard this strange announcement and experienced the novel sensation of finding himself speechless. Mr. Reiter on the other hand smiled more blandly than ever.

"That feature of the matter," he made passing comment, "strikes me as unusual. Yet another feature is even more so."

"If you have other surprising things to tell me, sir," came the bewildered response, "let me hear them, by all means. It would appear that I have undertaken a case which develops unexpected phases."

"I have known," went on Reiter with evident enjoyment of the unique situation, "of belated restitutions before. This, however, is the first time in my experience that I've encountered a keen competition from two quarters at once, to pay back the same defalcation."

The Hon. George Dubois stared blankly at his companion. Never since the time when, as a young layer, he had put a defense witness on the stand to discover that he was proving a star pleader for the plaintiff, had he felt so nonplused.

"Keen competition," he echoed vaguely.

"Precisely, my dear sir," came the immediate response. "Quite recently I was approached by another attorney — like yourself distinguished counsel—who made a similar offer of restitution." Mr. Reiter paused, smiling as a man can afford to smile who holds unbeatable cards.

"However, in that case," he added thoughtfully, "there was a marked difference. That emissary admitted that he represented, not humane outsiders, but the man himself who had been guilty of the robbery.

"He naturally availed himself of his privilege as counsel, and told us nothing of the whereabouts of his client or of the identity he had assumed. He did, however, say that the money with which the restitution was to be made had been earned by that man, through his own unaided efforts, and that when he had paid it in he would stand stripped to financial nakedness."

From Mr. Dubois came a sound which was something like a gasp, but which he converted into a casual clearing of his throat. Since he accompanied it with no words, Mr. Reiter continued:

"Between the proposition which came to me from that source and the one which you have just presented, however, there is a distinction, and—ahem—if I may say so without offense, the advantage in ethics and liberality seems to lie with the other."

"How so?" demanded the attorney.

In his swivel chair the managing director of the company leaned back and clasped his hands behind his gray head.

"It was a more liberal proposition," he

announced, " in that it imposed no conditions and was contingent on no terms. It purported to come from a man who was an escaped convict; who offered to pay in full, and who hoped that he might look to us for aid in gaining a pardon—but who was ready to pay unconditionally—whether we helped him or not."

The speaker paused and pursed his lips. " Possibly I overstate the case," he amended carefully. " He did request of us the understanding that we should not join in the chase; that we should not seek to penetrate his anonymity. But he did not require that we should work for his pardon, though his counsel stated candidly that when he paid us he would stand absolutely penniless."

Mr. Dubois cleared his throat again. He nodded his head understandingly.

" This condition of affairs," he announced, " is a thing of which I knew nothing. I feel sure that it is a thing of which my clients were equally in ignorance. I must assert, none the less, that my clients do not suffer in the comparison. Your other proposition came from the man himself, speaking for himself. Mine comes from the purses of generosity—not from any injured conscience or the war chest of accessories."

Mr. Dubois straightened in his chair. He spoke the truth so far as he knew it. He radiated the liberality of principals whom he supposed to be taking up, without obligation, the burdens of another.

" My clients seek to come to the assistance of a young man who in his boyhood made a serious mistake which involved him in criminality and its consequences. Unless they can so serve him their generosity fails. They owe your company nothing, and if they choose to assume this onerous debt, it must be in consideration of gaining for that unfortunate the high prize of liberty and a chance to rehabilitate his life."

He rounded out his sentence sonorously, and with a quiet gesture of authority and set feeling that, for a man ambushed by surprise, he had retrieved himself rather well. Mr. Reiter also appeared of that opinion, for he inclined his head in affirmation.

" We can't accept double payment," he stated calmly, " but, if you are interested in knowing it, I may say to you that whatever influence we can bring to bear toward executive clemency is already under way."

" I shall carry that report to my clients," announced the lawyer, rising with dignity, " but I fancy that the matter has now resolved itself without their further intervention."

Suddenly Mr. Reiter sat forward in his chair.

" Don't discourage them!" he exclaimed vehemently. " If, as you say, they have been going forward out of sympathy and humanity, I imagine the opportunity still lies open. If noble impulse actuates them, the stage is set for their entrance. That money that was stolen from us will be repaid within a few days. With the major sum will come the interest—and then the young ex-criminal who has been working to pay it back will stand naked to the winds of poverty."

" I have not been authorized," suggested the attorney cautiously, " to take up any point beyond the restitution of the money stolen with interest added."

" As you like," snapped out the other man tartly, " but if the motive was that which you asserted; generosity—then your clients are just starting." Abruptly the speaker became facetious. " So far as I can see, this man is coming out of it not only clean, but cleaned.

" He'll go home in a barrel, and if the gentlemen for whom you speak are obsessed with generosity they might clothe him. At all events, I'm going to give you the name of his attorney."

" Thank you," acceded Mr. Dubois. " I'll embody all you've told me in my report."

That afternoon in the house on Washington Square North, Mr. Dubois related the results of his interview.

Pettigrew remained silent, twisting his hands, and for a while Barrows, too, contemplated his cigar end.

Suddenly he bent forward.

" As I understand it," he said, " the confidential relation of lawyer and client now applies to us—carrying its privilege?"

Mr. Dubois nodded his head in evident perplexity.

"Then get in touch with that other attorney." Barrows ripped out his words like a drill sergeant. "That old man sitting over there, whom you know as P. B. Pettigrew, was the chief of that crook trio that plundered Reiter's concern. He got and kept every cent of the stolen money. I was the man in the taxicab with young Challon, and I know that the driver was killed by accident. Whatever Pettigrew and I have between us belongs to Challon—and he shall have it! Now get busy and fix it up."

The attorney straightened in his chair as if under an electric shock. His distinguished face stiffened to something like horror and his cultivated voice murmured: "This is somewhat outside my province, I'm afraid. I'm not a criminal attorney."

Barrows arose suddenly and stood trembling with abrupt rage.

"No, you're not a criminal lawyer!" he shouted. "You're corporation counsel. You're respectable. In other words, you're a fixer. All right. Fix it!"

"If I'd understood the nature of the affair," demurred Mr. Dubois with dignity, "I should certainly have declined this employment."

"You didn't decline it, though"—Barrows caught him up—"and, in good conscience, you can't quit it in the middle. Now you're in it and by going through with it you can undo a lot that needs undoing. Will you see that other gentleman of the bar who is, like yourself, unimpeachable, or won't you?"

Mr. Dubois gathered together his belongings.

"I'll go to his office now," he reluctantly agreed.

Pettigrew had shrunk like a mummy in his chair. Perhaps of the many crosses he had recently been called upon to bear this was the most mortifying and galling. The Hon. George Dubois had sat with him on committees of civic uplift; the twain had, in the purely metaphorical sense, rolled their eyes in unison, thanking God that they were not as other men are.

Now the layman avoided the lawyer's eyes. He felt like a merchant prince suddenly pulled down from his richly caparisoned white camel and converted into a leper and an outcast on his pile of rags outside the Damascus Gate.

Feebly he found his voice:

"It's one thing to seek a pardon for a man in prison—and quite another to ask one for a man already at liberty," he demurred.

The Hon. George Dubois arose abruptly and laid a hand on his shoulder.

It was as if for this fellow publican he felt, instead of scorn and anger, a nobly welling tide of sympathy.

"My dear friend," he said piously, and his voice was, or managed to appear, almost choked with emotion, "for the sinner who repenteth blessings are reserved which are denied to the ninety and nine."

He paused and again cleared his throat. Barrows wondered in ironical amusement what would show in the Hon. George's face if he had the means of uncloaking him as Pettigrew had just been uncloaked.

"As to this ex-convict," the lawyer resumed, "I think we have a better chance for clemency as matters stand than had he remained in prison. His record speaks eloquently for him now. His case goes to the Governor, not on a mere assertion that he wants to redeem himself and repay his debt, but on the established fact that he has done so—of course though he was convicted not for robbery, but for homicide."

"I have a confession signed by one Catewell, deceased," volunteered Barrows, and the eyes of the lawyer lightened with interest as he listened to what followed. Then once more the Hon. George cleared his throat.

"I have friends whose integrity the Governor trusts, whose advice he always hears in a receptive mood. I'll see them."

"Yes," prompted Barrows curtly, "get to those birds and give them an earful—if any of your friends has anything on the Governor—"

The attorney wheeled and his face wore an expression of horrified rebuke.

"Pardon me," amended Barrows, "I spoke frivolously."

The attorney dislodged his horn rimmed glasses from his nose and polished them on

a silk handkerchief. He took up his belongings and with senatorial dignity made his departure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TEARS AND LAUGHTER.

ALBERT HERKIMER was a different type of counsellor from his elder colleague, the Hon. George Dubois. He was young, outspoken and so endowed with inherited wealth that he practiced law as he had played football, animated by a passion of contest and a spirit of sportsmanship. He had met George Eldoras in the offices of John P. Morton, and later Eldoras consulted him without fear of a failing comprehension.

When Eldoras had got the whole wretched story off his chest, the lawyer had pursed his lips and whistled, and being without cant he had not replied in legalistic phrases at all, but had said in a low voice: "By gad, buddy, you did get in wrong, didn't you?"

From that moment Herkimer had handled the affairs of Eldoras as if they were his own, or the proposition itself were one in which they were teammates.

Since late afternoon this day, when Herkimer had ended a surprising conference in his own office with the Hon. George Dubois, the younger lawyer had been running on the trail of his client, hot with news. He had missed him at every point, and after bolting a hasty dinner at his club he had set out afresh in pursuit.

At Eldoras's apartment he was told that the man had gone out, and from such knowledge as his acquaintanceship gave him he leaped to the surmise that his client might be found at the house of which he had spoken more than once: the apartment of Edith Page. To that objective the attorney went full cry as fast as he could persuade his taxicab Jehu to cover the distance.

Eldoras and Edith stood somewhat perplexed as he bulked large in the door of the tiny apartment when it opened to his ring. He dwarfed the tiny dimensions of the place with his physical bigness, and at sight of him Eldoras reacted to a sudden pang of fright.

"This is my lawyer, Mr. Herkimer," he found himself saying dully, "Mr. Herkimer, Miss Page."

It was impossible that in so short a time there could have been substantial developments along the road to a pardon, but the impact of catastrophe takes no gradual upbuilding. This was the first thought which struck in on Eldoras at the sight of that genial face, and it seemed to communicate itself also to the girl, whose cheeks went suddenly white.

He must have come hot foot with some warning. Perhaps the good intent of restitution had only launched forces of discovery and brought the need of hurried flight and hiding.

But Herkimer's grin disarmed apprehensions. It was boyish and impulsive in its enthusiasm of importance and his words followed quickly in corroboration:

"I say, I'm not the grim reaper," he made hasty self-defense. "You two don't have to stare at me as if I came with beckoning, bony fingers and a fleshless skull."

Eldoras was the first to laugh. "We're glad to see you, of course," he said, "but we were wondering what brought you."

"I come," declared the lawyer, who outside the office could never remember that he was a lawyer, "as the messenger of fairy godmothers and beneficent crooks. I come bearing fortune and wealth. I come with the future in my hands."

George Eldoras, alias Challon, stood staring with an unaccommodated focus of comprehension, but the girl's more flexible mind snapped back like a bent poplar to erectness, and in her eyes danced the mischief of a smile.

"In that case," she said, "come in. We feared you came from honest and righteous principals—out of the past."

Herkimer stood for a moment distracted from the urgency of his mission. He was looking at the girl, and when he realized that she had analyzed his gaze he flushed brick red and said awkwardly, although awkwardness was not inherent to his breezy temperament: "I beg your pardon."

They had drifted to the center of the

small room now and the new arrival remembered his rôle.

"There has been an unprecedented development to-day," he asserted; "the fellow crooks who double-crossed you have succumbed to the smiting of conscience. They've been down there at the company's office trying to square up the defalcation, on condition that the concern will roll up its sleeves and hustle in an effort to secure a pardon for you."

"The fellow crooks?" Eldoras echoed the words in dismay. "There isn't but one left. One of them has been dead—or supposed to be dead—for years."

"Now, listen to me," exhorted Herkimer explosively. "If you're going to be literal we might as well not begin. You've got to realize from the jump-off that this whole fabric is woven of impossibilities—and accept them as they come.

"The dead man has come back to life. Not only that, but he's taken the other confederate by the front of his neck and choked out of him all the accumulated loot. That loot has run up from sixty thousand to some three hundred thousand and all of it, with no condition attached, is to be turned over to you."

