

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Honest Fool

by Theodore
Goodridge
Roberts

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and His Soul*

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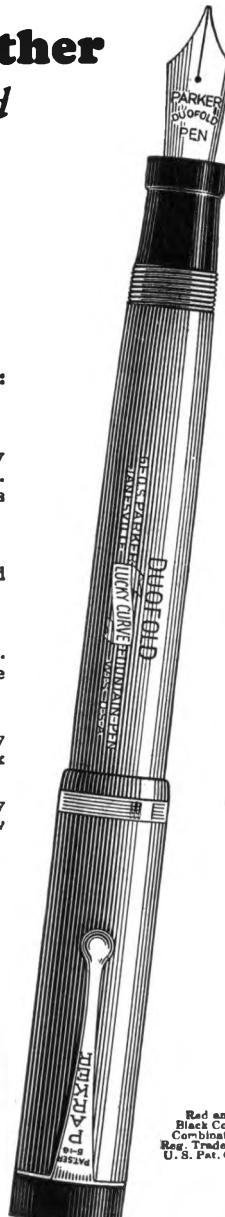
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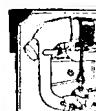
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CIXIX

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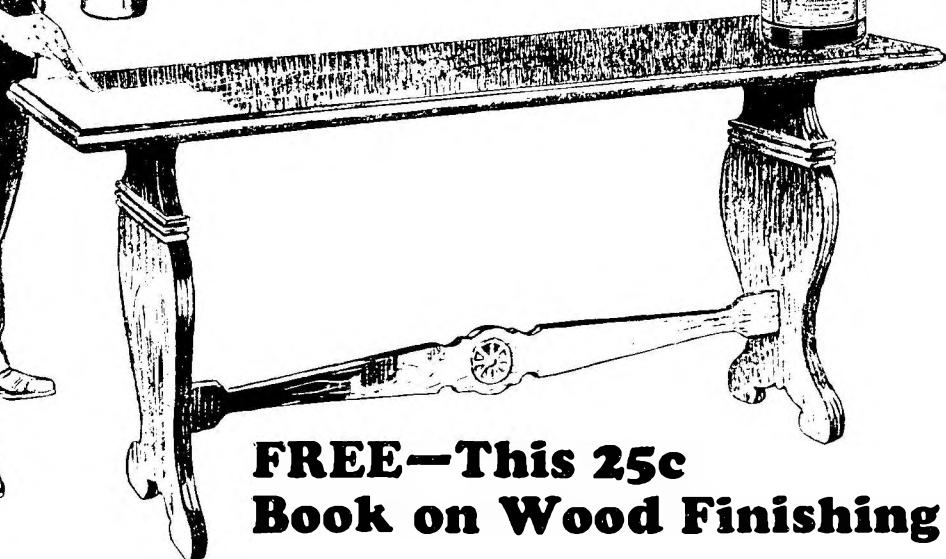
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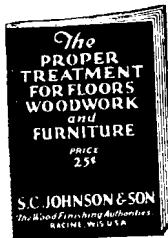


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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIXIX

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 1925

NUMBER 2



Honest Fool

By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

Author of "Where All Trails End," "Sea Change," etc

CHAPTER I.

A CAPTIVE UNTAMED.

JULES went on for his last turn of the day in the stage costume he did not approve of—a costume which he could consider only as a glaring though silent lie with his ax on his shoulder. There lay the butt of soft pine as usual, one of scores of similar butts of past exhibitions. He was tired of them—spiritually tired. He had already destroyed too many of them for the amusement of weaklings; and might it not be that he himself was suffering destruction, like the senseless wood, and guilty of more folly than the people he

amused? He believed these things to be so. He feared the worst.

He was not in a happy frame of mind. His dark eyes were sullenly veiled. The set of his lips gave a note of derision to his forceful chin and commanding nose.

Jules sank his ax into the soft wood with a one-handed twirl from the shoulder. Leaving it there, he unwound the red sash from his waist and threw it aside: unfastened and flung off his flaring coat of many-hued blanketing, and curled a lip at the eager attendant who caught up sash and coat.

Bah! He addressed himself to the butt of soft pine. With a downward knock and

an upward jerk he brought the ax clear. He squared and swung.

Plunk! He snapped out, crossed his hands, and swung from the other shoulder. *Plunk*—and into the air hopped a segment of pine as large as a loaf of bread.

The eager attendant snatched up the giant chip in both hands and tossed it over the heads of the orchestra into the center aisle, for the whole world to examine and wonder at. And Jules continued to swing his bright ax, and the orchestra chased the flashes of his wedge of steel, and wide flakes of yellow wood flew in the radiance of the spotlight and chunks of wood hopped on the stage.

The great butt lay in two pieces. Loud was the applause. Jules did not bow in acknowledgment of the clapping. Instead, he glowered at the attendant to whom he handed his ax.

He was billed as a savage, so he would permit himself the behavior of a savage. He threw the two sections of round timber into the wings, one at a time. Each landed with a mighty thump—but alas! the thumps were considerably in excess of the actual concussions. It was this sort of fake that soured and enraged the spirit of Jules. *Bunk! Bah!*

After this display of axmanship the "Hercules of the North" made light of barrels of flour, grindstones, iron balls, two fat men and other trifles. All his efforts were well received by the audience; and in return for their applause he gave them now a faint but ironic smile and now a sulken stare.

They were fools; and he was a fool—but his folly was more than theirs. They were cheap—but he was cheaper. They were undignified—but, name of God, what indignity was his!

Jules changed from the grotesque outfit which his manager had designed for him into a suit of blue serge of undistinguished cut. Mr. Mumphy, his manager, addressed several remarks to him without eliciting a reply. They walked to their hotel in silence. Mumphy followed Jules into his room and closed the door.

"What the hell's eatin' you?" he asked. He was a large man, this Mumphy. He

was broad and deep of chest—but his paunch was deeper than his chest. His face was large and flabby. It suggested some sort of boiled pudding that had failed. The small eyes suggested two moldy raisins. One wondered why some one had stuck a large cigar into the middle of it.

"Eating me?" queried Jules. "You 'ave it wrong. It is me, Jules d'Ance, who does eat—hell."

"Eat hell be damned! Ain't you livin' soft an' workin' easy, an' drawin' down good money? Call that hell? Maybe you want to go back to fishin' an' starvin' on that God-forsaken island where I found you?"

"It is so. I want to go back to St. Pierre Miquelon. You 'ave said it. You 'ave made one true statement at last. But for good money—what of 'im? Not'ing. You take 'im."

"I take the money, do I? Where do you get that line? What about your hotel bills, and the thirty dollars I pass you every Saturday? Think you're worth more than all that comes to, do you? Say, you're spoilt? A dollar looked big as a boat to you when we first met. But now—what d'you mistake yourself for? An actor? Go to bed an' dream over that lump of fog an' poverty where I found you."

"Mumphy, I talk one short minute to you. Do it pain you? Yes—but for your own benefit. Have a patience. You are the bull's knees. You are the bunk, as the slang says it. You are the pig's ear an' the 'ot gas.

"My dear sair, you make me ashamed, sick, fatigued, sad for the image of God. You are too fat, not clean, not beautiful; of the gutter; a liar, a trick, a cheat, a fool, a coward—and ah! so damn low!"

"I part myself from the indignity of such association an' return back to that fish an' fog—an' damn your contract!"

With a spluttered oath Mr. Mumphy hurled himself upon Jules. He hit the floor with his entire weight, arose and hurled again. He hit the carpet. He hit the air. He hit the wall paper. He hit the rug beside the bed. Again he hit the unresisting air. Then Jules hit Mr. Mumphy.

"It is good like zat," said the younger

hitter. " You make a noise. The 'otel management think I do my physical training."

When Mr. Mumphy, discoverer and exploiter of the Hercules of the North, recovered consciousness at last, he could not see. More than that, he could not speak. Also, he could not move either hand or either foot. The truth is, he was blindfolded and gagged and bound and tied flat on the bed of Jules d'Ance.

It was noon when he was discovered. A dozen persons were gathered around him before he was released; and so it happened that a dozen persons read the statement that was pinned on his chest. The statement was to the effect that Mr. Mumphy had received fifteen hundred dollars for Jules's efforts as a professional strong man during the last six weeks, and that out of this sum Jules had received one hundred and eighty dollars in cash, about two hundred dollars' worth of food and lodging, a passage by land and water between St. Pierre Miquelon and this populous American city, and some cheap clothing.

" In which situation I take fifty from your pocket and even so depart from you still yet your creditor," concluded the statement.

Mr. Mumphy went north to Cape Breton by the shortest route, for it was from a port of that land of bold contours that the world kept in touch with the Miquelons. He breathed fire on the way, for this fellow Jules d'Ance was his sole support. Indignation and apprehension churned his breast.

Jules did not return to his isle of fish and fog at once. From his unconscious manager's side he went to New York; from New York he moved to Montreal with speed and comfort; from Montreal he passed to the ancient city of Quebec; and from that historic and romantic site, made apprehensive by a glance of a constable who meant nothing at all by it, he passed far and deep into the woods.

It appeared to Jules that should Mr. Mumphy catch him and, by virtue of a signed and witnessed contract, take him back to the glare and indignity and pre-

tense of the vaudeville stage, he would go mad with disgust and humiliation. Or, worse still, he would kill Mumphy rather than go back. So he turned from paved streets and pierced deeply and laboriously into the unknown, all for fear of a man whom he despised.

CHAPTER II.

TWO STRONG MEN MEET.

JULES knew nothing of the woods or of the life of the woods except axmanship. On St. Pierre timbered areas are circumscribed and timber grows small. He had a natural command of the ax, the knack of it, perfected by practice on the stage; and he possessed astounding strength.

Mr. Mumphy had not presented him to the public as the strong man of a fishing village, but as a herculean woodsman, a product of thousands of square miles of inland forest and northern wilderness—for purely business reasons. The wild northland of forest and barren and muskeg, made familiar to Mr. Mumphy by the works of fiction writers, had been the mother of the strong man—according to Mumphy. That was business.

And now Jules penetrated the fringe of the land, and conditions that were supposed to have bred him, and found everything strange. He moved northward up a river, from village to village, later from farm to farm, later still from cabin to cabin.

The endless tilted miles of somber woods were to him more dreary than any fog over black rocks agleam with wet kelp. Even the language of the people twanged strangely in his ears, despite the fact that it and his own had sprung from a common source.

And his talk was strange in the ears of these people, so that they asked him where he came from and many other questions which he did not care to answer. He did not tell the truth, for fear of Mumphy and the life from which he had fled—but he did not lie. Lying was repugnant to his nature; and, also, he lacked the inventive mind.

So he simply refused to reply to questions which he could not conveniently answer truthfully. This puzzled all the people of that little river, offended some of them, and made many vastly suspicious.

Jules went into the woods in the fall of the year. The sun shone warm almost every day and the frost nipped hard almost every night. Jules carried an ax, a pack of provisions and blankets. As he had resisted the temptation to buy a rifle in the city, he still had a little money in his pockets. He purchased articles of practical equipment as he advanced, one thing there another here.

For eight days of his journey he slept under a roof every night, but at the end of the ninth day he could not find a roof to cover him. So he made camp on the lee side of a thicket of young firs above the rocky gorge of the bawling stream, and slept in his blankets on a bed of moss and boughs. He didn't know enough about this sort of life to sleep with his feet to the fire. He didn't know the trick of building a fire that would "stay in" all night. That was when the frost struck in earnest, just to show what it could do even in the third week of October.

Jules awoke at dawn, wondering vaguely yet painfully who had thrown him into the street with his clothes. Then he blinked his eyes open and realized where he was. He was chilled to the bone. The fire had been dead six or seven hours. The world was pale with frost. His blankets wore a pelt of white hair. His feet and hands were numb and his joints ached.

He rolled painfully out of his blankets, flapped an arm, flapped a leg, sat up and beat his hands on his breast. Dawn was gray along the rugged east. The western sky was egg-shell green pricked out with small white stars. All around lumped the black hills of forest, and the river cried up from its black gorge with a new note in its voice.

Jules staggered to his feet and floundered around. His chilled blood was soon warm and racing again. He lit some bark then and piled dry boughs on the yellow flame. He shook the blankets free of the dry frost, draped them about his shoulders and

clambered down to the river to fill his little teakettle. There he found a scum of black ice fixed to the rocks along the edge of the swift stream.

The fire glowed, the kettle boiled, and Jules was soon drinking hot tea. By that time the gray of the east had turned to blue. The green faded from the west; the white stars vanished; a blue that was not the blue of day and the upper sky swept over the world from horizon to horizon. Burnished silver shone beneath the eastward edge of it. The silver spread and lifted and was washed through with gold and pink.

Jules regarded the beauties of the awakening day with inarticulate appreciation. After the best of the display was past he fried bacon and brewed more tea. He was eating when he was startled by a human voice behind him.

"Good mornin', pardner," said the stranger.

He snapped his head around and beheld a tall, lean figure and a bewhiskered face in the shadow of a wide-brimmed felt hat. He jumped to his feet.

"Good mornin', sair," he replied in the same language. "I invite you to my 'umble breakfast." He bowed and smiled.

The stranger smiled and advanced and lowered a large but well-made pack to the frozen ground. He pushed his hat back, lifting the shadow from a long, weathered face and twinkling gray eyes.

"Don't mind if I do," he said. "Made an extra early start, for I figure to get into camp before sundown. My name's Lem Stalwart, operatin' for Quinn Brothers on Little Musquash."

He sat down on his pack.

"My name is Jules," returned the other. He thought of Mr. Mumphy and the fatal contract and the dust and vulgarity of the vaudeville stage. "Jules Perdu," he continued. "I am strange in this admirable land. I seek the job in the wood. I am possessee of powerful arm and leg."

"But you are French."

"Of the blood, the ancestor, yes, sair."

"But not of this Province, I guess."

"Province, no. I come a long way, for a job of—honest work."

"Well, all you got to do's keep clear of politics an' bootleggin'," returned Stalwart, smiling. "Most other jobs I know anything about in this old Province is honest—an' darn hard work. From Madawaaska, maybe?"

"Madawaaska," repeated Jules uncertainly. The word meant nothing to him. He had never heard it before or seen it on a map. His acquaintance with maps was slight. He only hoped that Stalwart would not ask a point-blank question.

"Wherever you're from, shake," said Stalwart, leaning forward from his seat on the pack and extending his hand.

They shook cordially.

"Used to hard work, anyhow," Stalwart remarked, enlightened by the handshake.

More bacon was fried. Fresh tea was brewed. Stalwart did most of the talking, and it was mostly about himself and the surrounding country and the Little Musquash. He asked no more questions. At last he filled and lit his pipe.

"Come along with me, Jules, if you've nothin' better to do," he said. "I'll hire you on. Wages ain't much in the woods this year, but I'll pay as near what you're worth as any man, I reckon."

Jules accepted eagerly. Ten minutes later they were on the way. Lem Stalwart walked ahead, like an Indian stepping around instead of over the inequalities of the ground. That is the way to walk rough country if you have to walk all day with a pack on your back. Jules observed and followed his leader's example. They halted for an hour at noon, and Stalwart slept half that time. They reached the camp on Little Musquash a good hour before sunset. Stalwart paused on the edge of the little clearing and turned to Jules.

"I come in this time by the longest way," he explained. "The tote-road is shorter—but I was takin' a look along the river. But you needn't mention it to Jeff. He's my son; an' we've been in here quite a spell already, cruisin' an' cleanin' up camp an' cuttin' out blow-downs an' fillin' holes. The teams will all haul in with half loads inside the next ten days, an' that'll be all the haulin' done before she freezes an' snow comes.

"But Jeff don't know we come by way of the river, d'ya understand? Now we'll jist snoop around in the brush an' come in from t'other side—an' maybe step in a mudhole if we find one handy."

He smiled uneasily, pathetically.

"You deceive Jeff?" queried Jules. "Play little trick on 'im?"

"Well, sort of. Yes, that's the idee. But no harm done nor intended. For his own good. Jist wanted to take a look along the river—without fussin' him up. Maybe you will understand, Jules—without me tellin' you. You're smart, I guess."

"I do my best, sair. I give my promise."

A chill touched Jules's heart. He liked this Stalwart, and it depressed him to hear that his new friend had a trouble, an anxiety of the mind and heart which caused him to play a cheap trick on his son.

What was wrong with this son Jeff? he wondered. What had he done? What mischief was he up to? Why had Lem Stalwart wanted to take a look along the river? What had the father looked for? What had he found? And why did he hide the fact of looking from his son? What manner of person was this Jeff? Not as good a man as his father, of this Jules felt sure.

They skirted the clearing behind a thick screen of brush until they came to the tote-road. They tracked the road back, away from camp, a distance of several hundred yards, before leaving cover. From this point they marched boldly into the clearing, making the most of two mudholes on the way and boldly across the clearing to the main and central building of the camp.

The door opened and a large man appeared on the threshold. Two dogs parted past him and flung themselves joyously upon Lem and acknowledged Jules with inquiring sniffs and tail wags.

The big man stepped out.

"Howdo, pa," he said.

"Howdo, Jeff," returned the father. "This here's Jules—Jules Perdu. Met up with him on the way in."

Jeff looked searching at Jules, for a moment even suspiciously. Then he extended a large hand, which the newcomer grasped. Thus they stood hand to hand and eye to eye, already friendly but ques-

tioning, each reading what he could. Jules was the quicker and surer reader of the two and already he understood something of the father's anxiety.

The grasp of Jeff's great hand tightened and his smile deepened. Jules's smile deepened in reply. Their good-humored, interested glances held. The newcomer had to look upward slightly to the woodsman, for though Jules stood six feet tall in his boots Jeff Stalwart was six feet three in his socks.

Jeff's hand tightened on Jules's hand—tighter—tighter. He threw his whole arm into the pressure of fingers and palm; and his shoulder; and then the great muscles across his shoulders. And his smile became somewhat fixed, like a grin. But the smile of Jules did not change. It remained gentle, natural.

Jeff Stalwart's brow contracted slightly and little muscles lumped and twitched along the clean lines of his jaws.

"Holler when it hurts," he said in a rusty voice. "I don't want to bust anything."

"'Urts?" queried Jules. "What 'urts? Frien'ship? A little good 'andshake? No, no! It warms my 'eart, sair—dis welcome. I am glad."

"He's up to his tricks, Jules," said the senior Stalwart, with an uncertain smile, as if he were not quite sure that Jeff's effort was in perfect taste. "It's all in fun. He will quit when you say so. Now go easy, Jeff!"

"He welcome me, sair; an' I, Jules, do t'ank 'im for it," returned Jules in a quiet voice, showing a bright smile and an unruffled brow. "He give me de 'earty grip—so; an' now I give 'im de friendly grip back again---so. Damn good friends, you an' me, Mistair Jeff, what?"

"Sure," said Jeff, with a very perceptible catch in his voice. His grin widened and stiffened.

Lem glanced swiftly and inquiringly at his son's face, then at Jules's face. He cocked an eyebrow and his smile brightened. He stepped close to the young men and regarded their big clasped hands closely. From the hands he shot fleeting, quizzical glances to their faces, seeing Jeff's

brow contract and suddenly shine moistly with sweat, and the stranger's smile remain unstrained and unruffled. He saw Jeff shift his position slightly and quiver from scalp to toe, while the other's easy attitude suggested that he held nothing heavier than a cigarette in his hand.

"T'ank you," Jules remarked, and with a little bow and a swift brightening of his smile he released the woodsman's right hand. Jeff sighed from the depths of his lungs and the pit of his stomach. Still holding his hand projected on a stiff arm, he regarded it with startled eyes. It looked queer, certainly—bloodless and cramped. Lem also stared at it.

"You pretty near 'urt yourself dat time," said Jules pleasantly. "You say how-do too hard—too strong—but you don't bust notting, I don't t'ink."

"Cripes!" exclaimed Jeff, uncramping and wiggling one finger and then another. "What you got there, anyhow? A fox trap?"

The three supped in the main building, which was mess room, bunk house and kitchen all in one. Jeff did the cooking. He worked intelligently and good-humoredly, but with a certain airy grace and casual attitude toward plates and platters which told Jules as plain as print that he was considerably jingled. Jules realized that this was at least a part of the cause of Lem's anxiety.

They were up early next morning and early to work on the tote-road. Jeff was not as gay as he had been during the previous evening. His smile was forced, he drank coffee but only pretended to eat: he blinked his eyes as if they felt dry and approached the tasks of roadmaking with noticeable reserve.

It was quite evident to both the senior Stalwart and Jules that he was struggling with a hang-over. But as the morning and the work advanced, he grew brisker and stronger.

The work was heavy, but it was play to Jules. To sink rocks into mud holes—that was mere child's play to the Hercules of the North Woods. And to chop out blow-downs and hurl the sections thereof to right

and left or lay them across the mud holes—all that was nothing more than gentle exercise to the man who had worked for Mr. Mumphy.

But he refrained from really letting himself go when the glance of either of the Stalvarts was on him, partly because he was sick and tired of showing off and partly because he felt that it might be a wise thing to conceal his full strength from his new friends, for a time at least. He was prompted to this by the same instinct that had prompted him to change his name so suddenly.

But whenever the eyes of the Stalvarts were fully occupied with their own tasks, he knocked chips out of obstructing blow-downs as big as loaves of bread and displaced rocks of incredible weight, and heaved logs and tops quite unnecessarily far out of the road. He smiled to think what money was being denied Mr. Mumphy's pockets by these unstaged feats of muscular prowess.

The day's activities concluded with the consumption of a great supper of baked beans and fried bacon and boiled potatoes and apple sauce and somewhat stale dough-nuts, after which Jeff Stalwart retired to his bunk. The elder Stalwart and Jules washed the dishes and the frying pans, then sat beside the hot cook-stove and talked about various things.

"I see ye're a superior young man," said Lem. "You got a good temper; an' that's sure a thing worth havin' in the lumber-woods. An' I guess you leave the hard liquor alone, jedgin' by yer good temper an' clear eye. Maybe ye're educated. Hev you much book-larnin'?"

"I read very good, but not easy—very slow," replied Jules. "The newspaper, the book of small words of French and also of English, when I get 'im. I bring four books in my pack."

"I read some myself—some, but that ain't much. I wasn't born in Quebec, no more nor yerself. I come from New Brunswick, too, but not from Madawaaska. I ain't French. But I been in Madawaaska county—been there aplenty in the old days, always chasin' the tall timber; an' never there, nor never here in Quebec, hev I set

eye nor ear on a Frenchman jist like yerself, Jules. You're differunt; an' yer lingo's differunt."

CHAPTER III.

MUSCLE WORSHIPERS.

JULES made a name for himself that winter on Little Musquash. He didn't intend to do so, he didn't want to impress people as being anything but an ordinary woodsman—but he couldn't avoid it. His wish was to be inconspicuous, but circumstances worked against him.

He had begun badly that first day, by "besting" Jeff Stalwart in the gentle game of grips, for Jeff was the champion gripper in that neck of woods. He had thus announced himself then as a man of uncommon strength, and situations of much the same nature presented themselves frequently throughout the winter, and in almost every case his caution and better judgment were shouldered aside by instinct. His instinct was to exert his strength whenever occasion offered.

One day Jeff Stalwart "lodged" a tree, and even while he was plowing his way through the deep snow to fell the tree in which the first one was fouled, Jules happened along and shouldered the butt of the lodged tree and staggered away with it until its stop tore clear of all obstructions. Then, just before it measured its mighty length and weight on the snow, he tossed the big butt aside and sprang out of harm's way.

"Jumpin' cripes!" exclaimed Jeff. "Say, Jules, you'd ought to work in a circus."

The whole camp talked about that for several days, and Jules wished that he had left the confounded tree for Jeff to handle in the ordinary way.

One day a chain broke and a load of logs went off and pinned Larry Dodd in the underbrush and five feet of snow. Jules happened along and moved the logs out of the way as a lesser man might a spilled jag of cord wood. Larry was slightly bruised and almost suffocated, but as good as new in half an hour.

For a week the camp talked about the

way Jules had heaved those twenty-foot sticks of spruce—the smallest of them was fourteen inches across the butt—back onto the bob-sleds, and Jules wished that he had performed the rescue in some less spectacular manner. He almost found it in his heart to wish that he had left Larry buried until the "swampers" had exhumed him by the customary methods.

One evening, just before supper, Lem Stalwart entered the main camp with one of the fellows he had been "laying" for even since October. This was an alleged peddler of watches and cuff links and mouth organs and pipes with imitation amber stems, but in reality a member of the gang that kept Lem's camp and other operations supplied with gin and whisky.

He was a sizable man—but the boss brought him in by the scruff of the neck. Unfortunately, a quantity of his wares was there ahead of him. Jeff, always his best customer, had half a pint of it already under his belt.

"Here's yer friend, boys," said Lem. "Take a good look at him—for you won't see him after to-morrow for quite a spell. He's goin' out to-morrow to the nearest lockup."

"What for?" asked Jeff. "What you got ag'in' 'im?"

"I got apiente; an' you got more, lad, if only you had sense enough to know it. I caught 'im slippin' a dozen pint flasks into one of the oat-bins."

The men crowded around the boss and the peddler. Jeff was not the only one there who had consumed a portion of a delivery that had been made earlier in the day. There was a scuffle, a slow shouldering and swaying about, a confusion. The intention of this was to separate the boss from the peddler and permit the latter to reach the door and the freedom which lay beyond it.

Jules became aware of this intention just as the peddler emerged from the scuffling crowd at its nearest point to the door. Jules jumped and intercepted the fellow, laid hold of him with both hands and flung him into one of the lower bunks with such force that the back of his head came into stunning contact with the wall of logs at the back of the bunk.

"Then, pleasantly exhilarated by that effort, he playfully dispersed the crowd by heaving Jeff and several others into other bunks. Several of them, including Jeff, scrambled out and showed signs of fight; whereupon Jules put Jeff back again with what appeared to be no more than an open-handed pat on the chest. Old Lem then lost his temper just long enough to hit Jim Swale a wallop on the jaw. The boss's action knocked Jim senseless, but brought all the others, including the reckless Jeff, to their right minds.

"What's eatin' you all?" cried Lem, in a voice of indignant wonder. "Are you as drunk as all that—any one of you—to hustle me in my own camp? You, Jeff! Are you crazy? What d'ya take this outfit for, anyhow, a shebeen? Then yer wrong! It's a lumber camp!"

"Jumpin' Lazarus! Why, it's ten years since last I had to hit a man who was workin' for me! An' he wasn't what you'd properly call a white man. That must of been rotten liquor you drunk!"

The men who had taken part in the scrimmage hung their heads in shamed silence; all except Jules, who retired to the deacon-seat, and Jim Swale, who sat up with a hand to his jaw and moaned plaintively.

"Where's the gin peddler?" asked Lem. "What did you do with 'im, Jules? He ain't sneaked off, after all our trouble, surely?"

"I place 'im on a bunk safely," Jules replied, pointing a hand.

The boss stepped over and looked into the bunk indicated.

"You ain't killed him, I hope," he remarked.

"I 'ope not," said Jules, with a note of mild concern in his voice. "I t'ink he continue to exist, sair. I did not t'row 'im 'ard."

He was right—the peddler continued to exist. A little attention brought him back to a consciousness of life and the hole he was in. He was able to eat a little supper; and next morning he was well enough to undertake a journey in the company of Lem Stalwart.

Lem had a serious, private talk with his

son before setting out, a talk which appeared to make a deep and somewhat painful impression on the reckless Jeff. The peddler managed to have a few words with Jules when Jules was helping him into the pung beside the boss.

"Louis Gerou—my name," he whispered. "You hear 'im again maybe some day, you damn skunk!"

Jeff Stalvart behaved in an exemplary manner during his father's absence of a day and a night. He performed his duties as temporary boss with dignity and difficulty. He felt sick and sleepy. He eyed Jules owlishly when occasion offered, but did not say a word about the incident of the peddler. His father's parting words, whatever they were, had impressed him deeply.

Jeff wasn't a bad fellow at heart—only a trifle wild and a mite careless and slightly irresponsible and more or less vain. He wasn't one to hold grudges. He felt ashamed of having hustled his father; and he remembered Jules's part in yesterday's unfortunate affair with mingled regret and admiration and wonder. A pretty good sort of lad was Jeff Stalvart, barring the few failings above mentioned; and he would have been a fine man if only he could have left certain stimulants alone.

No member of the crew mentioned the capture of Louis Gerou or the fracas in the camp to Jules, nor before him, during the absence of the boss; but after Lem's return they talked about it a great deal. They spoke with awe of Jules's part in the affair.

They said that Jules had thrown the peddler four yards, and that the peddler weighed two hundred pounds; and it wasn't long before they made it six yards and a foot and added twenty-five pounds to the weight of Gerou; and Jules regretted having lifted so much as a hand in the matter.

Thus Jules became a marked man on Little Musquash, against his intentions and his better judgment. Circumstances were against him.

It was not only as a strong man that Jules made a name for himself that winter. Certain traits of character and mind attracted the attention of his companions. One of these was his honesty.

He was tactlessly upright. When any man touched up an incident of the day's work with a little art, as most men are inclined to do, Jules instantly untouched it, if he happened to be in a position to do so.

Caleb Todd, a teamster of renown, told a dashing story of the bolting and running off of his famous blacks and of the skill and courage displayed by himself in averting a minor disaster. It sounded fine.

"I see you all the time, my frien' Caleb—the 'orse jump, the 'orse gallop, everyt'ing," said Jules in his mild and polite voice. "You exaggerate—yes, very greatly exaggerate—your part in dat small incident. You take a pull at the long bow, like I read in a book."

"Zat so?" retorted Mr. Todd ungraciously. "Hev it yer own way then. You'd natterly know the most about it, in course ---nix, I don't think!"

"Naturally, yes," replied Jules, with a bow and a smile. "True, I would know the most concerning dat matter—the most t'an you—for I see it very well from the first jump till the 'orses stop on 'is own accord, but you 'ave your 'ead in a snowbank all the time."

"Dang you an' yer jaw!" cried Caleb. "When you swallered the dictionary I wish you'd et one with some aitches in it!"

Whereupon every one laughed, and Jules most heartily of all; and presently Caleb joined in the mirth, feeling that the last word had been his.

But Jules was liked, despite his peculiar appetite for the truth. Some called him Honest Jules, and some spoke of him as "the honest fool"—but all admired his character and envied him his strength.

None really believed him to be a fool, and all entertained affection for him. They were pretty good men themselves. They averaged high; for Lem Stalvart had long prided himself on the quality of his crews.

Not only for strength and honesty was Jules a marked man in the Little Musquash country. He was also marked as a student and a chess player. He read every day in one or another of the four books he had brought into the woods with him. Two of these were novels by Balzac, in their original language, another was "The Golden

Treasury of English Poetry," and the last was an exhaustive work on the game of chess. The first two had been given him by his father, who had taught him to read the language of his ancestors; and the others were gifts from the good priest who had baptized him and taught him English and chess.

He played chess in Lem Stalwart's camp, but before his first game there he had to make a board and a set of "men" and teach the moves and rules of the game to one of his companions. By the middle of January there were three boards and sets of chess-men in the camp and a dozen enthusiastic players.

In this pastime, over which chatty lads grew silent as the tomb and smiling faces darkened into scowling concentration, Jules was easily first. He didn't lose a game. The competition for second and third honors was hot and determined. The boss was good; and so were Larry Dodd and Joe Fox. Jeff Stalwart and several more were not too bad; and the others were too bad but determined.

Thus it came about that on Little Musquash Jules acquired the name of being the strongest man in the world, a great chess player, a fool for honesty and a bookworm.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT.

SPRING came at last to the Little Musquash, the Old Musquash, the Ste. Jeanne, Frenchman's Creek, the St. Pierre d'Argent and a thousand more streams and rivers of the timbered north. A thousand logging roads suddenly rotted to uselessness under the bland winds and gnawing rains—but not before Lem Stalwart had his entire cut "browed" along the edge of the stream.

No spring had ever caught Lem with a stick in the woods. The boss felt particularly well pleased with himself and his affairs this season, and then Jules Perdu soured his mellow mood.

Jules took the boss aside and informed him of his intention of leaving the Little Musquash country immediately.

"Same here," said Lem. "We're goin' down to Ste. Jeanne. You didn't think we operated up here slam through the summer, did you, Jules?"

"I am removing far away, a great distance more far t'an the settlements of Ste. Jeanne," returned Jules.

"What for?" asked Lem. "You got friends here. I'm yer friend, for one: an' you can't ever say you heven't a home an' a job so long's I got a roof an' five hundred acres o' land."

Jules took the lumberman's right hand and pressed it tenderly in both of his, and at the same time he hunched and shook his wide shoulders and dropped the corners of his mouth.

"You are my good friend," he said. "You 'ave been most kind, most good to me; and I 'old you in great affection—the most of any man alive. And I 'ave affection for Jeff also, who 'as a good 'eart; and also for many more of your brave and jolly lumbermen. But I must go away, go on, remove into new country. It is my fate, my destiny."

"Fate be damned!" exclaimed the boss. "We all like you, Jules. You are a fine feller; an' none of us is such a fool as not to see it. And yer the only man I know of with a holt on Jeff. You've done Jeff a whole lot of good, takin' his mind off liquor an' the like."

"You stop with us, Jules, an' I'll give you a farm. Yes, sir, a cleared farm, stock an' all. A good farm, house an' barns an' all. I own six of 'em; an' I'll give you one of the best, next door to me an' Jeff."

"I t'ank you wit' my 'eart," returned Jules in a broken voice. "But it cannot be, my dear friend. I 'ave been on Little Musquash a long time, and now I must go into new country. I cannot stop longer on the one place."

"But why can't you?" demanded Lem. "What's the matter with you stoppin' here or anywhere else as long as you like? You ain't afeared of the law, I guess. You ain't a fugitive from justice. I guess?"

"I am a fugitive from injustice," replied Jules sadly. "And yes, I am afraid. But I do not wish to tell you more, my good and generous friend. I commit no murder,

no robbery, no bad crime—but I run away. I say enough. The lesser said the soonest mended. So now I run again."

"Don't you trust me, Jules?"

"Yes, yes! With my life I would trust you. But this is a mean t'ing; an' my pride forbid. It is no 'eroic matter."

"Have it yer own way, lad. Where do you cal'late to move to?"

Jules hadn't the faintest idea of where to go to now that the believed he had made too great a reputation for himself to remain longer in the Little Musquash and Ste. Jeanne country. He had thought only of penetrating farther into the wilderness.

Now he had a swift inspiration. Madawaaska, a name which he had heard for the first time in his life from Lem Stalvart's own lips, popped into his mind. He did not know what it was, whether a river, a mountain, a county or town, nor in which direction nor how far off it lay.

"Madawaaska," he said.

The boss received the information with an air of deep reflection. He scratched his chin, cocked his hat over an ear and stared at the ground.

"I know that country," he said at last. "I've operated there. It ain't a bad country, but I know a better layin' to the south of it—an' that's where I was born and riz, an' where I married. Yes, my wife was a Tobique girl. When she died I moved north, an' jist kep' on amovin' till I happened to stop on the Ste. Jeanne. Jeff was a little feller then.

"But it's a good country, an' I been kinder frettin' for it for quite a spell now—all that Tobique country and all that Victoria country. Porcupine Brook was where Jeff was born. I had a good place there, an' a sawmill, an' land enough. Porcupine Brook; I have been thinkin' about it of late—kinder hankerin' for that house with the three big elms over it. You ain't specially set on Madawaaska, maybe?"

"On Madawaaska? No, not so much. I go a great distance, t'at is the necessity for me."

"Well then, Porcupine Brook's the very place for you. When d'ye cal'late to start?"

"To-morrow, nex' day, very quick. But your attention, my dear friend! My objec'

in removing from Little Musquash will be defeated if my destination becomes known to 'undreds of people."

"Don't fret about that, Jules. Nobody'll know where we've went to but only you an' me—an' Jeff, when we git there."

"We? I do not understand! When Jeff get t'ere? I do not compre'end."

The lumberman stepped closer and laid a hand on one of the massive shoulders. He lowered his voice.

"Jules, I'm goin' with you, because I like you," he said, "an' we'll take Jeff along for the good of his soul. If you are on the run, it won't hurt you if I run with you. You won't be caught any easier because of me."

"Yer too good a man to lose track of, Jules; an' I been hankerin' for Porcupine Brook quite a spell now; an' Jeff'll be better off there, away from the hard liquor an' hard characters o' Ste. Jeanne. I had a lot of trouble with Jeff afore you come, an' some since. He's in with a bad gang—the Griffou gang.

"There's a girl, too—one o' the same crowd. Marcel's her name. He's a fool about her; and she ain't the kind I want my son mixed up with. No, by God!"

"I am flattered," replied Jules. "You pay me great tribute. But do not forget, my dear boss, 'tis son Jeff you 'ave is a man. Yes, and a big man, too; and a man of a 'ot 'ead. He love the lady, it may be. I 'ave read of such t'ings. He is of an age, our large Jeff."

"She's jigged him, that's a fact—but I got a hook in him, too. It's this way, Jules. I ain't what ye'd call a poor man. I ain't been operatin' in the woods every winter, an' farmin every summer, all my life, jist for the exercise. I got some money an' property; an' Jeff, he's my only son. He's my only chiid."

"But it's my own money an' my own lands and houses, an' I kin will it all away to hospitals an' missionaries if I want to, or take it to Montreal an' blow it all in afore I die if I choose. That's the hold I have in Jeff. That's how I hold him—with a golden hook."

"But I don't want him to do himself out of it. He's my son; an' he ain't a bad

seller, Jeff, only a mite wild an' careless an' low in his tastes."

"So be it," Jules agreed. "I owe you much; and to go to Porcupine Brook, it does not sound a bad t'ing. To please you, my good boss, and to be of 'elp to my friend Jeff, it is a pleasure to me. But remember, it is in the dark. I do not remove for the notoriety, but for the contrary reason."

"Thank you, Jules. Yer a good man, and yer influence on Jeff is good. An' don't worry. Mum's the word."

Jules went out of the woods with the others as soon as the last log had been hauled to the brows. He and the Stalvarts went to the largest of Lem's farms, which lay two miles above the village of Ste. Jeanne. The house was partly occupied by an elderly couple who had looked after the live stock all winter.

The land was still under snow, although brown furrows of the fall plowing showed in streaks here and there on southern exposures. Spring was in the air, with balmy winds and bland rains. Spring was in the heart of man, also; and black crows were cawing and wheeling over the sloppy ice on the river.

Spring was in the blood. Jules felt it and contemplated the purchase of undergarments of lesser weight than those at present in use. Jeff felt it. Within two hours of their arrival from the woods, Jeff slipped out of a side door of the house and, unseen, headed for the village.

Jeff did not come home until noon of the next day. He entered by the same side door by which he had slipped out. One eye was closed and discolored and his nose, slightly swollen, lacked a patch of skin. Lem, who had been listening for him all morning, met him in the passage between the side door and the back stairs.

Jules did not wait in the kitchen to overhear what followed. He went out and sat on a chopping block of golden birch in the golden sunshine and hoped that nothing would be said by sire or son for which anyone would be sorry.

"Where have you been?" asked Lem.

"With the boys," replied Jeff. "Sat in to a little game."

"I guess so. A hell of a game! What did you git yer eye in the way of? A full-house?"

Jeff supported himself against the wall and paid his father's witticism the tribute of a laugh. It was not much of a laugh, for the expression of mirth hurt his poor head like broken bricks jolting about in his skull.

"Shut up!" cried Lem. "I ain't bein' funny; I feel sick, that's how I feel—sick of yer actions. You've been drunk, dog-drunk. An' you've been fightin'. An' you've been at Griffou's. Ain't you got a mite of pride? Ain't you got a thought for me, nor for yer ma's memory?"

Jeff moved along the wall and sat on the stairs and sank his sore head in his big hands without a word.

"You'd ought to be ashamed," continued Lem—but some of the sting had gone from his voice. "Yer man enough to act like one. Yer big enough; and yer thirty years old. I know a lively lad'll set into a game of cards now an' then; an' I've drunk hard liquor myself, many's the time; but where's the call to be a hog?—aye, a hog in a hog-house!"

Jeff raised his head as if to speak, only to lower it again in silence. He was in no condition for controversy. Lem regarded the bowed head in silence for a minute, then said: "You'd best go to yer room an' sleep it off, Jeff."

Jeff climbed the narrow stairs and Lem returned to the kitchen. Jules came in from the wood yard.

"We got to git him out of this," said the boss, heavily. "It ain't all drink, nor natural foolishness that's the matter with him."

"We must do our best for 'im," returned Jules, gently.

"Did a woman ever gaff *you*, Jules?" asked the other, eyeing the strong man with interest.

"The gaff?" queried Jules. "Ah! to 'ook 'im be'ind the gills! No, I never play t'at game, never rise at the fly--but I 'ave read about it in twenty books; and t'at is much safer."

"Stick to yer books," said Lem.

Jeff did not come down for supper. Lem

took coffee and toast up to him after the others had eaten, carrying the tray in one hand and a lamp in the other. He found Jeff on a tumbled bed, still in all his clothes.

It was not until two hours later that Lem returned to the kitchen. The elderly couple had creaked off to bed, and Jules sat there alone, with a shoulder to the lamp on the table, reading a book.

"I put some fear into him, an' I guess I talked some sense into him," said Lem. "I had to threaten to will every red cent away from him. But we start for the city to-morrow, the three of us. I got some business to do there, an' then we'll head for Porcupine Brook. But don't say Porcupine Brook to Jeff, nor a word about me sellin' out here. One thing at a time—that's the only way to handle him."

Jules, who had laid his book aside, said slowly, "Jeff 'as the faint 'eart; and 'e must love the money too much. If I 'ad a girl, if I was gaff, you could not frighten me away. You might talk the sense into me—I don't know—but not t'row the scare wit' t'reat about money."

"I believe you, Jules," returned Lem, thoughtfully. "That's what makes me wonder what you *are* scared of. Yer scared of somethin', or you wouldn't be hidin' in these woods and still on the run. It ain't like you, Jules. It must be somethin' damn' serious—like disgrace."

Jules smiled, and his eyes brightened with increased interest as he met his friend's curious regard.

"Like disgrace, yes—but not so damn' serious," he said. "You are clever, my dear friend. Serious? Yes, to me, Jules—but to you it might seem a joke. I don't know. It is only my own 'eart, my own soul, I do know for sure. If I disgrace my own spirit, my man'ood, and get my pride 'urted—very well, I run away; and I take good care not to do so again—not in the same manner, anyhow."

"Was there a woman in it?" asked Lem.

"No," replied Jules; and his smile widened. "Not'ing so amusing, so romantic, so gay. It was a business mistake—but not a trickery nor a robbery—not on my part."

"I believe that, Jules. You are honest as sunlight. But what the devil was it—that disgrace?"

"I offended my own soul."

Lem scratched his chin. "The devil you did!" he said. "Well, it sounds pretty bad—but I ain't much the wiser."

"I cannot say more, my good friend."

Lem sighed and filled his pipe, and Jules resumed his reading.

CHAPTER V.

PORCUPINE BROOK.

THEY went to the city of Quebec next day, by rail, and put up at a quiet hotel. Jeff Stalwart's spirit and manner were subdued to a remarkable degree. He sat about in silence, with an air of deep and painful thought, of desperate calculation. Lem went abroad on business every morning, brisk and hearty.

Jules sat around with Jeff and read books and magazines and newspapers. Lem tried to make the evenings gay. He took his companions out every night to dinner, and afterward to a show of some sort, perhaps; and he always bought a round or two of liquor for Jeff and himself and a half bottle of claret for Jules. But through everything—no matter how bright the lights and gay the music and mellow the liquor—Jeff maintained his air of intense and tragic thought.

One morning when he and Jules were together in the deserted lounge of the hotel Jeff hitched his chair close to his companion's and leaned over and spoke.

"What's the old man up to?" he asked.

"Business," replied Jules.

"To hell with that!" retorted Jeff. "What's his game, that's what I'm askin'. What's he keepin' you an' me loafin' round here five days so far?"

Jules shook his head.

"D'ye reckon he's busy with the lawyers, disownin' me?" added the other. "Is that what he's up to? Spit it out!"

"I do not know," answered Jules, slowly. "He has not told me 'is business. But if t'at is true, what you suspect, he would tell you to your face. Your pa is no cheat, no

tricker, no sneak; and 'e love you very much. Is it not so, Jeff? All 'e wants is for you to buck up."

"I don't want to hear none of that Sunday school stuff," said Jeff. "I don't pretend to be an everlastin' saint, like some—but I'm a man. I don't reckon I'm such a darned sight better'n everyone else in the world. Now look-a-here, Jules, you tell me what's wrong with me—what the old man thinks is wrong with me—an' I'll tell you if ye're right or not. Go ahead!"

"Very good. You act the fool too much."

"How d'ye mean—act the fool? Drink? Cards?"

"Yes."

"And what about—the girl? D'ye call me a fool for that, too?"

"I do not know. And I don't call you a fool, Jeff. I only say you act the fool."

"Did you ever see Marcel Griffou?"

"I don't t'ink so."

"Well, listen here! The old man's all wrong about her. Jist because her old man's a bad actor—mixed up with the rum-peddlers an' maybe shoots a mite out o' season, an' spears a salmon now an' agin an' the like of that, an' sells liquor in his own house—he figgers she's bad."

"Hell! It don't foller a man or a woman has to be jist like their father. What about me? My father don't drink too much hard liquor."

"Marcel's good! She don't go 'round sayin' so all the time, like some folks, an' despisin' everyone who gits a mite jingled now'n agin, but she's--she's as good as she looks; an' that's sayin' a lot."

"You should tell it to the boss."

"Tell him! I've told him; an' I might's well of told it to a hitchin'-post. He believes everything bad about her jist because the Griffous is a tough gang, an' because she serves the drinks now an' then an' maybe hears a mite o' rough talk sometimes."

"You love 'er?"

"Sure! I'd marry her in a minute."

"You are old enough. You are t'irty. A grand age. And big enough."

"Yer dead right! I'm old enough to know what I want."

"And would she marry you in one minute?"

"Sure she would! Why wouldn't she?"

"And yet the minutes go, and the days and the mont's, and you do not marry. It is a wonder. It is the queerest t'ing I ever 'ear about."

"Queer? Don't you know what the old man would do if I was to marry her? Ain't he told you? He'd disown me—me, his only child. Not another dollar would I git from him, nor a cent nor an acre of land when he's gone. He'd rob me to the bone! And he's a rich man. What d'ye think of that?"

"I t'ink you 'ave the faint 'eart, Jeff, or the great love for money, or the great laziness. I t'ink I feel ashamed of you."

"What's that?"

"I 'ave said it. You are not an admirable character. Too soft!"

"What the hell! D'ye mean because I don't marry the girl?"

"As you believe 'er so good and love 'er so much—yes!"

Jeff continued to stare for half a minute with boring eyes. Then his lips twisted in an unbecoming smile.

"That's yer game!" he exclaimed. "Help the old man to save me an' make me respectable with one hand an' try to dare me into marryin' th' girl with the other side of yer mouth. I kin see through you like through a window. Say, yer slick—but not slick enough. Yer playin' a dirty trick, Jules Perdu!"

"Trick? What trick? Make yourself more clear."

"You make me sick! I thought you was honest. You don't know what I mean, hey? All right, then. Who gits the money when I break with the old man? Who'll be his next son?"

"Perhaps he would see reason, in time," Jules said, quietly. "Why not? If you show 'im a good wife, why not? The boss is man enough to admit a mistake. But if not, the ospitals get the money, or perhaps the missionaries. What do you care, if you love the lady? You can work and make money."

"Like hell the hospitals would git it! You'd git it, you damn' hypocrite!"

Jules's face went bloodless and remained so for several seconds. There was a shake in his voice.

"Jeff, I take money for wages for good work," he said. "I 'ave never taken a dollar but for service rendered, nor shall I ever do so. And when you called me what you did you said a black lie and you came very near to getting your 'ead knocked off."

There was no mistaking his sincerity. Even Jeff could not mistake it, dull and hot though he was. And there was no ignoring the danger signal.

"You believe me?" queried Jules.

Jeff admitted it, but sulkily. Then he said, "Suppose I tell the old man you want me to marry Marcel Griffou?"

"But I don't want," returned Jules. "It is you who want. I do not know 'er, not even by the eye. If she is so good and beautiful as you say, I t'ink 'er too darn good for you. As for the boss, I already told 'im I consider you a greedy man, a fellow wit'out spine, a poor calculating dog, in this particular."

"Keep your names to yerself!" cried Jeff. "Mind yer tongue, or I may forget myself!"

"Not yourself, Jeff," replied Jules, smiling calmly. "Oh, no! but me—me, Jules d'Ance. You might forget—but not likely—t'at I can t'row you out of the window wit' the utmost ease."

"What's that you say? Jules who?"

"I said it. Jules d'Ance. Little 'd' and an apostrophe and a big 'A.' A name of gentlemen. My name d'Ance."

"An' what about Perdu?"

"Perdu?—lost. I was lost in the woods."

"So d'Ance is yer real name. Well, Mr. d'Ance, you better mind yer step."

Jeff sent a picture postcard to Marcel Griffou from Quebec. He said nothing to his father of Jules's views concerning his attitude toward the girl at Ste. Jeanne, knowing that the strong man would hear of it and fearful of how the strong man might take it. And another reason! Jules's idea that Lem might forgive him, in the course of time, if he married the girl, might be right; and so he might possibly risk it—(he couldn't get her out of his head for a minute at a time, Lord knows!)—in which

case he would want all the credit to himself. Try as he might, he could not fool himself nor fret himself into doubting Jules's word that he would take not even a dollar of the Stalwart fortune except as a wage for honest work. Only for a moment had he really doubted the honesty of Jules's intentions; and though he kept a hot grudge in his heart, in his wounded pride, against the strong man for having called him a coward, he made no retaliatory move. He did not even tell his father of the information which the Frenchman had let slip concerning his real name. It might mean much, and again it might not. In thinking it over calmly, he could not see it as being of any importance. Jules was full of queer whims like that, and certainly he did not act or talk like a man who was afraid of his name or of anything else. So he kept quiet. But he did not forget nor forgive the mean remark concerning his faint heart and spineless back.

When Lem warned Jeff and Jules that they were all three bound for New Brunswick to look over some timber limits of which he had heard, Jeff made no protest beyond remarking that this was a darned queer time of year in which to "cruise" the woods and that it seemed to him there was still plenty of spruce back on Little Musquash to keep a man busy for a few winters.

They arrived at the settlement of Porcupine Brook by a roundabout way. They made the last ten miles of the journey, from the nearest railway siding in, on foot over the early morning crust of frost-nipped mud and the last scum of old snow. It was spring time, and all the brooks and rivers were running brown and high. Lem led the way straight to a rambling house whose weather-gray and irregular roofs were overdrooped by three fine old elms. The people of the house received them with marked consideration; and the man of the house went out and hitched two horses to an old wagon and went after their baggage. The woman cooked them a mighty breakfast. After breakfast they went out to look around the place.

"This is the house you was born in," said Lem to Jeff. "Yer ma passed away

here, when you was only a little nipper jist five year old. I sickened of it then an' cleared out—but I don't feel the same way about it now. I was tryin' to forget then—well, kinder forget. Every room made me lonesome then—twisted my heart. But now I'll be glad to remember. That's what time does—makes the same things look different."

Jeff eyed him inquiringly, suspiciously, and was about to speak when the woman opened the kitchen door and shook out the red and white tablecloth. Lem turned to her.

"Do the Morgans still live on the next place above?" he asked.

"No," she said. "There ain't a Morgan left in the settlement, nor anywheres near it, far's I know. Some died an' some went away to the States. Peter Harlow bought it off old Penn Morgan, about ten year ago. The Harlows come from 'way back in the woods somewhere."

Lem looked at her alertly.

"Not from Piper's Rock?" he queried.

"I guess that was it," she replied. "I don't know the back country myself—but I've heared that name."

"Man of about my age, this Peter?"

"I'd say he was older, Mr. Stalwart. He looks it."

"Good farmer, good neighbor, nice quiet family an' everything like that, I take it," said Lem.

The woman eyed him gravely for a second or two, then smiled.

"Maybe it ain't the same Harlow you was thinkin' of, Mr. Stalwart," she said, and stepped back and closed the door.

Lem scratched his chin.

"What's the idée, pa?" asked Jeff. "What does it matter to you? He ain't yer neighbor, whoever he is."

"That's jist exactly what he is, Jeff," returned the boss. "It's this way, Jeff. I got homesick for this country. It's the best country in the world, anyhow. So I've bought back this old farm, an' the next one below it. I used to own the next above, too. It was me sold it to Morgan. It's good farmin' land; and there's still plenty of timber on this brook, an' up the Lever, too."

"What about yer farms at Ste. Jeanne?"

"Well, Jeff, I sold out."

Jeff's face reddened, then paled slowly, then slowly regained its normal color. He turned and moved away without a word, sat down on a woodpile and relit his pipe. But he struck match after match, breaking four or five, before he got a flame and the tobacco alight.

"He takes it fine," said Lem, hopefully.

"I t'ink perhaps you make a mistake," returned Jules.

"A mistake? How d'ye mean a mistake?" demanded the boss.

"Perhaps it is not so bad as you t'ink. Jeff's action for the girl back on the Ste. Jeanne. It may be you do not know 'er very well. It may be she would be a good wife for 'im. She is a good girl, so 'e says."

"Good! Louis Griffou's girl! You don't want to believe everything you hear, Jules—especially about a woman an' from a man she's gaffed."

"She is very beautiful, I imagine."

"I don't know, an' I don't want to! I ain't set eyes on her once in ten years, that I know of."

Jeff seemed to accept the situation lying down. He got a letter off to Ste. Jeanne, however, promising that he'd be back in a few weeks, within a month at the outside.

The Stalvarts and Jules were idle for several weeks after their arrival at Porcupine Brook. The woods were too wet for cruising timber; the soil was too wet for farming. There was nothing for them to do but potter about. The Skellogs remained, considering Lem's offer of yearly wages. Jeff wandered about the country-side in high, well-greased boots. Lem and Jules and Tom Skellog overhauled rusty farming gear, put in patches of new shingles here and there on house and barns, and cut bushes out of neglected pastures.

Jeff was soon bored with Porcupine Brook; and then he met Charlie Harlow. The meeting, which was a chance one, took place on an old wood road back of the Harlow clearings.

"How do?" said Charlie.

"Good day," said Jeff.

"Stalwart's yer name, I wouldn't wonder."

" You said it. Jeff Stalwart, from the next place below. What's yer own, friend?"

Jeff said it politely, with a smile, for he liked the other's general appearance. He liked the daring but humorous eyes, the cock of the weather-stained felt hat, the trim mustache and the whimsical mouth.

" Mine's Charlie Harlow," was the answer. " You folks come through from Quebec, so Tom Skellog says. Ever been to Montreal?"

" No, but I been to Quebec City three or four times."

" Purty lively, I bet! Somethin' to do all the time, I guess?"

" You said it. An' here—hell! It was the old man's notion, coming' back here. It don't suit me—not worth a damn. All I'm doin's rustin' my iron constitution with well-water an' forgettin' the difference between clubs an' spades."

" Is that so? Well, you needn't, Jeff. Maybe we ain't so goldurned dead hereabouts as you think. I know where there's a deck of cards and a bottle or two of something that ain't well-water. Was you lookin' round for a little game, Jeff?"

" Lead me to it!" cried Jeff.

Charlie did not have to lead his new friend far. Peter Harlow and Mrs. Harlow were seated in the kitchen on splint-bottomed chairs near the stove, Peter smoking a pipe and reading a patent medicine almanac with languid interest and his wife knitting a gray sock. Charlie introduced Jeff with a flourish and a wink. The welcome left nothing to be desired.

" Jeff's lookin' for a little game," explained Charlie.

" Checkers?" queried Peter.

" No," said Jeff.

" Cribbage, maybe? I uster be a humdinger at cribbage. A nice game, as I recollect it. Fifteen-two, fifteen-four. It'd soon come back to me. I do believe."

" What about a few rounds of jackpots?" suggested Jeff.

" That's talkin'! Will you set in, pa? Poker, you know," said the son of the house.

" Poker," echoed the senior, investigating his bush of parti-colored whiskers with a crooked forefinger and wrinkling his brows.

" I kinder disremember the names. Would poker be the game where two kings is better 'n two queens?"

" Sure, that's poker," laughed Jeff.

They went upstairs, two flights up, right next to the rafters.

" You can't tell who might happen in," explained Peter. " There's a mess of folks in this community takes fright at a mite of innocent fun an' hold that ye're as good as gone to the devil already if you flip a card or take a drink."

" My old man's something like that himself," said Jeff. " Not's bad as all that, but a glutton for bein' respectable—or lookin' it, anyhow."

" That so? An' what about yerself?"

" I ain't qualifyin' for no deacon's job."

" Maybe we'd best not invite yer pa up here if he was ever to make us a visit?"

" Ye're dead right, Mr. Harlow."

" Nor never offer him a snort of liquor?"

" Not on yer life! He'd down it, like as not—but he'd git the wrong idee of you into his head. An' what he once gits in there stops there. You'll size him up easy enough when you see him."

Peter Harlow winked. " Idees differ," he said. " Now I be as respectable as the nex' man—but there's some things I consider innocent amusements is not thought the same of by others. It takes all kinds to make the world—or Porcupine Brook."

There were chairs and a table in the garret—those and very little else. Cobwebs draped from the peak of the roof, and dust lay on the floor everywhere except in the immediate vicinity of the table. A few old cigar butts also lay on the floor; and a small lamp on the table suggested that the garret was sometimes occupied after dark.

Peter Harlow produced a pack of cards

CHAPTER VI.

ENTER TWO LADIES.

JEFF took the first pot on his openers, a pair of red kings. Its value was two dollars and seventy-five cents. Peter Harlow was out of luck for quite a while. He didn't seem to know what he was about, He pulled in a four dollar pot at last.

"I'mbettin' all I got on this hand," he said. "It looks good—if I ain't forgot." He showed a full house. "Three alike an' a pair," he said. "I forgot the name of it, but I reckon it's better'n two aces."

"You'll larn, pa," said Charlie, winking at Jeff; and then he excused himself, went downstairs and soon reappeared with a pitcher of cold water and three glasses. Peter shuffled over to a far corner of the garret and brought back a bottle. They drank, then resumed the game. Presently they drank again. Jeff was ten dollars to the good. The cards took a turn against him later, but he was only a dollar out when Mrs. Harlow called up that supper was ready.

"You'll stop an' eat with us, Jeff," said Charlie.

"Guess not, much obliged all the same," replied Jeff. "Pa wouldn't know what kept me—and I guess he better not."

"Jist as ye say," said Peter. "Ye're welcome any time, any day."

They descended to the kitchen. The supper-table was set; and there was Dora Harlow lifting the coffee-pot from the stove. She turned to them as they issued from the closed staircase. Her small face was slightly flushed.

"Dora, this here's Mr. Jeff Stalwart," said her father.

Dora set the coffee-pot on a corner of the table and gave Jeff her right hand. She also looked fairly into his eyes for a fraction of a second with a pair of eyes that struck Jeff as being very unusual in both radiance and expression. Only for a fraction of a second did she keep her glance level—but it was too long for Jeff. Four more drinks upstairs would have done less damage.

"Jeff says he won't stop to supper," said Charlie.

"Oh!" murmured Dora. "We don't often have company."

She sounded disappointed, hurt, but resigned. Her eyes were lowered and her shapely head slightly drooped. She appeared to be shy and embarrassed. She continued to blush delicately; and her lips were strikingly red.

"Guess I'll stop," said Jeff.

Dora had very little to say during supper. Charlie did most of the talking. After supper Jeff helped Mrs. Harlow and Dora wash the dishes. Dora whispered to him without looking at him, when they happened to be standing elbow to elbow. "Please don't start pa gamblin' and drinkin'," she breathed. "He used to be real wild. Please don't go on with it to-night. Don't let Charlie lead you into losin' your money."

Jeff was deeply touched by her interest in him. He set out for home at eight o'clock, and arrived safely and in good order. He told his father and Jules that he had lost himself in the woods.

During the week that followed his first meeting with the Harlows Jeff made seven calls on that attractive family. He soon had the old man and Charlie "sized up," for he was not entirely a fool. He soon became aware of the fact that Peter was a sly bird. Peter pretended to innocence and simplicity in many matters and phases of human activity of which he was not innocent and toward which his attitude was not at all simple. For instance, his card-playing! Poker of several varieties, forty-fives, high-low jack, banker—he was master of them all and yet kept up a pretense of being a bungler at every one of them; and, beyond doubt, he could fix a hand for himself when he really needed a good one. But he was content with small winnings. He was no glutton. And in the matter of liquor he pretended to be in no hurry to sell. He gave Jeff a small flask of whisky, refusing to take a cent for it. But Jeff wanted a bottle. Well, Peter might be able to find an extra bottle, if Jeff insisted. He found it. He named the price. "That's jist what it cost me," he said; and Jeff knew he was lying, and he knew that Jeff knew he was lying, and Charlie winked openly at Jeff—but Peter didn't turn a hair.

Charlie was easier to place. Charlie was a gay lad and did not pretend to be anything else. He dissembled only when it was absolutely necessary to do so. He did not attempt to put up a false front of rustic respectability. In this, he was more honest than Jeff Stalwart—but, on the other hand, he was "wilder" than Jeff. He was a law-

breaker; and he didn't care who knew it so long as the game-wardens did not catch him at it. He fished and shot out of season, but he was not wantonly destructive about it. He had courage, and a sense of humor, and a temper above the average in kindness. He was less prone to trickery at cards than his father; and he was always willing to help a lame dog over a brush fence. He was not a model farmer, nor was he an energetic one—but he could put in as hard a day at haying or plowing as any man when circumstances demanded it or he was in the mood for it. Jeff sized him up without difficulty, liked him, admired his daring and envied him his freedom from paternal restraint and criticism.

Jeff didn't know quite what to make of Mrs. Harlow, but suspected that she was as sly as her husband.

He felt that he knew Dora, that he could read her like a book. She was astonishingly innocent, considering her surroundings; and amazingly modest and refined, considering those same surroundings. She was one of the most modest girls he had ever seen. He felt sure that she did not entertain the slightest suspicion that her father ever cheated at cards or sold liquor at a profit of two hundred per cent, or that Charlie had ever broken a law. And he knew that she was pretty prettier even than Marcel Griffou. Hers was a fairer and less tragic beauty than Marcel's, and a gentler. Her manner was timid when compared with that of the belle of Ste. Jeanne. And yet, despite her modesty, there was something in her eyes—well, something that fairly knocked Jeff's heart and buzzed his brains around and around.

Jeff bragged a little about his father's property; and he did not leave the Harlows in doubt of the identity of the sole heir. He told his father and Jules that he had been to see the Harlows and had found them a most respectable family. Lem said he was glad and somewhat surprised to hear it, as he had known Peter Harlow when a young man away up the Lever at a place called Piper's Rock, and that Peter had been one of the worst actors on the river in those days.

"That's what they told me," said the

artful Jeff. "They said he'd been wild when he was younger and asked me not to git him started at playin' cards."

