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September 1925

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MAGAZINE

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By A. H. WARD

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Of course I didn't know it then. The idea just appealed to my common sense or reason or whatever you call it. I sent for the book that Mr. Greenslade, the

president of The National Salesmen's Training Association, will send out absolutely free to any man who writes.

After reading this remarkable book I enrolled. Don't think I'm boasting. I'm just stating facts. Within one year, I had averaged over \$1,000 a month income—\$13,500 the first year—and in addition was elected as an officer of Post's of Chicago.

Now don't misunderstand me. I don't say that you can do as well. You may not make a thousand dollars the first month. But I do say that since looking into the matter can't cost you a cent, you should at least investigate. You can't help but benefit and if you're any man at all you should double or triple your income without half trying.

My friends may laugh at me for allowing my picture to be printed here with my name, but I do so anyway because I realize that my story may be instrumental in showing other men a quick, easy way to realize their ambitions.

SEND TODAY FOR YOUR COPY

If you really want the good things of life—the things that only money can buy—I urge you to send the request blank on this page to Mr. Greenslade. He will send you free and without any obligation "Modern Salesmanship" the book that started me on the road to success. Then decide for yourself. Even if you don't go ahead you will be out only two cents. And on the other hand you may find a way to double or triple your salary in a short period. Just mail the attached coupon today with your name and address.

Yours for success,
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National Salesmen's Training Association

Dept. M-76 N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Ill.

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National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. M-76 N. S. T. A. Building, Chicago, Illinois.
Send me free the book that gave Mr. Ward his start.
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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER
1925

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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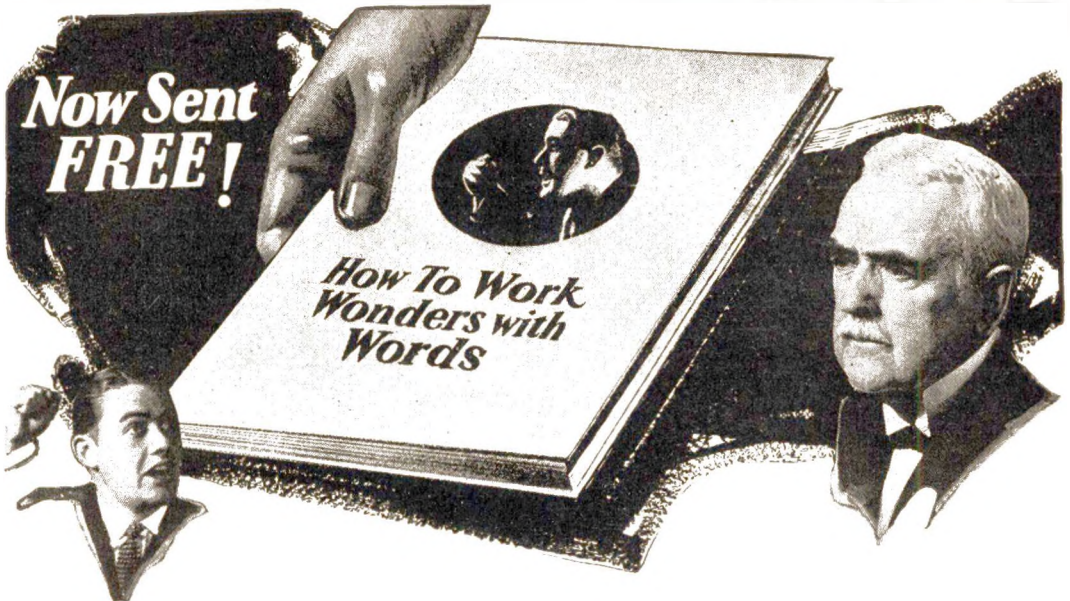
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The distinguished author of "The Ship of Shadows" and "After the Manner of Asia" even surpasses his former high standard in this super-exciting story of an American's adventure in underworld London.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (September issue out August 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.



Not Only Men Who Have Made Millions Send for this Astonishing Book -but Thousands of Others!

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"actual-fact" stories of some Remarkable Experience
you readers have had*

ALL that is required of you is to write the story of that Remarkable Experience, in two thousand words or less, and send it to the True Experience Editor of The Blue Book Magazine, 36 South State Street, Chicago, Illinois. Only stories of Remarkable Experiences in the five fields of Adventure, Mystery, Business, Sports and Humor are desired, and for each such "actual-fact" story of a True Experience in any one of those fields that the Editor retains for publication \$100 will be paid the writer.

You don't need to possess literary talent

Tell the story of your True Experience in your own way; the Editor will do all that is necessary to make your story smoothly readable. It's the Experience that counts. In proof of this, it may be said that in each instance all five of the Experiences in the present issue were edited and made as readable as they are, by the Editor and his associates, without in any instance, of course, changing the facts as given by the writers. So don't be afraid to send in your accounts of your remarkable True Experiences because you think you can't write like an author. You're not required to.

On the following pages appear the first five of our readers' accounts of their Experiences

You have no doubt had experiences even more unusual. Write the stories of them if they relate to Adventure or Mystery, or Business, or Sports, or Humor, and send them in, with stamps inclosed for their return if the Editor doesn't keep them for publication in this magazine. Be sure also to write your name and address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story. For each such story the Editor

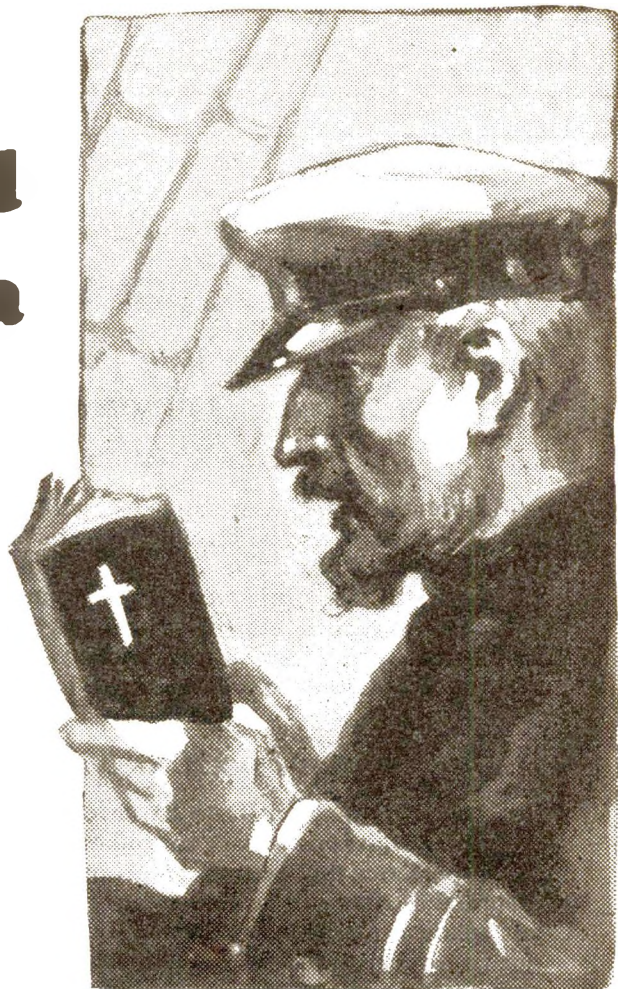
does keep for publication in the November issue its writer will receive The Blue Book Magazine's check for \$100 on September 1st.

As but one such actual-fact story in each of the five fields specified—Adventure, Mystery, Business, Sports and Humor—will be published in any one issue of The Blue Book Magazine, it is clear that the monthly total is

\$500 for You

Buried at Sea

THE man who, as a sailor, knew at first hand of this experience, has sailed all the Seven Seas through half a lifetime. His experience, it seems, is best classified as Humorous, even though there was an element of Adventure to it.



By

RALPH DAUBENY

TULA is one of the smallest and most insignificant in a group of small islands lying a little to the southwest of the Philippines. Indeed, it is of such little consequence geographically that even in large-scale maps it is only a mere black dot.

Its chief imports are whisky, gin, copra and pearls, the amount of the two latter articles imported tallying almost exactly with the amount exported—a fact which a stranger might regard as curious, until he became better acquainted with the commercial peculiarities of the island.

Tula, but more particularly Dougherty's bar, is a meeting-place for nearly all the masters of pearling-schooners in those latitudes, their chief port of arrival and departure.

Also it is an unofficial clearing-house for pearls, many legitimately obtained, but a regrettably large number poached.

That is why a destroyer flying the flag of Japan or some other nation which represents the plundering of its leased pearling-grounds is frequently to be seen lying outside Tula's charming little bay. Not that this disturbs the serenity of Mr. Dougherty's patrons in the least, once they are safe ashore, for science has not yet devised any means whereby a pearl poached may be distinguished from a pearl obtained under license. It is only when at sea with a profitable haul of these gems aboard, a haul which it might be difficult to account for satisfactorily, that these genial mariners quake at the sight of a destroyer.

If you should ask me why I shipped as a hand before the mast on the *Grace Darling*, a pearl-poacher of the first water, my answer would be: "Where the devil drives, one must ride." It was the *Grace Darling* or starvation for yours truly.

It was with a course laid for Tula that the schooner *Grace Darling* heeled along one hazy morning before a freshening breeze. An examination of her papers would have shown that she was bound for Tula with copra; an investigation of her hold, that the copra was really there as per manifest. In due course, and by the grace of God, she would discharge her cargo at the port specified; also, in due course, she would ship it again and clear for some distant port with a character, so far as her papers were concerned, pure and above reproach.

Yet Captain Paul Hapke, her owner, glowered as he paced up and down his tiny quarter-deck; and the crew, from the mate downward, wore the expression of men who have suffered undeserved ill-fortune. And from our point of view we certainly had, for not a single pearl was hidden away aboard the *Grace Darling*, and our consciences were as clear as our hearts were heavy.

Nearly every pearling-ground of promise we had visited on this trip was being watched or patrolled, and the few that were not had already been visited by some poacher who had cleaned up all there was to clean up, and had done it very thoroughly.

PRESENTLY Captain Hapke paused in the course of his perambulations and picked up a pair of binoculars that lay on the cabin hatch. For some moments he stood with these focused upon a faint smoke-trail far astern; then he handed the glasses to the mate, who had just come aft.

"Jap destroyer," announced the mate, handing the glasses back.

The Captain's gloomy face relaxed in a grin.

"After us," he said. "We'll play him up for a while; we don't often get such a chance. Clap on more sail, Davis."

He again raised the glasses to his eyes and swept the horizon. But nothing was in sight except the smoke-trail astern, and a small brig some distance ahead and barely visible through the haze.

The mate repeated the Captain's order,

and up went the fore and main topsails and the flying jib, the crew entering into the spirit of the game. We were rarely in a position to trifle with the powers-that-be, and like the Captain, were disposed to make the most of the occasion, being well aware that this seeming attempt to evade the destroyer would merely serve to strengthen her commander's suspicions concerning them.

So the *Grace Darling*, bowling along under her press of canvas with her bows in a smother of white foam, behaved exactly as a poacher might be expected to behave. And of course all to no purpose, for the destroyer was coming up astern hand over hand. Her commander had by this time, no doubt, recognized the notorious schooner whose captain was known to be one of the most daring and successful raiders of the pearling-grounds in those waters.

THE fact that, despite his reputation and the number of times his vessel had been searched, he had invariably managed somehow to conceal or get rid of all tangible evidence of his trespasses, only made the authorities the more eager to lay him by the heels.

At last the destroyer came within hailing distance, and as her commander shouted for the schooner to heave to, the latter hoisted the red ensign. This, as Captain Hapke had anticipated, was judged to be a last desperate attempt to avoid capture, a final and hopeless bluff.

"Heave to!" came the order for the second time, and Captain Hapke obeyed as the destroyer sheered alongside, her high fo'c'stle towering well above the schooner's deck.

The commander, an agile little Jap, scrambled nimbly over the bulwarks, followed by a squad of six men, and was met by Captain Hapke, who wrathfully demanded to know the reason for this "outrage."

The Japanese officer, accustomed to such displays of righteous indignation, smiled cheerfully and asked to see the ship's papers.

Protesting vigorously and threatening international complications, Captain Hapke led the way to his cabin and produced the papers.

All this, of course, was a mere formality, since it was obvious that a pearl-poacher would not carry a documentary

evidence of his calling. Therefore the officer, having glanced at the papers, and so complied with the regulations, got down to real business.

"It is with great regret I inform you that we must search the vessel, Captain," he said in fluent English, but with true Oriental politeness.

Glowing with conscious innocence, the skipper of the *Grace Darling* renewed his protests.

Polite, but wholly unmoved, the other ordered his men to start the search. They did so with a systematic thoroughness born of long experience, the search being directed not so much to finding pearls—which might well be hidden in some inaccessible place—as to finding evidence of pearl oysters having been recently taken aboard. That fact once established, though not conclusive evidence of poaching, might justify the vessel being taken into port and submitted to a more minute investigation.

THE early morning haze had disappeared by now, and the lookout on the schooner's fo'c'stle reported the brig which the Captain had seen earlier through his glasses. Captain Hapke again picked them up to have a better look at her, then uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Lord! I'm precious glad we're to windward of that packet," he announced, passing the glasses to the mate by his side.

The latter took them, and saw that the brig had her ensign at half-mast, and was, besides, flying the dreaded yellow flag that advertised the presence on board of an infectious disease.

"Looks as if they're going to bury some poor devil," he said presently.

The Captain took the glasses again and leveled them at the brig; the Japanese officer, equally interested, put up his binoculars also.

They saw, resting on the brig's leeward taffrail, an oblong canvas bag, the sinister nature of which they had no difficulty in guessing, especially when a couple of men were seen to step forward and reverently place a flag over it.

Then they saw the crew, bareheaded, form up in two lines, while the Captain read the burial service.

This done, he made a signal; there was a splash, and then, as the brig's ensign slowly fluttered mast-high, the *Grace Darling*, dipped her own in salute to the unknown dead.

Shortly after this mournful episode, the Japanese commander informed Captain Hapke, not without a trace of chagrin, that he was at liberty to proceed on his way, as no evidence of poaching had been discovered. To this, he characteristically added the deepest apologies for any inconvenience he may have caused while performing his duty as a humble and unworthy servant of his country. Having rounded off this flowery speech with a low bow, he and his men returned to the destroyer, which then cast off.

CAPTAIN HAPKE, who had maintained throughout the proceedings an air of indignant aloofness, smiled as he watched his enemy depart.

"That was a bit of real luck," he remarked to his mate. "If we'd had pearls aboard, that little devil would have smelt them out sure as a gun."

The mate nodded. He as well as the Captain realized that our bad luck on the pearling-grounds had turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

"That Jap's making for the brig now, but I bet any money he don't board her," he said.

The brig was now almost out of sight, but with the aid of his glasses the Captain saw that the destroyer was rapidly overhauling her.

"You're wrong, Davis," he said presently. "She's gone alongside. You can't scare them chaps with smallpox or bubonic plague." He put down the glasses. "We'll take in the topsails and the flying-jib now," he added. "Trice up the mainsail as well."

Somewhat surprised at this order,—for the *Grace Darling* was forging ahead in fine style,—the mate put it into execution, and the schooner began immediately to lose way.

The Captain, who had again directed his gaze toward the brig, turned once more to the mate.

"They are almost out of sight, now," he added, "so we'll just put about."

As this meant we would have to tack away in the very opposite direction to the course we were steering, the mate stared at the Captain in astonishment. The latter brushed him aside impatiently.

"Look alive, there!" he shouted to the crew. "'Bout ship, ready all!"

He took the wheel himself, and eased the helm down while the fore- and mainsail booms were hauled amidships and the head

sheets slackened to help the schooner come up to the wind. For a moment she remained almost stationary, hanging on the wind with sails fluttering, till, catching the breeze again, she heeled to it and went off on the starboard tack.

Then Captain Hapke did another surprising thing. Leaving the mate in charge of the wheel, he ran for'ard, mounted the rigging, and perched himself aloft on the foremast cross-tree.

"What's eatin' the old man, now?" growled the mate, at a loss to account for the skipper's eccentric behavior.

"What's bit him I don't know, sir," answered the bosun, who had sailed with Captain Hapke for years, "but I lay he aint gone up there jest to make noises like a canary bird."

SOME few days later the *Grace Darling* dropped her anchor in Tula's picturesque little bay and proceeded to discharge her cargo of copra.

Considering that Captain Hapke and the rest of us had been thwarted in our unlawful attempts to poach in forbidden waters, one might wonder at our remarkably good spirits, for there was much hilarity that night at Dougherty's bar. A day or two later the brig we had last seen in company with the destroyer entered the bay also, but she was no longer flying the dreaded yellow flag.

As she passed the *Grace Darling*, the

latter dipped her flag, a compliment which created some astonishment aboard the newcomer. Later on, when the skippers of both vessels were refreshing themselves at Dougherty's bar, the master of the brig asked Captain Hapke, none too amiably, the reason for the salute.

"Oh," smiled the other, "I'm always willing to pay my respects to a smart man. That little trick you done right under the very noses of them Japs was the smartest I've ever seen—bar one."

The Captain of the brig started and looked at him through eyes narrowed to slits.

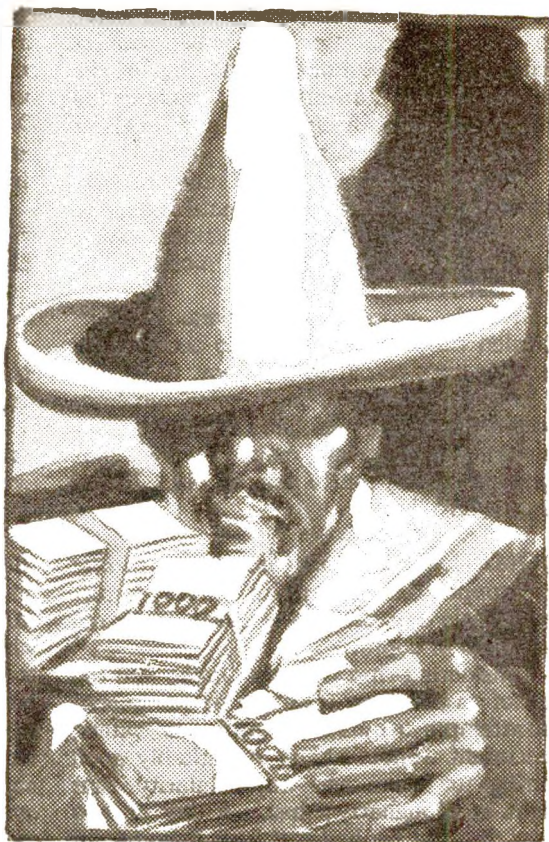
"They're mighty cute, them Japs," went on the skipper of the *Grace Darling*, "but even they never suspected it was a bag of pearls packed around with cork—and not a corpse—that you committed to the deep that day. Well, I'll admit I wouldn't have guessed it myself but for one little thing. Maybe you were too busy worrying whether the rock-salt sinkers would melt too soon and let the bag float up again before the Japs cleared off—or maybe you were worrying over something else. But whatever it was, you forgot to take your cap off while reading the burial service over the pearls. It was that which started me to thinking—that and—oh, well, have a drink with me, Skipper. I can afford it."

For, you see, Captain Hapke had salvaged the "corpse."

No Literary Ability Required, Remember

IT is desired that you readers should clearly understand that you need not possess a marked talent for writing in order to have your "actual fact" account of your Remarkable Experience considered for publication. So it is emphatically said again: "The Experience itself is what counts." Go ahead and write an account of the most remarkable experience that ever befell you, whether it be an Adventurous Experience, a Mysterious Experience, a Business Experience, a Sport Experience or a Humorous Experience. When you've written your account—preferably in two thousand words or less—write your name and address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page, inclose stamps or a stamped and self-addressed envelope so that your story may be returned to you if it doesn't happen to win acceptance, and mail your manuscript to the True Experience Editor, The Blue Book Magazine, 36 South State Street, Chicago, Illinois.

HERE'S *an Adventurous Experience of a specially interesting sort, narrated by a one-time soldier of fortune in Mexico. That it happens to have a funny angle is nothing against it. And it's pretty timely right now, considering all that's going on in Mexico at present.*



When **L**ucre Larruped Liberty

By **ROBERT DERR**

THERE are two sorenesses I will carry to my grave: One is against the automobile; it spoiled the jolly old sport of bicycle-riding. The other is against what probably will go down through history as the World War; it just about ruined the filibustering habit.

Filibustering before the war of 1914-18 was as deeply ingrained in the characters of some Americans as lawmaking and reforming was—and is—in those of the great majority.

Of course it still is legal to ride a bicycle, and there are bicycles to be had. But who wants to make a fishing-trip on a bicycle

when one can go ten times as far in a flivver with less effort? It still is possible to go a-filibustering. And you can get killed just as dead in a banana-republic war as in a world war. But most of the boys who had acquired the filibuster habit in the days before the World War got a ride in the World War automobile. So the old filibustering bicycle doesn't look the same to them any more. They can't get a kick out of a war in which a few hundred ragged "patriots" and a couple of antiquated machine-guns deal out tickets to heaven—or the other place.

Soldiers of fortune a-filibustering bent in

the good old days prior to 1914 didn't have such high-fangled notions. They generally went in with side-arms, and came out wearing borrowed pants and worried looks.

I took a whirl at one of the two or three hundred revolutions fought to liberate the downtrodden Mexicans, along about the tail end of 1912. The particular spot we picked was Lower California. It was governed then, as now, by a two-fisted gent named Cantu. The war was planned in a San Francisco café. A Mexican, one Felipe Juarez, who claimed descent from the Mexican patriot of the same name, did the organizing. Tex O'Hara, out-and-out soldier of fortune; Tim Haley, promoter, con-man, ex-soldier and all-around thrill-hunter; Jim Bullard, soldier par excellence, European-trained; and Rodney Williams, a handsome lad who'd read too much Richard Harding Davis, and wore moleskin riding pants with spurred boots, and wanted to be a hero—these besides myself, accepted jobs as the "general staff."

Haley had joined up because his health demanded a change of climate. One of his friends had fallen under Uncle Sam's frown for counterfeiting. Haley had helped him out and wasn't hankering to meet any gentlemen from the Secret Service.

O'Hara and Bullard went along because they craved action and believed that with half a chance they could run Cantu out of the peninsula and divide the perquisites of his job. It had, and still has, the reputation of being one of the best jobs, from the standpoint of financial returns, in captivity. The total income was estimated at around a million dollars a year—gold. Juarez had it picked for himself, but Tex and Jim wasted no worry about that. They figured Señor Juarez would get the honors and titles. They'd collect the cash or know why. Both had been with Villa.

Rodney Williams was the "angel" of the expedition. He had a rich dad. He was to supply the munitions and pay-roll. In return we guaranteed him excitement and a pretty uniform. I went along because old lady Fortune's maiden daughter seemed to have married me permanently, and Mexico sounded as good as any other place for that sort of honeymoon.

Eventually we arrived at a rendezvous near Sesbania, where Juarez had whistled up a gang of patriots. There were about three hundred in the crowd. A more down-at-heel, hungry, God-forsaken lot I never hope to see. They were armed with a

variety of firearms that would have delighted the heart of a collector. As a museum and circus they were a big success. As an army they were a fizzle. Artillery was conspicuous by its absence. And to make a bad matter worse, our friend Rodney, who had stayed behind to purchase and forward the farm machinery (we shipped cannon and machine-guns as farm machinery in those days), failed to deliver.