Eldoras shook his head dolefully and regretfully.

"You were sane yesterday," he said sadly, "I can testify to that with absolute certainty."

"I dare say I'll be sane to-morrow, too," retorted the lawyer. "And then I won't be offering you more than a quarter of a million dollars as carelessly as a man tips his bootblack."

"Go on," prompted Edith breathlessly. "Who are these enchanted crooks with the golden cornucopia?"

Herkimer shook his head. "I've talked only to their attorney," he admitted, "and their attorney invariably refers to them as 'my clients.'"

"I knew there was a catch in it," moaned Eldoras. "Does this other lawyer practice exclusively at Mateawan?"

The manner of Herkimer changed. The boy suddenly grew up and the strong-jawed face stiffened.

"Listen to me," he commented. "It was too confounded unusual to start in on sanely, but now we've all had our silly fling at it. I'm your lawyer and an expensive one if I choose to be. So listen."

They listened while he detailed for them the whole of his interview with the Hon. George Dubois, and when he finished the eyes of Edith Page held their Mona Lisa quality of mocking inscrutability. She was matching up strange fragments of a mental picture puzzle.

She was reflecting that just a little while before he had been closeted with Herkimer the distinguished Dubois had been closeted with her two employers. But of those thoughts she gave no hint.

Herkimer finished his narrative, and then rising out of his chair in response to an impulse of climacteric effect, he concluded: "There's the story. These unnamed clients want to make belated reparation. I don't think I violate any professional confidence when I say that if Dubois goes after a pardon he'll get it. He'll get it as surely as I'd get a newspaper if I paid the boy its price. All you have to do now is to sit pretty and let the chips fall where they will."

But Eldoras had been sitting deep in his chair, and while the eyes of the girl had been held by the face of the lawyer who made magic as he talked, a slow and fierce fire had been smoldering into outbreak in his heart.

Now he came eruptively to his feet—so abruptly that his chair fell backward with a crash, and his hands were clenched into fists. His eyes blazed with fury and his voice rumbled like a low thunder.

"I'm seeing red, Herkimer," he began, almost madly. "I can't and won't touch a nickel that means making peace with those two men who betrayed me! When I came out of Sing Sing, I swore I was done with prison—but now I think I'm ready to go back.

"Now I think I'm ready to go through the green door that leads—one way only—to the chair—provided only that before I go I can finish the fight I started with Catewell in that taxicab down town!"

His voice was coming in the disjointed staccato of sobbing fury as he broke off.

His breast was heaving with a tumult that had swept him beyond the frontier of sanity.

"They took me," he panted, "when I was untried and weak and yellow. They hypnotized and debauched me, and flung me aside to rot in the penitentiary. They can't pay me for that with money—the only way they can pay me is with blood—their own blood!

"A half million in gold wouldn't make up for those rotting years of lost youth. A million in gold wouldn't pay for that half hour lying in the wet underbrush while the prison siren screamed its tallyho to the countryside, that two human beasts had broken cover—I guess you've never been hunted or you'd know.

"Ten millions in gold couldn't pay for making the woman I loved think that I had thousands for selfish indulgence, but not ten dollars for a wedding ring!"

He halted again and bent with his face clutched between hands on which the knuckles stood out white, his eyes glaring with the lust to kill.

"But there's a way you lawyers can pay me out in full," he said chokingly. "Give me the names of those two men—and let me have a half hour with them alone. I'll collect, barehanded, and without discount—and then I'll be ready to go back up the river—to the green door!"

Herkimer's eyes met those of the girl. His lips shaped no words, but the glances said, "Take the witness." He himself turned and went as far away as the narrow space of the room permitted. He stood there with his broad back turned, making the clumsy effort of a big physical presence to obliterate itself.

Edith Page crossed and dropped on her knees by the figure that now hulked in its chair. Her arms went tenderly about the heaving shoulders, and her hands clasped themselves behind the bowed head. Her voice was as low as the echo of a whisper, but softer.

"Does revenge mean more to you than I do?" she asked.

George Eldoras slowly raised his face, and its passionate eyes were red and maddened. Slowly, as one beats his way back from delirium to sanity, he looked at her, first wonderingly and vaguely, then with gathering preceptions of life's variable proportions.

"Nothing means more to me than you," he said. "Nothing can mean as much."

"This is pirate gold," she told him gently. "It was filthy money until you cleaned it; but I think now it's purged. You stole it, as an agent, and you repaid it as a principal. These others were late in helping you, but their consciences are in torment. They must be in torment.

"Let them ease those consciences. Let them do their part."

"If"—he said brokenly, as one instinctive idea thrust itself persistently through his confusion, "if these people who pretend to help me were my real friends, they'd give me the names of those two men who ruined me."

"Am I your friend?" she questioned. "Do you trust me?"

"Great God, how can you ask that?"

"Then judge the others by me. I don't know who the two are, but I can guess. I think I could almost tell you—and I won't."

"Why?" Suddenly he sat up as though an electric bolt had shot through the welter of his bewildered agony and lessened its volume. "Why won't you?"

"Because nothing is to be gained by your knowing. Because you have one question before you now. You must choose between love—that's me—and hate—that's them."

Again he clasped his face in his hands and bent in the torturing torment of indecision.

"I was ready to marry you," she went on gently, "when marrying you meant sharing your danger. I'm still ready to marry you, when it means sharing your prosperity. Do you take back your offer?"

Suddenly he came to his feet, and his eyes were burning with a light that was no longer agonized. It was as if lightning had clarified the cloud-rack. Edith Page smiled her Mona Lisa smile.

"Will you marry me—now?" he demanded almost fiercely.

"Now," she answered, "on one condition. With the distinct understanding that after the ceremony I'm to be the boss."

"You're the boss now—and hereafter," he declared.

Edith Page turned toward the lawyer, who wheeled slowly to face her, in the manner of one bringing himself back out of immaterial ether.

"We have no answer to give you at this moment," she said, "but after the ceremoney we will have an answer. It will be this. You may tell the unnamed clients of your colleague, that we accept what we believe to be ours; the amount we have paid back and one-third of the increment that we have cleansed. We want nothing more." She paused, and a vivid color seemed to envelop her with a quickly flashing radiance.

"And now," she added demurely, "we need a best man and some one who knows how to get us married in short order."

"Do I get to kiss the bride?" demanded Albert Herkimer. "This seems to be an occasion on which no one does anything without stipulating terms and making difficulties."

Suddenly Edith Page, who had stood against the force of storm and uncertainty, burst into tears.

"You get to kiss her now, if you like," she declared with paradoxical laughter in her wet eyes.

Into the bedroom where P. B. Pettigrew sat alone entered Yates.

"I'm truly glad, sir," he said with dignity, "to learn that you feel so greatly improved this evening."

"Improved?" Pettigrew shot a vicious glance at the servant. "What gave you that absurd idea? I never felt worse."

"I'm sorry, sir. I gathered from what Mr. Barrows told me that you felt like a new man. He said you hadn't felt up to dressing before since he came into the house; that you'd insisted on wearing pajamas and a bathrobe. He said that tonight he thought you would like to put on your evening clothes, sir, and he sent me up to lay them out for you."

Pettigrew stared at the man for a long minute, and then he admitted grudgingly, "Well, after all, Yates, perhaps I do feel a shade improved. But not well, Yates; by no means well."

Barrows himself entered just as the servant was withdrawing, and he was in evening dress.

"Cheerio, old egg," he accosted, "how does it feel to be able to take the long, unfettered step? I understand you've decided to resume the ordinary habiliments of the man about town."

Pettigrew cast a chill glance at his visitor.

"Now," he suggested; "now that you've had your own infernal way in every diabolical respect, it's just possible that you may be so considerate as to ease my mind on a score which troubles me."

"I sincerely trust," declared Barrows genially, "that it may be possible to do so. What is your pleasure?"

"You might now give me back the confession which reposes in your safe-deposit vault. If you should die suddenly—you know—"

Barrows threw back his head and his laugh was hearty.

"I assure you, my dear Pro Bono, I should be delighted to comply. But, you know, you burned that confession."

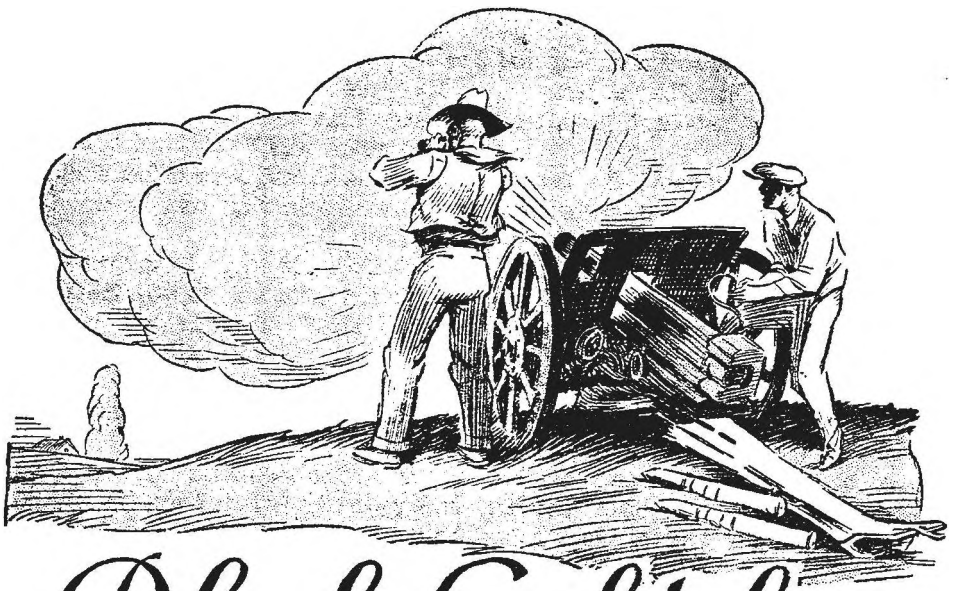
Pettigrew stared with bulging eyes.

Burned it!" he exclaimed. "I burned an imitation. You yourself assured me of that fact. The original was safely planted in a vault. It's the original I want."

"As to that, it was necessary to fib to you, Pro Bono, which is always regrettable," came the equable response; "but now that the comedy is played out I can tell you the truth. Had I admitted that you had destroyed the keystone to my arch, I should have been courting catastrophe. However, Pro Bono, such was the case.

"You were nearer to victory than you supposed that night. I had two envelopes in my pocket; original and copy. Our friend, the dummy-chucker, got the wrong one—and you burned it. I had to cover up my loss. That was the original copy, my friend; but it makes no difference now."

THE END.



Black Gold from Hannibal Reef

By ALBERT DORRINGTON

JIM CONOR stood in the shadow of the mine cage and stared at the horizon where the sandhills gaped like open wounds against the sky. In the south there were scrub gullies and clay pans and spear grass that stabbed like a knife. It was a picture of desolation, and Conor turned again to the deserted mine shaft, where eighty men had burrowed and blasted with gelignite only a few hours before.

Conor was ugly with the twisted muscles and arms of one in constant conflict with treacherous ground and caving tunnels. Beyond his uncouth appearance Conor possessed nothing more valuable than his weekly pay envelope at the Hannibal Reef mine, a ten by eight canvas tent, a billy can, a water bag, and an old iron teacup.

There was Margaret, his eighteen-year-old daughter, who worked in a cheap restaurant at Tranbar, eleven miles away. Margaret attended the hungry diggers in from Pine Creek, and kept the books for the restaurant's illiterate proprietor. From Conor's knowledge of men in the raw, Margaret's job was no Sunday school affair. He had promised that if ever fortune permitted him to win even a game of marbles he would send her to the city to live with decent people in a decent house.

The door of the office at the rear of the shaft opened softly. A tall, blond man with stooping shoulders and fever grilled eyes came out. He was spick and span to his highly polished tan shoes and clean cut flannels. For fifty seconds or more he considered the lonely, goblinlike figure of Conor standing near the shaft before speaking.

Conor felt the gaze until it ran down his spine and raised the temperature of his neck and brow.

"So the boss has cleared out, Jim!" he

said at last. " That telegram gave him the jumps. You've no notion, I suppose, what it was about?"

Conor eyed him curiously, but without fear. " The damned strike, of course! The committee meets to-day at Tranbar. He ought to have shown you the wire, anyway, Mr. Dean."