Lem didn't ask any awkward questions. He felt that if the Harlows were only half-way decent their friendship wouldn't be a bad thing for Jeff, for it would take his mind off Ste. Jeanne. He didn't doubt for a moment that even a partially-reformed Peter Harlow would be a vast improvement on the demoralizing Griffous. He went over one evening, alone, to call on the Harlows. There were other visitors that evening, a brace of reckless forty-fivers from the main river—but Peter caught sight of Mr. Stalwart's approaching form in time to warn them to keep quiet and out of sight. Lem was charmed to find in Peter a reformed character, and was pleased to recognize in Mrs. Peter the reforming influence. He was charmed with Dora. Her beauty and modesty impressed him deeply. He did not see Charlie. Peter said that the lad was out, and admitted that he did not know where, and confessed that he was a great gadfly about at all hours. "A mite wild—but no vice," he concluded, wagging his head and sighing. Lem congratulated himself on the move from Ste. Jeanne and on Jeff's friendship with this family of Harlow.

Farming operations began on Beaver Brook. Jules worked like a horse. Jeff did not strain himself, but neither did he openly shirk his duty by plow and harrow. Jeff continued to call on the Harlows daily, usually after supper. Jules sat tight, playing chess with Lem, or reading, when the day's work was done. His wish was to remain inconspicuous. One evening, however, he set out for a walk within half an hour of Jeff's departure for the Harlow place, leaving Lem to play cribbage with Tom Skellog. He wandered up-stream, along the top of the bank. He went slowly, for he was not in a hurry, admiring the fading tints in the west, the new stars in the east, the wide and wholesome peace of sky and earth and wood and flowing water. He thought, with thankfulness, of the distance and difference between all this and his life with Mumphy. That humiliating experience seemed now an

age ago and a world away. His heart was at peace. No worldly ambition fretted him. He liked this work on the moist soil and with horses and horned cattle, and he liked the friendly hours of rest when the muscles were only pleasantly tired and the mind was no more than pleasantly alert. This was a good life. He preferred it even to that of the lumber-woods.

The Harlow house stood within two hundred yards of the stream, partially screened from every direction by wide-limbed spruces, old apple trees, clumps of lilacs and wild cherries. As Jules came abreast of the house he saw a gleam of lamplight through stems and boughs. He halted for a moment, touched with a fleeting chill of loneliness; and then, as he stepped out again, he was startled by a crash followed close by an angry shout, and another crash and more shouts. He was not sure that he recognized Jeff's voice in the outcry, but the note of alcoholic fury and abandonment was unmistakable. He turned to his right and ran up the path toward the house at top speed.

The kitchen side of the house was toward the stream; and the arresting sounds came from the kitchen; and Jules's point of contact with the house was the kitchen door. He heard bumps and shuffling thuds and explosive oaths. He opened the door and entered the field of disturbance. The wide room was illuminated by only one lamp, and that was in the hand of a trembling young woman at the foot of the staircase. He supposed that she was the Dora of whom Jeff had spoken casually to him twice or thrice. He gave the lamp-bearer only a glance, then concentrated his eyes and mind on the other inmates of the kitchen. There were seven of these, all men. They were all more or less on their feet, and all in action. He picked out Jeff and the Harlows, father and son. The other four were strangers to him. He had made out this much when a knife flashed in the hand of one of the strangers; and, at the same moment, another of the unknown hit old Harlow over the head with a chair.

Jules jumped, with a shout of warning to Jeff. Jeff twisted aside; and Jules grabbed the knife-artist with one hand and flung

him. Without pausing, he caught the fellow with the chair a swing on the chest; and chair and all crossed the room. He stooped to where Charlie and another of the strangers were rolling on the floor in a murderous embrace, grabbed the stranger, tore him clear, shook him in both hands and threw him out into the quiet night. Turning like a flash, he was just in time to catch hold of the fourth stranger as that rioter staggered back from a swat of Jeff's fist. He caught him, twirled him once and heaved him after number three. Then he took off his hat to the girl with the lamp.

Dora advanced a step, staring; and Mrs. Harlow appeared behind her. Jules bowed again, then turned and smiled at Jeff, at Charlie Harlow and at the bewhiskered elder seated on the floor.

"I 'eard the disturbance," he said. "You will excuse the intrusion, I 'ope. Not one of you 'as suffered a serious injury, I trust."

"None of us, thank'e—but what about them two lads in the corner there?" returned Peter Harlow, rubbing his head.

Jeff laughed suddenly and shortly. "You sp'iled a pretty fight, Jules," he said.

"You were in danger of being spoiled wit' a large knife, my good Jeff," replied Jules, calmly. "Regard it—there on the floor."

Charlie picked up the knife, then crossed to the corner where the man whom Jules had flung with one hand lay limply beside the man he had biffed on the chest. He stooped low over them.

"I guess they'll come 'round," he remarked. "Must of brung up ag'in' the wall on their heads. Look at the dints in the plaster."

Jules slipped out while all eyes were intent upon the unconscious fellows in the corner. Outside, he found the other two strangers prone and groaning. He paused for a second above each, to look at the face, then went down the path up which he had run only a few minutes before. He was no more than half-way to the stream when he heard Jeff calling to him and Jeff's sizable boots thumping the earth behind him. He halted and turned. Jeff came up with him and stumbled against him.

"No need to spill it to the old man,"

said Jeff in an agitated voice. " Them fel'ers jist happened in—drunk when they got here. It was all their own fault. But if pa heard about it he'd git the wrong idee."

" What is the right idea?" asked Jules.

" Jist what I'm tellin' you. The liquor wasn't drunk here, an' the trouble wasn't started by me nor the Harlows. That's the right idee."

" Very good, Jeff. I 'ave no intention of mentioning it to your pa. I see no necessity for doing so—unless it should 'appen zat one or two of those unfortunate men should bring it to his attention."

" No fear of that, Jules! They'll never know what struck 'em. They'll go home, as soon as they kin move; an' I guess they'll think twice before they start anything in that house agin."

" Very good, Jeff. I do not tell it to the boss—but I must say to you zat I 'ave my own idea of the matter, and zat it is not yours."

" Then keep it to yourself!"

" Yes; and I am glad I saved you from the knife, Jeff."

" That's so, Jules. It was lucky for me you happened along when you did. Much obliged!"

Jeff returned to the Harlow house; and Jules went slowly home, wondering about Dora Harlow. Had she been in any way concerned in the fight, he wondered. Far away in his sea-girt, foggy birthplace he had seen men spurred to violence more than once by the combined effects of strong liquor and pretty girls. He wondered what Jeff was up to.

Jeff did not come home that night. Peter Harlow appeared bright and early next morning, with a bandage on his head only partially covered by his hat, to say that Jeff and Charlie had gone up-stream for a day's trout fishing.

" I don't blame 'em," said Lem. " Many's the time I've fished this brook from the dam clear up to the falls. And this looks to be like a good day for 'em bitin'. But what ails yer head, Peter?"

" I run it ag'in' a stanchion in the cow-stable last night," said Mr. Harlow, with an apologetic grin. " It was past ten before we got the cows in; an' I didn't wait for

Charlie to fetch the lantern. Sarves me right."

He accepted Lem's invitation to breakfast, but headed for home immediately afterward. Jeff did not turn up that night, but walked into the kitchen next morning with an old potato sack well bulged with ferns and wet moss and speckled trout. He looked in the pink of condition. Later, Jules asked him if he had been fishing.

" You guessed it," said Jeff. " I wasn't. I stopped right there and worked at gettin' the swellin' out of a bump under my eye with arnica. Charlie went fishin'. I was scared to have the old man see me with a bump."

" And what became of the four strangers?" asked Jules.

" They went home—the darned fools! They started, anyhow. Hazzard's collar-bone was bust, I guess—the dirty liar!"

" Did he lie about 'is collar-bone?" queried Jules.

Jeff replied only with a hot glance. Then he turned and walked off.

Three days later Jules decided to go fishing up the Porcupine. He felt the need of a day of solitude, a day on his own; so he said nothing about it to the boss or Jeff. He dug worms after dark and set out very early in the morning, leaving behind him a brief explanatory note for Lem. He followed the bank of the stream. On the Harlow front he heard a splashing ahead of him. He slackened his pace and lightened his step instantly. He continued his advance cautiously, keeping a screen of bushes to his front and stepping lightly as a cat. Presently he caught sight of the cause of the splashing—two men on all fours at the edge of the water, at the foot of the path leading up to the house. They were dipping their heads and splashing their necks. Jules stood motionless, watching. He recognized one of the bathers as Peter Harlow, the other as the fellow who had drawn a knife on Jeff and afterward dented the plaster of the wall with his head. The stranger ceased his splashing and spoke. He emitted a string of blistering oaths.

" What's eatin' you?" demanded Peter Harlow.

" You know what's eatin' me, you——!" came the scalding reply. " Eatin' my stomach an' my brain an' the back of my eyes, like rats a-gnawin' wood—the—rot gut you sell for liquor!"

" If you don't like it, leave it!" snapped Harlow.

The stranger's reply to that was another string of oaths. Then they straightened themselves, groaning, and turned about, cursing, and staggered up the path.

Jules continued his ascent of the stream. He felt depressed. He felt sorry for Lem Stalwart; for it was quite evident to him that there was nothing to choose, in the matter of moral influence, between the Harlows of Porcupine Brook and the Griffous of Ste. Jeanne, from whom Jeff had been draggled. He was not sorry for Jeff. He was bored with Jeff. He was of the opinion that Jeff Stalwart did not deserve anything better than the thing that was very evidently coming to him.

He passed the broken dam and an old ruin of a mill. He took two trout out of the mill-pond, then passed on. He fished a pool here, a pool there, never giving more than ten minutes to any one. He passed another farm, half a mile of rough woods, a deserted lumber camp, more woods and a third farm. This third farm above the Harlow place was the last on Porcupine Brook. It seemed an unambitious affair in a secluded spot. Jules saw a low gray gable, a feather of smoke and a patch of gray barn roof through the trees. The strip of meadow beside the stream was widely fringed all around with alders, as if the farmer were too old or too lazy to wield a bush-hook. From there up to the Falls was all tangle of brush, tangle of old slash, blow-downs and heavy woods. He wet his line in every other likely spot on his side of the stream, and reached the Falls at noon with thirty trout. He rested there and ate his lunch of bread and butter and cheese and apple pie. He loafed at the Falls for more than an hour, took a couple of three-quarter pounders out of the pool below it, then began to fish his way slowly homeward.

The trout lost interest for a time in the excellent angle worms which Jules cast above them and dangled before them. It

was close upon five o'clock when they resumed their activities. Jules hooked a big fellow at the upper end of the bushy meadow of the higher-up farm. His rod was a simple sapling, to the tip of which his line was tied fast. Thus equipped, his method of handling a fish was necessarily direct and lacking in subtlety. He yanked and the big trout yanked; he hoisted and the big trout dragged; and the strain was too much for the snooded hook. The catgut gave when the fish was half way out. Jules made a plunging grab for it and fell all the way in. As he scrambled ashore, his wet ears were amazed by a peal of musical laughter. Despite the embarrassing circumstances, it struck him as the most musical sound he had ever heard from human lips. He dropped his rod, removed his dripping hat with one hand and dashed the water from his eyes with the other and took a look. He beheld, within seven yards of him, a young woman regarding him with dark and dancing eyes.

" You are Mr. Jules Perdu," she said.

" Jules d'Ance—at your service, *mademoiselle*."

" But you do not know me."

" I have been unfortunate, miss—but now it appears zat my fortune is about to mend, is it not?"

" I am Marcel Griffou."

CHAPTER VII.

POACHERS' RISKS.

JULES got home in time for supper; and immediately after supper he spoke to Jeff out in the chip yard, out of earshot and eyeshot of Lem Stalwart and the Skellogs.

" Where is zat young lady you love so much?" he asked.

" Hey?" returned Jeff.

" I ask you, where is that young lady, Mlle. Griffou?"

" Where the hell would she be?"

" I ask you."

" Don't you know? What's eatin' you, Jules?"

" Yes, I know—but I ask you where you t'ink she is?"

"Hah? What you drivin' at? Where I think she is, hey?" He peered closely, curiously, uneasily, into Jules's face. "What the hell's eatin' you to-night? I think she's on the Ste. Jeanne. What d'ye reckon I think?"

"She is not on that river Ste. Jeanne. She is on this little river of the Porcupine.

Jeff's eyes bulged and his lower jaw sagged. He stared in dumfounded and incredulous silence.

"She t'ink you are not well, perhaps, for you do not return to Ste. Jeanne as you promise, so she run away from there and come to Porcupine Brook, to the house of old Mr. Smith, where she cooks and feeds the chickens for zat old couple," continued Jules.

"Are you lyin'?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"Hell! What'd she do it for? What if the old man was to see her?"

"As for zat, what if the boss was to see your precious 'arrows and their friends as they truly are?"

"You keep yer mouth shut!"

"Yes--but not because you look at me like zat, Jeff. Look at me more polite, and address me more polite, or perhaps I forget zat you are my friend, and the son of my friend, and more of a fool zan a rogue. If I should forget? Well?"

"No need for you to git ugly, Jules. All I ask is, keep quiet. I'd do the same for you, Jules. Don't blab to the old man about Marcel nor nothin'--that's all I ask. And I tell you, Jules, the Harlows ain't as bad as you try to make out."

"Do not worry. I 'ave no desire to blab your cheap, foolish, unmanly secrets."

Jeff had to be satisfied with that—but, to judge by the expression of his mouth and eyes, it stuck somewhat distastefully in his gizzard.

Lem Stalwart's ambitions as a lumberman seemed to fade with each passing week of life on the big farm on Porcupine Brook. He had money enough already; and there was work enough right here around home for himself and Jeff and Jules and Tom Skellog, if one figured it out; and it was a great thing to be within reach of Mrs. Skellog's cooking three times a day and of

a feather bed every night. A man of hard-earned property and a thirty-year-old son, owing nothing to others, owes something in the way of consideration to himself. That is how Lem figured it out as spring ripened into summer and summer wore along; so he said nothing more about cruising timber. He felt easier in his mind about Jeff these days. Jeff never showed more than the mildest suggestion of the effect of liquor now—not before his father, at least; and he never remained out past one in the morning, unless he happened to be away up stream fishing with Charlie Harlow; and though he was neither as steady nor as energetic as Jules, he made a very creditable showing as a farmer. Lem felt that he had done a wise thing in moving from Ste. Jeanne. He was happier here, and Jeff was out of the demoralizing zone of the Griffou influence. He did not believe Peter Harlow to be quite—no, or anywhere near—as virtuous as he sounded and tried to look; and yet he reckoned the Harlow family, as a whole, to be a peculiarly fortunate thing for Jeff. A perfect family, a family in which virtue and respectability were painfully in evidence all the time, would have failed to attract Jeff—so he very justly surmised. He felt no uneasiness even on the score of Charlie Harlow's influence; for though Charlie was undoubtedly more of a woodsman than a farmer, and not above sitting in to a game and taking a drink now and then, his lean face and clear eyes showed no marks of dissipation. As for Dora, Lem felt that she was all that a girl should be, despite the fact that she was far more attractive than there was any need for a girl to be. Her modest air had made a great hit with him.

Jeff went away up to old Elbert Smith's place within twenty hours of learning of Marcel's presence there, and discovered that he had forgotten something of Marcel's charm. He told a fairly convincing story, which Marcel believed; and he told it so well that he almost believed it himself. The gist of it was that his father was proving very difficult, but that he had reason to hope that the winning over of the old man was only a matter of time and discretion. Marcel promised to be patient and discreet.

Marcel believed in Jeff. She believed him to be just as fine and brave as he said he was; for the truth is that Marcel was really what Jeff had told Jules she was, an innocent and unsophisticated young woman, despite an appearance as gay as her heart and the fact that she had frequently served drinks to her father's unlawful customers and overheard much rough talk. Yes, Marcel Griffou was a good girl—and, alas, simple enough to accept Jeff Stalwart at his own valuation.

Jeff left the bushy farm early and called in at the Harlow place. He didn't say where he had been, neither did he mention his reason for having been there. He looked at Dora; and, at the first opportunity, he kissed Dora; and then he felt about Marcel's arrival on Porcupine Brook exactly as he had upon first hearing of it from Jules. Poor Jeff! He felt that things were not breaking quite right for his peace of mind—that Fate was treating him to undeserved and unexpected trouble—that he was a much abused young man—and that there would be the very devil to pay if he did not watch his step. He went upstream again next day, away up to Smith's, and again he stopped in at Harlow's on his way down; and this was his program almost every day for weeks on end. He said nothing of Dora to Marcel, nothing of Marcel to Dora, and nothing of either of them to Jules.

Jules thought a great deal about Marcel Griffou. He tried not to. She was none of his business. Jeff Stalwart's girls were nothing to him. Jeff's foolishness was no affair of his. His arguments were sane; they convinced the reasoning side of his mind; so he ceased thinking of her during the day and dreamed of her at night instead. Then he put more beef and bone into his daily tasks, hoping to weary himself past the dreaming point; but, though he toiled from dawn till dark and, single-handed, accomplished more than an ordinary man could behind a team of horses, his mind continued its upsetting game of making pictures of Marcel Griffou while he slept. The edge of his smooth temper became slightly roughened. The surface of his calm spirit began to rock slightly from the commotion

of mental and spiritual undercurrents. Sometimes he glanced at Jeff, when Jeff swaggered or laughed, with a gleam in his eye that instantly wilted the swagger or stilled the laughter. He was even short with Lem on several occasions, much to the boss's astonishment and distress; and once, when Tom Skellog bawled directions at him concerning the rigging of a twitching chain under the root of a pine stump, he dropped the chain and stepped over to Tom. He did not do a thing, he did not say a word, and he went back in a moment and hooked the chain according to directions—but Tom did not raise his voice above a whisper again that day. At last Jules decided that he needed another day's fishing. So he dug worms one night and got away early next morning.

Jules called at the little gray Smith house shortly before noon, with two dozen trout to serve as an excuse. His welcome by the old couple and Marcel left nothing to be desired. He remained to dinner and for several hours afterward. Marcel looked and sounded as charming as ever, but there was a shade of an expression that had not been in her eyes at their last meeting which puzzled him. She did not mention Jeff to him; and he was equally mute on that subject.

Jules had not put more than a quarter of a mile of his homeward journey behind him when he heard a rifle shot snap from the woods back on the other side of the stream. The first report was followed almost instantly by another. Then silence closed in again. Jules waded the stream, climbed the steep bank and broke his way straight ahead through the tough under-brush. Rifle shots in the woods at that time of year meant trouble for something or some one; and Jules was in the mood to court trouble. Emotions were at work within him which he saw no way of expressing except in some troubrous connection. He went forward with smashing sounds, without attempt to conceal his movements. He jumped new blow-downs and kicked his way through old ones. He halted every now and then to listen; and at last he heard a groan from the ground close at hand; and there on the moss he

found a man crumpled and bleeding. His face and throat were covered with blood and his eyes were closed with it.

Jules knelt and examined the unconscious stranger. It was an unpleasant task—but the result was heartening. All the blood came from a shallow furrow along one side of the head just above an eyebrow and an ear. Jules tied up the wound in strips of the wounded one's own shirt, then lifted him in his arms and turned back on the way he had come. He did not pause until the stream was reached; but there he halted long enough to dip the stranger several times into the deepest and coolest pool within reach and to wash his own hands. This treatment caused the stranger to open his eyes.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am one of Lem Stalvart's workmen," replied Jules.

"What're you doing? Where you takin' me?"

"I am carrying you to Mr. Smith's house. A rifle bullet hit you on the skull. I was going down stream when the two shots were fired, and so I went to look and I found you."

"You heard two shots? An' did you find any one else?"

"I did not look furzer than you. Was there more zan one wounded man, perhaps? If so, I shall go back and look again."

"You needn't mind. You get me to Smith's an' then fetch a doctor."

The wounded man closed his eyes; and the rest of the journey was made in silence.

The instant old Elbert Smith set eyes on Jules's burden, he cried: "It's Jim Monday, the game warden! What divilment have you been up to, mister? Is he dead?"

The wounded man opened his eyes as Jules lowered him gently to the bed in the spare room and immediately answered for himself.

"He ain't," he said. "You kin bet yer last dollar he ain't."

"Within a fraction of an inch of it," said Jules calmly, his breath steady after the long carry. "Two shots attracted my attention; and upon investigation I discovered zis gentleman lyin' on the ground unconscious and very bloody. But a miss

is as good as a mile, as the philosophers say."

"Who shot 'im?" asked the old man.

"Ask Mr. Monday," returned Jules in his smoothest voice. "E was present, which I was not."

"You shut up—an' go fetch a doctor from the village," exclaimed the warden irritably. "You go on like a man was shot through the head every day! I might die while you are standing there lettin' off yer mouth!"

Jules smiled and drew old Elbert aside. "Monday is not seriously injured," he whispered. "A glancing knock on the skull—and it is quite a strong skull, I t'ink. You will oblige me greatly by driving away for a doctor wiz your good 'orse, while I return to the woods."

"What's the idee?" asked the old man suspiciously.

"The idea is zis. I 'eard two shots fired quick. Were they fired by one man? And if not, who else was hit? The question intrigues me."

He turned and walked out of the house. Old Elbert followed him and laid hold of him by an elbow.

"Monday's a bad man to monkey with," he said. "He's game warden; an' he's a hellion at the job. I live inside the law, an' always have—never even shot a partridge in closed season—but I leave the wardens to do their own work. I don't monkey with their job. They're paid to do it. The law's a tricky thing for an outsider to fool with—at either end."

"There were two shots," returned Jules patiently. "If both were fired by the man who hit the warden, zen I'd like to investigate the matter. If not, if one was fired by Monday, perhaps some poor misguided man lies out in the woods now, in pain, perhaps in great peril. I shall go and see. I do not fear the law nor its officers."

"You better leave it alone. He told you to go fetch the doctor."

"Mr. Monday is not my master. And neither is e in danger of 'is life."

Jules hastened back to the spot in the forest where he had found the wounded game warden. There lay a rifle that he had not noticed before, hidden by young

ferns. An exploded shell was in the breech. He picked it up and went forward, slowly, shouting as he went. He had not gone farther than fifty or sixty yards before he came upon the body of a young bull moose. It had been shot twice through the neck, and it had been bled through a long knifecut across the throat. That was all. It had not been paunched or slayed. Jules stood just beyond the carcass and looked back the way he had come; and he found that he could see clearly all the way back, through a long rift in the underbrush, to the exact spot where he had found the wounded game warden! So! The man who had bled the moose had been in a position to see Mr. Monday. Just so! Then it was only reasonable to suppose that Monday had been in a position to see the unlawful slayer. But Jules did not leave it to suppose. He snapped the tip of a little

maple sapling at a right angle, for a landmark, then went back to where Monday's blood had stained the moss, turned and took a look. The bent sapling was in unobstructed view. He returned to the vicinity of the carcass and searched around. He found a rifle and picked it up. That made two rifles. He found a blood trail and followed it. The clear twilight was dim in the forest, but by stooping low and moving slowly he managed to keep to the trail.

Blood was spattered here and dripped there on the moss and young ferns. In several places the ferns were crushed and the blood smudged wide. Jules's progress was slow, but he soon came to the end of the trail. There lay a man on his face, motionless. Jules turned him onto the flat of his back gently, knelt and stooped low and looked into the unconscious face of Charlie Harlow.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



ON MEMORIAL DAY

AGAIN, the Day of Absalom—young Absalom,
 Its gray dawn lifts above the brooding hills,
 Again, the plaintive bugle note is calling,
 Is mingling with the murmuring of the rills,
 The story, precious story, of our slumbering Absalom.

Upon the hills and in the vales—o'er Absalom,
 The wimpling banners brightly lift and fall,
 They guide our tear-dimmed eyes aloft to glory,
 Then, softly down toward the greening pall
 Where sleep, untroubled, dreamless, wraps the young man, Absalom.

Oh, hallowed Day of Absalom—dear Absalom!
 Thy reddening dawn has gilded vale and tree!
 And yet—the quavering bugle note is grieving:
 “Oh, Absalom! Would I ~~had~~ died for thee!
 “For thee, my young man, Absalom! My son! Oh, Absalom!”

Robert Fulkerson Hoffman.



The Girl in Knickers

By JOHN D. SWAIN

Author of "The Man Who Knew Fitzsimmons," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

ARISTIDE JUNEAU, a dapper, gray-haired gentleman, gazed with honest affection at the slender girl who faced him, her big brown eyes fixed seriously upon his.

"*Pardon, ma'm'selle*, is it that you have torn your blouse?" he asked solicitously, his gaze shifting to her left shoulder.

Instinctively the girl glanced sidewise, her pretty head turning ever so slightly.

Instantly, and with a wide sweep as graceful as that of a swallow's wing, her elderly companion kicked her in the jaw. Then, continuing and completing the full circle with a cartwheel, he stood erect, bowed from the waist, extended both hands and clasped her own firm little fists.

"*Ma cherie*, this shall be old papa Juneau's gesture of farewell!"

The kick had been indeed a mere gesture, the caress of a white padded toe that touched as lightly as a falling leaf the

smooth ivory cheek of Anna Flint. For Juneau was professor of *la savate* in the Nordstrom School of Physical Culture for young women.

"You have been the joy of my heart," he continued. "Alone among my amiable pupils you possess a genuine flair for the beautiful art I love and try to impart. And now, *voilà!* It is finish. You go forth as a missioner to illumine with the torch of *la savate* this crude land of *la boxe*."

He released her hands, stepped back, wagged a minatory forefinger.

"Bear away with you the memory of this my final gesture: *never permit your adversary to distract your attention!*"

Anna laughed, displaying the sort of teeth a graduate in physical culture ought to be able to.

"I shall remember," she promised. "And I shall remember you, good papa Juneau! You have been kind to me, always."

Impulsively she stepped forward, cupped the deep-lined face in her two hands, kissed his forehead. Then turning swiftly she fled from the room.

Old Juneau stood motionless, a crimson tide flooding his cheeks. Impatiently he brushed his moist eyes.

He was of a sentiment, was this ex-champion *savateur*, and never was he able to part from a favorite pupil without emotion; and in all his ten years at Nordstrom's there had come under his tutelage no maiden so gifted as little Anna with the true Gallic inspiration for the art of the lethal kick. To behold her, *par exemple*, deliver a perfect *coup de pied* beneath the chin, was to enjoy an exquisite instant of the poetry of motion compared to which the posture of a mere Russian ballerina was something to mock one's self of.

The girl meanwhile had flitted to another bare room in the rambling establishment, a room whose floor was covered with a padded mat, on which a little brown man squatted, smoking a cigarette in a long jade holder.

He laid it aside as she entered and rose all in a piece as a cat rouses when disturbed. A double line of white teeth slashed his inscrutable face as Anna came toward him, her hands extended in greeting and farewell.

"Good Mitsukato, I come to thank you for teaching poor clumsy me the art of jujutsu," she smiled.

The little Jap took her hands in his own thin, wiry ones. Unlike a Latin, he did not kiss her hands; but, on releasing them, he saluted his own, bowing thrice.

"Not clumsy," he protested. "Oh, velly good, yess! Mees Anna, eef big, bad mans stlike, you take heem apart see what make heem tick! Honorable Yankee joke, by Mitsukato."

In the Oriental eyes glowed the same affection that had been in old Juneau's when they had rested on Anna Flint.

There were other farewells; for it was June, and the school year had closed. In a day or two Nordstrom's would be locked up until another autumn should usher in a class of rookie girls.

In Anna's case it was more than the

close of a term; it marked the end of the two-year course and the receipt of the highly prized Nordstrom diploma with its golden seal and its heraldic device of a shapely young woman holding aloft an unbelievably big dumb-bell. No owner of one of these diplomas ever had to go about seeking employment. For the course was both scientific and severe, and more than half of every senior class fell by the wayside.

So now Anna visited in turn the teacher of boxing, angular Molly Sheehan, sister of Kid Sheehan, the famous welterweight; the very English Miss Bounder, instructor in field hockey, tennis, running, and all outdoor sports; Dr. Jarrow, professor of anatomy, physiology, hygiene and first-aid, and Nordstrom himself, who taught Swedish gymnastics and swimming.

Every graduate of his school must pass creditably in all branches, and with distinction in at least two. Anna Flint had led her class in no fewer than five points, and for the exotic arts of jujutsu and *la savate* had shown an aptitude no other Nordstrom pupil had ever remotely approached. And she was leaving with the sincere love and admiration of both her classmates and her teachers.

Indeed, Nordstrom had told her that after a year or two of outside experience, a place awaited her on his own faculty; and this was a compliment indeed, since the canny Swede had combed the world of sport in order to secure specialists in every department of indoor and outdoor athletics for women.

At length, having made her adieux, and all her fellow students having departed, Anna went to her room to pack up her simple effects. It was a tiny, white painted cell as severe as the cubicle of a Vestal Virgin in Rome's old Forum. Upon its white iron cot and hard mattress the girl had slept during the past two years, rising each morn promptly at six to patter down the hall for the cold shower which preceded a frugal but wholesome breakfast.

As she slowly removed her street suit, a connoisseur of feminine beauty, were such privileged to be present, would not have guessed the dynamic force that abode under deceptive curves and tenderly juvenile

lines. For it was the boast of Nordstrom that he did not turn out a flock of "fierce and athletic girls," as envisioned by Walt Whitman.

Here was none of the sinewy, semi-masculine development which so often companions the modern athletic girl. A splendid coördination was the ideal, adequate muscles controlled by steady nerves ruled by a compelling will. The arduous hours on flying rings and parallel bars, or in the heat of combat on hockey field or tennis court, were balanced by a well-devised system of relaxation.

"Tranquilize yourselves, young ladies," Nordstrom would adjure as he walked down the long line of bloomer-clad girls lying in the sunshine which warmed the elm-studded lawn. "Do as does the cat when she rests. Extend each finger and toe. Humor your nerves and muscles and bones. Purr—if you like! But do not talk, or wriggle about, or even think!"

As the concrete result of his system stood Anna Flint, alone in her little white chamber, now clad in loose tweed knickers with Scotch hose and stout, easy elk-hide hiking shoes. She looked gentle, almost frail, her thick, bobbed chestnut hair prisoned beneath a tam-o'-shanter of russet and old blue plaid, a wistful light in her big brown eyes as she bade a last good-by to the only home she had known for two years.

But she was deceptive. She was dynamite wrapped pleasingly in warm-toned tweeds; chain lightning in the wistful curves of a girl of twenty-two.

Her fingers automatically took this and that object from shelf and drawer and placed it neatly in a stout canvas rucksack, while her mind reviewed the curiously abrupt change in her life which had sent her to Nordstrom's on her twentieth birthday.

As the only child of old Amos Flint, a taciturn operator in railways and industrials, she had been like the scores of petted girls she played about with from Bar Harbor to Palm Beach. She had been adequately "finished" at a school rather harder to enter than one of the big Piccadilly clubs. At eighteen she began to show symptoms of becoming blasé and bored and

cynical, because she knew no ungratified wish.

And then—with the jarring, jolting suddenness with which such things occur—had come her father's death from shock which overtook him in the midst of his most spectacular and desperate gamble; and after the usual leisurely red tape of the obsequies and the probate court, old Bascom, the family lawyer, had informed her with as much sympathy as his card index, pigeonhole heart could feel that she was as her father's heiress the proud owner of twenty-two hundred and seven dollars and nine cents.

At first, and for a long time, these figures were meaningless to her. In the big shops where she had had an unlimited charge account her eyes would be drawn to some costly fabric, some gorgeous toy, a sleek fur or a smart little hat reasonably priced at a hundred or so, and she would idly order it delivered, only to fetch up with a gasp and a flushed cheek as memory prodded her with a lean finger. She would change her mind and leave, thereafter to enter that shop no more.

By courtesy of the creditors she was given a year's extra tenancy of the great house on the Avenue; but without servants—and she could not even afford one. It was like living alone in a museum. She took a cheap room in a genteel lodging house—cheap, that is, by her old standards. For a time she dwelt here in a queer dream, hardly able to remember in what restaurants she ate, or what food was served her.

She sat inert through plays, and once outside could not recall what they were all about, whether comedy or one of those grim bits of Russian realism. The music she heard was mere sound, and nothing else. She saw many of her old playmates, even had two offers of marriage, but could not recall what words had been uttered.

By selling her personal jewels she prolonged this dreary half life indefinitely; but unfortunately she had never cared much for precious stones and had far fewer than she might have owned. Her costly wardrobe went piece by piece, and for absurdly small prices.

Then, as suddenly almost as the calam-

ity had descended upon her, came the reaction of her healthy young animal body and spirits. She blinked, frowned, tapped her pretty lips with a golden pencil, decided to do something about it all.

Old Bascom had offered her a place in his musty offices, and she had laughed. The thought of punching a typewriter and consulting cabinet files and composing odes to anonymous parties of the first and second parts and wearing a neat black blouse and drawing a weekly pay envelope rather amused her.

But on taking stock of her attainments, there was little to hearten her. She could play some jazz, dance perfectly, drive a sport roadster fifty odd miles an hour, win useless gewgaws at mah-jong tourneys, mix several kinds of cocktails from most unpromising ingredients, and drive any normal male temporarily if not permanently insane. But any of her girl friends could do these things as well; and she was intelligent enough not to consider them as vocations.

What, then? There fell under her eyes, in a magazine, the advertisement of Nordstrom's School of Physical Culture for young women. She had of course known of it in a vague way; her own finishing school had employed one of its graduates. And as she read of its equipment, aims, terms, and time for enrollment, she also recalled that she had some renown among the younger set as a cup winner.

She had often taken part in golf and tennis tournaments; had indeed once carried the national woman tennis champion to a bitterly contested deuce set in the finals, had come within a couple of strokes of equaling Miss Shirley's record on the St. Patrick's links. Riding she had learned from an English groom, swimming from a Hawaiian prince—she had learned to play the ukelele at the same time—not that this mattered now.

A joyous, frivolous, undisciplined mind in a sound, sturdy body! The answer came to her as her eyes scanned the famous slogan of Nordstrom's: *Rule your body, or your body will rule you!*

A week later, when the school opened, Anna Flint was one of the entering class.

It had been unbelievably hard work; she had looked forward to it rather as a lark. Few of the freshies, she had thought, could possibly have enjoyed her own advantages. When she thought she wanted to fence, she had gone naturally to the most expensive *maitre d'escrime* in the city. Willie McTavish had taught her to swing a mean driver and a meaner mashie. Old Tom Peddie had coached her in tennis on the Casino courts.

After a week at Nordstrom's, she felt as if she was as clumsy as a peasant with the rackets. Every muscle ached, each joint was sore, she possessed ten thumbs, and the tuition she had paid in advance was money thrown away.

For it was not part of Nordstrom's system to let any beginner feel that she was a star performer. But once a proper humility had replaced Anna's unconscious cockiness she went ahead fast enough. And now—her rucksack packed, pup tent and blanket roll adjusted, the rest of her belongings locked into a small trunk to be left behind till wanted—she walked out of her room and down the stairs and would have shaken the dust of Nordstrom's from her feet, save that there never was any dust tolerated inside his model plant.

With a long summer before her, a choice of several good positions in the fall, and only some sixty dollars remaining to her from the hectic half century of Amos Flint's struggle against the vested interests, she had decided to do as so many girls were doing this year. She would a hiker be, carrying her own little portable stove, sleeping out fine nights and at farmhouses on stormy ones, catching and cleaning her own fish, possibly snatching an occasional radish or onion or salad green from a lonely garden.

She would, for one summer, be lazy and care-free, a lady vagabond, a girl in knickers.

II.

ACROSS one of the many little fresh-water ponds which along the North Shore of Massachusetts preserve their water sweet and potable almost within reach of the spray flung upward and outward by the

Atlanta, the westering sun was sending shadows of the slender cedars which screened it from the highway.

It was not on the great artery which skirts the shore from Boston to Portsmouth, but on one of the older, less frequented and much rougher roads along which jounce the two-wheeled carts of the kelp gatherers, and where you may meet a drove of cows being driven home for the evening milking, and in the summer time smart saddle horses that are here undisturbed by the eternal procession of automobiles.

On this sweet June afternoon the placid waters of the little pond were being ruffled by a pleasant and unusual intrusion. A young girl clad in a flaming one-piece web of clinging jersey stood poised like a living torch upon a gray boulder swept down a million years or so ago from the lowlands of New Hampshire, and stranded upon the miniature shore.

Hidden in the thicket of scrub cedar and bayberry, her knickers and rucksack secreted behind a thorny barberry hedge, she felt herself as safely remote as if in an oasis; and, with a final bright glance of her flashing brown eyes, arms extended above her head, finger tips touching, the beautiful muscles of her round thighs flexed and shot her, a crimson arrow, into the golden-brown waters. So cleanly did she enter that half a dozen turtles dozing on an old ship's keelson near by did no more than thrust forth their flat heads from their gold dotted shells.

As her head with its red rubber cap appeared far out in the middle of the pond, the girl saw not a yard distant a huge bull-frog squatted upon a lily pad, his silly eyes agoggle. Lightning swift, a brown arm shot out, and the amazed and indignant frog was momentarily imprisoned in her hand. Then, as the slippery body slid through her gently restraining fingers, he voiced the news with a sonorous *garummp* as he shot below the surface to warn his brother batrachians that the ancient tradition of mermaids was after all well founded.

For some minutes the girl frolicked in the warm, shallow waters, trying snatches of all sorts of crawls and trudgeons, from time to time floating on her back, hands

clasped behind her neck, and pink toes saucily aloft. At length she stood erect and started to wade ashore. And it was then only that she discovered that she had an audience other than turtles and frogs and the lone kingfisher who had from the dead limb of a wild apple tree been harassing the little fishes by his bulletlike onslaughts.

Seated a few yards from the pond, his ugly sack of a mouth distended in a grin of sinister approval which displayed strong yellow teeth and one gaping hole where a bicuspid should have been, was one of the least inspiring creatures Anna Flint had ever seen.

She swiftly catalogued him as a tramp, although she had never seen one off stage. He was thick shouldered, red faced, with a stubble of sandy beard and a big cap rammed so low that his ears stood out like mudguards.

He wore a dirty blue flannel shirt beneath an old faded coat, and corduroy pants over the knees of which were folded huge hands whose knuckles were chapped and scarred. His little blue eyes twinkled with enjoyment. In his way he was a lover of beauty.

His grin broadened as he saw the girl's eyes widen, the rich color flood her face and neck. He waved a welcoming paw.

"Take yer time, girly—daddy 'll wait fer ye!"

With these words he arose and stretched; and Anna took note that he was tall as well as broad, with powerful thighs slightly bowed, and a great reach of arm. At the same instant, she began wading vigorously ashore, churning the water so that it splashed all about her and fell in a miniature rain.

The man looked surprised at her swift advance. He had figured on something quite different. She might scream for help, or swim across to the other side, in which case he had planned to follow the shore line and meet her as she emerged.

She might cry and plead for mercy, which would be rather amusing. He had guessed that her clothes were hidden near by; that sooner or later she would have to come ashore and dress.

The road, as he had taken pains to note,

was deserted as far as he could see in either direction, and there was no house in sight. It was a great bit of luck that, his quick eyes catching the flash of crimson, he had turned curiously aside thinking to find an oriole or a red-winged blackbird, and had been treated instead to such a generous and pleasing display of youth and loveliness.

But when the girl, after that first gasp and pause, began to make for shore as fast as she could, and in his direction, he was both puzzled and disconcerted. And when on emerging to dry land she still kept straight on, her eyes set hard upon his, he became strangely uneasy. He licked his lips, blinked his mean little eyes.

"Tha's right, kiddo! Come to papa," he croaked.

And Anna came.

Came unfalteringly, her great, serious brown eyes questing his, her shapely arms hanging loose, little drops of water caressing her limbs as they ran down to her feet.

It is said that a man is never so old or repulsive that he loses his faith in his power to interest a woman. Red Maddox had his own delusions as to his way with the girls; but even his egotism was unequal to the strain of presuming that he had kindled love at first sight in the breast of the glorious little naiad whom he had evoked from the sequestered pond. He felt curiously alarmed as she bore down upon him, wordless, her lips firmly set.

Yet—how helpless she was! Hardly clothed. Not even stooping to pick up a futile stick or stone. Her tender little hands not even clenched! He wet his lips again, and waited.

When Anna abruptly paused she was so near that her fragrant breath bathed Red's face, his nicotine poisoned exhalation sufficed her sensitive nostrils. Slowly, almost lovingly, she raised her arms, cupping his prickly chin in her left palm, the fingers of her right hand settling firmly into the thick hair on the back of his head, pressing against his skull.

Then—just as his own thick arms jerked up convulsively to crush this warm, fragrant, maddening creature against his soiled blue shirt, something happened. Anna's left hand—the one cupping his chin—moved

violently to the left, her right rotated the bullet head downward and to the right.

There is an ancient toast: Here's hoping you never see the back of your neck! It was the grisly salute of the hangmen of old Newgate, who invented it: and it has reference to the fact that a hanged man, dropping to the length of his taut halter, the knot properly under his left jaw, seems to twist his head violently aside as if indeed seeking to view the back of his neck. Hence the toast of the old Newgate hangmen in their hours of relaxation.

It seemed as if, under the sudden, powerful urge of the girl's muscular wrists, Red Maddox sought to scrutinize the back of his own dirty neck. A dizziness overpowered him, a queer prickling swept through his arteries, there was in his ears the swarming of many bees. His body grew limp, sagged.

Instantly the girl shifted her hands. She seized with both hers one of his dangling arms, turning it palm upward and drawing it over her shoulder as her body pivoted so that her back was to him. She arched from the waist, bearing down at the same time upon the hand she had clutched, and with a mighty heave sent the man catapulting over her head and into the pond with a terrific splash which frightened every frog and turtle under water, and drove the observant kingfisher screaming away from his supper.

Angry eyed, Anna stood breathing deeply and watching the rings widen from the place where Red had disappeared. Not until the outermost ring had indeed touched the marsh grasses at the very rim did an uneasy feeling steal upon her. It was time—high time—for the ugly block of Red Maddox to emerge from the pretty little lake he had polluted.

As the seconds fled she was obliged to admit that not even a Kanaka pearl diver could safely stay under so long. A frown gathered between her eyes.

There was no better place for him—she thought—than at the bottom of a lonely pond. It was unthinkable that he was worth salvaging, would be missed by any living creature. And yet—she could not bring herself to turn aside, dress, and go her way. For that would be murder. And though in

dragging him ashore she plagued the world thereby and soiled her own hands in touching him, yet must she go in after him.

A second time she entered the warm, friendly waters, sure that the hobo's head had struck bottom, or that it had not yet cleared from the effects of the "vital touch" of Mitsukato which she had administered. And presently she dragged his sodden carcass ashore, stripped off the coat, laid him upon his face, one arm extended and the other crooked beneath his head, and kneeling above began to give him first aid for the drowned, as taught by Dr. Jarow.

It was not long before he was decanted, and revived. She propped him against a tree, too groggy to note her as she swiftly went through the pockets of his coat.

They yielded a lurid cargo. A fistful of curious, skinny keys, an ugly blue-black gat, a half pint flask; these she hurled far out into the pond. A soggy dollar bill and some loose change she put back in the coat. There remained a scrap of brown wrapping paper with some cryptic pencilings upon it; and, obeying an impulse she could not explain, she laid this out to dry while she swiftly changed into her knickers.

Then, with a sharp glance at the subdued but evidently convalescent Red, she folded the paper and thrust it into her own pocket. An instant later and she was striking up the road at a good four-mile clip.

Half a mile along, a backward glance showing no pursuit by the hobo—not that she feared any---she eased off her pack and sat down to study the diagram of the scrap of paper. Observed at leisure it was less cryptic than had seemed at first glance.

At once it took body as a crude map, drawn by one having few gifts as a draftsman. Here in one corner was a big arrow, marked N, E, S, W. And the sun, now setting, gave her the cardinal points. She was traveling north, in the general direction of the rough arrow. A wavering double line might well indicate the very road she was now on; for at one end of the diagram was the name Briar Farms, a town through which she had passed some two hours back, and at the other end was indicated Sussex, to which she was bound. Also, the ocean was

shown at her right, and at the left a pond, possibly the very one in which she had just had her swim and its surprising climax.

An inch or so along the road—the map was not drawn to scale—was a small cross, marked *church*; and just beyond, but to the left, another cross, marked *big beach*; and here a road, or lane, was marked sharp to the left, terminating in a penciled square against which was written "the lyons."

Taken in connection with the other trifles she had found in the hobo's pocket, it seemed plain that he was guided by this chart, making with no good purpose toward "the lyons," whatever they were. Possibly the name of some one of the big houses which dot the North Shore, estates which more closely resemble those of England than anything else in the United States, with their fox hunting, their broad acres, formal gardens, and vast brick or weed Colonial houses, or pseudo castles of stone. At any rate, having nothing better to do. Anna decided to have a look at "the lyons."

Within the mile she picked up the church, a little white spired meeting house, upon whose front a black shield announced in gilt letters that it held to the Unitarian faith; and less than a mile farther along she came to the branch road at the left. But here she was momentarily puzzled: there most certainly was no "beach," big or little, the ocean being at the right. It was rapidly growing dark; and just before it was too late to make it out she noted a great beech tree standing at the crossroads. This surely was none other than the "big beach."

Unhesitatingly she plunged up the slope to her left, along a road where no houses showed, but only wide stretches of rolling country dotted with great boulders, scrub firs, and occasional sluggish tidal streams.

It was quite dark when she came at length to a high brick wall, which she followed for some hundred yards before an iron gate appeared, its double leaves closed, and with a pair of concrete lions *rampant* upon the posts to which the gate was hinged.

Through the grille and at some distance up the gravel driveway loomed the pile of a great house in which a dim light or two through drawn shades only accentuated its

forbidding façade. It was dominated by a square central tower which thrust itself up into the blue-black sky in which stars were now pricking forth. The gate was locked; but at the right a smaller gate which let upon a footpath stood ajar.

And so—Child Anna to the dark tower came.

III.

THERE was a porter's lodge just inside the gate, but it was dark, and no one accosted Anna as she entered. Indeed, there was an indefinable air of desertion about everything, an overluxuriance of hedge and grass, a stir of little furred and feathered creatures of the night, as if they had taken over the life of the place.

Yet it was not abandoned. There were lights here and there in the black pile of the house ahead; and suddenly, when the little path curved as it paralleled the driveway, a man's voice arrested her.

"Stick 'em up!" His voice, low and menacing, startled her. She stopped, uncertain.

"Stick what up, please?"

A white beam of light smote her, caused her to close her eyes. The voice spoke again.

"Well—I'll be damned! If it ain't a girl scout. Figurin' on campin' out here?"

Anna opened her eyes, and could now make out the solid figure which blocked her narrow path, his wide shoulders brushing the hedge on either side. He was even taller and heavier than the hobo. He had broken arches and a broken nose; but seemed a capable sort of person between these extremes. A half smoked cigar was rammed into one corner of his mouth, and it moved up and down as he spoke. One hairy hand held an electric torch, the other a gun.

"No, I didn't plan to park on your grounds," Anna answered as she appraised him. "But I have reason to think there is a plan to rob your house, or something."

The man studied her in silence for a moment, then pushed aside into the hedge, motioning her to precede him.

"You better tell it to the boss," he said; and so, single file, with his pocket torch lighting the way she continued to the house.

Evidently they were not unprepared, she thought. They kept an able night watchman about, at any rate. Arrived at the entrance, her conductor did not ring, but opened the heavy oak door with a key, and ushered her into a great hall dimly lighted.

It was paneled in some dark wood, and halfway down its length a mighty stairway swept upward into the gloom. Again, she had the queer sense of an untenanted place; her eyes caught the dull glitter of suits of armor, like patient guardians biding their time.

In a drawing-room to her right the hall light penetrated far enough to reveal two or three ponderous chairs and couches wearing linen covers. Over a mantel a dusty mesh covered what was evidently a mirror. There was no sound other than their own footfalls.

For the first time a slight chill gripped her heart, ancestral gooseflesh roughened her skin. For, deadly as a lance de fer though she was in her courage and her knowledge of many secrets of attack and defense she was yet a woman, and for untold centuries women have been subject to the physical powers of men. Not even two years at Nordstrom's could overcome ancient inhibitions that plucked at her nerves, and she was glad when, throwing open a door at the far end of the hall, her companion ushered her into a small study that was bright and warm with a reading lamp on the big flat top desk and sea coal crackling in a grate.

From a deep leather chair an elderly man rose, laying down the newspaper he was reading and tossing his cigarette into the grate. He was tall, thin, scholarly looking. Anna thought, a man with a pointed gray beard and mild yet singularly attentive eyes behind shell goggles. The watchman spoke.

"I picked this girl up down near the gate. She gimme a spiel about some rough stuff she got wise to, that's gonna be pulled off on us."

The nice old gentleman smiled.

"I am Mr. Power, and this is Lioncourt, my summer home. And you are?"

"Miss Anna Flint, sir. I'm hiking along the North Shore, as so many girls are doing this year."

"Quite so; and very jolly it must be! Please be seated, Miss Flint; I'll have some hot tea fetched in a jiffy."

He relieved her of her rucksack, pushed forward a comfortable chair by the fire. Then he turned to the other man.

"Tell Joe to fix up a nice tray, Flatty. Then come back and we'll hear Miss Flint's story."

Flatty left, rather reluctantly it seemed to Anna; but in his absence her host did not touch upon her reasons for coming to warn them. Instead, he asked her about her travels, urged her to take off her hat, and poked at the fire to coax it to a fervid glow.

"I trust your outdoor life gives you a good appetite," he said. "We are just now a household of men, and curiously casual about our meals. Each one eats whenever he feels like it. But my—er—sister is somewhere about, so you needn't feel strange. And I am of a grandfatherly age."

The man called Flatty returned at this moment, and without knocking. He still wore his hat, but at a glance from Mr. Power he removed it and shied it onto a divan, dragging up a chair for himself, facing Anna.

"And now—" he began; but the older man interrupted.

"Not until she has had a cup of tea, my good Flatty. "Ah—here it comes!"

The door swung inward, propelled by a stout boot; and a fat, swarthy Indian entered. He had not shaved that day, and was in shirt and velveteen trousers; but Anna's eyes could see only the tray he bore. It contained not only hot tea, but slices of white chicken dancing on aspic jelly, a lobster salad lovely to behold, with its vivid greens and yellows, its firm pink and white meat, and a stack of buttered toast with all sorts of little frosted cakes.

The girl could not restrain the deep sigh of anticipation that rose to greet this plutocratic high-tea; and the genial old gentleman chuckled with satisfaction.

"Fall to, my child," he said when Joe had set the tray on a taboret and slouched out of the room; and for a few moments she gave herself over to the good things before her, actually forgetting that she was not alone.

But halfway through the lobster salad, the first pangs of her healthy young appetite appeased, she fished the brown paper from the pocket of her tweed jacket and passed it across to Mr. Tower.

"It was this that brought me here," she said simply. "It is crude, of course, but plain enough so that I had no trouble in finding the place."

Both men had pounced upon the document, and were closely examining it, their heads together.

Presently Power spoke.

"I see," he said. "But still I don't quite understand. Just why should you surmise that any danger impends?"

Anna swallowed a sip of fragrant tea.

"Oh, that's because of the man who had the paper. He was the ugliest brute! A hobo, I think."

"And how came it in your possession, if I may ask?"

Anna selected a cake, nibbled at it, laid it aside for a maple eclair.

"Why, you see, I had gone swimming in a little pond. It seemed as lonely and remote as everything; the road I was on is too rough for cars, and I hadn't even met any one on foot for what seemed miles and miles. So, I never dreamed of being spied upon. But when I got ready to wade ashore there was this beast sitting on a rock, grinning at me. He had the nerve to tell me not to hurry; that 'papa' would be waiting for me! So I waded out, and he said other things, and I was angry and threw him into the pond, and I guess his head must have hit something, because he didn't come up, and I had to wade in and drag him ashore and administer first aid. Not that I cared if he *did* drown; but that would have made me a murdereress, wouldn't it?"

Both men had followed her with the closest attention, but neither made reply to her question. So she went on:

"Well, anyhow, he was pretty groggy; and something—I don't know what—led me to go through his coat pockets. I'd stripped the coat off, you see, before I resuscitated him. And I found a flask, and a lot of funny looking keys, and a revolver, and this paper. And so I was sure he was on his way here to rob you, or something."

Flatty grunted.

"How big was this bird?"

Anna looked at him while she munched a ladyfinger.

"He was about your size, Mr. Flatty, but not quite so tall. Thick and heavy, and rough looking."

"Can you describe his face, Miss Flint?" asked Power. "Any peculiarities—anything that struck your attention?"

Anna shook her head.

"No-o; only that he needed a shave and was red-faced and had little twinkly blue eyes and sandy hair."

"It doesn't seem that he could have had any philanthropic motive in visiting us," Mr. Power agreed. "And we are deeply indebted to you for taking so much trouble to warn us."

He glanced at the mantel clock.

"I'm sure you will forego the pleasure of sleeping under a fragrant haymow for one night, and let my—my sister take care of you? We've as many rooms as a hotel. I really cannot permit you to go out into the dark night with such characters as you describe prowling about. If anything were to happen to you, I'd never forgive myself."

Anna started to protest, when once more the door opened and a woman of uncertain years entered. Her figure was good, along the straight lines of to-day, but her make-up was so generous that it was impossible to form any close estimate of her age. Somewhere around forty-five, Anna hazarded, but could not decide whether or not she wore a wig, though she was reasonably certain that her teeth had been bought and paid for.

The chatelaine stood regarding Anna from brilliant black eyes set in a glazed and high-colored face. Power rose to his feet; but Flatty continued to lounge in his chair.

"Nadine, this is Miss Anna Flint, who came to do us a real service to-night. It seems that evil men plot against Lioncourt. You must second my insistence that the child avoid the dangers of going outside to-night. Won't you entertain her until she cares to retire, and then see that she is made comfortable?"

Nadine selected a cigarette, lighted the match in approved form by a flick of her pink thumbnail, exhaled a clever series of diminishing smoke rings, meanwhile regarding Anna from bold eyes.

"Sure I will," she agreed. "Come with me, deary. I'm fed up with men, and tickled pink to see you."

She led the girl through the hall and upstairs to her own boudoir, a room the size and general attractiveness of a public school playground.

Left alone, the two men exchanged quizzical glances. It was Power who spoke first.

"What do you make of it all, my good Flatty?"

"She's a liar!" snapped the watchdog.

The other man raised deprecating eyebrows.

"Still—there may be some crooked work afoot?"

Flatty nodded vigorously, and spat into the grate.

"Sure they may! And she's in it. The kid's clever, but like all women she lets her imagination run away with her. Overplays her hand. She's been sent ahead—sort of a female lighthouse—and she was prob'ly give a straight story to tell. And what does she do? Why, she has to give us a spiel about walkin' up to a guy about my size, and heavin' him into the drink as calm as if she was Mrs. Sandow and him a sick cat. Whyn't she just say she found that paper, and let it go at that? We might of believed her!"

Power nodded thoughtfully.

"But she did so enjoy her own story," he commented gently.

Flatty snorted.

"Gonna turn her loose now she's here?"

The old man smiled, shaking his head.

"Not just yet. She's rather an addition to our dull party, and I shall rely on you to help Nadine to induce her to stay on till we probe this affair a little deeper. Did her description of the hobo mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing, boss. It'd fit any one of fifty 'bos. Anyhow, he's probably only one of the gang of hijacking that's beatin' their way here to double-cross us, each

with his little road map. What worries me is, who's the Big Noise? And who squealed on us?"

Power sighed wearily.

" Too many share our confidence. We've been as careful as possible, but there must be a dozen who know where we are, and who can guess why. Any one of them has his price. You know that as well as I do. None of us here would sell out, because it is more profitable to sit pretty. But we must keep an extra lookout, and I may decide to make a quick getaway. Too bad—for I have taken quite a fancy to this place as a summer home."

Flatty rose, yawned, and turned towards the door.

" Time I made another round of the place," he announced. " From now on, I'll do my sleeping daytimes. So long, boss!"

IV.

MEANWHILE, upstairs Anna had been listening to Nadine's reminiscences of her past social triumphs. " Oh, I've lived, deary!"

Nadine extended slim legs upon her console table, and regarded them approvingly through a fog of cigarette smoke. " I've crashed into Monte Carlo wearin' more ice than Santy Claus, and copped off a peck of them pink and blue franc notes in less'n two hours' play. Danced the rest of the night with barons and dukes. Kings too, maybe. They go to Monte incogno. What I mean is, like you or me would register at a hotel under some other name. They're human, the same as we'. And the same in Paris. I've parked at the little iron tables right out on the sidewalk with the *noblesse oblige*, and drank my absinthe straight and took no hard looks from anybody. Was you ever acrost, deary?"

" When I was a little girl I went to school in Switzerland."

" Yeah? That's a pretty place, too. But kinda dull. And snow everywheres, even in summer. Speakin' of snow—I s'pose you wouldn't care for a shot, deary? No? Well, I ain't what you could call a snowbird, but a sniff now and then—not often—sort of braces me up. It's fierce here, after

the places I been in and the live bunch I've trotted with. Only for Ed—my brother, deary—I'd beat it to-morrow."

Nadine produced a little black and gold lacquer box, opened it with care, and from it poured a tiny heap of iridescent white powder onto the back of her hand at the angle of thumb and forefinger. Raising it cautiously, she inhaled it with one generous sniff, then leaned back and closed her eyes ecstatically.

It presently appeared that Nadine was one of those rare addicts who instead of becoming exhilarated by cocaine, grow sleepy. Just as there are patients who are made as wide-awake by morphine as by strong coffee. It was only by a powerful effort of hospitality that Nadine roused herself sufficiently to show her guest to an ornate suite of chamber, boudoir and bath; and she disappeared immediately thereafter, explaining drowsily that she suffered from insomnia something fierce, and was obliged on rare occasions to have recourse to a bit of coke.

Anna amused herself for a while examining the attractive furnishings, the choice etchings, the lovely bits of French furniture, the many ingenious contrivances devised for woman's comfort and frivolity. Then she took a warm bath, and with a smile at her humble tweeds and sturdy rucksack hung over a chair near by, she clambered between the sheets of Irish linen and devoted herself to the luxury of reading a book from a rack which stood conveniently by the head of her bed.

But she found herself unable to pin her mind to the banal adventures of a couple of flappers and a pseudo-noblemen and bootlegger. The day had been rather hectic; and there were features about the house in which she was quite surprisingly a guest which puzzled her exceedingly.

Lioncourt and its owners were vaguely known to her through the society columns. The Power family was distinctly smart. They had possessed both wealth and culture for several generations.

How then explain the incredible Nadine? Power himself was fairly authentic; but where were his servants? Joe was a creation of straight vaudeville. Flatty seemed

a capable watchman; but why should he treat Power as an equal, and go unrebuked?

Where was Nadine's maid? The butler? Anna's whole life had been spent among the sort of people who owned places like Lioncourt on the North Shore; but it had not prepared her for anything like what she had seen to-night.

From belowstairs rose a babble of masculine laughter and talk. It was not pitched in the key of the set to which people like the Powers belonged. She could not of course hear what they were saying, and eavesdropping was foreign to her code. And yet, vaguely alarmed as well as intensely puzzled, without any conscious plan she presently found herself upon her feet, wrapping about her the soft eiderdown coverlet from her bed.

Like a somnambulist she stole to her door, turned the nob. It opened on noiseless pinions, and she stood in the clock hall. Only the light from the ground floor served to guide her to the stairs.

It was only necessary to descend some three or four steps and to peer between the gracefully turned banisters to discover that the door of the little study was open. The interior, brightly lighted, was revealed to her with its astonishing setting.

Three men sat therein. In place of Flatty, a pale, weasel-faced youth in a chauffeur's livery slouched in a chair, one hand holding a drink he had just poured himself. To him she gave but a passing glance.

Joe, who had fetched her supper tray, sat with sleeves rolled far up his fat, hairy arms, a great glittering heap of rings, watches, lavallières, necklaces, pendants, and pins before him on the table, a pair of pliers in hand. With a dexterity surprising in such pudgy fingers he was sorting these over, prying from each bauble its stones and then tossing the settings into one of several heaps, whether gold, platinum, or base plate.

Mr. Power, sitting across from Joe with a magnifying glass in his hand, took each diamond, pearl, emerald, sapphire or ruby as it was loosened, examined it with the air of an expert, and placed it in one of a

number of little cardboard boxes before him.

And all this industry went on as nonchalantly as if Joe were shelling peas—the men idly chatting of more or less irrelevant matters!

Suddenly, the job was done with. Joe swept the heaps of precious metal into paper bags. Mr. Power collected his little boxes, and bestowed them in a respectable appearing brief case. The chauffeur poured himself another drink. Power spoke:

"Be sure you melt that stuff before you turn in, Joe. We can't take any chances on having stuff that can be identified lying around an hour longer than necessary."

"Sure, boss. And say—that was a rotten lot of junk Silk fetched down to-day! Where's he been workin' anyhow: Revere Beach?"

Anna Flint did not wait to hear Power's reply. Round-eyed, her spine feeling like a long icicle, she pattered in bare feet up the steps and along the dark hall to her door.

A moment later and she had whipped into bed, and quite amazingly—since youth is always amazing—she fell almost at once into a dreamless sleep.

V.

THE sun streaming through shades Anna had forgotten to draw awoke her. A glance at her cheap wrist watch showed the hour to be nine. An exciting day had caused her to oversleep.

With an exclamation of annoyance she leaped from her bed. The great house was silent as a tomb. She stole to her door, unlocked it, and peered out into the empty hall.

How many, and what manner of folk slept behind the long line of closed doors? But she wasted little time speculating upon this. A healthy appetite had awakened with her; and there on a stand beside her door stood another tray. She seized it and bore it within her room, locking the door again.

A sheet of paper bearing the crest of the rampant lions and the name Edward Livingston Power lay folded beside

a covered dish. There were a few lines penciled upon it:

Hoping that Miss Flint enjoyed a good rest, and may discover this tray before its contents are cold.
(Signed) E. POWER.

Smilingly she lifted the silver covers, finding bacon and eggs still warm, toast and marmalade, fruit, and a thermos bottle of delicious hot coffee.

Conscientiously she had gone through her setting-up exercises before touching food. But when after an icy shower she sat down to eat she left not a crumb on the dishes.

Dressed once more for the road, she descended the stairway determined if nobody were about to steal away from this house of mystery, or worse. She debated whether or not to leave a note of thanks for the scholarly Mr. Power. He had certainly treated her with chivalrous kindness! But she was still undecided when, just as she drew near the front door, Flatty appeared from the drawing-room at her left.

He looked a bit bedraggled, with red-rimmed eyes and bristly chin, as if he had been up all night and needed a good bath and sleep.

He grinned sourly at her, his eyes on her rucksack.

"Thinkin' of leavin' us?" he grated.

"I am," Anna replied crisply. "Please thank Mr. Power and his sister for their hospitality."

She reached for the doorknob, when Flatty's right hand shot out and closed painfully about her wrist.

"Not quite so fast, kid," he leered.

Anna dropped her rucksack, looked him squarely in the eyes.

"You will please take your hand off," she said. "I'm not used to being pawed over by strange men."

Flatty grinned: "Is—that—so?"