We couldn't do anything without it, and O'Hara, who had been friendly with Villa, volunteered to journey to Medanos, in Chihuahua, where Villa was reported last, and try to borrow the necessary sinews of war. He no sooner was on his way than Juarez started posting proclamations in the various towns. That stirred up Cantu. He sent a bunch of cavalry out to chase us from his melon-patch. Bullard, a splendid tactician, managed to outmaneuver them, but they shoved us steadily toward the border.

Finally they forced an action, turned our flanks (the gang of good-for-nothings who composed the "army" of liberty couldn't, or wouldn't carry out Bullard's orders) and at last surrounded us.

Our "army" departed in disorder. Bullard, Tim and myself turned our noses toward the American line and crossed it two jumps ahead of the hostiles. We kept going, not wishing to argue where half a mile or so might make a vital difference in our chances of growing old.

A LONG about nightfall we brought up at a deserted shack. We picketed our horses and settled down to slumber. I was the first to awaken. The shuffling, chatter and mysterious something that marks a crowd had aroused me. I peered out. We were surrounded by as hang-dog a collection of Mexicans as I ever had seen. I kicked and shook Tim and Jim into wakefulness and broke the bad news. We looked to our guns. Bullard cursed feelingly.

Then he peered through a crack and turned to us with a grin.

"Hell!" he commented. "That's nothing to worry about. That's our own army. I'll go out and palaver and see why they're here."

He did. There was a duel of Spanish between himself and the native who had taken command in the absence of the "general staff." When he turned to us, the grin had faded. There was a woebegone expression on his face.

Briefly he explained. Our army never

When Lucre Larruped Liberty

had been paid. It wanted its money. If we couldn't or wouldn't pay—well, Cantu couldn't send his troops across the border, but he wasn't responsible for the actions of rebels, and probably would pay well for the leaders of those rebels delivered dead or alive on Mexican soil.

"So," Bullard wound up, "we might as well prepare to make our scrap of scraps, and go out with our tails waving high."

He turned and through a crack in the wall drew a bead on the leader of the army.

Tim Haley grabbed his arm. That Mexican never will know how Haley cheated him out of a harp. Bullard just couldn't have missed him at that range.

"How much do we owe these Dagoes," Tim wanted to know.

"About fifteen hundred dollars," Bullard told him, adding: "It might as well be fifteen million."

TIM started ripping up his coat. Jim and I forgot our troubles, telling him to calm down—that it wasn't necessary to go loco yet. He paid no attention to us, but out of the debris of his coat hauled a pile of five- and ten-dollar bills. All told it was about two thousand dollars.

"Go out and pay 'em," he told Bullard, "and give 'em the extra five hundred as a bonus. Tell 'em to go back to the camp and wait for us, and we'll be back with a lot more in a couple of weeks."

Jim Bullard was so surprised that he did as he was told. Afterward, as we sat smoking in peace, contentment and poverty, the reaction set in.

"Doggone it, Tim," Bullard remarked between puffs, "I wish we had shot it out with those birds instead of giving them your money. If we'd kept that, we'd have a stake for a new start."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Jim," Tim consoled him. "Really, I was glad to get rid of it."

"Glad to get rid of it! Say, are you loco completely? Never knew you to give up dough so easily before."

"This dough was different. You see, when the 'Slippery Kid' got pinched in San Francisco, he slipped me that wad so the Government men wouldn't get him with the goods. It was counterfeit, every dollar of it, but our Mexican friends didn't seem to know the difference. I'd been trying for months to get rid of it so the Secret Service boys wouldn't trace it back to me. I guess I have."

Skull and Bones

And here's a Mystery Experience that might very well have scared the man who underwent it to death. We hope that it will prompt you to send in an account of some Mysterious Experience you yourself have had. Doubtless it was even more thrilling than this curious tale of the Adirondacks.

THIS is a true ghost story. Mind you, I do not mean that other ghost stories are not true. But if I can make you feel the way I did when—well, don't begin here if you are alone in the house and the moon is hidden, and the clock is moving around toward eleven.

First, let me say, that I have traveled very largely in the remote regions of the earth and listened to many weird tales, but that up until two years ago, I had never for an instant been convinced of the existence of any world that might be termed supernatural.

This story really begins in the quality of insatiable curiosity within me—curiosity to find out things I might better not know, perhaps. Geographically, however, it be-



By

JAMES F. STONE

gins in the Adirondack Mountains. An unlikely place, one would say, for phantoms to sift through steel bars when the owl is hooting at the inky sky and the dun birds of the night flutter in the shadows.

I had been spending a rather tiresome summer there—an incessant round of golf and tennis, with little to break the monotony. The longing to get away from dull social chatter and venture into unknown territory was overpowering me again, and I knew that sooner or later I should vanish over the horizon at the relentless beckoning of Wanderlust. It was my destiny to be so constructed.

We were, I think, seated around the evening log fire in the main hall of the big bungalow when some one mentioned the

old Ritter Place. My host, who was a huge man with dark, smoldering eyes, immediately turned on the guest who had broached the subject. "Don't speak of the place!" he said—almost fiercely.

We, of course, immediately asked him why we should not speak of it. For a long time he would not reply. Finally he said: "It's haunted." And that is all we could get from him.

IT was natural, then, in view of my ennui, that I should decide to investigate. This I at once proposed to do, asking for volunteers to spend the following night there. I was a trifle surprised to find that no one was enthusiastic to join me. Everybody, it seemed, had been to "Wilderness" before, except myself. And everybody had been duly impressed by the stories circulated through the countryside about the old Ritter Farm. It was up to me, then, to go alone, and to come back in the morning, after sleeping quietly with the "ghosts," for a little fun-poking at my fellow-vacationists.

I confess that the general depression of the very atmosphere on the following day made me less vivacious than usual. Nor was it encouraging to have my host come to me as I was preparing my kit for the adventure and beg me to give up the idea.

"Charley Devins stayed there one night. He is crazy now. Joe Skarj got lost and wound up at the Ritter Farm toward evening three years ago. They found him on the road, babbling, the next morning."

I insisted that the natives were superstitious and cowardly.

But just before starting, I put a revolver in my pocket. There might be *something*, I conceded. They gave me directions, and about sundown I started out to hike the four miles. I was astonished to find how lonely the wood road that led back to the Ritter Farm was. Two tremendous moths and a bat were the only living things I saw. And as I approached the farmhouse, at twilight, I was forced to push my way through a veritable thicket.

The house was a large, rambling structure, paintless, loose-shuttered, and battered by the elements. But what most impressed me was the feeling I had as it came into view. There was no discernible, *sensible* evidence, but I was positive that something had been moving about *in* the house a scant second before I had come upon it!

Nevertheless, I clumped up on the rickety veranda, swung open the front door, which creaked abysmally, and entered the old Ritter Place. From somewhere beneath me I heard a swift, muffled scurrying sound. Rats, I thought. Outside it was getting dark.

An impenetrable stillness overpowered me. Almost anything would have been a comfort in the category of sound, except the sound which I soon began to hear. I could scarcely credit my ears. Chains! Clanking as though in the depths of some infernal pit! For an instant I could not believe my senses—surely a real ghost (granted there were ghosts) would not go in for such nonsense. I laughed—a hollow and unconvincing laugh that startled me.

And from the cellar of the house that laugh was repeated!

A COLD sweat broke out over me. I turned to the door by which I had entered, thinking to get out into the open for a moment to regain my control. But it had slammed behind me and stuck, so that by no effort could I pull it open. The laugh was repeated, closer to me, it seemed. The windows! I could get out through a window. But the windows were all high and small—and barred! The ghosts had trapped me!

I think that it was at this point that my dread reached its peak. After that, for a considerable space, I crouched in a corner, unable to think rationally. The horrors of the house rapidly made themselves manifest. I could not shut my eyes to them.

First, I noticed outside the window a faint, phosphorescent flickering. This gradually increased in intensity and assumed a shape. The shape of a skull! A subtle luminosity swirled back and forth over its cavernous eyes, and its teeth chattered audibly. Before it the bars of the window parted, and it swept into the room. Almost instantaneously the remainder of this dead thing—a skeleton—materialized, and attached itself to the skull.

Hypnotized, paralyzed, fascinated, I watched this hideous specter. Nothing in all my previous experience was comparable to it for stark ghastliness. Then I thought of my revolver. Drawing it out, I fired point-blank at the gibbering skull. The light swirled, and a feeble groan issued from its bare teeth!

There is, however, in the make-up of every man, a point at which, becoming

saturated with fear, or any other emotion, he can experience no further. This numbness came over me. It was followed by a staggering of my senses toward their customary logic. It was simply unthinkable that spirits would become so utterly horrid.

To think this far was to act. I rushed forward and grasped the bones in my hands. *They were real bones!* I had half expected my hands to pass through the phantom. I grabbed the lower ribs. Then I pulled. A rope snapped, and the "ghost" crashed to the floor. My next act was to scramble up to the window through which the skull had been admitted, and to drop through it to the lawn.

As I did so, a voice—a very human voice—yelled "Hey!" and a pistol cracked viciously behind me. I ran across the yard, through the high grass, and gaining the thicket, I lay down in a state bordering on nervous collapse.

Immediately several figures emerged from the "haunted" house and started to search for me. Lanterns were lighted. A pair of men passed very close to where I lay, and I heard one of them say: "We'd better get the stuff out tonight! I don't think that guy was scared half silly enough to believe this ghost stuff is the goods."

And then it occurred to me that a half-way house, just five miles from the main bootlegging road to the city from Canada, would be a great strategic vantage-point—particularly if it were so "haunted" that no one ever dared go near it.

In the morning, as soon as there was light enough to see, I hurried back to Wilderness. They were still sitting up debating whether or not a large armed rescue-party ought to be sent for me. A large armed party was soon organized to go back and search the place for bootleggers, but as I had heard the bustle of loading trucks and the roar of motors leaving, from where I lay until dawn, I expected to find little evidence.

Such was the case—although we did unearth an astonishingly effective collection of ghost-imitating apparatus. After hearing our story, the local police hummed about the Ritter Farm for several days. They were rewarded by several empty bottles and several cases of poison ivy.

But whenever anyone asks me if I believe in ghosts, I say no. With this reservation: that there was a time in my life when I would have given nine-tenths of my kingdom not to believe in them.

AND here's a Sport Experience. Can you equal it—or beat it—with the story of a sporting experience of your own? Probably you can. It needn't be a professional sporting experience. Just as remarkable things happen in amateur sports. What ever happened to you? Send an account of it.



The **G**ruddge ^{By} EUGENE ADAMS

THE evidence I want to get into the record has to do with grudges. The one on which I experimented was, I believe, the most perfect specimen ever grown in the upper Hudson Valley. It was born at Lyle's Halfway Inn, on the Glens Falls-Lake George road, when I undertook to assist my pal Tom Linehan in a conflict with some friends of "Battling Bill" Kelly. I could have forgiven Kelly had he merely thrashed me, for he weighed nearly two hundred pounds against my one hundred and thirty-five, was a boilermaker by trade and engaged regularly in prize-fights. A beating at his hands would have made me a hero in the eyes of the young miss I had done battle to impress. But the spanking he gave me made her laugh.

I was the best laugh Glens Falls had since a Halloween gang put Miser Morris' pig on the roof of his porch and the old tightwad shot it thinking it a burglar. Getting even with Bill Kelly became a life

work. How to do it became, day by day, a more intriguing problem.

Only one who has felt a long-aching tooth ease under treatment can appreciate the relief that was mine when I found Kid McFadden, the "Brooklyn Flash," without funds in the city of Troy. McFadden was regarded as second only to Fitzsimmons for his pounds, and as good as any other heavyweight in the business. In his need of cash I saw my opportunity. I proposed that as "Battling Butler," an "unknown," he fight Kelly. I would bet all the money I could raise, half of which, with the purse, would give McFadden the "stake" he needed. McFadden agreed.

Hurrying back to Glens Falls, I egged the Kelly backers into offering a "winner take all" purse, and at odds of five to one against my "unknown," got more bets than I had dared hope for. When I placed my savings of two hundred dollars along with eight hundred I begged or borrowed from

friends and relatives, in the hands of the stakeholders I was happy in the conviction there was no risk of losing the money. A victory for Kelly would compel me to leave town in haste, probably on the brake-rods of a Delaware & Hudson freight-car. But I knew that Kelly couldn't beat McFadden and only regretted that I could raise no more money.

MERE victory, I decided, wouldn't give my grudge permanent relief. I wanted Kelly punished, and promised the Kid two-thirds of the winnings instead of half if he would batter Kelly for a few rounds before applying the knockout punch. It was needless extravagance, because Kid McFadden was notorious for the delight he appeared to take in torturing beaten opponents.

My one real fear was that the Kelly following would discover Battling Butler's identity and call off the fight. That fear was groundless. McFadden did the little training he deemed necessary in the privacy of Leaven's barn. In the shabby, almost shambling figure that walked from the training quarters to Mrs. Hackett's boarding-house no one noticed a resemblance to Kid McFadden, Beau Brummel of the prize-ring.

Miller's Hall, at the top of the Glen Street hill, was packed to the doors the night of the fight. As Kelly climbed through the ropes, he was roundly cheered. He bowed, smiled, sat down in his corner, and when the cheering continued, got up, bowed and smiled some more. He favored me with a half-sneer by way of letting me know he considered my money already in the hands of his backers. I wanted to dance for glee as I thought of the beating he would get, and the insolvency his supporters would suffer when I collected my bets.

Battling Butler had not appeared. I was not worried. Letting his opponent work up nervousness by waiting was McFadden's favorite trick. He delayed so long that the crowd believed he had skipped out in a fit of fright.

"Where's your whirlwind?" some one shouted at me.

"He's blown out of town on a freight," a wag retorted.

THAT was the signal for a barrage of raillery. Maurice Sweeney, a popular rough-and-ready singer with a knack of

paraphrase began a parody on "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here." He sang:

Pay, pay, the gang's all here;
You wont eat, but we don't care,
You wont eat, but we don't care:
Pay, pay, the gang's all here—
We will cash our bets in now.

The crowd caught the words and roared them in chorus. They were in the middle of the verse for the fourth time when McFadden slid through the ropes. He stood for a moment in his bathrobe, the shambling figure they had seen on the street. Catcalls and jeers left him unmoved.

"Who told you you were a fighter?"

"G'wan back to your dishwashin' job."

"Wanta leave any message for the folks?"

The announcer performed:

"In this corner Battling Bill Kelly, the pride of the Hudson Valley; in this one Battling Butler of Troy; ten rounds; both men members of this club."

As his name was called, Kelly stepped to the ropes and bowed. Battling Butler sat hunched in his corner and ignored the introduction.

"Scared stiff already," was the comment.

WHEN the referee called the men to the center of the ring for the usual instructions, McFadden dropped his slouching pose, slipped out of his robe and revealed the classic physique of the perfectly trained athlete. The crowd gasped admiration. Kelly's powerful but clumsy bulk was as that of an ox alongside the swift and graceful deadliness of the tiger.

"Ringer," some one shouted.

"Stung," another yelled.

They knew boxing form well enough to recognize that Battling Butler was of the first class.

As the referee completed his explanations McFadden's voice rang clear, steely and sneering over the buzz of the crowd:

"I wonder where this big clodhopper got the idea he could fight."

Kelly saw red at the insult. It was with an effort that his seconds and the referee prevented him from attacking Battling Butler on the instant.

At the gong he rushed from his corner in fury. McFadden took a few steps from his own, awaited the rush, sidestepped it neatly and landed a vicious left hook to the ear.

Again the rush, the sidestep, the punish-

ing hook. Then Kelly attacked more slowly. McFadden faced him squarely, grinning as he stopped a powerful left swing with a lightning left jab to the face. As his glove landed, the Kid gave it a twist, leaving a painful bruise. Again and again that cruel "corkscrew" stung Kelly as McFadden beat him to the punch or blocked his blows and made a lightning return. When the round ended, Kelly's face was torn and bleeding, his eyes puffed and swollen, but McFadden had made no attempt to land the slumber-punch to the chin nor to unleash the grueling, weakening body blows.

KELLY went to his corner with steady step. That cheered his backers, although they realized he was being shamefully outboxed.

"Wear him down, Bill," they shouted. "He's just a dancing-master. Get him. He can't hit."

The crowd snatched the cry.

"Get him! Get him! He—can't—hit."

They kept it up throughout the second and third rounds, while McFadden repeated his tactics of the first.

In the fourth round Kelly was cautious. He circled McFadden, as a bull seeking to corner a tiger for a finishing charge. McFadden, who had been kidding him from the first stroke of the gong, threw a little more insult into his remarks.

"Getting ready to quit, are you, you big bum?" he sneered. "You might as well. You couldn't lick a postage stamp."

Kelly ripped out an oath and rushed. McFadden met the attack halfway with a terrific uppercut that jerked Kelly's head backward and rocked him to his heels. Deliberately he waited for Kelly to recover. The boilermaker displayed caution, but McFadden set about provoking another rush.

"He can't hit, can't he, you big hayseed? That was only a sample. I'm going to take your hide off an inch at a time, and about the ninth round I'm going to knock you cold."

Another rush. Another uppercut.

But McFadden hadn't put enough steam into it, and Kelly landed a couple of flailing swings to the body, broke through McFadden's guard and compelled the Kid to clinch to avoid punishment. It was the Glens Falls favorite's first tally, and the crowd went wild.

"Get him! Get him! He—can't—hit."

The battle-cry of the Kellyites again rocked the hall.

It didn't worry me. I knew McFadden had slugged toe to toe with the best of them, and that he was in no difficulty. I felt, however, that he would take no chances of stopping a wild punch and probably would end matters in the fifth round.

Kelly evidently had gained courage in the fourth for he opened the fifth with a rush. McFadden sidestepped, hooked him viciously and followed up with punishing body blows. My guess was correct. The Kid had decided to finish. They mixed toe to toe. The fans held their breath. Only the thud of gloves broke the tenseness. Suddenly the Kid stepped back. His right glove crashed to Kelly's jaw. The boilermaker slipped to the canvas, limp.

I wanted to sing "Pay, Pay!" at the crowd as the referee counted. To tell them my grudge at last was satiated would have been joy. But it occurred to me that somebody in the crowd might have recognized McFadden and that if news of his identity was passed to the losers, I might come in for some rough handling.

So I slipped quietly toward one of the exits, from which I could see Kelly carried senseless from the ring, and be able to depart before the losers had opportunity to vent any wrath they might feel.

AT "nine" the counting stopped. There was a roar of cheering. I didn't look backward, but continued to edge toward the exit. I realized that Kelly, gamier than I would have believed, somehow had struggled to his feet. But I knew that McFadden would knock him down again. The knockdown came almost instantly. I heard the crunch of it, and the thud of a body knocked half across the ring.

The man who stopped that punch would be unconscious for many minutes.

I hurried my progress toward the exit. As I reached it and turned to view the ring, the count of "ten" was spoken and the crowd's pent-up enthusiasm was turned loose.

Then I saw Battling Bill Kelly swaying unsteadily on his feet as the referee held up his hand to announce him winner.

Huddled in the center of the ring lay Kid McFadden, knocked cold by a terrific wild swing he had failed to avoid as he was preparing with contemptuous cocksureness to give the dazed Kelly a finishing wallop.

And here is Business—American business—one of the things that no one can get away from—or wants to. For American business has penetrated all the far corners of the world. What was your most remarkable Business Experience? Why not send in to us your account of it?



By
THOMAS P.
SCHNEIDER

Selling Razors to the Sheiks

IT was talk of manganese that took me into the Kurdish foothills. That sort of a mission would have sounded odd a generation ago, when manganese was used principally as a cure for snake-bites. But there's nothing peculiar about it now. The new steel alloys that were developed to meet the needs of light automobiles brought a lot of strange metals out into a place in the sun. Many a mine paid off the old mortgage reworking its tailings for tungsten. If a man knew how and where to get vanadium cheaply and quickly, he could afford to hire an expert auditor to take care of his income tax.

The company for which I was working never overlooked a bet. Right now two of the best mining engineers in the world are trailing through Malayan jungles looking for a new manganese source. And every corner of the globe is being checked by the New York office in a grist of daily

reports that offer prospects or guesses—with the guesses far to the fore.

So I went up into Kurdistan at the suggestion of some geologist who thought something ought to be there—to trust myself to the kindness of the Kurds and the Chaldeans and the devil-worshipping Yezidees—up into the Garden of Eden to look for material for flivvers. That's modern business for you—stirring the bones of Eve to increase the comfort of some flapper in Main Street.

I don't want to give the impression that all of this was breathless adventure—daring risk and all that sort of thing. Nowadays when a man rides across the Syrian Desert in an automobile he writes a book about it. He pictures himself as a sort of a combination Cœur de Lion and Chris Columbus and makes no mention of the scores of folks who travel this route daily as another commuter would take the five-

fifteen to Yonkers. Civilization is pretty nearly habitual in this so-called world nowadays. I have seen Fords in Bagdad. There are automatic carpet-making machines in Mosul. And I have found an ice factory not a day's ride from the ruins of Nineveh.

But admitting all of that, the territory which I had to work had seen very little of Occidental fauna—including the ubiquitous bipeds of commerce. Most of the population is dark-brown Mohammedan, fanatical and suspicious. It might have understood me had I been looking for cuneiform scripts or licorice-root or wool or carpets. Perhaps "understood" is not the proper term—"tolerated" is better. For a Kurdish hillman would be hard put to understand why anybody should be interested in such things, though he might make some concession to the whimsicality of the daft visitors from the West. It was perfectly obvious that neither toleration nor understanding would be granted a man who came on a novel and unexplainable errand such as the search for mysterious purple crystals. And my prospects were made no brighter by the story of a strange luck-charm that had come into Kurdistan—a golden emblem that was to restore the sons of ancient Assyria to the grandeur of those hazy days before Timur the Lame had taken a notion to destroy the irrigation ditches.

I FIRST heard of this stirring of the hillmen when I went for advice to the United States consul in Irak, then in Mosul to keep a watchful eye on the oil-concession argument. He was a little skeptical about my chances.

"Investigative commerce is causing more unrest in this particular region than was caused by Maude's army," he said. "We have this oil-dispute. We have also the constant antipathies that make life interesting for the Kurd and Chaldean and similar animosities between the simple Yezidee and his Christian and Mohammedan neighbors. Anybody with a box of matches could start a fair-to-middling hell here any time. But it seems that God has graced commercial travelers with special gifts along such lines.

"There was a young fellow here a few months ago with a lot of cutlery. He had no chance of selling his stuff in these parts, but you couldn't discourage him. He went up into the hills, and now I am upsetting

all the sheiks in the neighborhood looking for him.

"It was shortly after he left here that I began to hear the stories of the luck-charm that is making such a row in the hills, and I couldn't help thinking the way fortune works. There was that boy with a pack-train loaded with useless stock—trying to peddle safety razors to a tribe that would commit suicide before it would sacrifice its beards. But if he had thought to bring a lot of swastika pins and cheap lockets instead, he could have helped himself to all the gold in the vicinity."