" Dandy " Dean had managed the Hannibal mine since it had come into the possession of its present owner, Silas Jerome. A question of an eight hour shift for the men had caused the sudden withdrawal of all the underground workers, including the boys and battery hands. Disregarding the " call out " of the strike committee, Conor had stuck to the mine. Despite his uncanny ugliness, he was often the victim of inspirations.

Only a couple of years before he had owned the Hannibal Reef and had failed to pay running expenses. Silas Jerome, an assayer from the Long Dip mine at Golden Eagle, had made him an offer for his rights. Conor had accepted gladly, and from the day of the transfer the Hannibal Reef had sent up three ounces of gold with every ton of stone taken from the workings. That was Conor's luck.

A year later, when the luck pursued Conor to the verge of starvation, Jerome offered him the vacant job of winchman at the Hannibal. It was accepted with avidity.

" I've a notion, Jim," Dandy went on thoughtfully, " that the boss won't be back for a while. So I'm going to talk if you'll chew on to this." He thrust a fragrant black cheroot into Conor's toil cramped fist.

Conor's amazement at the manager's sudden affability was almost dramatic. The Dandy was not a giver; he was a born breaker and taker when dealing with reefs and men.

" I'm getting old, Jim," he confided as he sat gingerly on the edge of an open sluice box. " I've had trench fever since that scrap in Turkey. Old Jerome is cutting in on my nerves. This is the first time in two years he's left the workings. Something's happened besides the strike!"

" Maybe," Conor said, and was silent.

The manager's eyes took in the deserted battery at the rear of the shaft, the silent furnace room, and the big iron safe that reposed in the far corner of his office. For several moments his slim hands played with his watch guard like a man fingering a rosary.

" Jim," he went on with a sudden intake of breath, " the best road in hell is one out of it. I've been studying the finger posts lately."

Conor stared at him with bleak suspicion. A few minutes before he had been thinking of his daughter Margaret, the girl with her mother's eyes and the bit of a mouth no bigger than a cherry. He sighed heavily. Jerome could afford to send his son Philip to a university, while Margaret washed dishes and fed the leery crowd at Dago Pete's restaurant.

" You was sayin' about that little home trail, Mr. Dean." He nodded abstractedly with the fumes of the black cheroot stealing into his blood. " Show me the way!"

Dandy Dean turned his slim thumb in the direction of the office safe. Then he looked at the hot sky, at the heat mirage that danced beyond the spear grass and the plains.

Mentally Jim Conor took a dive that carried him to the hard, flat bottom of the manager's soul. But he came to the surface like one who had touched a peri's cavern.

" You've got two thousand ounces in there!" he stated hoarsely. " It should have gone to the bank yesterday only for the strike."

Dean thumbed his rosary for a period of six heart beats.

" The gold rightly belongs to you, Jim," he said at last. " Jerome caught you. He gave you a handful of dollars for a mine he knew to be worth a million. While he owns the town you may roost with the snakes and centipedes. While his son is filling up with the pride and culture of an expensive school, your clean minded little girl is picking up slush and slang in a dago cook house."

Conor twisted his iron shod heel like a man under the lash. His eyes blazed dully. " Get on with it!" he answered hoarsely.

Dean walked into the open and paused in the shadow of a rain rusted Turkish cannon the mine battalion had brought home from Mesopotamia. The captured piece had been dragged from the rail head and had reposed for years on Hannibal Hill as a symbol of the heroic deeds of the men who belonged to the district. The miners claimed it. They had flung back the Moslem cavalry on the Tigris and the Euphrates. The gun belonged to the Hannibal!

Dean climbed slowly the sandy hummock called Hannibal Hill, and examined closely the breech locks of the gun. Conor followed his movements dully. Nearly every day Dean ascended the hill to pat and fool round the weapon, like a lonely boy humoring a big toy.

Conor choked back the speech that flowed in him. He wanted to know why the discussion was being held up. He wanted that thumb gesture toward the safe more intelligently defined. As a pilgrim in the Valley of Hades he was acutely interested in the way out. His feet and hands were raw with travail and heat.

Manager Dean sat on the gun brace and looked down at Conor, his tattered pants and broken boots.

"Jim," he declared sorrowfully, "that two thousand ounces will never go to Jerome's bank. Yet, I'm supposing if we carted or trucked it to the nearest port the police would be there to receive it."

"You'd get no farther than the next mountain!" Conor flung back in disgust. "In this country a man cannot beat his tracks. With a load of two thousand ounces ye need a horse or an automobile. But whichever way ye run with gold, the wireless or the telegraph operators announce the funeral. That's not the way home for me, Mr. Dean."

Dean sat very still, his anæmic face haggard in his poignant absorption of Conor's reply. He rose suddenly and spat away his cigar.

"Jim," he declared nervously, "I've got it! No automobile tracks, no horses or delivery checks at the railway! Just a clean get-away! How's the furnace?"

Conor glared at him.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Some heat and a few of those dud shells that came with the gun; there were some left after the last celebration of the victory of Bagdad. You remember the boys fired some off? There's a cartload stowed away in the explosives shed. The War Department were keen on the boys keeping up their artillery practice, as you know. The shed has five or six big practice shells."

Dean entered the furnace room and emptied half a sack of coke on to the fire. His questing eyes took in Conor's irresolute manner. Restraining himself, he rapped the iron smelter that hung over the furnace.

"We'll fill this with bar gold from the safe! By the time the gold is fluid I'll have unscrewed the nose caps from three of the shells. The cases are stuffed with cotton waste, no doubt, and there are no exploders or explosives inside. I served with Creegan's Battery on the Tigris, where the fever first got me. I know something about bad ammunition, let me tell you! We can run the melted gold into three of these empty shell cases and fire them from the gun. You get that, Conor?"

Conor gasped.

"And where in hell will they fall?" he demanded.

The manager laughed sourly as he adjusted the smelter over the draft driven furnace.

"I've studied the range, and can lay the gun, Jim. Barring miscalculations, the two gold shells should hit the back of the old shanty at White Lagoon. Three miles, seven hundred and fifty yards I make it. No one ever goes near the place. The nearest settler is old Sun Lee, the fisherman. He's two miles the other side of the lagoon."

Conor fumbled over the smelter, sullen browed and suspicious.

"I'm listenin', Mr. Dean; but for the love of Mike tell me the reason of this pandemonium to be, an' the shootin' away of good gold!"

Dean almost collapsed in his effort to remain calm under the stress of his emotions. Without Coner's aid he could do nothing.

" Jim," he said hoarsely, " if I shoot the gold to a place where we can find it, *it will have left the mine without putting a single trace on us.* Jerome will come pelting back shortly with an escort for the gold on the way to the bank. We'll sit back and say that the mine was held up in his absence by masked strikers. Get that! The police hate the strikers like poison. They're bound to believe us. And while they're tearing round Tranbar for clews we can run a cart over to White Lagoon and take the stuff to the coast. Man, it's as easy as buttering beans!"

Conor relaxed. " It's a dog's chance, but I'll take it!" he said at last. " Here goes!"

In the smoky flare of the mine furnace Conor and Dean worked like driven devils. At times Conor would dash to the crest of the hill and search the bush track for signs of Jerome. Not a dust wave disturbed the clear, sharp lines above the spear grass and the bunya pines. The silence and the desolation throbbed like twin nerves.

" Another hour and we're safe!" he predicted, stirring the glowing mass of gold in the smelter.

Dean had made the shell cases ready for the metal. Into these they poured the thick, softly bubbling gold, until the last ounce was scraped from the smelter.

In a little while the manager was able to cool the gold filled cases with buckets of water from the tank that fed the mine engines. Clouds of steam filled the furnace room. The job of fitting the cases to the cartridges was the most difficult of all.

Conor's patience and readiness to assist revealed the sudden lust for riches which had come upon him. All his life he had burrowed for gold, only to have it snatched away by others. But now in this lonely haunt of wild dogs and carrion birds he had found the room of Midas!

II.

THE North Queensland sun had dipped beyond the ranges. Already the bats were fluttering in and out of the dusky precincts of the mine. Dean was kneeling beside the projectiles, an open tin of black varnish beside him. With a stiff brush he laid on a thick coat over the noses and bodies of the shells until they resembled polished iron.

" Black gold, Conor, if that Chinaman happens to spot them," Dean chuckled as he prepared to fire. " Black gold if the strike gang or one of those dog trappers kick their shins against them. Steady now!"

Conor mopped his hot brow with a toil stained rag, the freckles of his gnarled face and stubby nose gleaming redly in the failing light. Away to the south the black canopy of the scrub shut out White Lagoon and the old shanty that was once the home of cattlemen and squatters.

With his field glasses searching the spot Dean picked out the local landmarks. " I bet my share of the loot that I hit that big sand heap back of the shanty roof!" he announced in a hoarse undertone.

With straining arms and muscles they drove the first shell into the gun breech and locked it.

" Stand away!" Dean commanded the slack jawed Conor.

A dull, blinding roar followed his warning as the gold shell tore from the throat of the gun.

Dean's straining eyes sought to follow the flight of the projectile. Conor, with the glasses, saw a cloud of dust leap from the open ground at the back of the shanty.

Dean laughed jubilantly. " I guess that is as fast as most money travels. Roll up that other one, Jim."

Flocks of parrakeets and magpies rose screaming from the trees at sound of the explosion. Conor struggled with the two blackened shells, swinging one into the open breech while Dean stood by.

" Be jabbers, I feel like a child liftin' a hod of bricks!" he gasped. " Time was when I could—"

Dean spun on his heel. The second shell sped after the first, while the thunderous vibration seemed to shake the mine to its timbers. The smoke cleared and found Conor staring with a hanging jaw in the direction of Tranbar.

" Some one is coming!" he snapped. " Horses and men!"

Dimly across the darkening plain they made out the polished points of bits and carbines, three or four heading straight for the mine.

"Back to the gun!" Dean shouted. "That damned third shell!"

Conor saw in a flash that if the visiting troopers discovered the unfired shell the whole story might be revealed. No one could guess what they were after.

In a trice they had slipped the gold projectile into the breech. With a shaking hand Dean snapped it shut and fired. The smoke blew across the shaking mine, while stones and rocks fell away from the hillside under the fierce vibration.

Dean retired hurriedly to his office to wash his face and hands. With a pocket comb he trimmed his hair carefully before a mirror in the wall. Then he took a spotted tie from a drawer, together with a clean collar. Not for nothing had men christened him the Dandy. When danger threatened in the shape of polished steel and the officers of the law, Dean turned instinctively to bright linen and a cheerful exterior.

"Remember the strikers have been here, Jim!" he instructed Conor. "Stick to that story. We fired one or two blank shells to attract the police. Let's tramp round a bit before they arrive and mix up the tracks. But stick to the story I tell!"

Seated by the flare of the furnace fire they awaited the coming of the troopers. In the darkness they arrived, filling the gullies and hillsides with the clatter of their voices. They were four in number, and to Conor's infinite amazement and relief Jerome was not with them.

Three troopers remained near the mine shaft while the sergeant stepped into the furnace room with a brief word of greeting. Dean stood up, his cigar case held out.

"I'm expecting Mr. Jerome," he said curtly. "I see he's not with you?"

The sergeant drew breath as he gave Conor a sharp side glance. Then he addressed Dean.

"I'm sorry to report," he began, his glance still wandering in the old man's direction, "that Mr. Jerome has met with a fatal accident on his way to Tranbar. His horse shied in the ranges and threw him into a deep cutting. One of my men found him dead!"

Conor stifled his cry of amazement. Dean's frozen glance steadied him.

"That's bad news for the Hannibal!" the manager answered sorrowfully. "A good man gone before his time!"

The sergeant nodded and held his ungloved hand over the furnace thoughtfully. The night had come up with a nipping wind from the hills, and the flare of the hurricane lamp on the wall made ghostly shadows on the warm, sandy floor.

"What was the gunfire a while back?" he demanded with a shrewd survey of the well groomed manager.

Dean lit a cheroot and held another to his questioner. His lightning brain had to reconstruct the story he had planned with Conor. Jerome's death had made things easier. The sergeant knew nothing or everything. Dean spoke with scarcely a tremor in his voice.

"With all respect to the dead, sergeant, I have always felt the danger of having a pile of useless ammunition in the vicinity of my batteries. This is a time of strikes. A dangerous or vindictive man, coming here at night, might easily wreck the workings with a shell cartridge from the shed at the back. It was asking for trouble. So I took it upon myself to fire a few of them away just now, and if it's no offense I'll burn away the rest in the course of the week!"

"Quite right!" the sergeant agreed. "No good ever came of storing old war stuff in a place like this."