For a second or two they stood facing one another wordlessly. Then Anna pulled sharply away from him, which both caused his grip to tighten and extended his arm. She half turned, thrusting her own left arm beneath his just at the elbow, her left hand gripping her own right wrist, the one he was holding. Suddenly, rising from her

toes, she threw her left arm upward, at the same time bearing down with her right.

There came a sharp crack, and Flatty dropped her wrist, bawling with pain and surprise, his right arm dangling useless at his side. The girl made no move to escape.

When his howls died down so that she could make herself heard, she said: "If you will stop squalling like an overgrown schoolboy I'll help you. It's nothing but a dislocated elbow. See! I'll slip it back into place."

She reached down and took his hand in both hers; then, gracefully raising one leg she braced one foot between his armpit and tugged with all her might. A soft click told her that the adjustment had been accomplished.

"You must be careful not to use the arm much for a day or so, then it will be all right again," she encouraged.

Flatty mopped his sweating brow, angry and wondering eyes fixed upon her.

"Who in hell are you, anyway?" he snarled.

"I'm a teacher of physical culture. Look me up next fall, and I will give you some private lessons. It's a shame for a big, husky man like you to be so clumsy. And now tell me—*am I supposed to be a prisoner here?*"

It was not Flatty who answered her, but the urbane voice of Mr. Power at her shoulder.

She turned quickly and found him smiling at her.

"I beg you not to use the word *prisoner*, my child. How indeed could frail men like us hope to detain you against your will? But I had hoped that you would be willing to be our guest for a little time. You see, I am anxious in case we are attacked to have you identify the man from whom you took the map. It is my desire to do my bit toward suppressing the crime wave that curses our fair land at present."

Anna considered.

"I'll stay a reasonable time," she decided. "But warn your man here to keep his hands from me."

Mr. Power bowed.

"You have already warned him far more forcibly than could I."

Flatty departed, rubbing his arm and mumbling his intention of having a snooze on the divan in the drawing-room. Mr. Power after inquiring if Anna had found her breakfast to her taste, and apologizing for his sister as a late riser, begged her to consider the house and its grounds as her own, and retired to the little study at the end of the hall.

VI.

ANNA possessed her fair share of feminine curiosity. Lioncourt was not exactly a rest cure, elements of actual danger were not lacking. But she decided to stick around for one day and see what might happen. When she once made up her mind to leave, she believed she would be able to go. This might of course be overconfidence; but it was the way she felt about it.

She dropped her rucksack and blanket roll onto a carved chest in the hall and strolled into the library which opened off across from the drawing-room. Here she soon became absorbed in a remarkable collection of books, many of them old and beautifully bound. She was curled up in a leather chair looking at the cuts in an early edition of "Don Quixote," when some one rapped smartly upon the front door.

The tireless Flatty, looking sleepier than ever, answered the summons; and Anna, crossing to the shuttered window, peered between the slats and beheld a smart young lieutenant of the State police, his motorcycle leaned against one of the big pillars of the porte-cochère. He evidently knew Flatty, and addressed him familiarly.

"I picked up a couple of hard-looking eggs this morning, Tom, hanging around your place. Both of 'em had gats, and I ran them in for toting concealed weapons. Thought I'd tip you off."

"Much obliged," rumbled Flatty. "This man's country is gettin' worse 'n the Wild West."

"Yeah," agreed the officer. "And another thing, Tom. When Mr. Power left, he told me there would be nobody around here but you. No parties. I see quite a number of people coming and going 'most every day. How about it?"

"'S'all right, Jack. My father and aunt, and their chauffeur. Happened to be passing through, and I invited 'em to stop off. The place is really safer with 'em in it—and it makes it less lonesome for me. No parties, nothing like that; old folks, quiet sort."

Anna did not catch the officer's reply, her attention being drawn to the man she knew as Power, who was stealing down the hall past the library, to hide himself behind the front door which Flatty had pulled nearly closed when he had stepped outside to talk with their caller. Power's back was to Anna, his attention riveted on the conversation; and a sudden inspiration caused her to slip soundlessly back down the hall and into the little study which Power had just vacated.

It was plain that he was not Power at all; that he and the other queer members of the household were there against the absentee owner's express orders, and in collusion with Flatty, the caretaker. It was not probable that they meditated robbing Power of his books or furniture, or any such small game as that; by piecing together what she had seen and heard, Anna guessed that a band of crooks, of whom her distinguished host was quite probably the master mind, was using Lioncourt as a headquarters for stolen property. There had been numerous sensational jewel robberies and stick-ups of late along the North Shore, and while a number of arrests had been made no trace of the loot had been found.

If, now, that brief case with its loose stones had been left behind by the bogus Power in the study, and she could have three uninterrupted minutes! She reached the door unobserved, crept in.

It was there! There on the desk, close to the chair which Power had pushed back when he quitted it to listen to what the State constable had to say. Her fingers fumbled at the catch; they seemed all thumbs. But once open, her nerves steadied. They were there, the same little cardboard boxes she had seen the night before; and she breathed deeply as, on removing their lids, the blue and green and white and red fires of diamonds and

emeralds and sapphires smoldered in the depths of their leather prison.

Her mind moved swiftly and logically now. The stones—she must hastily conceal these, and without delay. But the briefcase she must take with her; so that when they missed it, the mob would assume that she had decamped with the spoils, and would not pause to search the room for the stones. These she had no time to hide cunningly; at any moment Power might return, and the little study had but the one door.

Her eyes darted about the room, questing a place not too obvious, to thrust the jewels into. The grate? The fire when lighted that evening might ruin them, certainly would destroy the pearls. Beneath a leather chair cushion? They would make a hard lump there. A vase? There was none in this man's room.

Her eyes chanced upon a large glass globe which had been the tenement of a goldfish family. It was unoccupied now and dry, but it contained a quart more or less of sand and pebbles, together with one of the little cement castles with which such globes are tricked out.

Hurriedly she scooped the débris to one side, emptied the little paper boxes into the globe, roughly covered the gorgeous heap with the sand and dull pebbles, topped all with the little castle. Save that the pile was now a good deal higher, the globe looked exactly as before.

Snapping shut the brief case on the empty boxes she ran on her toes to the door to peer out and see if old Power were still engrossed in eavesdropping. And even as her hand thrust forward to press back the door, it opened wide, and the fat, greasy face of Joe stared in on her. And behind him, down the hall, Power stood whispering with Flatty, who had reentered the house.

Joe seemed to sense the situation instantly. His eyes took in the fact that she was alone, that she clutched the brief case in one hand, and that she was just on the point of making a get-away with it. He showed his teeth, pushed on into the room, barring her escape.

"So! Verree clever! We feed you and use you nice, and soon's the boss steps out

you cop the works. Well, maybe you fool hem; but Joe keep one eye peeled. *Drop that bag!*"

Instead, Anna sent it crashing through the one window and out onto the lawn. With an oath, Joe leaped for her.

There wasn't much room in the study for maneuvering, and Anna's move was as instinctive as the twist of a kitten tossed in air. There was just space enough between them, with none to spare.

As Joe sprang, she leaned backward, both arms flung outward and downward like a slackwire performer's, while her straight right leg shot up with the power and accuracy of a drop-kicker's. The sturdy toe of her hiking boot caught Joe under the chin and snapped his head back with a splintering of live ivory. His knees buckled and he fell forward on his face as Anna sidestepped to avoid the impact of his heavy body.

In so stepping, her back was turned to the door; and without having heard a sound she became aware of something hard and cold which pressed against the back of her neck. A pleasant voice came to her from behind.

"Really, my child, you keep my quiet household in an uproar! This that you feel is a gun, and it is loaded. I deeply regret the seeming lack of chivalry, but after the way you manhandle my young men, what can one of my venerable years do? Flatty, you might pass a serviceable cord about Miss Anna's hands—and feet. I wonder if she can do any mischief with her ears?"

Anna's eyes smarted with tears of mortification and rage. Why had she been such a little fool as to try to outwit and outgame a whole crew of men, when a word to the efficient young man of the State constabulary would have served every purpose? It had been, she realized, because she had been loath to turn over to the law the nice old gentleman whose gun at this very moment irritated her neck. And this was her reward!

Well, the game was up now. They taught no tricks at Nordstrom's that could beat a thirty-two caliber at the base of one's brain!

She shuddered as Flatty approached her

with a cord he had taken from the desk drawer; and the slight movement brought her eyes on a line with the smashed window through which she had but five minutes before hurled the brief case. What she saw electrified her even more powerfully than had the touch of Power's gun.

Outside, looking in, was the most magnificent specimen of young manhood she had ever beheld. In his trim khaki uniform, with the insignia of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts upon his cap and a war medal upon his breast, straight limbs encased in shiny leather guards, a service gun in his right hand, he looked like General Pershing, and Rudolph Valentino, and Santa Claus, only far, far handsomer and braver and nobler.

"It's all up, boys!" he announced through the broken pane. "My side kick has the front covered. Just drop that gun, 'Parson' Graves! And hold 'em up high."

Still covering them, he thrust up the window with his left hand and clambered briskly into the room.

"Clever move, throwing out that bag, lady! I heard the crash and turned back to investigate. *Whoa!* E-easy there!"

For Anna had swayed toward him, her eyes fluttering.

Never before had she felt such a queer, delicious, woozy, floating sensation. What it meant she could not imagine; but Anna Flint, ranking graduate of Nordstrom's School of Physical Culture, was exercising her inalienable right as a woman, and was getting ready to faint.

Nevertheless, she did not yield to the alluring coma; and the stimulant which snapped her out of it was the glimpse of another woman. The young officer stood with his back to the window through which he had entered, his gun covering the meek but watchful Parson Graves, fat Joe still unconscious on the floor.

Just as her eyes closed there was registered in them a smooth white arm clasped by a jade circlet. The covetous, over-manicured fingers were reaching furtively in through the window, and toward the heavy goldfish globe which stood just inside the room upon a taboret.

Anna's eyes widened, her gaze traveling up that smooth arm to the elbow sleeve and shoulder of a gorgeous mandarin coat, and so came at last to rest upon the white face of the woman Nadine, her sleepy eyes glittering with the cunning of the addict.

For an instant while Anna swayed against the broad shoulder of her constable, she was unable to cry out or even to move. And in this brief interval she beheld the heavy bowl lifted from its taboret by Nadine, who, despite her seeming lethargy, must, Anna realized, have watched her as she emptied the contents of the leather brief case into it.

The glass globe was almost at the window ledge when with a desperate wrench Anna freed herself from the lethargy that had locked her vitality in its clammy embrace. She left the alluring shelter of that strong, masculine shoulder, balanced herself, and cast a swift glance at the desk beside which she stood. Upon it, among other odds and ends, stood a brass paperweight in the form of a little figurine of Blind Justice holding the scales. Her fingers were closed tightly about it.

There was not even time to raise her arm to throwing position; but with a swift underhand delivery, as one bowls a cricket ball, she sent the little brass image crashing against the goldfish bowl.

There followed simultaneously a piercing cry from the thwarted Nadine, a hissing intake of Parson Graves's breath, a swift backward leap of the surprised young officer as their crystal prison shattered into a thousand bits, the floor of the little room seemed suddenly alive with a cascade of blue and red and violet and green fires as two hundred thousand dollars' worth of precious stones skipped and spun across the smooth parquet!

And, as if with deliberate irony, a necklace of matched pearls flew through the air like a rainbow and dropped insolently upon the fat, greasy neck of Joe. He did not move; but a little moan causing Anna to glance aside, she beheld Parson Graves swaying on his feet.

It was he, rather than the girl in knickers, who had fainted away!



The Command of Honor.

By **WALTER A. SINCLAIR**

FEW die and none resign." Rather a catchy phrase that. It has amused several generations.

Office-holders? Bah! Nothing could be more scorned by the solid businessman, the secure professional or the prosperous workingman. Not that *they* would relinquish their security or their freedom from general criticism to take over the precarious, thankless task of conducting public business. Oh, no. Not they.

More open to reason are the unsuccessful and unscrupulous. *They* would take the responsibility— and anything else that was not nailed down securely. Envious suspicion, not respect or understanding, colors their more tolerant view of the public servant. To them a public office is a public crib, a good place to be loose in with sticky fingers.

Before a public made up of those who scorn to be interested and of those who covet or condone the possible graft, the office-holder performs until struck down, too often by accident rather than by indignant righteousness. Or else he seeks to

make himself invisible by giving a colorless administration.

Occasionally he eludes all previously known classifications, and then he utterly astounds his dear public, even as Captain Bill Hendrick did when they put Malcolm Wayne on his trail.

Wayne swung off the accommodation smoker and strolled over to the nearest driver whose ancient rig stood beside the depot platform. The other hackman eyed his rival enviously.

"How much to drive me to the—" Wayne hesitated and consulted a letter, then concluded—"the Grand Palace Hotel?"

The driver speculatively studied his prospective fare for the space of a few seconds, spat at a wheel hub, and replied briefly, "Fifty cents."

"Sold," announced the young man from the big city, handing his suit cases to the driver and stepping into the back seat of the rig.

The Jehu slapped the reins around the

neck of the ancient steed, whirled him to the nearest corner, rounded it and stopped in front of a doorway just beyond. It was not more than a stone's throw from the depot, and the stone-thrower would not have to be too powerful, either.

Swinging the grips to the pavement the driver stood expectantly while the dazed young man from the city mechanically alighted, handed over the promised fare, and stood before the hostelry grimly regarding the retreating rig. The driver was striving with poor success to control his risibles.

"Well, if that's a good sample," ruminated Wayne, "this town certainly needs to have its books examined."

Which brings us to the cause of his dropping off the late afternoon train at this rural county seat in the Central States, vaguely termed in the East as the Middle West.

William Hendrick had been county clerk for thirty years, having prepared very ably for that high office by sacrificing one leg for the preservation of the Union on an April day in '62.

Little did the hasty army surgeon, feverishly cutting while Albert Sidney Johnston's gray regiments fell back from Shiloh, realize that he wielded the power of a Murphy or a George Harvey in awarding continued political preferment when he bandaged the knee-length stump of the soft-spoken captain of Union Volunteer Infantry and left him to return to his home town. Here was an unanswerable argument during the many campaigns which followed those war days, campaigns in which the G.A.R. and the Sons of Veterans marched to the polls in regimental formation.

The younger generation grew up with the fixed belief that the office of county clerk and Captain Hendrick were synonyms. The courtly, military-appearing gentleman with the quiet voice and pleasant words for all who met him as he swung briskly along on his unostentatious crutches seemed the ideal man for the office. He filled it with distinction and with courtesy for all. Elections became mere ratifications.

Eventually, however, the day came when the old enemy with the swinging scythe had mowed down the comrades until their vote

no longer was a deciding factor. And the Sons were growing bald or forgetful. A party schism disrupted his party's organization and Captain Hendrick's fences were swept away.

When the smoke had cleared, a new man, a younger man had captured the party nomination, which was almost equivalent to election in that county. With unrustled countenance, Captain Bill retired from his snug harbor in the courthouse to the difficult task of beginning life anew at sixty, after more than a quarter of a century in public office.

What he thought, what he suffered, nobody else knew, for he never complained to any one. Just as during the preceding three decades, he presented to a cynical world a pleasant, untroubled face and to friend or foe he had a kindly word.

Each morning he could be seen at a regular hour driving the fat family horse down Main Street to his new little office. There, after attending to his meager correspondence and having previously fortified himself with his favorite newspaper, he turned resignedly to see in what new form the opposition sheet would reiterate its old demand that his official career be examined thoroughly.

The dead lion was being kicked. The attacks had begun the day after the convention. They were guarded and libel-dodging editorials, carefully worded indirections which by constant repetition had done their work of arousing unrest and doubt on the matter, although none save the few interested would admit that they suspected irregularities.

The newspaper attacks specifically and with poison-spreading wording insisted that no criminal acts were charged, but stressed that in a quarter century tenure of office by one man, slips or mistakes might have been allowed to go unheeded. The leading question of the hostile sheet was: "Why does he not defend his record? If he is so certain, why does he not demand an investigation?"

To which the friendly paper replied that there was no charge to meet, that no reputable person had or would raise a doubt against Captain Bill, and that it was time for the campaign of cowardly innuendo to

cease. Captain Hendrick continued to smile pleasantly at his friends and to go about his daily drives with calm demeanor.

Then, without warning, the blow fell. An investigation of his old office was ordered. Expert examiners were engaged to delve into the books and papers of the county clerk's office and to turn up anything they could find. The newspaper which had agitated this probe blazoned forth a scare-head front page in which it was promised that the investigation would astonish the county.

With the subsiding of the preliminary trumpet flourishes the county sat back to await developments. These were to be furnished by Malcolm Wayne and Jared Perrine, expert accountants and examiners from the big city. And now Wayne had arrived to begin work.

He registered at the hotel recommended to him in a letter and engaged a room for Perrine, who was to arrive on the following morning. After making himself presentable he strolled to the courthouse, having been assured that the distance was trifling.

An hour's conversation with the county commissioners gave him the necessary information regarding the details of the work which he was to begin the following day. Later Wayne found himself chatting with the friendly young deputy of the new county clerk. Matters of no great moment having been discussed, the townsman remarked:

"If you've nothing else to do to-night, you might be interested in going over to the hospital ball." As the examiner stared an interrogation he continued explanatorily: "It's a regular monthly event over at the hospital—the asylum, you know. The people in charge over there let all but the really violent ones recreate that way once a month. The patients and some of the attendants have a really good orchestra, and lots of the townsfolk who are interested in these patients go over and jolly 'em up by mixing with them for an evening. If you've never been to such an affair it might interest you as a novelty for an hour at least."

"It sounds inviting," agreed Wayne, politely, "and if you'll take me along I'll be delighted."

At eight o'clock that night he and Gregg, the young county employee, stood on the edge of the State Hospital ballroom watching with interest the well-conducted dance of the mixed company. From their actions it was impossible to distinguish which were patients.

The young man from the big city admitted that he was indeed witnessing something new in his experience.

"If you feel like dancing or if you'd like to talk with any of the girls here to-night just let me know," said Gregg, genially. "I know practically everybody here, both those who are kept here and those who possibly ought to be."

He laughed at his little joke and followed Wayne's gaze, which was directed at a very pretty young woman a few yards away. A mischievous devil sparkled in Gregg's eyes. Before Wayne had time to refuse had he so wished, Gregg dragged him forward, whispering "Be very careful what you say to her." Then, raising his voice, he addressed the young woman:

"Louise, let me introduce Mr. Wayne, a newcomer from the city," he announced. "Miss Hendrick, Mr. Wayne."

And with that the humorous Mr. Gregg dashed away in the direction of a petite auburn-haired girl who had been beckoning him with her eyes. The band crashed forth as Wayne paused uncertainly before the willowy, dark-haired young woman in plain shirtwaist and dark skirt. As a dazed outsider he heard his voice saying, "Shall we dance?"

Whatever her reply was he could not say but after one moment in which sympathy for his bewilderment drove refusal from her expression, she had nodded and they were waltzing. If his conversation lacked coherence, his dancing was irreproachable. No other couple on the floor moved in as perfect rhythm to the music as they did. Not a word was spoken, for Wayne was trying desperately to fathom Gregg's admonition to be careful what he said to his dancing partner.

"Surely she can't be—she doesn't belong here," he assured himself. But he spoke very guardedly when the number was over.

"I never enjoyed a dance so much be-

fore," he declared as they strolled to one of the big windows for a breath of cool spring air. There was little of guardedness in his enthusiasm.

"Thank you. I appreciate the remark, coming as it does from you," she replied, enigma in her liquid, dark eyes.

"From me?" he echoed, puzzled and wondering if she meant because he was from a large city. Or could it be—?

"Don't you know?" she inquired calmly, with just the slightest raising of her eyebrows. There was a hurt look in her eyes now.

Wayne's heart interfered with his normal breathing. Was it possible that this quiet, adorable young woman really belonged in this institution after all?

"No, I know nothing," he replied rather blankly.

"In that case, I think it was rather unkind of George Gregg to introduce you," she commented simply. "I am afraid it will do you no good to be seen with me. People will talk, no matter how brief or formal our acquaintance may be."

"Let them talk," declared the bewildered young man, speaking impulsively and for the moment forgetting the injunction of his mentor. "I am my own judge of such matters and if I want to dance with you I will. To prove it, will you dance the next number with me?"

"No," she replied. "I must get away."

"Away? Do you mean—?" he exclaimed and then checked his startled inquiry. "If there is anything I can do for you, any way I can help you, tell me now and I will—"

"Hush!" she warned. "You might be overheard, and it would ruin you. Don't talk about it any longer. There is a way you could help me, but you must not do it, must not think of it. You could not and should not, even though it is in your power."

"I will," he asserted recklessly, forgetting everything else. For an examiner and public accountant he was a somewhat cavalier young man. The girl silenced him with a gesture.

"You don't know what you are talking about," she continued. "You must stop

speaking that way at once and leave me or you will get us both into a lot of trouble. Please let me go."

Wayne started to speak again, when with a quick cool little bow she left his side and hurried around the edge of the dancing floor to another part of the ballroom.

Bewildered by what he had heard and experienced, the newcomer withdrew from the room for fear his looks would betray his disturbed thoughts. In that dazed condition he secured his hat and coat, boarded a street-car and returned to his hotel.

Once the door was locked he sat down and pondered long and bewilderedly.

"If she isn't sane, then I don't want to be," he muttered. "And yet, what the deuce did she mean about didn't I know? And that about being seen with her would ruin me? And about wanting to get away? What in thunder was her name, anyway? All I can remember was Louise. Jove! such eyes. Sane or not, she certainly is a beauty!"

With which illogical conclusion he retired to sleep.

At breakfast on the following morning the mystery was solved completely by a neat, full-page headlined article in the local paper which had boomed the investigation. With tingling indignation Wayne read the florid account of how the expert engaged by the county had danced and chatted on the preceding night with the daughter of the man he was to investigate. The name of the old county clerk had seldom been used in any of Wayne's conferences and he had never for a moment remembered it during the dance.

Perrine, older and soured, joined him after breakfast and rallied him sharply about his romantic adventure of the night before.

"I was met at the station by the editor of the *Banner*," he said with ponderous sarcasm. "He inquired if I intended to disport myself with any member of the victim's family. I assured him I was a conservative family man. But seriously, old man, that was a rather fool thing to do, considering our position here."

"Great grief!" exploded the younger man. "Do you sit there and suppose that

I deliberately—? Oh, rats! In fact, oh, hell! Why, it was that confounded young Gregg, a cub in the county clerk's office, who put this over on me without my having the slightest suspicion. Between him and the cabman, these small town comedians are having fun with the city slicker. Why, he had me introduced to the girl and had vanished before I had time to draw a breath. Anyhow, I hardly caught her name and I didn't remember the name of the man we are here to investigate at that."

"Well, wasn't there some reason for his introducing you?" persisted Perrine. "Didn't she give you the merry wave or....?"

"Hold on there," commanded Wayne. "She's a lady, every minute of the day. I was casting admiring eyes in her direction without knowing who she was when that young fool dragged me over. He told me to be careful what I said to her and left us. I thought from his remark that maybe she was one of the patients. And some of the things she said had me guessing. What she was trying to do was to shoo me back before I compromised myself. She did everything but tell me in words of one syllable, but I misunderstood. Then it seems Jasper J. Muckrake was on the job. Let's forget it and get to work."

"Right, son," agreed Perrine, and they walked briskly to the courthouse.

II.

THE weeks that passed were filled with hard work for the two men. They came and went with not a word to any one else about their investigation or their discoveries. That had been their advance agreement with the county authorities. There was no more accepting of social invitations which might lead to compromising distractions, but the two investigators occasionally relaxed in public manner. Twice during that period Wayne saw Miss Hendrick, once while she and her father were driving along Main Street and again one evening at the local theater where a traveling company was giving a one-night stand.

On both occasions he bowed to her and saw his salutation returned, but neither of

them sought a conversation. Wayne realized his own position and what hers must be. Eventually Perrine discovered that something was weighing on his partner's mind.

"What is it, youngster?" he asked. "That girl?"

Wayne gloomily regarded the wall of his room.

"I believe you're smitten," exclaimed the other playfully, or at least as playfully as Perrine could make it.

"Smitten?" burst forth Wayne. "Man! what gives you such almost human insight? A girl with such glorious eyes and hair! And a face that would make a man forget his duty. And a charm of voice and manner that's irresistible! And here I sit, unable to speak to her, acting as one of a jury of two on her father, barred from her by fears of Mrs. Grundy and the *Banner*. I suppose we can't quarrel with our daily bread, but that editor is skating on mighty thin ice when he comes around me with his questions every day. He seems to think he owns us just because his agitation brought us here."

Perrine cast his eyes upward solemnly and blew out a big cloud of cigar smoke.

"You're a nice, unprejudiced jury," he murmured.

"You don't mean to say that I would let any feeling I have in the matter interfere with—" he began, when Perrine interrupted him with:

"You couldn't—with me."

There the matter dropped until it forced itself to Wayne's attention in startling manner. They were on their last day of examination when he was given the shock. Perrine had gone to the hotel to work on the report and Wayne was just preparing to leave the courthouse room assigned to them, when the telephone bell tinkled. At first he decided to ignore it and was starting to leave the room when some unexplainable impulse caused him to answer the summons.

"I want to speak to Mr. Wayne," came a muffled voice, distinctly feminine and lowered to the least audible pitch.

"This is Wayne speaking," he announced, puzzled.

"This is Miss Hendrick," came the voice almost in a whisper. "Oh, Mr. Wayne, can't you give me some indication in advance of what—of what you have found out?"

Amazed by the request, the young investigator looked guiltily around the room. Nobody else was present.

"I can't do that," he managed to say finally. "Really, I have secrecy imposed on me until the matter is submitted to the proper persons, to the commissioners."

"Not one little hint? Please!" The last word was drawn out in a quavering, seductive undertone.

"You mustn't ask me. It isn't permissible," he answered, groaning inwardly. His beliefs were being shattered rapidly.

"Can't you understand?" the voice continued, and there seemed to be a suppressed sob in the low tones. "If we only knew, we might leave town before the report was in, or if you can't tell me over the wire I could meet you—"

"No," snapped Wayne, using the shortest way to reply, for fear that he never could finish a sentence coherently.

"Are any of the revelations—unexpected?" persisted the voice with the sob.

"Yes." The word slipped out. Then, realizing that he had been trapped into an answer, Wayne hastily hung up the receiver and left the courthouse.

His dinner displeased him that night, and he was short in his replies to Perrine, who was working on his report. The older man saw that Wayne was morose, and jokingly asked: "Girl again?"

"Don't!" cried the younger man, as though stung to the quick. He turned such a forbidding countenance on Perrine that the latter whistled in his astonishment.

"You aren't giving off any rhapsodies on glorious hair, midnight eyes, charm of person—"

"Stop it!" commanded the other tartly. And Perrine realized sagely that it was time to desist.

Wayne resented the confinement of the hotel room. The May night was calling as he strode angrily out into the open where he quickly covered several blocks before he realized how rapidly he was walking to

nowhere in particular. Then he slackened to a leisurely swing which took him down dim side lanes quite unfamiliar to him, but more suitable to his disturbed mood than the well lighted Main Street.

Across these sidewalks hung the thick-leaved branches of trees, casting inky shadows under the moon's rays. Here were pretty walks, sylvan-arched and flanked by modest, comfortable homes. From them came the sounds of music and the mellow glow of ruddy lamps. Here to him came a feeling of comparative calm after the unpleasant emotions of the evening.

Music, lights, pleasant subdued voices, muffled sounds of domesticity, the great American home soothing, resting, refreshing its occupants for the morrow. He yearned for such a home with peace, contentment—and a mate.

His eyes were fixed meditatively upon the sidewalk when suddenly he was aware of a gate latch clicking ahead of him. He looked up in time to encounter the surprised gaze of Louise Hendrick as she stood on the inner side of the picket fence before a modest dwelling.

"Good evening," she greeted simply, her dark eyes frankly meeting his.

Wayne had lifted his hat and was about to pass by after returning her salutation. Instead, without conscious intention, he found himself leaning confidentially over the gate.

"I didn't know you lived here," he stated apologetically.

"I don't suppose you did," she returned evenly, without the slightest hint of understanding his meaning. "And yet you are here."

"I have a habit of coming to you," he continued vaguely. "It seems to me that I was led here by fate for some reason. It appears inevitable that we should meet, whether other people like it or not. Nothing can convince me that I came here by accident. And yet, who would have thought I would be hanging over your garden gate talking with you, after the abrupt conclusion of our last conversation?"

"It was rather abrupt, wasn't it?" she said; and he could see in the soft spring evening light that she was smiling, albeit

a trifle sadly. "You probably have learned since to your sorrow what the consequences are of speaking recklessly to me."

"I don't care about the consequences," Wayne announced bitterly, a trifle puzzled by her calmness. "I don't care what any one says or thinks. I don't care—do you understand? I only know—oh, Louise, can't you see?"

Wonder light was in her eyes now. In them was the dawning of infinite tenderness, of sadness and joy intermingled. Her lips parted in an eager smile which wiped out the lines of pain which had pressed them so closely.

For a moment she swayed as though some great force was driving her to him, something that neither could resist, something which had nothing to do with calm consideration of their relative positions. But her gentle yielding was halted even as it began.

Through the front door came the padded sound of faint *clump-clumps*. Silhouetted in the soft amber light from the hallway was a straight, slender figure moving calmly but steadily toward them. On the porch the figure halted and spoke.

"Louise, dear, are you there?" The voice was wonderfully mellow and deep, with just the suggestion of a guitar twang to its echoing finale. A voice rich with kindness, sympathy and courtliness. There was nothing inquisitive about the tone—merely a polite salutation. It announced rather than inquired.

"Yes, father." Louise Hendrick turned to the silhouetted figure that had paused on the porch. She took a step or two toward the house. "This is Mr. Wayne, you know. Mr. Wayne, my father."

Instinctively Malcolm Wayne clicked his heels together as he faced that commanding figure on the porch. No man with two good legs under him ever stood straighter than did Captain William Hendrick at that moment.

Although two crutches of dark brown wood snuggled into his armpits, the old veteran ignored their presence almost as though he denied their existence. There was nothing about the way he handled them to call attention to these artificial

aids, nothing to solicit the sympathy of the spectator for his physical deficiency.

Wayne, who had heard sneering comments that this man had traded on his missing leg for thirty years at the public crib, was keenly aware at the moment that nothing about Captain Bill requested any such consideration. There was nothing of the cripple, physical or mental, about him. His long head, topped with an abundance of iron gray hair, was held high and his shoulders were squared in soldierly style.

"Won't you invite Mr. Wayne to step in and sit a piece with us?" suggested the captain courteously to his daughter. "It is such a pleasant evening that I was going to sit here on the porch while I smoked. If it is not presuming too much, we would be pleased to have you join us. Of course, as a lawyer, I ought to warn Mr. Wayne that he is risking his professional reputation. It might be considered a bit unethical, but I am sure our neighbors can trust us to keep away from debatable topics."

He laughed a low, soft chuckle which set all the guitar strings within him thrumming. Wayne was drawn irresistibly to the man. It was patent why he had held the affections and support of the voters for more than a quarter century. The public accountant felt a responsive stir of friendliness—and of pity for what he had endured and still must endure.

Louise Hendrick had unlatched and opened the gate for Wayne and he was walking toward the porch with her before he realized what he was doing. Within him the voice of ordinary business caution was screaming: "Stop! Don't you know what this means? You are ruining yourself." But Wayne strolled firmly ahead and seated himself on one of the porch mats which Louise spread at the top of the steps. She seated herself beside him. Wayne was within a few feet of the veteran who had lowered himself into a rocker. The mellow light from indoors touched up his countenance with friendly tint.

The iron gray hair topped a high, scholarly forehead. The face was sensitive and almost delicate in spite of the dark gray mustache and goatee which covered the lips and jaw. There were hints of suffering

carefully suppressed about the good-humored eyes and firm mouth. The hands which hastily put the crutches out of sight and slipped the skirt of a light overcoat over the pinned-up trouser leg were slender and aristocratic.

"I suppose you are looking forward to next week," suggested Wayne, hastening to clarify any possible ambiguity by adding: "The thirtieth."

"Well, no, we were thinking some of going away to-morrow for a little while. You see—" and Captain Hendrick suddenly interrupted himself, while Wayne remembered with a strange, unhappy pang, the telephone inquiry. "Of course, I usually ride with the comrades. We're gradually dropping out. It won't be many years when we all will have broken ranks. I hope there never will be another occasion that will replace us in line with younger men. It is rather sad in a way, noticing who is missing as each year comes around. And yet it is pleasant to meet some of the old comrades one never sees at any other time."

"Tell me some of your experiences down there—in '61," urged Wayne.

"Oh, no," softly declined the older man with a deprecatory wave of his hand. "That is all past. It is best forgotten. There were good men on both sides, brave men. They did what they thought right. The thing is settled. There can be no progress, no advancement when men keep up their war memories and hatreds after all these years. For most of the year I prefer to forget all of that, but on Memorial Day I'll admit my thoughts are drawn to it when I meet my old comrades. That is all. We are living in to-day and, in our children, we live in to-morrow. There can be no good in looking back. Think of Lot's wife."

He chuckled softly. Wayne sat silent, puzzled. Was this the veteran who lost a leg repulsing a charge at Shiloh? Was this one of the company commanders upon whose unyielding valor Grant based his successes?

The investigator was pondering when the gate latch clicked and a stoutish, middle-aged man swaggered up the walk. He was a rather beefy-faced, aggressive looking in-

dividual whose clothes fitted him negligently, whose hat was cocked at a belligerent angle and who failed to remove the cigar from his contorted mouth as he reached Miss Hendrick's side. He nodded coldly, a bit apprehensively.

"Good evening, Sherm," said Captain Bill, civilly. "Do you know Mr. Turbush, Mr. Wayne?"

Yes, Wayne knew Sherman Turbush, the editor of the *Banner*. He had good reason to know him, for the man had pestered him daily for advance information on the investigation which daily he had refused. Turbush favored him with a sneering glance charged with accusation.

"Kinda funny place for you to be, Wayne, considering," commented Turbush truculently.

Wayne opened his mouth to retort angrily, but somehow it seemed out of place in the presence of that calm man in the porch chair.

"Captain Hendrick," snapped Turbush, "you probably know that the investigation of your administration has been completed and that the report of this gentleman"—the word was drawled out sneeringly—"and his partner will be submitted to the county commissioners to-morrow. I managed to get that much out of Perrine anyway, although it appears that these gentlemen don't give out any information—to the press."

"You know we were placed under promise of secrecy until we reported," said Wayne sharply. He rose. "Pardon me for interrupting. I had better leave as you have private matters to discuss."

"Never mind leaving now," ordered Turbush. "I was going to look you up later and this is more convenient, to have you both at once."

"Possibly Mr. Wayne would prefer not to remain, although I am sure he is welcome to do so as far as I am concerned," interposed Captain Hendrick. "What is it, Sherm? I didn't know that the report was ready."

"I'm here to give you a chance to make a statement in advance of the report—it may take some of the edge off it," snapped Turbush.

"I'm sure I haven't any statement to make," replied the veteran. "Nothing more than I have always said. As far as I know there is nothing out of the ordinary to be found in my record. In the course of thirty years there may have been some slight errors. I won't say there are none. I don't know of any. I have nothing to say."

"Thought you might want to issue some appeal to the G.A.R. vets to rally round in case of--anything," fished Turbush.

"Not at all," replied Captain Hendrick mildly. "Why, no, Sherm. I was elected by all the people. I wouldn't think of dragging the comrades into this, if—as you suggest, there was anything wrong."

"Well, suppose there are—unexpected revelations?" demanded Turbush.

Something turned and clicked within Wayne's memory. As he swung his gaze on Turbush he found the man regarding him keenly.

"Are there going to be unexpected revelations?" asked Captain Hendrick evenly. His face was calm, inquiring.

"Ask your friend here," challenged Turbush, turning toward Wayne. "How about it? Are there?"

"I said that you know I can't answer your questions," parried Wayne with an uneasy feeling of impending trouble.

"No, not my questions, not mine," the editor emphasized the personal pronoun. "But how about somebody else's? Ha! I see you know what I mean. You needn't deny. You can't, because I was on an extension of the telephone when I had my society reporter ask you. And you answered that there would be unexpected revelations, thinking that you were talking to Miss Hendrick."

"What's that?" demanded Captain Hendrick, suddenly rousing from his calm.

Wayne lifted relieved, astonished eyes to Louise Hendrick. Her big eyes were opened with astonishment—and more. In them glowed that light found neither on land nor sea. She hadn't asked, his heart sang; of course, she hadn't.

"I said he said there would be unexpected—" began Turbush.

"No, not that. What did you say about my daughter?" inquired the veteran.

"I said Wayne thought he was telling her," explained Turbush. "We had to fool him to make him talk."

The father turned a thoughtful, almost paternal gaze on Wayne, who was looking at Louise. Her face wore a startled expression with a deeper, more tender look struggling to the surface. In her eyes was astonishment, but her lips curved to a softer, sweeter line.

And as she became aware of Wayne's joyous glance, her eyelids descended over those large, liquid orbs to hide what they would betray. It was a moment for understanding for all."

"How about it, Mr. Wayne, are you going to deny it?" asked Turbush bluntly. Wayne tightened his lips. "It doesn't make any difference now, but maybe if you told Captain Hendrick what these unexpected revelations are—that you thought you were tipping off his daughter about—" Wayne's nails bit into his palms—"he might be willing to say something. It is my duty to the public to find out. So I ask you pointblank: What are these unexpected revelations?"

For a tense moment they stood there, will silently battling against will. Wayne's glance strayed from father to daughter. Both were gazing at him with a question, a plea in their eyes. And the editor who had contrived the scene hung on every expression, every hesitation.

"I will bid you good night," announced Wayne, starting away.

"One minute," requested Turbush, authoritatively. "I have a story all in type based on your disclosure. I'm going to run it as a front page to-night. Now, have either of you anything to say?"

"Why, no, Sherm, if you're bound to run it," responded Captain Bill.

"The law, I believe, holds a paper responsible for any matter appearing in it," suggested Wayne. "And an editor criminally. Although a truth never overtakes a printed lie."

"Well, that's just what I'm giving you a chance to say—is it a lie? Ha! you don't deny it," jeered Turbush.

Wayne stood miserably silent before the pleading glances of Louise and her father.

He had been tricked once into speaking without authority, but he had no excuse now that he was on his guard. He shrugged wearily and walked out through the gate.

Captain Hendrick's house was on a corner. As Wayne turned down the side lane a soft voice hailed him from across the fence. Louise had fled into the side yard and was waiting in the shadow of an elm.

"I want to thank you," she whispered, "for what you—tried to do for—us."

Her face betrayed what she was suffering. Wayne's heart yearned to comfort her. But his professional honor commanded silence.

"Has Captain Hendrick ever been under any great strain?" he inquired. "Anything—years ago—that would make him forgetful, absentminded?"

"Never," she breathed with a catch of anxiety in her voice. "Never that I remember. But wait! I have heard how, just before I was born, when for several months my mother's life—and mine—hung in the balance he never left her side. He had his official work brought here. He hardly slept or ate until it was all over and she had given her life for me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wayne, comprehending. "You understand my position."

"Oh, yes. I wouldn't let you tell now," she cried, her voice growing a little hard. "Not even to ease the mind of that dear man, not even to save our pride. If anything is wrong, we can face it. Thank you—and good-by!"

The last came explosively as though to beat out a sob, and she had whirled and darted away, while he stood, arms outstretched and voice struggling against repression.

III.

WAYNE tramped aimlessly for several blocks before turning and heading for his hotel. His mind was in a tumult. His heart was bothering him with queer, ungovernable conduct. Before he knew it his feet were turning into the alley alongside the *Banner* plant and he had walked to the brightly-lighted door of the composing room.

From within came voices and the rattle-clack of the single linotype machine. He strode inside.

Crowded in the dingy rooms were the press, the linotype machine at which sat the operator with his back to the door, and the type cases. In the center of the floor were the composing stones, over which stooped a tired, unshaven man wearing on his brow an eyeshade composed of old posterboard on a rubber band. From the small section adjoining this mechanical department came the pecking sounds of typewriters. A young woman whose hair needed more attention peered in through the door leading to this editorial section and hastily backed away at sight of Wayne.

He knew his way about small town newspaper plants, having started his working life in one. A few swift steps took him to the iron page form which leaned conspicuously against a case and which flaunted a large white paper tag marked "Hold." This was warning not to use except on special orders. Dangling from a hook beside it was the page proof, also with the penciled warning "Hold." Across the smudged white page marched in the plant's largest type:

HENDRICK HIT BY PROBE.

The entire page was devoted to it. The *Banner's* whole stock of big type had been assembled in a mass of innuendo and dire prediction, all built up from Wayne's carelessly released remark. Crudely skirting the libel limit, the article quoted Wayne's admission and demanded to know what it meant. The interrogative was used to put over the accusation. The editor asked if the "unexpected revelations" had to do with errors or irregularities in Captain Bill's long tenure in office. The report "to be handed to the commissioners to-day will give the answer," the *Banner* promised.

The screed was padded with these interrogation-accusations and with a review of Captain Hendrick's long years in public office, stressing the total salary he had received, the perquisites at the command of his office, the opportunities for irregularities in this self-perpetuated administration. His war record was carefully omitted. The

form was made up with a front page heading and date line indicating it was to go to press that night if Turbush decided he dared serve this delectable fare up for the town's breakfast the following morning.

A growl arose in Wayne's throat, and at its sound, something—his sixth sense possibly, caused him to turn. Turbush had entered the composing room from the front of the building and was rushing toward him. The foreman suddenly looked up from the stone and was petrified. The lone linotyper swung around and gaped at the tableau. There was a single flashing instant of expectancy.

Primitive man never had time to work out strategy when he was confronted at the mouth of his cave by a dinosaur or a saber-toothed tiger. He simply seized the biggest, sharpest rock he could raise and let go with it. So with his descendants.

Something primitive surged through Wayne at that instant as he saw Turbush charging him. Quick as a flash his right foot shot out. The projectile toe scored a bull's eye in the dead center of that page form. Its keystone kicked out, the entire structure of type, rules and leads collapsed in a jumbled heap of pi.

Then as the other three crouched to jump him, Wayne seized the emptied iron form and swung it above his head. The charge halted abruptly. He backed toward the alley door.

"You'll answer for this," blustered Turbush at a safe distance. "What do you mean by pi-ing that form?"

"You know where to find me if you feel that way to-morrow," roared Wayne, defiantly. "Maybe you'll thank me."

Then he vanished into the darkness.

IV.

As the courthouse clock struck ten next morning sounds of muffled clamor and exclamation oozed through the locked doors of the county commissioners' board room. Corporal Bob Puckett, whose bronze lapel button had insured him his humble job as door attendant for even longer than Comrade Hendrick's years, hastily disengaged his ear from the anteroom door panel. He

limped briskly to the telephone booth in the hall and invested a nickel in privacy.

He had hardly obtained his number and started to pour his excited message into the instrument when the boardroom erupted commissioners. Leading was Caleb Durham, who attempted to maintain first place by placing a detaining arm before the others.

"I tell you it's my place as chairman of the board to tell him first," he roared, but the other two were equally obstinate.

"Tell you what, Cale, let's all go together in a hack," suggested Judson Whitaker, as the three middle-aged-to-elderly men went struggling down the big stone steps in a whirlwind exit.

The reporters and others who were waiting for the news from the room followed the excited flight, trying to pick up a word of what it was all about. They did not notice Perrine and Wayne standing deserted beside the cluttered paper-covered board table.

Down Main Street dashed the excited county heads. With only two blocks to go, however, they were too late to bring first news as they surged into the modest little second-floor office of William Hendrick. They confronted, standing before the veteran, none less than Seth Little, the ruthless, climbing, battling county boss whose genius for trimming to catch each favoring wind was his greatest asset.

He was hatless, just as he had been when he ran across the street from his office upon getting Corporal Bob's telephoned tip.

"I have just congratulated Captain Hendrick upon the astounding outcome of this absurd investigation," announced Little, who, more than any other man, had been responsible for retiring the veteran to private life. His mind was on the voters with bronze buttons. "I wanted to be first."

"Doggone, you knew we wanted to be first," expostulated Durham. "Captain Bill, allow us to inform you officially, sir, that the only thing out of the ordinary that the experts could find in your books for the whole time was that twenty-odd years ago you failed to draw your salary for three months. We voted unanimously to print a

full statement setting this forth, sir, and to pay you what the county owes you—with interest."

V.

SHADOWS lengthened as the May afternoon drew toward its close. The parade was over. The old men in blue had distributed their little flags among the weather-beaten mounds now topped with wreaths and flowers, and had assembled in a quiet little group. Family carriages and buggies were drawn in a semi-circle at one end of the city of the silent. Wayne, seated in a phaeton with Louise Hendrick, saw Seth Little, the alert county boss, speak to the lieutenant in command of a National Guard squad lined up on either side of an unmarked, flower-heaped mound. The officer, who owed his commission to Seth Little, nodded. Little raised his voice and addressed those within hearing.

"Lieutenant Dean has asked me to announce, friends, that he wishes to have the command for the salute to the Unknown Dead given by a man we all consider it an honor to honor—Captain William Hendrick."

A subdued murmur of approval rose from those who did not know how to applaud in the presence of the dead. Out from the small group in blue swung the flashing crutches bearing the straight, slender man in civilian clothes, his only advertisement of his war service being the small bronze lapel button.

Erect, dignified in his kindly simplicity, he took his place at the head of the facing files. Vibrantly came the soft-spoken command, and two rows of rifles pointed skyward. The second command was drowned in the volley. A crashing paeon of honor to the Unknown Dead, this day it also was a salute of honor to a man.

THE END



SONG OF A BANK CLERK

THIRTY-SEVEN, forty-two, and fifty-one—

Oh, the air is heavy laden with the spring!
Down in Dixie niggers singing in the sun,
Chopping cotton to the crazy tunes they sing.

Debit—credit—check it off and rule it down—

Oh, the fragrance of the newly furrowed loam!
And the little moon a peeping through the Maréchal Niel that's creeping
O'er the trellised, broad veranda back at home.

Carried forward, page one hundred thirty-nine—

Oh, the sunlight dancing on the swimming-pool,
Girdled round with maiden-hair and muscadine,
Gravel-bedded, crystal clear, divinely cool!

Entry: "Mary's lips are just the heart of June"—

Oh, it's sick I am to feel the summer rain
On my upturned face a falling! I have heard the South a calling—
'S out of balance—I must check it all again.

Thomas Pearce.



Sea-Prize

By **KENNETH PERKINS**

Author of "Buccaneer Blood," "Sundown Café," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

CAMILLE RENNES, nineteen, a beautiful Creole of Louisiana, lies at night in a small boat from Arthur Crudston, chum of her brother Henri. She does not know that Henri asked Crudston to keep her away from the Rennes plantation until he could shoot an enemy. Camille, seeking a haven from the misunderstood Crudston, rows to a schooner at anchor in the gulf. This is the Condor, recently stolen from a Central American port, and aboard are "Captain" Surrey, an educated Englishman prone to murder; Pierre Bouche, a muscular Frenchman, and Snoop, a cockney, both escaped convicts from Guiana; Bellows, a giant American negro, and two Brazilian half-castes. Camille comes on deck unseen just as mutiny breaks out. Surrey puts it down ruthlessly with his revolver, and cows Bellows into submission. The others are imprisoned in the ship's brig. Crudston comes aboard, seeking Camille, and is made a prisoner. Surrey and Bellows cast dice to see which shall scuttle the craft with the five prisoners. Bellows loses, and must not only commit the crime, but become perpetual servant to Surrey. At this moment, the white fiend and the black monster catch sight of Camille Rennes, frail, slim, ghostlike, in the doorway of the cabin.

CHAPTER XV.

WOMAN'S GUILE.

THREE figures stood in the deck cabin of the Condor—an Englishman, a phantom, a negro. The four bulkheads boxed them off upon a remote stage, out of touch with land or mankind or reality. They were upon a ship whose existence in that mooring was unknown

to the port authorities of any corner of the world.

A word breathed from that laconic and florid-faced actor, the mere striking of a maul against a seacock, and the curtain of the drama would descend. Or else through another expedient, just as simple—the weighing of the anchor—and the schooner would stand out for some remote point of the Gulf's horizon, her destination as much

of an enigma. To sink or to make sail—the drama on board still remained aloof from the world.

Such was the isolation of those three as they played their parts. They were at grips with one another—and with their own destinies—without an audience to witness their desperate conflict; no one to even guess of their existence—except for five men stuffed in a brig below and condemned to death.

There they were, three mortals, all conscious of the fact that their conflict was one desperately concerned with mortality itself. They were playing with death—and from what quarter death would come none of the three knew.

To look at the skipper's face, you would think that he was the least concerned of the three; but that is to be doubted. For he was in fear of his own life; whereas the girl who had come aboard to save the life of another was ridden no longer by that most ruthless of all the agents of cowardice—the law of self-preservation. She had freed herself from that law.

Her fear now transcended the body. It was like an ectoplasm that had been breathed from her own being into the fetid mists all about her. A terror hung there like a shroud over the whole ship, permeating the cabin, the hatchways, the black, close shadows between decks. She found herself standing in the midst of a hideous dread which somehow seemed no longer to be in her own heart.

But the giant Bellows was racked with a different torture. He stood there, his torso hewn out of iron, nude from the waist up, glistening black, and merging abruptly into the darkness where the shade of the lamp cut the light off horizontally. In that upper space of darkness Bellows's black face was for the moment invisible to the girl's dazzled eyes—as if he were beheaded.

Bellows's was a complex attitude: there was a fear rooted in the past of a savage race. Perhaps of the three, the bull-necked negro was the only one who had any fear for his soul. As for his body—he still had a certain justifiable faith in it.

Put him in hell with demons and he could give a good account of himself as a

fighter—if fighting would avail. But in hell—as in the situation where he now found himself—Bellows had a terrifying conviction that physical strength would not count.

The crumbling giant, bereft of his faith in the one source of power in which he was supreme—his body—staggered back to a corner of the cabin, putting the glass-topped table between himself and the apparition. If he could only have fled through the door! If he could only go to the forecastle for his horseshoe! If they had only let him bring a rabbit's foot aboard!

But the fool crew had actually ostracized him for so much as mentioning a rabbit at sea. Perhaps that was the trouble. He himself was to blame for the appearance of this ghost. He remembered, too, they had caught him once throwing egg-shells overboard. Yes, he was to blame!

What could he—a poor negro from the levees—know about these deep water witches and prohibitions? He backed his great shoulders—now merely masses of flabby meat—into a corner of the two bulkheads, propping himself up, like a scarecrow hooking its back on a stake.

The laconic Surrey, laboring desperately under a battery of shocks—of amazement, of incredulity, then of the chagrin and the violent anger of a man at bay—made a fine attempt at stroking his lips into submission by yanking his mustache.

Here was a woman! He cast aside his first impression—which was the same as the negro's—that this was some visitation from another world: the White Lady of the North Sea, perhaps, drifted into a warmer clime. He smiled, cruelly, madly; set his teeth. He regained his breath by hissing—the sound became confused with the negro's manifestation: a hoarse breathing followed by a snort.

Surrey's lips were able to form words—at first inarticulately, then in sharp spurts, which developed into his customary ironical cadences.

"I did not know there were two of you who came aboard, madam," he said. "Most embarrassing." Surrey was completely himself. He smoothed his mustache, bowed, then stood up for the first time quite straight. "Because of certain very

unfortunate circumstances I was compelled to put him in irons. Confounded rotten of me. An indignity."

He was frowning as if desperately angry—not at the girl, but at himself. A good way of covering up his own funk. Here this night moth had come fluttering into the complicated web of his plans, and, delicate as she was, she had completely tangled it. Surrey, who was always resourceful and sedate, had not the slightest purpose left.

What was to happen now—only the fates and destiny could tell. As for himself, he would enjoy this brief moment—perhaps his last—as the absolute monarch of life, or death, of rule over that handful of hapless mortals. "I beg you to sit down."

She did not refuse—nor did she move immediately. She seemed to take some absurd delight in the amazement which her full length figure, standing just within the door, created. Both Surrey and the negro could only stare. The loveliness of the first impression was not sullied by the mire on her stockings—and on the presence of but one slipper; nor the wet, weed-slimed silk and brocatelle lace.

"You must sit down," Surrey said again. "You seem to have had a rather bad time of it. My word! Boat capsized? Just what has happened, madam? No, don't tell me if it will upset you. I shan't mind if you just sit here, saying nothing. But do take a sip of this."

He was thinking fast and furiously. Two of them had come aboard, had they? A very perplexing situation. The man could be handled very well—killed, or just left in irons and forgotten.

But a woman! This was a nasty turn. You can't kill a woman. Surrey had never been in such a fix before. He was amused at Crudston, interested in him as a very entertaining enigma. But this confounded girl coming out of the sea, as if she had been drowned and was brought to life—pale, sopping wet, shivering, wild eyed—and yet all the while mysteriously calm. "I say, take a sip of this and tell me all about it."

He was quite brusque this time. Of

course she would have to explain matters—tell some story or other. Nothing was to be gained just sitting there trying to cast a spell over them with her eyes. This might work with the negro, but not with the skipper.

She refused the chartreuse. "No, no! I couldn't touch it! I'm too frightened—please—if I can only collect myself!"

He helped her to a chair. "I was quite sharp—that manner of speaking to you. I see you're all upset. Quite rotten of me. You see you caught me off my chump. Took me some time to believe that you weren't the ship's ghost, you know!"

She had had some time to think. Her one motive was to save Crudston. Would it be best to play everything aboveboard, to come right out with it, and beg the skipper for Crudston's life? Ridiculous. She had heard too much of what had been going on in that deck cabin, while she was hiding beneath the forward porthole.

She was dealing with a criminal—with an unscrupulous and murderous man. It would take more to move him than the sight of a woman kneeling before him in tears.

She must try other means. Her first step was to give a satisfactory excuse for coming aboard. She reflected that a pirate about to sink a stolen ship had good reason to kill every stranger who came aboard—particularly if the coming aboard had been without rime or reason, as the girl herself had come.

She thought of a dozen lies—and then discovered as if by inspiration that the one story the skipper would believe was the truth itself. And the truth itself was the one story which might give the girl and Crudston an advantage over their captors.

If she had said that she came aboard to save Crudston's life, the skipper would of course leap to the erroneous conclusion that she was in love with him. In that case Crudston and she would be kept apart, and, worst of all, Crudston would be regarded in the dangerous light of a man fighting for his mate. Short work would be made of him on that ship.

She chose another—an astonishing course.

"You are very kind," she said. "I know you will help. I have been through much that has racked my nerves. I have seen much in this hour that I never dreamed I would see in my whole lifetime. You can understand that. You can see for yourself."

The skipper had little cause to disbelieve thus far. She looked as if she had been dragged by her hair through the ooze of some bayou. The negro was standing abaft the table as if he were the skipper's dilated shadow cast by the lantern upon the expanse of white iron. She could now see his face, upon which was displayed a succession of slow but vital passions.

Abject fear of the supernatural had given place to amazement, then to worship, then to sympathy. The dishevelment did not mislead Bellows; the big negro could tell that he was looking upon a high-born Creole.

"Yes, you have been through much," the skipper was saying. "Particularly if you came aboard before that confounded row with the crew. You did? Jove! I'm ashamed of the whole rotten mess. If I'd only known—"

"But I had to come! I couldn't choose my time. I saw the fighting. But—" She paused, her eyes actually flashing, as if the thought of what she was about to tell excited her beyond measure. "But I was fleeing something worse!"

"My word! You don't mean—"

The skipper was not assuming his astonishment.

"I was fleeing that man, *monsieur*, whom you put in chains."

"Bless my soul! I can't make head or tail out of what you're saying! What man? You surely don't mean that man who came in here a short while ago? He was a spunky tidy, I'll tell you, madam. Quite a bit of courage he showed. I was thinking—sublime courage, I might say. He knew you were aboard, and I didn't. Kept his mouth shut jolly tight! *Had* to put him under hatches, you know." Again Surrey found it convenient to be apologetic.

"You can't understand! He is the man I mean, yes. But I was fleeing him. I did not come on board with him."

Surrey showed his first signs of skepticism.

The girl hurried on. "Don't you see! I came on board first, let my rowboat go adrift. I preferred coming to you—whoever you happened to be, it mattered not—but I wanted protection. I came here while the ship was a bedlam of brawling. I saw you fighting all the others, *monsieur*."

She played this card easily enough, without, however, adding that his prowess thrilled her. She guessed he would be too wise to swallow that!

He stroked his mustache nervously. He had already been given a pretty big pill to swallow. And yet for the life of him he could not see any sign of lying in her face. Her eyes appeared blazing. Her whole figure was a flaming tower of pride—pride that flamed higher, more madly, because of an injury.

"He followed me, *monsieur*!" she said in a low, shaking voice. "No, you cannot understand what that means! If you lived here, in Louisiana, then you might! I am a daughter of the Rennes family, *monsieur*. If you knew what that itself means you would understand the tragedy you are seeing before your very eyes. This drunken scamp—swamp angels, we call them—this scoundrel gave me chase."

"Yes, it is hard to believe, but I fled him—even down to the marshes. I was alone there. A rowboat in the tules. I was forced to flee on the bayou. He followed in a skiff. His skiff, *monsieur*, you will find—"

"Yes, he told me all about his skiff," the skipper said, discarding this bit of proffered evidence as insignificant. What he was more interested in was the condition of her person—those clamp folds of silk and lace, that slippered foot streaked with mud—and the other foot in silken stocking; the disheveled hair falling in a tangle from the gorgeous comb to the bare wet shoulder. Those were details that corroborated her story in part. But there was one thing else far more convincing: her anger.

"To think that I—who am a Rennes woman—"

She covered her face in her hands.

"I suppose you fled him—after some

sort of a tussle?" the skipper was saying as if to himself. "Yes, yes, I quite understand! The blinking rotter! He fairly tore that magnificent gown from your shoulder, madam!"

She put her hands crosswise to her two shoulders. She had dug her own finger nails into them when out there on deck before the cabin porthole.

"Madam, you distress me! You are not cold?"

She shook her head. The negro leaned forward from the corner into which he had fitted himself.

"Look here, Mr. Boss Man!" he blurted out eagerly, huskily, and with a suppressed but gigantic wrath. "You let me go below and mash that gem'n's bones, suh! You-all just give me the word. I knowed all along he was white trash, suh. And this here lady—she's what I call quality. Yas, suh! Quality, that's what! I know somethin' about them Southern white folks, suh, and this here young lady—."

Surrey snapped his fingers and clicked, as if to silence a barking dog. Bellows withheld his wrath as best he could, puffing violently. To withhold anything seemed a dangerous expedient for him—whether it was laughter or fury. His great body was like a volcano without an outlet.

Surrey was studying the girl with a hungry but baffled desire to find out the truth. Surely her story was probable in one respect—she was a Creole, raging in damaged pride. There could be no sham about that indignation consuming her, flaming under the delicate olive skin, flashing like the angry rays of garnets from her eyes.

Just like a woman of that type, Surrey was musing to himself. Touch her bally hand, and she'll consider it an insult. If she's posing, she's the right one to do it. The immaculate and high-born woman! She was the same the world over—in Spain, in Brazil, in France—where the *mademoiselles* seemed to belong—or in Louisiana! You could always tell them. Even that lumbering black wharf rat knew what he was talking about—"quality."

"You came aboard at a rather unfortu-

nate time, madam," Surrey said, after accepting her story as at least a probability. "But you came to a haven where at least you will be treated as the high-born lady you are!" His chivalry was always smooth, natural, and somewhat convincing. "You are safer on board this yacht than, it so appears, in Louisiana. You will at least find no one here who will dare to offer you the slightest affront of look, word or gesture!"

Yes, very convincing. And there was that giant negro—like the shadow of Surrey—whom the girl understood. She had a far greater power over him than Surrey himself had.

"And now concerning the disposition of this rotter," the skipper began, looking down with a delighted smile at the girl's face. "Keelhauling would be a bit too good for him, I take it?"

The mention of the punishment her attacker deserved seemed to ignite a new and more consuming fury in the girl's breast. She clenched her fists; her teeth flashed. "*Mon Dieu!* Everything is too good for him! If I had him here I would anchor my fingers in his eyes! I would trample upon him--yes, upon his face! I would if I had the strength, tear him to pieces as a cat tears the limbs of a marsh rat!"

Her own breast, heaving, seemed to give forth the ponderous and passionate snorts of anger which really came from the direction of Bellows.

"Quite a rotter he must have been!" Surrey admitted. "No wonder you fled out to sea!"

No wonder! It was all clear enough—if Surrey could persuade himself to believe her story. Besides, what other motive could she possibly have had for coming aboard? There she was, having obviously waded in the swamp ooze—as she explained—where she had found a skiff.

Some capricious fear had sent her seaward. Perhaps not capricious after all. Perhaps the damnable bounder had forced her to make for the open water. He looked like it, too—that young codger who had blundered into the cabin without so much as a knock.

And Surrey remembered that obstinate

refusal to explain himself—pure drunken obstinacy. He was a hard character—there was no doubt whatsoever about that—audacious, brusque, without any conception of fear for his life—a fellow who could doubtless keep his thoughts to himself.

Captain Surrey, in his contemplation of this newly developed situation, was hugely delighted. Here was a Creole girl enraged because of an indignity, throwing herself into the skipper's very arms, fleeing a magnificent young brute who was safely stowed away in the brig below.

Surrey was thrilled. It was the apex of his career. Here he was a god, holding these hapless mortals in the very palm of his hand. The outcome was not a matter of Destiny or the Three Sisters! or of Fortune! He himself—the captain of the Condor—would fashion the outcome out of his own imagination—as if he were writing a play.

Here were his characters: a beautiful Creole, a rascal who had hounded her to the sea, a giant negro, a holdful of supernumeraries under hatches! Destiny? Not by any means! The captain of the Condor. "I myself am Fate!" Surrey reflected gloriously.

He looked at the leading figure of his tragedy: the Creole aristocrat standing there, transported in fury; her eyes so brilliant, so fiercely beautiful, as to suggest a tigress; her lips parted, blood-red, showing the dazzle of teeth.

"Hell hath no fury as that which you have shown, madam!" he cried enthusiastically. "Shall I—a man of no passion—presume to imagine a punishment fit for this rascal? Oh, yes, perhaps I could think up some nonsense or other: I could bring him to the gangway and prescribe the cat-o'-nine-tails for his athletic young shoulders."

The girl paled. On top of the horror of visualizing Crudston flogged she had the tremendous responsibility of fighting for his life. She must beg for his life, for mercy—and for torture at the same time. Suddenly she was inspired. She burst out scornfully:

"The cat-o'-nine-tails, *monsieur*. He would laugh at you! That is no fit punish-

ment. He is not a boy whom you would whip as a teacher whips a truant child. His torture must reach the very soul!"

"Quite so!" Surrey exclaimed enthusiastically. He looked at the girl, lowering his highly arched brows, until they gave him a Mephistophelian aspect. He was smiling—it seemed a crafty smile, which it was only in part: he was out and out delighted.

She was a cat who wanted to play with that marsh rat, and Surrey would revel in the scene. He would not doubt her anger. He was like a stage manager concerned over the tears of an actress rehearsing her part.