WELL, of course that talk got no manganese, and the plight of the youth who had missed his market did not seem to have much to do with the geology of Kurdistan. There was more comment about the mystic amulets and the growing race-consciousness of the hill tribes. But I attached no significance to that. If a Kurd took a notion to commit a murder, he would do it for a dollar watch or a shiny belt-buckle or no reason at all. That the danger had become tribal instead of individual did not make much difference. I got letters from all the sheiks of importance around Mosul and started out.

The hills step out of what rumor fixes as the site of Eden to snow-capped heights toward Russia. The mountain trails were engineered by goats, and have been followed since by honest banditti in search of provender and amusement. Out in the cañons the simple-minded Yezidees framed their prayers to Satan just to keep him appeased against the day when he might be restored to his place as an archangel. I could not but wonder how they might interpret Beelzebub's attitude toward the extraction of manganese from these hills so peculiarly his own.

I had expected no opposition during the first few days, and I found none. But toward the end of the week, when I had left the crumbling ledges that passed current for roads and had picked my way upward through dubious passes into the interior, I must confess that my status in the community began to worry me a bit.

On the eighth day I ran squarely into a camp of hillmen clad in fur and rawhide and armed with flintlock muskets that might have been stolen from some museum. They were none too enthusiastic about me, and only a little better disposed toward Ali, the guide I had brought from the

lower Tigris. However, we went through all the formulæ of greeting. They accepted as a gift a tin of tobacco, and presently the patriarch of the group, a handsome old sheik with the eye of a basilisk, offered us sirupy coffee and spoke to us of the world that he had heard lay beyond the rim of the mountains.

"You come from Iran or Irak?" he inquired. I told him that I had come from across the two deserts and the several seas far from Irak toward the setting sun. He did not seem to be surprised.

"Ah, you are another Frank," he commented.

"Another?" I repeated. "Then some of my people have been here before me?"

"Yes, the young man with the amulets. He came here as a merchant with a great stock of knives that would make no impression on the thinnest enemy. And he has gone on toward Iran with the blessings of our people."

"You bought his stuff?" I inquired incredulously as I looked at the patriarch's flowing beard and thought of the safety razors.

"Much of it," he replied. "Our women gave us no peace until we had done so. And now we bear the talisman that will make our people great once more."

There was more of that sort of gibberish, but I was able to make nothing out of it. I listened respectfully and then suggested that I be allowed to look for some colored rocks in the near-by cañons. He clouded up instantly.

"Out of respect for the Frank who was kind to us, we shall permit you to pass on to the next tribe—but you will look for no stones here," he declared flatly. "We are growing strong now, and we shall permit no magic in the interest of the pale peoples we must one day conquer. . . ." And that was that. Even my argument that the stones were to be ground up into the iron that would make juggernaut cars in which the people of Western cities would one day be killing themselves failed to move him. He suspected that I might be hoaxing him. And so the next day I plodded on into the wilderness to meet more mystery and more opposition. In one village, where I had every reason to believe no Occidental had penetrated since the Roman campaign against the Parthians, I was greeted with enthusiasm as a brother of the man of the amulets. All ways along that march hairy apes of every

imaginable variety gave me words of praise for the seller of safety razors. But I was not allowed to look for manganese. It just simply wasn't being done.

WELL, I trudged those hills for five months—and it was always the same story. The manganese may be there. Some day I am going back with a new equipment and find out. But I never will be able to look an Arab in the beard again without thinking of William Bill Grady of Worcester, Mass., and his gift of salesmanship. I went on through my discouraging program until snow came to add weight to the hostility of the hillmen. And then I slipped over the Persian border to Teheran, where I caught up with the safety-razor industry and met Mr. Grady. He was playing the piano in the home of an American missionary, waiting for a new supply of merchandise with which to go adventuring into Afghanistan.

He seemed genuinely sorry when I told him of my hard luck, and was hardly cheered when I complimented him on his effort to sell barber-shops to the barbarians.

"Yes, I sold the razors," he said as if he were talking about the auto stage to Bagdad or the price of a cup of *cha*. "I almost didn't. You'd think those hairy bozos would need safety razors more than anything else in the world. But they'd just as soon be scalped as shave. And that, by the way, is what happened to your manganese."

"Me—I'm not really a safety-razor salesman. I'm a fixer for an oil company that I'd better not mention. The razors were a side line that almost sunk me."

"You see, I brought the things in with me intending to distribute them and make some friends and all that. But it didn't take me any more than five beards and a mustache to see what I was up against. Then one night I got to looking at some of the advertising posters that came with the junk, and luck just naturally took its course. One of the pictures showed a gink in a movie engineering uniform standing near an oil derrick and smiling at one of my razors."

"One of the guides saw the picture and asked me what it was all about, and in a moment of inspiration I told him that this gent in movie pants was looking at a great amulet for which I had a factory agency in Irak, Iran and a lot of other places."

The mention of the amulet and the picture of the oil-well seemed to take this Kurd's eye right away. There isn't a bird in the backwoods of Persia or the Arabian peninsula who hasn't heard about oil, and that night the whole village was making a mystery out of the business.

"Well, pretty soon an old sheik came to me and asked me just what there was to all the talk, and I had to think fast.

"I showed him first that the thing would cut hair—which was as much of a surprise to me as it was to him, and then I asked him if he had ever heard of the great Samson. He had.

"‘Well,’ I said to him, ‘here’s the answer: Delilah used one of these things to cut Samson’s hair. It was in this device, patterned after the mystic cross of Egypt, that she achieved her power.’ Pretty good, yes?

"‘You’d naturally figure that my problem was all solved then. But it wasn’t.

"‘I don’t think much of the charm,’ he said to me. ‘It’s too much to carry around. I like the little ones better.’ And right there I played trump.

"‘Well,’ I said loud enough to be heard all through the little bazaar where the women were swapping bread and vegetables, ‘it isn’t a man’s amulet, anyway. Womenfolks all through the Mohammedan world are going to wear them because such charms will make them like Delilah, irresistible to the strongest men, leaders in the great movement that is to restore the East to its former grandeurs.’

"And that’s that. Maybe you think that

the enslaved women of Islam just sit down and let the men run the works? They do—just as they do in Manhattan."

Grady turned around and hammered a bell. A Christian girl—a Chaldean, I took her to be—came into the room. She wasn't wearing any yashmak—the face-veil of Islam—and I did not need Grady's triumphant gesture to show me what was significant in her appearance. From each of her cordovan-colored ears hung pendant a bladeless safety razor.

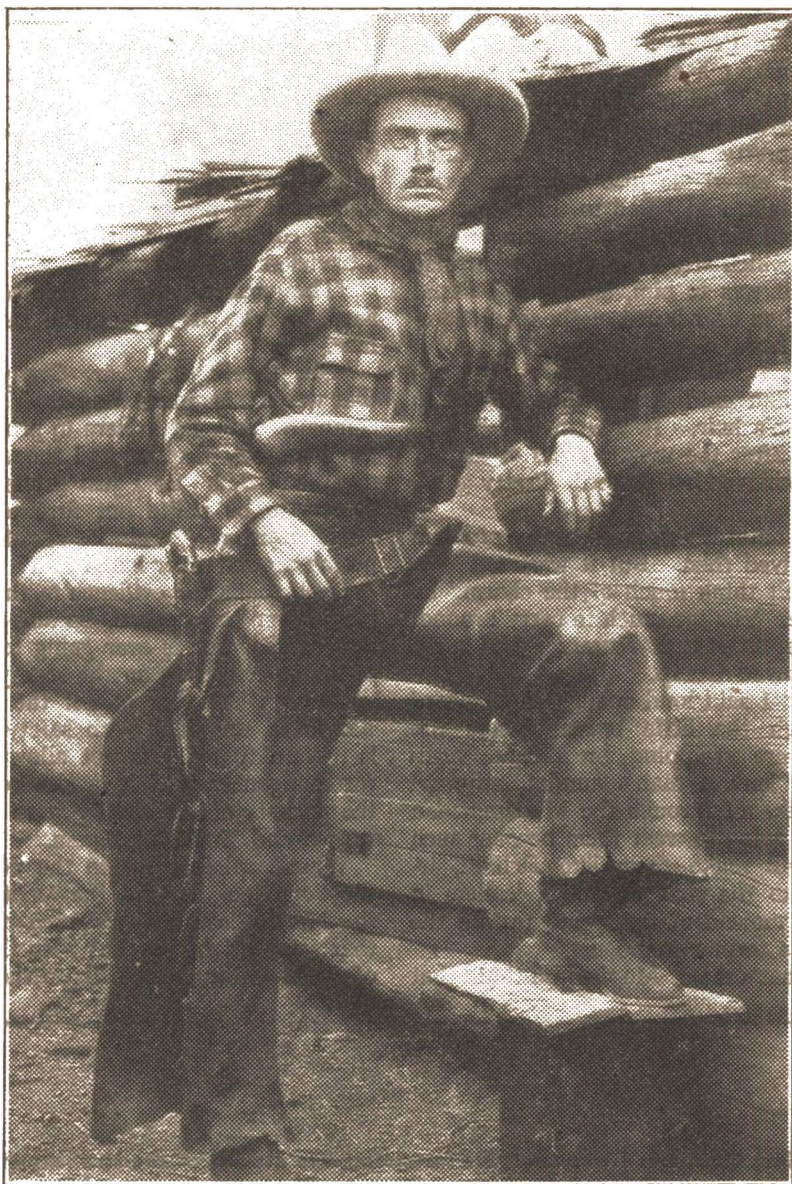
"The manganese?" I blurted, trying hard to keep from laughing in the girl's face.

"Oh, that!" said Mr. Grady. "Well, that was a misunderstanding. You see, our company can't get in here to prospect until the boundary dispute and the concessions mess is settled. So I just primed my customers to be polite but firm toward any Occidentals who would be certain to come nosing around after I had left."

Well, that's the evidence in the case. It may never be checked, because no Christian investigator is ever going to do much of his investigating on the seamy side of a yashmak. Whether or not the harems of Kurdistan are filled with safety razors, it is certain that I was not allowed to look for manganese, and it is also certain that the pockets of Mr. Grady were filled with rupees and Turkish piasters.

When explorers get to the point where they can look around the territory about the North Pole, they're going to find out that some bright boy has been there ahead of them—selling snowballs to the Eskimos.

Now that you have read the foregoing five stories of readers' experiences in the fields of Adventure, Mystery, Business, Sport and Humor, just ask yourself if you have not had an experience more unusual than any one of these. If you decide you have had, write an account of it in your own way and send the account to the True Experience Editor of The Blue Book Magazine, 36 South State Street, Chicago, with stamps inclosed for its return if the Editor doesn't keep it for publication. If he does keep it for publication, the Magazine's check for one hundred dollars will be sent you. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your account.



JAY LUCAS—COWBOY, BEAR-HUNTER, WRITER

WHEN Jay Lucas was sixteen, he joined a cow-outfit down in Texas—and promptly won the respect of his fellow-punchers by shooting a running coyote with his pistol. He liked being his own boss, however, and since the war, until recently, he has been a professional hunter of predatory animals in Arizona—grizzlies, mountain lions and wolves. A vivid cowboy story by this man who knows, begins on the next page. It will be followed by an authentic tale of wild animal life.



Trouble on the Range

A real cowboy is the author of this full-of-action Western story, for before he took up predatory-animal hunting Mr. Lucas punched cows in Texas and Arizona.

By JAY LUCAS

BEN JURNEY drew rein close to the curb, and sat staring down the dust-covered street. His stomach squirmed, partly from the effects of the hunger he did not have money to appease, and still more from the after-effects of the tequila, bad whisky and various other concoctions that had been almost his sole nourishment since he left a good job at the C Bar B and proceeded to spend a year's savings in record time.

A bent, shabby, gray little man came walking stiffly down the sidewalk, and seated himself on an empty whisky-case in front of the saloon. Ben groaned inwardly as he looked at him—that's what he would be some day, a worn-out cowboy, tattered, weather-beaten, stiff from some hurt received from a falling horse. *Why* couldn't he save his money and keep out of trouble!

Ben twitched his big shoulders. He dismounted by throwing his right leg over the horse's neck, and dropping to the

ground lightly as a cat. On the ground he was a far less active figure; his lean hips had a stiff swing as he started past the old man.

Then suddenly from the door of the saloon lurched a big, clumsy figure in cowboy dress. He glared around a second, until his eye fell on Ben. Though Ben was still several feet away, the stranger stepped to the middle of the sidewalk as though to intercept him.

"Do you know who I am?" he demanded, and then, without waiting for an answer, volunteered the information:

"I'm Buck Hughes of the Triangle H, an' I'm the toughest waddy that ever straddled a bronc' in Arizona. Get off'm the sidewalk. I'm goin' down that-a-way!"

THE color rushed quickly to Ben's face, and receded as quickly, leaving him grayish-white. His lips drew into a thin line. He half heard the little old man murmur surprisedly to himself:

"Hello! We've another bad-man in town besides Buck!"

The man from the saloon read something in Ben's face that made him pale slightly. His hand flashed to his gun—but no sooner than Ben's. But the little old man had sprung between them with surprising agility.

"Hey! Wait a minute, boys! Don't bloody up the sidewalk!"

Both stood pale-faced, their guns in their hands, waiting for the little old man to get out of line. But he seemed to have no intention of doing that. He spoke again, in his brisk, birdlike tones.

"Now, boys," he chirped, "there's no use in shootin' each other up that-a-way! Why don't you jest let me hold yore guns an' try a round with yore fists? Jest do that, boys."

Ben hesitated, but Buck Hughes jerked off his gun-belt quickly and tossed it to the feet of the little man.

"Fight!" he roared. "I can whip two like that Mexican-lookin' fool with my left hand!"

Ben quickly jerked off his own belt and dropped it beside the other as he passed the old man in his rush. Then the fight began.

A crowd rushed from the saloon and gathered around, yelling encouragement to first one and then the other. A few of the spectators emptied their revolvers in the air to show their appreciation of the spectacle that was being furnished. This brought more onlookers. Clicking high heels and jingling spurs hastened from both directions.

It was a battle fit for the gods to watch. Ben had the greater breadth of shoulder, but Buck was far heavier and of solider build. Neither knew anything of the science of boxing. There was almost no attempt at guarding; it was smash and grapple, smash and grapple, sometimes on their feet, sometimes rolling over and over on the ground, like mountain lions in a death-struggle.

For an instant both men stood glaring at each other, the clothes of both in shreds, their faces bruised and torn. Then Buck determined to end the struggle; he knew that his strength and wind were failing fast. He made a mighty rush. Ben side-stepped, and more by luck than skill, crashed his big fist against the point of the other's jaw. Buck dropped like a wet saddle-blanket and lay still.

There came a mighty yell from the crowd. Some one was plucking at Ben's sleeve.

"Good fer you, stranger! But look out fer Buck when he gets holt of his gun ag'in! He's a killer."

It was the little old man. Ben buckled on his gun-belt, picked his neckerchief from under the feet of the crowd, and wiped the blood and sweat from his face with it. Now Buck was on his feet too, buckling on his gun. Like snow in the hot sun the crowd melted, some into the saloon, some around the corner into the narrow alley. Only the old man remained.

For an instant the two stood poised, Ben quietly fingering his neckerchief, which had been again knotted around his neck, Buck red-faced and puffing. Then, as if at some prearranged signal, the hands of both flashed to their guns. Nothing followed but empty snaps.

"Heck," chuckled the old man, "you don't suppose I'd give yore guns back to you loaded!"

Ben's teeth showed in a grin of triumph, but the color fled from the other's face. For all knew that Ben's gun had snapped a fraction of a second before the other's.

With a sour oath Buck turned and disappeared in the saloon. The little old man plucked Ben's sleeve.

"Let's go," he whispered, "before the crowd gets back an' takes you off an' gets you drunk. I want to talk to you."

BEN quickly followed the other around a corner. The little man entered a big frame house—a mansion for that part of the country. Ben jerked off his hat and stepped warily as he felt his feet sink in a heavy carpet. This was easily the most sumptuously furnished room he had ever entered. Some there are who might have gasped in amazement at the conglomeration of heavily padded furniture, but to Ben it was the last word of elegance.

A big, pink-faced young man entered with an apron tied askew around his waist, and a white cap tipped jauntily over one ear.

"Time you got back, Sammy!" he growled. "I been wantin' a smoke fer an hour, an' couldn't leave dinner to go get it."

He unceremoniously reached his hand in the little man's vest pocket, withdrew a muslin sack of tobacco and tablet of shuck papers, and rolled a cigarette. After one ecstatic inhalation, he spun on his heel and

returned toward the kitchen, playfully kicking over a chair that happened to be in his way. Mingling with the rattle of pots, a ribald song drifted raucously back to them.

"Jim's jest the heck," bewailed the little man. "But what do you expect of a cook! Anyways he doesn't get drunk more than once a month, so he aint as bad as most of 'em."

He sank into a chair and waved Ben to another. Ben sank down gingerly in the springs, and glanced around nervously. What if the owner of the house—who was probably some big banker or something—should come in! The little man peered intently at him awhile before he spoke.

"Son," he mused, half to himself, "I never saw you before, but I wouldn't be a danged bit surprised if you was that Ben Jurney from down Conchitas way that I heerd about."

Ben reddened.

"Huh—ugh—that's my name, but more'n half the things you hear about me aint so. I'm kinda hot-headed, but I can't help that."

"Half of 'em so! Then you must be a holy terror! They say you never told a lie?"

"No, I didn't. I either tell a feller the truth or tell him to go to hell; an' if he doesn't like that—"

"You jest take a shot or two at him."

Ben started to spring angrily from his chair, but the little man waved him back.

"Keep yore seat, son. No harm intended, none a-tall. Now, do you know who I am?"

Ben shook his head. How could he be expected to know every worn-out cowboy in the country! Probably a flunkey around the house.

"I'm Sammy Hopkins."

BEN almost sprang from his chair. Sammy Hopkins—the idol of all the cowboys of the Southwest! A man who had built up a tremendous cow-outfit from nothing, who boasted that he had never worn a white collar in his life, and had trusted his feet to nothing but high-heeled boots since he was fourteen. A man who would share his table, and his own bed, with any out-of-luck cowboy who happened along. There was almost awe in Ben's voice when he spoke again:

"Shore proud to meet you, Mr. Hopkins. I heerd lots about you."

"Son, it aint fair fer you to try to start a fight with an old man, an' that's what you'll be doin' if you call me Mister ag'in. My name's Sammy; that name was good enough fer me when I was yore age, an' it's good enough fer me now."

THE little man stared broodingly at a purple plush chair for a long time. At last he turned back to Ben.

"Son, I'm goin' to offer you a good job if you'll take it, but first I'll have to lay all my cards face up. Will you promise to keep what I tell you under yore hat?"

"Shore."

"Well, it's this way: a horse fell on me about a year or two ago, an' I aint been able to ride much since, so I had to hire a foreman to run the Circle T fer me. The long an' the short of it is that the outfit aint brandin' the calves it should, an' I want to know why."

"Is the foreman a good cow-man?"

"Slim Garrett's one o' the best in Arizona."

Ben hesitated an instant; then, in his usual way, he spoke what was on his mind.

"Is he shootin' square with you?"

"That's what I want to know. I aint jest in love with him personally, but he's a jim-up cow-man, and could make the outfit pay better than anyone else I know if he wanted to. No use beatin' about the bush: I want you to drift out there an' get a job—they need a man right now—not lettin' on that you ever saw me. You'll draw fifty a month wages, an' I'll throw in another fifty on the quiet to help you keep yore eyes open. If you can straighten things out, you get the foreman job at two hundred a month."

"Two hundred!" Ben had never heard of such high wages.

"Yeuh! You get the job, but it'll be up to you to hold it—to make the outfit pay, in plain English."

"Fair enough! You've hired somebody. Want me to start out right now?"

"Heck, no!" grinned Sammy. "It's dang near night. Get a early start in the mornin', an' here's wishin' you luck—an' oh—while I think of it! That Buck Hughes you had the run-in with started up an outfit over west of mine about a year ago, an' seems to be gettin' up quite a herd all at once. His cattle's the best breeders I ever heerd of."

Ben's eyes narrowed.

"I sabel!" he grunted.

BEN saw the cloud of dust rising from the corral, and heard the excited yelling long before he came to the Circle T. He knew what it meant—some one riding a bad one—and dashed his spurs to his horse. He slid the beast to a stop just in time to see a slim young cowboy fly over the head of a coal-black horse, and land sprawling on his back. The foreman turned around on top of the corral.

"Welcome, stranger," he greeted in a low, dry drawl. "'Light an' stay fer dinner."

"Thanks, but I was goin' on to the Bailey outfit, I heerd they needed a hand there."

"Afraid yo're late, stranger. Dan Bailey brought out a man yesterday."

"Heck ag'in! You don't need a hand here, I suppose?"

"We-ll," Slim Garrett pulled his straggling mouse-colored mustache. "I—I might."

He looked Ben over critically, as though trying to read what sort of man he might be. The cowboy who had just been thrown came up, striking the dust of the corral from his clothes.

"Slim," he grinned, "wont you give the stranger a job if he rides Nightmare? He's piled the rest of us."

Slim never changed his expression.

"Yes," he drawled slowly. "Want to try him, stranger?"

"Shore need a job," mused Ben, starting to pull his saddle from his horse. "An' I can't die only once, anyway."

Ben threw his saddle on the top of the corral and swung himself up after it. He sat down beside the foreman, and addressed him:

"My name's Journey," he said, "Ben Journey."

"I—I didn't know. If I'd known—"

The foreman was staring at the dust of the corral, pulling his mustache expressionlessly.

"All right," he continued. "Let's see you fork that black."

Ben sprang into the corral, and saddled the horse, which stood quietly, saving its strength. He was preparing to mount when Slim Garrett spoke again, in the same dry, expressionless drawl:

"I—uh—you'll have to ride it outside the corral—give it a chance to buck."

Ben flushed. So the foreman didn't want to give him the chance the last rider had had! Very well, then!

"I'll ride him anywheres you say. Open the gate."

His tone was quiet—dangerously so.

The cowboy who had been thrown—Ben had heard the others call him Jack—flung the gate open, and Ben stepped into the saddle.

As Ben struck the saddle, the horse shuffled rapidly backward, sinking gradually to the ground. Close to the fence, he sank to his haunches and threw himself over on his side. Ben picked himself up from the ground, clawing dust from his eyes and mouth—he had not expected that trick.

The black was struggling back to his feet. With a bound Ben was astride the saddle, to rise with the horse. His spurs bit deep in the shoulders, then tore arcs high in the flanks. The horse shot straight into the air, and again crashed to the earth on his side. This time Ben came down on top of him, clumsily sprawled, but still astride. The black lurched to his feet with a wild squeal of rage.

Like a bullet he shot through the open gate, with a bound so high that Ben's head struck the top-bar. Dazed by the blow, Ben lurched to one side, losing one stirrup. The black sprang catlike to the other side, throwing his rider still more off balance. Then Ben's head cleared. With a pressure of the knee that drew his thigh-muscles taut as stretched rawhide, he pulled himself back into the saddle, and shot his foot back into the lost stirrup.

ACROSS the little flat Nightmare hurtled, squealing, pitching, bounding, shooting straight in the air, and crashing back stiff-legged to the earth. Twice more he threw himself, but each time Ben rose with him, seated solidly in the saddle. *Bump—bump—bump—bump—bump—b u m p—b u m p* thudded his hoofs, with the peculiar rhythm of the bucking horse.