Conor breathed easier as he took a huge can from a nail in the wall and prepared to make some coffee. Imperceptibly the sergeant drew near him, bending low to whisper a few words.

"I have to tell you, Mr. Conor, that your daughter, Margaret, completed a runaway marriage with Mr. Jerome's son, Philip, early this morning! A bit unfortunate," he added in an undertone, "after what happened to the old man! Of course Philip doesn't know yet!"

Conor leaned heavily against the furnace

for a moment, then straightened his shaking limbs.

"Let it go no further, sergeant!" he begged in a hoarse whisper. "For the love of God, keep it from Dean!"

The sergeant nodded shrewdly as he turned casually to the manager. "We'll be moving back to Tranbar," he said slowly. Then, as if prompted by a signal from one of the troopers standing outside, added: "By the way, Mr. Dean, there was a clean-up at this mine, just before the strikers left, two thousand ounces, according to report. Is it advisable to keep it here in view of the strikers preparing to give trouble?"

Dean was on his guard now; his answer came with certainty and conviction.

"You may take it from me, sergeant, that Mr. Jerome saw the gold leave here before he quitted the mine!"

"Who conveyed it?" The sergeant reentered the furnace room as though unwilling to leave the warmth. He stood in the red glow, an iron gray veteran with lynx eyes. Not for an instant did his steely glance leave Dean.

"The gold left here in three boxes, sergeant. For safety Mr. Jerome and myself labeled the boxes 'Zinc.' It went to the bank carrying those labels. Mr. Jerome asked me to go with the van to save the expense of a police escort!"

The sergeant smiled grimly. "The boss was keen on saving money," he said. "Anyhow, his lawyers will be here shortly, no doubt, to look into his affairs. His son, Mr. Philip, bears a good name among the strikers. They're likely to come to terms with him now!"

Nodding briefly to Conor the sergeant passed from the building, and a few moments later had taken the track to Tranbar, followed by his men.

Conor understood now the reason of Jerome's hasty departure from the mine. It was the news of his son's marriage with Margaret that flung him into the saddle and sent him pell-mell over the ranges to his undoing.

"The Lord forgive me for what I have done!" he muttered with the coffee can gripped in his shaking hand.

Dean was silent and introspective. His brain probed and analyzed the situation with the skill of an attorney. His wandering glance had taken in the sergeant's confidential attitude toward Conor; he had read to a syllable the lip movement which had apprised the old man of his daughter's marriage with Philip Jerome.

For a while he was content to watch Conor moving about the furnace house. He noted the old man's slow movements as he drew some bread from a stone jar in the corner.

Subconsciously aware of his sullen glances Conor looked up slowly. "What's up, Dean? Have some grub? This coffee is not bad," he found voice to say.

A sallow smile wrinkled the manager's cheeks. His digestion was not equal to the sour baked bread and moldy bacon that were Conor's daily portion.

"I'll have some in a while, Jim. I'm worried about those troopers. Tell me what the sergeant whispered over the furnace. I've known him for a year, but he never yet whispered in my ear, the old fox!" Dean yawned like a man weary of the day's work.

Conor batted his eyes and threw some bacon scraps into the furnace before replying. "It was to tell me not to leave the Hannibal until Jerome's people took it over!"

Conor rolled a cigarette from some tobacco scraps in his pocket. Once more he placed the coffee can over the furnace. A dingo pack flutted in the ranges; the whirr and rush of the flying foxes outside seemed to intensify the solitude of the night.

Dean stared dreamfully into the furnace at the slow dying embers, while his brain grew sharp as the blade of a matador.

"Of course you'll stay on here, Jim," he declared with a sudden softening of the voice. "Those strikers are a rough lot. There's Andy Heenan, Eddy the Snitch, and that wild man, McGowan! When they hear of the boss's death they'll head back here for the stuff they think's in the safe. Maybe I'm a bad guesser, Jim, but that's how I feel!"

Conor inclined his head slowly. "Maybe so," he argued. "But if the gold isn't there, what matter?"

"All the worse for us!" Dean frowned. "They're a hell house bunch, and if they get their hands on the rifles they've stacked away in the workings, they might make us find the stuff!"

Conor did not answer immediately. Being a surface man and not in the confidence of the strikers he was not aware that arms had been concealed in the workings below. He had suspected something of the kind, but had held his tongue.

"Why don't you answer, Jim?" the manager demanded with a show of impatience. "We can't take risks. I'll go down myself, now, and get them. We can't let that crowd boss the show!" He walked to the door of the cage that stood over the dark shaft.

Conor stirred uneasily. He did not like the idea of Dean handling loaded rifles. One would be enough to put him in possession of everything when he returned to the top. In his slow, uncertain way Conor felt that Dean was not to be trusted further. And since Margaret had become the wife of Philip Jerome he must play for safety.

"You're right, Dean," he agreed cheerfully. "It would be asking for trouble not to arm ourselves! I'll go down if you'll lower me! I'll switch on the lights below and bring a couple of guns on top. Look out for the brake grip! It faults when you drop the cage too quick!"

Conor stepped into the thing while Dean stood by and lowered him into the workings. The iron cage slid down the three hundred foot shaft with the speed of an elevator. The indicator showed the level reached, and Dean threw over the check with the skill of a winchman.

He stood for a moment staring down the dark shaft. Concerning Margaret Conor's marriage with the son of the dead mine owner, he felt sure that the sergent had not lied. The unexpected family alliance disturbed the manager. A few hours before he and Jim Conor had taken two thousand ounces of bar gold from old Skinflint Jerome. That gold was now the rightful property of Philip Jerome, the son-in-law of the man who had helped steal it!

Dean was no fool. The event was going to react on Conor. Sooner or later the old man's mind would grapple the situation.

Peering down the shaft Dean saw a faint light shoot across the drive. The bell at the top of the shaft rang violently. A tiny, crucified leer showed on Dean's lips. The violence of the ringing told him plainly that Conor could not find the rifles. He could feel the old man's rage in every clang of the electric bell hammer.

"Damn him!" he said under his breath. "He'd have sold me, anyhow!"

Dean slammed the iron lattice that shut in the dark shaft, and returned to the warmth of the furnace fire. Here he helped himself to some coffee and another cheroot. Jerome's people might not visit the Hannibal mine for days, yet to stay longer would be to invite trouble. The sergeant might not feel satisfied about the zinc label story; he could ring up the bank and demand their assurance. Also the boy Philip might happen along on his black steeplechaser. To stay was fatal!

The shaft bell continued to ring hysterically. Dean merely shrugged his narrow shoulders as he sipped the strong coffee. He could almost see Conor's big thumb gouging the bell socket, his red Irish face gleaming with perspiration and fury at the knowledge of being tricked into looking for rifles that were not in the mine!

Dandy Dean finished his coffee, then stepped to the shaft and struck the madly ringing bell with a hammer. The shattered pieces fell silently into darkness below.

Half an hour later Dean walked from the Hannibal mine across the gully that led through the wonga scrub to White Lagoon.

III.

EARLIER in the day a boy of twenty had ridden under the wonga vines that trailed in rope like bunches across the track to White Lagoon. Seated astride a small bay horse was a girl of eighteen. The echoes of their hoof beats struck back from the red walls of the ranges ahead. A merciless sun beat down from a sky of brass, sapping the life from the shrinking earth and trees.

"This landscape reminds me of a gnat's birthplace I once saw at a Christmas pantomime, Margo!" the youth called to his companion. "It's something fierce!"

Margo laughed as she cantered closer. "I can smell the lagoon, Phil, and that palm tree veranda back of the old squatter's shanty. It's a dream hut. Wait, dear, till you've seen the black geese planing that blue opal stretch. I've got the wool wads for your ears when the pinky parrots wake up in the morning!"

"Any hippopotami?" Phil mocked, beating the flies from his sun blistered face.

"Don't cheapen my paradise with your low comedy stuff!" Margo reprimanded seriously. "I can be happy without hippos. I'll show you lyre birds that were hatched in heaven, Phil! There are black swans and emus on the sand bars. Only one man goes near the place, old Sun Lee, the fisherman!"

Margo had eyes that twinkled like blue cornflowers against her sun honeyed complexion and wheat red hair. The wheat red hair belonged to the land of opalescent ranges and shimmering fire clays. She spoke with the sun in her face, with the warmth of the forest in her young blood. The boy brooded in his saddle. Margo's voice killed the rawness of midday and played on his senses like a violin.

"If dad sets the police after us, Margo, the lyre bird haven won't shelter us for long!" Phil Jerome voiced the thought that had plagued him for hours past.

"Forget the law, Phil! Your dad can leave his money to the Chinese missions. Let it go at that! If you can't get a job in a hurry I know where they want a hotel manageress right now! This side of your face isn't smiling, dear?"

They came to a fork in the narrow bush track, and without words Margo plunged down an old cattle pad that brought them to a sapphire breasted lagoon, alive with teal and green throated pigmy geese. A dense forest of bunya pines and saw-toothed ranges shut it from the south. On the eastern and western exposures stretched the eternal spear grass and claypans.

Philip Jerome pulled up smartly as Margo jumped to the ground and hitched her mount to a post at the rear of a tiny log shanty. The place smelt of boronia and pagoda incense. Into this veranda sheltered abode they plunged with the curiosity of children at a bazaar. The two rooms were clean swept and garnished with newly cut flowers. The furniture was of plain oak, the carpets beaten until the ruby rosebuds of the pattern gleamed.

"The hands of old Sun Lee never sleep!" Margo cried. "He's as clean as ivory and as civil as silk! Tell me, dear, why bad white men belittle the chinks?"

"They only see them in the poppy dives, kid. This celestial lyre bird of yours shall attach himself to our person if my wad holds out!"

"Forget the wad!" Margo warned. "And the fact that you're just from school. I've been on an eating-house pay sheet for two years. I've saved money while I passed the pickles and the doughnuts at Dago Pete's. I'll tell you something else," she confided, peeping into the small pantry of the toy living room; "I bought this place on the installment plan!"

"You bought it!" Phil rocked with laughter. "Gee! How much?"

"Never mind the price. It was government land. I got the option from Mr. Jeeves, in the Survey Department. He advised me to acquire it. I used to ride over here when things were quiet at Pete's. Now it's mine!"

Margo ran in and out from veranda to kitchen in an ecstasy of girlish delight. Phil hunted for matches and lit the oil stove beneath the patent cooker. There were eggs and cream and coffee, together with a big basket of fruit left by Sun Lee on the dresser.

The air cooled toward evening; the flaring, red eyed sun was caught in the icy bosom of the ranges. A fragrant hush fell over the cloudlike face of the lagoon. Phil was standing at the door, watching the horses feeding in the lush blue grass. He turned to Margo suddenly, a half uttered word on his lips.

A dull, earth shaking roar seemed to split the hills. In the gathering dusk he saw a blade of fire lick the northern sky. A yelping tornado of sounds hurtled above his head. The shanty rocked as though a trolley car had ripped by. Then something fell a hundred feet away with the impact of an avalanche.

Phil staggered back from the blinding shower of earth and stones that filled the air. Margo blanched and saved herself from falling.

"That's gunfire!" Phil declared. "Some one at the Hannibal fooling with that Turkish bow-wow. I'll swear a shell fell hereabouts!"

He turned again to the door and paused. Another trolley-like roar overhead, followed by a far off boom, rocked the shanty like a wind blast. Again the earth heaved and quaked, spurting gravel and rocks almost to the tree tops.

"We are being bombarded, kid!" He slammed the door hastily to excuse the shower of grit and pebbles. A boyish anger swept him at the thought of the malicious spirits who found time to fool with a piece of artillery.

IV.

A DEATHLIKE silence followed, with here and there the low screams of water fowl scattering across the lagoon. Darkness had come between the gunshots. Margo crouched in a low chair, hands over her ears, but only half afraid.

"If you'll tell me what it's about, Phil," she said, without daring to look up, "I won't ask you to eat those doughnuts I threw together a while back!"

The gunfire had ceased, and after mature consideration Phil ventured to light the lamp that stood on the kitchen table. "You bet that Turkish metal flinger will get fired on the scrap heap to-morrow!" he promised between his clenched teeth. "And maybe the lazy hands will hunt another job!"

"Dad wouldn't shoot it off!" Margo retorted. "The only noise he ever makes is when the mine whistle blows. I wonder who it was?"