No man can see a woman cry and misbelieve. A man—once in many moons—might break down in tears, and you think he's a bally donkey. Ought to be ashamed of himself. Merely exaggerating his sorrow. But a woman can put it on, and convince her own stage manager.

Surrey was completely enslaved. He was enslaved by her bedraggled magnificence, by her helplessness. He tried to think of a satisfactory punishment for her pursuer.

"Shall we drag him beneath the keel of the ship? That is an age-old practice of treating a man who shows a bit too much swank."

The girl answered quickly, feverishly: "That is better—for it is a humiliation. But he is a great swimmer. It would mean nothing to him—as punishment. If you could think of something just—to disgrace him as he has tried to disgrace me!"

"Capital! Let me think: Justice, you say? Well, to tell you the truth I believe that nothing less than shooting him for the dog he is would be just. Or else I could make a scullion of him. For my part, that is much worse than killing him!"

The girl held her breath. She was afraid to say anything at that vital moment. One false step in her fight for Crudston's life and all would be lost. She sank to her chair, as if in a faint. Her very semblance of fury had exhausted her. She steeled herself to speak without emotion. Again her vivid lips trembled. Her face was at once ghastly and beautiful.

"*Monsieur*, what is it to kill a man—but to send him into an eternity of peace?"

She did not know how fortunate that stroke was! It had struck the keynote of Surrey's existence and of his faith. An eternity of peace! That was death. Can you punish a man by giving him the greatest gift of Destiny? But to put him to work scrubbing a deck—that in Surrey's philosophy was the Seventh Circle of Hell.

"Madam," he announced triumphantly. "I have a whip—not for his youthful back—which is tough; but for his youthful honor, which is sensitive! I'll set him swabbing the ship from stem to stern. I'll humiliate him before your eyes. He'll chip paint. I'll stick him in the galley washing pots! I'll have him holystoning hell from now on!"

Her lips parted. Her tigress's eyes were wide, incredulous, with a green sheen flashing gorgeously across them. She stared in wild joy at the skipper so that all light was blackened about him—except for that one high relief of cheek bones, of aquiline nose, of drooping red mustache, of Mephistophelian brows. Bellows stood behind, grinning from ear to ear.

The whole outcome was perfect. But it was the girl who had achieved the victory. Crudston was saved! Whatever torture his pride would suffer—at least, he was not to lose his life!

CHAPTER XVI.

DEFEAT.

AND the skipper himself was overjoyed at the scene which he himself—as judge, as dramatist, as destiny—had written! And like Pygmalion, who had fashioned a being out of his own hands, Surrey was pleased with his heroine.

She saw him looking at her now in complete absorption, as if studying the work of a master artist. She tried not to flinch. She doubted her triumph—it was too sudden, too miraculous. In fact, she was awakened in the very next moment.

"Bellows, you will go forward and man the capstan," Surrey was saying, still engrossed and worshiping that lovely masterpiece.

The negro's grin remained frozen on the black expanse of his face. "Mc man the capstan, suh?" he gasped finally. "Look here, Mr. Boss-man, you ain't goin' to pull out that there sea-cock youahself!"

The skipper smiled at this silly apprehension. Did the stupid black actually think there was any more question about that sea-cock? Did he actually think a ship could be sunk when it had a cargo like this radiant being on board?

"I said, Bellows," he repeated incisively, "you will man the capstan. I want the bower hove short ready for hoisting. As for the sea-cock—" He did not deign to explain this matter to a deck hand. But he added as if speaking far away—to the ship herself, which he had decided not to sink—to the ghost of the ship who now inhabited that hot, brightly lighted deck cabin. He was, in short, looking straight at the Creole girl. "I have other plans."

Surrey was gracious. He was courtly. In voice and gesture he was a marked contrast to that blustering fellow, Crudston. He had a trick of turning, of crossing the cabin, of facing this way or that—without showing his back to the girl. He was precisely like a finished actor of the old school who is trained never to turn his back upon the footlights. Always he seemed to face her, always he seemed to be in obeisance; his head slightly bowed, peering at her as if upward—even though he was a head taller than she.

"I realize the very haphazard and imperfect nature of our introduction," he said when the negro had left them alone. "You are not one to be handled ruthlessly by destiny—and hurled into a chance acquaintanceship. In my case destiny was not ruthless, but most kindly: I find myself in the position of your protector. But unfortunately not in the position of an acquaintance.

"My point is, madam," he said, bowing slightly lower, "may I dare to ask you under these circumstances to refresh yourself at a little supper?" He saw her shrink back as if the light hurt her eyes. "You have been through a gruelling experience. This trouble on board ship, you know—not

to mention what you went through before you were driven out here to sea."

"I really prefer to wait until I get home," she said.

"Until you get home?"

It was not necessary for him to shake his head, to smile indulgently, skeptically, sympathetically. He uttered the words in a flat, smooth voice - without the stressing of a single syllable. No innuendo could have been more crushing in its obvious significance. No woman could have failed to understand it.

"The truth is, *monsieur*," she said bravely. "I am not hungry—for food of that sort. But for—vengeance."

This pleased him immensely. He chuckled, stroked his drooping mustache, pulled his lip down to a cruel twist. "Ah, yes, yes, yes! Of course! I dare say I made a very ridiculous suggestion."

He continued chuckling, then started on a new tack. "But your apparel, madam! You must be quite cold. And your nerves! Jove, you must be in sorry need of a bracer." He thought of a stateroom below which, according to all appearances, had been occupied by some Brazilian lady or other—at least, there were a number of feminine adjuncts to the compartment—when Surrey came into possession of the yacht.

There were Spanish shawls, zarapes, combs, colognes, face creams and powders. "I beg of you not to stand there trembling before me like that—when you will find everything for your comfort—dry apparel, you know, a shawl for your shoulders, and what not, in one of the staterooms. Can't I show you the way?"

"I am not cold, *monsieur*."

"Later, then, perhaps," Surrey said with a polite shrug.

"Yes, *monsieur*. When I return to my home—which, as you will understand, must be before the dawn. If destiny, as you say, had been less ruthless, and had hurled me on board this ship with a chaperone—some one other than that *chien* whom you have chained—then perhaps I could be your guest!"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand. Most unfortunate, the whole affair. And most em-

barrassing. I must find some way or other to be of assistance to you in this situation. For I fear, madam, that you will have to cross that dead line of respectability which is the dawn."

"I do not understand your words, *monsieur*."

"No, of course, I dare say not!" He knitted his brows thoughtfully and then raised them, giving her the full flare of his red, expressive face.

"I myself, as the skipper, you know—the captain of the Condor, am sufficient as a guardian of propriety. I am the law. As the master of a ship, I am all powerful. I can perform the marriage ceremony, I can bury the dead at sea. I can pass judgment of death. Am I not sufficient?"

"We are not on the high seas, *monsieur*!" the girl said in an uncertain treble.

"We shall be in half an hour."

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur*, what can you possibly mean by such words?"

"You heard me send the negro forward. He is there to weigh anchor."

"No, no, *monsieur*! Before God! You cannot mean that! What are you saying? Weigh anchor! What for? Surely you don't mean—"

"Yes, we are going to make sail."

She put her hands to her face, clutching at her cheeks, staring at Surrey as if she were looking at a hideous fiend.

"To make sail? To sail away? Sail where? Away from here!" She laughed softly, hysterically. "That's something to laugh at, *monsieur*! And yet—why? You can go to any port in the world you want—that cannot be denied. But—after I have said good night!"

"I must beg madam to accompany me—as supercargo," the skipper announced.

She sank to a seat, her face pallid, blank. Her lips parted dumbly in her despair.

"As madam has said, I can sail to any port of the world I choose. As a matter of fact, it makes very little difference. You yourself may stipulate just where you desire to be conveyed to. That is to say, so long as it is not an American port."

"You cannot mean, *monsieur*, that you are going to abduct me thus from my native shores. It is too horrible! This is some

maniacal dream out of which I pray God I will be awakened! Stipulate a port—convey me—what are these mad man's words, *monsieur*, that you are uttering?"

Surrey straightened up, his face heating. He hated scenes. A scene with a man was bad enough; with a woman it was an abomination. He stepped to the door and stood there, as if permitting her to go out on deck, preceding him if she so desired.

"Madam, you will have the freedom of all decks—except, of course, the forecastle, which pertains to the crew. You are welcome in the saloon at any time you desire. Supper will be served. I shall deputize one of the seamen as your own particular steward. Should you desire to go below now to your stateroom, well and good. Should you desire to remain, it is the same. You are a guest on this yacht and every wish will be heartily attended to, as soon as you make it known."

"I shall remain here, *monsieur*!" she said.

He bowed in acquiescence. "As the only officer on board, I must give the commands necessary for the making of sail. You will pardon me?"

She sat mute, as if stricken; as if dazed by some physical blow which had drained her face of its color, her mind of its reasoning.

He bowed, took with him a lantern, and then went out on deck, backing out, turning briskly, and going along the decks scanning the water.

He went as far as the taffrail, looked over, holding the lantern so that its rays shone upon the rudder. From thence he came forward along the starboard rail, scanning the water as before. When he came to the gangway, he ran down the ladder to the float and cast off the skiff—which was the object of his search.

It went floating off the quarter, lifted silently by a long, smooth swell. Presently it became of the same color and density as the night. None on board the Condor ever saw it again.

Even the realization that he had gone down to the skiff failed to awake the girl from her mute and passive horror. She sat there, her face white, her mouth still part-

ly opened so that in the brilliant light her scarlet lips were vivid against the pearly teeth. If she had seen herself there with her great lustrous eyes focused upon the chart—she would have been reminded of the tremendous power which she still held: her own beauty.

But instead of that she was thinking of her utter defeat—in the moment of an unbelievable victory. Helpless, beaten, cowed—the fire of her assumed passion had gone out, leaving her a frail wisp of a being—still with the fascination that comes of mystery and of unreality.

The harsh clanging sounds from the forecastle deck struck in upon her consciousness, beat upon her, pommeled her whole being without mercy.

It was the rhythmic clatter of the pawls in the capstan—and then the clanking of the anchor chain.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHANGHAIED.

"STAND by that capstan," the skipper said to Bellows, when he went forward. "If that woman heaves herself by the board when I'm below, you follow her!"

"Oh, I'll see to her, suh!" Bellows rejoined. "Ain't no cause about worryin' for her! Them quality folks they know how to behave anywheres you put 'em, suh! She won't give no trouble. Less she climbs down to her boat and rows off agin to where she come from."

Surrey put an end to this supposition by snapping out:

"Her skiff is adrift!" He added as if to himself: "She can't get ashore unless she swims."

The negro took this in silence. There was no wisdom in heaven above nor on the earth or sea that could fathom his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Surrey went below to pick out a crew from that gang of mutineers in the brig. It was all well enough to let them stay there under hatches if the ship were to sink. But if the ship were to be sailed, that was a different matter. It would take more than a negro to man the

Condor, although, Surrey reflected, the giant black was strong enough to hoist a bower anchor.

The imprisoned men were thankful enough when they heard the key clicking in the iron door. They were huddled in there, reeking in sweat, gasping for air. Indeed, there was not room enough for the five to lie down and their only ventilation was from a single barred porthole and the perforations in the iron bulkhead.

The door swung open and a puff of vile air smote Surrey as he held the lantern up. The men stared like a cageful of monkeys frightened at the intrusion of their keeper. Their streaming foreheads wrinkled, their eyes blinked, their tortured mouths gaped.

Whatever was demanded of them they would do—and without protest. They had had visions of being buried alive there in that grave—until the waters of the sea rushed into the sinking ship and gave them their only hoped-for freedom—the freedom of eternal rest. And here as if in answer to the foul and feverish prayers of Bouche and the Brazilians—and the Limehouse oaths of Snoop—a miracle had happened. The lord and master, the skipper, the angel or devil who held the keys of existence, appeared before them.

Surrey was again clothed in his former glory: quietly giving commands that no one in creation would dream of disobeying.

He ordered one of the Brazilians to the galley to cook a meal. He sent the other, who was still moaning with a wrenched shoulder and a broken nose, to the wheel.

"Snoop, stand by in the engine room."

Snoop whined, smiled, sniveled, and glorified the skipper's name. Everything was the same as before the mutiny—that was quite clearly understood.

It was the same, that is to say, except for the fact that one of them—Bouche—was wounded. Bouche's soul was a festering sore. But now he had no strength to utter a threat. The hot lantern beaming upon his blood-drained face evoked no sign of the murder within his heart. He was passive, tortured, yearning for water, groaning with every breath.

"Take this man to the forecastle," the skipper called to Snoop as the latter was

about to climb into the engine room. "Fetch him some rum and water. When we're under way—that will be time enough to dress his wound."

There was one man left: the one with manacled hands, the one with the athletic frame, the one with youth, the one with that valor which had passed the skipper's understanding.

"Look here," Surrey said in an entirely different tone. "You stand up." He stepped back, keeping the iron door widely ajar. Crudston faced him. "Out here where we can see each other! Lively now!"

Out in the 'tween decks passageway they faced each other, the heads of both reaching to the beams.

Crudston looked anxiously into the skipper's face for an answer to the one great riddle that was racking him: *Had the girl escaped?* His eyes, dilated for a long time in the blackness of the brig, peered intently into the flushed and illumined face before him.

Surrey was smiling. It was the kind of smile which might have said: "I reckon we understand each other!"

Crudston knew at a single glance just what it meant. But he would believe nothing—until it was corroborated by the skipper's own words. The latter, however, started enigmatically:

"I say, you are a queer card!"

Crudston strained eagerly, vainly to find out the truth. The thin florid face bore every mark of triumph.

"If I'd known just what sort of a chap you were that little quarrel of ours in the deck cabin might not have been quite—so bitter. What shall I say? First: I admire above all else this thing they call sublime courage. Jove! I never saw a man fight the way you did—offered your life up with a snap of the finger! And all for—"

Yes, there was the dénouement—absolute and hideous. Surrey announced it scoffingly: "All for a woman!"

Still Crudston held his tongue. Perhaps there was one infinitesimal chance that the skipper was not actually stating that Camille Rennes was aboard. But even this hope was dashed.

"Look here!" Surrey went on. "Dash

it all! If you had come to me as man to man and told me the facts of the case I really believe I would have helped you get her!"

"Good God!" Crudston exclaimed, wrenching at his manacles.

"As it is I came near making an awful mess of it. What if I had acted on my first supposition: that you were some damnable port authority or other from the seaboard?" He laughed grimly. "No, I am satisfied about that. Of course, I would have done away with you. But here I find you came aboard chasing some silly woman! Yes, you may well stare. I know it all."

Crudston not only stared. He gave vent to an oath of amazement. How in the world did this villain get at the truth of the matter so patly?

"You see, she told me."

"She told you!" Crudston uttered under his breath. His lips were easily read.

"Of course, I didn't believe her." Mr. Surrey laughed. "I believe no woman. Anything a woman says to one man about another must be analyzed, but not believed. In this case, however, my analysis seems to prove that she is right. Otherwise I fail to see why you two should come aboard this ship—the girl disheveled and hysterical—and you cryptic and obstinate. It all fits in with uncanny perfection."

Crudston was nodding his head dumbly. The girl he had offered his life to save had been caught, and she had renounced him! What use was there now of stratagems and lies and masquerades? His deed had been in vain.

The girl had actually revealed the whole truth: that she had come aboard to escape a man she had adjudged a drunken pursuer.

And here was Surrey taking it all as a huge joke!

"Look here," the skipper said cynically, "is a woman worth that?"

Crudston was about to cry out with an oath that any woman was—even a woman who meant nothing to him, as this foolish little girl. Instead, however, he gritted his teeth doggedly, looked Surrey in the eye for a moment of murderous hate.

Surrey went on:

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"Is a woman—no matter how radiant, as this Creole lass seems to be—worth it?"

"Worth what?" Crudston asked defiantly.

"Chasing out to sea; coming aboard a pirate-ridden craft as this which I command; hounding her to the very brink of your own destruction. Jove! You must have been madly in love!"

He saw Crudston laugh grimly. In love with that fiery and whimsical little baggage! Good God, what a travesty!"

"I have seen a dog tree a squirrel, madly, frothing at the mouth, yelping, screaming, oblivious of all existence but of that one frisking little being that has gotten beyond its reach! That is a picture of yourself, sir! My word, but it thrills me. If I could direct your courage and your recklessness and, I might say, your dogged willfulness—into the right channel I could use you!"

Crudston was still laughing to himself about that point concerning his being madly in love with Henri Rennes's sister!

Surrey interrupted:

"Have you ever shipped before the mast?"

Crudston locked up quickly, his laugh stopping short. The other did not wait for the answer.

"Never mind. I fancy you could sing at a rope when the occasion offered. Can't use you in navigating this little vessel. What I need is a crew. Now look here," he concluded sharply, "do you prefer remaining under hatches, or will you work?"

Under hatches—or work? It was easy enough for Crudston to choose. Camille Rennes was aboard—there could be no doubt about that. This scurvy dog would not let her escape. Camille Rennes—whose brother was waiting for her back there on a remote and unapproachable shore!

"Come now! There's no reason for those manacles. Your arms are too magnificent to be chained. I can use you. Which do you prefer—the brig or the forecastle?"

"The forecastle!" Crudston answered, readily. Anything to be free. If he could get on deck and see what was going on! If he could only have his strength to fight

for her all over again—and in a different way!

"Take these manacles off, sir! I'll work. I'll obey your commands as a seaman before his skipper. You can trust me for that! The girl means nothing to me, so help me God! I was drunk and I chased her to hell and gone—there's the story! When she came aboard this ship—I followed. Your fighting frightened her and sent her under cover—and I took advantage of it. I wanted to get her away from you. There's the whole truth, so help me God!"

"Yes, it all fits with a really diabolical perfection!" Surrey exclaimed, thoughtfully. "You look like the type of man who will step off with the wrong foot when it comes to chasing a woman! I know your type—and I confess I am disposed towards such men. You are a man's man—and women fear you as they might a bear who hugs too dangerously."

He added with a menacing smile: "Of course, you know, I am not taking any chances. I believe the girl's story and I believe yours. But I shall act on the supposition that you are both lying."

Crudston disregarded this. "I am ready for your commands, sir," he said, shaking off the unlocked manacles.

"Then go forward and bear a hand with the negro at the capstan."

Crudston stared with a staggering intimation of what was coming. The skipper had said he was not taking any chances. Even so! His next words showed what he meant.

"We are riding at the best bower, which is already hove short. You will go forward immediately and with the help of the negro hoist her."

Surrey turned on his heel and went aft, swinging his lantern jauntily, as if to signify his complete confidence in the fact that his command would be obeyed. Obviously he understood human nature well enough to know that Crudston would go forward to the forecastle deck and work. He had no other course!

Crudston stood for a moment in the darkness, stunned at this unlooked-for turn of events. The anchor was to be hoisted—and they were going to put to sea! What had happened?

It was all quite clear. Surrey had found something that had made him change his mind. He had seen Henri Rennes's sister—and she had found favor in his sight!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SPIRIT IN TORTURE.

THE massive-limbed Bellows had already manned the capstan of his own strength. The business of getting the yacht directly above her anchorage—ordinarily requiring a half dozen men—was accomplished by Bellows winding the capstan with terrific heaves and snorts. But when she was riding to a vertical chain, the extra pull necessary to get the bower out of the mud was beyond him.

Congenitally incapable of remaining at his post—particularly when idle, and now given so much chance for mischief or mutiny—Bellows went aft. He wanted to catch another glimpse of that goddess in the deck cabin whom he had seen, feared, and worshiped.

He found the decks amidships deserted, the skipper having gone below. The portholes of the deck cabin still poured forth their flood of cold, electric brilliancy. He thrust his bullet-shaped head toward one of these, facing the glare with blinking apprehension, with a breathless solemnity—as of a heathen looking upon a sanctified pagoda.

There she was—a being of radiant light; a goddess who because of some malignant witchcraft had been caught, bound by a spell, imprisoned in a body of clay which still retained all the lines of divinity.

Bellows did not stay there wrapped in worship, except for a brief moment of ecstasy—the spiritual ecstasy of the devotee. What he wanted to say to her must be said quickly—before the skipper came above again. He went around aft to the cabin door, his bare feet padding on the deck.

She heard him there, as he stood sniffing hesitantly at the threshold. No, he could not come in. He himself knew that. He stood outside as his slave ancestors had stood—beyond the presence of their plantation masters.

"It's only me, missy," he said huskily. "Don't want to stahtle you, no, missy. Only poor ole black Bellows. Tha's all!"

She lifted her eyes from the chart—where she had been reading the names of Mexican ports—reading in fascinated oblivion and horror. Bellows brought her back from those dreams. She looked up without any apparent shock.

"No cause for you bein' stahtled—no, missy. No cause at all. Not even afraid. Everything's goin' to be all right. *I'm* seein' to that. Me. Ole black Bellows—he's del'gated."

"I'm not afraid of you. Come in here," she said quietly. "What is it you want?"

He took a step nearer to the door, still remaining outside the threshold. "I want to tell you not to be afraid of nobody else either! You're quality—and as such, we-all are goin' to kowtow to you. Why even the skipper hisself will kowtow. And if he don't, he answers to ole black Bellows!"

The negro realized his voice was raised. He began to whisper huskily: "Still and all, missy, it 'pears to me like this ain't a place for a chile of your qualifications. Did you see that there riffraff trash down below? Yes, sure enough, you-all say that fight! I was the one that perfo'med that thar fight, missy. Maybe you didn't know it. But it was me! Any fightin' that goes on abo'd this boat is generally speakin', *me!*"

Again he found that he must modulate his voice carefully. "But if I'd only know'd, missy, that you was comin' abo'd, do you-all think I'd started that little argument! Lawdy—I'm sure ashamed of myself. Why to think that ole black Bellows caused you that trouble! For you to see such sights as that!"

"You-all should be on a plantation—with a hundred cullud folks singin' and kneelin' and workin' their hails off for you! Strewin' flowers for you to walk on! Not messin' around like I did fixin' up a fight for you to step smack into!" His earnest and husky protestations seemed to shake his massive chest. He held out his giant paws, stubby fingers interlaced, as if wringing his hands. He spoke with the intensity of a convert praying for the first time to a newly found deity.

She did not listen. She was too engrossed watching him. She knew him as well, in that moment, as if she had seen him daily on her plantation for all her nineteen years! She knew him as a school teacher might know a big stupid boy who has taken the same year's work over and over again. She knew him for his weakness, his strength, his gullibilities, his abjectness, his childish pride. She knew he was always hungry, always lazy, always oversleeping, always brawling. She knew him to be capable of infinite fidelity.

"I ain't got much time to tell you what I want to, missy. Got to be mighty spry. It's this: That no-account skipper—he's got to be watched. He's quality all right—oh, yes; but in a different way. If God A'-mighty Hissell says that skipper is good enough to lay a finger on you here's one who's gwine to object! God A'mighty Hisself ain't gwine to stop what I'll do."

He hastened on, coming tardily to the conclusion that he was wasting precious time: "The skipper thinks he's gwine to take you across the Gulf somewhere, missy. Do you-all understand them words? Else how come he ordered me to haul up that there anchor—like I was a team of mules? He's gwine take you away. That is, he *thinks* he is. But this here ole black man has other plans!"

He spoke now just as eagerly but assuming the tone of one entreating a frightened little child to have courage: "You see, missy, all as we got to do is to get you ashore first. And it's me that's gwine to do it! If I can hoist a anchor, ain't gwine to be no trouble fo' me to lower one of them there lifeboats into the water. It'll make a noise, yes, but I'll work quick. So long as I know you'll jump in the boat, and stick there till I drops in mahself.

"Easy—ain't it? Then watch this here poor ole black gem'n row! Don't be afraid now, chile! You do as I says. He'll catch me—oh, yes. No doubt about that! Can't git away from that debil—no, missy! But it's worth it. And what's more he won't catch me till I puts you safely ashore."

From the contemplation of the giant negro as a type, the girl awoke suddenly to the meaning of his words.

Lowered to the water in one of the little lifeboats and then rowed ashore. Yes, it was quite possible. As the negro himself had said, he would be caught. Surrey had taken that all into consideration no doubt when he went below leaving the girl up there free. He would come above at the first squeak of the davits; and if too late to prevent their putting off, he could give chase in another lifeboat, firing at them the while.

But it was possible. The negro would row—even if a bullet hit him! She had visions of him bending his gigantic frame to the toy oars, oblivious to a bleeding wound—as she had seen him in that scuffle he had had during the mutiny. Oh, yes; he would get her ashore—if he had an ounce of life left in those terrific sinews. She knew him!

But if she accepted the negro's offer for help, what would happen to Crudston?

As Bellows strained forward, every muscle taut, eager, ready to do her bidding, even if it cost him his life, he saw her smile pensively and shake her head.

"I can't go," she said. "I don't doubt you. You are a black giant with a good heart. But go away. You are risking your life speaking to me like this."

"Look here, chile, what do I care for mah life? You come along! Ain't no time to waste."

Again she shook her head with the same brave, pensive smile. But a short while ago she could have put off in a skiff without being seen. She had made her choice then. "I shall stay here," she said. "I am not afraid."

The sound of some one coming up the companionway aft made the negro cock his bullet-shaped head, his forehead wrinkling in apprehension.

"You must go away," the girl repeated. "Do not think of my troubles. You see, I am afraid no longer."

He turned about slowly, his huge lips drawn down at the corners, his dark, veined eyes staring woefully at the deck, like a hurt dog's. He padded off, his long arms hanging listlessly to his knees, his head swinging in a retarded rhythm to his walk as if he were shaking it in mute perplexity.

It was no use. She would not accept his brawn which was all that he had to offer. He remembered something from his boyhood that his Voodoo grandmother had told him: *The sacrifice must be without guile.*

What good was *his* body—gin-sodden carcass of black meat? A miserable offering to such a deity. No wonder it had not been found acceptable.

"Ain't good enough," he mumbled sadly to himself, his woolly head shaking in tragic assurance. He lumbered forward and sank dejectedly upon the capstan, his arms folded over the iron drumhead, his knees on deck, his face turned aft again toward the glaring eyes of the cabin. He remained there mute and cast away, a shapeless mass of relaxed sinews—as if he had fallen there on deck from a terrific height—He was a black devil hurled bodily out of Paradise.

CHAPTER XIX.

WOMAN, THE SPHINX.

THE skipper on deck, a Brazilian sailor at the wheel, Crudston and the negro at the capstan. The girl in the deck cabin—waiting for she knew not what. She saw Crudston up there forward enacting the part of a deck hand. That was easily understood: the skipper had put him to work.

She, of course, could not speak to him; she did not dare. She had effectively established the pose that she was afraid of him. As a result Crudston was allowed on deck—under the jealous surveillance of Captain Surrey. She waited. The time would come later.

The best bower came up with a clanking of chain and capstan pawls; its flukes dripping a strange flow of ooze and phosphorescence. The schooner seemed to awake, to tremble to the starting of her auxiliary. Her propellor churned a slow rhythm, beating regularly like a pulse.

The black varnished surface of the water moved slowly, giving the only sign that she was under way. Sluggishly the water flowed astern, gathering momentum, until it broke into two long curling waves which began at the ship and extended in a widening angle toward the horizon.

Shoreward the black reefs receded and seemed to sink in the widening universe of water. The one or two remaining lights of St. Hyacinthe far inland, were engulfed. As Camille Rennes, buoyed by a strange numb courage, looked off the quarter, the last vestige of Louisiana vanished.

Out on deck Bellows and Crudston were hounded from the forecastle to the main-mast by that quiet and merciless demon, the skipper. They took three reefs in the mainsail; the negro, pawing about with the reef pendant kept up a constant grumbling, his voice booming far down in his throat like a soft tattoo of tropic thunder.

"I'll fix you!" he said, pulling viciously at the little rope. Neither Crudston nor the skipper took any notice of him—although to all appearances the black was not addressing himself to the rope, but to his new shipmate. Crudston, tying the reef knots. "Think you-all kin take liberties thataway—and with quality folks! I ain't forgettin'! Wait till I git you below again, Mr. Man!"

Another vicious yank at the pendant and the sail, heaving the great weight of canvas toward the end of the boom. "Can't git away with insultin' the quality—not on bo'd this ship! No, suh! I se goin' to mash you to such a pulp that the pelicans will smell you rottin' all the way from Evangeline Bayou. Yas, suh! Any insult give to that lady is give to me! Ole black Bellows! I'm her factotum from this time on. She don't doubt me, no, suh! Said so herself! You jest wait, Mr. Man! Wow!"

They went on tying the square knots, the skipper standing just behind their shoulders, listening but not paying any notice to the negro's grunts and grumbles. A footling quarrel between two sailors before the mast was always to be expected. Without that, a skipper can be suspicious of the morale of his crew. A sign of good health—those fights of the forecastle.

"Jes' wait, Mr. Man! Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy! Won't it be good! Won't it be good! Ain't gwine to be a bone in your body left big enough to shoot craps with! Oh, my, oh, my!" He yanked one of the reef points clear of its eyelet hole in his bombastic passion,

The sail was hoisted. Without sufficient air to fill her, she hung there dead and then with a few turns of the wheel, the bow paying off slightly, the boom hovered, came to life, and then swung over as if too lazy to resist even that fugitive air. A squeak of the jaws at the mast, a flutter of canvas, a running of the sheet through the blocks—and she again gave up the ghost. The energy was too much; the sail hung like a pall. Then the sheet being trimmed, she filled slightly and the schooner was steadied pleasantly to the influence. But you couldn't feel a breath of air on your cheek.

A very peculiar skipper—so thought Crudston. There was the water as smooth as glass, jet black, without an undulation now that they had weighed from the roads and were free of the ground swell. And yet the skipper had actually ordered three reefs!

"Steady her at that!" the skipper called to the Brazilian seaman at the wheel. "Bellows, go forward."

Bellows grinned from ear to ear. His work done, he was free now to return to the forecastle where he anticipated a very enjoyable event. This white trash—the prisoner who had been justly relegated to the estate of seaman—would be sent forward likewise. And then:

"Lawdy! Lawdy!" the negro licked his chops hungrily. "What I won't do, oh, Mr. Man!"

Unhappily his joyful anticipation was cut short by the skipper's next command.

"All right, you," Surrey was saying to Crudston. "You will come with me to the deck cabin."

Again Bellows was plunged into the dejection of a soul crushing disappointment. He shambled forward along the decks with the same lolling movement of his head. Oh, well! His time would come! He flung himself down, hooking his ungainly arms over the flukes of the best bower, and waited with the patience of a dumb and thwarted beast. Crudston would be sent forward sooner or later.

As he waited there in the bows, you could not distinguish between the iron flukes of the anchor and his own double fists.

As the skipper and Crudston walked from wheel to deck cabin, the former maintained the immemorial dignity of ship's officer and kept a pace ahead of the man he had created a seaman.

"Something to tell you first," he said, speaking back over his shoulder. "I have nothing against you—that is to say, nothing if your relations with this woman are what she has professed. You have grossly offended her. She fled you—coming off from shore. Quite plausible. You are her worst enemy. Quite all right! What have I to do with such nonsense?"

Crudston set his teeth, and walked along silently at the captain's heels, his heavy riding boots drowning out the soft pad of Surrey's white shoes.

"But on the other hand—" The skipper turned, paused. Crudston waited. "If on the other hand you happen to be lovers, and the girl lied to me—then I must say, it will be a very awkward situation. The voyage will be a long one. No doubt you will try to get her ashore at the very first opportunity.

"You would, of course, make an attempt upon my life—the very first chance I gave you. How could I sleep? Can I trust that black beast up forward there? Can I trust those odds and ends of human dross down below? I think jolly well not! Most awkward."

He started again for the door of the deck cabin. "No, don't answer me. No doubt you would profess the girl is right: that she hates and fears you. That you were a bit on when you gave her chase. But I shan't believe you. I shan't believe a single word any one tells me! I have other ways of finding out the truth, I dare say.

"It sounds a bit fat—my using such terms. But how else can I phrase it? If she shows the slightest softness for you in the scene which I am about to stage—then you—oh, hell!"

"I die," Crudston said with a grin, relieving the skipper of the necessity of an over-dramatic avowal.

"Thank you."

"I understand the situation," Crudston added with uncommon assurance. The fact was, he felt pretty certain Camille Rennes

would not be likely to show any enormous spurt of affection. It would be miraculous, too sudden—impossible. Crudston had no doubt now that she feared and hated him. The whimsical little fool thought he alone was responsible for getting her into this whole damnable mess.

She stood up, taken by surprise when the two men entered. To be brought precipitously face to face with Crudston was a shock. She clung to the table which she had used as a bulwark between herself and the two men. Her silken hair, disarranged, was still drawn upward by the single glittering comb, so that it showed the high, white forehead, the finely shaped skull tilted back as she gazed into Crudston's face.

Her great, soft eyes looking upon him were eloquent of pain, bewilderment; this man whom she had feared and hated had assumed a vital significance for her. He was no longer a part of her emotional life—as he had been when she fled him in those muskrat swamps. He was an embodiment of a great principle. He was a strange and precious being—but not a human being. He was something to be cherished and fought for with her very life. He had been given to her by destiny to protect, and she must now give an account of her stewardship. He was her brother's friend. He was worth the whole world.

Skipper Surrey, removing his officer's cap and adjusting his thin hair in a perfect part, begged the girl to be seated in the navigator's own seat before the glass-topped chart. Crudston stood in a corner by the door, his arms folded. The auxiliary far below in the bowels of the ship thrummed like a pulse; the mainsail, close-hauled, steadied her with a delightful influence—of which you were always conscious. They were on a course—whither, no one knew, except that omniscient devil, the captain.

Surrey spoke to Crudston now as a skipper speaks to a member of his crew who is brought to the gangway.

"The orders you are to take I shall give within hearing of madam. For they are the result of a conversation I have just had with her."

Crudston looked at the girl, but peering intently into her great inscrutable eyes, he

could not have read her thoughts—not even if he had been gifted with the powers of the angels in Heaven.

"From now on you are to take orders from the Brazilian cook. To do any menial task he sets forth; to be ship's housemaid; to shine pots in the galley; to swab down the saloon deck. It is madam's wish."

Crudston winced, clenching his teeth as if he had been struck. He looked at Camille. Her eyes were upon him; they seemed burning with some inner torture of helplessness and abandon.

Camille herself knew that she must not falter. Her very cheek felt hot—scorched by Crudston's gaze.

Surrey was going on with his orders, sharply:

"You will report below now and get the guest's stateroom shipshape. You will put ice water in the glass bottles; put clean linen in the bunk, shine the brass. It is to be the stateroom of madam during this voyage. Your duty as ship's housemaid will, of course, embrace the keeping of that stateroom in the most impeccable order." He turned to the girl. "Is there anything else, madam?"

When Camille spoke the brilliant carmine drained from her lips. Her mouth trembled; her voice was a dry sob. Perhaps this was the intensity of white anger. Perhaps it was the horror caused by the sound of her own words:

"Will *monsieur* the captain repeat what he said to me—that a woman is safer on board this ship—than in Louisiana?"

A gasp, an unvoiced oath, came from Crudston's throat.

Surrey's florid face became as if illuminated by light. Amazement, cruelty, satisfaction flamed there. Conflicting shocks went through him, lending their expressions like a kaleidoscope of hues, leers, smiles, grimaces to the thin, vivid mask.

Could it be true, after all? Were his two prisoners actually ready to spring at each other's throat? What could this girl mean tearing herself into such tatters in her passion?

"I dare say, madam, I can put it clearly enough—so that this blackguard and the rest of my crew will understand." He faced

Crudston, and said with biting coolness: "This lady is a guest on my yacht. She has the freedom of all decks from stem to stern. Any indignity offered her by look, word, attitude or gesture will be punished by death."

Crudston's fists whitened. He stepped to the skipper and the two men faced each other—their chests a hand's breath apart. Crudston knew that his enemy was ready in the twinkling of an eye to shoot him down. Otherwise he would have killed him there with one blow.

"You understand?" Surrey asked in conclusion.

"Yes, but don't forget that you yourself will answer in the same coin."

Skipper Surrey knew how to answer back to that! He was diabolical in his mastery.

"You will go below," he said coldly, "and help the cook prepare a supper—for madam and myself!" Before Crudston could make a move, he turned to the girl and asked: "Will madam be so gracious?"

"Thank you very much, *monsieur*; I will."

Crudston stared at her in speechless consternation. Was *this* the sister of Henri Rennes—his best friend? What sort of a she-devil had she become? It was incredible, hideous. He tried to read the answer in her eyes, but he could not.

She was a sphinx. She was of stone. She stood there radiant with a ghastly sort of beauty; her ashen lip bleeding where she had bitten it, showing almost black against the pure white flame of the skin.

Luckily enough for Crudston something happened to prevent him striking the skipper. The latter braced his legs apart; Crudston lurched back against a stanchion; the girl clung to the table as if to prevent herself from sinking to the deck.

The ship's stern had given a settle; then with her rudder bringing her back to her course, she rolled, laying along heavily on her course again. The jaws of the boom growled as the spar, thrown aback with the list, swung out again into place. None of the three in the deck cabin realized in those few moments of tense conflict that a sea had come up.

Knowing full well that his life was hang-

ing by a thread, Crudston decided to bide his time. He did not wait for a second command to go below. The skipper was not in the habit of giving a command twice. But before leaving the cabin Crudston looked again into the girl's eyes—beseeching the merest sign: Was she repudiating him and allying herself with this demon pirate?

She gave no answer. Again Crudston looked upon a sphinx—an image that was all the more strange, because it was not of stone, but of white flesh, of blood coursing like tiny veins of flame.

The only expression he could read was one of a desperate, a soul-torturing resolution.

She never forgot his look, just before he turned and went out with the skipper to the heaving decks.

CHAPTER XX.

SCORE "ONE!"

IT would be impossible to tell just how many there were on shore who had witnessed or heard the Condor weighing anchor and putting out to sea. Her skipper was reasonable in supposing that no one had seen. It was very light. There was now merely a dim sprinkling of stars.

There might have been a shrimper returning from a baile in one of the bayous. But the shack camps were further inland. Except for the lights of St. Hyacinthe, which had gone out one by one, there had been no sign of life on the shore. It might have been some undiscovered seaboard of the world.

It so happened that there was one man down there at the mouth of the nearest bayou who saw the Condor. The skipper had suffered the necessary lights to remain lit—merely a matter of avoiding suspicion. And those stars likewise added a dim and fitful radiance.

But the man who saw the schooner put out to sea was too obsessed over another matter to give it a second thought. A ship weighing anchor and standing off for the southwest was as completely banished from his memory as she was from his sight—as

she was swallowed up in the dense obscurity of the horizon. What did it matter?

What if she were laden with gold? What if men were being tortured or slain? What if her scuppers ran blood? What if she carried the fate of a nation—of the whole world? How miserably insignificant it was compared to the loss of one's sister!

Henri Rennes was the man who heard the distant clang of anchor chain, the rattle of capstan; who saw the little red lights move slowly, the mainsail hoisted—a dim white quadrangle, ghostly, close-reefed and hence ridiculously small. She stood off on her course—it could have been to any point of the compass for all he cared! The light breeze that finally filled her sail touched his hot forehead.

It felt capricious, strange, of a different odor than the drowsy breath of the bayous—a difference that struck in sharp upon his consciousness—as the odor of a strange clump of trees a hunter might come upon in a forest. He thought it at once chilling, at once hot. It was malignant, salty, fierce even though he could scarcely feel it. It was venomous.

Henri Rennes had boarded his motor boat and, quartering back and forth across one bayou and then another in search of the little tender and his lost sister, he had come down toward the gulf.

Here it was he saw the schooner. He erased the sight from his mind—although the wind, and a curiously inky smirch on the night horizon reminded him of the fact that the schooner's sail was close-reefed. The skipper—so thought Henri Rennes—knew what he was about.

But what did these things matter? A wise boatman perhaps might not make so bold as to venture out across that bar at such a time. No telling what that inky line on the southern horizon meant. But Henri Rennes was in search of his sister. The cost of a motor boat horsed on the reef by that surf was not to be counted.

The mere fact that he anticipated danger out there beyond the bar, drew him out. Camille and that reckless ass Crudston might have been swept out by the current. They were nowhere in the waters about Mme. Laurent's house, nor the shrimp camp

below. No sign of the tender anywhere. One look up and down the beach—a cruise of a furlong or two would satisfy him. He swung the prow of the launch seaward.

While the skipper was driving his crew from deck to deck—battening hatches, clapping preventer gaskets on the furled sails, clearing the decks for the storm which he felt in his bones—Camille Rennes remained alone in the deck cabin.

A menacing bubble of a sea was on; a curious phenomenon because of the fact that as yet there was no indication of a high wind. The schooner lay along heavily, the boom of the mainsail still unruly, swinging back with a slackening of the sheet, hovering capriciously as if of half a mind to jibe, then rattling out again. It was like a thing without reason—an idiot of terrific power who jumps about growling without a comprehensible motive.

The swinging of the boom and the spasmodic snarls of its jaws against the mast, terrified the girl. It was mysterious just as the sea itself was mysterious, rolling in long black sweeps, piling up to the rail, roaring off astern.

Dizzy and tortured by her fears, unable to stand without clinging to the table, the stanchion, the rim of the porthole, Camille longed to go below where she could be nearer to the man she had just reviled.

The companionway was some distance aft—just under that terrifying boom. She hovered at the door of the deck cabin. Forward the bow wave divided sending a sheet of spray over the forecastle deck, dashing into the open portholes of the cabin. The girl was doused.

Like a diver deciding impulsively upon a dangerous plunge, Camille fled out upon the deck, which aft of the foremast was still dry.

As if by a malignant, a conscious purpose, the sea sent a long, black wave rolling, mounting upward. It boarded the schooner amidships, and dashed with the roar of an explosion, over the windward rail. The girl found herself staggering in a swirl of foam, clinging for her life in a chaos of darkness. The schooner staggering to leeward under the blow, remained on her beam

ends, wallowing slowly along with her lee rail not an arm's length from the surface.

She clung there, a dripping, terrified, frail thing, her hair streaming. Her eyes, blinded at first by the biting salt, opened, looking full in the face of Captain Surrey.

Surrey had come to her and stood over her, arms akimbo, fists upon his waist, legs straddling the deck so that he swung like an inverted pendulum to the heave. Behind him was the silent crew looming as strange, ghostly forms in the sickly light of the lantern.

His flushed face scowled. His eyes were narrow slits with a venomous point of light in each.

What was he going to do? Did he know the truth—that she wanted above all else to go to the man she had pretended to hate? She looked up, buffeted by the storm, terrified by the mounting seas, her hair falling down across the pallid forehead, clinging like weeds to her wet shoulders. She was the one who had lied to him; he would find out sooner or later. You cannot fool a man who is supernatural, omniscient. She was the one who must pay.

Another sea smashed up against the waist, exploded to a curtain of foam, of long shreds of water that whipped her bare shoulders, the side of her face, her mouth. How could she crawl from the rail down the dizzy incline of slippery deck to the companionway?

There was Surrey, poised like a man with wings, swinging across her vision, swinging back again—a figure blotting out the silent crew, the mast, the forestays, the anchors, the capstan—and that lee rail dipping toward a turmoil of frothing water.

Another wave, inexorable and furious, thrashed her back. Her slender hands were torn from the wet rail. She sank forward into the skipper's arms. She had won the first step of her fight against him—but the savage seas were still his allies.

“Madam, allow me to assist you below.”

He did not cling to her. He merely put out his arm for her to cling to—for her very life. He walked steadily aft toward the gangway—through a pandemonium of racing seas, of scuppers running with white water, of blocks and boom growling in im-

potent rage. She felt that there was only one thing with any balance or reason in that chaos: *That was Surrey himself!*

Between decks, Camille was ushered into a scene of comfort, of comparative safety, of magnificence. A conflicting surge of emotions took her, as she stood there—sopping wet, wretched and yet beautiful—like an angel whose wings have been dragged through mire. Her fine tresses dripped salt water on a plush carpeted deck; her damp hand reached for the support of a velvet curtain; she sank into the depths of a tapestried chair. A lace covered bunk was at her arm, and just above a large porthole deeply submerged in a racing sea.

On the bunk were spread the contents of a sea chest—one which had belonged no doubt to some grand dame of Buenos Aires, who had been a guest on the yacht. Camille Rennes was to take her place; her gowns; her jeweled combs; her Spanish shawls; her perfumes which were set in little mahogany frames against the bulkhead; her satin slippers.

That miserable sea cook, the Brazilian Indian who was now Crudston's master, stepped in with a tray, a single glass, a napkin, a cherry in pungent wine and liqueur.

A sense of seclusion, of comfort, of safety from the storm came over her in that tilted cabin, and with it there was the pang of great danger. But this last was only momentary—like a passing flush of fever. Her fear was not for herself, but for some one else.

The menial there was fitting a square glass bottle of water into a rack above the washstand. The skipper stood at the threshold dominated by his uncanny chivalry.

He ordered the seaman to the galley. He bowed to the girl, his cap in his hand, his thin hair parted perfectly—despite the storm; his face dry, florid, cool, as if it had just been powdered by a barber.

"This is your stateroom," he said. "You have, of course, the freedom of all decks. But until we run out of this dirty weather, might I suggest that you stay below?"

The deck was inclined; a sea roared past the porthole, sending the schooner again

on her beam ends, shivering in every timber. The ice rattled in the bucket, the curtain rings slid down the tilted brass rail; a jeweled comb fell to the floor.

"After the hurricane, *monsieur*—then what?"

"After the hurricane?" he repeated, smiling. "Let us wait. I'll find out what I stand on—then." He held out his hand, reaching across the threshold. "Madam may have this key," he said quietly.

She took it, her palm held upward inertly, as if she wondered what it was for, what it meant.

He watched her hand.

Slowly her fingers closed upon it.

Surrey bowed, backed away, then went above. The door closed, thrown back into the bulkhead by a heavy list.

She did not lock it. She sat there wrapt in a more absorbing fear than the fear for one's self. She was responsible for the stewardship of something besides her own life: the life of her brother's best friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

OLD DEVIL SEA!

WHAT happened during the first part of that storm might have been regarded as an act of destiny—or of coincidence. Properly analyzed, however, it was a logical result of the given premises. Camille Rennes had at first come aboard the Condor because this ship offered her the only refuge at hand. For the same reason—that it was the only available refuge—her brother, Henri, caught out in the gulf in the fury of the storm, headed his motor boat at top speed for the Condor.

He had been unable during the first stage of the storm to negotiate the narrow mouth of the bayou. A phenomenal run of high seas and no wind had made the beach unapproachable. To stand in for those shoals, mud flats, reefs, meant the certain loss of his speed boat—and most probably of his life.

He headed out for deep water. There was the schooner with close-reefed mainsail, hauling over for the southwest mostly under her own power. In his speed boat Henri

Rennes could outdistance her, but he was not immediately forced to give chase. With the morning light he might risk the bar. But it was no use.

The sea had started running high before he realized that he was riding something more serious than the ground swell. He coasted along westward, sending the long ray of his headlight across the low reefs. There was a larger bayou mouth down the shore. But by the time he got there his boat was laboring along in a succession of racing seas.

The speed boat, built for smooth water, listed with lee rail under as he swung her bow again toward the safer open water. To keep the lee rail out, he had to maintain a direct course southwestward. Once only did he turn broadside to those long troughs—whereat he shipped her half full of water.

She labored along, a fragile, slender thing of mahogany whipped and smashed on her course like an egg shell. Dead ahead was the schooner, dipping in long, graceful circles, partly steadied by her sail; her red and green lights describing slow rhythmic gestures, like the lighted baton of a concert master leading his orchestra in the dark.

Now she was a looming shadow; now her sail flashed a dim white. Now she was a gray phantom, fleeing madly for the cover of the darkness in the west.

Standing in the cockpit knee-deep in water, laboring like a madman at the pump before the engine was flooded, Rennes brought his little craft plunging into the ship's wake, a triangle of flat, racing water, quickly obliterated by the long seas.

It was no use. He could not make it. The cockpit shipped another flood of warm water. The spark went out. The propellor dragged like a sea anchor, and the mahogany shell went lumbering groggily up toward the crest of a wave, failed it for the first time, poised there like a sloop hove to before the wind, and then went careening down into the trough.

She swallowed. Rennes, waist-deep, drew his revolver and fired a volley of shots into the air. Another wave smashed him forward to the bulkhead of the deck cabin. He clung there, his legs afloat in the

swamped cockpit. Another sea—one after another beating his strength from him.

Then he had scarcely made himself fast by twisting the belt of his gun holster about a cleat when another wave was resurrected like a malignant jinni from those mounds of water; it came lolling along, tucked its shoulder under the windward rail, and sent her rolling over, keel upward.

Rennes did not immediately realize in that maelstrom of darkness and salt water that he had capsized. His hand jumped madly for his gun—probably with the impulse of firing his last shots in another call for help. He did not tear open the flap of his holster. The gun was useless now—for he realized that he had capsized and was waiting in vain for that sea to roll on.

He tore himself free of the cleat and started weakly to struggle toward the surface. His strength, he was assured, was not enough to get him there. It was an eternity before his own buoyancy brought him into a scene of black-green mountains.

He swam with exhausted, futile strokes. Where he was swimming to he did not know. Nor would it have mattered. He was swimming up the side of a green hill, toward the frothing crest. But before he reached the top he found himself plunging down in great strokes as if buoyed by water wings, possessed of superhuman strength, racing into an abyss. Up again.

A comber rolled over him—or else he had been dragged down—he could not tell which. Whatever it was he knew he had been under—perhaps the second, or was it the third—time? A ship, lurid and ghostly in the starlight, was sailing about him as if in circles.

He fell back into the comfortable depths of the water, his head pillow'd first by a rolling crest, then smothered by biting salt; his brain reeling in darkness, his lungs laboring frantically for the last gasp of life-giving air, his stomach sick, his arms floating, numb, as if detached from him. And now his whole body became a thing detached. He saw it rising out of the water—yes, resurrected like the bodies of all seamen on All Saints' Eve to man a phantom bark.

Wild cries from the helmsman, in broken English and Portuguese, piped all hands on deck. A searchlight cast out its long, white band across the face of racing seas, of jet black water. The storm was hounding a hapless mortal, lifting him into heights of scudding spray, hurling him into deep chasms.

The crew watched with an indifference which was at once stolid and gaping. There sat Snoop on a hatch grating, looking on with huge, frightened eyes, his pasty face tucked on his knees; his bony fingers clinging interlaced about his shins.

There stood the helmsman who, being the only deep-sea sailor of the crew, stood with brown hands on the spokes of the wheel, legs apart swaying easily to the roll. A mute and ugly excitement was on his half-breed Indian features. A scene of a man drowning was mother's milk to him.

And there stood the negro, Bellows, hurling one life buoy after another toward the drowning man, with a rhythmic abandon—precisely as if he were casting dice!

The cook and his new scuffer, the powerful Crudston, were piped above, coming on deck on the heels of the skipper.

"Wot's he goin' to do, I'd bloomin' well like to know!" Snoop muttered. "Thinks he kin save that drownin' rat—does he? Thinks he'll send us orf in boat in this sea? Oh, no! I guess bloody well not! Stand by me now, mates, and I'll show yer as how to refuse duty on board this ship!"

But Surrey gave no order to stand by the davits. To lower a boat in that sea meant the possible loss of three men in the attempt to save one. Not that Surrey would have cared. There were more than three men on board whom he would gladly have drowned—if he could have sailed a schooner without them. But now he was a master of a ship, dominated by the first law of the sea.

Before they ran afoul of that storm Surrey could have contemplated snuffing out the lives of a half a dozen men; but now the one passion that rode him was the passion to save the lives of his men—and the life of that miserable waif of existence, tossed about out there in the trough of the seas.

The drowning man was now well off their starboard quarter and the schooner on the port tack. Bellows, at the searchlight, was already losing the tiny black speck out there, with every passing of a sea. To turn into the wind meant that they would leave him far astern—and by the time she came about it would be a miracle if they found the man again.

Instead Surrey called out: "Stand by to jibe!"

Snoop was set at the light. The cook, his assistant Crudston, and the negro trimmed in the sheet.

"Easy with the helm! Let her smell of it first! Pay off! Pay off! Bear a hand at that sheet, you blasted sea-cook! Snub her when she jibes!"

The helmsman let her pay off—which was, in fact, the only way she could answer the rudder in that sea. She went staggering down before the wind in no more time than it took to trim in the sail.

"All right, you black devil, bear a hand at that rope—and with all your strength if you don't want her to burn your hands off! Here she comes!"

The sail hovered. No one on board knew the moment she'd jibe, unless it was the skipper, who felt it in his bones. The vessel started to climb a sea, hovered, seemed to stutter as if every timber were a tongue paralyzed suddenly by a fright; then the boom crashed over.

The crew clung for dear life to the sheet as they were told; the helmsman obeying Surrey's shout, did not check her, but let her complete the jibe so that her circling course absorbed some of the jar.

"Eat in to windward now, you black Indian!" Surrey shouted. "Keep her trimmed in!" This to the crew. She went back on the new tack close-hauled. "As close as she'll go without luffing, or you'll run that lubber down!" he cried. "Get to wind'r'd of him, damn you!"

"Losing steerage way!" the half-breed shouted belligerently.

"Pay off there, you men! Avast! Now a little more!"

She answered the rudder just enough to obey the skipper's next order, which was to luff. The sail fluttered and thrashed like

a Gatling gun. The vessel hove to; the helmsman relaxed, and began to breathe again, knowing his wheel was of no more use.

Snoop cast the ray of light directly down upon the waves. There was the man, fifty yards off the port bow, now submerged, now with head out and arm lifted weakly, now submerged again.

Snoop failed to appreciate the beauty of the skipper's maneuver. "Wants to drowned us orl, that's wot! The bloody fool! Jibed us around, so's to loosen every tooth in me 'ead."

The vessel hovered in the eye of the wind, ready to fill away with the slightest trimming in of that sheet. Or, this failing, she was beating dead to windward and would sheer up broadside to the man in less than a minute.

One more maneuver brought Snoop's heart up into his mouth; it brought an oath of admiration from Bellows; it brought a frightened cry from the helmsman. They trimmed in the sheet again, the sail filled with a gust. The vessel not being under way, listed far over, putting her lee rail under the water.

The crew hung for their lives to the cleated sheet; the helmsman to his wheel. Surrey ran down the deeply inclined decks, plunged to his waist in the frothing water, hooked an arm through the shrouds, and reached out with a long, scrawny, powerful arm into the boiling wave which she had just begun to pile up as she gathered way.

He caught a shapeless sodden thing by the scruff of the neck. He hung on, dragging the burden along, as if it were a sea-anchor of blankets brailed up with twine. As she got under way the schooner lay along less. The lee rail came up out of the deluge; Bellows and Snoop, now that the danger was over, darted to the skipper's feet, grasped the burden about the waist, and helped heave it aboard.

"Belay there!" Surrey cried suddenly. "Don't touch him, you confounded beggars! Let him lie there stretched on deck. Stand off!"

Snoop sneaked away as if fearing a whip. Bellows looked over his black shoulder in

surprise, then doggedly obeyed. On the deck lay the limp and sodden likeness of a man.

The crew gathered, but stood off from Surrey. He appeared leaner, taller, because of his wet, clinging whites. A gaunt and terrible aspect came over him as he gazed down at the man at his feet.

The skipper's angular face was florid, fierce in the lantern light. The eyes were hard, piercing. They saw him thrust a long, slender hand downward to feel of the heart in that half drowned body. It went to the holster. The eyes narrowed. The lips partly hidden by two long, drooping mustaches, were drawn tightly—as if in a smile.

He stood up again. He bit his mustache, looked toward the black giant at his right, then into the ghastly face of Snoop.

The crew waited. Their master was going to kill some one. There was no doubt about that. But he gave the impression of nodding his head and smiling knowingly as if to say: "I shall bide my time."

Only one man of that crew knew the meaning of the skipper's menacing smile. That was Snoop.

Snoop crawled off into the dark, wise and triumphant. He had filched a revolver from the man Surrey had picked out of the sea!

CHAPTER XXII.

SALVAGE.

THUS did the work of Surrey—with all the concomitants of heroism and leadership so dear to his heart—resolve itself into his own defeat. Jibing his vessel, driving his crew, jeopardizing his own life in that glorious moment of dragging a drowning man from the sea—what did it all avail him now?

One of his men was armed. How futile was all the psychic mastery in the world against one lead bullet in the temple!

Either Snoop or the negro had that gun; Surrey believed rightly that it was Snoop. But he was wise enough not to demand it of him at that moment. There would come a time, perhaps. But it was not propitious now.

He was surrounded by his mutinous crew; Crudston was there smarting under his humiliation, ready at any moment to jump at the skipper's throat. Big Bellows was there, forsaking him for a greater deity—the girl. The whole cast of characters of his drama were revolting against the author, enacting their own parts to suit themselves. The measly cockney Snoop was assuming the comedy rôle of a seaman who wants to be a shipmaster; in other words, a mortal who wished to be a god! Bouche was below—a villain whose soul cried out desperately for blood; the two Brazilians were supernumeraries—without passion, without lines—but waiting in dumb and passive desuetude for the death of the leading man!

And here was the indispensable adjunct of classical tragedy—a being introduced to solve a situation insoluble by mortals—a *deus ex machina*, in this case a god from out of the sea.

He lay face downward on the deck, immovable, shapeless as if having lost the form of life. Not much of a god—more like a heap of canvas and blankets you would drag at the stern of a dory to lay to in a storm.

"Here, you scuffer!" Surrey called to Crudston, who was standing at the main sheet during this scene. "You're the housemaid on this ship. This carcass belongs to you. Take it below and kick some life into it."

Until now Crudston had not seen who the man was. He went to him, knelt down, turned the heap of dripping clothes, of inert flesh, around, and looked into the face. The face was bruised, one side flowing with blood, where it had been crashed against a dead-eye of the shrouds. It was a white face, contorted with the torture of a terrific fight, of exhaustion; the face of a man who was at grips with death; the face of Crudston's best friend—Henri Rennes!

They saw him pick the bundle up carefully, tenderly. He stood on the swaying deck, getting his balance, then with the inert form held in his powerful arms—with the infinite care of a father carrying a sick child—Crudston went to the companion-way.

The crew could not understand the look

on the youth's face as he carried that wretched, formless thing, an expression of amazement, of hope, of a yearning that wrenched his very soul.

Surrey took no further notice of the incident. He had acted as a true shipmaster and obeyed the first law of the sea. What he had to count on now was the fact that one of his crew was armed. He failed to realize that the man who had the gun was not the greater menace.

It was Crudston who held in his arms something far more dangerous, something capable of destruction far greater than one of those cringing seamen armed with a gun.

It was a half drowned, shapeless carcass, perhaps—but it was the brother of Camille Rennes.

During the long, dark hours of that storm Crudston worked over the unconscious man. He worked in a little glory hole, laying his charge in a bunk which on regular voyages belonged to the steward.

He bullied the cook—supposedly his master—into fetching hot water, hot towels. He sent him packing into the galley to mix a flip of hot gin and beer. He made him help in rubbing the white hands and feet of the prostrate man to stimulate the circulation.

Crudston worked desperately, feverishly. He fought like a dog that sinks its teeth into the throat of a greater adversary.

He was fighting death.

He prayed. He kicked the Brazilian out of the stateroom, and then prayed aloud in Henri's ear.

"Do you hear me, *mon ami*?" he cried eagerly. "Awake! Cling to your life! Fight, for God's sake!" He lowered his voice, crying more tensely, more eagerly: "Fight for your life, and for the sake of your sister!"

Henri Rennes's eyelids flickered, showing the white of his eyes. He gasped for air, heaving his sunken chest in a tortured groan. His head sank heavily into the hollow of Crudston's arm.

In the next hour—the darkest of the night—the glory hole heaved and rolled as

if it were a tiny disembodied thing in a universe of darkness, of storm, of chaos. In that hour Henri Rennes went closer to the border line.

But his friend fought on.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TO BELL THE CAT.

THE breeze, which had steadied the Condor on her long plunges through the gradually mounting seas, freshened. It came blowing along in fitful snorts, like a man enraged, stuttering for breath before hurling his invective. The schooner lay along, her lee rail all but dipping, her decks awash with the bow wave.

Surrey went below to the dining saloon for coffee and cognac. The crew went snooping about, their general objective being the forecastle, where they waited impatiently—each man for the rest to gather.

The Brazilian at the wheel clung there—an Atlas not daring to forsake his great burden—but eager to be relieved, so that he could join in the momentous work at hand—the killing of their skipper. Surrey knew well enough that to keep him there was to put one enemy out of action.

The other Brazilian, the cook, having been dismissed by his assistant, sneaked off to the forecastle, waiting in dumb uncertainty. No use planning for the coming hour. They would all be dead anyway—either a hurricane would swallow them up, or else they would die at the hands of that devil white man.

Snoop joined him, packing his wounded companion Bouche to his bunk. The latter lay on his back, imagining vain things; tortured with greater problems than the dumb and stolid Brazilian; fired with great passions; threatened with more dangers: the hurricane or the skipper or his wound. He would die. But before he died—let him avenge his wrongs.

Snoop, as was customary, assumed a certain importance in the cramped quarters of the forecastle. It was a setting well suited in dimension to Snoop's heroics.

"I've got 'im! S'whelp me Gawd, I've got

'im!" he declaimed flourishing his fist, a big-knuckled claw which terminated a spindle wrist. "S'whelp me, I'll drop the bloody cove with his 'igh and mighty swank! Tried to drownd us orl that's wot! Jibin' around all for the sake of a drownin' blinker! Yuss, he did, s'whelp me—but just look at this: Look 'ere, gents, one and orl. Just kindly look at this present I've got for his bloomin' nibs!"

He extracted a revolver from his baggy trousers. The Brazilian half-breed cried out jubilantly in Portuguese. Bouche gave vent to such an oath of soul-felt ecstasy as seemed to be his last gasp of breath in this life.

Snoop went on: "Now maybe I ain't got him taped—wot? Ow, my winkle!" The three voices conflicted in a hilarious but breathless babel of Portuguese, cockney slang and Bouche's patois.

"Where'd I git it? Oh, yuss, arsk me! That's the best of it. He wanted to drowned us, did he? Well and good. *That's* where I got it! Ole Davy Jones give it to me, you might s'y! Ay, wot? The bloke out'n the seas—he had it. I 'eard him shoot it orf. I rummaged abaht the first thing, 'oping to git my 'ooks on it. Which I did, b'God, when we hoisted him, spewin' and chokin' and drownin' on board."

A musical roar of laughter thundered into the climax of Snoop's declamation. In the door stood Bellows. Snoop dwindled perceptibly into his proper insignificance. Bellows, stooping to enter the forecastle, dwarfed everything—the Brazilian, the prostrate Bouche, the bunks, the lockers. He filled the whole space; it turned dark as if a gigantic shadow had fallen across bunks and men.

"You're gwine to what?" the negro jeered, shaking the very deck with his rhythmic laughter. "You're gwine to come abo'd the Boss-man? Oh, no, not you—you little cockroach. You're gwine to shoot the Boss-man? No, you ain't. You had a chance a minute ago. But what did you do? You snuck forward and *hid*. That's all the firin' you-all kin do!"

His jeering turned into a more threatening tone: "You're afraid of the Boss-man even when you-all have a gun in youah

hand! Don't say you ain't. I seen the whole spectacle before mah very eyes. You stood up there thisaway—" Bellows hunched over, trying to make himself as small as possible.