The others were loping alongside on their horses, calling encouragement first to Ben, then to the horse—all, that is, but Slim Garrett, who looked on with the same expression of apathetic indifference. Then the corners of Garrett's eyes crinkled un-

"You rode him, stranger!" yelled Jack.

Nightmare weakened rapidly; there was less lurch to his leaps, less jar when he struck the ground. Suddenly he knew that he could not buck his rider off. With a shrill squeal, he broke into a wild run across the flat, regardless of dog-holes.

THEN came the crash—the horse rolling over and over in a suffocating cloud of dust, Ben running ahead with his arms outstretched, struggling to regain his balance. When Nightmare, after a moment of dazed stillness, again struggled back to his feet, he found Ben back in the saddle. That ended the struggle. The horse, still dazed from the fall, docilely answered the rein, and trotted back to the corral, where Ben unsaddled him. The foreman looked broodingly down from his horse.

"I—uh—the boys'll show you a bunk. Fifty a month."

Jack squatted on the ground beside Ben, while the others turned toward the house without another word being spoken. A queer lot they were, thought Ben. Slim, weather-beaten, silent, all with the same trick of staring expressionlessly ahead that the foreman had. Must be a pleasant outfit to work on! Strange that Jack, who was only a boy, with a frank, devil-may-care face, should be on such an outfit.

"How long you been here, partner?" asked Ben in a friendly manner.

"'Bout as long as I'm goin' to be, an' that aint very long! Dangdest lot of dummies I ever got into—give you the creeps to watch 'em sit around the bunk-house at night an' stare at nothin'. Have to stay here a few days more to get a grubstake, an' I'm here to say I'm danged glad you got the job—you look like a *human*!"

"Fairly so!" Ben grinned. "An' I'm danged glad there's one human here anyhow. If there wasn't, I might get hydrophobia watchin' the mummies, an' bite one of 'em."

The shrill clanging of a big triangle sounded from the house. Jack rose to his feet.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Another early lunch. They must be goin' on another of their long rides this evenin'. They'll likely leave me at home."

"Leave you at home?"

"Yeuh. They leave me at home to do some chore or other whenever they ride the west side of the range. I aint ever been over there since I started work for this outfit."

"Do you think there's something wrong on the outfit?" shot out Ben suddenly, noting a peculiarity in the other's tone.

Jack started walking slowly toward the house, looking at the ground. Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked frankly at Ben.

"I know there is! They figure that I'm a kid cowboy an' can't see, but they don't stop to think that I had to make a hand on my dad's outfit as soon as I could walk. Next time I go to town, I'm goin' to have a talk with Sammy. Ol' Sammy's a prince."

THEY disposed of a hasty, silent lunch, and all returned to the corral. The foreman assigned a horse to Ben, and soon all were saddled and mounted.

"Jack," began the foreman, "you—uh—you an' Ben can ride over east to Black Tanks an' see how much water is there. I—the rest of us are jest goin' to take a little ride west, an' we'll have help enough without you."

Jack flashed a glance to Ben, and the two silently turned their horses from the others. At the top of the hill they looked back; the others were headed west in a brisk trot. When the two had ridden down the hill out of sight of the others, Ben stopped his horse deliberately.

"Partner," he asked determinedly, "what you say to follerin' 'em up an' seein' what's goin' on?"

Jack looked at the ground a long time, then carefully studied Ben's face. At last he spoke resolutely:

"Partner, I'm with you. I aint sure o' what's happenin', but I got a good idea. An' damned if I'm goin' to see ol' Sammy get a rotten deal."

"But how about that tank?" asked Ben.

"We can lope over there an' see how much water there is, an' then swing in a circle an' pick up the trail of the others."

They put the spurs to their horses and rode mostly in a lope until they came to Black Tanks, which they found to be dry.

"Now," said Ben, "you know the country; you take the lead."

Jack meditated a moment before he spoke:

"I jest been thinkin' that from how they were headed when we saw them last, they must be goin' to the old Wagner place. They never take me there with them, but I was there once before I came to work for this outfit. Don't you reckon it might be a good idea to lope right over there? They got a long start on us now, an' we can cut across an' save time."

Ben wheeled his horse.

"Jest as you say. What sort of place is it?"

"It's an old abandoned homestead. The house is fallin' down, but the corrals is

pretty good yet. Whenever anyone's workin' cattle around there, they generally take 'em to the corrals, as it makes it easier to handle 'em."

They struck a steady gait in the direction that would let them pass the ranch-house without going too near it—they feared that the cook might be prowling around. After three hours of steady riding, they struck the trail of the others. Before they had followed it a mile, Jack suddenly stopped his horse.

"Listen!" he demanded.

"Sounds like a herd."

"Dang right! It's at the old Wagner place, jest as I thought."

AGAIN they started on, but had gone only a few yards before Ben suddenly stopped his horse and threw out his hand.

"What was that?"

They both listened carefully. Jack was the first to speak. "I don't hear nothin'. What was it?"

"I couldn't be sure. Sounded to me like a shot."

They again listened intently; no sound came to them but the distant bawling of the herd.

"Likely I was mistaken," remarked Ben, touching his horse with a spur.

The noise of the herd grew louder as they approached. Keeping to the thickest of the brush, they climbed a small hill overlooking the little flat where the old homestead lay. Near the top of the hill, they tied their horses and cautiously covered the rest of the distance afoot. Concealed by a patch of scrub oak, they watched the scene in the flat.

There seemed to be unusual bustle and hurry. Two herds were being hastily driven from the corrals, one east toward the Circle T, the other west.

"Aint that Buck Hughes?" demanded Ben, pointing toward the herd headed west.

"Shore is! Do you know the skunk?"

"Kinda. Had a little argument with him in town, an' had to kinda beat him up a bit."

A look of fierce joy illuminated Jack's face.

"Beat him up! Hooray!" he whispered. "Only reason I don't hand you a cigar is that I aint got one. He's a dirty snake!"

They watched for a moment in silence; then Jack's eyes crinkled.

"Now I sabe! See anything wrong with them herds?"

"Somethin' wronger'n the devil! Buck's herd has two calves to the cow, an' Slim's aint got no calves to speak of. Wonder how much a head Buck pays Slim?"

"Likely not much; they aint costin' Slim nothin'."

They lay in silence until both herds had disappeared in the junipers; then they returned to their horses, and slowly rode down to the corrals. After inspecting the corrals casually, they turned toward the house. Jack slowly dismounted and entered, pausing to roll a cigarette on the rotting veranda. Almost instantly he was back in the doorway, white-faced.

"Ben," he gasped, "come here!"

Ben hastily sprang from his horse, and hurried after Jack into the room.

"My God!" he gasped.

On the dirt-covered floor, beside a broken table, lay old Sammy Hopkins, his gray head resting in a pool of blood, his six-shooter lying close beside his outstretched hand.

The men stood looking down on him silently. Ben felt a great lump in his throat as he saw the blood-clots matted in the curly gray hair. When he turned to Jack he saw the tears rolling frankly down his cheeks.

"Pore ol' Sammy." There was a break in Jack's voice. "The whitest man in Arizona. An' the dirty skunks got him!"

Ben picked up the six-shooter and spun the cylinder.

"An' he didn't even get to fire a shot!"

"What are we goin'—"

A low groan interrupted Jack. With a yell of incredulous joy, he sprang to Sammy's head.

"He's alive!" he shouted. "Ol' Sammy's alive!"

THE old man's eyes fluttered open, and rested an instant on Jack. Then he closed them again resignedly.

"Hop to it, son," he muttered feebly. "Finish the job you fellers started— I've lived about long enough, anyway."

Ben hastily slipped an arm around his shoulders and raised his head.

"Sammy, ol' partner, they're gone. Jack's a friend of ours."

The eyes fluttered open again, and rested in wonder on Ben. Then a faint smile came to the white lips.

"Ben," he whispered, "I always did hear that there couldn't be a shootin' scrape in the county without you bein' around."

"Son," he continued after a moment's pause, "how many bullets in me? How long'll I last?"

Ben make a hasty examination.

"Ol'-timer, far as I can see, you jest got a real nice partin' in yore hair. I can't say jest how long you'll last, but I kinda think you'll last a good many years longer than any of that gang of coyotes that's drawin' wages off'm you."

The old man sat up with surprising strength.

"Heck!" he murmured incredulously. "I thought they'd got me! That's what comes of gettin' scared."

He rose to his feet, placed his hand to his head dizzily, but grinned at the boys.

"I was jest prowlin' around here to see what was goin' on. I heerd the herd comin' in, and left my horse in the junipers out o' sight, an' hid in the house here to watch. Slim an' Buck started walking over here with some papers in their hands, an' as there's only one door, I thought I might as well go out an' meet them. The minute I showed in the door, they both jerked their guns an' shot; I don't know which of 'em hit me. I went fer mine, but I'm gettin' old an' stiff, an' was just a mite too slow."

He walked out and sat down on the edge of the veranda, leaning his head dizzily against the rotting post, and closing his eyes an instant. Then his eyes flew open determinedly.

"What are we goin' to do now?" he demanded.

"That's up to you," remarked Ben. "Yo're boss of the outfit."

"The heck I am! Yo're foreman now, an' it's up to you. I never interfere with a foreman. If he can run the outfit, he can run it better if he's left alone; an' if he can't run it, he can't run it. What are you goin' to do?"

Ben thought a moment.

"Well," he mused, "it's hard to know just what to do. There's only two of us, an'—"

"Huh!" snorted Sammy. "I'd like to know how you figure! Countin' me an Jack as only half a man each?"

BEN grinned, but he looked down at Sammy with pride. There was a boss a man could be proud to work for! Sick as a dog, but never for an instant dreaming that he couldn't stand shoulder to shoulder with his men in a fight, and do a man's

part. Ben thought a long time before he spoke again.

"Well, I see no use in mixin' up with 'em with the odds so much ag'in us—they're a hard lot, too. How'd it be fer me an' Jack to ramble on back to the ranch like nothin' had happened, an' you ride back to town an' bring out the sheriff an' a posse?"

"Jest as you say; you're runnin' the outfit."

He started into the junipers toward his horse. Not until he was out of sight of the others did he allow his disappointment to show in his face.

"Heck!" he murmured to himself. "I thought sure he'd say to go on after 'em! But he's right—he uses his head. He'll make a good foreman. Think I'll start him on two-fifty; a good range boss's worth it."

A CHILL fell on Ben and Jack as they entered the dining-room of the ranch. The others were already eating—eating slowly, and staring broodingly at their plates. The hunchbacked Chinese cook motioned silently to two vacant chairs—he too seemed to be infused with the dismal spirit of the place. No one spoke a word as the two took their places, although they had heard a low murmur of conversation before they entered. Jack turned to Slim Garrett.

"We're late," he explained. "Found three big slick-ears over near Black Tanks. We lost one of 'em in the brush, an' had to ride nearly all evenin' to find him ag'in."

Slim raised his head and stared silently, abstractedly, at Jack for just an instant. Then he again dropped his eyes to his plate. A feeling of uneasiness crept over Ben. Could he suspect?

The meal was finished in silence. Then the men all trooped silently to the living-room of the bunk-house, and sat down to roll cigarettes. Ben fished an instant in his pockets.

"Now what," he wondered, "could I have done with my tobacco? Oh,—I remember now,—I left it in my chaps at the corral."

"Here's mine," offered Jack.

"No, thanks; might as well get my own before it gets too dark."

He rose and went to the corrals. He paused there to roll and light a cigarette before he started back the little distance to the house. Somehow, he had a queer feeling of uneasiness. Could they suspect? What was in the air? What was going to

happen? He walked slowly, trying to dispel the feeling that something was going wrong.

HE pulled the latch-string and stepped into the room. Before he realized what was happening, his arms had been seized, a neckerchief thrust in his mouth, and he had been thrown to the floor. He tried to struggle, but the odds against him were too great. He was borne down by sheer weight. His arms and legs were quickly tied with a lariat, and the gag made secure. Then he was thrown into a chair beside the table.

Slim Garrett, who had taken no hand in the struggle, sat down opposite him. He picked up a deck of cards, and slowly rifled them.

"Ben," he drawled, "you—uh—yo're a pore detective. Didn't you know that when I was p'intin' the herd comin' back, I could see the tracks where you an' Jack had follered us?"

Ben mumbled something in his gag.

"I sent Sneed back to the Wagner place, an' he was jest in time to see you an' Jack ridin' away. What did you do with the carcass of ol' Hopkins? The coyotes'll likely eat it 'less you buried it."

It was the first time Ben had seen him smile—a queer, twisted smile that reflected his twisted mind. The red raced to Ben's face, and he struggled against the ropes that held him. Slim actually chuckled—a low, dry chuckle that chilled the blood.

"Ben," he continued, "do you know anything about anat'my? We're havin' a little argument here. We're goin' to shoot you through some big artery or somethin', an' shoot Jack through the head, so that we can make out like you two got in a fight. It'll look like he shot you, but you lived long enough to get him. That'll match up with yore reputation. Where you think would be a good place to shoot you? We can't shoot you in the neck because that would crease you. I think jest over the heart would be the best place."

"No, it wouldn't," interrupted Sneed in a hoarse, whispering drawl. "It's jest like I said—the big artery in the thigh would be the best place."

Ben struggled furiously in his chair.

"Look out!" drawled Slim. "He'll knock the lamp over. Take him in the other room, boys."

Two of the men approached. A push sent Ben toppling from his chair. Each of

the men took hold of one ankle, and they dragged him unceremoniously through the door. When they dumped him on the floor in a dark room, he felt beside him a warm, struggling bundle that he knew to be Jack. Through the closed door he could hear the low hum of voices raised in argument, the scraping of chairs, the clumping of high heels on the floor. Presently he heard the outside door open and close. The hum of voices grew louder, more heated.

He could feel Jack struggling and twisting beside him. Evidently Jack's hands, like his own, were tied behind his back. What could Jack mean by kicking him so with his knees? More scuffling beside him. Hands plucking at his ropes. A stinging pinch.

Suddenly Jack's meaning dawned on him. He hastily squirmed over, and wiggled until he had brought his hands in contact with Jack's. Then, fast as he could, but still slowly, feeling his way, he began to tug at the knots in the rope about Jack's wrists.

The knots were well tied. He struggled and broke his fingernails, but the rope was stiff, and the knots still remained solid. Suddenly he felt a slight slackness of one knot. Plucking and twisting at it, he slowly undid it. After that the others were comparatively easy. He could feel Jack's hands come apart slowly, with many strainings and twistings. Then Jack rolled away from him.

A minute or two of struggling and scuffling beside him. Then a light, cautious step, and Jack's hands were working frantically at the knots of his ropes. A minute or two more, and he was loose. He bent close to Jack's ear.

"What room is this?" he whispered. "Where can we get guns?"

"I have an extra forty-five in my bed here, an' there ought to be a carbine over Sneed's bed. You jest stay where you are till I look; I know my way about here."

FOR a few seconds there was a cautious shuffling of feet. Then he felt the familiar stock of a big six-gun pushed into his hand. He reached out the other hand, and passed it along the barrel and magazine of a rifle.

"They're both loaded," whispered Jack. "I felt in 'em."

Ben shook him delightedly.

"What artery are you goin' to shoot me in, Jack?" he whispered.

"The Slim artery, I reckon."

"Let's throw the door open an' jump into the room. We can have 'em covered before they know what's goin' on. If one of 'em so much as bats an eye—well, you know what to do."

"*Seguro!*" came the grim answering whisper.

"I'll jest open the door about an inch first, an' look in. If it squeaks or anything, I'll have to fling it open an' jump in among 'em."

"I'll be right with you."

Ben carefully tested the door. Very, very slowly he opened it an inch and looked in. He was about to throw it wide and step into the room, when a loud, sudden knock rang on the outer door.

"*Open! This is the sheriff!*"

The men sprang to their feet, and their hands flashed toward their guns. Suddenly they paused, as a quiet voice came from behind them.

"Boys,"—Ben stepped into the room with Jack beside him, both with guns leveled,—"kindly stick 'em up—if you feel like it."

They felt like it! The grim faces confronting them told plainer than words that they could expect little more mercy than they had been prepared to give a half-hour before.

"All right, Sheriff," sang out Ben. "Come right in."

The door flew open suddenly, and the space bristled with gun-barrels. Then the guns lowered, and the sheriff stepped into the room.

"Good work!" he nodded to Ben and Jack.

He scrutinized the group in the room.

"Where's Slim?" he demanded suddenly.

Ben looked around in consternation. He had not missed him before.

"Dunno! I heerd the door open jest a few minutes before you knocked. He must have heerd you comin' after he went out. Maybe he don't know who it is—if we keep quiet a few minutes he may come back."

"**T**HE sheriff!"

It was a wild yell of warning from Sneed, Slim's right-hand man. Ben's gun-barrel caught him across the head, and he dropped like a log. The sheriff swore fervently.

"That fixes it! He's wanted bad, too. Robbed a bank in Oklahoma three years

ago—I jest found out about that today. Two of the others here were in his gang, an' they— *There he goes!*"

They could hear the pounding or running hoofs leaving the house. The sheriff ran out, to find his own horse gone—Slim had not waited to saddle another. Besides, the old night-horses in the corral would be too slow.

"Sheriff," Ben said hastily, "he'll go to warn Buck Hughes first thing. Leave some of your men here, an' me an' Jack can take two of their horses an' go with the rest of you to the Rafter H. Jack knows the way."

The sheriff sprang through the doorway.

"Let's hurry!" he grunted.

FOR an instant they could hear the clatter of hoofs racing across the stony wash. Then silence. Ben and Jack stopped an instant to buckle on their gun-belts, which were lying on the table, and to see that the guns were loaded. Then they hastily sprang after the sheriff, and leaped to the backs of the horses which he told them were the best.

Off into the starlit darkness they dashed, Ben and Jack leading, the others close at their heels. They did not follow the clearing of the old wagon-road, but raced straight through the thick junipers as Slim had done. The branches seemed to have grasping arms which tore their clothes and scratched their faces, but they gave no heed. Sometimes a horse stumbled to his knees, but his rider never ceased to quirt and spur. They rode through the night as an Indian rides, trusting to luck and to their horses' sure-footedness. Once an overhanging limb swept a rider from his saddle. The others paused only long enough to call back asking if he were hurt, and then dashed on again, leaving him to catch up as best he could.

"Sheriff," grunted Ben, "we'd better slow up, or we'll wind our horses. It's an all-night ride."

He and Jack reined their horses in a trifle, but still the pace was reckless. Hour after hour they rode, mostly in a long lope, sometimes, on the hills, in a swinging trot. Just before sunrise they neared the Rafter H. Now they checked their horses and approached cautiously. As they came into the clearing they could see Buck Hughes quickly lead a saddle horse from the corral and spring to his back.

The sheriff jerked his carbine from the

scabbard, called to his companions to halt, and leaped from the saddle. He rested the gun on his knee, and fired. Buck's horse sank under him. Buck's hand dropped to his six-shooter, but a bullet dropping at his feet made him pause. He slowly raised his hands in the air.

At a word from the sheriff, three men dropped to the ground and covered Hughes with their carbines. Ben, the sheriff and the others then approached him, keeping to one side of the line of fire of the men with the carbines. Soon his gun-belt had been removed.

"Now, where's Slim?" asked the sheriff.

"He's where you wont get him!" leered Buck. "He jest called out to me as he rode by headin' west. I was in bed."

"That likely means that he's gone east. Probably follerin' the old wagon-road to town. Maybe he— *Huh!*"

THE sheriff's eyes opened as old Sammy Hopkins rode stiffly out of the junipers. Over the horn of his saddle was looped the reins of another horse, on which sat a man with his hands tied to the saddle-horn. The crowd broke into a laugh, for such a sorry figure they had never seen before. They knew it to be Slim, but he was scarcely recognizable—torn, bruised, muddy, tattered, hatless; a scarecrow would have looked presentable beside him.

"Howdy, Sheriff, howdy," greeted Sammy, grinning. "Lucky thing I got to thinkin' after you left town, an' started out here."

"How did you get him?" asked the sheriff.

"Heerd him comin' ridin' hell-bent fer election. I'm gettin' old an' stiff, so didn't want to take chances of shootin' it out with him—knew anyway that Ben here is the only man around that could beat him on

the draw. I jest hid in the cedars beside the trail, an' roped him as he came by. An' what you reckon happened then?"

"Cyclone hit him?" guessed Ben, grinning.

"Wuss'n that! Wuss'n that! My horse ran away, an' my rope tied hard to the saddle-horn! You know, I'd never have thunk it of ol' Whitey—wont even walk fast most of the time. He was wuss'n a green bronc'! Dragged pore Slim through a mudhole, an' then around all over the flat till he was near dead. Shore lucky there was no rocks there, or he'd 'a' been dead. I thought he was, anyways, but a coyote's harder to kill."

"Well, they got us, Buck!" murmured Slim thickly.

"Buck!" corrected the sheriff. "Why don't you call him Jud Flynn, like you used in Oklahoma?"

The color fled from Buck's face. So he should have to face trial for bank robbery and murder—the hangman's noose! He rubbed his left shoulder tenderly.

"My shoulder's bad sore yet," he whined, "from where Ben hurt it in town."

He opened a button on his shirt, and ran his hand in the opening as though to feel the sore shoulder.

Suddenly Ben's hand flashed to his hip. A crashing roar from his forty-five. Buck doubled up and slumped backward, a dark spot in the center of his forehead. The hand that slipped limply from the opening in his shirt held the butt of a small revolver.

"Good!" grunted the sheriff.

Sammy stepped over to the figure on the ground.

"Shore is!" he corroborated. "Saves the county the expense of a trial an' hangin'; an' Oklahoma'll furnish the necktie for his partner here."

"The Cat of the Canons," another true-to-the-West story by this author who learned to write by hard study beside many a lonely camp-fire, will be a feature of an early issue. Be sure to read it.



A Close Corporation

The author of the famous Free Lances in Diplomacy here begins a fascinating new series dealing with the exploits at home and abroad of an enterprising civil engineer.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

GRIGSBY had gone up to bed an hour before the usual owls left the billiard-room, and was sound asleep in twenty minutes. As an engineer, however, he had become accustomed to waken instinctively when danger of any sort threatened either his construction-work or himself—to waken with eyes still closed and recumbent figure motionless, but with every sense alert, concentrating upon what and where the danger might be. So, though he had been in deep-breathing unconsciousness a second or two before, the faint tang of wood-smoke in the air of his room brought him out of it with the first inhalation—shortly after one in the morning.

Some dangers call for motionless consideration before they are located; smoke calls for instant action. At the second breath he was out of bed, opening the door into the hall, where the suggestion of something burning was scarcely more perceptible than in his room. Accustomed to quick-thinking in emergencies, he knew that in bare feet and pajamas he was handicapped for effective fire-fighting, and so

in less than two minutes he pulled on the heavy shoes, riding-breeches and puttees he'd been wearing during the day, the shoes not being completely laced, but held sufficiently by the puttees. Then he ran lightly down two flights to the ground-floor—through parlors, dining-room, kitchen and a connecting barn which led to the garage, grabbing up a soda "extinguisher" in the hall as he went.