Phil stepped out into the wonder of the violet night. The moon had risen above the pines and loomed like a big breadfruit over the mirror of the lagoon. Margo clung to Phil's arm, her soft hair whipping his shoulder like wheat in the wind.

Fifty feet from the shanty, in a chasm of uprooted earth and tree branches, they came upon a black, cone-shaped object lying in the sand. Phil stooped and examined it gingerly before speaking. "A dud shell, Margo, or we'd have wakened in the real home of your lyre birds!"

Margo eyed the black-snouted projectile suspiciously. "What's a dud shell, Phil?"

"One that doesn't explode. Sometimes a fool in his wisdom hits one with a hammer or stone, and the dud thing wakes up and completes its commission. Fondle a cobra, but don't stroke that accursed thing!" he warned her.

They turned back to the shanty, while Phil halted an instant to con the dark outline of the old Hannibal mine, piled against the moonlit sky.

"Funny how all my father's money came from that dump up there, kid! Your dad's luck was out when he sold! I feel Jim's position more than you think, Margo!" he added earnestly. "Maybe the day will come when we'll offer him some real help. He never had a fighting chance!"

Margo squeezed his hand. "Poor dad! He was always chasing the chickens when the burglars were at the cash register! Yet, dear, I sometimes thing he was lucky to hold his job at the Hannibal! I think your father acted better than most bosses under the circumstances."

"Dandy Dean runs the show," Phil commented. "We disliked each other at sight. That's one reason why I keep away from the Hannibal!"

The oil lamp glowed in the old bush shanty, casting a spirit of hominess and cheer in that wilderness of speargrass and jungle. The yelping of wild dogs drew nearer, and in a little while they heard the clatter of stampeding hoofs on the range slopes.

Phil looked up uneasily and his eye fell on his rifle slung above the mantelpiece. "There's a dingo pack hunting buffaloes!" he told the listening Margo. "The wild dogs often pick up a lame bull. If I went out now I'd get a shot for sure!"

Margo's eyes danced maliciously. "If ever I worry about buffaloes, Phil, it won't be on my honeymoon! I'm just wondering whether those ginks at the Hannibal are through with the shooting?"

Phil sighed as he drew nearer the chair

in which she sat. The thunder of hoofs died away in the west, and the night had grown still as the face of a sleeping child.

V.

DANDY DEAN thrust aside the wonga vines as he came to the fork in the road. The turn brought him abruptly almost into the lamp halo that surrounded the shanty. Beyond the latter lay the white, shimmering lagoon, with Sun Lee's broad beamed fishing boat lying upturned on the bank.

It was the lamp halo around the shanty window that filled the mine manager with a fighting panic, a dry-throated rage at finding some one in possession of the coveted shelter.

"Who was it?" The upturned boat suggested the possibility of the Chinaman's presence in the shanty. Dean walked with panther softness toward the window. In the shift of an eye he saw Margo reading to Philip Jerome from a book held under the lamp.

It was not jealousy that flung the bitter oath from his lips. At Dago Pete's he had often paused to joke with the blond beauty of Tranbar. He was ready to envy the bandit or outlaw who would fling her across his saddle and eat lead in the get-away. Against Philip Jerome he bore no grievance for stealing Margo from the crowd of cattle kings and mine owners at Tranbar. But to have Margo and Phil at White Lagoon, spooning and playing the honeymoon stunt, filled him with liquid spleen. Those shells!

He retreated stealthily, his feet sinking in the soft sand, blown by the tropic gales of centuries from claypans and hogback ranges. In the dizzy moonglow he came upon the chasm of uprooted earth made by the first projectile. His eyes blinked and narrowed as he detected Margo's tiny sandal prints in the earth. He saw where Phil had stooped near the shell. Fifty yards away was the second black snout, upturned in the moonlight. Farther off, on the edge of the lagoon lay the third projectile, a crushed and battered object after striking surface rock.

Dean threw himself to the ground and tried to think speedily.

It wanted six hours at most till daybreak. He could get the three shells into the Chinaman's boat and pull away to Pera Head, at the lagoon entrance, five miles distant. There he could cover the shells with sand and hire a cart that would take him to the coast, half a day's journey away. Schooners were plentiful. New Guinea, Borneo would be good enough for a while. Phil Jerome had stolen Margo. He would take the gold!

The seven-mile walk from the Hannibal had sapped his energies after the stiff evening's work in the furnace room. Very slowly and cautiously he approached the shell nearest the shanty. Stooping, he tried to lift it, and the effort toppled him over. He swore under his breath as he drew a strong rope from his coat pocket. Running a noose round the base of the shell he lay forward with the rope over his shoulder and hauled.

The slope in the ground toward the lagoon eased the strain. The impact of the soft metal against stones had flattened and warped the projectile and prevented the easier method of rolling.

Foot by foot he humored and steered the thing until it lay a few yards from the upturned boat. Quickly Dean shoved the ancient craft into the water, and then, working the shell between his knees he levered it gently onto the thwarts.

He felt easier now. The scheme after all was not beyond accomplishment. He hurried forward to the earth heap where the second shell lay.

Margo's voice sounded unpleasantly near as she read to Phil by the lamp glow. The moon had dipped over the jungle line. In another hour he would be groping in the black dark.

The second projectile had not suffered the flattening impact of the first. But there was no slope to help, and Dean felt the rope chafe and cut through his cotton jacket as he strained forward. The skin of his shoulder grew raw. He halted halfway to the boat and fastened the rope around his waist. It was easier and less painful.

A grunt of sheer joy escaped him as he fell forward, both hands gripping the boat.

He rested with his arms on the gunwale like one who had crossed the floor of Tophet. One more effort and the wine and pleasures of far-off cities were his. He could easily translate the gold, at some Chinese bank in Rangoon or Macassar, into American dollars or sterling.

Using his knees with more skill, he lowered the gold shell into the boat with less effort. He could have kissed the crazy old boat that had become his argosy! Just one more!

He half crawled to the third projectile, lying on the hard floor near the lagoon. A close inspection showed the result of the terrific impact. The soft gold nose had mushroomed against the rock, the body had splayed like the feelers of an octopus. In the dark one might have mistaken it for some loathsome sea reptile.

Dean braced himself and hauled. The thing moved an inch or so. Digging his toes into the hard ground, he flung forward, gasping and choking with the effort.

"Damn the gold! I once called it the sinews of God! It's blood—blood made hard and heavy!"

His heart galloped; his brain reeled sick and dizzy as he fell to the ground.

The door of the shanty opened quickly. Phil appeared in the sudden light, rifle in hand, his eyes scanning the lagoon edge.

"I'll swear something fell!" he called softly to Margo. "A man's voice, too!"

Dean lay breathing like an otter in the semi-darkness; he was flabby, wet with perspiration and the heavy dew. The shanty door closed with a bang. He heard the sound of a key in the lock.

Struggling to his feet he strained on the rope like a sledge hound, teeth snapping, eyes bulging with the remorseless demands on his fast ebbing strength.

He rested and hauled—hauled and cursed the sinuous, devil-clawed mass. His burning feet and hands reached the boat. He gazed with sweat-scoured eyes at the sky and saw that the dawn was at hand. One more effort!

With nerves and muscles screaming at this last call he slithered the burden of gold into the boat. Crawling in after it he lay for a while on the thwarts, unable to reach the oars that lay beside him. He felt safe for a time, and became dizzily conscious that the boat was drifting from the shore, carrying him from the shanty and Philip Jerome's far-seeing eyes.

The air grew chill, a sign of the dawn's coming. One by one he watched the stars fade until the first crystal streaks showed in the far east. It was time to be doing!

He sat up with an effort, and the movement produced a curious wheezing sound under his feet. He had heard a similar cry once in the rotten timbers of a mine, just before it caved and swallowed men by the score. Just here he noticed that the rope attached to the projectile was still fastened to his waist.

Dropping the oars, his fingers sought the knot at his side. Then he heard the voice of the lagoon beneath him, felt the cold spurt of water that leaped between his knees and ran foaming, swirling under the seat and around his waist. It was then the bottom of the musty old craft slid from his foothold, leaving him gripping the sides with lunatic strength.

A suppressed howl escaped him, the soul wail of the trapped eagle with its talons in the flood. A soft plunging sound reached him as the first mass of gold fell through the void. Dean was touched by the lightning of his fate.

A weight like that of a devouring lion tore at his waist as the crab-clawed shell followed the others. He clung to the fast-sinking sides of the wabbling craft. He dared not let go even to unhitch the accursed rope that girdled him to the sinking metal!

With the weight of the octopus gold dragging him to the strangling mud of the lagoon, the lightning in his mind showed the crooked face of old Conor shouting, praying at the bottom of the Hannibal shaft!

All his life the Dandy had lived in fear and cowardice the life of one whose squeal is heard before the blow arrives. Yet when the shell grip laid him by the loins his teeth snapped over the yell of fear on his lips.

The courage denied him in life came with the last breath when the claws of gold drew him down and down.

In the white light of the tropic dawn a pair of oars and some pieces of Sun Lee's fishing boat drifted idly out toward Pera Head.

VI.

PHIL and Margo breakfasted early. Their happy laughter was heard above the cheeping of the sun birds sweeping over the lagoon. Flights of black duck and wonga pigeons crossed the forest line.

Mr. Sun Lee, trepang fisher on the outer reefs of Pera Head, hobbled unsteadily to the shanty door. In his Mongolian eyes lurked the sharp misery of one who has lost a boat.

At the shanty door Margo met him with a beaming face. "No flowers, Sun Lee: no fruit from your garden? Woe is me!" she cried in pretended misery.

Sun Lee made a single gesture in the direction of the lagoon, where the two oars and pieces of the boat drifted. "Missa Dean flom Hannibal mine come heah las' ni' and sinkee my boat! Woe is me too! Allee my livin' gone. One boat costee two hundled dollar!"

Phil leaned from the shanty door, some rags and a half cleaned rifle in his hands. "This woe stuff, Mr. Lee? What brought Dean here?" he inquired guardedly.

Sun Lee threw up his hands despairingly, and in a wailing monotone explained that he had seen the mine manager hauling the heavy projectiles across the beach. Since the strange gun noises, earlier in the afternoon, Sun Lee had kept to the shelter of his hut, not daring to venture abroad. But in the moonlight he had observed Dean and the tragic results which had followed the piling of the shells into the unstable craft.

The mystery of Dean's operations puzzled Phil. No sane man would spend a night hauling and dragging worthless pieces of brass and iron from the distant scrub to a boat, he argued. The Dandy was too careful of his health and his person to waste time on such profitless labor. Yet, in view of the senseless firing of the Turkish weapon, it looked as if the mine manager had become mentally afflicted.

At midday the sergeant rode in from the Hannibal accompanied by a couple of troopers. He had discovered Jim Conor at the bottom of the shaft and had hauled him up in the cage apparently none the worse for his experience.

The sergeant broke the news of Silas Jerome's death to Philip. "These accidents will happen," he admitted sorrowfully. "Tranbar will feel his loss, sir! There is another matter I must mention," he went on in a lower voice. "A matter of two thousand ounces of gold, which Mr. Conor informed me had been shot out of the gun at the mine!"

"Shot from the old gun!" Phil almost shouted.

"The gold bars were melted down and run off into cones to fit the breech," the sergeant explained. "Curiously enough the gun was sighted and laid for the shells to fall hereabouts."

Phil glanced swiftly at his young wife before he turned to the sergeant and related what the Chinaman had told them. "The Chink says that the boat sank with the weight of the shells!" he added finally.

"No wonder, if he trusted to Lee's old fish basket to carry two thousand ounces of solid metal!" the sergeant grunted. Followed by Phil and the troopers he walked to the edge of the lagoon and ran his binoculars over the spot where the boat had foundered.

"Funny he didn't swim ashore," the sergeant commented. "Dean was a regular water spaniel, too. Anyway we'll drag for him at once and give him Christian burial."

Phil and Margo returned to Tranbar that afternoon. The troopers remained at White Lagoon to recover the shells and the body of the mine manager. The rope around Dean's waist, and the heavy projectile attached, solved the nature of his end. The gold was returned to the mine.

Phil built a stone house at White Lagoon. Jim Conor constructed an automobile trail from Tranbar to the house. It was hewn and blasted through the ranges and valleys. They called it Conor's Penance Track. But it gladdened the hearts of Margo and Phil as they drove home in the unutterable fragrance of the tropic nights.

The Circus Flea

By JIM TULLY

IT had been Eddie Adair's first workout since his return from New York, where he had won three fights in Madison Square Garden.