" And you-all had yo' very hand on the six-gun. Yas, suh. I seen it. And the Boss-man he looked at you—thisaway—" he pretended to be looking at a spot down on the deck—" and you turned powerful yellow about the gills, and then you went crawlin' off to the engine room like a cockroach huntin' fo' a warm spot!"

" *Sacrebleu!*" It was the wounded Bouche who replied. Snoop, of course, remained cringing and thoroughly silenced. " It is like this coward. Even when armed he will not take his revenge. Give me the gun—it is just that I myself kill him? I will crawl above—with all the strength that remains and get payment for this wound!"

" Nah, then, shut yer mag, Mr. Frenchie, shut yer mag!" Snoop cried, assuming a more masterful tone toward the incapacitated Bouche than he dared assume toward Bellows. " There's a time for everythink! The ole bloke knew that one of us was armed—either me or the black here—or else the cove we hauled out'n the sea. Yuss, b'God, he even searched the cove for his gun! Do yer think that was the time for me to do him in? That's a bloody good one!"

" Give the gun to me!" Bouche wailed.

Bellows objected: " Gem'n, jess you-all listen to me. I'm the only one as kin shoot that thar weapon. Give it over now, you lil slice of mean white. Come on now, you-all jess hand that over."

Snoop, backing away to the corner of the triangular room, held his precious possession out—not as a present—but as a threat. His face wrinkled into a laugh. He was certainly highly amused—and hideous to behold. His huge eyes narrowed so that they seemed closed, a mass of crow's-feet. His blue lips went all out of shape, showing broken stained teeth and a missing canine. When he laughed he did not look like a man—but like the shell of a man—a consumptive coughing.

" All right then, Mr. Pimple!" Bellows

capitulated. " We'll shoot craps to see who takes that thar gun, goes above and shoots the Boss-man."

Although Snoop did not agree, they shot craps—all four of them. The negro leading with great ceremony; Bouche casting the dice weakly to the deck, from his bunk; the Brazilian throwing clumsily—shoving out his hand, and letting the dice drop in a laughable attempt to cast—precisely like a monkey trying to imitate a man throwing a stone.

Snoop himself cast—just for the fun of it. Bellows, of course, won. And Snoop, of course, kept the gun notwithstanding. In fact he turned viciously upon his tormentors:

" Strike me dead if I'll give it up! You'll kill 'im maybe—yuss. But wot 'appens to me, I'd like to know? Yer'd do me in next. No, s'whelp me God, I keeps it! It's a weeping I'll use ag'in' *you* if yer tries any more of yer blahsted lip! I'm the leader of this 'ere crew from now on!"

Bellows and the Frenchman vented their wrath in futile oaths. They recognised the inevitable. A gun was too precious a thing on that ship for any man to give up. They would have to trust to Snoop as the executioner. But their faith in him was so faltering that they began to lay very elaborate plans to go through with their scheme in case Snoop failed.

The skipper himself was armed. If he killed Snoop in an exchange of shots—then what would happen?

" I myself will go on deck." Bouche announced. " I will stay abaft a mast, and let this man Snoop place himself near the mast, so that if he falls he will fall at my feet, and thus give me a chance to thrust my hand out and take the gun."

" That thar is a good enough idea," Bellows admitted. " But this here gem'n,—meanin' Mr. Bellows myself—he ain't gwine to hide abaft of no mast!" He offered his services in another quarter—one which always appealed to his imagination. " I'm the gem'n who's gwine go up to the door of the captain's stateroom and say,

" 'Mr. Boss-man, we-all are waitin' fo' to ax you a few pussonal questions, suh. Will you-all kindly step up on deck jess for one

fleettin' moment. When the fleetin' moment's over, Mr. Man, you-all will take jess one step mo' which will be a powerful long one and it'll take you so far that you'll never have time enough to retract!"

"That thar's the way I'll talk to him, gents. Ain't no use jess waitin' outside his cabin do'. He's wise enough to know he better stay in there sippin' coffee and eatin' supper! But when I speaks—then you-all git ready."

He turned to the Brazilian sitting on the edge of his bunk, nodding in acquiescence and swinging back and forth with the roll of the ship. "Here, you yaller Injun. What-all are you gwine to do fo' the pahty?"

The Brazilian extracted a knife from his sheath, cut the yellow tortoise shell which was his thumb-nail, winced.

"All right, Mr. Injun, you stay over a lil aport of the companionway. When the Boss-man steps up on deck all you have to do is to kind of attract his attention by stickin' that there instrument into his kidneys. That's all you have to do. I'll be on the starboard side with this bare instrument—" he showed a considerably more dangerous looking weapon—his fist. "The white man who's resurrectin' that thar drowned gem'n, he's on our side. And so is the Injun at the wheel.

"In other words, gents, after the Boss-man kicks off we're goin' to have peace and quiet on this ship—and it'll all be like

Beulah Land itself and the lions and goats will lie down in perfect harmony."

He looked down at little Snoop, who had broken out in a smile which—allowing for his unhealthy face and stained teeth—was almost seraphic. Snoop seemed to have caught the full significance of Bellows's oration.

"No more fightin'! Beulah Land! Peace at larst! Oh, my eye! If it was only now! I bloody well wisht it was now!"

"You do, do you?" Bellows said disgustedly. "Well, don't wish too hard, Mr. Man. I forgot to say that when we finish this job and peace comes on bo'd this ship—you and me are gwine to have a lil chat together. A jolly good lil chat, suh. And it ain't gwine to be exactly in the language they use in that there hebenly region we-all calls Beulah. No, suh. Not quite exactly, suh!"

With this conclusion to their plotting, Bellows led the way aft. They came on deck by way of the main hatchway, as if in obedience to the skipper's last order to bat'en it down. They fumbled about at the grating for a moment, and then took their places as directed by Bellows.

The only course now was to wait for the skipper to come on deck.

Luckily they had a champion—Bellows—to issue the challenge. One of the mice, in other words, had offered his services to hang the bell on the cat.

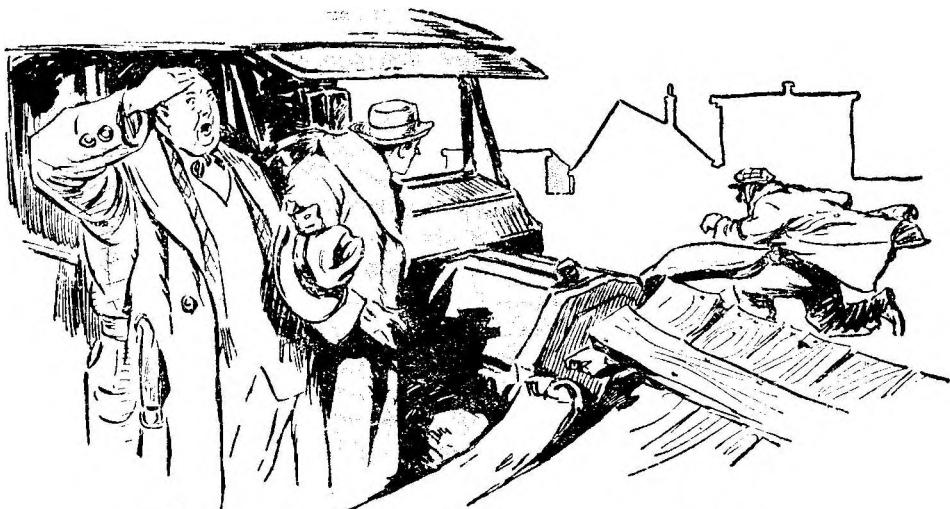
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



TIDE POOLS

LOW tide, and little purple pools of sun,
Red pools of sunset, magical, each one,
With all the beauty that a sun and sea
Can make, and all the pomp and majesty.
In each small pool! Wee bowls of loveliness
Filled now with purple glory and red flame
An even greater glory yet will bless
Your lives, a mightier beauty you will frame.
Wee pools, when lovely night lets down her bars
Each bowl will still and whitely hold the stars.

Mary Carolyn Davies.



---His Own Good

By STANLEY JONES

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

M R. BLUNT'S secretary lifted her blue, slightly disdainful gaze from the racing carriage of her Underwood. She granted a sympathetic smile to the young man who had just emerged from the great frosted glass door bearing "Blunt & MacLean" in gold letters, edged with black. The young man's face had the expression of one who had been suddenly thrust beneath a cold shower.

"He's a tough one, eh?" Miss Clary nodded toward the frosted door.

"Tough!" echoed the young man, pausing by the little railing to fasten his well-worn briefcase, "he's the original old pirate." He glanced over his shoulder, then grinned engagingly. "My hair's still on end, I don't mind telling you. I'd as soon approach a cannibal king with an endowment policy as I would John T.—"

A great hulk of a shadow fell suddenly athwart the frosted glass door. Massive shoulders, a profile whose jutting chin challenged the bold nose above it, a thin wave

of stiff hair that you instinctively knew to be white.

"No! I say, *no!* Don't bring that matter up again!" The door, heavy as it was, fairly trembled. The brass knob turned, and with its turning the blond head bent over the racing keyboard again and Jimmy Dyke bolted into the anteroom and down the stairs like a startled antelope.

Once out in the bright November sunshine, the familiar sights and sounds of Main Street did much to restore his composure. He put his hat on right side to, shaking his head ruefully over the precipitate exit.

"Never sell anything till you get over that, you poor sap," he said bitterly, as he stepped down off the curb.

"Watch your step, young feller," boomed a genial voice; "birds who go mutterin' across streets with their heads down keep th' coroners busy!"

And Jimmy's worried look gave way to a laugh as he paused by the friendly blue

bulk of Mr. Grogan, looming like an island of refuge in the middle of the bustling traffic stream.

"For a harp, you've got more than your share of sense, Tim," rejoined Jimmy, as Mr. Grogan's white-gloved hands snapped this way and that above his visored cap. "Sometimes I think I'll get you to stand over a tough prospect while I tell him my story. He might at least hear me out."

"An' sometimes I'd be glad to do it—get over on your side, you—particularly after bein' run into. Two times last week I was stricken—both times by wimmen. 'Tis often I think it's me fatal beauty draws 'em off the course an' into me," Mr. Grogan shook his massive head pensively.

"An' your skinny friend, Joe Spencer, even he run onto my feet this very day with that blatherskitin' little mousetrap o' his. Hangin' out th' side to yell at Miss Mary Blunt across th' way—I shudda give th' thing a kick up onto th' sidewalk!" said the officer in deep disgust.

Jimmy laughed.

"Mary ever run foul of you, Tim?"

"Not Miss Mary; she drives a car like th' old man, straight an' true—but a bit too fast for a woman." The blue eyes twinkled in a sidewise glance. "How's things goin' there, son? Good?"

A quick flush stained the clear tan of the young man's face, his brow furrowed seriously.

"Yes, fine—with us. But you know the old man, Tim."

"I know 'im, th' hardboiled old gargoyle," assented Tim sagely.

"Well," continued Jimmy toward the one ear bent his way from Mr. Grogan's impressive height, "he thinks I'm fiddling my time away on this insurance business. In fact, he laughs at me. But he says nothing doing for Mary an' me until I either change my line or show him I can write Big Business!"

Mr. Grogan snapped a smart salute at a limousine bearing a "Deputy Commissioner" shield on its hood, then:

"Well, ain't you doin' pretty good? I know you hooked me and Maloney wid yer soft line!"

Dyke nodded.

"Yes, I'm getting under way, but the big fellows take a lot of cultivating, an'—"

"Hell, you'll get 'em, son," boomed Tim. "Stick on 'em." His eyes twinkled. "Have ye tried John T. himself?" A slight but evident shudder passed over Jimmy's well knit body.

"Have I?" he demanded, almost tearfully. "Have I? Lord, if he weren't Mary's father I'd have been over that desktop and on to the floor with him at the receptions he's held for me!"

"Don't you ever mention *that* again, if you want me to keep my mind!" And with a flourish of the old briefcase, Jimmy left the chuckling Grogan and shuttled his way nimbly through the machines to the other side of the street.

"Have you tried John T. himself?" he muttered indignantly as he drew forth his list of appointments for the afternoon. "Humph, pirate!" And off he strode, weighted with a sudden seriousness. For Mary Blunt, the pirate's daughter, was one of the few subjects on this spinning globe that Jimmy regarded with any particular seriousness.

As dusk fell, he climbed the darkened stairs to his office, still sniffing joyously the fall odor of burning leaves. He never smelled them without rebounding mentally to the crisp autumn days on the cleat-torn gridiron up in New England. That seemed ages ago, he thought, recalling how coldly sweet was the air as it pumped into his lungs on the jog round the track after the gruelling scrimmage. Ages ago, yet to-day he had felt his heart pump and squeeze again as it used to in the tense seconds awaiting the kick-off, or the shock of the first play.

He had reached out his hand to turn the knob of the door bearing "Blunt & MacLean" on its frosted glass. And he had grinned, nervously but joyfully, to find that he still had the capacity to thrill at impending conflict. Life, he thought momentarily, will only lose its savor when that has gone. As long as a fellow's got something to fight for, and the capacity to stand the gaff and—

A hastily scratched note on his desk drew his eye as light flooded the little room.

JIM DEAR:

Please forgive me if I break our date for supper to-night. I hate to, the worst way, but dad was so anxious to "get my reaction"—you know these advertising men!—on the talk he's giving before the Chamber of Commerce this evening that I felt I had to. And supper was the only time to do it. (Yes, I know he's an old bear, but I'm the only one here and he kind of relies on me, though he'd die before he'd admit it to a soul!)

Why don't you drop in and hear him talk, after nine? It's open to the public, and I guess you're part of that—'cept in my case. And I'm sorry about supper, Jim dear.

MARY.

P. S.—Remember, you and Joe and I are eating oyster stew together, to-morrow noon, dutch.

There was another P. S., one of which erased the momentary disappointment clouding Jimmy's clear blue eyes, and one of which is none of our particular business. Whatever it was, it sent him whistling softly to the window to acknowledge the rauous squawks of Joe Spencer and his curious car, two stories below in the street.

Joe was approximately the same length as his car, which might have been six feet, three inches. And neither, as Joe frequently pointed out, carried a superfluity of weight—speed was the big idea. Sprawled in one of the small bucket seats, legs sprawled and inconceivably trellised about the steering wheel, horn-rimmed glasses up-tilted—the ensemble suggested nothing quite so strongly as a great, genial grasshopper at ease in a peapod.

"Mrs. Spencer, the queen mother," bellowed Joe through cupped hands as Jimmy flung up the window, "has requested me to bring you home to supper to-night. How about it?"

Countless pairs of eyes followed this stentorian salutation, and Jimmy was quick to nod assent and withdraw from the lime-light. Joe didn't mind; no one had ever seen him ill at ease.

"Yes, sir, right here, sir," he cried sharply, as Jimmy emerged. With a fierce effort, he untangled his legs and floundered out of the little machine. Jerking the flimsy door open, he loudly but politely requested

the hurrying crowds to allow passage for Mr. Dyke.

"You poor simp," observed the latter beneath his breath as he was assisted solicitously into the seat, "you're getting, day by day, just a bit more balmy under your hat."

Several of the passers-by paused to smile at his evident confusion, which delighted Joe beyond measure. With a fearsome grinding of gears, he worked out into the traffic, trying to talk to his passenger as well as keep an eye on the crowding machines, and the girls on the sidewalk. His spirits were bubbling almost to the boiling point.

"A big day for this city to-day, James. I'll tell you! Haven't you noticed a general uptrend in business conditions, say since nine twenty-five this morning? Well, there has been. Yes, sir," He pounded Jimmy's knee enthusiastically, narrowly averting collision with the limousine ahead.

"Bonds were sold at that hour, bonds without number, and by the old master, J. Spencer himself!"

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Jimmy incredulously. "Who bought 'em, tell me that, you string bean?"

A look of mock anguish passed over Joe's expressive countenance. It was succeeded by one of gloom.

"That's like you, James," he affirmed sadly to himself. "But I'll tell you. None other than John T. Blunt, by name and inclination."

"Yah, your uncle! That's no trick. But I'll admit I'm surprised he'd take anything you'd recommend."

Joe's sudden, infectious laugh shattered the air.

"He didn't, that's the funny part. I went in with what I thought was a good list, and damned if he didn't look at it, snort, throw it into the basket and then give me a much larger order on his own ideas!"

Jimmy laughed with him. "The old pirate, that's John T. all over! But you sold him, anyhow, boy."

Joe shook his head.

"No, he sold himself, James. But that doesn't show on either the scoreboard or the

checkbook. All that is recorded for posterity to gape at is the astounding fact that one J. Spencer negotiated the business. And that's enough, when it required me to play Daniel in that den!"

"Guess you're right at that, Joe," and the slight furrows appeared once more on Jimmy's usually placid brow, until Joe swung the rattling car up the curve of the driveway and handsome Mrs. Spencer greeted them beneath the porte-cochère.

Later in the evening, when a decent interval after supper had elapsed, Jimmy excused himself from the clinging protests of the Spencers, shook off the physically detaining clutch of Joe, and made his way to Memorial Hall, where John T. Blunt was scheduled to speak.

Nodding a whispered "Hello, Ed" to the grizzled doorkeeper, he slipped into the rear of the well filled auditorium and subsided behind a pillar.

John T. was hard at it. He did everything that way; he worked without thought of himself or those about him, and when he played, he played for keeps and with all he had. His keen and diplomatic partner, Jerome MacLean, never allowed him to escape on to the links alone with a valued client. Experience had shown that they were quite apt to return to town in different machines, and in two cases the senior partner's headstrong impetuosity had cost the agency promising accounts.

"I must emphasize," and crash, went the gnarled fist on the speaker's desk, "that each and every human being on the face of this earth has emotions and instincts which can be reached to the profit of the intelligent, persistent salesman. I bar no one!" A telling pause, while the piercing eyes swept the audience to challenge contradiction. Jimmy instinctively drew closer to his pillar and peeped out.

"Love, ambition, pride, comfort, possession, envy, hunger, fear—they lie in each of us. Possibly dormant, awaiting the word or picture that will stimulate them to active desire. But, once this desire is aroused, it is our task to see that it is satisfied by *our* particular product more completely than by Tom's, or Dick's, or Harry's!"

The resonant voice rang out clear and

strong. Who could fail to place confidence in a voice like that, thought Jimmy, coupled with the Titanlike presence of John T.? It was incredible to imagine him ever mistaken, in anything. Yet, the young man could recall two or three cases—"in closing," boomed the voice into his wandering consciousness again, "remember this: First decide upon the most logical basic instinct or emotion to be reached, then set your stage for the most vital, dramatic appeal, and stick with it till the cows come home! Sell yourself, first and last, on the fact that your interest is for *his own* good!"

Jimmy Dyke slipped out as the thunders of applause crashed and reechoed against the high walls. His last glimpse over his shoulder revealed the white battle crest of John T. Blunt bobbing in short jerks of acknowledgment.

II.

SCUFFLING reflectively down Maple Street, hands punched deep in the pockets of his old tweed coat, Jimmy thought over the fragments of the discourse he had heard. He wondered whether, deep down in the granite, John T. had buried those emotions and instincts which he had declared to animate every human being. They were certainly sunk deep—love, pride, envy, fear.

Jimmy could not picture John T. as animated by them; he smiled at the thought of fear impelling John T. to do anything. Yet, they were basic emotions, working their way as powerful but unseen currents work their will upon a boat floating on the apparent smoothness of a river.

"Set your stage; vital appeal; stick with it; your interest is his interest," clicked in his mind.

Everybody knew those things, trick was to apply 'em. To pick out one point, and work it to the exclusion of all else. Well, why not? He'd seen it done, though he had never thought through the mechanics, considered the props, watched for the wires.

Jimmy strolled slowly through the listening night, his mind busy with new thoughts, until he awoke with a start to find himself a short half block from the Blunt home on Cedar Hill.

"That's what habit'll do," he said aloud

to himself, nodding his head sagely; "especially with one of the major instincts, or emotions, such as, well—love, f'rinstance."

He quickened his step, smiling broadly at some inward thought. As the cracked blue-stone of the Blunt walk popped under his heels, the smile expanded into a laugh which revealed square, white teeth, and puckered a dozen fanlike little wrinkles at the corner of each eye.

"Have to talk this new basic stuff over with Mary," he grinned. "She's got a good bean, if I haven't."

So absorbed were they in the low voiced discussion, sunk deep in John T. Blunt's favorite sofa—the "pirate's den," Jimmy called it—that they were jerked upright when a gruff voice intruded just behind them.

"Pretty hour for youngsters to be up gabbing about nothing," grunted John T., pitching his floppy gray hat onto the library table. "Time for honest people to be abed." He cocked a fierce eye at Mary's fresh auburn beauty.

"Yes," replied his daughter seriously, "and especially such a prominent citizen as you, dads." A fleeting dimple eddied the smooth curve of her cheek, and Jimmy noted what he called the "kidding spark" in the widest hazel eyes. "It's all right for me," she went on, over her shoulder, regarding John T. quite serenely, "because I'm a girl and girls can do anything to-day. And it's also all right for Jimmy, for he's nothing much. But you, dads, are one of the city's outstanding somebodies and an example of—"

"Bah," snorted her father. "That's enough of that stuff from you, young woman." He stamped around in front, rubbing his hands and regarded them with his back to the cheery glow of the coal fire.

Mary gazed at his bulk, eyes faintly quizzical. "Just to show you how desperate we were for conversation, dads, we were discussing the high lights of your speech to-night. Jimmy thinks he got a lot out of it—"

"You at the hall to-night, young man?" interrupted the gruff voice, though it seemed to the young man that it carried slightly less gruffness than usual.

He cleared his throat.

"Yes, sir, I enjoyed it immensely, and—"

"Enjoyed? Bah!" cut in John T. scornfully. "Did you *get* any points out of it? Points that you might apply in your business—if you *were* in a real money making business!" The welcome gloom of the library hid Jimmy's flush, and Mary's slender fingers gave his a brief squeeze.

"I believe I did, sir, but I can't say for sure until I try to work them out in actual practice." He hesitated a moment, then went on: "But the psychology of the selling appeal, as you outlined it, sounded most practical to—"

"It's a crying shame the way that poor word 'psychology' has to be lugged into everything to-day," objected John T. vigorously. "Sets up a lot of mental barriers for folks to clamber over, and when they look back they see it's nothing but their old and valued friend, 'common sense,' with a new lace collar and a few strings of beads. But they *will* have it! It's as much as a big account is worth to leave it out of any discussion over twenty minutes in length."

The big man snapped a flake of cigar ash from the tentlike expanse of gray flannel that was his vest, smiling at the pair on the couch. A few sprays of Mary's short copper strands caught and held the rival glint of the coals, thrown like living, glowing filaments against the rich brown of the sofa's back which supported her head. And, of a sudden, John Blunt's fierce old eyes grew wonderfully soft as he gazed down upon her, his thoughts harking back through the years to another head of this same molten shade whose impress would never leave his shoulder. He cleared his throat noisily just as Mary sprang up, her own eyes answering his thoughts, and squeezing his great paw affectionately.

"It's time you went to bed, dads," she said warningly, giving him a series of small shakes by the coat lapels. "You're tired out from shouting at all those pompous old men, and from stalling off salesmen like—well, Jimmy here, for instance."

Deftly she overruled his fulminating protests, tugged him loose from his anchorage before the fire, and herded him skillfully across the long room and up the landing.

"I turned down your bed, but don't you go to reading or I'll come up and hide every last book in the room," she threatened as his steps died away in the upper hall.

"You send that young man about his business, Mary," floated down, even to the ears of that young man himself. "It's time he was home."

Mary's laughter tinkled from the landing, where she stood, a picture of unconscious grace in a slim, sleeveless frock just the color of the first spears of grass.

"You hear that, James?" followed up John T., clearly audible despite the mere muffling of a door or two.

"Yes, sir," shouted Jimmy, with a grin at Mary. "Good night, Mr. Blunt." A moment's silence, then:

"I'll tell you good night when I hear the front door shut behind you," answered the muffled thunder, with what—in any other man under the sun—might conceivably have been a crusty chuckle.

III.

NEXT morning Miss Clary guiltily slid her orange stick into her desk drawer as the door flew open.

"Lord," she breathed in relief, "I thought it was the boss, Mr. Dyke. What a start you handed me!"

Jimmy smiled at her confusion, removing his felt hat and leaning on the little railing. Afterward he often felt foolish, taking off his hat when addressing girls in even the most unimportant positions when he called, but it was an ingrained habit he had been unable to shake. And generally, had he known it, girls rather liked it in him. They told other girls about it, and a second or third call frequently resulted in rank treachery to executives in the matter of appointments where Mr. Dyke entered the scene.

"He's not in yet," continued Miss Clary, "but any minute—"

"I wanted to see Mr. MacLean," said Jimmy, "if you could help me out of it."

"Sure, just a minute," and a moment later she beckoned him from inside the great frosted door.

John Blunt's partner always reminded Jimmy of a genial, restless wire-haired little terrier. His well cut suits, smart shirts, and cheerful neckwear covered a body as lean as a strip of whalebone, surcharged with tireless energy. He was, furthermore, one of those rare souls whose cheer and politeness were available to office boys and stenographers just as readily as to a ranking business associate. MacLean smiled as Jimmy entered rather hesitantly.

"Morning, Jimmy, come in, sit down." He rose and shook the younger man's hand warmly. "Haven't seen you for some time; not as often as I'd like to." The dark eyes behind the gold spectacles searched him in the kindly way they had.

"Well," began Jimmy, "I've come to ask for advice, and possibly some help, Mr. MacLean, on something which may be a darn fool idea, and which may not. You see—" His lips twisted in some embarrassment and he hitched his chair a step closer. Then their voices dropped to a low murmur, indistinguishable to Miss Clary's ears, though she was sure she heard John Blunt's partner laugh rather immoderately from time to time. And when Jimmy emerged an hour later the twinkle in his eyes was reflected in Mr. MacLean's as they shook hands at the door.

IV.

THREE days later, at supper, Mary Blunt casually asked her father if he had noticed the day's news with any particular care. Accidents, serious and often fatal, would seem to be on the increase, she thought. And there were no less than three cases in which sudden calamity to the head of the house had left dependents without means of subsistence. No insurance to protect—did he think it was a good thing?

Her father snorted; looked suspiciously at the guileless, serious young face, and returned, reassured, to the attack on his treacherous grapefruit.

"Humph," he snorted; "course it's a good thing, if you've only got a little bit put aside. Only way some men can save a cent, being forced to meet a payment on a certain date. But I—"

Mary's soft voice slid between his words again:

"But we're not actually rolling in wealth, dads, and it seems to me that a man might carry a pretty good amount of insurance and save on his income taxes, couldn't—"

"That young snip's been talking to you," accused John T., applying a spotless napkin to the pink granite of his cheek where the grapefruit had just scored a direct hit. "He pesters me to death." John T. jabbed a knotty forefinger across the bowl of cut chrysanthemums.

"If it wasn't for you acting like such a softy over him, I'd—I'd—" Another dire thought stepped into the forefront of his mind and crowded aside the misdemeanors of Mr. Dyke. "Why, even MacLean has got so he hints around about this business of firm insurance. Only yesterday he said—Good Lord, look at the clock, and me here fiddling away my time!"

Three gulps at his cereal, and off he dashed, sweeping things aside in a mad search for hat and overcoat, until Mary picked them both up from the library table and helped him into them, smiling as wise women always smile at their men folks under similar conditions.

Striding across Main Street in the ebb and flow of the human ants scurrying into their steel and concrete hills for the day's labor, John T. Blunt shunted his way near to the imposing bulk of Timothy Grogan.

"Morning, Tim; you're looking as good as you ever could."

The human mountain in blue cocked a solicitous eye down at this sally, and grinned as he touched his cap. John T. Blunt was not without influence in the city's affairs, including its politics. He liked to shoot out a brusque pleasantry as he passed the big officer, and to draw forth a spark of the Celtic wit which lay, like a rich vein of gold, just beneath the official severity. The fact that it generally resulted in a laugh on John T. made not the slightest difference to him; he liked to hand it out, but "he could take it, too," as he often remarked to himself in passing.

But this particular morning Grogan scrutinized him a second time, then crooked a huge finger.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" demanded John T., squirming a bit uncertainly under the keen glance of the officer. "Ever see me before?"

Grogan shook his great head slowly, signaling the traffic on without removing his eyes from John T.'s ruddy face.

"I guess it's me imagination," he said, "after all."

"Why, what the devil are you driving—"

"You'll pardon me, sir, but are ye feelin' first rate to-day? I swear I niver saw a man's eyes with just such a look in 'em. Not nat'ral, at all, at all, sir." And Tim pursed his lips in evident concern over the plight of so prominent a citizen.

His subject flushed, and if his eyes had lacked a spark they had it now.

"You're crazy, Tim, that's all that ails you! If I felt any better you'd have to arrest me." John T. laughed, and added: "If you could!"

But Grogan did not respond to this opening, only following John T. with genuine concern in his gaze until the broad-brimmed gray hat melted in with the crowds and became a mere speck. Then he smiled, at the precise moment that the prominent citizen was surveying his features closely in a store window and muttering:

"Bah! Crazy as a loon!"

Three mornings later the mail brought to the senior partner of Blunt & MacLean a concise, polite letter, requesting brief consideration of the attached suggestions for his insurance. A simple graph, showing his approximate annual payments, the amounts saved on inheritance taxes, the dividends, and the increasing costs of premiums with each succeeding year, was attached. The name of "James H. Dyke" was signed as author and draftsman. When John Blunt's gradually reddening eye at last leaped from the mazes of the graph to the bold signature, Miss Clary trembled at the sounds of wrath which accompanied a tremendous tearing of paper and a resonant thump in the metal waste basket.

"I was afraid of that," she whispered to herself, letting her cerulean gaze wander

to the envelope which had contained the ill-starred communications. This also bore the imposing heading, upper left hand corner, "James H. Dyke, Insurance."

Still shaking her head, Miss Clary picked up the city telephone directory and thumbed it over until she came to the "D's."

V.

SHORTLY after noon the following day, Joe Spencer hustled into the office. Resting one bony hand on the gate, he hopped over the little railing and landed with a clatter beside Miss Clary's desk.

"Morning, Miss Clary," he beamed through the great glasses. "That's the way the go-getter magazines tell the bright young man to enter an office."

The girl, after an amazed start, laughed back at him.

"Well, I wouldn't try it in any office except your uncle's," she advised. "Do you want to see him?"

Joe considered this with a judicial furrowing of the brow, then:

"Well, frankly, no. In fact, I'd much rather"—he leaned nearer and lowered his voice confidentially—"sit here and talk over the day's doings with you, but I cornered him for lunch to-day for a very special purpose, and I'm afraid I've got to go through with it." Joe sighed a sigh of ineffable sadness, regarding her moonily through what Jimmy called his "burning glasses." He was obviously sincere.

"Very well," said Miss Clary, uncertain whether or not to laugh at this refreshing disclosure, "I'll tell him you're here."

Joe always reminded her of a gambol-some collie pup, with a humorous eye and an utter lack of responsibility. She wanted to straighten his tie, and see his vest buttoned on the right buttons—but he was never still long enough, even if she had dared suggest such decided innovations.

As the senior partner thumped out of the office, replying in grunts to Joe's animated chatter, Miss Clary smiled at the pair they made. And Joe's infectious laugh floated back up to her ears from the descending elevator.

This was a late lunch, and only a few stragglers from the noon hour crowds were drifting about the wind-swept sidewalks as Joe piloted his uncle toward a certain obscure grillroom which he had discovered.

"How much farther's this place?" asked John T. Blunt, clutching his hat as they bent forward into a stiff breeze on rounding a corner.

"Just about a block, Uncle John," his nephew assured him. "Nothing like a brisk crawl to work up an appetite, any—"

"Well," rejoined John T. pointedly, "I've got some work—damned important work—to do, if you haven't, Joe. Now, let's—"

"One more corner," interrupted the guide gayly, seizing his elbow, "and there we are!"

Just ahead of them a painter, looking singularly cool in his smudged white suit, was plying his brush on a gently swaying scaffold. The second story window sashes of a tall brick office building were receiving his indifferent attention as the pair drew near.

"Lord, he looks cold," remarked Joe, gazing upward. "Isn't it pretty late in the year to be painting, Uncle John?"

John T. rolled one reddened eye aloft as they paused near the scaffold, then merely grunted.

"Just a second," apologized Joe, "till I tie this dog-gone shoe lace." He bent double, like a gaunt ostrich busy with a grain of corn.

As John T. Blunt was fidgeting from one foot to the other in the nipping cold several things happened with incredible swiftness. Later on, as he tried to give them sequence, he discovered that he could not do so. They had simply happened, that's all.

A pulley wheel overhead burst into a crescendo squealing. A rattle of loose boards, a babel of warning shouts, the heavy crash of a paint pot beside him.

"Jump!" bellowed Joe, awkwardly floundering into him, eyes distended. Some one smashed into the well padded midsection beneath John T.'s vest, yelling "Look out!" The breath left his body in an agonized blat as he floundered to his hands

and knees. Then came a deafening, splintering crash in his very ears, and John T. buried his white face beneath his arms, never expecting to raise it again in this world.

Some minutes later—he never knew just how many—he cautiously wiggled the clenched fingers of one hand. They seemed to work. He tried the other hand with similar gratifying results. Then, ever so slowly, John T. turned his head from side to side and moved his shoulders. He was astounded, but everything seemed to work. Encouraged, he raised his head fearfully and looked about.

The remains of the scaffold lay a few feet from him, just where they had fallen. The painter, a young man whose eyes were large in a chalky face, stood beside them, supported by Joe Spencer and another youth.

"Don't know, I tell you, I don't know," he was repeating, his gaze roving between John T. and the remains of the scaffold. "Somethin' just went ka-flop, an' down we come."

He pointed a shaking forefinger at John T. and managed a sick smile:

"You're a lucky guy, that's all I gotta say"; and as they escorted him into a near by store he looked back over his shoulder and quavered: "Yes, sir, one lucky guy! Another foot, an'- good *night*!"

John T. gained his feet, his strong hands trembling strangely. Some one found his hat. Joe Spencer appeared, took his arm, and escorted him through the small fringe of onlookers who had collected to gabble and point out just how it had all happened.

"Whew, that wasn't so far off, eh, Uncle John?" murmured his nephew, giving him a sidewise glance.

John T. shook his head. His breath fluttered, somehow, and still came with an effort.

"Oh, they come closer," was all he could manage, but the voice that uttered it was no more like his own than a piccolo is like a steam calliope.

"Well, a good hot bite will help a lot," asserted his nephew with what seemed like untimely and unwarranted enthusiasm.

"Let's go!"

But John T. Blunt stopped short. He

regarded Joe with something of the old glint in his wandering eyes. Then he raised his hand, motioning to a taxicab that was cruising expectantly past.

"I'll be damned if I stir another step with you to-day!" said John T. Blunt, his voice gradually recovering his former power and tonal qualities. His eyes rested on Joe with mounting ire in their depths. "Do you realize I was within an inch of being killed on account of snooping up back streets with you? Go get your own lunch. I'm going home. And you might call up the office and tell Miss Clary I won't be back to-day." With that John T. clambered heavily into a taxi and sank back into the cushions.

It has been said that even a reasonably delicate youthful constitution recovers from a sudden and severe shock in half the time required for a robust adult constitution to do so. And this must be true, for as the taxi careened homeward John T. Blunt's mind dwelt ever more disquietingly on his recent experience, while his nephew whistled gayly between his teeth as he strode briskly into a drug store and folded his assorted lengths within the narrow confines of a telephone booth.

VI.

Two mornings later John T. Blunt looked up from the depths of a folder labeled "Spring Campaign — National Swivet Company." His door had just opened and closed quietly, and on the threshold stood none other than Jimmy Dyke, hat in one hand, watch in the other. John T. flushed, and inhaled angrily.

Jimmy smiled, somewhat nervously, and held up a hand.

"We really had an appointment for this hour, Mr. Blunt," he said, "but I know you have lost one afternoon already this week, so I thought I'd just boil down my interview on paper and leave it with you to go over at your leisure." He slid two sheets of white paper, clamped between stiff manila covers with small brass rivets, on to the corner of John T.'s mahogany desk. Concern was written large on the young man's face.

"Mary told me what a shock you experienced the other day, sir. I am sorry—it might have happened to any—"

"That fool nephew of mine," exploded John T., "was nearly the death of me. But for my quickness and presence of mind I'd have been injured, possibly—"

"And that would have been the worst thing in the world, sir, not only for—for Mary, but for the firm. Mr. MacLean has told me that you are the very heart and soul of it, and how clients often refuse to do business with any one else."

"Bosh," exploded John T. again, with a deprecatory snort. "Mac's been filling you full of wind—a favorite trick of his. I couldn't keep an account for a month without his soothing syrup for crying clients. He's a mine of ideas, too. Don't let him tell—"

"Well, it seemed to me that the combination is a pretty happy one," remarked Jimmy, glancing at his watch and turning to leave. "It's really a two-man affair, isn't it, sir?"

John T. Blunt was suddenly recalled to the fact that he had been interrupted by the noiseless arrival of Miss Clary, bearing two calling cards from the nether regions. He glanced at them, murmured "In conference," and let his attention wander back to Jimmy.

"H-m, yes. Yes, perhaps it is, to a certain extent. But we—"

"And it seemed to me that it might be a good idea to protect not only Mr. MacLean and yourself against possible misfortune, sir, but Mary's future interest in the stock of the company."

John T. knit his heavily frosted brows and considered the suggestion, much as a suspicious grizzly might consider a new tidbit suddenly thrust before him.

"Humph," he grunted. "I'm my own insurance company, young man, as I've told you before. Nothing happens to the man who keeps his eyes open and—"

"Yes, sir. I know that. I just thought you might be interested in seeing some figures. They're on page two." Jimmy pointed to the folder, smiled, bobbed his head pleasantly, and shut the frosted door softly behind him.

"My stars," gasped Miss Clary as Jimmy paused beside her desk, slapping his hat on the railing, "it was so quiet in there I thought he'd slain you with a look!"

"Wasn't it, though?" he beamed. "In fact, on the strength of walking out, instead of being thrown out, this time, I think I'll raise the ante on him."

"Good idea," approved the girl, in a whisper. "Something's upset him quite a bit. Go to it." And she smiled mysteriously as the young man squared his capable shoulders and took his own time—for the first time—in sauntering out of the door.

Farther down town Jimmy teetered on the curb and regarded the ceaseless and cyclonic motions of Tim Grogan. Several minutes passed before the big patrolman caught his eye in a momentary lull of the traffic tempest.

"Hello, son," he called, grinning broadly beneath his close-cropped gray mustache. "Knocking 'em dead?"

"Almost," replied the young man, darting quickly to his side. "Joe see you yesterday or to-day, Tim?"

"No later than last night, me boy. In fact, he rode me home in that crackerbox of his, an' claimed I bent the springs on my side. Then Kate insisted he stay to supper, which he done, an' kept the two of us roarin' until—"

Jimmy plucked the sleeve incasing the great, muscular arm.

"Then you really had a chance to talk later on, eh?"

"Shure, we talked on a number av things. He is nobody's fool, your small fri'nd Joe."

Jimmy laughed happily. "No, you bet he's not. And neither are you, which is sayin' a lot for a harp!"

He ducked an elephantine backhand slap as Mr. Grogan's whistle shrilled, and swarmed back to the sidewalk.

"See you next Thursday," he shouted over the maelstrom of heads.

Tim nodded grinning assent. "Thursday it is, son!"

VII.

As he left the office on the day following his interview with Jimmy Dyke, John T.

Blunt found himself wondering what the world was coming to. He wondered what had brought on this veritable deluge of calamity. Had he never scanned the daily papers with any degree of care, or had he simply been blind and calloused to the racking misfortunes which blighted humanity?

Monday morning he had found three clippings on his desk, beside his mail. All dealing with fatal or serious accidents in the city; auto smashups, holdups, and an account of a well-known banker who had slipped disastrously on a thin coating of ice on his front steps.

"Who left these here, and why?" he demanded testily of Miss Clary.

Her eyes widened with surprise as she glanced at them.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Blunt. I never saw them before."

"Well, throw them out, then—and keep them out," he added.

Monday evening his daughter, a vision in soft gray, met him at the door. Trouble of some sort, he saw at once, sat heavy on her slim young shoulders and sobered the affectionate vivacity of her usual greeting.

"What's wrong, puss?" he asked quickly, tilting the fresh young oval of her chin with his great paw. "Anybody been mean to my little girl?"

She shook her coppery head slowly.

"No, not to me, dad," slipping an arm through his as they crossed the threshold. She glanced up at him, smiling.

"They know better with you around."

"Well, what then? Cook leit?"

"No, but a dreadful thing has happened." She helped John T. out of his huge Ulster, and perched on his knee before the fitful flicker of the grate. "I just learned to-day that Ruth Milton's father—you remember her, when I went to school in Connecticut?—was taken sick last week, and they don't expect him to—"

"Is that so, is that so?" murmured John T. sympathetically, stroking the soft cheek as it nestled against his shoulder. "Well, well, it seems that—"

"Dinner is served, Miss Mary," interrupted Norah from the doorway, rustling there for a moment in her starched black and whiteness.

Tuesday morning there came a clipping from another newspaper, pinned to a memo in Jerome MacLean's angular, sketchy hand; the vice president of a great rubber company—one of the firm's clients—had unexpectedly succumbed to angina pectoris.

"You knew Harry best," ran the note. "Better write them at once, Mac."

With a groan John T. Blunt rang for his secretary. Where would the cycle end, or had he been an oblivious hub therein for so, these many years? With dismay he became aware, before the afternoon was half spent, that his cherished faculty for intense, whole-souled concentration on the job at hand was subtly undermined. And he had a headache.

Later in the week—it was Thursday—Jerome MacLean's alert terrier face thrust itself into Blunt's sanctum from the door that connected the two offices.

"How're you feeling to-night, John?" he queried, taking in his partner's massive bulk with his shrewd black eyes.

John T. Blunt swung ponderously about in his swivel chair.

"Not any too good," he said. "Why?"

"Thought we might take a ride down to the shore and put away a duck dinner. Got some things—new things—I'd like to throw at you and see what you think of 'em, in connection with this steamship account. Are you on?"

"All right," passing his hand over his eyes with a gesture of weariness that brought MacLean to his side in two swift strides. "Might do me good to get out in the air."

MacLean's wiry hand was on his shoulder.

"John, do you feel pretty well these days? I'm—we're all kind of worried about you. May asked me if you weren't working too hard, and even—"

"Yes, yes," John T.'s voice rose to an angry bellow. "Just leave me alone and quit asking me how the hell I am, will you? The whole bunch of you!"

His partner received this outburst with a solicitous shake of the head, and moved thoughtfully back to the door. Turning, he said quietly:

"We'll leave at five-thirty, then, eh, John?" To which John T. returned a muffled grunt of assent, from the depths of his rustling papers.

VIII.

STREET lights were tracing clear cut black patterns through the bare branches of the elms outside the office windows as Jerome MacLean hustled out. He was thrusting one arm into the sleeve of his heavy blue chinchilla ulster.

"I'll duck down and flag a taxi, John," he called. "Better bundle up warm—there are no butterflies out this evening!" His nimble heels clattered on the stone steps—MacLean never seemed to have time for the elevators.

Ten minutes later the senior partner tucked his red and black silk muffler—Mary had made it—inside his coat collar and strode out past the desks of the copy writers with a gruff "Good night, folks." Most of them, as he well knew, scurried into their wraps and seldom missed the next elevator down. Some evening he planned to come up on that next elevator and watch the faces that would confront him.

At the curb stood Jerome MacLean, thumping his gloved hands together. He was talking with the driver of the most disreputable old taxicab that had ever dared show its battered face to a world which goes in considerably for first appearances. An occasional glint flittered across the ridges of its battered hood, during a particularly violent shudder of its tortured engine. The body had a distinct list to starboard, like a weatherbeaten shanty which has grown accustomed to leaning into the wind. Mudguards—despite a deceptive coating of new black paint—looked no more secure than if they had been attached, that very minute, with safety pins.

MacLean whirled, smiling, as the senior partner eyed his choice of conveyance with evident disapproval. In fact, John T. Blunt had just opened his mouth to mention it when the flimsy door opened, apparently of its own volition.

"Not much to look at, eh, John? But I guess it'll get us to the inn." He assisted

his partner inside, a small section of step breaking off under the strain of the two hundred and twenty pounds.

"Where in the devil did you get this thing?" exclaimed John T. irritably, as the hard seat creaked warningly under his weight. "I'd as soon ride on one of those camp stools caterers furnish, and feel a sight safer, too!"

"Harbor Inn," directed MacLean to the heavily padded figure wedged behind the steering wheel.

A fearful clashing of gears, a grinding whir, and they moved slowly off down the street. MacLean laughed, then cupped his hands and shouted above the roar:

"Sounds like threshing season, down in the country, eh?"

"Like a sham battle!" roared back John T., holding his hat and peering anxiously ahead.

The old machine gave the impression that the motor and front wheels had found the rest of the works uncongenial in the extreme, and were making desperate lunges to leave it behind. The ancient body swayed and creaked in every joint, loudly protesting such a shameful course.

The passengers' breath rose in curling billows as the arc lights clicked past. MacLean flipped up his ample coat collar, regarding his companion with a sidewise grin in the tossing darkness.

"Close the windows," shouted John T., leaning forward to tap the muffled figure's shoulder.

A sudden lurch flung him back into his seat, his hat tipped over his eyes. The old rattletrap hurdled along like a tipsy beetle, flapping its mudguard wings, filling the crisp night air with the astounding clamor of its progress. MacLean seized his arm.

"There aren't any windows," he yelled. "I tried to find 'em!" He laughed at his partner's heartfelt outburst, sitting forward on the edge of the seat and swaying easily with the motion.

John T. subsided in impotent rage, apparently collecting his forces for a sudden and final swoop on the person of the driver, whose breath whistled out in clouds and gleamed like silver on his great, black, walrus mustache. He was a formidable

sight, his head encased in a tan knitted helmet, surmounted by a checkered cap pulled tight as a drum.

Of his features nothing could be seen save his eyes, which were blue, a rather small, straight nose, and the aforementioned startling mustache. A fitting freak, thought John T. bitterly, for his car. As for him, he didn't like the looks of either of the precious pair—Mac always was kind of cracked on some things.

They were in the comparatively unfrequented suburbs now, whirling and wheezing along. Occasional cars passed them. The sidewalks were barren save for a sprinkling of workers hurrying home to a late supper. Jerome MacLean stretched through the rattling window and hung for a moment on the chauffeur's shoulder. The latter nodded his hooded head vigorously, squinting down the road in the glare of the headlights.

"He knows the way," MacLean assured his companion, sinking back, his beady, knowing eyes darting from John T.'s glowering features to the highway ahead.

"Well, I know this much," and the senior partner bellowed belligerently in return, "I don't ride any farther in this—"

John Blunt's surging protest was suddenly blotted out by the scream of brakes and the startled shouts of the driver. Peering quickly over his shoulder, John T. shuddered and tried to tear the door open in one terrified snatch. Jerome MacLean, equally alarmed, grabbed his arms, bawling:

"Sit down, for your life!"

A small machine loomed up dead ahead, crossing the highway at right angles. On its rear was secured a huge crate, hanging well out behind the end of the body. Every detail burned itself into John T. Blunt's consciousness with the startling clearness of a flashlight picture. The frantic efforts of the other driver, whose car was evidently balking, his warning hand upraised, the confused shouting—churned into a horrid pandemonium as they lurched dizzily down on it.

"To the right," screamed John T., clutching a handle that promptly broke off in his grasp.

The frightened chauffeur swerved wildly to the left instead, then the white pine crate

towered and rushed on them as they shut their eyes and braced for the shock. But in that final instant, when the breath seemed choked in his throat, John T. saw their craven driver leap from his seat to the dubious safety of the scudding street, and mentally prayed that a broken neck would be his reward. Then they knifed headlong into the crate with a rending of boards, spun crazily and ground to a swaying stop.

That inevitable moment of stunned silence which treads on the heels of an accident fell upon the scene. Nature catching her breath at the roughness and hurts of her children. Then angry shouts, accusations. The irregular popping of a motor.

John T. raised his bare head and peered fearfully out of the cab window. Their driver had survived and was grappling with the tall, long coated man who had driven the other car. Their straining feet scuffed loudly on the pavement, mingling with curses, the thud of blows and labored breathing. A police whistle, apparently from one of the vacant fields which stretched away on all sides, shrilled aloud. Its effect was magical.

The belligerents broke apart, the tall man scrambling into the low seat of his car and speeding off down a side street. As heavy footsteps pounded near, the second combatant hesitated briefly, then jumped swiftly to the cab. He busied himself for a second before the steaming radiator, then darted behind it, oblivious of his passengers' fate. A quick wrenching, as of metal, reached their ears. Then, with one more hasty glance at the darkness which hid the approaching footfalls, he turned tail and ran in the opposite direction.

"What's th' matter here, anybody hurt?" puffed a deep voice, and the head and shoulders of a policeman stuffed the window of the cab.

MacLean's voice rose, nervously:

"I'm all right. How about you, John?"

"Guess there's nothing broken," muttered his partner, doubtfully, as he and MacLean collected themselves, found their hats, and descended from the ill starred conveyance.

"No thanks to that fool of a driver, though," said John T., indignantly, turning

on MacLean. "He had plenty of room to dodge that thing," pointing a shaking finger at the huge crate squatting in the center of the road, "if he'd kept his head. I hollered at him to—"

"What's in th' thing, two pianos?" demanded the officer, striding to it and flashing his pocket light through a hole in the side made by the capable bumper of the taxicab. He looked within, then:

"Well, I'm damned if ye're not the lucky lads! 'Tis empty, sir." He tried to budge it with one huge arm, then: "If she'd been loaded things would have been bad, bad," he observed, shaking his head thoughtfully.

"Why, Grogan!" exclaimed John T. Blunt suddenly, catching a glimpse of the patrolman's rugged face in the momentary gleam. "What the devil brings you out here?" He tried his legs in a step or two, but they seemed strangely unwilling, so he leaned back against the body of the cab, which gave gently before his bulk. MacLean recovered quickly.

"Where'd that scoundrel go?" he demanded of Grogan.

"Shure, he was gone before Oi arrived. Lit out like a kite, but we'll run 'im down," said Grogan confidently, stepping to the front of the battered machine with his light poised. A flash, followed by an angry exclamation, and he strode to the rear. A second angry grunt followed.

"What's the matter?" demanded John T., testily. He was conscious of the cold, now that the excitement had passed.

"The blaggard has had th' prisence of mind to tear off his tags," said Tim, with grudging admiration. He kicked the old machine disdainfully and pointed to the radiator, which had folded up, accordion-wise, on the motor from the impact with the crate.

"An' 'tis not likely he'll be afther claimin' the remains." MacLean spoke up, his teeth chattering.

"Well, since we're the only witnesses, and nothing to be gained by staying, I'd suggest we stop the first car that passes and go back to the city, thanking our lucky stars on the way."

"But," thundered John T., "not in any taxi. I'm through with 'em, so help me!"

"Shure, an' I don't blame you, sir," said Grogan, taking his arm helpfully. "'Tis lucky you are to go back to Miss Mary this night on yer two feet."

"You're dead right there, officer," nodded MacLean. "That goes for both of us."

IX.

LATE the following afternoon, Jimmy Dyke was seated at his desk. He had been there since nine that morning, fidgeting about, looking out the window, frequently consulting his watch. He was frowning abstractedly at the ceiling now, as the telephone jangled at his elbow. His hand darted to the receiver, when he smiled, whispered "Whoa there," and let it ring a second time. Then he picked it up slowly, and said "Hello!" very calmly and pleasantly. A girl's voice at the other end inquired, "Mr. Dyke? Just a minute, Mr. Blunt calling."

Again Jimmy's heart squeezed and pumped as though in the clutch of a human hand for the endless second before the shock of impact. His strong, brown fingers grasped a pencil lying beside them—the sudden snap as it cracked into two pieces made him jump. Then a gruff voice:

"James?"

"Yes, sir. How are you feel—"

"I'd like to have a talk with you this afternoon about five, if you're not busy."

"Yes, sir. Be glad to—"

"I've been going over those figures you left with me some time ago, and talking with Mr. MacLean, and perhaps you and I can come to some sort of a basis on a policy."

"All right, sir, I think—"

"I've given quite a lot of thought to the matter, and when I'm sold on a thing, I'm sold good and hard, as a general thing. So bring along your large bore guns. Five sharp, now."

With the click of the receiver on its hook, Jimmy Dyke rose solemnly, though his eyes were shining, and went through the evolutions of what Joe Spencer would have termed a "Punic War Dance" until the real estate man below thumped the steam pipes with rulers.

Then he picked up the telephone, and this was the strange beginning of what proved to be an extremely lengthy conversation.

"Hello, dearest, listen to this." "Oh, I beg your pardon." "Yes, Cedar Hill 4483, if you please."

Two days later, with the first fine flurry of snow, Mary Blunt drove her father in the railroad station. He kissed her affectionately, pinching the warm glow of her soft cheek and watching it flood back in again as she rubbed it ruefully.

"Hurry, dads, you silly old thing," cried Mary, hustling him aboard the train that was to carry him to Cleveland on a new and promising account.

"Behave yourself, now, young woman," her father admonished, "or you'll catch it when I get back." But she laughed his threats to scorn, dimpling up at him until the blur of rushing windows carried him out of sight. Then she jumped behind the wheel of the big car and shot for home, still smiling to herself.

Three hours later, John T. Blunt, of Blunt & MacLean, unexpectedly reappeared stamping up his front walk through the softly falling flakes. Not until he had settled himself in his compartment did he discover, after frantic search, that he had completely forgotten his tentative campaign which he was to submit.

John T.'s influence went far, but not far enough to stop the Limited until it reached the first small way station, where he alighted in a fine fury and motored back over the whitening roads. And no more trains that night. Another precious day lost, he fumed. Was he losing his mind?

As John T. mounted the front steps, the blanket of snow muffling his footfalls, he became aware of unusual activity within. The sound of voices, laughter, the genial glow of many candles in the dining room. Puzzled, he tiptoed to the window and peeped in, and the scene that met his eyes caused his jaw to drop with amazement.

The paneled oak walls gleamed in the myriad reflections of snowy linen, silver service, and the cheerful beams cast by the tapering blue candles. His daughter, more lovely than he had ever seen her, sat at the

head of the table, laughing at something which Jerome MacLean, her *vis-à-vis*, had just said. On her right, John T. could just see the upper half of Jimmy Dyke's head—the clear blue eyes, with the crinkles at the corners when he laughed, and the straight, clean line of the rather small nose. Something tugged at John T.'s memory—where had he seen eyes, and a nose just like them, in that same position?

On Mary's left sat Joe Spencer, beaming admiringly on his cousin's fresh beauty and talking in his jerky way to Mr. Timothy Grogan. Tim was at ease in a black business suit which set off the bluff redness of his face almost as becomingly as his workaday blue. Across from Grogan, John T. noted a strange young man, with wide, rather startled eyes and a complexion of unusual pallor. There was something vaguely familiar about him, too.

What in the devil did Mary mean, he thought, collecting such an assortment and lugging them in to dinner the moment he left the house? He was about to ring the bell when he observed all eyes to be centered on Jimmy Dyke. He was saying something, flushing a little, and smiling, and when he had finished he reached into his inner coat pocket and drew forth a long document, folded twice.

Craning his neck, John T. recognized it as an insurance policy. And as he looked, Jimmy replaced it carefully in his pocket, and shook hands gravely with each of the diners, Mary last, and perhaps longest. Then, all at once, the why and the wherefore of it all broke over John T. Blunt like a great light.

Only by exerting all his will power could he restrain himself from bursting in. Presently he might have been seen to tiptoe down again, and swing rapidly off up the street, his mind casting back, putting together, rejecting, approving.

An hour later he returned, a grim visage beneath his heavy brows. They were still there, but in the library now, and Mary was playing the piano softly, as he loved to hear her. John T. entered quietly, hung up his hat and coat, and suddenly loomed before them between the hall portières.

"Good evening, folks," he said. "Little

party, eh?" and a tense silence succeeded the tiny, tinkling discord as Mary's fingers slid from the keys.

The men rose awkwardly. John T. advanced, puffing easily on a cigar. But Mary was not his daughter for nothing.

"Yes," she said, her firm little chin up-tilted. "Nothing very much, dad. We didn't expect you back so soon, or—or—"

"Or I'd have been invited, no doubt," filled in her father, nodding briefly at the men. Mary drew the strange young man with the wide, startled eyes to her side.

"This is Mr. Tom Palusso, dads. His father owns the big paint store down town, you know, and Tom and I went to high school here together—"

"I think your face is familiar," said John T., crunching Mr. Palusso's hand with vast pleasure. Mr. Palusso withdrew his hand, flexing his fingers behind his back, and murmured some polite response.

"Well, Mary," spoke up Joe Spencer, plucking out his watch with an air of concern, "I'm sorry, but I've to run now."

He was quite serious, and in a brief instant Mr. Grogan and Mr. Palusso also recalled matters of import that required their presence elsewhere without delay. When the door had closed behind them, Mary returned to the somewhat strained silence of the dim library, where John T. stood with his broad back to the fire. Jimmy, fidgeting a bit, leaned against a corner of the oak bookcase, while Jerome MacLean, a trace of a smile on his keen deep-lined face, sat at ease in the yielding depths of the couch.

Mary's wide, gray eyes flitted from face to face, but for once she found herself unable to break the awkward silence.

Her father cleared his throat, then snapped a flake of ash from his cigar into the bed of coals.

"Well," he said, so suddenly and so sharply that a perceptible start seized his audience, "you put it over. And damn well organized it was, too." He looked hard at his partner.

"Beneath the occasional clanking of the machinery, Jerome, I believe I now perceive the direction of your fine Italian hand. Nobody else could have—"

"Merely a consulting specialist, John," smiled MacLean, with a deprecatory wave of his slender hand. "Mr. Dyke, here, and Mary provided the brains and the—"

"Well," interrupted his partner, a tone or two more loudly, "what the devil did you want to horn in on a plot to—?"

MacLean's fine eyes twinkled reminiscently.

"Remember, two years ago, John? That horrible secondhand car of yours that an unbelievably slick young man sold me, ably misrepresenting everything about it except the price? And how you aided and abetted him, until the two of you fairly wore me down—"

"It wasn't so bad," blustered John T., but his tone failed to carry conviction.

His partner threw back his head and laughed. So did Mary Blunt, a delicious peal from the shadows near Jimmy.

"Dads," she said, "it was terrible, and you know it!"

"Anyway," resumed the senior partner, doggedly, "I'm a hard loser, and I'm proud of it." He glared defiantly about, but nobody contradicted him. He puffed deeply, then resumed:

"About an hour ago I came all-fired near to busting in on this little gathering, showing your men the door, spanking my clever daughter, and canceling the reason for the party. I must be on the edge of my dotage not to have seen what was going on before this. However, I cooled off and decided to let the sale stand, on two conditions." Jimmy's eyes widened.

"Yes?" said MacLean, pleasantly, "and what might they be?"

John T. flushed, apparently in some confusion.

"The first is—is that you are not to mention this whole damfool business to any one who doesn't already know about it. I—I hate to be laughed at, and it's not very funny—"

"—yet!" interrupted his partner, with a broad grin. "As consultant to the principals, I guess we can meet this first condition, may we not?" Mary and Jimmy nodded, anxiously.

"My second condition," went on John T., fixing MacLean with a malicious eye,

" is that—since you have shown you believe in this thing almost to the point of killing the patient to insure his taking it—you take out a policy for the same amount, with the same enterprising agent! What do you think of that?" he finished triumphantly.

MacLean shot right back at him.

" I think so well of it, John, that I took one out something over three months ago. I didn't need to be sold quite so hard, or so intelligently, as you—"

" The deuce—you did," exclaimed John T. weakly, as the last puff of wind left his sails. He gazed at MacLean in amazement, muttered, " Well, well, humph," then turned to the two by the bookcase.

" James," he said, " I suggest that you continue in your present line of work. You should do well—unless you get carried away by the zest for selling and kill off the majority of your prospects. Whose idea was this—this successful campaign which you and your company put on for my benefit?"

Jimmy Dyke hesitated a moment, his fingers fiddled with his watch chain, then:

" Well, sir, it may sound funny, but I guess—I guess you were responsible for it," and he glanced up at John T.'s bulk, smiling shyly.

" I?" barked John T. Blunt, reeling under this final shock. " What are you talking about? I?"

" Yes, sir," continued Jimmy, nodding. " That talk of yours one night, down at Memorial Hall. Remember how you told us that every man could be sold if he was intelligently and persistently approached? If one of his basic emotions or instincts was aroused by a really dramatic—"

" So," cut in John T. testily, " you set out to scare me out of my wits, eh? Young men—and women—have no more discretion than so many sparrows!"

" And," went on Jimmy, seriously, " of course the really important thing to remember was that *your* efforts and *your* interests were for—for his own good, sir."

" That's enough," groaned the author of the sentiment, holding up one hand in protest as the other was pressed over his eyes.

" Get up, Jerome, and I'll take you on in the billiard room. A man can't be too careful of what he says, with young minds about him fairly athirst for knowledge."

Shaking his white head, John T. linked one great arm through his partner's, and their voices trailed off into a low murmur down the arched passageway. Silence succeeded, in the cozy dimness of the library. Broken only by the soft thump of a glowing coal in the grate, and a faint crackling such as a twice folded sheet of stiff paper might make in a man's inside coat pocket, under slow and gentle pressure.

THE END



RADIO MUSIC

THE gypsy music comes to me,
Now weirdly sad,
Now fiercely free.
My soul it carries far-away,
From sordid things of ev'ry day.

Ah, Love, dear Love, sweet Love, it seems,
I only see you in my dreams,
Thank God, for souls like you and me
Such things as dreams and music be.

Though duty law and leagues divide,
In dreams I feel you're by my side,
When gypsy music sings to me
Of all things wild and glad and free.

Margaret G. Hays.



Hopalong Cassidy's Pal

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

Author of "The Coming of Cassidy," "Hopalong Cassidy Returns," etc.

V—INTO THE HILLS

HERE had been gunplay in town the night before; Mesquite Jenkins and Red Connors each had exchanged shots at the same instant with a man who had tried to sneak up on the other. Red's shot, in the parlance of target shooting, had clipped the outer circle, drawing blood from a superficial wound; but it was counted as a miss, since the human target had quickly escaped.

In justice to Red, however, it is only fair to state that the target had been outside the building, but vaguely revealed in the darkness, while the shooter had been in a well lighted room. Mesquite, also in the darkness outside, had fired through the window into the room and had scored a dead center bull, accounting for another of the

assassins who had tried to kill his friend Hopalong Cassidy from ambush, back on the range of the Double-Y. Having scored the bull's-eye, Mesquite had kept the angry crowd under his guns while Red had taken a drink at the bar, and then sauntered out into the shielding darkness, joined his friend and with him returned to the hotel.

After such an incident, prudence and good sense would have dictated immediate flight from a town in which they could expect to find only enemies. That would have been the sensible and generally accepted course of action; but no one ever fairly accused either of them of being sensible in that strict application of the term. They both had ridden all day, and they were tired and wanted sleep; therefore, they

would get that sleep and face the thickened troubles and problems of a new day with cheerful energy and belligerency.