As he opened the sliding door from the barn, one glimpse into the garage was enough. A seven-foot flame was shooting up from the puddle of oil carelessly drained upon the concrete floor, and had already caught upon the rafters overhead. The soda in his extinguisher might have been so much sand, for all the effect it had. He succeeded in rolling out the four gasoline barrels, but it was only a question of minutes before the flame began eating into the barn. Although he had more than once urged a ten-thousand-gallon tank on the hill across the road, nothing had been done about it, and there was no force of water available. He tightly closed the tin-covered sliding door into the barn and took

perhaps five seconds to estimate the time available for getting the guests out of the inn, with its annex and cottage. Then he ran out to the hoop of railroad-iron suspended from one of the trees, and struck it repeatedly with the hammer until its booming tones echoed from one end of the lake to the other.

To the guests occupying ground-floor rooms he paid no attention—if they hadn't sense enough to get out of the doors or windows, they might roast, for all he cared; there was scant time for those on the upper floors, as it was. Not for an instant had he any sense of panic or nervousness. That would have wasted precious time—possibly lives. Rattling the handle of each door, and pounding as he went, he called out instructions to those inside in clear, level tones which set them doing as he ordered even though they were sure he overestimated the danger.

"There's fire at the other end of the buildings—coming this way! You have possibly five or ten minutes to get out! Don't lose your heads or stop to dress! Tie up all the clothes you can find, in sheets—throw them out of the windows! *Clothes!* Tie 'em up in sheets! Don't try to save anything but *clothes!* You'll need 'em!"

AS he was starting up the stairs to his own floor, the door of a room near the foot of them opened, and Joan Romney came out, with breeches and golf-stockings hastily strapped on over her nightgown—unfastened tennis-shoes on her feet. Through a communicating door he saw her aunt, apparently collapsed in a rocking-chair, a negligee thrown over her nightgown, every incandescent in the room turned on. But the girl, apparently, was as cool as he.

"I heard you striking the iron hoop out there, Mr. Grigsby, and caught what you've been shouting as you came upstairs. How much time have I got? This smoke coming in at the window probably makes the fire seem a little nearer than it is! I can do up most of the clothes in five minutes if I've got as many more to handle Auntie afterward. Or—had I better get her out first?"

"I think not. She looks rather paralyzed—but she'll do anything you tell her to if you say it quietly. If she doesn't, put up a howl, and I'll come back. Those folks upstairs aren't stirring as lively as

they should! —Hello, Pendleton!"—as the proprietor came running down the hall.

"How bad is it, John? I was sleeping like the dead!"

"Garage is gone—nothing can save the barn and inn! May possibly save the annex and cottage if you get busy! Go down and sit on that telephone until the fire gets to you! They've got two chemical-engines in Westford, and they might haul them up here with autos—in time!"

"Nobody in the exchange at this time of night—they don't consider all-night service necessary, you know, in these parts!"

"There's somebody sleeping within sound of an emergency-bell they're supposed to hook on when they quit! You keep ringing until they answer! Means several thousand dollars saved out of the wreck if those chemicals get here in time! Wind's blowing away from cottage and annex just now! Get busy, man—get busy! Gee! They're coming to, up there, at last! Hear 'em run! Smoke's chasing 'em out, probably! Look at this coming—will you! Scared silly—almost falling down the steps!"

Grigsby's hand shot out and grabbed the man as he was flying toward the lower stairs.

"Wait a minute, you! *Wait* a minute! You can get out without breaking your neck! Did you get any clothes together—do 'em up—heave 'em out the window? May have to go around a few days in pajamas if you didn't—and some of these mornings are nipping! Run back and get one suit, anyway! Then help me get the rest of these folks started!"

"*No!* Not on your life! Want me to be roasted! See you damned! Ah-h-h—*look!* The fire's right on top of us!"

"That's only the reflection on the wall, you fool! Go back and get some clothes! You wont? Well, then—go in here and help Miss Romney with her aunt while I chase upstairs again—she's got her hands full! You two are engaged—aren't you?"

"No—yes—I don't know! Get out of my way, damn you! There's no time to waste on an old woman—Miss Romney's able to look out for herself! We'll all be roasted alive if we don't hurry! Get out of my way!"

For one second Grigsby looked at the young fellow in sheer amazement; then, as he saw Joan Romney come out of her room with Mrs. Eversley-Whyte, he stepped aside.

"I beg your pardon, Caldwell! I guess I didn't size you up right! Run along out if you want to!"

IT should be borne in mind that in emergencies people act and speak far more rapidly than the eye grasps words on the printed page. Note how long it has taken to read this far, and it will be clear enough that not more than seven minutes had elapsed since Grigsby first ran downstairs. By this time the fire had eaten fairly into the barn, where a mow of hay was almost explosive in the fierceness with which it blazed up, sending tongues of flame through every crack to lick and catch upon the inn itself. Realizing that his time was getting shorter every second, the engineer raced up to the top floor and found half a dozen guests so confused that they needed sharp direction before they snatched a few clothes together and got out. Herding the last of them, as he supposed, he followed on down—to be met on the veranda by a horrified Joan Romney.

"The Stafford children! Mrs. Stafford is out there on the lawn almost crazy! Says she can't find the children anywhere! They have the room across the hall from yours on the top floor, with their governess! Do you s'pose it's possible that they can be—"

"Don't think so! Just chased everybody down! But I'll have a look, anyhow! It's getting pretty hot up there!"

WITH a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, he dashed up the stairs—to find the door of the children's room jammed by something on the other side of it. With a powerful heave of the shoulders, he managed to push that something along the floor inside until he could squirm his body through the opening and lift up the senseless governess. The two children were at the window—wide-eyed, partly stunned by what was happening. Grigsby didn't stop to curse at Miss Romney's foolhardiness when he found her at his elbow, but flung one of the sheets at her with orders to rip it into six-inch strips. This she did, so methodically that her strips were ready as soon as his. Knotting them together, he threw a loop under the governess' arms and lowered her out of the window—shouting to men on the ground to cast off the loop at once. Pulling it up, he fastened the children, back to back, and let them down—but the people below had difficulty

in untying the loop again. A volume of smoke suddenly filled the room and drove him back from the window. Pulling Miss Romney down upon the floor, where it was less dense, he crawled with her through the door and into a small attic with one dormer window at the end of the hall, overlooking the precipitous hundred-foot drop to the lake below. Both were choking a little as they got upon their feet. There was a suggestion of horror in the girl's eyes, though she was almost as cool as he.

"Are we trapped, Mr. Grigsby? Rather paralyzing—to have death come right on top of one when such a thing seems least possible!"

"Yes—I've noticed that a few times. I can't say for a minute or two how bad a fix we're in—depends upon whether the flames come through that door and partition before I figure it out! Wait a bit! I made for this place instinctively. Now I know what suggested it! You've often seen that long I-beam which juts out from this dormer and is supported by the cantilever strut anchored into the rock a third of the way down—ever notice what they use it for? Westford, six miles down the lake, on the opposite side, is the terminus of that little narrow-gauge railway-spur from Brockville Junction. All the supplies for the inn come that way—and it costs less to send them up by water in a launch than to haul them clear around the head of the lake by motor-truck, with these grades and bad roads. They hoist the stuff up here from the launch with that tackle out at the end of the I-beam, and swing it in the cellar-door just under us. This window is pretty small, but we can get through it—the beam comes in through the clapboarding two feet below the sill, and runs out forty feet over the water."

"You mean to crawl out along that beam—a hundred feet above the water—and slide down the ropes at the end of it? I—I'm not quite sure my head will stand it!"

"I can walk it much faster than crawling—we do that all the time on structural-iron, you know—and if a sheet of flame comes out after us, we may get dizzy! Crawling's out of the question! I'll get out first and then take you in my arms!"

IN daylight the dizzy height and narrow foothold would have made it a far more dangerous proceeding, but the engineer held himself ready to dive if he felt his balance going and risk hitting the forty-foot depth

of water at an angle that would give the minimum strain on his back. Joan shut her eyes and tried to keep from shuddering. After what seemed a year of suspense, he gently lowered her astride of the beam at its outer end and guided her hands where they could clutch the lashings of rope which held the big block underneath. With the flames bursting out behind them, it was but a moment or two before they were seen by the crowd on the lawn—who watched in breathless horror, expecting every second to see them topple over. When they got down astride the end of the beam, Joan said, rather faintly:

"I suppose I can slide way down there on this rope if I make up my mind to it—and if my hands aren't cut to pieces before I'm halfway down—"

"Oh, yes, easily—after I've told you how to manage a sailor's foot-hitch. But I can just as well take you down on my back, astride of my hips. With that particular foothold, a man can handle at least twice his own weight on a rope and still have one hand free. When you start climbing down onto my back, don't be afraid—I won't let you fall, even if you lose your own grip!"

Lying flat along the iron beam with his legs curled tightly around it, Grigsby hauled up the lower pendant block until there was enough downhaul slack to reach the water under them. Then letting himself down over the end, he threw his right leg around the downhaul so that it passed inside his thigh, around under the knee, outside the calf, and over the instep of his foot. Shoving the instep of his left foot under the sole of his right, with the rope between them, he obtained a perfect brakelock in which he could have stood without slipping for an hour or more if necessary. Easing off the grip of his left foot allowed the rope to slip around his leg and let him slowly down. This sailor's foot-hitch—as it is known on the old square-riggers—has been used, probably, for centuries, and gives a man complete control of his weight upon any rope from a half-inch up to one and a half.

When he had the downhaul securely gripped, he reached up one hand and firmly grasped the belt which held Miss Romney's breeches. Following his instructions at every point, she then let herself down over the end of the iron beam until her legs got a grip around his waist and she could drop one arm over his shoulder. Although con-

trolling her nerves with a fine exhibition of will-power under such conditions, she was trembling—and didn't dare look down, or anywhere beyond the rope which scraped her nose. As soon as he felt that she was hanging on firmly enough to support her weight and would keep her nerve, barring accidents, he began easing himself down the rope a foot or so at a time, to prevent it from chafing his legs too much. Most of the guests were now on the lawn at the south of the inn, along the top of the cliff, and had been watching the performance breathlessly—afraid to call out for fear of making the two lose their balance or grip. But they now sent up cheer after cheer—several of them running down the steep path and steps in the face of the cliff to the boathouse below, so that when Grigsby and his burden were within three feet of the water, a boat was already under them.

THERE was a disposition to pound the engineer and Miss Romney on their backs while superlative compliments were showered upon them—but he sidetracked most of this by asking what was being done toward getting the guests and whatever they had saved under shelter for the remainder of the night, which was getting perceptibly colder from a raw east wind that fortunately helped to save both cottage and annex. Grigsby commenced giving practical orders as soon as he reached the top of the cliff—knowing that assistance would soon reach them. Within a few minutes, in fact, cars and flivvers of every breed and condition began arriving with food and blankets from the bungalow colony around the shores of the lake. After them came the chemical-engines and a number of cars from Westford. Grigsby's booming strokes upon the iron hoop had been heard for miles—the blazing buildings told the story. So the vacationists and townspeople responded as quickly as they could. Considering the roads and the grades, they got there amazingly soon.

As the engineer had been coming to the lake for years whenever in the United States, within reaching distance, he had become acquainted with most of the regular bungalow-dwellers while paddling or fishing up and down the shores. So when Braley, just across from the inn, turned up in his big touring-car, he jumped on the running-board to ask:

"Have your cousins gone home, old man? Could you take in Miss Romney

and her aunt for a few days—let me cut a few spruce-boughs and camp down on your veranda?”

“Beds and grub for all three of you—no trouble at all! I suppose I could take in a couple more—but that would crowd us some, and there’s plenty accommodation for the rest all the way down alongshore to Westford. The Frazier House can sleep and feed twenty of ’em at least. How many are there, altogether?”

“About fifty guests. Pendleton can take care of possibly ten, and most of his help, in the cottage. All right, Tommy! Let’s get the women with their bundles, and go! The sooner they’re in bed, the better. And you’d best take your time going back—no reason for giving your car any more such banging as you must have risked to get here in the time you did! Besides, the women are pretty well done up. Miss Romney’s one corking good sport, I’ll tell the world!”

“Why—what’d she do? Say, John—a lot of the folks are calling for you—don’t you hear ’em?”

“Let ’em call! And get me out of here as soon as you can, for the love of Pete!”

“Why? Whatcha been doing?”

“Not a darned thing except a bit of night police that came about by sheer accident! Here’s Miss Romney! She’ll go get her aunt while I stay here in the shadow of your car.”

THE mysterious disappearance of Grigsby and the two ladies wasn’t generally explained until a day or two afterward—by which time the movement to lionize him for what he had done lost some of its pep. In the morning, at Braley’s, Joan turned out for her six o’clock swim as usual, apparently none the worse for her somewhat hectic night; but her aunt’s conventional ideas were suffering from shell-shock—it took her several days to accept the wearing a single sport-suit, whenever she wasn’t in bed, as a thing one could do without losing caste. That afternoon the engineer paddled Joan up the lake for a little mental rest. Presently, as they drifted under an overhanging spruce, he lighted his pipe and asked:

“Er—Miss Romney—if I really grasped that little affair yesterday morning, you’re engaged to Caldwell—not? Going to marry him?”

“I was. But when he made that beastly scene over your showing me the jujitsu

defense, just because we hadn’t been introduced, I got a slant on Percy which had escaped me before. After lunch he ordered me to go motoring with him. I refused—and we went down to the boat-house instead. I said a few things which perhaps I oughtn’t—gave him back his ring. The way he took it confirmed my belief that I was entirely right—but the way he acted during the fire, up there in the hall, settled the question absolutely!”

“H-m-m—I was kinda hoping you hadn’t seen or heard that. People aren’t all built alike. Most of us have weak spots somewhere, I guess. Still—I’m sort of pleased to know you’re through with Caldwell. He really isn’t your type. Of course it’s impertinence on my part to ask—but I am a little curious to know how you happened to pick him out?”

“I didn’t! He was wished on me! And after last night, Mr. Grigsby, you couldn’t offend me by asking anything that comes into your head! Dad had plenty of money, once, but his business associates robbed him—he left me just a very small income. Aunt Fanny took me to live with her when he died—kept hammering on the idea that I must marry a rich man or drop out of the set I’d always gone with. Percy Caldwell has an income of twenty thousand, and will get a million or more when his mother’s estate is turned over to him in a few months. Aunt Fanny said he’d been crazy about me since we were children—which, of course, is flattering enough to any girl. I told them I didn’t love him in the least! They both assured me that would come after we were married. So—I just drifted into it.”

GRIGSBY got the whole picture—the girl’s upbringing with a father who thought she was about right, yet impressed upon her the same qualities which made his friends love and his enemies respect him—the shifting to a more artificial environment with her aunt after Romney dropped dead one morning, when he discovered the rascality of men he had trusted—the nagging which had driven her into a risky engagement against her wishes and judgment. And she was going to be a jewel for some man, some day. For a while the canoe drifted along in absolute silence, as he kept his paddle-blade under water and digested all this. She seemed to know as well as he that exchange of thought and ideas isn’t necessarily vocal—often conveying more

perfect understanding when it isn't. Neither would have said that there was anything more than friendly attraction between them at the time.

THREE months afterward Joan sat in the living-room of her aunt's Park Avenue apartment, writing a dozen notes—all practically the same—to the only three relatives she cared about, and a few of her most intimate friends:

Dear _____,

I am going to marry John Grigsby, Thursday afternoon, next week, at the Little Church Around the Corner. It will be lovely to have you there if you can come—and to have you lunch with us afterward at the Ritz.

Affectionately,
Joan.

This proceeding outraged so many of Mrs. Eversley-Whyte's social canons that it was some days before she could persuade herself to be present at the simple ceremony and the delightfully informal luncheon which followed it. She had ascertained that Grigsby was by no means a pauper,—in fact, stood high in his profession,—but this meant nothing to her. Socially the man was a nobody. To her amazement, however, he was the most forceful and distinguished-looking man at the table, holding his own in the lighter chat, but with a subtle inference that in discussing more worth-while topics he was even better. He was more retiring than assertive, an excellent listener. And the impression of his personality was strong upon the whole party after he and Joan had casually disappeared—to drop completely out of sight for one solid month. In February those who answered their telephone and followed instructions found them snugly at home in a four-room apartment in the best residence-section of Brooklyn. After three days of hard work upon moving in, they had looked about them with a satisfaction almost too deep for words.

"We got away with it, Joan—didn't we? Nothing that anybody would call junk—not too much furniture and fixings, but enough! Nine-tenths of the apartments one goes into seem as bare as a barn—no books, no pictures, the minimum of department-store furniture, not a single darned thing to give the place any atmosphere of a home, a place that folks live in. But we've got it, here, even if we have to pull up stakes and go somewhere else in a year.

Why, do you know, I lived in a box-car six months on one of the South American railroads, just behind the construction-gang, and that car made the boys feel as if they could tip their chairs back, put their feet on the window-sills, smoke cut-plug and go to sleep if they wanted to!"

All this was by way of compliment to results produced mainly by Joan herself while he was away during the day—and she glowed under it.

"John, there's something I've been wanting to ask you. Let's not tell anybody—ever—anything about our honeymoon. Hm? I'd—I'd like to keep that just between ourselves—as the sweetest experience of our lives."

He nodded—with the slow smile she loved to watch.

"I—sort of—had that idea too, girl. Funny, how many similar ones we seem to find!"

"M-hm. Our code of life must have the same basic principles, I think. Playing the game is one of them. No matter whether life comes hard or easy—play the game, clear through, to the end—"

"Right."

"Treat the other fellow as we think he should treat us—"

"Right."

"Not make foolish promises; ever—but carry out those we do make—"

"Right."

"Help the other fellow a little, if we can—conveniently. Eh?"

"Even inconveniently, Joan—if there's nobody else to bear a hand."

"I—I think I'll hug you for that! Bend down here!"

NEXT morning, as she opened her door to take in the milk, a blond cherub in a blue-linen suit stood on the landing—legs apart, head cocked a little on one side, taking her in, reflectively.

"You busy, zis mornin'?"

"Why—not particularly."

"Zen I'll come in an' draw pitchers, I fink!"

"Why—of course! I guess I must have been expecting you. Sit down here at the other side of the table while I eat my breakfast—I'll get you a pencil and some paper."

The artist was serious, but not above resting occasionally at his work.

"What's you' name?"

"Joan."

"O-o-o-o—you stayed fou' days an' ten

nights in zat ol' whale's tummy, didn' you! Wasn' it orful dark? Didn' you hafta cut windys in him to see out wiv?"

This was intriguing, as unremembered biography—but she caught it in a minute or so.

"Oh-h-h—you must be thinking of my ever-so-great-grandfather, Jonah! He was the one in the whale—everyone in our family knows the story."

At this point one of the bells rang—too long for the postman, not quite snappy enough for the ice-man at the dumb-waiter. A white-faced woman in a negligee asked nervously:

"Have you seen my little boy anywhere? He had on a blue suit! His velocipede is down by the telephone, and he isn't playing on the street, or anywhere in sight—"

Joan put a finger to her smiling lips and quietly drew the woman inside, where she pointed to the little figure intent upon his drawing, at the table.

"*Sh-h-h!* Don't scold him! He just stepped in to pay a social call—and we seem to like each other very much. Isn't he a dear! Next time you miss him, better ring my bell first—I think this is going to become a habit."

THIS was the beginning of acquaintance with the Fosters. The Smithers tom-boy precipitated another with them, when she pitched down the roof-stairs and Joan took her in to patch a bleeding scalp. Grigsby himself started the daily exchange of civilities with Apartment G-4 by getting into a mutually satisfactory political discussion with Forbes Rockwell in the subway, coming home one night. Morning meetings at the mailboxes in the lower hall accounted for two more families. A smiling and gracious manner, with a few scraps of Italian, captivated Tony the "shoeshine" across the street, until in his dreams he was Joan's abject slave. Smith the green-grocer—born Mavrocordatos, in Patras—found that she had been through the Corinth Canal on a European tour, and established her marketing on a telephone basis. Mrs. Hurley, the subway ticket-agent, admired her hat while making change one morning—began to exhibit evidences of better taste in her own clothes from that moment. Without seeking for it in the least, even finding it somewhat burdensome on busy days, the Grigsbys were neighborhood folks within a month. So much for that something inside a few

of us which attracts our fellow-men and -women.

Joan liked to make a good many of her own clothes, hem window-curtains, put in half-hours on Spanish or some of the Asiatic tongues against a need for them in the out-places—looking up from time to time at the strong face, decorated with the beloved pipe, and bent over the plans, maps, sheets of memoranda, at the opposite side of the table. At times she would go over to the piano in its dark corner and play, very softly, bits from Grieg, Debussy, Liszt, Macdowell, Nevin—but this was only when she noticed the little pucker of fatigue between his eyes, because it invariably made him drop what he was doing, lean back in his chair and watch her as she played. Sometimes an hour or two passed without a word between them. Words were unnecessary. They were, and always have been, sufficient unto themselves—but neighborliness has its responsibilities and drawbacks. There are evenings when they had to make comfortable those who came up to call, to return such visits in some of the other apartments—though when it became known that they were bride and groom, the other families were really considerate in leaving them alone until it seemed as if company might be welcome.

ONE evening John looked up from his work with a slightly apprehensive expression.

"Wonder what's struck Bremmerton tonight? Just listen for a minute or so to what he's playing on that Strad of his!"

Bremmerton was the widower who lived all alone just under them—a retired actor who had saved enough to keep him in modest but comfortable circumstances for the rest of his life—a former "lead" in the classic drama who couldn't adapt himself to modern slush, though still active enough to have remained behind the footlights a few years more had he cared to.

"This must be one of his morbid nights they've told us about, John! That playing is worth three dollars a seat in Carnegie Hall—but I don't believe a man can do it when he's mentally normal. Let's go down and see him. Hm?"

It was evident that Bremmerton had answered his bell unwillingly, but the expression of his face changed a little when he saw who they were. His living-room was lighted by a single table-lamp with a red

shade which left the ceiling cosily in shadow but illumined faces in the comfortable chairs below its rim.

"May I accompany you in 'The Venetian Love Song,' Mr. Bremmerton? Your playing was too alluring to resist—we just *had* to come down!"

"Mighty kind of you, Mrs. Grigsby—we'll try it presently. But first your good husband will have to chase the blue devils out of me with some of his sane and cheerful talk—I'm in a bad mood tonight!"

"Any particular reason? Could we help, do you think?"

This was said with such unmistakable sympathy and good feeling that none but a callous brute could have taken offense. The actor was anything but that.

"You're helping now—as far as I'm concerned; but you can't right the topsy-turvy, wrong-headed, crazy mental condition everybody seems to be in today! This world is a beautiful place—one might discover new attractions and interests every day were it not for the rottenness of so many people in it! It makes little real difference to me that there's not a soul who cares a curse whether I'm alive or dead, because there are so many beautiful and interesting things which enable me to forget that. But here in this apartment-house, a little world by itself, it fills me with despair, completely disheartens me, when I see under its surface, as I'm peculiarly in a position to do, the tragedy, scandal, treachery and meanness which are slowly destroying some of the little families I've liked best during the last two years! When I began playing tonight, I could have taken my old service automatic from the drawer and sent a ball through my head without a single regret!"

"Well—that's a man's privilege, Bremmerton, when the game seems no longer worth playing. But—to Joan and me—you're not as poor a sport as that. We've sensed an undercurrent, here, among the folks we know—but can't seem to make head or tail of it. Couldn't you—er—loosen up a bit—give us some idea of what's wrong?"

BREMMERTON was still moody, but perceptibly less morbid. This likable pair restored some of his faith in human nature.