He now sat with a gaudy bathrobe thrown across his shoulders. The muscles of his right arm bulged under the pink skin from where it seemed to have pushed the robe away.

Eddie Adair was the logical contender for the middleweight championship of the world. He was considered by many fight experts to be the greatest pugilist alive.

Silent Tim Ryan, his manager, was in a nervous mood. Tim was always nervous when an important match was pending. For a cablegram had recently been received from Australia to the effect that Jack Thomas, the middleweight champion, had been injured in an accident, and would be unable to enter the ring again.

He had presented his title to the winner of a match between Joe Bruce and Eddie Adair, his two most dangerous rivals.

Other trainers and fighters had deserted the gymnasium, and all was the remnant of confusion, as though a storm had whirled through the room.

A large towel, touched here and there with crimson, was stretched across a corner post. A set of boxing gloves lay crumpled upon the canvas floor of the ring.

Silent Tim talked constantly, sometimes to Eddie, and sometimes to himself. It was a habit he had acquired to relieve his mind of the strain of pulling managerial wires.

The fighting world had dubbed him "Silent" in irony.

"Listen, Eddie," he said, "why is a woman's mind like a circus flea?"

"Answer your own riddle," replied Eddie, whose mind was on other things. "Well, then," laughed Tim, "you never can tell what way it 'll jump."

"Huh!" grunted Eddie. "If you didn't know any more about fightin' than you do about women, I'd have to get another manager."

"Oh, I don't know," was Tim's comeback. "I know a couple of things. I know that Mary Boyle's loco over Joe Bruce. They tell me she prommed all over Los Angeles while we were in the East. It sure would be a joke if Bruce copped you on the jaw for the ten count, and then copped Mary over the heart. Huh? That bird's knocked out twelve guys in a row. Nobody thought he'd stop the Black Slasher in Frisco, but he knocked him cockeyed in fifty-two seconds. He's an ape from Barneyo, that baby. Hair on his chest a mile long. If he had a tail he could knock a lot of them fighters out with it alone."

Silent Tim glanced at Eddie to note the effect of his words.

But Eddie was oblivious of Tim's taunting. He was thinking of two girls he had known from childhood.

Mary Boyle was piquant and perverse. Her lips were as red as cherries in June, and her hair was as black as coal at midnight.

Nellie Dener's eyes were as blue as a California sky. She had the tint of red apples in cheeks that dimpled when she smiled. Her auburn hair shone like waves of ruby in the sun. The two girls had always been the two white statues on the rough street of Eddie's life.

"I'm sorry Joe Bruce ain't a heavyweight, then we wouldn't have to fight him," Tim was saying as, smiling, he saw the hard lines gather about Eddie's mouth, as his eyes narrowed and looked down at his hands.

Inordinately large they were, the knuckles resembling great chunks of pink and white gristle. Eddie's jaw was heavy and dented at the side, as though the chisel had slipped when shaping it out of stone. His lips were thin and tightly pressed over his mouth. They were the close-set lips of a man who fights till he dies. The shoulders were stooped slightly, and broad and powerful.

In nearly two hundred battles Adair had never been knocked down. Thomas, the champion, had avoided meeting him year after year.

Tim chattered on tauntingly. "You'd be champion of the world if it wasn't for Joe Bruce. But the best you kin get with the baby is a draw, and you've fought him seven times. And now he's coppin' Mary Boyle. Oh, well," Tim sighed, "Washington had his Waterlow. I'll never forgit that last fight in Hollywood when Bruce knocked you for a row of crooked apple trees."

"That's a damn lie, and you know it!" shouted Eddie. "I slipped."

Tim smiled to himself.

"Maybe so, maybe so, but we'd better be leavin' if we expect to git to the firemen's ball to-night."

They left the gymnasium presently, and arrived at the firemen's masquerade ball some time later.

The ball was the chief yearly social event east of Main Street. All types of humanity were there. Until the small hours of the morning an orchestra clanged fearful music. With hearts lighter than their heads the dancers glided over the uneven floor.

Everybody at the ball fraternized one with another like invited guests under the same roof.

Mary Boyle came with Joe Bruce. Nellie Dener was escorted by her father, who was chief of the fire department.

When Eddie Adair danced with Mary Boyle men and women stood against the wall and watched them with mute admiration.

Joe Bruce scowled at the two dancers. But Nellie Dener was in the arms of a dream. She could not remember when she had not loved Eddie. But it never occurred to her to be jealous of Mary. For, being one of the few thoroughbreds each race produces, she had never learned to whimper at the pain of things she knew were beyond her control.

When Mary and Eddie had finished dancing Nellie ran impulsively toward them. Joe Bruce followed her, and motioned Adair aside. Silent Tim hurried excitedly after the two fighters, while the crowd watched with open mouths.

"What's the game, Bruce?" asked Eddie.

"No game at all, leave Mary alone. See?"

"Go jump in the lake an' pull the water over your head," blurted Eddie as Bruce closed his right hand.

"Listen, men," broke in Tim, "this 'll never do. When you fellows fight, why don't the loser agree to let Mary alone.

You know what Longfellow said: 'To the victor belongs the boils!'"

"I'll agree if it's a finish fight," snarled Bruce.

"So will I," answered Eddie.

"Some fellow ought to take her from both of them," thought Tim. "They worry like two kids over her. Think I'll try to get her myself. If she'll fall for Bruce she will for me. I'm acorns about her, too. I went to school with her brother. That oughta help."

A voice shouted: "Telegram for Tim Ryan." A boy pushed his way through the crowd and handed Tim a yellow envelope. Tim tore it open and read:

> Have matched Adair and Bruce in finish fight. Tia Juana, Mexico. Afternoon of July 4. Purse sixty-forty. Guarantee sixty thousand and percentage of gate.
>
> (Signed) B. GROFERT.

The greatness of the chance dazed Silent Tim. The goal of eight years as Eddie's manager was printed on the yellow paper. He rubbed his forehead, while Adair and Bruce watched him. Turning to them he said: "Well, you're matched."

"We'll shake on that deal about Mary," suggested Bruce.

"Yes, do!" suggested Tim.

The men shook hands indifferently and separated.

The news spread quickly through the dance hall. The early morning papers carried it in headlines.

When Mary had gone with Joe Bruce, Tim Ryan fell into a brown study. "What kin the likes o' her see in the likes o' him?" he asked himself. "One time a guy found out all about women and went noodles for his pains. Women ain't for men to know. Ye must take 'em on faith. An' the less faith ye have the more ye can take."

As Tim Ryan was thinking, Nellie and her father walked over to where he stood with Eddie Adair.

"Remember, Eddie," said Nellie, "win or lose, you'll always be my champion, for—" The words were choked in a sob.

A wave of feeling came over Eddie Adair. A blurred circle of light danced before his eyes. Two girls stood in the circle. Before he could frame words, Nellie had bidden him good-by and was walking away with her father.

"Aye, Nellie," said the latter, "a woman's mind is quare, but a man's is quarer. He's like a kid wit' two sticks of candy an' he don't know which one to bite first. That's a man for ye. He never knows what he wants till he don't get it. An' when he gits what he wants then he don't want it."

The weeks glided quickly into summer, as the fight became the talk of nations.

Joe Bruce took up his training quarters in Tia Juana, where crowds flocked to watch him. They came away thoroughly convinced that no man could last long in front of such a bruiser.

A grizzled sporting editor watched him train with mute admiration. When he had finished he stepped up to him and said: "You'll win this time, Bruce."

"Sure, I'll win. It's a finish fight, an' I'll break his neck in the bargain!"

A staff of trainers and near-fighters danced attendance on him. Bruce had no manager. Brutal and dogmatic in everything, he would take advice from no man.

There were years of ring cunning stored in his bristling and badly shaped head. His chest was so covered with hair that it resembled a mattress. A woman's form was tattooed on it. He was one of the hardest hitters that had ever worn a pair of boxing gloves. His wrist was larger than the forearm of an average man. The fury of his blows had been known to split the stout leather of his own gloves.

The arena was built in a sun-baked field near Tia Juana. The little Mexican town took on the appearance of a place in which gold had been discovered. People flocked to it from many points of America and Mexico. The excitement of the coming battle made even the slowest Mexican step more quickly.

On the day of the great fight Tia Juana was bedecked with many colors. The one hundred and some odd miles between it and Los Angeles was filled with automobiles. They streamed into the town by the thousands and were parked in a great open space near the arena.

Saloon doors stood wide open. Cracked

and discordant music could be heard everywhere. Slot machines and faro wheels worked with feverish regularity.

Travelers from the States drank whisky at a dollar a glass, and beer at fifty cents. American bartenders, long out of work, were again called into professional service.

Girls, wearing white aprons which covered their sinuous figures, walked near the slot machines and supplied change in nickels and dimes and quarters for the men who wished to play them. Other alluring girls drank with the men at the bar. It was their task to induce men to spend money for liquor, the owner of the saloon giving them a percentage.

Between the arena and the automobile parking stand an army of thousands surged. There was no room for a machine to go through the main street. It was blocked with humans.

No breeze came from the Pacific, and the sultry sun rolled sullenly through the sky. The desert dust covered men, automobiles, and buildings with a white and yellowish color.

Eddie Adair made the journey to Mexico the morning of the fight. His powerful machine rushed over the smooth roads, while the motor purred like a great, lazy cat beneath the sun. Tim and Mary Boyle, and his trainers had gone on ahead. Nellie Dener had also preceded him, and now, save for his driver, he was alone in the car. He sat in the rear seat, as formidable a mass of brawn as was ever developed in the American ring.

There were silences in Eddie Adair that were mystifying. He now looked out upon the blue water of the Pacific with a weary expression on his face. There was a touch of the dreamer in his eyes. Perhaps it had been inherited from the long line of dead and gone Irish dreamers who had also fought as they dreamed.

The fact that he was to stand under a scorching sun with a nearly naked body and fight to a finish did not seem to concern him at all. He looked away from the Pacific and down at his gnarled hands. His close-set lips parted and he mumbled: " I'll finish him or die this time."

He saw a pretty girl in the red and white apparel of a clown. He felt her body near his as he whirled about the room with her. Why was everybody he knew so fond of Mary Boyle? He hoped she would be at the ringside. Was it possible that she loved Bruce, or Tim? Or, who the devil did she love? His close-set lips parted in a grin as he remembered that Tim had said a woman's mind was like a circus flea. He did not blame Tim for being in love with Mary. Who was it told him that Tim could talk a pawnbroker into paying twenty dollars for a dollar watch?

He pulled his yellow automobile cap over his eyes and lolled back in his seat. For the first time he thought seriously about Nellie Dener. He dozed under the sun, and awoke with a start. He dreamed that he heard the referee count ten over him, while Nellie's soft hand was on his forehead.

Then he tried to banish both Mary and Nellie from his mind.

The dust-covered car rolled through San Diego and turned into a narrow road that stretched like a wrinkled yellow ribbon across the sun-scorched country.

He passed the customs officials and was greeted courteously by them. An officer mumbled when he had gone: " Gawd, what a fight it 'll be! Wish I was off duty."

Eddie was greeted by Tim and taken to a room where he stretched himself upon a bed until an hour before the fight.

The last preliminary was hardly over when Bruce climbed into the ring. A second held an umbrella over him as he seated himself in a corner, completely oblivious of shouts from the audience. He stared down at the canvas floor wtih a fixed expression.

The great structure was roofless, and Bruce looked up at the sun. He saw for a moment a small, dark cloud glide across the face of it. He squinted as the cloud slipped away and allowed the hot sun to pour into the arena.

The excitement caused by Bruce's arrival had no sooner died down than another shout went up as Adair climbed into the ring. Cameras were turned toward the men, and newspaper reporters made ready to flash the news.

The seconds, the referee. and the announcer all stood about the ring.

Eddie Adair also glanced up at the sun, and then walked over to Bruce's corner and looked down at his taped hands.

"What's a matter, think I got knuckles on?" sneered Bruce. But Adair's tight lips did not move.

The gong clanged for silence as the men stood awaiting instructions. The sun was in such a position that it would be in the eyes of one of the men while he sat in the corner. They flipped a coin to see which man would have the corner with his back to it. Joe Bruce won the toss.

A red pasteboard box was thrown into the ring. Four yellow boxing gloves rolled on the floor. A second grabbed them up quickly.

Nellie Dener and Mary Boyle sat close down front. Their frail beauty was in direct contrast to the elemental scene about them.

A heavy man yelled through a large, black megaphone. His voice was drowned in the babel of many voices. He yelled louder and louder and at last was heard.