Upon their return to the hotel they had found themselves joined by Lanky Smith, who immediately fastened himself to them in calm and unruffled assurance as to his welcome. Lanky had acted entirely upon his own initiative. If his two friends were glad to see him, they disguised it well. They felt it would be a grave mistake to let him know that he was welcome; give Lanky an inch and he would forthwith exercise squatter sovereignty over a quarter section and look around for more.

This characteristic of his was not an inherent one; it had been cultivated, by necessity, by years of association with his bosom friends, and he had found it handy in paying off certain old scores which, even now, were well ahead of his tally of cancellation.

His first act toward self-preservation had been to do each of them out of a bed which each had hoped to occupy in single blessedness. He had forced them to sleep together while he enjoyed his repose in solitary dignity and comfort. This did not prey on his conscience in any way whatsoever, but seemed rather to increase the restful oblivion of his sleep, and to add to the penetrating timbre and power of his snores.

Mesquite rearranged the blanket and turned over again, vaguely wondering how many times he had turned over during that long and unpleasant night; and every time he had shifted his position, Red Connors had growled sleepily and then settled back to resume his snoring; and every time he began to snore Mesquite had forcibly rolled him over on his side, and then tried desperately to get to sleep before the maddening red-head sagged back again. After what had seemed to be an eternity, Mesquite saw the eastern sky pale and grow brighter, muttered profane thankfulness, crawled over his companion and sat on the edge of the bed, his head sagging and his lids heavy.

Red's sleeping countenance was not placid. A frown puckered his unlovely face and set wrinkles on his forehead; and when a man wears a frown in his sleep it is not a reassuring indicator of a sweet waking

disposition. Now, as he pushed Mesquite's elbow off his stomach, he opened his eyes and scowled.

"What th' hell you reckon yo're doin', anyhow?" was his pleasant good morning.

"Aw, shut up!" growled Mesquite, as one of Lanky's crescendoes vibrated the thin partition.

Red blinked at him and arose on one elbow.

"Hey, kid," he said candidly. "I'd just as lief sleep with a litter of half growed pups as with you. What was th' matter with you? Dreamin' you was herdin' cattle, or bustin' cayuses, or somethin'?"

Mesquite's retort was of such a nature that the simultaneous blush of red in the eastern sky might have been explained by other than the generally accepted reasons for this phenomenon. Then he became specific.

"You sounded like you'd swallered a whole brass band. You got th' itch, or somethin'?"

"If I has I shore know where it come from," retorted Red, and then he listened as another crescendo climbed the scale, quavered on a high note, broke into a whistle and slid gracefully down again to end in a gurgle.

"——!" said Red indignantly.

"——!" echoed Mesquite savagely. "I been listenin' 'most all night to that coyote, when I wasn't listenin' to you, an' I ain't goin' to listen no more." He groped for a boot, his eyes half shut with sleep. "Between th' *two* of you——," his voice trailed into silence, an admission of the futility of trying to express his feelings by words.

He arose, staggering a little, and started for the door, the boot firmly gripped in his hand.

"What you aimin' to do, Kid?" asked Red in sudden hopeful interest.

"Goin' to stop that yowlin'," grated the Kid, his face for the first time showing an expression of pleasure.

A wolf scenting a kill wears much the same look. He was so enthralled by the thought of his expedition of assault and battery that he failed to realize that the yowling had ceased.

"Wait!" said Red with explosive eagerness. "I'm joinin' this here massacre!"

He bounced from the bed and reached for one of his own boots, and in that position he froze, for at that moment there came a thundering knock on the thin partition. It sounded like a thrown boot, with plenty of muscle behind it, and delicate clouds of dislodged dust and sand sprang from the woodwork. A roar followed it.

"Shut up!" bellowed Lanky's voice, a voice out of all proportion to his weight. "Don't you reckon nobody wants to sleep a-tall? What's th' matter with you coyotes anyhow?"

Mesquite looked at Red, and Red looked at Mesquite, and both sighed helplessly in the face of such gall, dropped their leather weapons and sagged, side by side, on the edge of the bed; and when they spoke it was in unison, the words indentical.

The door opened, and Lanky entered. Nodding surlily to his friends he approached the washstand, where there was one towel and a pitcher part full of water. He scrubbed diligently, using the last drop of the water to rinse his face, wiped thoroughly on the towel and chucked it on the dusty floor.

"They forgot to put water an' towels in in my room," he said as he went toward the door. "See you downstairs?" Without waiting for any kind of an answer, he slammed the door behind him and tramped back to his own room.

Mesquite sighed as he stared at the empty pitcher and the wet and now muddy towel. He arose and put on his hat, adjusting it carefully. Then he felt for his trousers with one searching foot, hooked them to him and drew them on. Removing his hat, he slipped into his shirt, replaced the hat and then reached for socks and boots.

"Perty early to get up," suggested Red, worming under the sheet and snuggling down. Late sleeping was a luxury denied him on the ranch, and he was overlooking no part of this holiday. After the last few nights of bunking on the ground, even a straw and bunchgrass mattress felt very good.

Mesquite sneered and finished dressing.

"With a sawmill in this room an' a steamboat whistle in th' next, I've had all th' *sleepin'* I want. Turn out when yo're ready; I'm goin' downstairs for some water an' a towel."

"Bring some back with you," said Red lazily.

"I don't aim to come back," growled Mesquite. "Get it yoreself."

Red grunted, spread himself over the whole bed, drew the sheet up over his face to keep the light out of his eyes and the flies off his nose, stretched ecstatically and was asleep before Mesquite reached the bottom of the stairs.

The bartender nodded a surly good morning, but from the kitchen came a sound of frizzling and squizzling which told of frying eggs, and the tempting smell of ham filled the room. Pushing back from a satisfying breakfast, Mesquite was about to pay his bill when he checked himself. If he paid it his friends might suspect that he had left, and might lose no time in hunting for his trail; if he did not pay it, but left that little ceremony for them to attend to, they would hang around waiting for him to return. The longer they waited, the better he would be suited.

"Reckon I'll take a little ride around an' see what this town looks like," he said, and carelessly went toward the stairs to get his rifle and saddle.

Red stirred, mumbled something and went back to sleep again as the door closed softly after his departing friend. Lanky was fussing around in his room, his door half closed, and paid no attention to the sounds in the hall.

II.

SEVERAL trails led from Broken Wheel, some faint, some deeply scored into the hard soil. From careless talk Mesquite had overheard the evening before, one of these trails interested him enough to cause him to choose it in preference to any of the others.

It led down the slope toward the north end of the valley, away from the great masses of broken hills, buttes, wild cañons and tangled ravines behind the town. The country that he turned his back on was,

by rights, his hunting ground; but no harm would be done if it were entered deviously; and, besides, being his logical hunting ground, to it would ride Red and Lanky as soon as they were certain that he had deserted them; they would ride to it with the directness of hounds on a hot scent.

Mile after mile he put behind him, riding at a pace that his horse could keep up for hours on end, following the winding and twisting trail as it led around buttes, over hills and down gentle valleys, the country opening out more as the miles passed. Fixed habitations he shunned, knowing nothing of their owners. He was looking for the range outfit of the Bar-W herd, hoping that it was the same Bar-W and outfit that he had seen near Ogallala not many weeks before; the Bar-W whose wrangler and drag-man had been killed in that town on the South Platte, and whose murders he had avenged in his own peculiar way.

He pushed up on the top of a little divide and saw faint, dark lines of timber against the horizon on two sides of him, marking the course of streams that never went dry. Down in his country most of the streams went dry in the summer, and he could not help but marvel a little over these northern creeks.

Before him lay a wide range, more broken than the lower prairies, but well covered with a deceptive, bunched grass of magic fattening qualities. Here and there a butte thrust up from the plain, sloping at the base where detritus prophesied its ultimate end.

Between two buttes the plain was freckled with cattle, and a larger spot indicated the outfit's cook wagon. Here and there whitish spots on the ground told where the bone hunters had overlooked the skeletons of buffalo, and the passing years had crumbled them back into the original lime. At the base of a steep-walled ravine the ground was thickly covered with the disintegrating bones, mutely telling the wise observer that this little precipice had been an Indian slaughter trap, where herd after herd had been stampeded over the brink to die in deep masses below.

With dried bones selling at forty dol-

lars a ton at the railroad, quite a sum here had been overlooked. This country had been the home of the Crows, but in later years was the treaty empire of the Sioux, who slaughtered buffalo as recklessly as the whites they accused of the same crime.

The cook wagon grew steadily larger, and by the time Mesquite drew up alongside it, the lonesome cook was grinning his welcome. He reached for the coffee pot and kicked the embers of the fire together, fanning them with his hat. While he worked, he talked.

"Set a while, stranger; feel like some coffee myself, an' you might as well join me. Been comin' far?"

"Farther'n you," said Mesquite smiling, although there was no need to lead the cook on.

"Don't want to bet on it, do you?" demanded the cook in high hope, as he dug into a trousers pocket and drew out a respectable roll of bills. "Give you two to one you ain't."

"Well, I've come a long way," said Mesquite, dismounting and sitting down in the shade of the wagon. He grinned exasperatingly. The wagon looked very familiar to him, with its wide, Southern tread.

"That's all right," said the cook, adding a few sticks to the glowing coals, and blowing with renewed energy. "I'mbettin' I've come farther."

"But if them Goliad mares had had their own way, you wouldn't 'a' come near as far," chuckled Mesquite.

The cook's mouth opened in astonishment as he turned his head to stare at this stranger. What did *he* know about the Goliad mares? Who was *he*? Why, this stranger might have come as far as himself, or even farther.

As he thought about the mares, he could not keep from coupling the murdered wrangler to them, and his face grew grave. The wrangler had hated those mares, and their persistent and bull-headed efforts to return to the country of their first-born, and the way they had tried to take the rest of the cavieyh with them. But how did this stranger know anything about them?

"Reckon yo're as fur from home as I

am, stranger," admitted the cook; "or mebby you heard about them damn mares som'ers south of Ogallala?"

"I passed yore outfit an' herd between th' Republican an' South Platte," said Mesquite. "Me an' my two friends. Campbell tried to swap th' mares off on us. Did you get th' message we sent after you, about Campbell's death? An' th' death of Billy-of-th'-drag?"

The cook slowly arose and held out his hand, his face beaming.

"We did; an' some of th' boys went back to clean th' slate," he answered, pumping Mesquite's hand energetically. "They heard all about th' rest of it, too; how you busted th' spirit of that murderin' deppity an' chased him outa town. But," he added in great earnestness, "why didn't you *shoot* him, 'stead of just scarin' him nigh to death? You could 'a' done it easy."

Mesquite told him why, and with a tin cup of smoking coffee in their hands, and biscuits made of baking powder that very morning, they sat and talked, swapped tobacco and admired each other generally. After a while the cook looked under the wagon, and waved a thumb in the direction of his glance.

"Here comes th' boss; he'll be plumb tickled to see you, Jenkins; all th' boys will be."

The boss rode around the wagon and dismounted in its shortening shadow, his eyes on the stranger, and a puzzled expression on his face.

Mesquite nodded and arose.

"Last time I saw you, you was ridin' back down th' Old Western Cattle Trail after lookin' at th' ford at Ogallala," he said. "I thought you was aimin' to deliver this herd som'ers, an' get it off yore hands?"

The foreman smiled.

"I remember you now. Well, we're still on our way to deliver it; but we got orders to summer graze it, an' not to turn it up till fall. Th' range is so good right here that we're holdin' 'em here, workin' north as we clean it. Where are yore friends? There was three of you, warn't they?"

The cook cut in, bursting with his news.

"This here is th' feller that chased that murderin' deppity marshal out of Ogallala for killin' Campbell an' Billy, an' sent us th' word that they was killed. Damn pity he didn't kill that deppity, though."

The foreman stepped forward and held out his hand, his face beaming with pleasure.

"I'm shore proud to meet you, friend; I heard all about you, back in Ogallala. How's yore friend?"

Mesquite told him of the ambush, and the reasons for his own riding, and found his companions in hearty sympathy with him. He told them of his present quandary; his entire ignorance of the broken country near Broken Wheel, and the probable points of rendezvous of the men he sought.

"When I learned that there was a Bar-W trail herd summer grazin' up this way, an' a little gossip about it, I figgered there was a chance that it was th' one I'd seen on th' Platte. I dassn't ask questions of strangers, not knowin' what they might be; but I figgered that you fellers would tell me all you could of what you know about this part of th' country. I want th' coyotes that shot Hopalong; an' I'm after 'em just like you went back to get that murderin' dog that killed yore friends."

The Bar-W foreman nodded his understanding and then shook his head.

"We'd be glad to tell you what you want to know; but we don't know anythin' about this country except right around here. We've all stuck to th' open range, barrin' that hell-hole of a town back yonder. I'll lend you half of my outfit to scour that mess of hills; but I can't tell you nothin' about 'em."

The cook leaned forward eagerly.

"Take him over to that Double-U outfit, an' back him up; them fellers belong up here, an' know this country like you know th' Concho. They can tell him a lot, if they know who they're talkin' to." He grinned. "Us Texans are a long way from home, an' we shore oughta stick together."

The foreman quit pulling the stems of a bunch of grass and rose from his squatting position.

"Mebby we won't have to go that far," he said. "We've got a local man out with th' herd. We'll be ridin' his way, anyhow."

Mesquite cogitated for a moment.

"Ain't shore I want him to see me, or know anythin' about me," he replied. "How long has he been ridin' for you?"

"Near a month," answered the foreman.

"Then that lets him out of bein' one of th' gang I'm after; but he might be friendly with it," Mesquite growled. "Huh! I got an idea millin' in my head; wait a little, till it untangles."

After a moment he looked earnestly at his companions and spoke again.

"I'll talk to this man of yours, *after* I talk with that Double-U crowd. We'll ride wide of yore herd an' yore men an' stop on our way back. Cookie," he said, smiling a little, "if you want to do me a favor, you tell anybody that rides up an' asks about me, that I'm a stranger tryin' to find th' shortest an' best trail to Fort Buford. You can tell 'em th' truth afterward mebby."

Cookie nodded, and watched his companions swing into the saddle; and as they rode away he examined his store of firewood and glanced thoughtfully at the fringe of timber along the distant creek. The nights were becoming crisp and his duty was plain; but loyalty to this man who had taken up the quarrel of the two dead Bar-W men came first in his thoughts: if the outfit grumbled at the smallness of the night's fire, then they could roll up in their blankets earlier than usual and learn a lesson having to do with the reckless burning of wood that they did not have to supply.

He was glad that in the after life there would be no fuel to rustle and quarrel about; according to his teaching, Heaven needed no fires, and hell burned brimstone, and no matter where he was billeted for he would be ahead of the game to that extent. Besides, if they hadn't thrown the herd so far off the trail he could use chips for cooking, and let the outfit collect its own fuel for a flaming fire, if they wanted one.

Mesquite followed his companion on a course well to the north of the Bar-W

herd, on whose southern side rode the local man. They rode past the north end of the western butte, climbed several small divides between dried-up creeks, and went along the curving slope of a ridge of hills.

Passing through a gap in these they saw another herd lazily grazing. This was a herd of select beef cattle, putting on the finishing weight for a slow and lazy drive to the nearest railroad shipping pens, where they would be put in cars and sent East by train.

In all his life Mesquite had never seen a herd of eight hundred beefeves so heavy and so uniform in size and quality. Half Durham, half Texan, the mother strain was so well hidden that he would not, on the wildest guess, have thought that the mothers of these cattle had come up from Texas, a bunch of wild, lean, long-horn animals of singular angularity. The first generation of the cross-breed lacked almost all of the visible signs of the mother; but the strength and virility and the power of resistance of the long-horn was not lost.

They rode lazily forward, the contended cattle not giving them a glance unless they rode too close. A horseman could ride among them with impunity; but a person on foot would have been in grave peril.

A stocky, black-haired man rode to meet them, gesturing easily and swiftly. To Mesquite it looked like aimless affection; but to the Bar-W foreman it offered a chance to practice in a language he had almost forgotten. His gestured reply was slow and awkward, and the other, repeating his message by laboriously gesturing each component unit, smiled at the slow answer.

After a little more gesturing the stranger turned his attention to Mesquite, regarding him curiously.

"He says yo're on th' warpath, a friend, an' lookin' for sign," said the foreman of the Double-U herd, his seamed faced crinkling into a fine network of lines. "We have a little trouble talkin', his bein' Comanche an' mine Crow; an', besides, I was brought up in th' talk an' he warn't. Some of his signs warn't used much up in th' North; but we do right well, considerin'."

Something about the features of the Double-U foreman backed up his statement that he had been brought up in the sign language; his mouth, his cheek bones, the shape of his nose. The man had been born in a skin lodge under the great log pickets of old Fort Laramie, before adobe took their place, and he was one out of hundreds who had made good in the white man's way.

Physically, the Indian strain was not as plain as it might have been, and in character it showed still less. He listened to all that Mesquite had to say, and at the conclusion he swung down from his saddle and with the point of a knife traced a map on the ground, placing landmarks as he described them, his hands as busy as his lips.

Mesquite watched him with an amused smile on his face, knowing that this map-maker was going into details so necessary to the white man's comprehension and so unnecessary to one of his own kind. He was as patient as the teacher of a kindergarten, the eloquence of his swiftly moving hands entirely lost on both of his companions.

He spoke of a day's journey, and checked himself, smiling at the persistence of habit. Here was a mind that thought both in the symbolism of the savage and in the abstractions of the white man; but the white man's way of thinking was but a layer superimposed on those of first impressions, and those earlier and more plastic tablets of the mind were more deeply graven.

Mesquite was amazed by the amount of information he obtained from that hurried map and doubted if his memory could carry, unconfused, the identifying features of the landscape and its landmarks. In this foreman's mind the leaning of a tree, the relative distance between two rocks, the background views, were plainly distinguishing marks beyond the possibility of confusion. For the first time in his life Mesquite felt the embarrassment of a tenderfoot.

After a little desultory conversation Mesquite and his friend rode off, this time going south of the range of hills, to come up

to the Bar-W herd on the side nearest town.

"I'm goin' to learn that sign language," Mesquite suddenly remarked, seeing a great light.

Hopalong and Red, all the way up from the south on that long ride over the old cattle trail, weeks before, had made many gestures which now stood revealed in their true nature. The two redheads might have discussed him very frankly under his very nose.

Mesquite's companion laughed in genuine enjoyment.

"Looks easy, don't it?" he said. "You'll change yore tune, though, when you come to tackle it. It'll take a lot of hard work an' a long time, an' if you do get th' hang of it in a stumblin' kind of way, who'll you talk to? If you don't use it you'll forget it. Better get a good trailer to teach you to see an' read sign. That feller back there can start out now, go to Broken Wheel, pick up th' sign of one of them fellers an' foller it right smack to th' man that made it.

"Anyhow, to talk th' sign language, you've got to think in it, like an Injun. It ain't worth th' effort, these days." He stroked his chin. "Now readin' tracks an' follerin' a trail comes in right handy for a man spendin' his life with cattle; 'specially in a country like this, where there's as many cattle thieves as there are honest folks."

Mesquite chuckled.

"I know trailin'," he replied. "But if I foller that trail from Broken Wheel it would put me in plain sight of them; an' they'll be watchin' for me. What I want to do is to get away from Red and Lanky, get into th' hills without bein' seen, an' know where to head for without wastin' a lot of time. When I strike th' signs of th' feller that got away from Broken Wheel, th' one Red shot. I'll know 'em unless he changes cayuses. There's yore herd, through that gap. Now we'll have a look at that feller you was tellin' me about."

The rider in question watched the two approach and as they drew near to him his appraising eyes discovered something disturbingly familiar in the younger man. Then, Mesquite's horse cavorting skittish-

ly at sight of the bleached and crumbling skull of a buffalo, whirled until the brand on its side stood revealed to the sight of the herder.

He sat suddenly erect in the saddle and glanced toward a high peak in the hills to the southwest.

Mesquite looked toward his companion and spoke in a low voice.

"Never saw him before; he ain't one of 'em."

"Glad to hear it," replied Bell, and spoke a little louder, in a careless voice. "We're holdin' 'em here as long as th' grass holds out, an' then we drift slow toward th' ranch. Best summer range I ever saw, all of it." He nodded to the herder, exchanged a few words with him, and went on toward the wagon, Mesquite riding beside him.

The herder watched them go and then, kneeing his horse, rode swiftly back and forth several times for a hundred feet each way, not for an instant taking his eyes from the two, and ready to check his mount to a normal pace if they chanced to look back.

Far off, on the high peak of the hills, a rider might have been seen to emerge into sight and repeat the herder's actions; he might have been seen by every man on the range had they known where to look or had they expected such a thing. Only three men saw him and his signal: the herder whose riding had caused this answer; Lanky Smith, from his vantage point halfway between the two signalers; and the half-breed foreman, who chanced to be looking toward the peak when the answer was made. The latter pondered for a moment or two, spoke to one of his men, and rode slowly eastward toward the trail from Bell's camp to Broken Wheel.

Mesquite, tarrying a few minutes at the chuck wagon, mounted and rode off in the direction of town, intending to go around it through the broken country farther east, and to strike into the tangled mass of hills and gorges from the south, a direction from which he would not be expected. He had ridden to within three or four miles of the place where he intended to turn off the trail, when he pushed up out of a dry ravine and caught sight of a horseman approaching him at an angle, following a

faint trail on the eastern slope of a steep bank, and one which joined the main trail farther on. It was the half-breed foreman, loping innocently to town on the excuse of laying in a supply of tobacco.

The two riders met at the junction of the trails and rode on together for a few minutes without doing more than nod at each other. Then the foreman smiled a little, and turned sidewise in his saddle.

"Out of tobacco," he said in explanation of his ride. "Don't look around yet, but when I get through talkin', let yore gaze travel around th' whole horizon as I point it out; an' when I use two fingers instead of one, look extra close. After you left me I saw a feller move into sight on Split Top, an' ride back an' forth several times. He was ridin' fast, which is th' old Injun danger signal. At th' end of it he got off his horse an' pretended to hide."

He paused for Mesquite's reply, but obtaining nothing more than a grunt, he continued:

"If he'd stayed in th' saddle, that would 'a' meant for his friends to collect together around him; pretendin' to hide thataway, told them to scatter."

Mesquite smiled coldly and his eyes glinted.

"Glad to hear that," he growled. "If I knowed th' country right well, I'd just as soon find 'em all together, an' save a lot of time an' work; but, not knowin' it, pickin' 'em up one at a time suits me better. What was you sayin' about that horizon?"

The foreman checked his mount, forcing it against that of his companion, and together they turned slowly, almost as though on a pivot. The foreman's extended arm and hand indicated a point far to the southeast and slowly moved as the animals moved, sweeping the horizon. Here or there he paused, as though he were explaining or pointing out something of interest.

Passing along the northern arc, the arm moved down the western, Mesquite following it closely with his eyes. As the extended hand came to Split Top, the second finger flicked out along the first, and flicked back again against the palm. The move-

ment of the arm had not been checked, but kept on its slow sweeping motion when it at last returned to the southeast, where it had started from, the arm dropped, and the two men rode on again at a lope.

"That was Split Top, where th' signaler was," explained the foreman. "You better turn east about here, an' keep out of sight of town."

Again his arm pointed eastward as though aiding in the giving of detailed instructions.

"That feller up on Split Rock was too far away to recognize you or yore hoss, even if he had good glasses. You was only a horseman to him, but he signaled danger, an' scatter. Th' only way that he could 'a' knowned that you meant danger was that somebody told him. Bitter Root Joe is workin' for Bell. He's th' only man from these parts that is. I got idears about Bitter Root, an' I'll wait back yonder in that ravine till he comes along trailin' you. When he does come along I'll be so cussed friendly an' eager to buy him a drink in town that he'll have to come along with me an' drink it. With Bitter Root, three drinks is th' beginnin' of a flood; an' I'll see that he gets them three, an' a plenty more. So long, an' good luck."

Mesquite exchanged grins with the half-breed, whirled, and rode eastward, leaving that capable person to spike the guns of Bitter Root Joe, and to sink Bitter Root's ship in liquor. That he was successful in this may be gathered from the fact that Bitter Root reached Broken Wheel an anxious and sober man, the bearer of warnings; but within an hour had started out on a spree which lasted a week, and in which was totally submerged all thought of delivering the news that had taken him from the outfit of the Bar-W.

III.

LANKY SMITH, lying in the brush along the top of a ravine until the signaler on Split Top had disappeared from his sight, waited a little longer and then slid down the bank, ran to his picketed horse, and rode eastward along the bottom of the ravine, taking great pains not to show himself to any watcher on Split Top. Coming

to a steep-walled pass between two buttes, he followed it for half a mile, turned into a narrow, dead-end chasm, and dismounted beside a partly opened pack.

Red Connors stepped from behind an angle in the wall, lowered his gun, and grinned.

"Learn anythin'?" he asked hopefully.

"Learned a heap," grunted Lanky, taking out tobacco and papers for a smoke long denied. He lazily rolled and lit a cigarette, and smiled at his impatient, red-haired friend. "Learned a heap," he repeated. "Added to what we've found out a'ready, an' what we suspect, I reckon mebby we can start, come evenin'."

"See Mesquite?" persisted Red, breaking a few dry branches for a fire.

He carefully arranged them like the spokes of a wheel, struck a match, and reached for the coffeepot as the flames licked greedily upward. The pot placed exactly as he wanted it, he looked up and glanced at his friend.

"Yep; I saw him," answered Lanky. "So did everybody else that wanted to. He's mebby goin' to be useful, Red, keepin' them fellers' attention on himself, an' off of us. There's a funny peak, over yonder," his gesture roughly indicated the southwest. "Looks like a Mex hat that's been split down through th' crown. Sticks up above all th' rest of th' hills. Reckon a man can see, an' be seen, a mighty long ways from it. Feller up on top of it rode Injun sign for danger, an' he got off his cayuse to hide for a minute. Know what that means?"

"Reckon I'm a plain, damn fool?" snorted Red, who had been brought up in the Comanche and Apache country.

"Well, I wouldn't want to bet ag'in' that," placidly replied Lanky. "Here, now, you listen to me. I got hold of an idear," and straightway Lanky endeavored to prove his words.

At the end of his talk Red slid a frying pan over the blaze and dropped some bacon in it.

"Makes me laugh," chuckled the redhead, wincing as a spatter of hot grease barely missed an eye. He chuckled again as he smeared the grease over a counte-

nance which had been greasy enough without the addition. "Mesquite's tryin' plumb hard to get shet of us, sneakin' away like he done this mornin'." He broke an egg on the edge of the pan and dropped its contents into the sizzling grease at one side of the bacon, careless as to where it spread. "If he only knowed how hard we're hopin' that he don't stumble acrost us, he'd be plumb disgusted."

Lanky grinned cheerfully and opened his huge pocket knife.

"He shore would," he said, and reached toward the frying pan. "He's a good kid, just th' same."

Red grunted. "Yes; but only a kid."

IV.

DAWN broke swiftly over the hills, almost magically. A man unrolled his blankets and emerged from the woolen cocoon to stretch and to rub himself briskly. The night air had been chill and penetrating, and he had not allowed himself the luxury of a fire at his feet.

Bone-dry wood made an almost smokeless blaze, and his rough and ready breakfast was soon cooked and eaten. Lower down in the ravine, passing the little, rocky bench on which he had spent the night, were the tracks of two horses, leading westward toward the inner and more complicated labyrinth of cañons and hills. The view of the camper was closely restricted by the surrounding walls, and to make certain of his bearings he climbed the cañon wall, taking advantage of every bit of cover that offered.

Reaching the top, he located Split Top, and made his way down again. Disappearing in the brush that masked the bottom of a small gully, he found his grazing horse, removed its hobbles, saddled it, led it back under the rocky bench, and soon was riding on his way, following the plain and telltale tracks westward, on the trail of another of Hopalong's ambushers. An hour later he drew up sharply, and frowned.

The tracks split, one set turning off into a branch cañon, and the other going straight ahead. Dismounting, he dropped to hands and knees and carefully examined them.

The marks of the worn calks of one set of shoes, differing but a trifle from those of the other set, decided the matter for him, and he pushed straight ahead. Another hour passed, and again he drew up sharply, to stare in pugnacious disgust at another track which appeared from a north-lying cañon and joined the one he had been following.

The new prints were the fresher, and partly obliterated the others. Again dismounting and dropping to hands and knees, he again spent a few minutes in close scrutiny. The new tracks were different from those which had turned off a mile or two behind him.

"Well," he growled, "findin' 'em two at a clip will save time an' a lot of ridin'."

A blade of grass, moving slowly upward as its pinning burden of sand, drying with the sunlight, slid from it, caught his eye. There had been dew the night before. He let a hand drop to his holster at this indication of proximity to the maker of that fresh track, and carefully scanned the cañon ahead.

As he moved back to mount again, the ears of his horse swung forward, and he swiftly grasped the animal's nostrils to check an inquiring whinny. For a moment he stood thus, and then, leading the horse among some boulders, drew its head down and tied the reins to the hock of a foreleg.

Not satisfied with this precaution, he rigged a side line hobble, took his rifle, and slipped away in the brush, moving slowly and cautiously, and pausing often to listen. Time passed swiftly as he continued his slow advance, and then he froze, listening intently.

The sounds came again, intermittently: whisking sounds, interspersed with a gentle cropping noise. Somewhere very close to him a horse was grazing. Dropping to hands and knees, and dispensing with the rifle, he crawled forward, and then froze again.

An indistinct, moving object, seen through the tangle of intervening brush, caught his eye. It was the side of a roan horse. Here and there sounded the fall of pebbles from the cañon wall, and from

the distance came the chirp of a bird. A gentle gust of wind swept through the cañon, rustling the grass and leaves.

A scene more peaceful could hardly be found; yet, on either side of him, Death might be lurking. Curious as to the identity of the grazing horse, he dared not move in its direction to get a good look at it, for he thrilled to a strong premonition of danger.

Lanky Smith rode a roan horse; but so did many other men. A warning *whir-r-r* twenty feet ahead of him, the angry buzzing of a rattler's tail, made him hug the ground. Was the snake warning him, or some one else?

The shrill chatter of a chipmunk, warning its tribe, sounded above him on an earth-covered bench. Craning his neck, he tried to see the snake, but failed; and a grim smile came to his face.

Up to now he never had credited rattlers with even the shadow of a right to exist; but this one had put him under an obligation. Again came the shivery warning, persistent and continued; and a dried stick cracked sharply, accompanied by a barely audible curse. The sound of a striking rock was followed by a thrashing among dried leaves, and Mesquite grinned coldly as the angry whirring grew slowly less. The rattler was dead, but in dying had laid the way for vengeance.

Colt in hand, Mesquite waited for this crawling man who had had to kill the snake that barred his progress. The gentle sounds of leather being dragged over wind-swept sandstone grew plainer, and Mesquite held his breath lest in breathing he should give warning of the nearness of his presence.

Steadily the softly rubbing sound grew, and nearer wriggled the wearer of those chaps. Here was a game worth while, compensating for the risk. The smaller end of a prostrate branch jiggled in the brush where it lay, and stopped suddenly as the dragging sounds ceased.

Overhead a sailing hawk came in sight against the rectangular patch of sky, dropped swiftly toward the chipmunk on the bench, and then whirled higher in sudden panic and darted out of sight above the cañon rim. Mesquite slowly and noiseless-

ly turned the muzzle of his Colt toward the left-hand side of the boulder he lay behind, and pushed the weapon a few inches forward; and as it stopped it almost touched the nose of a face which suddenly appeared at the corner of the boulder.

Lanky Smith shrank from the threatening muzzle, and then his jaw dropped in swift relief at sight of the owner of the weapon; but his relief was indicated only by expression, for his language caused the Recording Angel to cover his ears and shudder. Forgetting all else in the surge of feeling occasioned by this unexpected meeting with the man he had thought miles away and hopelessly out of the game, Lanky bounced to his feet, as though he could swear better when standing erect.

Mesquite arose more slowly, almost stunned by the appearance of his friend; and before he could reply to the caustic torrent issuing from his friend's lips, there came the rock-thrown crash of a heavy rifle, and Lanky dropped to his knees, senselessly clawing at the ground.

With the crash of the rifle, Mesquite's hand moved in a blur and his answer merged into the rolling echoes of the heavier weapon. Twenty feet up the face of the south wall, where a thinning cloud of gray-white smoke streaked upward in the updraft from the cañon, there came a shower of pebbles and sand, shoved from the ledge by a slowly moving object. This object slid to the edge, one end of it, hatless, pushed out over the void below, gathered speed as the rest of the body followed it, and plunged downward, the booted feet spreading apart and making a momentary Y.

On his hands and knees before his own smoke cloud had thinned, Mesquite dragged his friend behind the boulder and rolled him over on his back; but before he could examine the bloody wound on the head of the prostrate man, Lanky opened his eyes, blinked into the face bending over him, and continued his profane monologue from where he had been interrupted.

Mesquite grinned from swift relief, drew his right-hand gun, pushed the empty shell from its cylinder and mechanically shoved in a fresh one.

"You shouldn't 'a' been called Lanky,"

he observed with great irony. "They should 'a' made it *Lucky*."

And thereupon ensued a wrangle which prophesied well for the growth of confidence and friendship between these two cheerful fools.

At a sound from the rear Mesquite whirled like a flash, a Colt appearing like a miracle in his capable right hand.

"Don't shoot," snapped Lanky with deep feeling. "That's Red, th' damn fool, a trailin' you." He raised his voice. "Hey, you idjut: it's *us*; don't shoot!"

"Who's a idjut?" demanded Red, crawling into sight from the left. He gazed at the bloody welt on his friend's head, scowled at Mesquite, and then leaned against a boulder and laughed.

Lanky, his face smeared with blood, let his scowl die out and make place for a grin.

"What's so damn funny?" he inquired,

sheepishly. "We got Dan Slade, didn't we?"

"We?" inquired Red, holding his ribs. "We?" he repeated with a rising inflection.

"My Gawd, but yo're dumb!"

"That so?" snapped Lanky. "You was follerin' th' Kid; th' Kid was follerin' me; but I was follerin' Slade. Understand English, you carrot-headed jackass?"

"A lot of good it would 'a' done you, if th' Kid hadn't been settin' almost on yore head," retorted Red, indignantly. "He saved yore life, though he didn't save a hell of a lot."

Lanky looked reflectively at Mesquite, his preserver. He carefully wiped away some blood that threatened to flow into his eye and interfere with vision.

"Hey, Kid," he said, accusingly. "I paid for yore breakfast: you owe me a dollar!"

THE END OF No. 5

NEXT WEEK: "THE FOX AND THE HOUNDS."



WHERE, OH, WHERE?

WHERE are the skirts, the modest skirts,
The skirts our mothers wore—
The skirts to which the mind reverts
In dreams of days of yore?

Where are the skirts that were not slit
By fashion's ruthless hand?
The skirts in which a girl could sit
Or even walk, or stand?

Where are the skirts that would not let
The rays of sunlight through—
That maids could wear without regret;
Oh, why are they taboo?

Where are the skirts they made of stuff
That hinted at decorum—
The old-time skirts that made a bluff
At hiding those who wore 'em?

Jack Burroughs.



Lookin' for Trouble

By **CHARLTON L. EDHOLM**

Co-Author of "The Dancing Doll."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SUSCEPTIBLE GRAFTER.

WHEN Buck Logan opened the door of his apartment half an hour later he felt a keen sense of disappointment. The rooms were dark, there was no cheery voice to welcome him, and the comfortable surroundings no longer seemed homelike when he switched on the shaded lamps.

Something was missing. And that something was May.

It was curious that he had never felt that way before in his bachelor days. His diggings had always appeared a comfortable refuge, a retreat from the feminine society that occupied so much of his time, but now he had become used to that gay little chum with her impudent speeches. He had come to rely on her, to talk things over, and help him with his schemes.

With a sinking heart he wondered

whether she had once more fallen into the clutches of the gang, but on second thought that seemed unlikely. The *señorita* would have surely gloated over the fact if she had May in her clutches.

His eye caught a note, scrawled in lead pencil, lying on the reading table. It ran:

DEAR FRIEND:

If you come home while I am out looking for you, stick around till I come back. I am so terrible worried because you didn't show up last night. I am combing the town for you. I am sorry I got sore at you, and hoping you will forgive me for the rough stuff I pulled, I remain,

Yours respectfully and affectionately,

MAY.

Buck read the note in its childish handwriting, and read it again with a smile that was more than half tenderness.

He could see her painfully struggling to put her thoughts into writing, and impulsively he put the paper to his lips and kissed

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 9.

the place her hand had touched. It was just like her hot-tempered, affectionate little self to be sorry as soon as she had blown off steam.

He turned the paper over in his hands and his eye was caught by this postscript:

P. S.—If you have come to any harm through that red-headed Spanish hussy, I'll cut her heart out.

Buck reflected that May had already encountered the *señorita* and knew how formidable she was. Nevertheless, he felt quite sure that his little pal would do as she had promised. It would be like a hawk attacked by a nervy little sparrow, but he was certain that the sparrow would take a chance and start fighting.

He settled down to wait a while. If May did not come back soon he would set out to look for her—God knows where!

And with her message in his hand he sank back, wondering where he should begin his search.

May had penciled that message after a sleepless night full of worry over her friend's disappearance and remorse at having quarreled with him.

The long hours of the night had dragged through painfully. She had dozed off, then awakened with a start to listen or look out of the window to see if his figure might be in sight. She had wept a little, then scolded herself for such weakness. She had even knelt and sent up a prayer to all the saints she could remember, to protect her boy.

But when daylight came and he still was missing, panic seized her. She opened the telephone book to look for the numbers of hospitals, and was discouraged at the lengthy list.

Although she called up various institutions, there was no word of her friend, and finally she gave it up. It seemed a little bit risky to call up police headquarters. She had a feeling that the business they were engaged in was too delicate for police interference. She would leave that call as a very last resort.

She tried Laurencine Palmer's number and got a curt response. Very grudgingly the maid told her that Buck had called the

previous evening and had left before eleven o'clock.

More than that she would not say, and she refused point-blank to disturb her mistress.

May gritted her teeth with fury as the phone was hung up on her.

"The cat!" she exclaimed angrily. "After I pretty nearly broke a blood vessel being polite to her!"

When she called up Gerhardt Banning's apartment she was less tactful, with the result that the millionaire's manservant hung up on her with even less ceremony.

With tears of anger in her blue eyes, May scrawled the note for Buck and set off resolutely to invade the Banning apartment and force the millionaire to tell her what had become of her friend.

The magnificence of that marble palace overawed her a little, but she swaggered up to the porter with bravado. She overdid it so far that that functionary was more amused than impressed.

The big man in the elaborate uniform listened to her patronizingly, went to the switchboard and reported that Mr. Banning was still in bed and his valet would not permit him to be disturbed on any pretext.

"But I've got to see him!" stormed May. "This is a matter of life and death."

"I guess you'd better take a walk, miss, and come back in a couple of hours or so," advised the porter.

"Not a chance! I'm going to camp right here until I see that old geezer. How do I know that he won't give me the slip?"

A chauffeur had lounged into the lobby, and the porter winked at him genially.

"Hello, Jean!" he said. "Here's a lady that wants to see your boss. Do you know her?"

The chauffeur grinned. "Gee, I don't know all of Banning's lady friends. I'm no city directory. Is it anything about that accident last night, miss?"

"Accident!" May felt herself go pale, but controlled her voice. Her mind worked quickly.

"You've guessed it!" she exclaimed.

"That's just what I came to see him about."

"I didn't hear of the accident," said the porter. "What happened, Jean?"

"Oh, nothing much. The boss was driving, or there wouldn't have been no accident. I guess he got nervous and ran into a lamp post or something. Smashed a headlight and cut his hand on the glass when he was fooling with it. He must have bled a lot, for I had to give the car a good cleaning."

Through the girl's mind whirled countless horrible suggestions. Banning had left her apartment to find Buck.

The boy had left Laurencine's apartment and since then had disappeared. The millionaire had come back from his errand with blood on his car.

She had a picture of the boy being invited for a ride, taken to some lonely spot and murdered. She could almost see the two men fighting desperately, and the machine left to itself, running into a wall.

She felt certain that Banning could tell her about Buck, and she determined to make him speak if she had to waylay him on the street.

"I've just got to see Mr. Banning," she insisted.

But the chauffeur and the porter were equally discouraging.

"He's a hard man to see, miss. These rich guys are always being pestered by cranks and strangers. It won't do you no good to telephone him, and I can't let you stick around here."

"All right," said May with surprising meekness. "I'll go." Then as she left the apartment house the chauffeur lounged after her and by the time she reached the corner he was at her side. He was a big, hulking fellow, with a handsome but stupid face—a real lady killer among the nursemaids and servant girls.

"What's the straight of that accident?" he began ingratiatingly. "Maybe I can help you, miss."

"Maybe you could, but you are not likely to. I know a lot about it, but I want to talk to Mr. Banning, not to his chauffeur."

"Why not?"

8 A

"You'd just put him wise to what I know and help him get free."

"Don't be so sure of that. I'm not so wild about that big stiff as you think I am. He's a hell of a boss. I was thinking of giving him notice, anyhow."

"Well, if you really want to know," said May, "that was not an accident. He had a fight with a friend of mine. That's where the blood came from; the two men were fighting in the car."

"I thought that was an awful lot of blood for a little cut on his hand. Come over and take a look at the car if you want to. It's just a block from here."

"What makes you so friendly?" asked May suspiciously. "I don't know you! Why should you want to help me?"

"Oh, I sort of like your looks, miss. I'd like to get better acquainted."

"Lay off that stuff! There must be a better reason than that."

"Well, maybe there is. Though I like your looks, and that's no lie. But something tells me that there is a little jack in this for both of us. Let's work together."

"Oh, I see—you want to double-cross the old man because you think I'm going to blackmail him. It's worth thinking over. What have you got?"

By this time they had reached the garage on the side street and Jean opened the door to the small building containing three cars.

"This is the roadster that the boss was driving last night. See where the headlight is smashed. But I don't see any dents on the metal where he hit a post. Looks more as if he had run into somebody."

"That's so," replied May. "And you say the seat was all covered with blood."

"Yes, there was a lot of blood on the seat."

"Is that all you found?"

"No—there was something else. But it will cost you money to see it."

"How much?"

"Well," said the chauffeur, "you can see it for five dollars."

May produced the money, and Jean opened his hand. What she saw was a small gold fountain pen, such as Buck had often carried, and as she turned it over she saw the boy's monogram.

"You want to buy that, miss? It's no use to me."

"Yes, if I can get it cheap enough."

"How would two hundred dollars strike you?"

"Too much. I will give you a hundred."

"Make it a hundred and fifty." The chauffeur was leering at her. "I'm knocking off fifty because I like your looks, kid."

"One hundred's all I got."

"All right, you can have it for a hundred if you give me one good smack to remember you by," smirked the enamored chauffeur.

"You're on!" May counted out the money and slipped the fountain pen into her handbag. Then she delivered a swift slap to the chauffeur's puckered lips with such force that the bare walls reechoed. "There's your smack, you fresh guy!" she gasped, and darted through the open door.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WOMAN'S WIT AND MAN'S CUNNING.

AT the corner May looked back. The chauffeur was standing at the door of the garage holding his hand to his face and shaking the other fist in her direction.

She could hear his voice, but could not make out the words. It was just as well, she thought, for the chances were that it was bad language that no lady should listen to.

Her mind was now made up about Gerhardt Banning. If he refused to receive her she would resolutely set about to besiege the apartment house, walking slowly up and down the street, always near enough to recognize any figure that might come out.

The long day dragged wearily by. She found a drug store that commanded a view of the apartment house entrance, and time and again went in for an ice cream soda. Each time she lingered over the drink as long as possible, then slowly resumed her pacing of the hot sidewalk.

Late in the afternoon she began to won-

der whether she was not an inch shorter. She felt as if her feet must have been worn off at least that much.

Toward evening she had a terrible panic. Suppose he wouldn't come out at all that day! Suppose he had sneaked out by some back entrance!

Madly she dashed to the drug store and called up the apartment house once more. But the butler was still obdurate. Mr. Banning could not be disturbed. He was indisposed.

At least she knew that he was in. May determined that she would walk the pavements until she had reduced her height another inch before she would let him escape.

She fortified herself with another package of gum, and with snapping jaws and clicking heels continued her sentry duty until the afternoon faded into dusk. As it grew darker the girl ventured to extend her beat nearer to the apartment house door. She had kept away during the daylight hours for fear some one would report to the millionaire that she was watching for him.

She went so far as to pass in front of the door finally, and stole a glance at the magnificent porter in his showy uniform. At the same moment that official clicked his heels in salute, for the elevator had descended and Gerhardt Banning stepped into the lobby.

From the porter's respectful salute it could be seen that Banning was a person of distinction even in that dwelling place of the wealthy.

Banning gave him a curt nod, as if a servant were something not quite human, and walked impressively toward the street.

His face was gray and drawn, but in spite of the lines of worry he carried his tall figure like a man who considers himself important.

No sooner did his patent leathers touch the sidewalk than May sprang at him, seized him vigorously by one sleeve, and whirled him around.

The big man was so completely off his guard that she handled him as easily as if she were a policeman taking charge of a pickpocket.

"What—what—" he began.

But May, staring up into his eyes, did not release her grip on his sleeve.

"Where's Buck?" she demanded fiercely. "You tell me what you did to my friend, or I'll have you pinched."

Banning's first impulse was to shake her off and turn away, but it would have been as easy to shake off a burr. May was little, but had sticking qualities.

"Come now," she demanded, "out with it. Or I'll call a cop."

The girl would have been funny if she had not been so deadly in earnest. Her blond curls only reached to the millionaire's shoulder and he could have picked her up with one hand.

But her cheeks were flushed with a fighting flame. Fire snapped in her eyes, and Banning realized that he would have to deal tactfully with the little spitfire or there would be a scene.

And at that moment a scene was the last thing in the world that he wished for.

"Oh, excuse me," he began. "I did not recognize you at first, Miss May. I wish I could tell you where your friend is. Unfortunately I can't say."

"You saw him last night. What did you do with him?"

"No, I didn't—" began the banker.

But she interrupted him angrily. "Lay off! Lay off! I've got the goods on you."

"Oh, of course. I was so agitated that I forgot. Yes, I met him at Miss Palmer's door. We had a few words, and that was all."

"Did you get the bracelet from him?"

"No—yes. Mr. Logan handed me the bracelet. I gave him ten thousand dollars, and he said good night."

"That's funny!" cried May.

"What's funny?"

"You said you forgot all about meeting Buck. Yet now you tell me that he slipped you the bracelet and you handed him ten thousand dollars. Gee! You forget things awful easy."

"It's true, just the same."

A look of cunning came into Banning's cool, gray eyes.

"If your friend didn't return, it's just possible that he left town with the ten

thousand dollars instead of bringing you your half of it."

"That's what you'd have done, you double-crosser!" the girl exclaimed, more furious than ever. "You didn't pay him anything for that bracelet. You had a fight with him—that's how your car got all full of blood. You robbed him—maybe you killed him! I've heard enough; I'm going to call a cop."

"You're talking wild. You don't know what you're saying. You've no proof!" blustered the millionaire.

"Haven't I?" cried May. "What about this? Here's his pen with bloodstains on it. It was found in your car. Now, will you tell me all about it? Or will I swear out a warrant?"

A taxi had been trailing the couple for half a block, and Banning raised his stick to stop it. But if he thought he could make a dash and escape, he was a poor judge of speed.

No sooner was he in the car than May had thrust herself into the seat beside him.

"Now, then, tell me the truth," she said, "or I'll make the chauffeur drive us to the police station." With an inspiration of deceit she added: "The driver's an old pal of mine. I planted him here on purpose."

"If I tell you where your friend has gone, will you promise not to disturb me any more?" asked Banning shakily.

"Now we're getting down to brass tacks," said May. "First tell me what happened to Buck. Then come across with the bracelet you stole from him."

"There was an accident," admitted Banning. "I was driving to Miss Palmer's, as I told you, and had the misfortune to run into Mr. Logan at the crossing near her house. It was purely an accident."

"Go on. Where is he now?"

"He was a little bruised, so I took him to the hospital for first aid and they agreed that it would be better to keep him there overnight."

"So he's at the hospital! What hospital?"

"No, he's not at the hospital now. He called up just half an hour ago to say that he was on his way home and he thanked me for looking after him."

May was puzzled. "All right. We'll drive home right now and see if he's there." She gave the driver the address. "Now, what about the bracelet?"

"Here it is," said Banning; and in the darkness of the taxi Ray felt the circlet being slipped into her hand. "He just lent it to me. Unfortunately it is not as important to me as I thought it was."

"No? How's that?"

"I had hoped to find some evidence in that bracelet that would help clear my friend, Miss Palmer, of a serious charge. For that reason I was willing to pay several times its value to get it back."

"And now that you've seen it, the bracelet is not worth so much?"

Banning sighed profoundly. "Yes, that's it. My poor Laurencine!"

"Buck had some special reason for making a bargain with the *señorita*," explained May, touched by his melancholy. "I don't know the ins and outs of it; he was awful queer and mysterious. That's why we had a row."

"Do you think he had some plan that would help Laurencine?" Banning's voice was eager with hope.

"Can't say, but I will give him the bracelet and if there is any good news I'll tell you."

As they drew up in front of Buck's apartment May gave a little cry of joy. There was a light in the window. There was a shadow against the blind; and, without waiting for the car to stop, the girl jumped out and ran swiftly up the stairs.

Banning seized the opportunity with instinctive cunning.

"Grand Central!" he said to the driver. "There's a ten-spot for you if you step on the gas."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CROOKED TRAIL.

MAY sprang up the stairs two at a time and flung open the door of the apartment.

At the sound Buck had run to the door; and, sobbing and laughing all at once, the girl threw herself into his arms. Her blue

eyes that had so often flashed angry sparks at him were full of tears. She ran her hands over his body, as if to assure herself that he was intact.

"Oh, boy!" she cried. "I'm glad to see you! Gee, I was scared! I thought maybe you'd been bumped off."

She touched with caressing fingers the wound on his face with its fresh bandage and adhesive plaster.

"Is this where that dirty crook ran into you?" she exclaimed with sudden anger. "I'll put a mark on him!"

In her excitement she had forgotten the millionaire in the taxi, but now she ran to the window and looked out. The street was empty.

"Of course. Banning made his get-away. He would! That guy has the makings of a first-class gunman, only he hasn't got the nerve to stand up and fight."

"Banning has good reason to make himself scarce—or thinks he has!" said Buck; and he explained briefly how he had led the millionaire to believe that there had been witnesses to his murderous attack and that the victim had died in the hospital.

"That fellow's bad through and through," cried May indignantly. "All that time he believed you were dead, and yet he kept stringing me along, telling me that you were waiting for me here. A man who would deceive a girl like that ought—ought to be sent to the electric chair!"

"Oh, let's forget him, May! I'm so happy to have you with me again. I don't care what becomes of the whole gang of crooks and plotters. I've got you, and nothing else matters!"

"Do you mean that, boy?" Her voice was very tender, and she looked at him wistfully. "Did you really care when you thought I was lost, strayed, or stolen?"

"I care so much that I never want to let you go again!" cried Buck impetuously. "I've never seen anybody like you. There is no girl in all the world like you, May."

"Not even—not even Laurencine?"

"Oh, thunder!" Buck came down from his heights of bliss with a thump. "Why did you speak of her now? I'd forgotten

all about her when I saw you again. And now you remind me—”

“Remind you of what?”

“Well, that she had a claim on me. I’m practically engaged to Laurencine, and in a way I care for her tremendously, but—”

“But what?”

“But since I’ve met you, since we’ve gone through so much together, I realize she isn’t the girl I want to marry. I like her, yes, and now that she is in trouble I’m bound more than ever to help her in every way I can. Do you understand what I’m up against?”

“I’m afraid so, Buck! You think you are in love with me, but when you hear that other girl’s name then you are not so sure. God! If I ever fell in love, believe me there’d be no hesitation about it. I’d tell everybody else in the world to go plumb to hell! That’s me!”

Buck sighed profoundly. He wondered whether there was more character in that elemental girl who did not allow herself to be pulled this way and that by feelings of doubt, by obligations to a chivalrous idea.

“It’s like this: when I saw Laurencine last night she was terribly worried over the evidence that was piling up that Mrs. Banning came to her death by poison—and that the chocolates that Laurencine bought contained poison.”

“Do you think she had anything to do with it?” cried May.

“I can’t believe it!” Buck’s vehement denial was exaggerated to convince himself. “She can’t be a criminal! She hasn’t got it in her to commit murder! Even if she had a stronger motive—”

“A stronger motive? Then she did have some reason?”

“No, no, no! I can’t believe that Laurencine was so infatuated with Gerhardt Banning that she wanted to be his wife. They were good friends—nothing more!”

“I see!” answered May. “Then there is a motive? At least the average dumbbell that sits on a jury would see a motive there—and as long as Laurencine is in danger, you feel that it is up to you to stand by her, to be able to testify that she

was engaged to you—to marry her, if necessary, so as to protect her.”

“That’s it,” admitted Buck. “She is in serious danger, and if I turned my back on her now I’d be a real cur.”

“I guess maybe you’re right,” said the girl, but her voice was lifeless and all the joy had gone out of her face.

“I suppose you are tied to Laurencine until something breaks—until she is cleared of this suspicion or until she tells you that she doesn’t need you any more.”

“That’s about it, May. You know if I were free, I’d ask you to marry me in a minute.”

But the girl started as if she had been stung. The color mounted to her cheeks, her eyes flashed fire as of old.

“I like that!” she cried. “You take a lot for granted! What makes you so sure I’d say yes?”

The boy eyed her with a little perplexity and then asked gently:

“Wouldn’t you?”

“Wouldn’t I what?” snapped May.

“Wouldn’t you say yes?”

She could not evade his searching eyes. Her own drooped. Her angry expression softened.

“Well—well, maybe—perhaps. But that’s no reason you should feel so certain about it!” she replied.

Then, to break the painful tension that was between them, she opened her hand bag and exclaimed:

“Pipe the jewelry that rich guy slipped me!” and she tossed the bracelet to Buck.

“Great Scot! The Banning bracelet! You got it away from him!”

“Sure! Why not? He fell for me hard.”

But Buck became very serious.

“You’ve pulled me out of a tight hole, May. I didn’t want to tell you before, but I had promised to go in with the *señorita*’s pet gunmen to break into Banning’s apartment and get that bracelet.”

“You’d have taken a chance like that?”

“Yes! I promised to see it through. That murder mystery seems to hinge on my returning the bracelet to the *señorita*.”

“You think that somehow it may clear Laurencine?”

"I'm not sure! That detective, Blackwell, seems to be going on that theory. You did a big thing for both of us, May, when you got hold of that bracelet."

"You mean I saved you from turning burglar? Maybe saved you from being pinched and sent up the river?"

"That's part of it. But the important thing is that this may clear away the obstacles. It may make it possible for me to ask you that question."

With the return of his old gayety he took her face between his hands and kissed her cheeks.

"Fresh!" exclaimed May, but the slap she gave him was far from stinging. It was more like a caress.

Buck sprang to the phone.

"Who are you going to call up at this time of night?"

"The *señorita*. I want to tell her that that burglary can be called off!"

But in spite of his persistent efforts it was not possible to get the woman's number. Central announced repeatedly that the party did not answer.

As Buck finally decided to give it up and placed the receiver on its hook, the phone jangled violently. The boy snatched it up and heard a piping, reedy voice:

"Hello! Hello! Is this Mr. Logan?"

"Speaking."

"This is Hiram Blackwell. I've got to see you to-morrow morning. The case has taken on a new twist. That box of chocolates is leading us on a crooked trail."

With these cryptic words the detective hung up, leaving Buck and May to conjecture what the next day might bring forth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FLIGHT IS GUILT.

BEFORE Buck was out of bed the next morning a messenger handed him a yellow envelope which he signed for, and read while sitting on the unmade dav-enport.

The telegram said:

Trouble has handed me an awful wallop. You can look for your old uncle in New

York in a day or two, a sadder, wiser and considerably poorer man.

UNCLE DUDLEY.

The unconventional message from his extraordinary uncle reminded Buck with a jerk that the old man's fantastic program for his nephew had been completely forgotten. It seemed incredible that he, Buck Logan, should have left his apartment only a few days ago, a shy and retiring young man, looking for trouble.

He had put in a whole day trying to bump into some adventure that would give him a chance to distinguish himself. He had gone out of his way to look for adventures, and they had side-stepped him. Since then—*biff-bang-bang!*—he had been knocked right and left by the two-fisted attack of life in the rough.

As yet he was no nearer the front page headlines, however, and if Uncle Dudley's telegram was to be taken seriously and not as another fanciful pleasantry, the promised million might have gone up in smoke. Buck knew that fortunes founded on oil often took wings overnight. Perhaps by the time he achieved front page glory there might not be any million.

Well, if not, he had had one wonderful time. He had to thank Uncle Dudley for jerking him out of his rut and chucking him squarely into the middle of the whirlpool of life.

His mind was taken from the comparatively unimportant matter of Uncle Dudley by an early telephone call from Hiram Blackwell. Buck heard what the detective had to say, and explained briefly his loss and recovery of the bracelet.

A few minutes later the boy was pounding on May's bedroom door.

"Pile out!" he shouted. "Make yourself pretty and wash behind your ears. We're going to have company for breakfast."

When Blackwell reached the apartment they went immediately to a restaurant, where the detective told them the latest development of the Banning case over grapefruit, chops and coffee.

But the news wrecked the young man's appetite, although May and Blackwell did not take it so much to heart.

"Things look pretty serious for your friend, Miss Palmer. It seems practically certain that Mrs. Banning died from the effects of poison."

"Yes, I've heard something about that," replied Buck, "and Laurencine admits that she bought the chocolates. What is the new development?"

"As you know, these candies were analyzed and some of them were found to contain poison."

"But Laurencine claims that she did not even open the box."

"One of the chocolates had been bitten in two. It was found on Mrs. Banning's dresser beside the open box."

"She had been eating that piece of chocolate just before she died?"

"Exactly! And analysis of that particular piece showed enough poison to kill several people."

"My God," cried Buck, "I can't believe it. I've known Laurencine Palmer for years. She will prove that she had nothing to do with the crime."

"You believe she is innocent?" Blackwell eyed the young man with his mild blue orbs, but there was something deadly in that deceptive gaze.

"Of course, she is innocent!"

"Then why did she run away like a criminal?"

"Run away! It isn't like Laurencine to run away! Why I saw her only night before last."

"Precisely! And since then Miss Palmer has vanished. She left her house without any luggage as if she were merely going shopping. But instead of that she took a taxi to Grand Central and bought a ticket for Canada."

"How do you know that?"

"She's been shadowed right along. This attempt to escape the arm of the law makes it look very grave for her."

Buck turned pale. Laurencine had not confided to him, her best friend, that she was planning to flee the country. It looked bad!

"What are you going to do about it?"

"A warrant had been sworn out. Miss Palmer will be brought back and indicted on the charge of murder."

"This is monstrous!" cried Buck. "That is not enough to warrant a murder charge."

"No, if she had stayed right here to face the music. It's the stealthy flight that makes it look so bad."

"What about Banning? What about the husband?" cried Buck. "He was the man who gave his wife the chocolates. He opened the package and could have tampered with it easily. Why didn't you arrest him?"

"Gerhardt Banning will be indicted together with Miss Palmer," replied Blackwell gravely.

"Good boy! Can you lay hands on him? I thought such a big gun was above the law."

"He thought so, too, for a while. But he discovered his mistake."

"Have you served the warrant yet?"

"No! I have instructed the officers to hold it until I give the word. When I telegraph they will arrest both Miss Palmer and Mr. Banning."

"You mean?"

"They fled together!" explained Blackwell. "My agent reports that they are traveling under assumed names."

There was silence for some moments while Blackwell sipped his coffee, quite undisturbed by the happenings which were all in the day's work for him.

But to the young man it was something like a tragedy. His friend, that fine sensitive, aristocratic girl, fleeing the country under a charge of murder! It was one of those unbelievable things that nevertheless happen every day.

He stared at his plate with knitted brows. His mind was far away trying to find a gleam of hope for the girl he had once loved, some way of helping Laurencine whom he still cared for like a sister.

"What about the bracelet clew, Mr. Blackwell? Have you given up the idea of solving the crime through the bracelet?"

"No, I have not given up hope in that line. I keep an open mind. I follow every trail—but the flight of Banning and Miss Palmer seems to make their guilt self evident. Of course that does not always hold. Innocent people sometimes run away in a panic—but in this case it looks especially suspicious because Miss Palmer's flight in

the company of Banning supplies the motive for the murder. Evidently they are a pair of guilty lovers."

"That is not true!" cried Buck. "They are only friends! Why Laurencine was engaged to me."

Blackwell raised his eyebrows. "I'm sorry," he said. "I did not know that! You have my sympathy, but I'm afraid I can give you very little comfort."

"Can't you put off serving that warrant? Can't you wait until we have seen the Spanish woman?"

"Suppose you get her on the phone now. Find out whether she can see you right away. I don't like to waste time."

The young man jumped at the chance of a reprieve for Laurencine, and hurried to the phone.

But again there was no response to his call for the *señorita's* number. The operator at the apartment house informed him that she would not be back until night.

When Buck returned to the table with the bad news he found May in earnest conversation and Blackwell looked up with a deprecating smile.

"Your little friend has convinced me that no harm can be done by waiting until to-night. She seems to think that something may result from it and I am willing to make the test as originally proposed."

He looked at May with a rueful grimace. "This little girl is a good advocate," he said. "She can talk a sensible man into taking a long chance like this interview with the *señorita*, and giving up a sure thing like the arrest of Banning and Miss Palmer."

Before they left the table, Blackwell had arranged to meet Buck in the neighborhood of the *señorita's* apartment at half-past ten that night.

That would give the young man time enough to keep his appointment with Pugsy and Tattoo at the corner of Fifty-Ninth Street and Park Avenue.

Although he did not owe them anything, it seemed a little callous to let these enterprising young bandits commit a burglary all to no purpose.

He reflected, however, that it would be taking a needless risk to carry the diamond bracelet to that interview, so it was ar-

ranged that May should meet him together with the detective near the *señorita's* house.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PLASTER CAST.

HIRAM BLACKWELL returned to his dingy office in Park Row with a slightly dazed expression of a man who has received a shock.

For the first time in his life his practical common sense had yielded to sentiment.

And the person who had administered that shock was May.

In drawing his web about criminals or suspected persons Blackwell had never before worried very much about the feelings of the individuals involved. His single aim had always been to get at the truth and to bring the guilty to justice.

Although he had never pursued an innocent person knowingly, he had never worried very much if the terror or shame of arrest had borne heavily upon those who were afterward acquitted of crime.

But there was something in May's earnest and impassioned words that made him hesitate in the case of Laurencine. She made him realize that to have that warrant served upon that sensitive, aristocratic girl would shatter her reputation and cause her unendurable humiliation.

When May begged so fervently for a little more delay, Blackwell did not realize that she was pleading the cause of her rival. He never guessed that May was using all her powers of persuasion in Laurencine's behalf with the risk of losing the man she cared for.