"In every apartment-house you'll find one or more families with a mean streak so thick and yellow that they wouldn't try

to overcome the thing if they knew they had it. The worst one in this house is down in 'B-2.' That woman listens at the dumb-waiter by the half-hour, hangs over the hall-landings or out of her window to discover something by which she can get some trouble-making edge on her neighbors. She told Foster that his wife was in Washburn's apartment for an hour the other day, looking at some of his books—the writer, you know—while his wife was out marketing; and she's started trouble in two other families much the same way. In addition to her little touch, there's trouble brewing in other directions. Take the Smithers: Little Ellie is really one of the most attractive children on the block, but her mother's too much occupied with clothes and outside entertainment to give her any attention. She's the tomboy of the neighborhood—good for her, physically, but rubbing all the bloom off a growing peach. Smithers is paying-teller in a bank, probably isn't getting over three thousand—perhaps less. His wife and his living-expenses cost him more than that—considerably. He may have something put aside, or other resources—but suppose he hasn't? What's the answer? What's bound to happen pretty soon? And they're both of them folks we'd rather keep with us!

"Take the Rockwells—no children—pet dog and canary. For some fool reason I can't puzzle out, she got sore, or hurt, at something he did last winter—probably without knowing it—and she's been an iceberg to him ever since! He's becoming disillusioned, swamps himself in work, making more money than he ever thought he could make, but getting cold-hearted, pessimistic, taking his stenographer out to dinner and keeping her at the office, evenings. Julie's beginning to go out alone with her married friends. Both about as fine as they make 'em at the start—drifting toward shipwreck. Yet I seem powerless to butt in and right things even if I could see an opening—that's what disheartens me so! Not one of 'em cares a tinker's damn for old Bremmerton or what becomes of him—they'd consider any suggestion from me an impertinence!"

THERE was silence in the apartment overhead as the Grigsbys got into pajamas and nightie. When the light went out, there was fragmentary discussion.

"You can size another woman up, Joan,

before I'd even know where to begin. What do you think of Julie Rockwell—anyhow?"

"She's a fine, conscientious woman—means to do right, but quick-tempered—moody when she feels abused. It started over a ridiculous hat! She'd been wanting it for a month, in a shop-window—bought it. Forbes may have been worrying over some business matter, spoke irritably. His taste is instinctively good—hers needs more cultivation. He said that hat made her look like a type which every decent woman tries to avoid imitating, and she was very deeply hurt. It took her a few weeks to see how perfectly right he was, but she'd been brooding over it—thought, if he really loved her, he never would have spoken as he did. I've noticed that she's been freezingly polite to him once or twice, but didn't suppose they could be really drifting apart!"

"And the pitiful, exasperating part of it is that they certainly did care a lot when we first came here—seemed like perfect pals! If they separate, neither will ever find another so nearly congenial mate! My ideas are old-fashioned, of course—people laugh at me for them. But if a couple are sufficiently careful in their choosing to begin with, I believe that the 'one-man-and-one-woman' marriage is the only sort worth attempting."

IN the morning, as Grigsby paused for a moment on the hall-landing, the voice of Mrs. Sarnoff—B-2—came distinctly up as she was having a moment's chat with Mrs. Rockwell. (Mrs. Sarnoff had possessed the most unbridled tongue in her native Connecticut town before she married a Russian journalist and found herself an amateur in the art of scandalous propaganda.)

"As I was sayin' only yesterday, Mis' Rockwell—you can't trust the men. You gotta watch 'em all the time! If I didn't go round to the office every few evenin's an' bring Sarnoff home with me, I'd never know what chicken he was takin' out to dinner an' blowin' his cash on. Course—I aint sayin' nothin' like that about Mr. Rockwell stayin' late—but you can't always tell, now—can you? Hey?"

Grigsby's hands fairly itched to get the woman by the throat and put her tongue permanently out of business—but that sort of thing isn't done. Tell such a person what one thinks of him or her, and one is reminded of a skunk before the discussion

ends. Sue them for slander, and the newspapers fasten upon juicy testimony like flies on a piece of decaying meat. The only remedies are silence—and such ostracism as may be possible. He almost ran down the remaining flights to catch Mrs. Rockwell before she closed her door, but he could have taken more time. She was standing there alone in the hall, thinking—thinking—

"Glad I happened to catch you, Mrs. Rockwell! Joan and I want you both up in our diggings for dinner tonight—about seven. . . . Don't tell me you've got a date! We'll be plumb disappointed—and—there's going to be turkey, I think."

"Why—I—I'm afraid— It's awfully nice of you and Mrs. Grigsby. I don't see how I could make it in time. You see, I expect to be out—rather late. Probably won't get back until eight, if I do then. And Forbes will be out of the question—working late at the office—getting his dinner somewhere around Times Square, I suppose."

"Now wait a bit—just a second! Eight o'clock will be all right for us if you can't make it before—and I'll telephone Rockwell as soon as I get to my shack, on the job—"

"It won't do any good, Mr. Grigsby. He'll appreciate the invitation, of course, but he'll tell you that he can't get through before nine or ten o'clock."

"All right—I'll try, anyhow! But if he won't come, we can expect *you*, can't we? Come on—take a chance on the turk! We really want you!"

He knew as well as if her mind had been open for him to read—after what the Sarnoff woman had said—what it was she meant to do between six and eight that evening. It was entirely possible that Forbes Rockwell might take his stenographer out to dinner at one of the hotels in the theater district. Why not—when Julie herself dined out so frequently, and left him to eat alone if he did come home? And if he did, there was nothing to prevent her following them—watching to see whether they were talking business or enjoying themselves—misconstruing what she did see. Grigsby knew that until the Sarnoff woman dropped the poison into her mind, Julie had never suspected there might be anything more than business in his keeping Miss Aikman after hours in the office—though the girl was both pretty and well educated. And it seemed to him more important than his own professional work

at the moment that Mrs. Rockwell shouldn't see what she was now more than half convinced she would see. Forbes was both surprised and pleased when the engineer appeared in his private office, but shook his head regretfully at the invitation.

"Mighty darned nice of you, but—I'm afraid I couldn't make it. Mess of detail that it's too risky to hand over and take the chance of some other fellow carrying it out properly."

"How late do you expect to be here?"

"Nine or ten, at least."

"And if you didn't have to waste time going out for your dinner over here, you could make it by eight—get over home by eight-forty-five. All right! We'll start the turk a bit later and have him done brown by the time you get there." (Miss Aikman had gone out with her notebook, leaving them alone in the private office.)

"Look here, Forbes," Grigsby went on, "I'll lay some of the cards on the table! There's more behind this than just dinner. Can't go into details for some time yet—but that damned Sarnoff rip has been luxuriating in free speech until she may start something if we don't kick the props out from under her! You don't really want to hurt your wife—do you?"

"God knows I don't." The tone was scarcely above a whisper.

"Then you be ready to leave with me at six o'clock—when I call for you. How about it?"

Rockwell looked up—a speculative frown appearing between his eyes—then nodded.

WHEN Julie Rockwell quietly walked through the deserted outer offices into her husband's sanctum at quarter before seven, Miss Aikman looked up from the mass of data and dictated letters on her desk to take a few minutes off and tell her boss' wife that he had left for home with Mr. Grigsby nearly an hour before. She said that he had put a good deal of responsibility on her shoulders that night in order to drop work which he never had trusted to anyone else, but hoped she might carry it out satisfactorily, so that he could go home more frequently and not work so hard.

"It will be much to my advantage if he does, Mrs. Rockwell—because he'll pay me well if I can get away with it, and I expect to be married next spring."

The little dinner-party was a success because the Grigsbys made it so. Everybody

worked, at one thing or another—with big kitchen aprons over their good clothes. After washing the dishes, they danced—and husbands couldn't dance with other wives *all* the time. Then Joan quite simply told them about her first engagement, the fire at the inn, the way she and John had drifted irresistibly together simply because they were mates in all that the word implied—and asked for the Rockwells' story of their own experiences in that line—knowing from previous bits that it must have been satisfactorily romantic. Unless a man and woman have really grown to hate their life together, reminiscences of this sort are certain to bring back much of the time when they were all-in-all to each other, set them wondering how and why they have been drifting apart. What passed between them when they finally went down to their own apartment will never be told—nor have the Grigsbys ever wished they knew—being of a vastly different breed from the Sarnoff woman. But a lump sometimes comes in the Rockwell throats when they speak to each other of their friends on the top floor.

FOR a month or more John Grigsby had been watching his neighbor Smithers—his wife and daughter also, but more particularly the man himself—making a new safe-deposit box an excuse for dropping in at the bank and having a word or two with Smithers before he went out. The man appeared to stand high in the opinion of his directors, was liked by everybody with whom he came in contact. In his business relations he had the reputation of being absolutely straight—in little things as well as the larger issues. Coming home with him in the subway, as occasionally happened, Grigsby soon noticed little evidences of care which became more frequent as time passed. Not any down-and-out expression, but more subtle indications which cropped out in an occasional pessimistic remark, a more thoughtful look when nobody was talking with him. His wife never quite seemed to accomplish the effect she aimed at in dress, and possibly for that reason, bought more gowns than she might if the few had satisfied her. More and more, the feverish round of social life in the city had gripped her. She got nothing out of it but invitations, which carried return obligations, and occasional mention in the local society-columns—but she was tentatively accepted as a society

woman which, presumably, was her main object. Smithers had positively forbidden her to call upon him in the bank or even have an account there, but the bank people got occasional glimpses of her in other places, and so far, merely thought him lucky in marrying so good-looking a woman. Her evidences of extravagance hadn't registered with them as yet.

Grigsby, of course, had his own professional work to keep him busy. It was not possible to keep his neighbor under surveillance beyond studying him closely each time they met. But even with these occasional observations, he wasn't far out in his estimate of the time when matters were reaching a climax in Smithers' affairs. Coming home with him one evening, the teller was so preoccupied that he scarcely talked coherently. He was carrying a good-sized leather suitcase which looked as if he had purchased it that day—a strongly reinforced one with a lock that would have induced a thief to cut through the leather rather than meddle with it, and the lining of fine steel netting would have given him some trouble, at that—though there was no indication of anything unusual on the outside. In response to his neighbor's question, he said that he thought of spending the week-end in Philadelphia—taking Saturday off, if his wife decided to accompany him.

THAT suitcase stuck in Grigsby's mind.

The man carried it as if it were fairly heavy, but refused assistance going from the station to the apartment-house. If it were a recent purchase which he meant to pack after he reached home, it would have been empty—unless he had purchased new clothing at the same time, which seemed unlikely. The more the engineer considered all this, the more apprehensive he became. About ten—when he had been out for tobacco and had seen the lamp burning in his neighbor's living-room—he stopped at his door and rang the bell, knowing that Mrs. Smithers was out for the evening. The teller came to the door, fully dressed, but with the appearance of having been working hard all the evening. There were dark circles around his eyes—the air of his rooms was filled with stale cigarette-smoke and the odor of rank coffee. He was about to let his neighbor in, automatically—then seemed to remember something, with a little start, barely perceptible.

"I'm afraid I can't ask you in tonight,

old chap! It's pretty late, you know—and I've a lot of stuff to finish up before I turn in."

"M—well—it's a matter of a heap more importance to you than to me. Better let me come in and tell you about it—before anybody comes upstairs and sees us here."

A flash of apprehension streaked across the teller's face for an instant. He was about to refuse again, but reconsidered—and let his neighbor in. Without bothering to ask permission, Grigsby filled his pipe—lighted it, deliberately—and sat down at the side of the roll-top desk, covered with letters and sheets of memoranda which, evidently, were being systematically destroyed.

"Where's Ellie? Not out with her mother at this time of night?"

"No—sound asleep—in her own room at the end of the hall."

"Door closed?"

"Yes. She couldn't hear us if she woke up. What's all this about something of importance to me, old man? I'm interested—but so tired that I'll be getting nervous if you don't tell me—quick!"

"Tom,"—it was the first occasion upon which Grigsby had ever called him by his first name, but the tone was so kind a one that Smithers liked it,—"I sold a little mess of stock the other day when some big shark was boosting it way above what the shares are worth, and I haven't reinvested the money, yet. Would you like to borrow two or three thousand—at six per cent?"

"Why—for what purpose?" Smithers was fighting desperately against growing apprehension—to keep his voice normal. "What sort of security?"

"Merely your notes at, say, twelve and eighteen months. That ought to be long enough, hadn't it? Might renew part of them."

"Why—but—good Lord! Oh, *man!* Why didn't you suggest this to me three days ago, even yesterday! How could I know that you would consider such a loan—that you could even spare that much!"

"My fault, Tom—I was afraid of butting in! I had no means of knowing just when you might need it most. Well—that's my proposition. Shall I bring it around to you in the morning, at the bank?"

"My God! It's too late! If you've guessed as much as you seem to have guessed, you must know that! It's *too late!*"

"I doubt it! In fact, I think we can figure a way out—somehow—between us."

Smithers shook his head despairingly—then a sudden suspicion made his eyes blaze insanely. He crouched a little lower in his chair as if getting set for a spring.

"Grigsby—let's understand each other, clearly! I like you a lot—and that sweet little wife of yours. But if you think you can hand me over to the police—forget it! I've got a gun in my pocket, and I'll kill you without a second's hesitation if you try to start anything!"

NEITHER of them noticed a slight draft as the hall-door opened and somebody came in without making a sound—standing at the dark end of the hall when the door was softly closed—listening. The engineer calmly refilled his pipe as he answered this threat.

"Your gat is in that top drawer—not in your pocket. And I can easily stop you before you pull it. But handing you over to the police hadn't entered my mind at all. That would mean ruin for the whole family—my object is to avoid that."

"But I tell you it's impossible, John! It's too late!"

"Now—*wait!* Let's see if it really is! Would it be possible to tote that suitcase back in the morning—get it into the vault as soon as it's opened—bring it home again—empty?"

Grigsby's earnestness was beginning to produce an impression.

"Why—it *might*. I doubt if anyone would think of stopping me—suggest opening it. The president or cashier might joke me about it, but the chance of anybody getting curious at all is negligible—I'm usually the earliest bird in the morning."

"Are you willing to try it—with the chance of possible arrest for attempted embezzlement?"

"I don't know that I am! Why should I? I've got eighty thousand in that suitcase! If putting it back would change the condition of my affairs,—with your loan of three thousand,—I might consider it. But I owe two thousand to the department stores for my wife's bills! It's simply impossible for me to meet the last two payments on my car—"

"Can't you sell it to some friend? It's practically new. You really can't afford to keep a car, anyhow."

"Don't I know that! Neither can two-thirds of the men who own them—and

mortgage something to get 'em! But my wife says if you haven't a car, you're nobody—you don't amount to anything. And she's not far out, at that! Besides—I need the thing for my get-away!"

"How about Ellie? Do you realize that anything of this sort will cloud her whole life—make it almost impossible for her to marry any decent man when she grows up? He'd be afraid of the streak in her blood, you know!"

"*Don't*, old man! Don't pile it on! I've got more than I can carry, now! And I can't change my wife! She's a fine woman in most ways, but she can't stop spending—trying to keep up with a fool set who have no sense and don't get her anywhere. In another year, I'd be only deeper in the hole than I am now!"

"If she once realized where all this has driven you, Tom, I think she might surprise you. She came from a small New England town, didn't she? Where she never had any money to spend—scarcely a penny of her own? Then she marries a city man with a good job and a good salary, he puts her in a nice apartment, among a higher social class than she's been going with at home—gives her a pocket-and house-allowance which is more money than she ever had in her life to spend. And it goes to her head—she thinks there's no limit to it—"

SUDDENLY they were conscious of the white-faced woman who stood just inside the door clutching the portière. After one or two efforts to speak, her voice was scarcely more than a whisper:

"Tom—Mr. Grigsby is right! The money went to my head—I never dreamed—or stopped to figure up—how much I was spending. But I—I'll stop it—I'll begin to save! I'll make my own clothes! I'm sick of the car right now—sell it as quickly as you can! I—I came in—awhile ago! Stood there in the hall—heard everything you've said—both of you! I—oh, Tom, dear! You won't do it! You *wont*, will you? You'll take it back! I—I—"

She sank down in a heap on the floor.

After helping to lay her in on the bed, Grigsby tiptoed back into the living-room, where he gripped Smithers' hand reassuringly.

"You two are best left to yourselves now. I'll bring your check around to the bank in the morning. You see—I'll be kinda anxious myself, Tom, until that stuff is

back in the vault. There really isn't much risk that anybody will get too curious because they think they know you too well—but you can just nod if everything's O.K."

The fact that all the bank people did know Smithers so well prevented any notice being taken of him when he carried the suitcase into the big vault and put the bundles of notes back into their tin trunk. Their travels during that sixteen hours were never even suspected.

A YEAR later Grigsby came home one evening with a curious expression on his face which first puzzled and then worried Joan—filled her with a vague apprehension. He seemed immensely pleased—and yet, regretful. Finally it came out. He had been offered the appointment as engineer-in-chief of a big dam and irrigation project in Yunnan, Indo-China. They were to store the things they wanted to keep and sell the rest—transportation being more costly than new furniture in the Orient—starting at the end of the week.

Joan had become attached to this first home of her married life—had made friends who were dear to her. But she had married an engineer with her eyes fully open to the wanderings that went with the profession—and the Grigsbys were a close corporation. Wherever you found one, the other was near by. Their neighbors, however, received the news with a stunned, empty feeling. With the Grigsbys gone, the house would never be quite the same. Little Bobby Foster brought Joan his very best elephant with the white tusks—saying that "Gop" was *her* ephalunt now, and was to be taken with her. But she explained that "Gop" would be so lonesome without his brothers and cousins that he might die, so she thought it was better to leave him in Bobby's care until he was older, anyhow—but he would be her ephalunt just the same.

Tony, the shoeshine, assured her that it would be foolish to spend money on a taxi going over to her station.

"My brud' he jus' buy fina new car—sev' pass' car—you tell him what station, he take you anywhere you say. An' my unc', da ice-man, he taka da trunk in da ice-fliv'. Si! You no pay not'in'!"

As they drove swiftly away, Saturday morning, in the car of Tony's "brud", there were faces in every window, looking down. The peg-post cop at the corner, and Mrs. Hurley, from her subway ticket-booth, waved a farewell. The children tore along the smooth sidewalk on roller-skates, velocipedes and scooters as fast as their legs could paddle while the car was in sight. And as it disappeared, Tony suspended operations on the feet of a customer for one lingering glance. When the job was finished, he listlessly put on his collar and street coat—telling his two assistants they might go for the day.

"I gotta da bum feel', inside! I ciosa da shop! I go home an' playa da victrol'."

In the corner apartment on the third floor, old Bremmerton stood looking sadly out from behind his curtains. The only two people in the world who seemed to care anything for him were gone—out of his life. Stepping over to the bureau, he pulled out a drawer and took from it the heavy blued automatic he had carried in the army, fingering it thoughtfully—taking out the magazine to see if the clip was full. One shot would be enough, he thought—but there were eight if he had vitality enough left to use them. As he went over to the window again, caressing the gun, he heard the Smithers' door open, across the hall—and a woman's footsteps going down the stairs. He never knew what had happened to turn the tide of their affairs, but was certain that the engineer and his wife had been instrumental in bringing it about. The Rockwells, too—that was another instance, and a train of speculative thought ran through Bremmerton's mind. What was the something the Grigsbys had which worked out in ways like that? Himself, for instance? Could he cultivate the same fine intangible quality—use it in similar ways? The thought was intriguing. If one spent something of himself for other people, might not those others come to care a little—in return? He laid the automatic back in the drawer and gently closed it—feeling as if that exit were closed for all time.

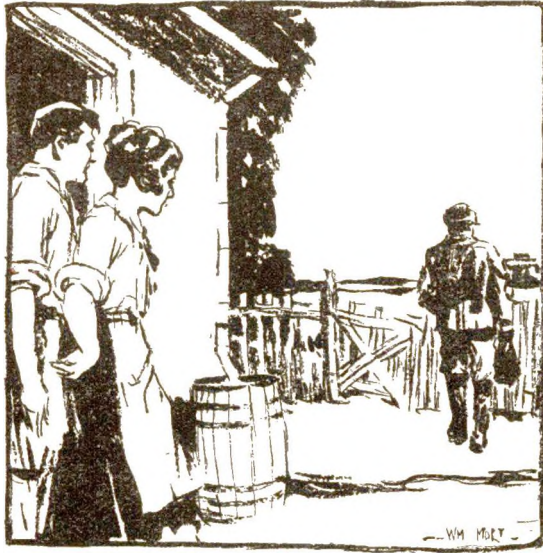
"They'd hear of it—think of me as a quitter. I couldn't stand having the Grigsbys say that of me—I'd turn over in my grave!"

"The Engineer of the Feng Hsu Dam," another episode in the adventures of the Grigsbys, by Clarence Herbert New, will appear in an early issue. Next month Mr. New will contribute one of his noted "Free Lances in Diplomacy."



WILLIAM BIGELOW NEAL

A REMOTE North Dakota ranch was Mr. Neal's boyhood environment. His father was sheriff for some years; and all through his youth he was in intimate association with the picturesque frontier characters who used to lend so much color to our national life. There were no schools in the vicinity, and he owes his literary training to his college-bred mother. Cow-punching in New Mexico, temporary labors in the fisheries near Seattle, and a strenuous war service are among the sources of his fiction material. The fine story which here follows comes from his present life on a North Dakota farm.



The Field of Amber Gold

A remarkable story wherein the poignant drama of man's eternal battle with the forces of Nature is impressively brought out: by the author of "Captain Jack" and "At Bay."

By WILLIAM BIGELOW NEAL

JOHN GRAHAME walked with shoulders stooped, head bent forward and down, until he was peering out at the storm through the half-inch slit between the visor of his cap and the top of a sheep-skin collar. When he left the little prairie town of Barliton, two hours before, the sun had been shining, and although it was thirty below, he anticipated nothing worse than a cold drive, ending as usual by the big coal stove where he rocked and read the papers aloud to Jane as she prepared his supper. But he had covered little more than half of the fifteen miles to his home when a blue-gray wall of clouds arose in the west and came on with the terrifying speed of the genuine Dakota blizzard. There were several inches of loose snow on the ground, and John knew what the wind would do to those powdery flakes.

He looked about him and considered. There were two or three farms within sight, and he was minded to try and reach one ahead of the storm, but then he thought of Jane. He could see her standing, as thousands of pioneer women had stood be-

fore, her face pressed against the frost-laden glass, looking anxiously out into the impenetrable wall of whirling snow, and praying the God of Storms to guide her lover safely through; he thought of the wind and the stoves that might burn all too fiercely, and with this vision of fire came decision: he must go through.

Grahame settled his cap and pulled the earlaps well down over the sides of his face; he unbuttoned his heavy double-breasted overcoat and buttoned it again so that the opening would be down wind instead of against it; he turned up the wide collar and buttoned the tab across the front; and from a box of groceries and other supplies he took an extra pair of knitted gloves and put them on under his mittens. When the storm was almost upon him, he slipped from the load and began to walk. He was ready, but none too soon. Little whirlwinds were already lifting the light snow in small spirals which wandered aimlessly here and there, and when the blue wall passed under and obscured the sun, it seemed to him that the thermometer

dropped ten degrees, so cold and piercing was the wind. From ahead came a low moaning which grew louder and louder—and then the storm struck.