The gloves were quickly adjusted, and bathrobes were thrown off tanned and brawny shoulders. The men seated themselves while the announcer's voice rolled through the building.

"Ladies and gentlemen—Joe Bruce in this corner, and Eddie Adair in that," pointing toward Eddie. "The two best men in the world will fight to a finish for the middleweight championship."

There was shouting and whistling. The stamping of thousands of feet shook the frame structure. Then everybody climbed out of the ring except the two fighters and the referee, as the great gong clanged "Time!"

Silence followed as the men advanced slowly toward each other. Feinting, they both led, and watched for an opening. There followed an even more intense silence. Then their feet could be heard shuffling rapidly over the canvas. Bruce missed a left and right that shot past the spot where Adair's face had been a second before. He worked in close to Eddie, who pounded his kidney viciously with a long right. Each blow as it landed sounded like the explosion of a gun. There was a raw spot above Bruce's right kidney before the end of the round.

At the beginning of the second round both men advanced swiftly and set a terrible pace. They volleyed powerful left and right hooks to the face and body, and grunted as they clinched. As they broke away Bruce straightened Adair with an uppercut that rattled the teeth in his granite jaw. A man in the audience screamed: "At-a boy, Joe!" The words were no sooner uttered than Adair crouched low and leaped forward. Bruce set himself rigidly to meet the attack, and yellow gloves flashed past yellow gloves, as muscular bodies writhed and reeled under the burning sun.

They were in a desperate encounter in a neutral corner when the gong rang. Adair had started a blow which he had been unable to stop, and the momentum of it carried him several feet in the direction of his own corner.

At the beginning of the next round Bruce worked in close with two left and right blows to Adair's head. They sent Eddie reeling backward across the ring. Bruce followed the advantage like a tiger intent on its kill, but Adair, now against the ropes, met him with a straight left as rigid as a bar of iron. It jabbed Bruce's chin twice, and the long right whipped across like a piston rod, and Bruce fell forward with his head on Eddie's shoulder.

Adair stepped backward, and again his right crashed with the weight of his entire body behind it, while his left hand worked upward through Bruce's guard. It caught Bruce on the point of the chin, and the blood gushed from his teeth as he reeled backward with Eddie after him. The ropes stopped Bruce, and, fighting on instinct alone, he blocked the rushes of the furious Eddie until he gained his equilibrium. They stepped backward to measure each other, and, rushing forward in a whirl of desperation, their heads crashed together, and cut gashes over each of their eyes. They clinched, and wrestled about the ring. Then, loosening the tangle of their arms, they stood in the middle and fought as few men have ever fought before.

Screams rolled through the huge pine amphitheater as the epic tussle seemed like-

ly at any moment to end in a crimson climax. The blood dripped from the foreheads of the antagonists as they danced about the ring under the fiercely mauling pain. Bruce dodged low from a ripping right which Adair had started. It landed on top of his head. He blazed away at Eddie's unguarded stomach, but in an instant Eddie's left had worked its way downward to guard it, as he slammed five horrible rights upon Bruce's unprotected back.

"My God!" yelled a doctor at the ringside. "He'll break his spine!"

Bruce straightened up to get away from the smashing rights. He clinched with Adair, whose tight lips were seen to move. "You'll let her alone when I get through with you. She'll go to your funeral." His lips closed tightly as the bullet-headed Bruce slashed a hard right to his jaw.

They clinched again and swayed backward and forward near the ropes, like blood-covered giants wrestling on the edge of a precipice. As men lose speech in the presence of fury, the shouting of the mob died down to an inarticulate mumble. Silent Tim gripped a post to keep from sinking. The gong clanged loudly through the mumbling maelstrom of jumbled words. As the blood-covered fighters sank in their chairs a pent up sigh escaped from the spectators. They breathed freely once more.

At the opening of the next round the bearlike Bruce shuffled out and set himself for the tigerlike leap of Adair. It came. The latter's sun-tanned and water-glistening body literally flew across the ring. His soggy gloves lashed out in front of him. His wild dash into the certain arms of punishment was immense. Something glory-like enveloped these men who were out to win, or die in the attempt.

Bruce sidestepped, but as he did the agile Adair shifted his rush, and caught him squarely on the jaw. The great amphitheater became a punchbowl of silence, as Bruce's form crashed to the floor. The prostrate fighter lifted his knee at the count of four and rolled over on his side, as the desert sun shone in his eyes.

He rose at the count of nine. His face leered at Adair, who leaped again to the furious attack. He delivered a one-two punch, and Bruce crouched low and moved cautiously, in an attempt to even up the round. All of a sudden he smashed out with bloody gloves, and his attack brought down the house and crumpled Adair on the red-spotted canvas floor. He rolled about like a muscular statue animated with life. He rose weakly to his feet and stumbled forward toward Bruce, who was trying to measure him for the finish.

The gong sounded.

"He's gone; he's gone; he'll never come back. I saw Bruce pound Larey that way in Frisco," yelled a heavy man in a ringside seat.

A sea of faces looked down in pity on the stretched out form of Eddie Adair in his corner. Tears blended with powder on women's cheeks who sat near the ring.

Mary Boyle moved nervously as she said to Nellie:

"This is terrible! How long can it last?"

"Till Eddie wins, I hope," replied Nellie.

Eddie Adair's brain throbbed intensely in his head. The crude psychology of the prize ring had taught him the power of an undefeated mind. And now he was trying to make it do his bidding.

Silent Tim held a quarter of a lemon against Eddie's mouth. It bit into the lacerated gums and lips as he sucked it. Then Tim squeezed a sponge of ice water down his burning back.

The gong rang, and the unexpected happened.

Bruce was hardly out of his chair when the hurtling Adair was upon him. The science of boxing had gone the way of winds in the desert. Mumbled excitement filled the large bowl. It sounded like the moaning of the wind on a winter night.

There was no let up to the fusillade of blows which followed. The gong ended the most furious round of the fight.

For round after round each man faced the withering fire of yellow, cannonlike blows. One had a shade of victory, and then the other.

"The unlucky thirteenth," a man yelled. "Something 'll happen this time."

The whir of two airplanes could be heard.

They circled above the open inclosure in front of the sun, and their shadows fell upon the men in the ring. As the shadow slanted across the lurching bruisers, the eyes of Silent Tim looked upward. A wild and prolonged shout went up, and brought his eyes from the sun to the ring. Eddie Adair's hands had dropped to his sides as he reeled across the canvas with the perspiring and bloody form of Bruce after him.

In a trice Adair covered up and crouched low, so that all that could be seen of his face was the eyes that peered through his guard at the bruiser in front of him. His arms opened, he feinted, and Bruce walked into the uppercut that staggered him. He came back quickly and slammed two blows to Adair's heart, which would have stopped the organ of a weaker man. As they worked in close, Eddie's sledgelike right pounded Bruce's back. In the breakaway Eddie threw a vicious left to Bruce's jaw, and followed it with a terrible right that missed. Bruce's head sank on his breast, and he whaled away as though life and death were the issue.

Adair's head bent low, until it almost touched the bristly thatch of his antagonist. In this position they stood and sent blow after blow against steel ridged bodies with never a pause until the crowd stood on its feet in sheer mad fury and forgetfulness of everything but the fierce wild whirl of battle.

For the fraction of a second they were tangled in a clinch. Adair groaned, "Let go." And Bruce groaned, with blood streaming into his eyes, "Let go yourself." In the breakaway, a wild blow from Bruce caught Eddie on the jaw. He staggered, stumbled and recovered. He smashed his right through Bruce's open arms. Bruce stumbled forward, and Eddie stepped backward, so as to uppercut him before he fell.

Eddie missed the intended uppercut, but Bruce fell nevertheless, like a broken bowlder upon the floor. His jaw twisted with the pain as he rolled over on his back. His small eyes squinted at the Mexican sun. But the brain in his cone-shaped head was busy. He rolled over again in a mad effort to rise before the tenth up and down motion of the referee's hand.

Adair stood poised above him, a smeared red and white block of granite with the madness of victory in his eyes. The audience looked amazed as they saw the game Bruce rise to the issue of brawn that awaited him.

His bearlike arms clutched Adair and held him in an unbreakable vise. Eddie pitied him for a brief second, but that passed. His long arm crashed downward and downward until it seemed that the blows would shatter his antagonist to pieces. The half conscious but still wily Bruce knew that knockouts did not come to a man's back, and he endured the pain while his muddled brain cleared. A merciful gong ended the thirteenth round.

The hot sun slanted westward and shone in the eyes of the fighter who faced it. Each man brought his ring generalship into play by trying to maneuver his antagonist into a position facing the sun. When this happened the attack of the man with his back to the rays was furious.

Eddie feinted and sent a short uppercut to Bruce's solar plexus. Their heads clashed together again and opened the caustic closed wounds above their eyes. The blood rolled down their faces and glistened in the sunlight. An uppercut from Eddie whizzed through the air, missed Bruce's chin, and caught him on the point of the nose. His face twisted with awful pain as more blood spurted downward. Eddie then jabbed Bruce's sore nose viciously until it resembled a chunk of beefsteak plastered in the center of his face.

To protect his battered features, Bruce worked into a clinch. Eddie strained every muscle to keep him at a distance, but the bearlike bruiser bored in and held on.

The immense throng stretched itself. The faces rose all around like the white foam that breaks upon the sea. A stamping of feet was started somewhere in the crowd, and the great bowl-like structure shook and vibrated with the steady rhythm.

Twelve more torturous rounds passed under the blistering sun. They seemed like as many hours to the two fighters, neither of whom had gained a decided advantage.

The gong clanged for the twenty-fifth round, while the crawling sun moved farther westward. One-half of the structure was shaded now, but the rays from the sun still flooded the other half.

In the twenty-sixth round Bruce made the gigantic throng hysterical. Dashing from his chair like a mighty catapult blown by a mightier tornado, his crashing right caught Adair dead on the jaw, and he fell to the floor like a sledge-stricken ox. Women fainted, men screamed.

Nellie Dener yelled: "Eddie, Eddie, get up, get up!" Her auburn hair streamed over her face, and she brushed it nervously from her eyes. "Eddie, Eddie," she cried again, "get up!" She clinched her small hands until the ring on her finger tore the flesh.

Silent Tim squeezed his knuckles until they cracked.

Bruce stood, his knees bent forward, his bloody gloves closed, his battered nose dripping red, a figure of a man strong enough to defy the elements. The audience stood. It made a move to go. They felt that it was beyond the endurance of mortal man to withstand that blow and rise to face another one. But the broken muscular figure squirmed on the crimson canvas. It rose in a half-sitting position at the count of six, and dropped backward again.

It squirmed again desperately, and its stubborn brain thumped by instinct in its head. At last, with a mad lunge, it stood, a shaking mass of bruised, and blood glistening muscle at the count of ten. The gong pounded like a cracked and toneless bell.

Adair fell in a heap on the stool in his corner. Silent Tim leaned over him. "Gawd! What a man you are Eddie, what a man, what a man!" he mumbled. The seconds rubbed his tired muscles with vigor. His oaken heart beat faster and faster, as his great body responded to the last wild call of the brain that guided it.

"Gimme a nip, Tim," he asked.

Tim whisked a flask of brandy from his pocket, and Eddie's tight lips closed about it. The brandy burned his lacerated mouth like fire. But it made his brain and body tingle with new life.

Over in Bruce's corner a second was talking. "He's gone, Joe. Take a nip an' finish him. He can't stick the round out." And Bruce, too, drank brandy.

They rushed at each other in the twenty-seventh round, and the terrible impact of the blows could be heard across the building. They swayed against the ropes, and exchanged pile-driving and body-jarring blows relentlessly. As each man stepped backward and forward their gloves crisscrossed and swished like the lash of whips. They worked in close again and their ripping body blows traveled so fast it was impossible to count them.

For fifty seconds more the inhuman and barbarous bombardment kept up, until it seemed that both bodies would sink under the intense fury of the combat. They planted their legs rigidly on the floor, and their muscles crawled under the bruised and blood-streaked skins. Their heads bumped together again. Their great shoulders moved as if on hinges.

Eddie worked himself into a position that would have hurt a contortionist. He held his left hand low, with the hope of landing a deadly uppercut. It slashed upward once, but the wary Bruce blocked it. He followed it with a lightning right cross that traveled about eighteen inches behind the blocked uppercut. It caught Bruce on the jaw with a sickening thud. Blood and water squished from Adair's glove as the blow landed. Bruce shook for a second like an oak the lightning had crashed. His knees sagged. His eyes rolled in his head.