May was playing the game. She had made it a point of honor not to win on a foul, but when she had persuaded the detective to be merciful and hold back the warrant a few hours longer she wondered whether she had not been a soft hearted little fool. She felt sure that Laurencine would not have done as much for her.

Buck guessed little of all this. His mind was busy with the plans for the evening, but Blackwell returned to his office with the purpose of going into the matter of the poisoned candy once more. He had a

stronger impulse than before to give Laurencine the benefit of the doubt.

Again he examined the box of chocolates. They were imported and bore the label of a well known firm in Paris.

He looked over the individual pieces. Only three of them had been found to contain poison. Analysis had been made of a portion of each and a perfect reproduction, a plaster cast, had been made of the one bitten in two.

Photographs had been made and enlarged prints had been delivered during his absence. He studied them with scrupulous care and presently arose to compare them with records in his huge filing cabinet. That half piece of candy had contained a large dose of poison.

As Blackwell studied the innocent looking pieces of candy, turning them over in his hand and examining them from every angle, he was struck by a fact that he had hitherto overlooked.

While they all appeared to be more or less alike there was a slight difference in the consistency of the chocolate coating and in the composition of the fondant.

Suddenly the truth leaped at him. The three pieces that were poisoned had not come in the same box. Among the imported chocolates were three that had been manufactured by the formula of the American candy makers, and these were the ones that had been tampered with.

The detective could not see the answer to this problem. If Laurencine had poisoned this candy why had she not inserted the fatal dose in the imported chocolates?

How could one account for the fact that the poisoned pieces were not in the original package?

Perhaps it was the husband of the murdered woman who had planted them there! Perhaps he had doctored these candies and slipped them into the box when he placed the bracelet among the chocolates.

Could the millionaire have been so fiendish as to plan to murder his own wife? And if so what would be the motive in arranging things so that the suspicion would fall on Laurencine, with whom he was infatuated?

Blackwell pondered over these aspects of

the case with his mild blue eyes staring into vacancy. Any one who had seen him at that moment would have taken him for the most absent minded of college professors, and a man of such harmless and timid disposition that he would hesitate to kill a fly.

Yet at that moment the mild mannered little man was weaving a network of evidence that was designed to bring death to the murderer.

In one respect he had concealed the truth from May and Buck. The warrants had not been served upon Gerhardt Banning and Laurencine, but they had been put to effective use.

It would have been folly to let the couple escape to Canada. Blackwell had kept in touch with his agents by wire and had instructed them to bring the financier and the girl back before they had reached Albany.

They were not arrested. They were merely detained. And the place of their detention was not a prison but a private house not far from upper Fifth Avenue, the property of a wealthy police commissioner, which had been placed at Blackwell's disposal for just such out-of-the-ordinary cases.

Blackwell reached for the phone and called up this residence.

"I think the time has come for a show down," he said to the deputy who answered his ring. "I am going to bring all the suspected persons together to-night. Bring Banning and Miss Palmer to this address at ten thirty." And he added a number about a block from the *señorita's* apartment house.

"Tell them that they will have every chance to clear themselves without publicity. But assure them that if they make a disturbance the charge of murder will be pressed and that they will be thrown into prison without bail."

"They'll come all right," said the deputy. "They wanted to show fight at first, but they are as meek as a pair of new-born lambs now. I've got 'em locked up in separate rooms. Mrs. Murphy is looking after the girl and I'm keeping an eye on the old buck myself."

The weather had turned raw and threatening. The detective was forced to turn on the lights earlier than usual on account of the lowering clouds and the rain.

Before he left his office that night he slipped a pistol into one pocket and into the other he dropped the plaster cast of the poisoned chocolate that had been bitten in half.

He whistled softly as he picked his way down the half lighted stairs. There were new bits of evidence that had come to him. He had drawn valuable cards that had strengthened his hand.

He had one trump card up his sleeve, but he was not sure how he was going to play it.

In fact until he confronted all the principals in this game, in which the stakes were life and death, he was not quite sure how he was going to play any of his cards.

In an hour he would open the game in the *señorita's* apartment!

CHAPTER XL.

THE DIAMOND ASP.

THAT night the first bleak, raw touch of autumn weather told that summer was done. There was a blustering wind. There were gusts of rain and then a chill mist settled over the city, driving the pleasure seekers to shelter. Only those who had business lingered in the streets. At half past ten that night Buck was walking through the fog and the drizzle to the corner near the *señorita's* apartment, where he had arranged to meet Blackwell and May.

He had failed to meet Pugsy and Tattoo. They had not kept their appointment.

The reflections of the street lights splashed paths of gold on the wet pavements, and the cars that passed him showed a tendency to skid on the treacherous asphalt.

From the river came the melancholy sound of foghorns.

The young man walked through the dismal fog with his coat collar up and his chin down. There was something ominous

about the night, and he felt ill at ease. At the appointed corner he looked for the figures of May and the detective, but no one was on the sidewalk.

Just then a big closed car that was moving slowly toward him halted beside the curb and a cheerful voice exclaimed:

"Here we are, Buck! All snug and dry inside!"

The girl extended a white hand and Buck took the bracelet which she had been carrying for him.

After a few words, which ended by Buck giving a low whistle of astonishment at Blackwell's information, the party separated and Buck made his way alone to the apartment of the *Señorita Luz Mendoza*, trailed at a discreet distance by the slowly moving car.

The house door was unguarded. Buck climbed the stairs, rang the bell, and waited in the dark hallway, his hand resting on the bracelet in his coat pocket.

The door opened, and Buck saw again the flame colored hangings of her apartment and the dancer's figure clad in black robes that clung to the contours of her body.

The *señorita* started with surprise as she saw the young man.

"Weren't you expecting me?" Buck asked.

"Yes—of course." There was some embarrassment in her tone. "But not so early."

"Why not?"

She closed the door behind him.

"I did not imagine that you could break into Gerhardt Banning's house and get here with the bracelet so soon. I did not expect you before midnight. Where are Pugsy and Tattoo? Why are you alone?"

"I was not able to meet your friends," said Buck. "I waited for them at the corner of Fifty-Ninth Street, but they did not show up. I wanted to tell them that the burglary was to be called off."

"Called off?"

"Yes. Since we made that plan I was able to get the bracelet by other means."

The *señorita* regarded him with a strange smile.

"You are a favorite of fortune," she remarked mysteriously.

"How so?"

"As you failed to meet them, there is no harm in telling you. Those two boys had planned to put a knife in you after they had recovered the diamonds. They had no intention of letting you in on the reward. They planned to kill you and throw your body into the river."

She smiled her slow, feline smile that expressed an absolute indifference to bloodshed and murder.

Buck was aghast at her callousness. She looked so beautiful, so seductive standing there in the lamplight, with the glow of the hearth fire playing upon the ivory tinted skin of her arms and touching with glint of flame the mass of copper-colored hair.

"Well," she said abruptly, and there was a catlike swiftness in her gesture as she extended her hand. "What are we waiting for? You have the bracelet. Give it to me!"

"Yes, I have it," said Buck, and he fumbled in his pockets, delaying as long as possible the critical moment.

"I was thinking of Pugsy and Tattoo," he remarked in order to have something to say. "They are going to be sore about this. They are on their way to force Mr. Banning's safe, and all for nothing at all. When they find they've been deceived they will make trouble."

"I should worry about those stupid rascals!" cried the *señorita*. "Give me the bracelet! Here's the money!" She threw back a corner of the tablecloth, disclosing a litter of currency.

Her eyes flashed with triumph as Buck extended the trinket in the palm of his hand.

With an impulsive sweep of her bare arm she had snatched it, held it for an instant under the lamp and then with a Spanish oath that was half a scream of relief she flung the bracelet into the fire.

Buck watched her mad act with stupefaction.

For a few moments the two stood breathlessly gazing at that circlet of precious gems that lay in the flaming coals.

Then without another word Buck stepped quietly to the apartment door and swung it open.

Instantly Blackwell, the detective, was beside him in the room, and after him entered May, Laurencine and Gerhardt Banning.

Buck pointed to the fireplace, and Blackwell took in the situation.

"Tut, tut! That is a strange use to make of a diamond bracelet," observed the little man mildly.

The Spanish woman had recoiled a pace or two and now stood with heaving breast looking at the intruder.

"Who are you? What does this mean?" she demanded fiercely.

Her darting eyes blazed defiance at the mild mannered, puny-looking little man and the shadowy figures in the background.

Then they settled with purpose on the statuette on the table before her.

Buck moved swiftly and swept the image to the floor before she could snatch it. The head rolled off and the dagger lay at his feet. With a quick movement Buck kicked it to the hearth out of her reach.

He expected to see Blackwell make a movement to subdue her with his pistol, but instead of that the detective began in a ready and apologetic voice:

"I beg you to pardon the intrusion, *señorita*. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Hiram Blackwell, investigator. I have called to have a few words with you to see if we cannot clear up that mysterious Banning case."

"I have brought some people who are under suspicion." He indicated the shadowy figures—Laurencine, pallid and statuesque like an image of terror; and Gerhardt Banning, somber and downcast, who stood with bent shoulders, like a broken man. Apart from the suspects was the slender figure of May, who was regarding her surroundings with undisguised distaste and wrinkling her nose at the smell of incense.

With a deprecatory gesture the little man fumbled in his pocketbook and presented his card.

The woman stared at him contemptuously.

With an insulting flip of her wrist she tossed his card into the fire. Then she folded her shapely arms across her breast and replied:

"You can prove nothing against me! Nothing!"

The detective glanced with a quizzical smile at the bracelet that was licked by the flames, and the *señorita* followed his eyes with an expression of triumph.

"It is Miss Palmer and Mr. Banning who are under direct suspicion of that unfortunate woman's murder," replied Blackwell very gently. He made a vague gesture in their direction.

"I may as well tell you that warrants have been sworn out charging them with the plot to poison Mrs. Banning by means of a box of chocolates containing poison."

"Ah, ha!" The *señorita* tilted her chin upward and showed her fine teeth in a defiant smile. "So you have trapped those clever poisoners! I congratulate you! I hope to see them both sent to the electric chair!"

In the movement of her body was the suggestion of Carmen. With her hands on her hips the dancer threw back her head and laughed, and then walked toward the detective with an undulating swing of the hips that expressed bravado.

"Ask me any questions you please," she said. "I'm only too glad to help you!"

"It's about those chocolates," began Blackwell. From his pocket he took the plaster cast of the bitten piece and laid it on the table.

Banning and Laurencine drew nearer to examine it and the *señorita*, just across the table from them, acknowledged their presence by baring her teeth with a snarl. Banning did not trust himself to meet her defiant gaze. Laurencine shuddered and drew back.

"Of course you know, *señorita*, that Mr. Banning was in the habit of taking candy to his wife! You knew that she was always nibbling chocolates?"

"Of course! That makes it very natural that he would use candy to poison the poor trusting fool!"

"Quite so! The box of chocolates was found open in her room the night of the

burglary," continued Blackwell. "One of them," he touched the plaster cast with his finger tip, "was bitten in half and the piece was lying on the dresser."

"That is all the evidence you want," cried the *señorita*.

"That piece of chocolate was analyzed and found to contain poison."

"Ah, the wretch!"

"It was also photographed and enlargements were made," continued Blackwell.

"And we found finger prints!"

"Finger prints!" exclaimed the *señorita* with a trace of nervousness.

"A man's finger prints," said Blackwell.

"Naturally!" The *señorita* was quick to explain this. "That scoundrel picked out the piece that he knew was poisoned and handed it to her. The Judas!"

But Blackwell continued in his dry manner. "The finger print was not Mr. Banning's. That was my first thought, but I corrected it later. It was identified as the finger print of a certain ex-convict."

"You know his name?"

"His real name is Brennen, but he goes by the alias of Pugsy."

"Pugsy!" The *señorita*'s voice arose to a startled gasp.

"Of course!" Blackwell went on in a matter of fact tone. "You know the man. He is the burglar that you hired to steal Mrs. Banning's bracelet. Now tell me the truth! Did you also hire him to leave some poisoned candy in her bedroom?"

"Are you crazy?" The woman had paled under this swift attack, delivered without any warning. "Why should I do anything so wild?"

"To make it appear that Mrs. Banning died by poisoned candy!"

"But she did!"

The detective's voice was sharp and abrupt as a pistol shot: "She did *not*!"

He picked up the plaster cast of the bit of candy and went on mildly.

"Mrs. Banning did not have that candy in her mouth! The impression of her teeth does not correspond with the tooth marks on this cast. Her teeth were broad. These marks are long and narrow. Why do you cover your mouth with your hand, *señorita*?"

"Lies, lies, lies!"

"And there was no trace of poison in her stomach!"

"No poison?" cried the *señorita*. "Then what killed Mrs. Banning?"

"I am afraid we are too late to secure the evidence," said Blackwell, meaningly. And at the words his glance strayed to the bracelet that still lay in the mass of coals.

The *señorita*'s smile was openly triumphant. Quite shamelessly she volunteered a perfectly incredible explanation:

"My bracelet fell into the fire by accident. I was so startled when you walked in on me."

Blackwell nodded grimly. He stooped and picked up the dagger to fish the bracelet out of the fire, then changed his mind and gingerly removed the glowing circlet with the tongs, and dropped it on the hearthstone.

"It is too late! It will do you no good!"

But as the detective rose to his feet he showed her a diamond bracelet in the palm of his hand.

"It is no matter! The one you tried to destroy was only a copy. Here's the original!"

No one present was prepared for what followed. With a scream of pent-up fury the Spanish woman snatched the Banning bracelet from the detective's hand.

Buck leaped between her and the fire to prevent its destruction.

The woman saw the intent faces surrounding her. Banning grim and scowling, Laurencine pale with terror, and Blackwell watchfully on guard with her own weapon, the poisoned dagger, in his hand.

With a swift gesture the *señorita* thrust the bracelet upon her bare arm, forced it as far as it would go and twisted it violently against her tender flesh.

At the same instant Buck and May comprehended her purpose and threw themselves upon her to prevent it, but as they drew the circlet from the arm of the struggling woman they saw that it had left a faint line of blood. The roughened inner surface of the trinket had scratched a tiny furrow.

"You will never get me," gasped the

señorita with a ring of defiance in her voice that had suddenly grown hard and shrill.

"The tiniest scratch of that poison is fatal!"

CHAPTER XLI.

BRANDED.

"**H**OLD her," cried May. "Don't let her go, Buck!"

The *señorita* turned her furious eyes upon the girl and screamed.

"Why do you torture me? Is it not enough that I have confessed—I tell you I will be dead in five minutes. Let me die in peace!"

But May had already stooped to press her lips to the tiny wound.

While Buck thrust her head aside, Blackwell pulled her off by main strength.

"Are you crazy? That is a deadly poison—a hellish mixture that this she-devil brought from South America!"

"I can't let her die like this," protested May, hysterically. She was almost in tears. "No, let me go! Let me go! I'm going to take a chance and suck that poison from her arm."

Then as she realized the futility of her struggle with the two men, May swiftly darted to the hearth, seized the tongs and snatched up the imitation circles of stones and metal that was still glowing hot.

"At least I can cauterize it! I've burned the poison out of rattlesnake bites!" she exclaimed. "Hold her arm, Buck. And you others keep her from throwing herself about."

While the Spanish woman shrieked and raged May drew the red hot bracelet carefully over the scratches left by the poisoned ornament in the tender flesh.

She was master of her nerves by now and her hand did not shake as the scorching smell arose to her nostrils.

Buck held the woman's outstretched arm in both hands. Blackwell and Banning had thrown themselves upon the *señorita*'s body, holding her down with all their strength, panting from the exertion. Shrieks of mingled pain and fury made the night hideous.

May addressed the struggling woman in soothing tones. "Yell, sister, yell! That's right! Go on and yell your head off! It will do you good and I don't mind. It's music in my ears! And you won't keep me from burning out this poison. I've cauterized snake bites and know just how it's done!"

Laurencine was huddled in the corner nearest the door, her white face held between her hands and looking at the scene with horrified eyes.

Suddenly she turned with a shriek and at the same moment the men holding the *señorita* jumped back in alarm.

At the door stood two heavy-set men with automatics that threatened instant death. Handkerchiefs were tied below the intruders' eyes, but there was no mistaking those menacing figures.

The *señorita* staggered to her feet and ran toward them for protection.

"Help! Help!"

"Sure, we'll help you!" growled Pugsy. But with one hand he thrust her out of the line of fire. "What's going on here?"

"Who double-crossed us?" snarled Tattoo. "Show me the guy and I'll croak him!"

"We're framed! These people double-crossed you," shrieked the *señorita*. "A second more and you'd have been too late!"

"Stand aside and I'll plug 'em!"

"Get that blond alley-cat! Plug her first of all!" screamed the dancer.

May made a quick movement to escape.

"Here's your finish!" barked Pugsy. "I'm going to plug you!"

But he was too slow. May had dropped flat to the floor, wriggled to the center table and with one jerk of the table cover brought the lamp down with a crash. The room was in darkness except for the faint glow of the coal fire.

Instantly there was an uproar of shouts, yells and pistol shots as the bandits fought madly in the dark. They shot wildly and, guided by the flashes of their guns, Buck and Blackwell flung themselves upon the thugs.

It was too fierce to last long. The guns were soon emptied, but the groans and curses and thuds of fists against flesh con-

tinued until May, fumbling along the wall, found a switch and flashed on a wall light.

At that instant Tattoo snatched up what money he could from the table and dashed for the door.

But he was not quite agile enough to escape one slashing blow of the detective, who still had the *señorita*'s dagger.

Blackwell immediately turned to the assistance of Buck, who was struggling with Pugsy, his fists on the bandit's throat and one knee clamped down on his chest. In a few seconds he was cursing madly at the handcuffs that snapped about his wrists.

Laurencine and Gerhardt Banning were huddled together in a terrified heap in the corner.

As for the *Señorita Luz Mendoza*, she had vanished like a shadow.

May was regarding with a rueful grimace a red mark on her slender white arm.

"Can you beat that," she cried, half laughing, half crying. "After all I done for that red-haired hussy, she takes a bite out of me! The crust of some people! What does she think I am, a free lunch counter?"

CHAPTER XLII.

A BAD OYSTER.

BLACKWELL was gasping and holding both hands to the pit of his stomach.

He had been caught an ugly blow from the wildly kicking Pugsy, that left him breathless and momentarily dazed.

But as soon as he had recovered the detective made for the door.

"Hang on to Pugsy," he wheezed, and darted down the stairs after the *señorita*.

Pugsy was in no position to make a break for liberty with the steel manacles on his wrists. The marks of Buck's fists were on his heavy face, one eye was swollen like a crab apple and the color of a purple plum. He looked thoroughly cowed.

"Get into the bath room," commanded Buck. "If you make a move before the police come I'll fix you up for the morgue instead of the station house!"

But Laurencine drew the young man aside and whispered frantically.

"The police! My God! Can't you keep the police out of this?"

She seized his arms and clung to him with her slender white hands, looking imploringly into his eyes as she continued piteously:

"Oh, Buck, don't let the newspapers get hold of this. Think of the scandal! The disgrace to me! I can't stand it!"

The boy regarded her with astonishment. Then something in her wild dark eyes made everything clear to him.

She was in love with Gerhardt Banning! After all that had happened she still wanted to marry him; and all the details of Mrs. Banning's death and the girl's attempted flight with Banning would make her the center of sensational newspaper stories.

"I'll see what I can do!" said Buck quietly. "It's going to be hard to hush up this story. It will be up to Blackwell."

"I think we can count on Blackwell's discretion."

Buck turned at the husky and cold-blooded voice of Gerhardt Banning at his elbow and the millionaire continued:

"Hiram Blackwell's only motive is to discover the murderer. The *señorita's* confession will satisfy him. If she has succeeded in taking her own life a plausible story can be given to the police that will leave Miss Palmer and myself out of it."

The millionaire spoke with so much assurance that Buck was impressed.

"I'll try to keep this quiet," replied Buck.

"Thank you," said Banning. "I knew you would be reasonable," and he sought to grasp the young man's hand.

But the boy looked at him coldly.

"It's not on your account," he retorted. "It's for Laurencine!"

"Then you promise! You promise!" cried the girl, wildly.

"I will do what I can. On my word of honor!"

There were a few moments of awkward silence. Then Banning said nervously:

"What about your little friend? Can we trust her? I suppose a reasonable sum would keep her quiet. I would do anything to save the reputation of my intended wife."

"Leave May to me!" said Buck shortly. But the girl had caught the millionaire's meaning and now blazed at him with all her pent-up wrath.

"You low-down, miserable wretch," she cried. "You think you can buy everybody with your dirty money! How do you get that way?"

"My dear young lady," began Banning.

"I'm not your dear! What's more, when I talk to a specimen like you I sometimes forget I'm a lady! Talking about 'my intended wife,' with your first wife not yet in her grave! I don't want to have anything to do with you! I don't want to have anything to do with your dirty money! I won't talk about this case because I'm only too glad to forget it. When I think of you it makes me feel as if I'd eaten a bad oyster!"

She turned away, clenching her fists and panting with indignation.

"Listen, May! Of course, we don't want his bribe money. I don't think Mr. Banning meant to insult you!"

"Don't talk to me," retorted the girl. "Don't agitate me! Another word and I'm apt to say something that will hurt his feelings!"

"I fancy everything can be smoothed over," said Banning. He showed an amazing lack of resentment, probably considering May too low in the social scale to be worth his attention.

"As for this interesting burglar. We can induce him to plead guilty on some minor charge, such as carrying concealed weapons and disorderly conduct. He'll be glad enough to keep quiet in order to get a light sentence."

Buck reflected that it was easy to see how this man had gained a fortune, with no moral scruples and with a readiness to turn every human weakness to his own ends.

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of Blackwell.

"They made their get-away," he announced. "The *señorita* and Tattoo. His taxi was at the corner. By this time they are a long way off. I waited to phone a general alarm to headquarters. They will be picked up in an hour or two, or I miss my guess!"

Banning took the detective aside and the two men consulted in undertones while Buck and May made their preparations to depart.

"Slip me my first aid outfit," said May, and as she applied powder she exclaimed:

"Gee! I look like a hick with my nose all shiny!"

"You look good to me, May. Are you ready to go home?"

"Home! Who said anything about home? Have the cooks gone on strike?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

TOO CHIVALROUS.

WHEN Buck awoke the next morning he found May already dressed and studying the morning paper.

"What are you looking for?" he asked. "Was the story of the *señorita's* get-away published in spite of Banning?"

"Not a chance! Anyhow, I wouldn't find it in the classified ads."

"The ads? What's the big idea? Are you looking for a job?"

"No. I want a furnished room. It's moving day."

"Moving day?"

"Of course. You don't think I'm going to stick around here any longer! Now that the gang is not laying for me any more, it's time for me to flit."

The boy jumped up suddenly.

"Don't be in a hurry, May!" he said.

"Lay off! Lay off! Keep your hands to yourself!"

She thrust him from her.

"But, May, I don't want you to go. Gee! This place will be a tomb without you."

"Don't be foolish. It's a swell dump. You ought to be glad to have it all to yourself." She looked with appreciation at the comfortable furniture, the pictures, the rugs, and added: "Maybe when I get what is coming to me I'll have a swell little apartment just like this."

"Do you like it here?"

"Do I? It's class! That's what! I'll tell the cock-eyed world, it's class!"

"Then keep it. I'll move out."

"You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not! I couldn't bear to live here alone, after having been here with you. I'll move."

"You're kidding!" smiled May. "You know you don't believe it yourself."

"Don't I? Well, here's my last word. If you leave this place I'll give up the lease. You may as well take it as not. Why, I'm lonely already when I think of myself sitting here in the long, rainy autumn evenings, all alone before the fire, with nobody to talk to, nobody to take out to dinner, nobody to hold a light to my pipe, nobody to look after me when I'm sick"—his voice broke pathetically—"nobody to welcome me home, nobody to bring my slippers."

"Hell, kid! I'll bring your slippers." The girl slipped her arms about his neck and closed his lips with kisses. "Lay off that sob stuff. You're breakin' my heart." And she added: "What time do they unlock the City Hall in the morning?"

"The license bureau? About nine o'clock. We'll step on the janitor's heels."

"Nix, nix! I don't get hitched on an empty stomach. You got to buy me a breakfast first."

Buck went under the shower, slipped into his clothes, and took the girl out to breakfast.

"Why all this speed?" May asked, as Buck told the waitress to make it snappy.

"I'm afraid you'll change your mind," he replied.

"Don't worry, boy. I liked you from the first minute. When I gave you that job as bus boy I was planning to make a man of you and then lead you to the altar. You never had a chance."

The following day, when Blackwell called at Buck's apartment, he was introduced to Mrs. Buck Logan.

But the dry-as-dust crime investigator had little enthusiasm for romance.

The mystery of love meant nothing for him. The mystery of an unsolved crime was his one and only passion. Glory meant nothing to him. The financial reward was useful because it made it possible for him to devote his time to solving the problems of murder. He felt a genuine thrill when

he had fastened the crime upon its perpetrator, and he even grudged sharing the secret with the masses.

He was no detective of the limelights and publicity agents.

"You saw the latest development of the Banning case?" he asked. "No? Well, I'm not surprised. It was buried on the third page of the afternoon paper," and he pointed to an inconspicuous paragraph.

The item told of a taxi driver who had been attacked by some sort of seizure the previous night and had driven head on into a trolley car on One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street.

When an ambulance arrived the driver was found to be dead, although his wounds consisted of minor cuts and bruises. The report ended with a statement that his passenger had disappeared without being identified.

"That is the last word we have had of Señorita Luz Mendoza," concluded Hiram Blackwell. "Of course agents are on guard all over the city and we may keep her from slipping out of the country."

"And Tattoo—" began Buck.

"As for Tattoo, this mysterious accident proves that the poison on her dagger was effective. The cut I gave him as he ran through the door was a mere flea bite, but that arrow-tip poison put him out of business in short order. The chances are he was lying dead over the wheel when the automobile ran into the street car."

"I see you managed to keep the Banning name out of the papers," commented Buck.

"Yes. What's the use? We know that Banning and Miss Palmer are innocent, and there is no object in making things unpleasant for the young woman."

At the mention of Laurencine, May got up and left the room.

"Your wife doesn't seem to like that young woman any too well," commented Blackwell.

"Oh, I guess she just went out to get you something to drink. Excuse me and I'll help her find the ingredients," and Buck followed her into the kitchenette.

They were gone for several minutes, and Blackwell could hear the clink of glasses,

but his pleasant anticipations were disturbed by a tap at the door. Evidently the stranger was unused to electric bells or could not find the button, and Blackwell went to see who it was.

"Is my nephew in?" asked the grizzled and raw-boned visitor who stood in the hall.

"Mr. Logan? Yes, he's here. He was just getting a drink for me."

"Well, I'm his Uncle Dudley. He's expecting me. For God's sake, don't disturb him if he's fixin' up a drink!"

"Have a chair," said Blackwell, smiling at the rough and ready old rancher who had already flung himself into a deep chair and propped his feet up on another.

"Thanks, I've got two already. If I only had a flower-pot I'd be all set."

"A flower-pot?"

"Ye-ah. Over at the hotel they are so refined that they will use nothing less than a hand-painted jar to accommodate the essence of eatin' tobacco. Out in the West we use a box of sawdust or the adjacent territory, but I reckon that kid-gloved nephew of mine has a hand-painted flower-pot. He's that soft!"

"Soft! Why your nephew is a hero! He was in a rough-and-tumble fight the other night with a couple of gunmen. You'd never make *them* believe he was soft!"

The old man brought himself up with a jerk and Blackwell told him briefly what he knew of Buck's adventures. Uncle Dudley slapped his thigh and laughed loudly. "Whoopee! That's goldurned good news!"

At the uproar Buck came in from the kitchenette, and his uncle rushed to seize him by both hands.

"I knowed you had the real stuff in you, Buck, my boy!" he shouted. "When I sent you out lookin' for trouble, I knowed it would make a man of you."

"Do you see any difference, uncle?"

"Do I? Nobody would think of calling you Percy now. Nobody would guess that you was brung up by your maw. Look at that place where somebody whammed you on the cheek bone! Ain't that pretty, now?"

"Do you like it?" Buck fingered the plaster gingerly.

"Sure I like it. It shows where you went up against this hard-boiled city and it stepped on your face."

"Well, if that is the sort of thing you enjoy looking at," interrupted Blackwell with a smile, "come around to the Tombs and I'll introduce you to the other fellow. He's a taxi driver and several other kinds of crook as well. His name is Pugsy, and he's a hard-boiled egg, but he's going to cold storage just the same."

"Sho' now! You beat up a taxi driver named I'ugsy. I reckon there's a big piece about it in the papers," cried Uncle Dudley. "After all you've done I reckon they save half the front page for you every morning."

"No," admitted Buck sheepishly. "I didn't get into the papers at all."

"What's that? Here you go rampagin' up and down New York like a wild bull and in the town that's alive with reporters they don't give you no write-up?"

"Well, you see, uncle, it was my fault. I guess I could have got on the front page, but the story was kept out of print—on account of a girl."

"Well, I'm a wall-eyed horn toad! You side-stepped all that glory on account of a gal?" Uncle Dudley shook his head sadly and reproachfully.

"Buck," he said, "you'll have to go out and look for more trouble. You're still a little bit soft in spots. Here you had a chance to have your name in letters an inch high, and you miss it. You think about a gal and it's all off. You haven't got the nerve!"

"But Uncle Dudley!"

Impatient of his protest, the old man thrust his nephew into a chair and stood over him with solemn face and an upraised forefinger.

"The next thing you've got to learn, young fellow, is not to be afraid of anything that wears skirts. You've got to treat 'em rough. You've got to show them who's boss. Now, look at me!" He slapped his chest impressively.

But at that moment his sunburned face turned pale beneath his tan, his jaw

dropped, and his eyes stared over the young man's shoulder in terror.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TROUBLE AT LAST!

THE bride, with a tray of glasses, stood in the doorway. She looked at Uncle Dudley for a moment without a word, then very carefully she placed the tray on a small table, squared her elbows, clenched her fists, and swaggered between the astonished Buck and his uncle.

"Fightin' bobcats! I'm glad to see you!" exclaimed May.

Her eyes shot little sparks. Her nostrils were distended, and as she finished this brief speech of welcome she paused to double up her fists once more.

"*You!*" The girl drew a long breath. "You wall-eyed, flea-bitten, bowlegged, mangy cow-thief! You ornery, claim-jumpin', cattle-rustling robber of widows and orphans! You spavined, ring-wormed old son of a gun! Gosh Almighty—I'm sure glad to see you! *Sit down!*"

The last words she brought out with an explosive force that made the old man drop into a chair with both hands upraised in weak defense.

"Aw, say!" he began plaintively.

But she cut him short. "Don't horn in. I've just begun, you white-livered sheep-tender! You—"

"Look here, Red Dempsey, don't you call me that! I never was no sheep man, and you know it."

"Don't you call me Red Dempsey, neither! I don't want you to take my name in your mouth at all, you old polecat. But—" She drew herself up with pride. "If you *must* speak to me in the future address me as Mrs. Buck Logan!"

On her lips the words sounded as if she said: "You may address me as the Queen."

Uncle Dudley turned wrathfully to his nephew. "What's this, you young whelp! My nephew gone and married Red Dempsey!"

But now it was May who put up her hands in feeble protest.

"Sufferin' polecats!" she moaned. "Am

I married into the family of this moth-eaten coyote?"

" You are if you're married to Buck here! Ishaw, you come along with me, boy. This marriage don't stand."

" What do you mean?"

" S-sh now, don't fret. I'll get you a first class gilt-edge lawyer and if you are really hitched up to this here wild cat I reckon a smart law shark can unhitch you." He turned to glare at the girl like a maddened steer. "--That is, if you are really married to her!"

" Really married!" May swung a furious fist in the old man's direction, but Buck caught her wrist.

" Are you both crazy?" he shouted. " I never heard of such a thing!" He turned to his uncle. " Why, I wouldn't give up my wife for a million dollars, not for all the money in the world."

He wheeled upon May. " You're a nice sort of a married woman acting like that! Is that any way to talk to your husband's guests? May, I'm ashamed of you!"

Buck stood between the panting belligerents and folded his arms in the attitude of Napoleon, and, like that hero, he heard the battle rage about his ears! Amid the volleys of heavy gun fire Hiram Blackwell unobtrusively sidled over to his waiting drink, put it away with one gulp and departed.

" You rattlesnake!" cried May, pointing her finger at Uncle Dudley. " You done my old man out of his share of the land."

" Tain't so! We busted up partnership and your dad took six hundred dollars and the buckskin team and moved to Texas."

" And you kept the land—all that land that is worth millions for a measly six hundred dollars and a buckskin team!"

" That was the agreement!" cried Uncle Dudley. " Your paw had the chance to take the cash or the land and he took the cash."

" Yes, but what about all that oil?"

" Now, listen, Red. You know very well that the oil was struck long after your dad left the country."

" You can't wriggle out that way. You know as well as I do that the oil was struck on that little old three-cornered patch near

the draw, that was left out in the first survey."

" Well, what about it?"

" Plenty!" The girl shook an accusing finger at the conscience stricken old rancher as she added: " You can't deny that that piece didn't figure in the agreement when you bought dad's interest. You know that the land was considered so worthless that it wasn't even mentioned in the bill-of-sale."

" Now looky here, Red. You let me alone and I'll pay you fifty thousand dollars."

" Don't call me Red!" May stamped her foot in fury. " And don't talk about a settlement unless you give me half of what you made in oil. You know as well as I do that I've got a half interest in that three-cornered piece of land where the oil is."

" What do you think of that hold-up, Buck?" The old man turned an anxious face to his nephew and he continued plaintively. " What do you think of this gal's story? She's been sending me threatening letters! She's been hounding me! She's been after me for years, and last week she sent me a telegram saying that she was going to sue now that she had come into a little money. What's your advice?"

" My advice is to let her have her own way," replied Buck promptly.

" But my lawyer says—"

" Because if you don't give it to her she'll take it," added Buck with a deep conviction.

" What are you two lunatics fighting about anyhow?" he continued, persuasively. " Hasn't it occurred to you yet that the money's all in the family? Listen, May. Uncle Dudley's going to leave all his money to me anyhow, and what's mine is yours! Isn't that right?"

The girl nodded assent.

" All right. If you force the old man to divide up with you, the most you can expect is half the money—and what's yours is mine, isn't that right?"

The girl laughed. " Sure, Buddy, you know it!"

" So here you two are fighting like tom-cats over *my* money!"

But Uncle Dudley was not so amenable to reason. He shook his grizzled head irritably and muttered. "It's the principle of the thing! It's the principle!"

Buck snorted. "I'm through," he said. "I can understand people fighting for money, or fighting for something they love, or on account of a fighting word, or just for the pure love of fighting, but when they begin to talk about the principle of the thing, then it's a case for the nut-house. Where does the principle come in, anyhow?"

"Well, you see, it was like this," began Uncle Dudley. "Me and her old man didn't part as friends—not exactly. We got into a fist fight over a calf and I knocked out two of his teeth and he bit a piece out of my ear. That's how we come to break up partnership. After that I couldn't seem to see nothing but his faults, and I couldn't see nothin' to admire in his gal, a long-legged, pop-eyed critter with red hair."

"It was not red," exclaimed May. "It was almost as yellow then as it is since I had it 'improved.'"

"She was a red-haired, fightin' bobcat," continued Uncle Dudley. "She was always fightin' with her fists. Pickin' quarrels with the boys, bigger boys than herself sometimes, and beatin' hell out of them. That's why everybody called her Red Dempsey."

"She is not like that now," said Buck with a smile.

"You think not," replied Uncle Dudley ominously. "As soon as I made a little money out of oil I heard from that young woman—threatening letters, mind you, though I wrote her time and again that I was willing to pay her two or three hundred dollars and say nothing more about it. I

was willing to quit any time, only she wouldn't be reasonable."

"Didn't your conscience ever trouble you, uncle," said Buck. "Didn't you ever think it would be the square thing to hunt up that poor little orphan girl and say to her that half your money belonged to her by rights and that you just couldn't bear to keep it any longer."

Uncle Dudley looked at his nephew sheepishly. Before replying he bit off a mouthful from his black plug and then he said:

"To tell you the truth, Buck, that's why I came East. I was going to ask your advice about it, because all my money goes to you, anyway. I was pretty sure you'd say 'yes,' so I fixed up an agreement ready to sign. Here it is!" The old man produced a folded document.

"You were going to make a fair settlement with May all the time! Then what were you arguing about and going on like a wild man."

The old man replied shamefacedly. "The only reason I held off so long was that I've got the reputation of being hard-boiled. That's where the principle comes in!"

"Principle?"

"Sure. I was afeered you might think I had a soft spot!"

"Well, I can't see as there is anything to fight about. May, shake hands with your Uncle Dudley. No—not like that, a regular handshake and a loud kiss."

As May obliged him Buck observed: "Just think, Uncle Dudley, I owe all my happiness to you. I'd never have got this dear little, blue eyed, golden haired wife if you hadn't sent me out on the streets of New York looking for trouble."

"You've found it!" said Uncle Dudley.

THE END



RIN-TIN-TIN

the famous movie dog, will appear as the star in the screen version of

UP FROM THE PIT

By CHARLES AUGUSTINE LOGUE

our Complete Novelette, one of next week's attractions.



The Big Key

By AUGUSTA VAN KIRK

SAMUEL MORTIMER WILSON lay resting under the maple tree's dappled shade. The adoring twins—Adelia and Azelia—kept away the persistent flies by means of long, leafy maple branches. They gave an occasional surreptitious swish to their own bare brown legs, only to resume with greater fidelity the slow waving over their father.

They gazed with loving awe as he lay unconscious of their quiet ministrations. His open mouth was covered by the heavy gray mustache and the gray imperial threw a shadow against the soft pink of his neck, where the loosened collar-band gave freer breathing space.

He lay easily upon his side. One fat hand was folded under the smooth-shaven pink cheek, the other, thrust beyond the hammock's edge, still grasped the battered, fly-specked palm leaf fan.

Upon the breast of the blue-striped hickory shirt was the large nickel silver badge so dear to his heart. "Sheriff" was cut boldly across the middle, and around

the edge, in smaller letters, was "Somerset County."

Protruding from his trousers pocket was the handle of a huge brass key, known familiarly and proudly as "the Big Key." The sheriff's bare feet were stretched in comfort to the grateful cool of Azelia's maple breeze.

The shrill whistle on the Somerset Signal Building announced the hour of noon and disturbed the sheriff's slumbers. He roused, rubbed the returning blood into his cramped hand, stretched luxuriously, and returned the simple smile of Azelia, who happened to be in his easy line of vision. He yawned audibly and sat up on the edge of the hammock, to which the twins put out a steady hand. Then he held up one fat knee after the other while Adelia knelt to put upon his feet the easy carpet slippers.

The sheriff gazed beyond the maple's shade, across the bare yard, worn smooth and hard by the busy, hurrying feet of the twins and their numerous brothers and

sisters, out through the warm May sunshine, past the brick wall of the jail with the high-barred windows to the small porch of the sheriff's residence in front, whence came the dull *thub, thub* of his wife's eternal washboard.

"Run into the house, 'Zely, honey, that's a good girl, and see if your ma ain't got dinner 'most ready."

Before the words were fairly out he was watching the child's willing feet scudding across the hard, hot ground and into the porch. He saw his wife pause, wipe her water-shriveled hands on her wet gingham apron and disappear into the dark of the kitchen. When Azelia came again to summon her father to the meal he had subsided again into the hammock, his eyes closed under Adelia's comforting fanning.

"Wil! we fetch it out hyur, pappy?" Azelia asked eagerly.

He nodded sleepily without opening his eyes and again the bare feet were off like the wind. In a twinkling the little girls reappeared, balancing between them a small rickety table laden with smoking cabbage, hot corn bread and strong black coffee. They stepped quietly. Azelia set down her end and roused her father by a gentle touch upon the hammock. When he was sitting up again and ready to begin his repast she resumed her flybrush, while her sister's slender arms patiently held up her end of the table where two legs were missing.

Married late in life to a widow whom he considered not his equal, the sheriff led the calm, peaceful existence of an Oriental, ministered to by his wife, spoiled and petted by their swarming brood. In the home he accorded them the affectionate neglect other men gave their hounds. When he walked abroad he left them behind. With a harmless swagger of importance and bravery, he was the man of affairs, the public official.

His meal finished, he strolled to the house, where his wife was dishing up the cabbage and corn bread for those behind the barred windows, those whom he chose to call euphemistically "the boarders." He graciously turned the big key and stood back while she carried in the heavy tray. He waited until she had

thrust each man's dinner through the slide in his cell door and returned. Then, the key in his pocket again, he climbed the narrow iron stairway encircling the tier of cells.

Squinting a faithful eye through each tiny peephole in the thick wall, he gazed where their funnel-like mouths opened in radiating command of the whole interior. Mentally pronouncing all well, he returned to the maple shade to "rest his heart."

The day had been an important one in the annals of Somerset County, and the sheriff's office was entitled to rest. For Tough Ben Gregory had that morning been placed behind jail bars after a hard battle, there to await trial for the robbery down at Lime Rock City.

Sheriff Wilson's share in the transaction had been the writing of the robber's name and offense, together with the date, in the jail register. Then he had turned the big key on the unhappy Tough Ben and left him to curse and threaten in peace. The real work of the patient pursuit and clever capture had been performed by the sheriff's deputy, Bud Howell, his wife's son by her first husband.

Bud had now gone back to the hills to bring in Tough Ben's partner in crime, and the sheriff, resting on Bud's laurels, so to speak, was recuperating in the hammock.

If to-day had been important, to-morrow was to be no less so, for it was Decoration Day. There would be speeches and marching and the graves of the soldiers would be decorated with flowers.

To-morrow the sheriff would rise early in order to be in time for the parade at ten o'clock. He would don the old gray uniform which his wife was but now dusting and brushing over the porch railing. There would be the usual anxious ceremony over getting him into it, for it grew tighter and tighter as the years went by.

His wife would be solicitously in attendance while the hovering brood of children would stand silent upon the threshold or rush downstairs and up again with his handkerchief, fresh from the ironing board, or bring his newly blacked shoes. Oh, those shoes! The bare feet used to easygoing carpet slippers would rebel and suffer in the

long tramp through the hot sunshine and dust of Somerset streets, but *noblesse oblige*, on this the all important day of the year.

In his hammock he stretched comfortably and thought of the joyful pain of the morrow. The gathering in Courthouse Square, the greeting of old comrades, the sunshine and the dust, the red-sashed marshal of the day on his prancing horse, the wilting flowers for the graves, the waving flags, the country folk in dusty wagonloads, falling in behind the blaring Somerset Military Band, the line of tramping men winding through the town and up the hill to the little white church, the sticky varnish of the pews, the droning flies as the men listened to the patriotic sermon with its references to the "old guard" and the "thinning ranks"; then the long march down the hill past the jail and the sheriff's residence, where his own noisy brood would be hanging upon the paling fence, whooping lustily as he passed with unturned head and unseeing eyes; the arrival at last at the cemetery, the salutes, and the flowers upon the graves.

Through it all Samuel Mortimer Wilson saw himself the center of interest, the handsome one, posing with just a touch of heart trouble, his white hair and pink cheeks towering above the others—the straightest, the youngest, the jauntiest man in all the marching ranks, the guardian of their peace, the protector of the people, the custodian of the Big Key—in short, the sheriff of Somerset County. All this passed pleasantly through his mind as he lay in peaceful comfort in the hammock.

When the cool of the evening fell, Sheriff Wilson donned the tight gray uniform and the uncomfortable shoes and sauntered through the warm dusk to Courthouse Square. Here he found some of the more enthusiastic of the early arrivals for the ceremonies of the morrow.

These, being innocent of the details of his life, accepted at its face value the story of Tough Ben's difficult capture, and how he had lunged about with his knife after his gun was taken from him. They only saw the glamour and danger of his office and listened open-mouthed to his tales of

personal bravery covering many years. They gazed in awe at his nickeled badge and asked timidly to be allowed to heft the Big Key, which he fingered with such obvious unconcern.

As he walked home in the soft May night with the heavy gray coat over his arm, it was with a sense of well established gallantry. Again he saw the waving flags, the pawing horses, the parading men, the blaring band. He himself was the center of interest, the honored participant.

As he approached the residence he heard the slow *thub, thub* of the washboard. He passed through the porch into the kitchen, where his wife, even at this late hour, was "wrenching out" a few pieces against the morrow's holiday. For while neither she nor her children would leave the place, they yet shone in the fulgence of his glory and must not fail to do him credit.

He kicked off the binding shoes and left them lying on the floor and dropped into a near-by chair. When his wife dried her hands and brought him a glass of fresh churned buttermilk and a piece of cold corn bread he smiled sweetly at her, but uttered no word. She returned to her eternal tasks, and when he had drained the glass he set it on the floor, padded across the kitchen, and climbed the stairs to bed.

In his earliest sleep, confused with the parading of the hosts in gray, were the sound of voices and the stamp of feet. There came a knock upon the stair rail and his wife's imperative summons to come down at once. As he groped about in the dark for his trousers he heard her return to the kitchen. He pinned the badge upon his undershirt, felt for the Big Key in his pocket, and went through the shadowy night to the wide stair leading down to the dim lit cross hall between the residence and the jail itself.

The summons could mean but one thing. Bud had captured Tough Ben Gregory's partner and there would be added glory for the sheriff's office on the morrow.

As he came joyfully toward the first floor he realized that the voices had ceased and only the murmur of the washboard came through the quiet night. Over the stair rail he saw the kitchen to the left and under

the hanging lamp his wife bending unconcernedly over her tub. Straight ahead, across the hall, the polished steel door of the jail gleamed dully in the half light.

But two steps from the bottom the sheriff paused and his heart missed a beat, for a masked man had stepped from the brighter light of the kitchen and stood just beyond the rail. The continued rubbing of the board and the swish of the water testified that he was to face the situation without feminine hysterics.

"Ma, where's Bud? Ain't he come in yet?" he managed to gasp as he clung to the stair rail. But ma only shook her head and continued the rubbing and swishing.

"I didn't come to see Bud," a determined voice issued from behind the handkerchief mask. "I come for Ben Gregory. Cough up there now with that key!" The man banged a fist upon the steel door.

"Ben's partner!" breathed the sheriff, his fascinated eyes upon the bow legs, the undersize of the rescuer from the hills. Then without a murmur he thrust a hand into his pocket and held out the key.

"Samuel Mortimer Wilson, don't you give up that key!" Ma's voice cut the still air like a whip and she stood with her dripping hands resting on the board.

Thus backed up by his wife, he withdrew his hand, only to put it out again as the man advanced.

"Samuel Wilson, you give *me* that key!" Again the whiplike voice and the woman stood at the door peering out into the shadowy hall.

The sheriff leaned over the stair rail and laid it in her wet palm. Without a glance at the intruder she stepped back into the kitchen, dropped the key into the tub of water, and went on with her rubbing.

"Come down there, you! You fish that there key out, and make haste about it, you hear me?" The man advanced threateningly upon the sheriff. "I got a gun in my clo'es, you'll feel pretty quick if you don't."

As the sheriff moved to obey, ma straightened once more.

"The first one lays a hand on my tub will git this dirty water sleshed all over him."

She glared impartially from her husband to the intruder and back again.

From the street came the sound of quick steps and the front door opened to admit Bud Howell, but without the partner of Tough Ben Gregory. Following him was a group of half a dozen young men of the town, come to hear of the pursuit and near capture.

"Ma," said Bud, "got anything to eat? I'm about tuckered out, an' I didn't git that little bow legged cuss, neither."

"And mighty good reason why, too," spoke up the emboldened sheriff. "Here he is now, right under your nose!"

He turned with a flourish to indicate the masked intruder. But with the sound of footsteps that individual had vanished. The open door at the rear gave mute evidence of his route of disappearance. Somewhat dashed, the sheriff yet saw his opportunity.

"I guess you was jest a little mite late, Bud. We just had a little holdup game tried to play on us."

"A hold-up?" Bud's face showed his seriousness.

"Yes, a feller come in here—Ben's partner, he was. I seen his bow legs, an' all, spite of his mask. He wanted I should give him the Big Key. Said he come fer Ben. But I says 'No,' I says, just like that. 'No. Only over my dead body. I'm the guardian of the law,' I says, 'an' Ben Gregory is the prisoner of Somerset County. You git out of here,' I says, 'an' don't you go swearing around here, like that,' I says, 'they's ladies present.' And then, just to devil him, 'cause I see he was so mad, I took and dropped the key in your ma's washtub."

"There," I says, 'fish it out,' I says, 'I dare you to.' But do you know what the white livered cuss went and done? Why, he just snuk off, went out that back door like a streak of lightnin' when I wasn't lookin'. Tough Ben'd ought to be ashamed of that partner of his'n."

"Yes, he ought, like fun!" spoke up one of the crowd derisively. "Why, that masked partner of Ben's, as you call him, was just little Dave Ingalls. And all us fellows was outside peeking in through the

window at the show. It was good as the circus. You been uptown, gassing round, too much, shuriff, and Dave, he's been itchin' to show you up. Oh, you and him was doing fine, you was. You was eating out of his hand. But when Bud showed up I guess Dave didn't feel like getting daylight let through him and so he beat it. Ladies present—haw, haw! It'd pay you to keep a few around handy, all the time, just in case—”

Bud looked up from his supper to the purpling face of his stepfather and the grin faded from his lips.

“ Reckon you boys had better help Dave in his disappearing act. He waved a thin brown hand. “ The sheriff, he's tired. Why, he'd ought to have been in bed hours ago, dreaming about to-morrow. You all beat it now. So long!”

As they trooped soberly through the hall Bud followed them.

“ Reckon I'd better let you boys know that if I hear of airy one of you-all gassin' round about to-night you'll hear from me. I reckon you know I mean business. Just forget it. That's all. So long.”

Sheriff Wilson crept miserably upstairs. But sleep and he were strangers that night. Shame and defiance swept over him by turns. One moment he determined to put on a bold front and face it out to-morrow. The next, he knew he could not. He, Samuel Mortimer Wilson, to be the laughing stock of Dave Ingalls and the Court-house Square gang? He would rather die!

And that gave him an idea.

When at last the tardy morning broke, the sheriff was in the midst of an “ attack.” The gray suit was folded and laid out of sight, the shoes picked up from the kitchen floor and put in a dark corner, the wide hat tucked in its box and shoved far back under the bed.

The sheriff was accepting silently the sympathetic ministrations of the twins, but the hammock was not swinging now. The thoughtful Adelia had tied it fast with ropes on either side.

Bud had gone back to the hills and ma was busy with her chores, with a sigh occasionally for Bud, who ran such danger from Tough Ben's partner. Azelia, poor

sympathetic soul, cringed with the first blare of the band in the square and would have barred the near-by streets from the gay holiday makers. Adelia, having been dispatched for fresh water, came back breathlessly.

“ Pappy,” she began before Azelia could interfere, “ they's a man out in the street, talking to the new boarder through the window.”

“ You-all come with your pappy and le's drive him away.” The sheriff rose stiffly and the little procession moved solemnly to the street beyond the jail, he leading with the white cloth still about his brow, the carpet slippers flapping, flapping. Azelia still bore the maple fly brush and the palm leaf and these she waved absently as she marched.

In the dusty street they found a mild mannered Hill-ikin, as the inhabitants of Ben Gregory's rough township were called. He was huddled under Ben's high barred window, evidently receiving instructions from inside. It was known that Ben had had charge of the loot and that he had managed to hide it somewhere safely before being rounded up by Bud.

“ You-all ain't allowed to hold no converse with no prisoner, not on the outside. That's the law! You have to ast me and I have to let you in and watch you that you don't pass him nothing.” The sheriff's voice, albeit pompous as became his office, yet held a human note of apology.

“ Well, could I go inside and talk to Ben?” the little man's speech was as guileless as his manner.

“ What you aimin' to talk to Ben about?”

“ I'm a friend of his'n and I come to see about gittin' him a lawyer.”

“ He's a-goin' to need one, all right, and a mighty good one, to boot, I reckon, cutting up such didoes like he done, an' top of that, defyin' the laws of arrest. I'll give you jest five minutes.” The pompous tone matched the gesture of drawing the heavy nickel watch from the depths of his pocket.

The little procession was moving toward the jail now, the sheriff leading as always, the small countryman casting furtive

glances to right and left as he sandwiched in between Azelia and her father. Adelia with her basin brought up the rear.

"Suppose you don't know anything about Ben's partner, do you? Bud didn't land him last night, like he calculated."

"No!" the stranger's quiet tones slipped over the sheriff's huge shoulders: "I'm just a friend of his'n and I'd like to help him now he's in trouble."

"Well, mind you don't try to slip him anything, a saw or the like. I'll be right here watching you. You can have just five minutes. Zely, honey, you run in the kitchen, like a good girl, and ast your ma what time it is. I fergot to wind up this morning."

He inserted the Big Key and swung the heavy steel door wide. The little man's glance went swiftly to right and left again as he passed through.

"I ain't never seen inside a jail before," he volunteered timidly.

"Oh, it ain't so bad, wunst you git used to it. My boarders has it pretty good: I keep a first class cook and I let 'em alone long's they behave theirselves." The sheriff's tone was jaunty. He was enjoying himself in forgetting the pain of the night and early morning. "Ben's 'room' is to your right, there, the third one down. We ain't got so many boarders now. Things has been pretty quiet. I'll be right here and my eye'll be right on you. Zely, honey, why ain't you gone to see what time it is, like I ast you to?"

The sheriff was leaning jauntily against the steel door, his bandaged head held high, the carpet slippred right foot crossing the left ankle airily, a veritable picture of the benevolent despot. He was gazing after the little man, who had taken off his hat and was crossing the paved rotunda of the jail on tiptoe as if in a sacred place.

Azelia grasped her father's arm.

"Pappy!" Her voice held the same whip-like quality as her mother's. "You slam that door quick's ever you kin. You got him—you got him. That's the man Bud's out lookin' fer—Tough Ben's partner. You *slam that door!*"

The child's slender arms were pulling

vainly at the combined weight of door and sheriff.

"What you talkin' about, honey? Why, that there's a good man—"

"Slam that door like I tell you! That's the man. Don't you see them bow legs and them little squinchy eyes? I saw him jump when you ast him about Ben's partner and then he all scringed down like he was hit. You just look at them legs and then you slam that door quick's ever you kin."

The man inside had taken alarm and came running toward them, pulling his gun as he came. The sheriff had just time to step back and throw his weight with that of the children, while the door clanged shut against the first shots inside. Then he leaned weakly upon the wall. Adelia cut a joyful pigeon wing, preserving the balance of the water within the bowl, and Azelia rushed off for her father's drops.

"Zely, honey, you give me a double dose of them drops. That's Ben's partner, all right. You children run away, now, so's you won't hear how he's a-cussin' in there. He thought he was being awful brave showin' up here, right under my nose. I knew him in a minute. Ben ain't had time to tell him where the loot was, and anyways he ain't got a chance to git it now, 'cause I've got him all right, and no mistake."

"You tell your ma not to give them boarders no dinner till Bud, he comes and gits that man in a cell. He kin appoint a couple of deputies to stand at the peep holes with guns aimed on him. Bud'll han'le him all right. He'll settle *his* hash!"

Already he was striding to the kitchen, one hand tearing the bandage from his head while with the other he unbuttoned his hickory shirt.

"Ma," he shouted, "you fetch me my gray uniform. I'm feelin' a heap better. I reckon I kin make out to go to the p'rade. Zely, honey, you and Dely git out my shoes and blacken 'em up nice for your pappy, make 'em look just as nice as ever you kin, honey. You-all 'll be proud of your pappy yit. He got Ben's partner. Won't Bud be surprised to think I done it? All by myself, too! Just as slick's cream. Make haste, ma! I hear the band."



Riding Orders.

By EARL C. McCAIN

RICHARD TRENT, his strong, youthful figure garbed in fringed buckskin, swung lightly to the saddle of a spirited sorrel horse and rode leisurely from the Three Crossings change station. Along the upper valley of the tumbling Sweetwater came the Pony Express rider from Red Bluff; the man Trent was to relieve.

As the distant figure drew closer and closer, it gradually took the form of a man on a brindled pony, while to Trent's ears came the thud of flying hoofs. A moment more and Trent recognized the rider as "Pony" Bob Haslam, one of the most famous men in the Pony Express, who, like Trent, could handle a gun as well as a horse.

Trent turned his mount to fall in beside the racing pony, the two animals galloping neck and neck. Haslam twisted in his saddle and freed the mochilla, or leather mail pouch. He passed this to Trent as he leaned a bit closer and cupped his hand to shout:

"Orders are to keep a sharp lookout for trouble. The Fort Laramie office has a report that there may be an effort to interrupt the service within the next few days."

"Interrupt the service! Why?"

"Because there's sure to be war over this slavery question, and the Pony Express is the only communication to California."

"Which side is planning this--the North or the South?"

"Neither one, so far as they can learn. It's a gang of outlaws and crooked politicians in California. They want the State to declare its independence from both sides so they can get control of the gold mining industry."

The racing horses were nearing the station by this time, but Trent leaned forward with another question.

"Where do they expect the trouble to break?"

"Somewhere between Fort Bridger and Fort Laramie. Everybody knows this is a bad Indian country. They figure if they

kill a few riders, they'll break up the service that way."

"All right, I'll pass the word along," Trent replied, and with a word to his horse he raced past the change station.

It was early morning, with less danger of Indian ambush than at night. As Trent settled down to the long twenty-mile ride to South Pass—with only the creak of saddle leather and the thud of the horse's hoofs to break into his meditations—he gave his thoughts to the trouble that Haslam had mentioned.

In a way, the news had not surprised him. He had suspected some such reason a few weeks before when he had been transferred from a quiet run in Nebraska to the Sweetwater and had found Haslam, young Bill Cody, and Jim Moore working runs in the same country. Those men were the best shots and the fastest riders in the Pony Express, and Trent knew that he had been selected because of his reputation in handling the two new Colts that swung at his belt.

Like most express riders, Trent had a fair knowledge of the national situation. He knew that war was looming, with the prospect of breaking out at any moment. California, in the midst of the gold rush, had a strength that was being eagerly sought by both sides, and it likewise contained various factions that were trying to sway the State for personal reasons.

The only communication with the national government and the East was by way of the Pony Express, carrying the mail two thousand miles across desert, mountain and plain from the rail end at St. Joseph, Missouri. In all that long stretch, the section along the Sweetwater—with change stations at long intervals and guarded by only a few men—was the most dangerous, and Trent realized well the possibilities of even a comparatively small band of men seriously interrupting the service.

From the Three Crossings station the route of the Pony Express swung southwest, between the Wind River range and the Green Mountains. This was the country of the Blackfeet, where valleys, gulches and hills twisting in every direction made the menace from Indians doubly dangerous.

Trent was holding well to the north, almost in the shadows of the mountains, when just ahead, he heard the sharp crack of a rifle, followed an instant later by the scream of a woman.

Instantly he checked his horse. The shot had sounded beyond a low ridge, and he cautiously approached the crest. In the valley below, a small band of Blackfeet warriors were busy ransacking a covered wagon and freeing the horses from the vehicle so that they could be driven away. The figure of a white man lay across the wagon seat, an arrow sticking upright in his breast, and beside the wagon lay the body of a woman.

In spite of the grim tragedy Trent began to turn his horse, because it was the first and only duty of the Pony Express riders to keep the mail moving, and he realized that the man and woman were dead. But a shout from the Indians caused him to glance back. One of the savages had just leaped from the wagon, holding a little girl of three or four by one arm.

The sight galvanized Trent into action. With a shout that expressed his own feelings he touched a spur to his horse and clattered down the opposite side of the ridge, throwing the bridle reins across the saddle horn and jerking both his guns from their holsters.

There were five Indians in the band. Three of these leaped to meet the attack, one lifting a rifle while the others tried to fit arrows to their bows. But Trent had caught them unprepared. As the big sorrel charged down on the group, Trent shot the one holding the rifle while his horse sent another sprawling. Even as he passed, he twisted in the saddle and sent a bullet crashing through the breast of the third.

It took a moment for Trent to turn his horse. By the time he had, the other two Indians—one still holding the child—had leaped upon their ponies. One was riding up the side of the ridge, and Trent, drawing closer, swept the warrior from his mount with a well-placed shot.

The remaining Indian was racing toward the upper end of the valley, lashing his pony with his right hand and holding the child with the other. Without thinking

of anything except to save the baby, Trent took up the chase.

The Blackfoot's pony was a wiry little beast, accustomed to racing over the hills. At the end of the valley, where it opened into several little draws, the Indian suddenly jerked his mount sideways and darted away at right angles. Deceived by the unexpected move, Trent rode some distance past. By the time he had checked his horse and turned back the Indian was plunging down the side of another ridge.

For the next mile the chase led across ridges and hills and in and out of valleys; the Indian twisting and turning while Trent clung grimly to the trail. Finally the Blackfoot crossed a low ridge and entered a long, narrow valley that was hemmed in by high walls, and Trent knew the race was over.

As the fleet-footed sorrel bore down on the pony, Trent pulled a little to the left; the side on which the savage carried the child. Closer and closer they drew together, until Trent, leaning to the right, could touch the baby with his left hand. He seized her free arm, and at the same moment, drove the keen point of his knife into the warrior's thigh. As he expected, the Indian released the child, and, twisting back in the saddle, Trent lifted her into his arms.

Realizing that he had already lost much valuable time, Trent turned back toward the Pony Express route as the wounded Indian galloped on through the valley. The child had been badly frightened by her rough treatment, and Trent, holding her to his breast, began talking to her as he rode.

On top of a ridge that overlooked the little valley where he had come upon the Indians, Trent paused for a moment. The horses from the wagon as well as those of the Indians were gone, and Trent saw that the warrior his horse had run down had also disappeared. But about the wagon lay three dead Indians and Trent smiled faintly as he thought of the revenge he had meted out.

As Trent came in sight of the South Pass station, he saw Mitchell, his relief rider, coming to meet him. As the riders met, Trent passed over the mail pouch and said:

"I'm late, but I had a brush with the Blackfeet and stopped to save this youngster. Haslam passed the word that there may be an effort to break up the service within the next few days. Orders are to be on the alert."

"I got the news last night, from Fort Bridger," the other rider answered, and sped away at a fast run.

South Pass was more than a change station. It boasted the only trading post north of Fort Bridger, and the only white girl in that section. The girl was Marjorie Lake, daughter of old Sam Lake, owner of the trading post. It was in front of Lake's cabin that Trent stopped his horse.

As he dismounted with the baby, a slim, dark-eyed girl appeared in the door. There was eagerness in Trent's step, because he had grown to expect Marjorie's welcoming smile each time he galloped into the post. But this time he noticed a difference in her manner.

"I've brought you a baby to take care of," he said, indicating the child. "The Blackfeet had got her pa and ma up in the pass, just before I got there."

The girl took the baby from Trent's arms, but her dark eyes flashed as she said: "I suppose you killed all the Indians?"

"No, I let a couple get away," Trent replied, puzzled, "but I reckon I left both of them in pretty bad shape. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, except that a man with your reputation ought to have killed them all," Marjorie stated. And she pushed the door shut as she stepped back.