The team at once stopped and began cramping the sled as they tried to back into the wind. Stepping up onto the tongue, Grahame placed a hand on the hip of either horse and spoke to them. His voice was lost in the rush of the wind, but they felt his touch, and it steadied them. They obeyed his pull on the line and turned into the wind again. There came a rippling of mighty muscles beneath his hand. The sharp steel calks bit deep into snow and ice, and the front runners were wrenched back into the road, and again the long steel shoes took up their whining song of protest against the cold.

FOR two long hours Grahame had been floundering beside the sled. Several times when he felt himself becoming chilled, he walked in deep snow until nearly exhausted; then he placed one hand on the box and allowed the team to pull him forward. He could see little of the horses and nothing on either side; nor did he look, for his eyes were fixed on the silver white ribbon of hard packed snow beneath the runner at his feet. The presence of that narrow sleigh-track meant the difference between life and death. If he held it, he was safe; if he lost it even for a moment, it might mean the end.

The blinding white of late afternoon changed to the gray of sunset, and still the big team fought on. Their breath came in rapid puffs of white vapor, while long slender icicles hung from their nostrils. Grahame's eyelashes froze to the lower lids and he rubbed them apart with his mitten. His collar had become a mass of ice, and a double handful of snow had driven through the tiny opening to pack solidly around his throat. Little by little the cold was driving through his clothing as well. He felt it first in his fingers, and he beat them against his sides, but the motion seemed to pump cold air up his sleeves for he felt it under his arms. The team stopped, and Grahame went to investigate. There was a dark shadow ahead, which as he approached resolved itself into another team and sled, evidently going the same way as himself; but the team had stopped and swung the tongue around until they stood back to the storm. The spring seat had fallen from its place, and now dangled

from one clamp. In the bottom of the box was the huddled body of a man—a man whom he vaguely recognized by his strangely scarred face as Fred Kinear, a newcomer in the neighborhood.

A hasty examination convinced Grahame that life was not extinct, and he set about the only course that might save the flickering spark. Working as fast as was possible with half-numb fingers, he unharnessed and turned loose the stranger's team. Trying to force them against the storm to a place they did not know would be worse than useless, and once free from sled and harness, they would drift with the storm until they found shelter in a coulee or behind a hill. Pulling the pin from the eveners, he changed his own team to the other sled.

Even as he worked, the last vestige of daylight faded and the atmosphere around him became a vast area of rushing, stinging, impenetrable gray. But one hope remained. The horses, if left to themselves, might face the blizzard and take him home. He knew it was not more than a mile and a half or two miles at the most. It was only a chance, but at any rate there was no alternative. In a few minutes the game would be played, and won or lost.

Climbing into the sled, he sacrificed the last chance of life, should the team fail him, by taking off his sheepskin lined overcoat and wrapping it around the unconscious man below. Grasping the lines, he swung the free ends across the hips of his team with all the force the wind allowed him. They wrenched the front runners around and headed into the wind. Again the lines cut into the air, and the horses broke into a trot. Once more came the stinging whistle of leather, and they broke into a run. The wind seared Grahame's flesh like hot iron, and he threw one arm before his face. Realizing the futility of trying to guide his horses over a road he could not see, he dropped the lines to the bottom of the box and pinned them with his feet.

Time and again the horses floundered into deep snow and Grahame's hopes sank to zero, only to come up again as he felt the sled again lunge forward on the hard-packed road. Gaining confidence as the minutes passed, he leaned forward and talked to the team as a mother croons to her child. Then he begged and cursed and cheered them by turns. In his excitement he forgot the wind and the snow and the pain—forgot even the menace of death

itself. A thought flashed before his mind of the book he had been reading only the night before. What in hell did Ben Hur know about the real article? Here was a race against the forces of nature when life itself was the stake. He laughed aloud, and with the laugh came a lurch to one side, a crash and the wild scream of broken wire, and splinters of a gate-post flew in his face. The sled slowed down on bare ground, only to lunge forward toward a black shadow ahead. An instant later he caught a fleeting vision of an orange glow, outlining the figure of a woman.

SOME fifteen years before and far to the south and east, Fred Kinear had grown to early manhood. From one of the parental strains, he had inherited length, breadth and a certain degree of thickness—not the thickness of surplus flesh, but rather the depth of chest and shoulder to which nature anchors the muscles of strong men. Another strain, perhaps, had endowed him with a sunny disposition and the ability to make friends and to hold fast to those he made. Socially he was a success, because like most really strong men to whom the Creator has given a level head as well, he regarded his muscular power as a trust and drew from it the supreme confidence in himself that automatically lifts men of his type above the bully class.

As a boy Kinear was one of those who must know how every mechanical contrivance operates. His most cherished possessions were the alarm clocks and the dollar watches other people had thrown away, for the first stage of development in the natural mechanic is the desire to take things apart, followed after a time by the second stage, wherein he tries to put them together again. The purely analytic stage is common to most boys, but the synthetic period is reached only by the genuine mechanic. At the time his schoolmates were dreaming of laurels to be won in the realms of poetry, Fred was out in the back yard monkeying with a toy steam engine, and when they reached the period of vacations spent on tennis-court and lake with racket and banjo, Fred was shoveling coal into a squat, puffy thing that was very hot and greasy, and had adopted the monkey wrench and oil can as constant companions.

After he was graduated from high school, he wanted to go to college. Unfortunately for him, he was not a member of the banjo

gang. What he got he had to earn, and so he found a job firing in the boiler-room of a light plant. One day a boiler exploded and they carried him to a hospital on a stretcher, with a white cloth over his face. Weeks afterward, he was allowed to sit up; a little later he could move around, and still later the bandages were taken from his head. The surgeon who had patched up his face was very proud of his work, but his pride was based on his accomplishment in light of the materials he had to work with, and brought small consolation to Fred Kinear when they first brought him a mirror. What he saw was a face, it was true, but not his face nor did it bear a likeness to any face he had ever seen before. One ear was little more than a gnarled button; cheeks and chin were a series of white scars, ridged and seamed; his nose was partly gone; his eyelids were too small and fiery red, and his upper lip was drawn up in a snarl which would endure forever.

There came long hours when Kinear fought with all his might for courage to face the world again—a long uphill fight; but in the end he found a measure of peace, for he knew that after all, he was still Fred Kinear in spite of what the mirror claimed. The steam might have seared his face beyond recognition, but it had not touched his brain, and certainly his soul was intact. He was still a human being, and as such would go forth and take up his work where he had left off.

Finally one sunny day Fred left the hospital. At the corner where he waited for a street-car, a small boy came along, to stop and gaze in awe at the disfigured man. Others joined him, and soon a ring of young faces surrounded him. Kinear had a sense of humor great enough to overcome, in a measure, the bitterness of this experience, and he laughed, or at least he intended to laugh, but it was only a matter of spirit and vocal cords, because the lips did not respond, and he saw the young faces shrink back in fear at what, to them, was merely a horrible noise. Kinear never laughed again.

In the car, when he asked a question of the conductor, and under the stimulus of a terrible effort to enunciate clearly, his face twisted itself into a horrible caricature, some one laughed, and thenceforth he spoke only when it became necessary. He sat down on the long seat, and a young woman made an involuntary movement away from him. That cut deep, and his

self-consciousness now caused him to misinterpret smiles and nods among the other passengers. The steam that scarred his face was as nothing compared to the manifestations of fear and ridicule and scorn that he saw, or imagined he saw; and a new process began within him. Where before it had been only the flesh that had suffered, now his very soul began to blight and shrivel, drawing in and away from the scarred shell of his body until he became a machine, driven by his mentality only. People who knew him said that from that day on, he became a soulless automaton, with a heart of iron, an emotionless, heartless creature of flesh and blood, asking sympathy of none and granting even as he received. Whether these things were true or not, the fact remained that Fred Kinear had ceased to exist as such, and from then on he was known as Scarface, or sometimes as Ironheart.

IN the home of John Grahame the man whom they knew as Ironheart lay under the care of Jane and the country doctor they had called in from Barliton. During the days immediately following the blizzard there had been times when it seemed they were waging a useless fight. This strange, silent man who suffered without complaint and who received their ministrations without thanks or comment, hovered very near the shadows. Hour after hour, for many days and nights, Jane sat beside the stricken man and did as the doctor or her own intuitions directed. Sometimes the doctor took her place, and when he could not come and she became exhausted from her long vigil, Grahame left his work and sat by the sick man while she rested.

In the end their efforts were rewarded. Slowly but surely their patient retraced his steps over the shadow trail and began his climb to health and when the day came that he was well enough to leave them, they knew no more of him than on the night Grahame had carried his unconscious form into his house. Beyond the fact that he had been in the country only a little time, their knowledge was limited to the scant gleanings of their observations, and they were limited enough. Speaking only in answer to their questions, and then in as few words as was possible, he had invited no confidences and had given none. When he left, he thanked Grahame with a nod of the head and turned to Jane. They both thought for a moment that he was

going to say something, for the merest trace of an expression came to his eyes, but neither were able to read the message they carried. It seemed that the tortured muscles of his face and eyelids were incapable of transmitting whatever went on behind them. Turning abruptly, he stepped into his sleigh and rode away.

Grahame's face grew hard and angry.

"Talk about gratitude, there isn't even decency in his make-up!"

Jane, with instinct guided by a woman's intuition, felt vaguely that her patient had tried to express a feeling of some kind. Why he had failed she could not understand, but she answered John's angry criticism quietly:

"I am sure that is untrue, John. There is something we don't understand." And as she saw John about to make another angry rejoinder: "John, it isn't worth our quarreling about. He is gone at any rate, and we have done our duty. You know Mother would say that is all we should think of, anyway—'a sense of duty well done.'"

"Mighty poor reward, I should call that. What are you trying to do? Make yourself out as sort of a saint?"

"No, John. But there is no need for you to be plain cross, is there? The first minute we are alone, too! I'll wish him back again if you keep this up."

"Jane, for heaven's sake don't wish that on us. I didn't mean to be cross. Come on out to the barn with me and have a look-see at the new little bossies."

"I'll do it. I haven't been out there for ages, seems to me."

But the story went the round of the neighborhood that they had been offered neither pay nor thanks for their care, and from then on the name of Ironheart was used to the exclusion of any other. The name of Fred Kinear was nearly forgotten.

JOHN GRAHAME stood in a pile of J wheat up to his knees. He had exhausted every resource. The walls of the granary bulged until the nails were popping. His stock could not get into the barn because the doors were blocked with wheat, and now Jane had been driven from the house, and wheat was flowing from the windows in amber streams. In desperation he strove to extricate himself from the rapidly growing pile. It had reached his waist and was still climbing. He tried to shout, and threw a last frantic look around

in search of help. Apparently he was doomed to die under a deluge of prosperity, for there was no one in sight. And then he saw something which brought to him a wave of consolation. From the roll-way of his root cellar he saw feet protruding, feet that waved and threshed around in the wheat to no avail. He recognized them, pair by pair, as the feet of his creditors buried headfirst in their own collections. One pair he recognized as belonging to his grocery and drygoods merchant, and he felt a tinge of sorrow; another belonged to his banker, the man who had made him mortgage everything on the place, excepting only his wife and dog; this time his gaze was coldly critical. The third pair belonged to the hardware man who had sold Jane that incubator that wouldn't incubate and the separator that wouldn't separate, the man who had made him mortgage his milch cows to buy a binder; and again his gaze was unsympathetic. Lastly he spied a fourth pair, which belonged to a real-estate dealer, a man who had sold him one hundred and sixty acres of gumbo, and he positively gloated over the man's predicament. But his joy was short-lived. The wheat had reached his chin. He put forth all the strength he had in him, in a last frantic effort. It was futile. Another rush of golden grain buried him ten feet beneath its suffocating bulk, and he could breathe no more. There were shooting stars and crimson fires and all the rest of that horrid crew, even to the ringing of bells, but the bells sounded muffled and far away, because the alarm clock was covered with a pillow. John Grahame sat up in bed. It was five o'clock.

The transition from nightmare to actuality did not bring the relief he had a right to expect. The room was cold, and a wind that spoke eloquently of further discomforts out of doors moaned along the eaves. A carefully shaded night-lamp in another room cast an all-too-feeble ray through the open door, and by its ineffective light, Grahame sat on the edge of the bed and began to dress.

Kindling a fire in the range, he used the reservoir for a foot-rest and laced his shoes while the fire was growing hot enough to ignite a bucket of lignite. Pulling on overshoes, sheepskin overcoat, a fur cap and gloves, he threaded the milk pail over his arm and took the lantern in the same hand. Picking up the slop pail with the other, he stepped out on the back stoop. A cold

wind smote him, and the yard was a dirty gray from drifting spirals of snow and dust. The windmill, apparently unable to make up its mind which way the wind was blowing, swung from side to side and reminded him that the turntable needed oil; the pull-out wire clanged harshly against the angle iron frame. A rooster, resenting the disturbance, crowed long and loud.

AS Grahame crossed to the pigpen, he looked to the east, and the sun seemed to be coming up under a canopy decorated with streamers of crimson. The hogs were sluggish, and came forth doubtfully, one at a time, but when he hung the pail and lantern on a post and opened the granary door, they lost their indecision and came out with a rush.

Passing the windmill, he threw it into gear and went on to the barn, where a long series of nickers and the lowing of a cow greeted him as he entered. From the feed-bin, he carried oats until the nickering changed to the crunching sound of horses eating, and the peculiar snapping, sucking sound of feeding cows. He milked and hung the pail on a peg while he walked to the edge of the field he was plowing. The ground was a little stiff, but not enough, he decided, to stop his work; so he went back to the barn and harnessed six horses.

When he was halfway back to the house, Jane opened the door and called to breakfast. He detected the odor of frying ham and quickened his pace. She met him at the door, anxious to know if it had frozen enough to interfere with the plowing, but John reassured her.

"The ground is a little stiff, but the horses can make it all right. I have no time to waste, you know, if I am to seed the whole hundred acres to wheat."

"If you should be a little late, don't you suppose you could put the rest into flax? It's a better money crop anyway, isn't it?"

"Yes, but there are too many weeds for flax. It's got to be wheat, but if we get even a fair crop of wheat we can meet the mortgage on the home place anyway."

"We are going to get a crop this year. I feel it in my bones."

"Yep, your bones said the same thing last year, if I remember right; but I didn't see any crop, did you?"

"No, of course not; but listen, John: we can't have a failure every year. There's got to be a change sometime."

"True as preaching; but if you are talking to brace up my courage, honey girl, you just don't have to. My courage is up and coming. I'll work sixteen hours a day, but I'll get that wheat in at the right time. Does that make you feel easier?"

John sat down to a carefully prepared breakfast of ham, eggs and pancakes. There was but little conversation at the table. The men who raise the nation's bread have but little time for talk. In twenty minutes John was out again, hitching the six horses to the gang-plow, four abreast across the tongue, and a lead team ahead.

Driving out through the yard, he came to the stubble; and half a mile to the westward he could just see a small piece of fluttering white fixed to a pole. Farther along was another, and at the end of a mile was a third. Maneuvering his team until the three stakes were in line, he drove to the edge of the field. Leaning to one side in his seat, he could see the stakes in line between the horses; then he kicked a lever, and the sharp lay-points dropped to the ground and slipped gently beneath the surface. There came the popping sound of sharp lays in roots and the whirring sound of knifelike coulters; and the stubble, shivering slightly, rose along the moldboards, to turn smoothly and fall bottom-side up, leaving a double furrow of black dirt behind the plow.

Half a mile down the field, Grahame stopped to throw the first stake across the plow. Fighting by the remaining pair, he finally came to the last one, and so out on to the section line. Behind him, a slender black line stretched away into the distance as true as a steel tape.

The second round was easier, for one horse of the lead team and one on the tongue were able to follow the furrow. Taking advantage of this, Grahame hung his handful of lines on the plow-levers while he walked behind and stamped some of the cold out of his joints. At his heels came old Shep, his assistant herder, on the lookout for mice, while behind the dog fluttered a flock of hardy blackbirds watching for worms turned out by the plow.

Five times before dinner and five times in the afternoon Grahame's plow sliced its way out and back across the field. For the first few rounds he was busy making minor adjustments in the plow and harness, but after that there was nothing to do but ride until he was stiff and then to

walk until he was tired. Some days it rained—if not enough to stop the plow, then just enough to make life miserable for horses and man. Sometimes the field was half obscured by snow-squalls or sleet. More often a hot sun started hard oil running from the axles and brought flecks of foam under the horses' collars.

WHEN Grahame and Jane had put in their first crop, fortune had favored them. A favorable season with steadily rising prices, enabled them to put up a good set of buildings and buy another quarter section, although purchasing the second, called for a mortgage on the first. A second good crop paid up a part of the mortgage on the land, bought additional stock and purchased the machinery they needed; and—then came the deluge. First certain impractical men then in power at the State capitol caused the golden stream of credit to be dammed—gold that had always flowed from the East to carry the farms from crop to crop. People in the East who had money to invest became frightened. They saw or thought they saw a great State crumbling to pieces in the hands of long-haired dreamers. Local banks, unable to borrow, could not lend; and worse yet, they had to collect. Next came the war, with prices which looked high and felt high, but still were below the cost of production. The Government thoughtfully put a price limit on wheat but allowed the price of machinery, twine and leather to climb as high as willing and able profiteers could push them. Lastly came years of drouth, until at the time when this story opens, Grahame had staked his last cent. One good crop would go far toward saving him. Another failure meant the loss of all he had.

Day after day he moved up and down the field, and the black streak grew wider and wider. Sometimes he changed to the drill and seeded what he had plowed, and meanwhile there came the soft rains of early spring, soaking up the thirsty earth. In time the first land plowed became a long band of blue-green. When the wheat was in, he changed to oats and finally to a few acres of spelts for hog feed. June came, and half of it passed, leaving the fields shimmering in the heat of the noon-day sun or waving in the cool breezes that followed the frequent showers. Grahame greased the moldboards of the plow to prevent rusting and then went fishing. He

needed a few days of rest before haying began.

One afternoon toward the end of June, Grahame, who had just finished cultivating the potatoes, was spraying them with Paris green. It had been an unusually hot day, without a breath of wind, and the air hung heavy and oppressive. Absorbed in his work, he noticed nothing unusual until there came a faint tremor of the air, a low, vibrant thing, half sound, half jar. Straightening up, he looked around to find the western horizon a tumbled mass of threatening clouds. There was a long fork of light, and again came the low murmur, although a little louder than before.

GRAHAME had long ago learned to fear storms which came up on apparently still air, and his first thought was of hail. He tried to dismiss the fear as foolish, because it was too early in the season for hail-storms. As a precautionary measure, however, he went to the pasture and drove in his stock. As he came back, Jane was working with the turkeys and young chickens. It took the combined efforts of both to find and drive in the last turkey hen, and by that time the clouds were well above their heads. On their crest was a long white billow rolling over and over, from which shot out streamers of white vapor to fall behind in long trailing lines. Behind the crests were the dreaded streaks of green, crossed and recrossed by jagged lines of crimson fire. Then came a black wall of water sweeping toward them across the fields, while the roar of thunder had become continuous.

In the house they worked fast shutting windows and getting ready for wind and rain if for nothing worse. The wall of water came on, shutting out mile after mile of fields, crossed the section line on their west and come up through the wheat. With awful force it struck. A roar, a crash and darkness. The house writhed and groaned, but it held fast to its foundation. Sheets of water ran from the eaves, and the yard became an electrically illuminated lake. For ten minutes it continued unabated, and then the roar fell away to little more than a whisper.

It was the crucial time, and Grahame held his breath. A glance had shown him that the buildings were all intact, and his hopes began to rise. Just then came the forerunner of doom. Something hit the roof like the tap from a small sledge. Run-

ning to the window, they saw the water in the yard spurting up as though from shells in a naval engagement. From the lungs of Grahame came the sigh of a man who recognizes defeat. Nothing on God's green earth could save them now. All was lost, his wheat, his home, his stock, everything gone. Pieces of ice from the size of a pea to big three-cornered chunks larger than hen's eggs were splashing and bobbing about the yard. With no wind, they were doing little harm, but Grahame drew no comfort from that, for he knew all too well what was behind them, and soon it came. Another roar, another crash. The battering on walls and roof, the splitting of siding and shingles, the breaking of glass and roaring of wind produced pandemonium.

Of the two west windows, they chose one and held pillows against the glass. The other crashed in with a shower of splintered panes, leaving an opening for icy projectiles that pounded across the room to pile up on the opposite wall. For a time the screen on the window they were guarding held, but in the end it gave way and only the pillows saved them from another deluge. When the last pane of glass had been battered out, they stuffed the pillows farther in and reinforced them with other bedding. And then suddenly it seemed as though a divine Protector had thrust forth a shield and covered the house. The tumult ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The quiet was oppressive. The wind dropped to a breeze and a burst of sunlight illuminated the field of wheat before them. There was nothing but a sea of mud.

For many minutes Grahame stood leaning against the battered window. His head rested against his arm, and his whole body sagged in an attitude of utter despondency. Only those who have known what it is to have the results of long hours of work and hope dashed to nothing by the lash of fire or storm can realize the agony of this man who suddenly found himself bereft of the foundation upon which all of his hopes were builded, and face to face with ruin. He was a strong man, as all of his kind must be who wrest a living from mother earth, but this last, the greatest blow of all, had been a hard one. The spark of resistance had been all but beaten out.

IN the hour of supreme discouragement it is usually the woman who revives first. Jane saw and understood the force of their

calamity as well as John himself; but within her she carried the indomitable faith of the pioneer—the faith which endured, over mountains and deserts, through bitter cold and choking dust, to build an empire under the war-clubs of Apache and Sioux. Jane's first thought was for the man at the window, and soon Grahame felt her arm across his shoulder and the gentle touch of her hand on his hair.

For a long time she too rested her elbow on the empty sash and gazed out on the scene of desolation. Before her eyes stretched a hundred acres of blue-gray mud. Not a living thing in sight, not a plant or weed! At the last thought an expression of grim satisfaction flashed across her face. At least the weeds had gone too. Behind the drill a drift of hail-stones was slowly melting in the sun, and the thawing ice brought a renewed tang of spring to the air. It seemed as though the season was just beginning again, and as she looked down along the pasture fence, she almost expected to see a blue bank of wild crocus, just as she had less than two months ago.

From the drill to the field and back to the drill again her eyes wandered, and though she was hardly aware of seeing either, the laws of suggestion came sub-consciously into operation. Slowly at first, and then with gathering force, an idea took possession of her mind, and with it came a new expression of hope. She turned with an eager gasp to the man at her side.

"John, I've thought of something."

She saw his face then. It was gray and haggard, but she shook his arm again.

"John, that field is as clean as summer fallowing. Why not put it into flax and try once more?"

For a while Grahame revolved the idea in his head and then dismissed it with: "Too late."

"No, it isn't. I know it isn't too late. Lots of people put flax in the last of June and win out. If we happened to have plenty of rain and no early frost, we might make it too. It's worth trying, anyway."

For a moment Grahame toyed with the thought. He raised his head and looked out over the field. Certainly there never was a finer seed-bed than that looked. Flax sowed then would have a flying start of the weeds even if the weeds started again, because it would germinate and grow faster than any of them. With plenty of moisture it stood a good chance to get ahead of the

fall frosts. Gradually his face cleared, and he too looked out upon the world with an expression of new hope. He straightened and started to say something, but the words died in his throat. He bowed his head again.