Adair lurched forward, and shot a right and left into empty space. Joe Brucce was sprawled on the floor. The referee counted ten. But Bruce did not hear. His tired head rested on a tired arm. He lay still, like death.

No movement was made. Not a word was spoken. Eddie Adair leaned over the shattered figure of Bruce in a pitiful attempt at helping him. Bruce's second rushed to him. "I hope you bring him to all right," said Eddie weakly.

"I'll bring him to all right. It 'll take more'n a man like you to kill Bruce!"

"I hope so," returned Adair as he stumbled to his corner.

The magnitude of the strain made Silent Tim as quiet for a moment as a man stricken dumb. The seconds worked over the new champion, while the crowd filed noisily out of the building.

In a short time the field, once black with machines, was yellow again.

Silent Tim crooned over the new middleweight champion, while Mary Boyle and Nellie Dener watched with tear-filled happy eyes.

"Well, Eddie," said Tim, "I don't suppose you'll want me to manage you no more. I did you a dirty trick yesterday. I married Mary Boyle."

Eddie was dazed for a moment as the surprising blow struck home. Nellie Dener noticed the look of pain in his face and hurried to him. "Eddie, boy," she said in a burst of sympathy, "I'm awfully sorry. I wish I could help you. Really, I do."

A great light came into the weary fighter's eyes as he turned to Tim. "Goin' to raise circus fleas, eh, Silent? Luck to you." His big hand clasped Nellie's. "You told me I'd be your champion, win or lose, Nellie. Is that still a go?"

"Now and forever," replied Nellie as she stepped closer to Eddie.

Mary Boyle Ryan looked surprised.

Silent Tim hummed a tune, the words of which were jumbled. They sounded somethink like:

"An' I learned about women from her, by jing,
An' I learned about women from her."

ʊ ʊ ʊ

OLDER AND WISER

WHEN I was poor and autoless
I warmly wooed Miss Frances,
And took her, when my purse allowed,
To matinées and dances.

But all in vain, her heart was cold,
For hand she gave me mitten,
And all my little gifts returned,
With every note I'd written.

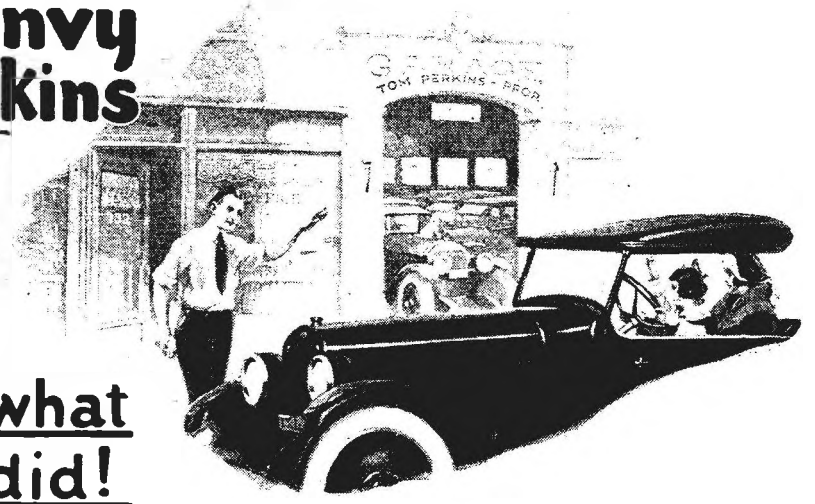
Some three years passed; an uncle died
And left me funds a-plenty;
I bought two very stylish cars,
And could have purchased twenty.

Then Frances penned a billet-doux
On stationery tasty,
And said she loved me after all,
Her former words were hasty.

"You know," she wrote, "how young I was,
One learns as life advances;"
I sent her missive back inscribed,
"I'm wiser, too, Miss Frances."

Philip Burroughs Strong.

Don't Envy Tom Perkins



-do what he did!

Tom Perkins liked the good things of life—he liked to attend the theatre; he liked to wear good clothes; he liked to travel on fast trains and live at good hotels. He *liked* all these—but that was as far as he got. The lack of money stood in his way.

His wife liked the good things of life too—she liked silk stockings and sealskin coats; she liked to live in a cozy little home of her own; she liked the things that make life worth living. She *liked* all these—but she had to depend on Tom to earn them for her.

Tom had done the best he could. He always had a job of one kind or another—and he always gave an honest day's work in return for an honest day's pay. What more could he do? Was it any fault of his that he could never earn more than just enough to buy himself and his family the bare necessities of life?

The turning point in Tom's career came quite unexpectedly. A boyhood playmate, who had lived in the same town several years before, came back one week-end for a visit and told our friend Tom what a great success he had made in the garage business as the result of taking the M. S. A. S. Home Study Course in Automobiles. Then and there Tom decided to investigate the possibilities in the automobile field himself—and he was greatly surprised at what he found.

A Wonderful Business

He found, among other things, that the automobile industry is the third largest business in the country today. He found that there are no less than twelve million cars and trucks in use in the United States and that the automobile factories were adding to this number at the rate of about ten thousand every day. He found that as the number of automobiles increased, more and more work was piling up for automobile mechanics to do. And, most important of all, so far as he was concerned, he found that the men who had trained themselves for this work were among the highest paid men in any line of industry.

Here, then, was a line of work that offered a real chance to get ahead in the world. There were jobs enough and to spare for all the men that the automobile training schools could turn out for years to come. And there was no chance of failure—unless people should some day stop driving cars, and he couldn't imagine anything like that happening.

It struck Tom that this was a good business to get into. Within two weeks he had enrolled in the M. S. A. S. Home Study Course and was spending his spare time evenings learning the automobile business—and it seemed only a short time until he had completed his training and had received his diploma.

$40 per Week to Start

This done, he went to the leading garage in the town, applied for a job, and got it at $40 a week, more than he had ever earned before. For the first time in his life he felt that he was really on the road to success.

At the end of a month, his pay was raised to $55 and, in another month, it was again raised—to $75 a week. Tom was truly getting up in the world.

That was three years ago. Today Tom is the owner of his own garage and has two mechanics working for him. Besides, he has secured the agency for Chevrolet cars and Willard Storage Batteries and has built up one of the leading auto electric service stations in his section of the country. He has won for himself the reputation of knowing his business—and, as a consequence, he gets not only the bulk of automobile repair work in his own town but also a great deal of work from car owners in neighboring towns where there are no first class garages.

Tom's earnings now average $600 a month from the garage's repair work—and several times that amount from his sales of automobiles and batteries.

No Experience Necessary

But, you may say, Tom must have been an exceptional man—he must have known something about automobiles before he took the M. S. A. S. Study Course. Quite the contrary—he had had no experience at all in automobile work. In fact, he couldn't even drive an automobile at that time and, as he himself says, he didn't know the difference between a carburetor and a wheel-base—didn't even know a car had a wheelbase. The only difference between him and the other young fellows in his town who are still working at $15 to $25 a week is that Tom made a step to better himself. He got off the short ladder that he was trying to climb and got his foot on a tall ladder where there was room to do some real climbing.

Any young man can start climbing the automobile ladder that leads to money and success by doing just what Tom did. As soon as he heard about the big money-making opportunity in the automobile business, he wasted no time in investigating it.

Start Climbing Today

Do what Tom did—write today for particulars about the M. S. A. S. Home Study Course. All you have to do is fill out the coupon and mail it—and you will receive full information without charge.

The day that Tom first heard about the M. S. A. S. Home Study Course was the turning point in his life. This may be the turning point in yours—who knows? *Mail the coupon today!*

MICHIGAN STATE AUTOMOBILE SCHOOL
747 Auto Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

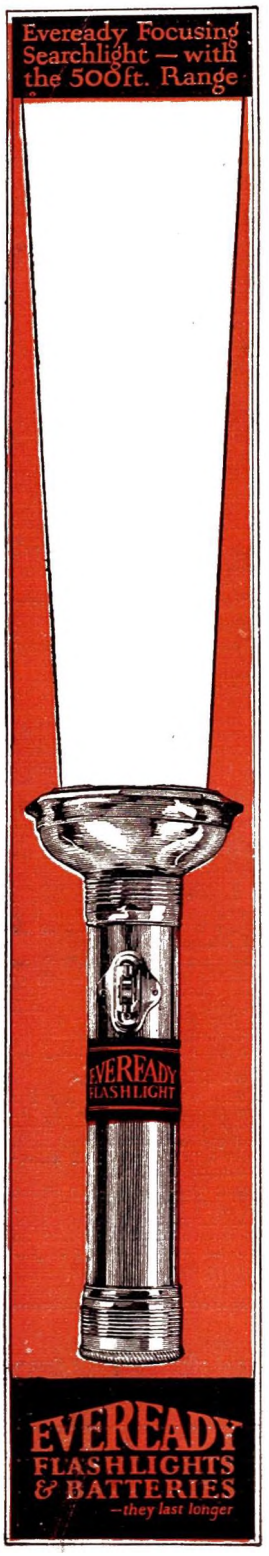
Without expense or obligation to me, please send Outline of your Home Study Course and tell me about men like Tom Perkins who have made a big success in life by becoming automobile experts.

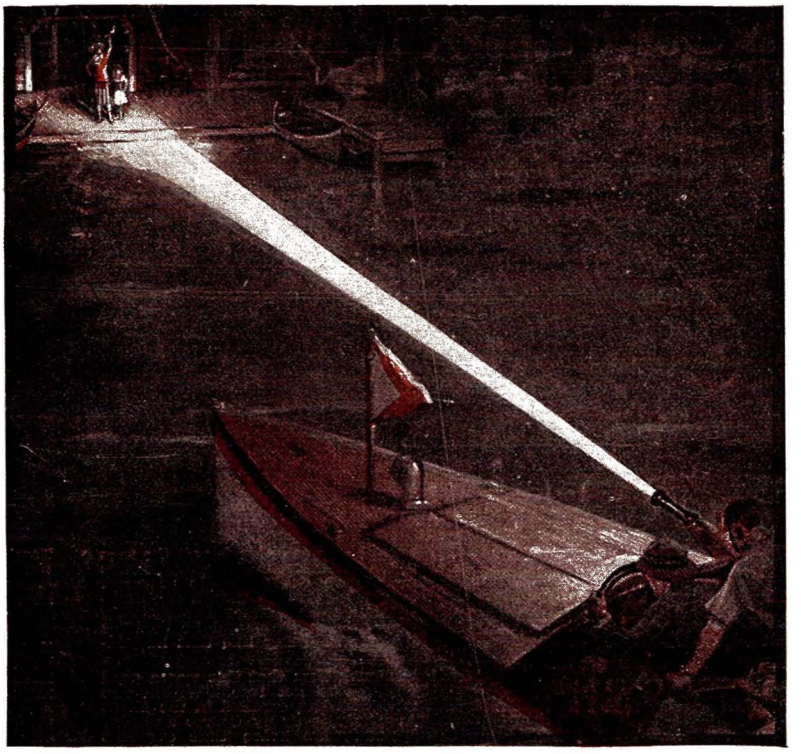
Name.....

St. or R. F. D......

City.....*State*.....

If you would also like to receive, free of charge, a copy of the 100-page catalog of the mammoth Michigan State Automobile School in Detroit, to which students come from all parts of the country, make check mark in square. ☐





"FOUND 'EM AT LAST. BUT SAY, OUR EVEREADY WAS AS NECESSARY AS OUR STEERING WHEEL"

In the midst of darkness, there is a world of protection and help in the Eveready Flashlight—instant light when you need it, right on the spot where you want it

Ever blunder along off shore trying to find a landing place? Irritating! Dangerous, too! Why not avoid it, and always see the right place to land by carrying an Eveready Focusing Searchlight with its 500-foot range.

On water or land, it means protection in the dark. Prevents accidents and mistakes by helping avoid them. The only light that defies wind and rain.

In traveling, in motoring, boating, sailing, hunting, fishing, camping, it is worth its cost over and over. The light of a thousand uses; and one use any hour may repay a thousand-fold the small price—$1.35 to $4.50.

There are 60,000 Eveready Dealers trained to deliver Eveready Service with the sale of Eveready Flashlights and Unit Cell Batteries; at electrical, hardware, drug, sporting goods and general stores, garages and auto accessory shops.

Eveready Unit Cell Batteries fit and improve all makes of flashlights; they give a brighter light; they last longer