Trent stood still for a moment, wondering what had caused the change in the girl. Then, noticing her father at the rear of the cabin, he walked over and asked:

"What the devil's wrong with Marjorie, Sam? I brought in a kid I saved from the Indians, and she acted like an iceberg."

"It warn't the kid that caused it, Dick. Marjorie was in the store when that new superintendent got in from Salt Lake, and was askin' about the riders 'tween here and Fort Laramie. He seemed to know of you, and said you killed a man down in Cherry Creek last winter. Marjorie heard that, and you know she's kinder set ag'in' your reputation as a trouble maker."

"I'm not a trouble maker, Sam," Trent answered quietly. "I simply meet it half-way whenever I find it trailing me. I reckon this fellow didn't explain that I shot in self-defense after that man had pulled his gun to kill me?"

"No, he didn't. But I wouldn't pay no 'tention to it, Dick. Marjorie's like all women. She's a little fussy, sometimes."

"Who is this man?" Trent asked suddenly. "And what's become of Jim Slade, the old superintendent?"

"Slade's quit, so this fellow says, and he's takin' his place. His name is Harper, I think, and he's waitin' at the store to see you. He's kinder mad 'cause you were late."

"All right. I'll go get it over with," Trent replied, and, turning his horse over to Dave Walker, the station man, he set out for the store, thinking more about the girl's behavior than the coming interview.

The store was the most important building at the post; in fact, the only building except for several small cabins occupied by Lake and his daughter, the Pony Express station man, and several trappers. Like Jim Bridger, Lake had come into the country when the Indians had welcomed the trader. He had won the good will of the older chiefs by his fair treatment, and as a result, had never been molested by the red men.

The store was a long, low building of logs, with a counter that served as a bar extending along one side. It had several small windows and a door at either end. With customary quietness, Trent had stepped through the door and was calmly surveying those in the room before his presence was noted.

At the lower end of the counter three men leaned against the bar, talking. One of these was big in frame, with a strong, cruel face, and the butts of two revolvers protruding from his holsters. He wore a coat of cloth, as did his companions, which alone stamped them as men who frequented the settlements. As one of the group noticed him, Trent stepped forward and said:

"I'm Trent, the express rider between here and Three Crossings. Somebody here want to see me?"

"I do," the big man answered. "My name's Harper, and I'm taking Jim Slade's place as superintendent. I want to know what you mean coming in two hours late?"

Harper's tone was mean, and Trent's blue eyes narrowed a trifle. He took his own time before he replied.

"I ran into a band of Blackfeet up in the pass and stopped long enough to rescue a white child they had captured."

"That ain't what you get paid to do," Harper stated. "The only duty of a Pony Express rider is to keep the mail on time. I guess I won't need you any longer, and you better trail it out of this section."

"Is that so?" Trent asked sharply, and there was a steel-like quality in his voice that matched the hard lines about his mouth. "As superintendent, I reckon you've got the right to fire me, even if I did delay the mail to save a child's life. But you or no other man that God ever made has the right to tell me when or where I've got to go."

Harper had stepped from the counter, as if to draw his guns. But he checked the movement of his hand. Trent, too, had stepped out, and his hands hung suspended above the waistline, ready to sweep downward to the weapons that waited in his belt. Harper hesitated, as if debating to risk drawing, then with a careless laugh that failed to ring true, he said:

"I ain't looking for trouble, Trent; I know you're the fastest gunman in the Pony Express."

"I'm not looking for trouble, either; unless I see it heading straight for me," Trent answered, and without saying more, he walked from the room.

Outside the door he paused a moment. It was long since noon, and he had eaten no lunch. Usually he ate the midday meal at Lake's cabin before setting out for Three Crossings with the eastbound mail pouch. But the girl's attitude had made it clear that she didn't want to talk to him, and it wasn't characteristic of Trent to beg consideration of man or woman.

In truth, Trent was in love with Marjorie; had been since his first trip to the post three weeks before. At times he had been certain that she returned his affec-

tion, when she had faced him across the table, or whispered a hurried good-by as he swung into the saddle to meet the incoming rider and take his run.

The one thing that had come between them was his reputation as a fighter; something that had been gained without any particular effort on his part. True, he had learned to shoot even as he had learned to ride, but those things were necessary to existence in the West. And he had never taken unfair advantage of any man, or drawn his guns except when in the right.

Trent felt a certain sympathy for Marjorie's viewpoint. Old Sam Lake's policy had always been to get along in peace, with white men or Indians. Undoubtedly he had trained his daughter in the same principles. But Trent felt that in judging him without hearing his side of the case, Marjorie had been unfair, and it caused him to walk past the girl's door to the cabin of the station keeper.

Walker had already eaten, but his squaw soon placed warm food before the visitor. Trent was talking to the station keeper when Lake came in. The old trader waited until the squaw had left the room, then said:

"Keep your eyes peeled for that feller Harper, Dick. I heard him talkin' to the others after you left the store, and I figger you ain't through with him yet."

"How long's he going to stay here?" Walker inquired.

"I dunno. Several days, I reckon," Lake said. "He wanted to put up at my cabin but I told him I didn't have room. I don't like the way he's been watchin' Marjorie, and I got to get right back 'cause she's alone in the store."

Trent thanked the trader for the warning as he arose. As Lake hurried from the cabin, Walker remarked: "That's funny about Harper staying here so long. Slade used to come through now and then, but he never stayed more than one night here."

It was almost time for Craddock to come in with the mail from the south and Trent accompanied Walker when the station man went to saddle a horse. Seeing no one ready to take his run as the rider appeared on the trail, Trent went to the cabin where

Harper and his friends were to stop. The new superintendent was sitting on the step of the cabin and Trent asked:

"Who's going to take my place? Craddock's already in sight."

"Benton here will take it," Harper indicated the man on his right, "but I'm gonna let him wait until night to start. He'll have a better chance of passing the Indians after dark."

"Oh, no, you're not," Trent snapped, making a sudden decision. "Craddock's coming, and it's more than three hours until dark. When you find a man to handle my run right I'll turn it over to him. Until you do, I'll carry the mail myself."

Trent waited for no reply, nor did he look back to see what Harper and his companions were doing. He ran to the horse that Walker had ready, leaped to the saddle in time to meet Craddock, then galloped toward the great gap that formed the Pass.

As the horse settled to a steady lope, Trent pulled a little to the right, crossing a hill to take the shortest route through the gap. As he reached the top of the ridge he slowed his horse and twisted in the saddle to look back.

In a wide valley east of the post a fair-sized Indian village was making camp for the night. The shape of the lodges indicated that they were Crows and Trent wondered what had caused them to move so far north as he rode ahead.

As the sun dropped behind the higher peaks of the Rockies and twilight faded into darkness, Trent slowed his horse a bit, holding to the center of the valleys where the heavier grass deadened the sound of hoofs. A few miles more and the blinking lights of Three Crossings beckoned from the darkness, then Trent rode into the change station and passed the mail-pouch to Haslam.

There were three men at the station, two of them being guards who had been sent out from Fort Laramie. Though these men had only recently come from one of the headquarters posts of the Pony Express, they knew nothing of Slade quitting or that Harper had taken his place as superintendent. But they had heard of the threatened plan to interrupt the service, and this

formed a topic of conversation until Trent fell asleep.

Haslam came in earlier than usual the next morning and Trent had to hurry his breakfast to relieve the incoming rider. It was still early dawn as he set out for the South Pass station. Halfway through his route he came upon a hunting party of Blackfeet who were slaughtering a small band of buffalo cows, but by hastily ducking behind a ridge Trent passed without being seen.

As he rode into the South Pass station he noticed Marjorie, with the baby he had saved, standing in the door of the cabin. But when he had turned his horse into the corral the cabin door was shut, so he again went to Walker's cabin for his dinner. During the meal Walker remarked:

"I'm kinder worried about that fellow Harper. Old Two Bears and his warriors have made camp just across the ridge, and Harper and his friends insisted on taking the Indians a keg of whisky. Harper says he got old Two Bears to come north to make war on the Blackfeet, so as to keep them away from the Pony Express trail, but I don't like his plan. You can't trust any Indian when he's got a bellyful of whisky."

Trent nodded quietly, though the news worried him a little. Naturally, his first thought was of Marjorie. But he reasoned that since old Sam had always escaped attack by Indians, the post would hardly be molested.

If the Crows were planning trouble, Trent missed their war parties when he relieved Mitchell and rode toward Three Crossings.

He made the entire trip without seeing an Indian. His trip back the next morning was uneventful until within a mile of the post, when he saw Walker coming to meet him. Trent stopped his horse as the station man galloped alongside and said:

"There's hell a poppin' at the post, Trent! Harper and his friends have drove old Sam out of his place, and they're waiting in the store to plug you as you ride in with the mail. Harper's holding Marjorie in the store—for God knows what!"

Trent took a moment for thought, then

jerked the leather pouch from his saddle as he said:

"Take this and slip past the station to the corral, so that Mitchell can take it on. I'll come in through the hills to the south. I reckon I'll have to shoot it out with Harper after all."

As Walker rode away, Trent turned sharply and crossed a ridge that would protect him from view. Then he swung south and rode swiftly until even with the station. From there he cautiously made his way toward the post. Three hundred yards away he dismounted and, leaving his horse in a clump of trees, went forward on foot.

By taking advantage of the bushes he reached the protection of Lake's cabin without being seen, then darted to the corner of the store. Outside the rear door he waited an instant, then with a gun in each hand quietly stepped inside.

The girl, her jacket ripped open and her hair loosened, was facing Harper in one corner of the store; her face so pale that her black eyes showed up in sharp contrast. Beside the door stood Benton and the other man, both armed with rifles and watching the trail, though laughing at Harper's efforts to corner the girl. So quiet had been Trent's entrance that his voice had the whiplike snap of a rifle as he called:

"Here I am, Harper! Go for your guns!"

Harper spun about, his heavy face blank from surprise. In an instant the girl had darted past him and back of the counter. Harper started to duck behind the end of the latter, reaching for his right hand gun, but as the weapon left the leather one of Trent's guns roared and the weapon was torn from Harper's fingers. At the same moment Benton tried to snap his rifle into place, and a bullet from Trent's other gun shattered his wrist.

For a moment Trent crouched, waiting, a smoking gun in each hand. But the fight was over. Harper's hands were above his head, the fingers of his right hand dripping blood. Benton was leaning against the wall, clutching his broken wrist, while the third man's gun was on the floor. Feet wide

apart and his mouth a hard, straight line, Trent stepped closer, waiting an instant before he said:

"I'm not going to kill you, Harper, because I don't want this girl you just attacked to see me do it. But she may not be looking the next time I see you. I'm going to give you fellows the same order you gave me the day you came; that's riding orders to get out of the post."

A shadow darkened the rear door and Trent whirled like a cat. But it was Walker, Mitchell and old Sam, all with guns in their hands. Walker came in first, and sizing up the situation said: "We were waiting to help you, Trent, but you slipped in here before we knew it. We're ready to back your play."

Trent sheathed one of his guns, then jerked the remaining gun from Harper's belt and handed it to the girl behind the counter. Then he disarmed Benton and the other man, and with the other three men backing him up, marched Harper and his companions to the corral. When Walker had saddled their horses Trent forced them to mount, and with a slap of his hat sent the horses galloping away toward the south.

As Trent stood watching, the audacity of the thing he had done--in driving a superintendent of the Pony Express from a station--appealed to him for the first time. But somehow, he felt that it would come out all right. He had seen too much of the Pony Express and its men to think that the company would support Harper when its officials learned what he had tried to do.

Harper and his men were riding south when they suddenly made a sharp turn to the left and bolted across a ridge. Trent was puzzled for an instant, then he saw the reason. Up the trail from the south came a party of nine or ten horsemen, and as they galloped up to the post Trent recognized the lean figure of Jim Slade, once the most powerful man in the Pony Express.

As Slade and his men stopped in front of the station Trent stepped over and said: "I reckon I've just done a pretty wild thing, Mr. Slade. I shot up your successor and drove him out of the post."

There was a quizzical light in Slade's eyes as he smiled at Trent and said: "My successor! What kind of a looking man was he?"

Trent described Harper. As he finished Slade stated:

"That's Bromley, the man we want, and the leader of the gang that was trying to break up the Pony Express. His plan was to claim he had taken my place and get rid of the regular riders, then seize this post as a headquarters for his gang. We got next to his scheme through a friendly Indian who found out that Bromley had got old Two Bears to join him in the plan, and we captured most of the gang when they came into Fort Bridger." He turned to his men and said:

"We'll just scatter through the hills, boys, and finish the job by bringing in Bromley."

As the riders turned their horses, Trent hurried to the store, but there was no one in the building except old Sam. Trent turned toward the cabin, and noticed Marjorie standing in the door. For the first time in three days the girl met him with a smile, and as he reached the door she said:

"You'd better come in to dinner, Dick. I kept it waiting both yesterday and the day before."

"I'm sorry, Marjorie," Trent said quietly, taking her hand as he saw that her lips were trembling. "I suppose I get mad too easily, but it hurt me to think you judged me so hastily."

"I'm sorry I said what I did, Dick; especially after father told me that you did it in self-defense. I think I realize, after to-day, how fair you will always be."

The child that Trent had rescued had come into the room and was pulling at Marjorie's other hand. Perhaps to hide the emotion she felt the girl lifted the baby in her arms, and Trent, wondering just how to proceed, said:

"What are we going to do with her, Marjorie? Jim Slade's here, and we might get him to take her into Salt Lake?"

"We'll do nothing of the sort. The baby's an orphan, and you brought her to me. I'm going to keep her myself."

"But the baby lost her daddy, too, Marjorie," Trent said, suddenly finding a way

to proceed. "Don't you think we had better plan to keep her together?" And the girl, understanding his meaning, nodded. Marjorie's head was nestling against his shoulder when the clatter of hoofs sounded outside. Trent stepped to the door and Slade, riding closer, said:

"We found them, but too late. Bromley gave the Indians whisky, so they would help out in his scheme. When he saw us coming he and his friends rode to old Two

Bears's village. But the Indians were all primed for a massacre, so before they pulled down their lodge and lit out for the south they got action by killing the three white men. That settles the plan to break up the Pony Express, and I'm going to make things safer all along the Sweetwater by placing these men of mine as extra guards at the various stations." And Trent, as he stepped back to the girl, knew that the Pony Express was safe.

THE END



THE LITTLE SONGS

I WOKE to-day at half past five,
My heart was sick unto despair;
But, oh, 'twas good to be alive
When all the bird songs filled the air!

This morning in the market place
Where carts with cabbages were filled.
A huckster man with rugged face
An air from "Rigoletto" trilled.

Up where the wheels of commerce roll,
A man whose eyes are dimmed with age,
Sang "There is Sunshine in my Soul."
Within his elevator cage.

A stalwart man stood in the sun
At noon, and turned the semaphore;
He smiled at autos one by one,
And sang "It ain't a goin' to rain no more."

I watched a builder on the edge
Of yonder scaffold—on tiptoes
He worked his way along the ledge,
And whistled "Mighty Lak a Rose."

To-night I sought the open road,
I met a man upon the way
Who carried on his back a load,
And sang the while "A Perfect day."

The little songs I heard among
The crowds to-day—I love them so!
God bless the singers who have sung
Them, ah, far better than they know!

Sophie E. Redford.



Socker Dooley - Matchmaker

By **CHARLES FRANCIS COE**

FIGHT night! Surging crowds, tense anticipation, excited prognostications, and a mad scramble for the choicest of the seats. Through a narrow aperture come the pasteboards that designate the spectators' location. There isn't much of a system for selling them. One is apt to find one's self rubbing elbows with anything from a Senegalese *bon vivant* to a prosaic milkman.

On the night in question Socker Dooley, one-time world's champion, found himself rubbing shoulders with a decidedly distinguished appearing gentleman who later proved to be none other than W. P. Luthers, lawyer of note and rabid fistic fan. Socker looked the gentleman over and drew his own conclusions. Luthers did precisely the same thing as to the famous fighter.

"Smoke?" The lawyer queried, at the same time proffering a cigar of mellow flavor.

"Tanks, Cull!" The huge hand of the fighter closed over the weed avidly and he bit the end off and felt for a match. "A smoke ain't de woist thing in de woild w'en a guy's doin' nuttin' but wait, huh?"

"Indeed not! I find it most enjoyable. Acts somewhat as a sedative to the natural excitement of the moment." The man was eying the evidences of Socker's ring past and seemed anxious to talk with him that he might learn whence they came.

"Excitement!" gasped Socker, turning, the better to face his new acquaintance. "Yuh don't mean tuh tell me yuh kin git excited over uh night uh fightin' like dis is gonna be! Honest tuh Gawd now—kin yuh?"

"Of course. I look forward to a night of fast, hard scrapping. Don't you?"

"Same old stuff, captain. A few bums dat 'll swing wild punches until dey gits tired 'nuff fer the udder guy tuh hit 'em. Den—curtains!"

"Well, well! I understand that this Muncher Madden is a real comer. They tell me he is a highly educated chap and fights with his head as well as his hands—going through college right now, I heard!"

"De old bull, commissioner! Dere ain't a real pug in de business no more. All bums. Dey spill dis bunk about Dempsey havin' millions. He gits dat in de afternoon papers only. Once in a great while, w'en news is scarce and guys w'at write ut is in uh hurry, he gits ut in de evenin' editions, too. But don't swallow dis comer stuff no more'n yuh do dis Dempsey bunk. Believe me, I know! Dat's de real Siwash hokum, dat is!"

"But, my dear fellow, somebody makes tremendous sums out of these bouts! Look about us even now. A good forty minutes before the time set for the first preliminary, and the house already half filled. There must be several thousand dollars spent for just a little show like this. Think of the money Dempsey draws!"

"Lissen, chief. I hates tuh tell yuh de facts! De public is all damn fools! Dey don't know nuttin' erbout de ring game. Any money de promoters don't git de managers and matchmakers does! Don't get me wrong, I ain't kickin'. I seen me day and I cleaned up durin' it, too. If I thrun de dough away—dat's my fault!"

"I rather thought you were a fighter!" The lawyer nodded wisely as he spoke, as though in disclosure of some magic mental power or cunning which had revealed to him the subtle fact that Socker Dooley, with two tin ears, two shantied eyebrows, and a face that showed the marks of better than a hundred and fifty ring battles, was a battler. A blind Indian riding a celluloid bison through the catacombs would have grasped the fact instinctively.

"Sure—man, I'm Socker Dooley!" There was nothing more needed. The words were as magic. Friendship was sealed on the spur of the moment, and

any culture, polish, veneer or fictitious elevation that might have been a part and parcel of the lawyer's education and success was absorbed like lightning in a swelling of the chest contingent upon proximity with the ring great.

The lawyer's cigar shifted to a somewhat tough angle in the corner of his mouth. He pulled his derby into a slightly more tilted position, slouched in his seat, and cast a gunman eye over the near-by spectators.

"Well, believe me, Socker, somebody is cleaning up big in this fight business! You can't tell me that a shrewd fellow who knew the game couldn't make a mint of money running fights."

"It's a business in utself, cove. Take a tip from uh guy as knows—don't tackle de thing widout yuh knows de game inside and out!"

"I wasn't thinking of the thing from a personal angle. It rather struck me that a chap with your fame and knowledge would make a deal more money in that end of the game than in actual fighting—that's all."

"Don't start dat, judge—please don't start no line uh talk like dat. Yuh ain't spillin' no new idees tuh me! I seen w'at I thought was uh chanst once. Well—tuh hell wit' ut! Chant me one uh dese here bedtime stories if yuh feel like ut—but lay offen de business end uh de fight game!"

But it is a trait of the legally trained mind to argue. The lawyer, having made an assertion that had all the appearances of possessing logic, was adamant about deserting his stand on the casual statement of even a Socker Dooley.

"Just the same, Socker, there's money in it. These fellows aren't running things like this just to see the fun! I maintain there is a barrel of money in the business end of the game. I bet I could make it, too—all things being equal."

"Whatcha broadcastin'? Yuh don't know de game! Yuh ain't got de—"

"I bet I could, just the same!" with the air of one sticking to his guns.

"Yuh don't know what ye're gassin' about! Any guy dat tries tuh horn intuh

dat game has growed uh wen in place of uh head. A wart on de back uh his neck ud hide even dat!"

"Just because you lost money on one venture doesn't disprove—"

"Who lost money? I never lost no money on promotin' fights. Where'd yuh git dat brain spasm?"

"But you said—"

"I knows w'at I said. I said don't talk tuh me erbout dat end uh de game. I ain't cuckoo, sheriff! I never lost uh dime promotin'—dat is, direct."

"I thought so! The money is certainly paid in to some one—"

"Wait 'n I tell yuh!" Socker groaned, as if in tolerance of the other's ignorance. "Wait 'n I tell yuh!"

II.

"I WAS up in Boston after a bout wit' Sloppy Ingersol. He was de guy w'at used tuh slop around de rcpes so much dat de contortionist union voted him intuh de organization and outa de ring. After de bout—I knocked dat bird so cold de windows covered wit' frost—I figgers I'll look over de town where Washington gave birth tuh de nation.

"All de news writers is playin' me big, and, wit' me pitchers in de papers all de time, folks was bound tuh rec'nize me on de streets. Fine'ly a swell guy lamps me on Boston Common, and I knows right away dat somethin' is doin' 'cause dere ain't so many swell guys on dat Common durin' business hours.

"Dis must be Socker Dooley hisself!" de swell bimbo gurgles.

"It ain't nobody else," I says.

"Excellent!" he says. "I was on de point of lookin' yuh up. I am William Preston Addams. In addition tuh which I am president uh de Mazanita Athletic Club, of which yuh doubtless has heard."

"Doubtless," I says. "Doubtless. Me and de Mazanita Athletic Club has met."

"Excellent!" He wheezes once more. "I am on de point of askin' yuh tuh talk tuh our membership—"

"I does me talkin' wit me mitts," I says, easin' him outa me way. "I'm on me way

tuh see where Paul Revere got up at midnight just tuh go fer uh ride—"

"Excellent! My dear seller, just trot erlong up wit' me and give thuh membership an exhibition of wat is tuh be did wen de lunch hooks is flung fur and wide. We are very anxious tuh instill de members wit de athletic fever. Yuh are just our man!"

"Half de time I didn't know wat he was sayin'. He was callin' 'fever' by de name uh 'fervor,' and tryin' tuh make on he was educated! But he was good enough tuh talk me into goin' up tuh dis Mazanita hang-out and I gotta confess dey had a whale of a dugout there!"

Socker dragged vociferously at his dying cigar and exuded over his battered lips a veritable deluge of smoke. Then he continued:

"Wait'n I tell yuh. Dey has a club-house wat had everything in ut tuh make a athletic fat man happy. Yuh could spend hours in de gym widout workin' up a sweat. De athletic director was runnin' business men's classes, and I looks over a line uh guys pullin' weights dat woulda made de United States Senate look like a Chinook school uh cookin'! And ut takes a damn wise fat man tuh look good in flappin' drawers, believe me!

"Dat night dey throws a feed intuh me dat ud knocked Ponzi intuh de church choir. After de feed dis Addams gent rises up on his hind legs and I wish yuh coulda heard wat he said tuh dem birds.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! He says dey is all members and should be interested in bringin' erbout great reform uh de nation by perfectin' deyre bodies. Here I was, he says, a fighter uh renown wat had come tuh tell dem how tuh do things.

"I got such a kick out uh de old whiskers speech I never knew ut when he sat down. But den I gits up and I tells 'em some things dey never heard in dat place before!"

"After dat dey talks erbout expenses, and I can't help but laugh. Here is dat gang wid a hall big enough tuh fight de champ battles in and make ut pay—and dey're tryin' tuh figger on makin' expenses!"

"Wait'n I tell yuh! I gits up agin. 'Gents,' I says, holdin' up me hand like uh

trafic cop, 'yuh ain't got de right idee. Listen tuh Socker Dooley uh minute. Den I tells dem tuh start uh fight club in de hall and git a good man tuh run ut on uh percentage. Dey'll pay expenses and build uh new hall in a year, I tells 'em.

Dey gits all steamed up over de idee and falls heavy. Den dey asts me will I be matchmaker uh de club on uh percentage. Will I? Ast me three times an hour, will I? All me life I been thinkin' how soft fer de guys wat make de matches, collect de well known sock linin' and leave de udder guys fight! I takes de job.

"Three days later dis president is after me tuh know wen we holds de first bouts. Uh course, dey wants de first night tuh be de big start, and I tells him tuh leave dat part tuh me and I'll git de best boys in de game fer half wat dey'd get anywhere else.

"I did, too! I let's de woid git out dat I'm running de club and all me old pals and enemies git in touch wit me. It was wen Hoofer Dant shows up dat I gits me first bad idee. I hates dat guy like uh manager hates uh loser, and his line uh gab makes me sore.

"'Socker, old kid,' he says, 'yuh are runnin' a fight club at last. huh? Well, old-timer, we'll fergit bygones and be friends. I'd like tuh work here against any good man, and I figgers yuh won't let past things stop me, huh?'

"'No, I won't, Hoofer,' I says. "Our first bouts is three weeks from tuh-night, and yuh can figger on workin'. I'll pay yuh two hun'nerd bucks, which yuh split wit de udder guy any way yuh agrees between yuh.'

"He stalls about de price, but I stands pat, and he signs up. Wait'n I tell yuh! I hates dat bum, and I figgers right away I'll git him uh nice lickin', see? I signs up a guy wat I knows kin lick him! De idee seems like uh good one, so I thinks uh three udder guys I don't like, too. I gits a guy sure tuh lick every one uh dem!"

A grin that bespoke considerable satisfaction with the progress of the tale adorned the lawyer's face as he grasped the situation. Socker saw it and raised his finger in admonitory gesture.

"Wait'n I tell yuh, now. Wait'n I tell

yuh. I got one guy in mind wat I hates like I does horseshoes in boxin' gloves! Yuh may know uh him—Warty Williams?

"Well, anyhow. Dis Warty guy tries tur double-cross me once wen we was doin' an exhibition before de highbrow Library League up in New York State. I has tuh knock de big bum intuh de lap uh a society lady and beat it from town wit all de cops trailin' me wit a flock uh warrants fer man-slaughter!

"Den, anodder time, I gits all matched up with some guy in Troy. I never knowed who ut was till I got tuh de club ready tuh fight. Dere was a fifteen-hun'nerd-dollar gate, and I hadda beat ut away widout fightin' because de udder guy was dis same Warty Williams, and I knowed he'd squawk tuh de cops about de warrants. Oh, I hated dat guy awright!

"So I signs him up, not lettin' him know it was me dat was gonna pay him. Den I starts lookin' eround fer a real fighter dat was sure tuh beat de bum up while I stands dere lookin' on and laughin'.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! Not two days after dat de president uh de club comes in and says he has brought in a kid wat thinks he kin fight. Will I box wit him? I did. If dat kid thought he could fight I don't know wat woulda happened if he'd woke up. Take ut from me, he could fight like de hammers uh hell! Wow! Wat uh right he did swing! And a left hand dat was like a knittin' needle—workin' steady and findin' holes every time!

"'Who is dis kid?' I asts.

"'He calls hisself de Enigma', de old guy gurgles. 'Dat 'll do so long as he kin fight.'

"'Well, he kin do dat, president,' I says. 'I'm here tuh tell de world dat if yuh leaves dis kid wit me fer two weeks he'll give de best uh dem a run!' So dey leaves him.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! I teaches de guy tricks plenty and he can damn near keep me busy before two weeks goes by. Den I gets me second big idee. Hatin' dis Warty Williams like I does, and achin', like I am, tuh see him git licked, I plans on puttin' de Enigma in against him! De kid is dead sure tuh kill Warty!

"An dat's de way things set right up tuh de night uh de bouts. But all de time I got me plans complete. I'm figgerin' dat I'm all set in de business end uh de fight game and soon I'm gonna stand back and gather in de kale fer watchin' udder guys swap punches.

"Den de night uh de fights comes round.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! Don't think fer a minute these guys I figger on seein' licked is bums! Dey is all old-timers what has done me dirt at some time er udder. Don't think I ain't usin' me head on de business end, too! I got dese matches lined up tuh make some money fer meself as well as de club.

"In de first bout I got Hoofer Dant fightin' Ding Deebon. Ding is dead sure tuh win. So I lays a bet dat way, see? Business! Me not bein' no pug alone I uses me bean. I'll see de fun, git de guys I don't like uh nice lickin' and win some mint moss fer meself. Business? Was dat business? Ast me a coupla more times!

"De second bout is Slink Meyers ag'in' Radio Gray. Slink is a guy wat could lick Dempsey if he had any heart. But he's yellah. Fight? Slink looked like one uh dese fast movin' pitchers till he got hit on de arm. Den he folded up like an Arab's tent and a trained nurse er first class stenographer woulda beat his head off!

"Dis Radio Gray is uh hell of a nice guy. Dey calls him Radio because his arms was full uh waves, and I figgers he's bound tuh wave one onto Slink's dial inside two minutes uh workin'. Den out goes Slink. I lays fifty bucks on de Radio Kid and figgers ut profit from good business sense.

"Next comes Bum Winkle and Kid Rounds. Bum is de kinda guy wat bores in wide open, both hands swingin' wild. He's done dat so long dat his face looks like uh topographic map uh de Andes Mountains. He's only got two teeth left in his dome.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! Deyre ain't a man livin' dat kin remove molars along wit dis Kid Rounds! He's got a fast, straight left wat is complete ruin fer mastication. I seen him jab Young Skeet one aftanoon and Skeet walked eround fer a week wit his

chin in his mitt. Somethin' like four teeth was gone!

"Take ut from me, I laid a bet on ev'ry bout. There I was, Socker Dooley, fighter wat knowed thuh game, dippin' in wit both mitts tuh de easy graft uh de game. I never said nothin' tuh nobody erbout thuh bets. And nobody thought tuh ast me nothin'. Thuh president hung eround uh lot, but he was so interested in de Enigma dat he didn't think uh nothin' else.

"I seen him and de board uh gov'nors whisperin' among demselves whenever me and de kid was workin' out together. I had tipped dem off dat de kid was tuh fight Warty Williams and I was dead sure dat he was gonna win. Dey seemed tuh like de kid a lot, not only because he could fight, but he was like dem in his looks and talk.

"Wait'n I tell yuh—dat kid never called me nothin' but 'Mr. Dooley.' Never 'Socker.' He was a gent, dat kid was! I found out afterward dat his people come over on de Mayflower. In de cabin, too; dey wasn't no deck hands! Dis Enigma woulda looked good in anybody's matinée, and de way he talked was like one uh dem lords wat marries a sewin' machine girl and dumps uh couple uh kindoms intuh de brook instead uh marryin' de rich and beautiful princess!

"Now, I ast yuh, inspector, wasn't dat layin' some real business lines? I hadda bet on ev'ry fight and ev'ry fight fixed up de way I knowed my man ud win! Talk tuh me about business! Me, I was matchmaker! And I could see meself rakin' in de willin' dollars fer watchin' udder guys fight! Tell me, was I crazy?"

"So far, so good, Socker!" The lawyer nodded. "It may not have been highly ethical—but business possibilities would seem to lurk in the arrangements as outlined—"

"Awright! Now wait'n I tell yuh—"

III.

"DE house was packed right up tuh de rafters! I seen I was due tuh make thuh money on me percentage tuh double de bets I had made. De president was sittin' in a box and on de udder side uh de ring

was a box full uh guv'nors. I had Eddie Lawrie refereein' and anythin' dat gits by dat bird won't matter anyhow.

"Bein' as it's de first night I figgers I oughta run things off snappy, so I climbs in de ring just before de first bout and I makes 'em a speech. I tells 'em dat dey is gonna see a night uh fightin' dat 'll make de Northern Lights look like one uh dem lamps wat Lincoln studied under. I tells 'em fightin' is me whole trade and I brought togedder boys wat I knows is gonna push boxin' gloves till dey'll look like bees swarm-in'. Dey cheers me pink, dat gang. De president, he smiles like a newly elected Congressman, and waved his mitt like politicians pat little boys on de head wen dey're votin' fathers is dere.

"Then in comes Hoofer Dant, and de gang gives him a welcome dat makes him dizzy. Him bein' more er less of a bum he couldn't see he was gittin' by on my name as a matchmaker! Then in comes Ding Deebon. Gee, dat kid looked good dat night! I figgers he'll go round dis Hoofer guy like a cooper round a barrel and make me de easiest fifty bucks ever!

"But somethin' happened. I ain't sure even yet wat it was. Ding comes out at de bell. He stalls Hoofer offen his feet and sticks a snappy right tuh de bum's muncher. Hoofer goes back on his heels all set tuh take de dream punch walkin', but Ding stands dere and looks foolish! He said afterward dat he hurt his hand with de punch, but he didn't hurt 'em both and if he pushed Hoofer wit his left de big cheese woulda gone down fer de count!

"Hoofer fans back intuh dis world and rushes in blind. I seen him clinch and I hollers tuh Ding tuh watch his head. But it didn't do no good! Ding leaves dis insect tuck his bean right under his chin. Up comes de head wen dey break and Ding's head flies back so hard de hinges creaked. Before he could git it back intuh place Hoofer is bowin' tuh de crowd, Lawrie is asleep and I is out fifty bucks!

"But de crowd is happy. Dey cheers de action and gets steamed up plenty fer more. I pockets me grief on account uh de nice percentage I'm makin'. Ding shoulda won, I says—but dat was luck!

"Den along comes Slink Meyers and Radio Gray. Gray looked purty dat night, too. He was in de pink and ready tuh put up de fight uh his life. In de first round he waved dem flippers uh his like uh ribbon in uh breeze. And de wind was all blowin' Slink's way, too! How he did sock dat bimbo! Slink's head bobbed like one uh dem little silver balls wat yuh see dancin' on de water in a shootin' gallery.

"I was back uh Slink's corner, and wen he come in fer de first rest he sees me.

"'Say, wat de hell are yuh doin'?' he says. 'Has yuh got guys outside throwin' gloves at me, too?' Dat's how sweet dis Gray was workin'.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! In de second round he hit Slink so often and so fast dat Slink dropped his hands and tried tuh start over! And right dere comes de sad news. Gray, him bein' beautiful and dumb, drops his hands tuh see what's a matter. When he picks 'em up again I'm anudder fifty bucks short and sore as a split lip. Slink wipes off his chin wit one wild welt wat turned de Radio gent's smile intuh de Rock uh Ages!

"Well, I says—dat's Fate!

"Den comes Bum Winkle and Kid Rounds. Here, I says, is where real fightin' takes a hand and de best man wins. I'm sore erbout losin' de hun'erd bucks, but I grin just de same. I'm so damn sure uh dis Rounds pickin' dis Winkle intuh uh French antique dat I has laid a hun'erd bucks on de bout instead uh fifty.

"Yuh shoulda seen dat crowd wen de boys show inside de ropes. Dey was yellin' deyre heads off fer me because I was such a hellin' good matchmaker!

"De first round, Rounds sticks dat left uh his'n intuh Winkle's face so much de big bum got used tuh it! Fine'ly de kid crosses a pretty right. Bum Winkle's arms shook like streamers in front of an electric fan, and I lays back happy. Dere he goes, I thinks. But de bum kin take ut. He spits out his last two teeth, grins like de Grand Cañon wit a fog liftin' outen ut, and sails intuh Kid Rounds like Columbus musta run fer de beach!

"Dat dere was a fight! De crowd didn't feel deyre seats till de bell. Pop, pop, pop, went dat sweet left uh de tooth yanker's.

Slug, slug, slug! went dem mitts uh Winkle's. Boy! Dey worked so hard and fast dat I fergot me bets and hung on de ring like a barnacle on a battleship. But Bum bored in too hard and fast, fer de Kid Rounds didn't have de sock tuh lull de tough guy tuh sleep. De law uh averages slips over a wild right and down goes me last bet!

"None uh de bums dat I hated had ever fought so good before! Wen I sees Kid Rounds curl up like a mattress spring I knows ut ain't luck. And it couldn't be Fate either. Not twice in de same place on de same night!"

"Dat, I says, weak and unhappy, is *Destiny*!"

"Wait'n I tell yuh—de crowd is gone cuckoo. Dat's de way wit fight gangs. Show 'em a coupla sleep punches and dey loses deyre nut completely. Even de high-bred president is gittin' a kick outa ut all. And de Board uh Gov'nors is gone so far dey is spittin' on each udder's feet rather dan take deyre eyes offen de ring!"

"Bring on de Enigma! Bring on de Enigma!"

"Ever'body is all steamed up fer de main bout. Nobody knows dis Enigma, but I seen dat de president and de gov'nors is as excited as de crowds. Later on I learns dat de cagey old president has laid a thousand dat de Enigma wins. Not only dat, he's got five hun'erd from each uh de Board uh Gov'nors tuh lay de same way. My Gawd!"

"Wait'n I tell yuh—Warty Williams shows up and takes his corner. Gawd how I hates dat bum! Wen he sees me dere he grins kinda queer and raised all dat was left uh his eyebrows. He tries tuh make believe like we're old pals wat has fergot all dat mighta happened. Like hell we is!"

"Who's dis Enigma guy, Socker?" he asts. "Dis here is your club and I'm gonna give yuh de real stuff tuh-night! How long does yuh want me tuh carry dis button clerk erlong?"

"Wen yuh see dis Enigma yuh're gonna pass intuh a Tut-Ankt-Amen, Warty," I says. "Dis boy kin fight like you only dreamed about!" De crowd gives Warty a

big hand. Dey begins hollerin' deyre heads off fer de Enigma gink.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! De kid ain't showed up! My Gawd, wat a mess! Dey hunts all over the club fer him and don't have no more luck dan a guy sellin' tickets tuh a park bench New Year's aftanoon!"

"Right away de crowd starts cat-callin' fer de big bout. Warty sits over dere in his corner swingin' his mitts and actin' like he didn't care who was led in tuh be slaughtered. But all de time I knows he's wonderin' if he collects even if he don't fight. Fine'lly he calls me over.

"'If dat kid don't show, I collect his forfeit, don't I, Socker?'

"'If he don't show and yuh fight somebody else, yuh does,' I tells him. Den I goes tuh de president and asts his advice. De poor old gink is half way between paralysis and sordid liver.

"'A thousand dollars!' He moans. 'One thousand American leather men dat dis Enigma wins—and how can he win if he don't fight?'

"I seen dat Wilbur Preston Addams was slippin' loose from his codfish background and gittin' downright human even he did have a mortgage on de country his ancestors built.

"'Yuh're righter dan de opposite uh left, prexy,' I tells him. 'If dis Enigma don't show up yuh lose yuhr dough—re—mil!'

"Once more he groans. 'And de guv'nors! De poor, poor guv'nors! Actin' upon my advice dey has each took five hun'erd buttons of wealth and happiness dat de Enigma wins!'

"'Which gives yuh company uh de right sort,' I tells him. Den I steps intuh de center uh de ring. I seen de time had come wen a real matchmaker should give de fans wat dey paid tuh see—a fight.

"Wait'n I tell yuh—I musta looked like a one man pageant walkin' out dere. I hold up me hook and de crowd quiets down.

"'Gents,' I says, all dignity and confidence, 'you has paid money tuh see a real fight. Yuh seen three uh dem, but I knows yuh been lookin' forward tuh dis main bout as de show uh de evenin'. Awright! Dis Enigma has took cold, I

guess. He gathered up uh set uh chilblains dat has prevented his walkin' tuh de club—'

"De boos dat come was like a cellar bowlin' alley! I see de president shrink down in his box like a sardine nestles intuh oil. A glance at de well known Board uh Guy'nors near turned me cold. Dey was gazin' at de president like he was a smilin' traffic cop, or uh salesman dat hated tuh talk--or some udder thing dat nobody ain't never seen yet.

"Dat president sure had amalgamated a mess uh troublesome detail fer hisself!

"'Socker Dooley is gonna give yuh a fight!' I says. And yuh shoulda heard 'em cheer. Warty heaves uh sigh uh relief 'cause he sees dat forfeit money is comin' his way and I knowed de dirty bum wouldn't run away from no two hundred bucks!

"'Yes, sir,' I says, 'Socker Dooley is gonna furnish uh flock uh listic joy dat'll knock yuh off'n yer seats.' I slips me coat off and hangs it on uh ring post.

"'He's gonna furnish a evenin' uh welts dat'll live in his'try like Napoleon at Valley Forge! He's gonna toss off dese clo'es and step intuh dis pavilion uh poke hisself!'

"'My Gawd!' I hears Warty grunt. He's wise now dat I'm gonna fight him meseli. I've took off me pants and de crowd sees dat I'm all set in me boxin' trunks. Warty'd like tuh dive fer freedom—but two hun'ered bucks is uh lotta money fer uh guy like dat—and de crowd was knee deep!

"I flings me pants over de ropes and starts fer me corner. Eddie Lawrie says ever'thing is Hoyle as we weighs in de same and de club has got uh substitution clause in Warty's contract.

"Wait'n I tell yuh, mayor. By de time I has de gloves on me mitts de crowd is chantin' cheers like a Hindoo medicine man at mass. Dis night has put de Mazanita Athletic Club on de map, even if ut does look like de president and guv'nors is gonna dissolve!

"I kin see by Warty's face dat he's thinkin' erbout thuh Library League—and dat udder bout wat he done me outen! Dis here is Massachusetts! All de New

York warrants in de woild ain't gonna help dat sandbag slugger now!

"Now wait'n I tell yuh!"

IV.

"At de very first bell Warty comes outa his corner like he was trappin' raw lions fer lunch! He wipes across a right dat chilled de president complete. I ducks ut, drops intuh a clinch and whispers tuh Warty some uh de things wat's comin' his way soon. He tries uh rabbit punch on me neck and I sees his elbows workin' eround tryin' tuh cripple me up. I knows he's fightin' des'prit and tryin' tuh git ut over quick by dirty work.

"Wait'n I tell yuh! Just fer de way he was actin' I rubs me hair in his lips and mugged him under de smeller wit de grip uh me glove. After de first clinch he comes clear wit his nose lookin' like a rawsberry and tears ruinin' outen his eyes like uh professional mourner. Just tuh show him I meant it all I jabs his beezer sweet and snappy and dances back tuh leave him figger things out in his own way!

"He ain't so anxious tuh rush after dat! He dances eround a little, cusses at me under his breath, then covers up like de entrance tuh uh tomb. I opens him up wit a sock on de back and wen he straightens, I miss a left jab so dat me arm slips over his shoulder. When de time is right I bends me wing quick and me elbow slides intuh his throat till he musta felt like uh pelican. By dis time Warty sees dat he's in fer as sweet uh lickin' as a guy kin git.

"Just before de bell uh de first round I crosses me right and down he goes. I don't wear no wrist watch, but I knows when ut's less'n ten secunts tuh de bell! At de count uh seven de bell rings and de seconds drag Warty tuh his chair and feed him smellin' salts till he's back in Boston.

"He comes up fer de next round lookin' like a guy livin' in de death house wen a keeper has just finished tellin' him about de nice, new 'lectric chair wat de State has bought. I kids him erlong, never hittin' him hard enough tuh put him away, but tormentin' dat bum sweet and purty! All de time I'm thinkin' uh de things he has

did tuh me—and ev'ry time I think uh dem I socks poor Warty on a diff'runt spot.

"Wait'n I tell yuh—I carried dat guy erlong dat way fer five rounds! I had him beggin' me tuh knock him cold and tellin' me tuh take half de purse dat was his'n. But I kids him just de same. I wanted tuh prove tuh him wat a skunk he was. De crowd was bellowin' like a mad bull. Greatest fight dey ever see! All but de president and guv'nors. Dey was glum as a present day barroom.

"Fine'lly I creases Warty straight tuh de chin, after tellin' him I was goin' tuh. He went down like uh lead elevator. Lawrie counts him out and thus ended thuh first—and last—fight bill uh de Mazanita Athletic Club!

"See, mayor—I didn't lose no money promotin' de fights! De club made uh little jack, de crowd saw uh whale uh a night uh fights—all dem things run off smooth. But wait'n I tell you!"

"I'd been layin' fer dis Warty Williams gink fer uh long time. I seen me chanst tuh git him in dat fight outside New York State, see? *So I had de Enigma kidnaped just as he was startin' fer de club!* I hid him in a barn up tuh Andover.

"Now wait'n I tell yuh! 'Member wat I was sayin' erbout dis kid bein' uh educated bimbo? Didn't I tell yuh dat he talked like uh actor? Well, dat Enigma guy come from Chicago. Ever'body out dere was in de know on him! He was doin' dis fightin' thing fer uh lark! All his rel'tives and close friends was sittin' up late dat night tuh hear wat he done way off in Boston. Instead uh hearin' wat uh hero dis guy was, dey hears me makin' uh bum outa him by dat speech I makes in de ring! De papers quit callin' him de Enigma and names him 'chilblains' after wat I says in de ring!

"And wait'n I tell yuh—strike me fer uh Kaffir princess wit uh flowin' beard if dis Enigma's real name ain't Wilbur Preston Addams! I've dumped de reputation and valor uh forty-nine generations uh aristocracy plumb intuh de dear dark ages. *De damn kid was nobody less'n de president's nephew!*

"De Mazanita Athletic Club may be runnin' fights yet, fer all I know! Mebbe de Enigma is makin' uh mint uh gelt under some foney handle—mebbe de club has got rich runnin' fights—but take dis from me—don't git tuh meddlin' in uh game as treach'russ as dis one!"

THE END

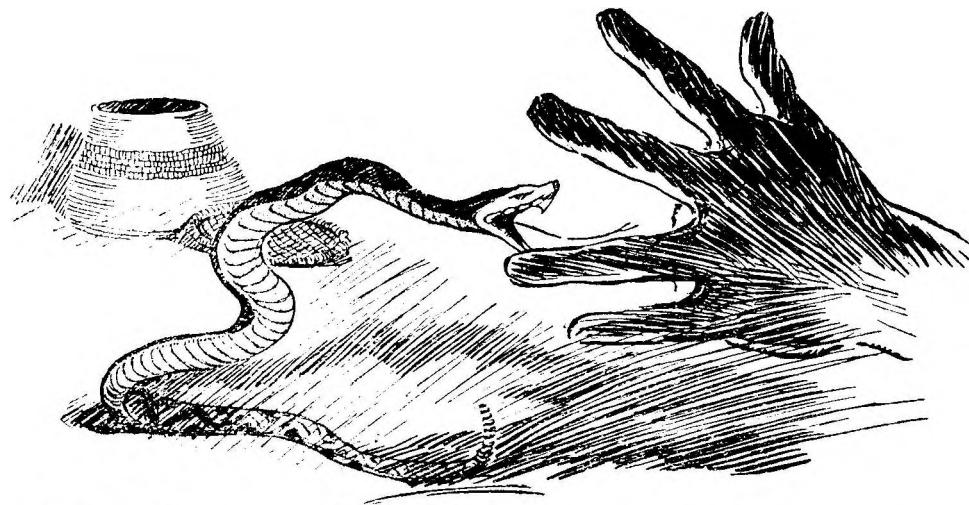


WHEN A WOMAN CARES

HE loved him. So when he came near
 She cast her glance the other way,
 While wildly beat her heart in fear
 That he might speak to her that day.
 While shrinking from him lest he might,
 Within her heart she hoped he would;
 And as he passed beyond her sight
 She thought he should have understood.

For when a woman does not care
 She will not feign indifference,
 But smiles and talks with pleasant air
 Devoid restraint and heart-strings tense.
 And when she cares she runs away
 Or feigns a distant manner cold,
 While secretly she longs to stay
 And hear the old, old story told!

Charles H. Meiers.



The Experiment

By ARTHUR MILLS

IGIVE the story just as Harry Dobell told it to me one evening in his rooms. We were sitting before a blazing fire; the rumble of London's traffic could be heard through the heavy curtains. For these things I was thankful, for the tale was as terrible as any I have heard.

Talk had turned on a new cure for sleeping sickness, reported to have been discovered in Paris—a rather drastic cure, the principal feature being to inject into the patient the germ of another deadly disease.

I had doubted the possibility of such a method succeeding. Dobell was inclined to agree with me.

"I once saw them try something of the sort on a man who had *tinga*," he said.

"What is *tinga*?"

"A sort of plague: you won't find the word in any dictionary. There is only one district in Brazil that I know of where they use the expression."

"Is it a bad thing to get?"

"Well, at the time I am talking of no one had ever been known to recover from it. Natives died in twelve hours, white

men in twenty-four. Yes, it is pretty nasty. I have often thought it must be the same sort of thing as the Black Death, which killed half Europe in the sixteenth century. A man with *tinga* goes the same sort of dirty blue color before he dies; at least a white man does; discoloration does not show up so much in the native skin."

"Have you seen a white man with it?"

"Yes, this chap I am telling you about. We were traveling together at the time."

Dobell leaned back in his chair and sucked his pipe. I waited. It was in the lap of the gods whether he would talk any more or not. Few knew the interior of South America as he did.

"He was a great big fellow," Dobell continued. "of the name of Johnson—an Anglo-American, I think, though he had lived mostly everywhere; stood six feet four and as strong as a horse; to look at him, you would not have thought anything could kill him. He, I and a fellow called Peters were traveling together. Peters was a naturalist, Johnson and I were prospecting for diamonds."

" Well, we had crossed the Alta Parana and were working North toward the unexplored part of Matto Grosso. If we could, we meant to get canoes and go down the Araguaya. Then we ran into a region where this tinga was about.

" Lord, man, I have seen some pretty nasty sights, but I never want to enter a tinga stricken village again. It is worse than cholera, because the natives get the wind up over it more. You see, with cholera there is just the fraction of a chance of recovery; a man who gets tinga knows he has none. In this village some were dead, others dying, the remainder sitting about waiting their time.

" We did what we could and then pushed on. Now though tinga is a quick job once it starts, it can take up to six days to develop. Therefore, we knew we had round about a week to pass before we could be sure we had escaped infection.

" Well, the only thing to do was to forget all about the village we had passed through. It was no good wondering whether we had caught tinga or not. By common consent, once we had set off on trek, the word was never mentioned.

" However, some fellows will carry out the letter of an agreement, but don't comply with the spirit, and Johnson was one of them. Great big hulking chap that he was, he had the heart of an insect. He never talked about tinga once we had left the village. If he had one of us would have hit him, for it wasn't a comfortable time for any of us, seeing that the odds were fifty-fifty one of us had got it. But, by gad, though he did not say anything, that fellow *thought*—and you could *hear* him.

" I caught him one morning outside the tent looking at his tongue in the glass—a yellow fur on the tongue is one of the first symptoms. He pretended he was just going to shave, but I never saw a fellow with the sweat on his forehead and his eyes half out of his head, just at the feel of a razor in his hand.

" I took the looking glass away from him and chucked it in the scrub.

" ' You'd better grow a beard for a bit,' I said.

" He gave a sort of sickly grin and went back into the tent. Darned if that very night when Peters came in he didn't find Johnson with his shirt off, looking under his arms. Said he had been bitten by a garrapato. Huh! There wasn't a garrapato within a hundred miles and he knew it. The fellow was fair getting on our nerves.

" We had two muleteers—a caboclo and a pure, buck black. The caboclo was from the district—a queer bird, mostly native—in fact, his mother had been a stark naked Indian from the Ipala tribe. That caboclo was as full of folk lore and superstition as a monkey is of fleas, and it was a treat to get him talking when he sat round the fire of an evening.

" The moon was a sort of god to him, and when it was at a certain angle nothing would induce him to eat, for he said that then a man's food turned to fire in his stomach; must have eaten something that disagreed with him pretty thoroughly one moonlight night. He had, too, all sorts of queer remedies for illnesses; the bark of a certain tree for a cut or sore, the root of another for fever, and skin of a lizard, burned and made into powder to rub on the mules when they had sore backs.

" Some of his remedies were jolly effective, too. Come to think of it, there was no reason why they should not be. A lot of modern medicines are made from roots found in the interior of South America.

" Johnson used to listen to the fellow by the hour, being a morbid sort of bloke, who loved hearing about strange illnesses and cures.

" Well, five days passed after we left the village and nothing happened—no calamity, I mean. Johnson became calmer, but I can't say he was a particularly cheerful companion. On the morning of the sixth day Peters and I went out, leaving Johnson in camp. We took the caboclo with us.

" Peters was making a collection of the fauna of the interior and I remember he got a rare specimen of beetle that morning, with which he was particularly pleased. But the thing that stands out most in my mind was the rattlesnake's nest—a mother snake and half a dozen young ones. I was for

killing the lot, not being fond of snakes at any time, particularly 'rattlers,' with their beastly habit of lying in one's pathway and striking as one passes, instead of slinking off as soon as they hear one, as any well behaved snake should do.

"I put my gun up when the caboclo caught my arm and started gibbering at a great rate in his tongue. Peters, who understood the native lingo, listened to him.

"He does not want you to kill the snake," Peters explained; "he says rattlesnakes do much good."

"Nonsense," I said, lifting my gun again.

The caboclo renewed his protestations.

"I shouldn't," warned Peters; "if you upset his superstitions he'll only leave us."

"There was something in this, so I lowered my gun once more, feeling rather annoyed all the same. However, when we got back to camp, we found a state of affairs that made us forget all about rattlesnakes quickly.

Johnson was lying on his bed in the tent. He was absolutely rigid; his eyes were fixed on the tent pole. He looked at us as we came in; the fear of death on his face. Peters leaned over him at once.

"Open your mouth," he commanded.

Johnson obeyed and both of us could see that his tongue had turned a bluish gray color, and was so much swollen that it protruded between his teeth. He lay perfectly still; then, suddenly, his hands went to his sides and he leaned forward, his body twisted nearly double.

"Peters signed to me to come outside.

"This time he will die!" he said quietly.

"Has he got tinga?" I asked.

"Well, he has all the symptoms."

The caboclo, who had followed us into the tent, now joined us. He caught Peters's arm and made him return to Johnson's bedside. The caboclo began talking rapidly. Peters listened, then translated.

"He says he can cure you."

Johnson turned his tormented eyes on the caboclo. A faint gleam of hope came into them. It was conceivably possible that the Indian, with his wonderful knowledge of native herbs, knew some remedy.

The caboclo continued talking. Suddenly I noticed Peters staring at him hard.

"What's he say?" asked Johnson.

Peters was silent.

The caboclo spoke again, more emphatically.

"Tell me," Johnson whined peevishly.

"He says that his people, when they get the fever, cure it with the bite of a snake," said Peters slowly; "he wishes to know if he should get a snake."

"A snake! A snake!" Johnson sat forward. "And they use the skin of a lizard for the sore backs of mules. It may be as he says. Can he find one?"

Peters spoke to the caboclo, who left the tent. Later Peters and I went outside again. We had done all we could for Johnson temporarily, and his state was terrible to watch.

"Can he live?" I asked.

Peters looked thoughtful. "Well, fear is killing him as quickly as anything at the moment. Wonder how he'll like the caboclo's remedy? Ah, here he comes."

Looking up I saw the caboclo returning from the forest. Under his arm he carried one of the baskets which Peters used for his specimens. The man set the basket on the ground.

We three stood silent. Next moment I found myself looking at Peters, with horror in my eyes that must have been nearly as great as the horror in the eyes of the sick man lying in the tent. For from that basket there came a sound which will cause a horse to stop dead in his tracks or bring the sweat on to the back of the hands of the bravest man—the sinister rat-tat-tat-tat of a rattlesnake's tail.

The caboclo grinned and pointed to the basket.

"Make him well quick," he said.

Peters explained: "Apparently his tribe believe that the bite of a female rattlesnake with young will cure tinga. Go in and talk to Johnson a few minutes. I want to have a look at this snake."

II.

DOBELL agreed with this, but looked at me.

"Have you ever seen a rattlesnake strike?"

I said that I had, adding that I thought it was the quickest form of animal action that I knew—quicker even than a chameleon's tongue.

Dobell agreed with this, but that what he meant was, had I ever seen the effect of a rattlesnake's bite on man? I said I was thankful to say I had not.

"Well," said Dobell, "it is a pretty terrible death; paralysis and blindness are two of the most merciful stages. However, to get on with the story.

"I shall never forget the scene in that tent a thousand miles from anywhere. I went in to sit with Johnson. He was weakening rapidly and kept plaintively asking where the caboclo was with the snake. After a bit Peters and the caboclo appeared, carrying the basket. The caboclo was grinning all over his face; in fact, if he had been a fashionable doctor he could not have had a better bedside manner. They set the basket on the floor and Peters said to Johnson: 'We have got your snake.'

"He spoke in as matter of fact a voice as if he had just brought a bottle of quinine.

"Johnson forced himself on to his elbow. It was pathetic to see the light of hope again in the poor devil's eyes.

"Peters signed to the caboclo, who lifted the lid of the basket with his stick. Immediately that awful rat-tat-tat-tat began. Johnson's face turned yellow-white.

"'A rattlesnake!' he gasped.

"Peters looked at him steadily. 'Yes. The caboclo says the bite will cure you. Have you the guts to try?'

"'B-b-but, has he ever seen any one cured?' Johnson stammered.

"Peters spoke to the native and translated his answer. 'He says it is the medicine always used by his own people, provided the snake is a female of the species and she is with young.'

"I won't go into the next quarter of an hour in detail, during which time Johnson was trying to make up his mind. For myself, I thought he would die during this period. Suddenly an odd calm came over him. He looked Peters straight in the face.

"'I shall die anyway, I will try,' he said.

"The basket was pushed close to his bed.

"Just show the snake your hand," Peters said; 'he will bite quick enough.'

"Johnson did as he was told. Now an odd thing happened. You know that a rattlesnake will always strike at anything it fears in reach. Up to now the brute had been lashing out at each of us in turn, so much so that we had had to take care to give the basket a wide berth. But when Johnson advanced his hand within two feet of the head, the snake took not the slightest notice.

"'Put your hand nearer,' Peters commanded.

"Johnson did as he was told. My aunt! I felt sorry for him. Fancy *trying* to get a rattlesnake to bite you!

"Still the brute took no notice.

"'Pinch his tail,' said Peters.

"Again Johnson obeyed, and this time got what he wanted, for the snake would not stand for this.

"He was struck just between the second and third fingers. I can see the place now.

"For a full two minutes we were all absolutely silent. All eyes were turned to the bed, whereon lay the man who had voluntarily submitted to being bitten by one of the most deadly snakes in the world. It was, I think, the most terrible and dramatic moment of my life.

"Then Peters turned to the caboclo and asked a question.

"The caboclo muttered a reply.

"'He says that in a quarter of an hour you will be cured,' Peters said. 'Does your hand feel numb?'

"Johnson nodded.

"Peters spoke to the caboclo again.

"'Do you feel a pain running up your arm?'

"Again the sick man nodded.

"'That is good; that is the snake poison racing to fight the poison in your system.'

"For five minutes there was dead silence. Then the caboclo spoke to Peters, pointing to the foot of the bed.

"Peters leaned forward, rolled back the coverlet and put his hand on Johnson's feet. He signed to the caboclo to do the same. The caboclo obeyed. Immediately he touched Johnson's feet he broke into an excited harangue.

" ' He says,' said Peters, ' that the cure is working; numb feet are a good sign; yours are icy; do you feel my fingers?'

" Johnson shook his head.

" ' Now can you? I am pinching hard.'

" Johnson shook his head again.

" ' Close your eyes; lie right back; don't try to think; the internal pains are better aren't they; you have no headache now; breathe quietly and naturally—as I count—one, two, one, two.'

" Two minutes later Johnson subsided into that deep black sleep that used to come to men at the end of acute nerve strain in France. Peters put his hand on his forehead.

" ' Feel that!' he said to me.

" I obeyed. Johnson's forehead was cool.

" He has got no fever."

" ' No,' Peters agreed. ' In six hours he'll be as well as you or I—a bit weak perhaps.'

" ' Do you mean the tinga is cured?'

" ' If ever he had it! Myself, I don't believe he had. Look at that idiot.'

" The caboclo had turned the rattlesnake out on the ground and was now kneeling a discreet distance away, making obeisances and crooning some sort of native chant.

" The rattlesnake slowly uncoiled and be-

gan to crawl in our direction. I snatched up a stick.

" Peters laughed.

" ' No need to kill it: it won't do any harm.'

" ' Won't it?' I said. ' Well, I don't mean to give it a chance to.' I lifted the stick.

" ' As you like,' said Peters; ' but I extracted his poison bags before I brought him into the tent.'

" ' You what?'

" ' Well, you don't suppose I was going to let a fellow creature be bitten by a real rattlesnake whether he was dying or not!'

" ' But!' I stared at Johnson, sleeping now as calmly as a weary child.

" ' The human machine is a very curious thing,' said Peters; ' no one really knows what processes work it. Why should cases have happened of sudden shock restoring sight? But this I do know. If that fool there had been left much longer without anything else to think about, he'd have been as dead to-night as if that rattlesnake had had any poison in his fangs.'

Dobell knocked his pipe out.

" And not much loss if he had been, either; he was a darned nuisance the whole trek."

THE END



ALONG THE WATER FRONT

THE air is filled with a breath of tar—
Rife with the song of the chattering gear,
The restless feet of the stevedores
Surging along the noisy pier.

A loose pile sounds its weird complaint,
Caught in the grip of the flooding tide.
Romance walks when the night hangs deep,
Where the bleak tramp-freighters ride.

Some one waits for a coming ship,
On the ancient pier where the star-fish clings.
The weary gulls drift in from sea
With the afterglow on their snowy wings.

Caught in the grip of the dead-swell's heave
A green light beckons across the miles.
The sea-lure rides in the gathering dusk,
And the god of the wanderlust smiles.

"BEST IN THE

LONG RUN"



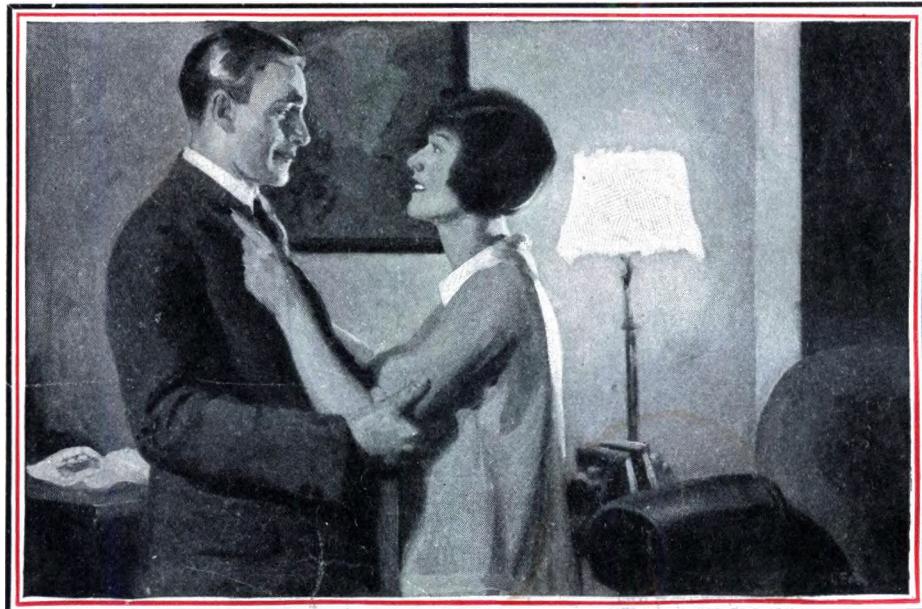
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