"No money, no credit!" he groaned.

"Oh, John, don't say it. You have credit."

"There isn't a thing left on the place I could put up for security, and who'd be fool enough to lend me money for seed-flax so late in the season? No—no use! We're beaten, and that's the end of it."

For a while Jane returned to her study of the ice-swept field, but she did not show the discouragement of her husband. Instead the light of a strong resolution grew in her eyes, and soon he felt her hand on his arm again.

"John, I've thought of something else. I still have the hundred dollars you gave me so I could go to the hospital when—that is, this fall. Let's take that and buy the seed. It will be enough and some left over for groceries. If we get a crop, there'll be plenty of money for me, and if we shouldn't—well, I can get along just as so many other women do. Come, John—come! We must hurry. There's no time to lose."

JOHN'S head had come up again, and he turned to the indomitable little woman beside him and gathered her into his arms. And so a woman did what her pioneer sisters have done a thousand times before, and what women will do a thousand times in years to come. She drew from that seemingly inexhaustible well of courage, and inspired in her man the strength and determination to try just once more—and then once again.

Long after dark, that same night, Jane heard the rumble of Grahame's wagon and went to the gate to meet him.

Climbing up on the wheel and holding her lantern down into the box, she saw the light reflected on the oily amber surface of flax. Lifting a handful, she watched it slip between her fingers. It felt cool and smooth and clean. Somehow there came to her, with its velvety touch, a new hope and faith, the faith which makes all things possible to those who must win success only by trying again and again.

On the long ride home with the flax John had had ample time for thought, and he came to realize what Jane's faith and

courage had meant to him that day, and what it would mean in the anxious days to come, and he tried to give expression to the thought.

"You sure are the best little crutch any lame man could have, honey girl."

"Lame man! Don't say it! You're not a lame man!"

"Not physically, I'll admit but—Jane, where did you get all your courage? You're like a rubber ball. Punch you in one place, and you bob out in another. Now, me, if I'm punched in, any place, I stay punched in, I guess."

Jane laughed, but she recognized his troubled thought under his levity.

"You're unjust to yourself, John. This is the difference between us. You have all the care and worry. You have the responsibility, not only of your own future—which, if you were alone, would bother you not at all—but also the responsibility of my future and—our children's future. Don't you know that the fear of failure is what takes the courage out of a man? What you have to learn is how to forget to be afraid; and you know you will never lose your crutch, so what does the rest matter?"

"It doesn't matter at all, honey. Nothing matters as long as we have each other. . . . Get up on the seat with me and ride to the granary. I'm tired and hungry too."

"Oh, John, and I have kept you here gabbling all this time! No, I'll run into the house and have something nice and hot for your supper by the time you've unhitched."

NEXT morning Grahame went over the field and debated with himself whether it would be better to disk or not before hitching on to the drill, but in the end he decided that the disking would dry out the soil and that with the additional time it would take, would do more to lessen his chances than the few weeds that might survive.

In midafternoon of the fourth day Grahame was coming down the last lap of the final round. Ahead of him the six big horses forged steadily on, dragging the twelve-foot drill step by step toward home. From under his feet he could hear the musical sound of thin disks cutting the surface, and the jingle of many small chains dragging on the ground to cover the tiny furrows, while from each spout of the ma-

chine a miniature cascade of flax sifted down through a rubber pipe and dropped gently between the disks. At the end of the field he lifted the disks from the ground and turned for a last look over the field. There stretched an even hundred acres of newly seeded grain. Whether or not he and Jane were to keep the farm home in which they had staked so many golden dreams was a secret locked in the bosom of the freshly sown field, but he would not worry, would not be afraid: he would take Jane's counsel to heart.

That night Jane awoke to hear the soft pattering of rain on the roof. She touched her husband, and together they looked from each window in turn. It was the same in every direction—not a star in sight, but just a lowering canopy of slate-gray clouds from which came the long slanting lines of life-giving moisture. John turned exultantly to his wife:

"Well, honey, we win the first round anyway."

A FEW days later they saw the miracle of germinating grain. In seemingly endless rows, and but a few inches apart, the soil was breaking and lifting into tiny ridges, and in some places there were delicate leaves showing under scale-like canopies of soil. Every morning and every evening they made the same pilgrimage, watching the little plants break through and stand erect, the long lines like so many miniature evergreens. In two weeks the field was green again, and Grahame's flax-field became the Mecca of neighbors and real-estate men who wished to show a perfect stand.

There came now another lull during which Grahame and Jane replanted as much of their garden as they thought would have time to mature before the frost. Later came the haying, and in addition to the wild hay John cut and stacked, before turning under the stubble, the scattering growth of oats and spelts which had come up in wake of the storm. With no early harvest to take up his time, he helped around the neighborhood, for while there was no cash in it for him, there was always a day coming when he would need help himself.

One day in early August, when Jane and Grahame went to the field, they found the deep green was fading to a lighter shade, and the next morning, under a warm burst of sunshine, the flax had turned to an ocean

of waving blue. Acre after acre, away into the West until their vision was lost amid the dancing heat-waves, were countless millions of tiny blue blossoms nodding in the sun. Fleecy clouds threw light shadow-areas which moved slowly across the field, and currents of air, passing here and there, sent shimmering paths of alternating blue and green before their eyes. Again Grahame's arm tightened about his wife, and this time he chuckled as he announced: "Round Number Two, and we've won again."

"How long before it will be out of danger, John?"

"Depends on the weather. Say a month—six weeks, perhaps."

"That's a long time," said Jane wistfully.

"Here, don't you lose your grip, little wife. Where'd we land if you gave up, I'd like to know?"

Jane laughed. "Oh, I'm not losing my grip. I'm only getting a fresh start; but John, as the danger gets nearer and nearer, it takes a lot of nerve never to be afraid, doesn't it?"

"You bet it does, honey; but me—I'm learning a lot these days. A man doesn't have to flunk entirely because he is knocked out once. Let's forget it and go fishing."

And there was no need for worry. September came without frost following a season of ample moisture. The blue petals had withered long ago, and in their place had come tiny green bolls. That was the danger-period, and night after night John had watched the thermometer, for the slightest trace of frost would destroy the delicate bolls and plunge their hopes once more into discouragement; but no frost came, and he watched the little grains pass from milk to dough and at last harden to the point where they were safe. Then came a time of windy weather and clear skies when the field slowly turned to gold and then brown, and the day arrived when Jane and Grahame stood and listened to the dry, metallic, rasping sound of ripe grain. He took off his hat and threw it out on the grain. The serried ranks of stems hardly bent, and the hat rode buoyantly above the field. That was a sign of twenty bushels to the acre! They returned to the house, too happy even to talk, and Grahame went to work on the big "header" or "push-binder," as it is sometimes called by virtue of the fact that the horses are behind instead of in front of the cutting and binding mechanism.

THERE are two ways of cutting flax. One is to take off the binder attachment and allow the grain to pass to the carrier and be dumped in windrows. The other is to cut it like other grain and shock it. Grahame had decided to go to the additional expense of tying it, as he explained to Jane:

"Because it is so late in the season, there is a chance of snow before we can get it threshed. Even heavy rains would damage it. If it is shocked, you can see how we can save more of it than we could if it's lying on the ground. It will cost more, but it's worth it."

"Yes, I see that; but—it's a lot of work to put a hundred acres of grain into shocks."

"Well, I have the time, and I can work—none better."

And so early next morning he hitched his six horses to the big binder and drove to the field. When the sickle had almost reached the grain, he tilted the platform so the knife would work five or six inches above the ground. Then he kicked another lever, and the whole machine sprang to life, and the twelve-foot knife began its tireless sawing motion through the guards. The platform and elevator canvases began their endless revolutions, to the accompaniment of much flapping of free ends, while a multitude of chains and sprockets added their whirr and rumble to the ensemble.

As the long knife touched and slipped beneath the flax, the slender stems quivered, then leaped into the air, to be met by the impact of the reel-slats and fall in a long line on the platform canvas, to be swept to the left and in between the elevator canvases. Emerging at the top, they fell forward and down until upraised arms stopped their progress. The long ribbon of grain was fed into the binder, and the packer arms drove it into a solid bundle. When the pressure became too great, a long needle from below, carrying a piece of twine drew it tight through a notch in a disk which already had carried the twine back, thus forming a loop. Now three small steel fingers grasped the twine and revolved once, tying a knot. An instant later another disk revolved and brought a small knife uppermost, to cut the twine just beyond the knot. Then two more arms whirled overhead and kicked the finished bundle down upon the carrier.

On the last day of the cutting Grahame had not been feeling well, and when the

long obstinate streak of grain had finally dwindled to nothing and he turned toward home, he realized that something was decidedly wrong. He had dropped the traces and begun to unhitch when a wave of dizziness sent him leaning against the binder frame for support. With a strong man's disregard and contempt for sickness, he attempted to go on with his task, but his strength gave out altogether, and he slipped to the ground in a heap.

After a while Jane, wondering at his long delay, came from the house in search of him. Frightened, she dropped to her knees and holding his head in her lap tried to coax him back to consciousness. Once he opened his eyes and murmured something about being knocked out in the last round, and lapsed again into unconsciousness.

IT is not necessary to dwell on Jane's ride ¹ to the nearest telephone nor the long fight the doctor and the sympathetic neighbors helped her put up before Grahame was out of danger. Influenza and pneumonia ran their course day after day, sapping the last ounce of strength from the body of a once strong man, until he lay a mere shadow of himself.

One evening Jane stood at the window, looking out over the field of flax. It had never been shocked, for there had been no one to do the work. Fortunately there had been no rain, and the bundles, remaining dry, had not sprouted, but now Jane was worried. The wind had blown from the east for several days, and now as she glanced toward the west she saw a long, low, slate-colored cloud moving along the horizon. She could not repress a shudder of fear. Of course it might pass with a shower or two, but so late in the fall, she had little hope. Apparently the stage was set for a genuine snowstorm, and if the flax were once covered, it would probably remain covered until spring.

In spite of the extra work incident to John's sickness, Jane had left no stone unturned in her efforts to find a threshing rig. She had seen or written every thresherman who ordinarily operated in their neighborhood, only to meet with one disappointment after another. What little crop the hailstorm had left, locally, had been stacked, and the men who owned the big machines had moved farther away to get the cream of the threshing before returning to do their own work. Meanwhile time had worn on, bringing nearer and nearer the

inevitable day when storm clouds would close in and drop a mantle of snow to enshroud the grave of their last hope.

Sick at heart, Jane turned from the window. She had done all she could. If snow came, they were out of luck, that was all. Once during the evening she thought of Ironheart. She knew his rig was somewhere to the north of them, and that it was one of the survivors of the big steam rigs which had of late given way before the small neighborhood gas outfits. With his twelve or fourteen teams and the big separator, he could clean them up in one long day's work. For a moment a ray of hope dawned in her breast. She thought of the hours she had spent nursing Ironheart back to health. If there were an ounce of gratitude left in that shriveled shell, he would surely help. Then she saw him again as he looked the morning he had left them, cold, cynical, apparently thankless for all she had done; and the spark of hope flickered and died.

At last, worn out by work and worry, Jane went to bed, but just as she was losing consciousness, an idea came to her. If it didn't snow during the night, she would go to the nearest rig and offer them half the crop if they would come in and thresh it, at once. She woke Grahame, and they discussed it, pro and con, finally deciding there was no other course open to them. Meanwhile the night wind sang its melancholy way around the house, and once the feeble light from the night lamp showed them a single snowflake melting against the windowpane.

Sometime later Jane heard John's voice calling to her; and awakening, she saw him propped up on his elbow and straining his eyes out into the darkness. As she moved slightly, he cautioned her: "Listen!"

From somewhere out of the night came a low rumbling sound that rose and fell, accompanied by a steady *throb-throb* as though some monster were breathing fast and deep; far up the road they could see a slender streamer of sparks drifting with the wind.

Minutes passed. The rumbling became louder, and now they could hear the clatter of heavy gears running loose, on the downhill grade. Suddenly they saw, illuminated by the sparks, three plumes of steam climb into the air, and came the wild, high shriek of a steam whistle, once, twice, thrice.

"Good God," exclaimed Grahame, "it's a threshing outfit calling for water."

There could be no doubt whatever. It

was a threshing rig coming down the road that passed their house. Could it be possible that some one was coming to help them? The thought came to Grahame and Jane at the same time, but it seemed too wildly impossible to mention. They could see plainly now, for the engine was almost abreast of the house, and behind it came the great bulk of a separator, lumbering along with its gaunt arms outlined against the sky, while still farther back was the low squat body of the cook-car, followed by an extra water-tank and then a long line of horses and racks stretching away into the gloom.

When the engine was almost to the gate, Grahame reached out and grasped his wife's hand. In a moment they would know, and they dared not breathe. The front of the boiler was even with the gate. It was passing. Then when their last wild hope seemed about to be dashed to the ground, the engine swung in a wide turn and came straight toward them. The house seemed to tremble on its foundation, and the exhaust echoed shrilly from the empty hayloft. Now the big machine was passing beneath their window. The fire door clanged; a lurid glow lit up the engine's platform; and Jane caught a momentary glimpse of the man at the throttle: it was Ironheart the thankless.

JANE lighted a lantern and made ready to do her part, and there was much to do. She must leave John alone while she rode about the neighborhood to notify the men who had promised to help. She was nearly ready, when a knock sounded at the door and she opened it to find a young man on the threshold.

"Is this Mrs. Grahame?" he inquired. At Jane's nod, he continued:

"The boss told me to say that he had made all the arrangements and you will have nothing to do. We have all had supper, and the cook-car will be here for breakfast."

"Thank you very much, and thank Mr. Kinear for me," replied Jane. "And please tell him I will have teams here to take the grain and—"

"I was supposed to tell you about that too," he broke in. "The boss sent his car down here ahead and notified everybody that we should start at daybreak. He has two trucks himself, and there are two more working with the rig, so he thought that maybe, as long as Mr. Grahame wont be

able to do much work this winter, he had better send the flax right to the elevator from the machine, leaving only what you will want for seed here. Good night," he said, and turned to go, then came back again: "Another thing, I was to tell you that if enough teams turned up to help on the long haul, he is going to thresh right here in the yards so you can have the straw for feed and for windbreak this winter."

Never in all her life had Jane experienced such a feeling of intense gratitude as that which swept over her when she realized that there was no worry, nothing for her to do but care for her husband; and back in his room, she talked and watched by turns until the light in the haymow was blown out and she knew the men were asleep—all but the man on the water-tank, who sat slouched forward in his seat, wrapped in the folds of a heavy sheepskin coat.

A breeze came from the east, and she was thankful, for it meant the flax would be dry enough to thresh at daybreak. Sometimes, after a quiet night, it would be too tough to thresh until near noon the next day.

John reached out and took his wife's hand.

"Kind of looks, honey, as though we might win the last round, after all."

AN hour later Jane could hear the rattle of gears running loose on the downhill slope, and in a few minutes the big engine turned in at the gate. Halfway across the yard it stopped, and a man ran back to pull the pin between separator and tender. Then the engine came on with only the separator. At the expense of much snorting and chugging, the cumbersome separator was finally wheeled into position, where it settled with a thud into the holes already dug for its hind wheels. The engine then cut loose, and turning so as to face the separator, backed toward the house far enough to allow for the long drive-belt; there it stopped, and soon the yard was quiet again except for the low whine of imprisoned steam.

Throughout the remainder of the night Grahame and Jane alternately fought for sleep and watched from the window for the dreaded change in the weather. Clouds were scudding across the sky, and there was a feeling of rain or snow in the air. Rain so late in the season would in all

probability turn to snow, and so one was as bad as the other. Few people can realize the suspense John and his wife were called upon to bear during those hours of darkness, but there is an end to the longest night, and an hour before daylight came the faint tinkle of an alarm clock and a man from the cook-car went to the engine; reaching up into the cab he grasped a cord, and there followed the long, clear blasts of the whistle. As if in answer a feeble light flickered through the cracks of the haymow door; another flashed in the cook-car, and far out on the prairie other lights came out one by one, each marking the location of a farm from which help was coming.

Presently from every direction across the field came wagons to join those already in the flax. The first ones loaded, pulled in and ranged themselves in a double line on each side of the engine. Ironheart climbed the separator and gave a signal. The engineer opened the cylinder cocks, and eased his reverse back. Then he tapped lightly on the throttle, and the big engine moved slowly, very slowly back, lifting and stretching the drive-belt until it was drawn taut and hung in the air, slapping and chafing itself where it crossed. Another signal, and the reverse was pushed ahead, the throttle opened slowly again and the engine glided into almost silent motion.

The quivering belt began to move back and forth. The separator too came to life, starting reluctantly with many protesting groans and squeaks; but gathering speed, these sounds gradually ceased, and it took up a heaving, shaking motion that ejected spurts of dust from every joint and crevice, filling the air with a yellow haze which hung in dense clouds about the machine.

Beginning with a low hum, the separator's tone arose gradually to a whirr and thence in a crescendo to a high-pitched droning whine, steadily, monotonously, on and on.

ALL through the day the big machine kept up its ceaseless whine. Several times snow-squalls swept by, and one or two crossed the field, but it had grown colder during the day and the dry snow did little or no damage.

When darkness came, the field was clear, but still long lines of wagons awaited their turn to unload. Under the magic touch of dusk men appeared as grotesque shadows, gnomes, silhouetted against the skyline. Behind the separator a veritable mountain of straw arose to pinnacled peaks and towers,

whose members occasionally toppled over and slid down the stack only to be rebuilt higher than ever. The exhaust from the engine merged into a steady roar, while a scarlet flame glowed steadily under the spark-arrester on the smokestack. The separator became a vibrant, roaring shadow. Its whine and moan were higher and louder than ever in contrast to the silence of the night; above it still towered the figure of a man, distorted almost beyond recognition by the darkness and dust-clouds, but still the directing genius of it all.

Finally the last bundle passed into the hungry maw, and a moment later the weigher tripped for the last time. The high whine began to fall away—lower and lower until it became a gentle rumble, a purr, a long-drawn-out sigh, and silence broken only by the gentle hiss of steam.

Grahame expected Ironheart would come to the house for a settlement, but an hour went by before the same young man who had talked to Jane the night before came to the door. Up in Grahame's room he took from his pocket a bunch of storage-tickets and laid them on the bed.

"The boss says there are two thousand bushels at the elevator in Barlinton, and four hundred and eighty here in the granary."

Grahame made a hasty mental calculation—two thousand, four hundred and eighty bushels at two dollars and sixty-five a bushel—

When Grahame had collected his scattered senses, he turned to the young man and said:

"Did Mr. Kinear tell you what the bill was? I can't give him a check, but I can indorse enough of these tickets over to him to meet it."

Before Grahame had finished, his caller was through the door and his voice came back as curt and terse as the voice of Ironheart himself:

"There is no bill."

The wind moaned along the eaves, and the whistling rasp of snow sounded against the siding, but within there were warmth and happiness, for Grahame and Jane had won the last round.

Miles up the road, a great black hulk lumbered through the night, and as it moved, occasional flashes of lurid light from the fire door illumined the expressionless face of the strange, silent man who held his hand on the throttle and watched the snow-swept road ahead.



The Legacy

The laughs come thick, fast and hearty in this story—by a new writer to whose future appearances you will look forward with enthusiasm.

By CALVIN BALL

"It is, eh? Well, count it out in fives and tens."

I kept my eyes open while the teller doled out the money like it hurts him somewhere to see it go.

"Look out one don't stick to your fingers," I says.

I walked out the Junction City National Bank cramming the money deep into my pants pocket and wondering would it stay there long enough to get warm before somebody hooked it away. Every book-agent, house canvasser, and gold-mine swindler in the State's got me down on their sucker list at the head of the class, and if I aint buying preferred stock in a patent double-grip monkey wrench, I'm busy shoving out money for something like the new-invention demountable washing machine which I bought it from Jake Flimm because he said all you got to do is put your clothes in the machine and let them stay there until they're soaked. I am the one which got soaked.

I didn't get more than ten steps from the bank when I looked up the street, and

there on the corner coming toward me was Jake Flimm. I flattened out the bulge in my pocket where I had stuck the money and tried to get a painful look on my face like I was broke, but I could see from the way his eyes stuck out that he had spotted me leaving the bank and was already figuring out how he's gonna spend my money.

I turned around like I didn't see him, and walked toward the end of the block, but when I looks over my shoulder I saw he was strolling along after me, casual-like, and picking his teeth so I wouldn't suspect what he was after, but gaining on me fast.

When Jake finds out you got money, he's right away got something to sell you, and he's a slick talker with a smooth tongue which if he ever gets a chance at you he don't stop talking till you've got his merchandise and he's got your money; and it's always a rotten swap.

I turned the corner and ducked into the Metro pool-room, figuring that way I'd shake him off, and him figuring he'd shake me down, and I could tell which way it was going to be when I looked up a couple

minutes later, and saw sure enough he was easing through the door, his eyes already on me, and him not yet all the way in.

I walked to the back end of the pool-room, but the rear door's locked, so I sat down in a corner and held up a newspaper like I was reading it and very busy. Jake stopped to talk with some of the birds playing pool at the first table, but while he talked, he kept edging back to where I was, and the first thing I knew he was in front of me with a frozen smile on his face like he was glad to see me.

"Hi, there, Ed!" he calls out at me. "Is that you behind that newspaper?"

A NEWSPAPER aint much protection when you got a weasel like that after you, so I folded it up and put it under the chair.

"This is me," I says, and I give him a hard look.

"I aint seen you for a day or two," he says, slapping me on the knee, an' plumping himself down beside me confidential.

"I been grieving about it, Jake."

"I want to talk with you, Ed, because I been thinking about doing you a good turn."

I eyed him up and down.

"When anybody's thinking about doing me," I says, "I don't call it a good turn."

He looked surprised.

"What's the matter?" he asked, raising up his eyebrows. "Didn't I let you in on that washing-machine deal?"

"I'm not in on that deal," I told him. "I'm out on it, and you know it. What kind of a good turn is this which you are now figuring on doing me?"

"I been thinking, Ed, that you've lost a little money on some deals we've been in together, and I want to see you get it back. You and me are gonna hook up together. There's plenty money to be made. Lots of suckers around. All we gotta do is catch one and squeeze him."

"The sucker which is the one you are going to squeeze is me," I says. "You take your hand off my shoulder, because I got business to attend to." I started to get up.

"Sit down. Sit down, Ed. You want to make money, don't you? That's the idea. Get the money. You follow my advice, and you'll get it."

"If I follow your advice I'll get it in the neck. What kind of a slick scheme you got up your sleeve?"

"Ed," he says, "if you only had five hundred dollars, you could make a mint!"

I shook his hand off my arm and stood up.

"Now, see here, Jake," I says, looking him in the eye. "You know bloody well I got five hundred. You heard about that legacy, and you saw me coming out the bank. I can tell you right now I'm not going to invest a penny in any plan of yours!"

HE held up both his hands with the palms sticking out.

"I didn't hear a word about any legacy! My plan don't call for a cent of investment. You don't have to invest one penny!"

"Then what you mentioning about me having five hundred for?"

"Ha! I was just sounding you out to see whether you got it all right, or was it a rumor. You don't have to invest one nickel!"

"All right, then," I says, getting back into the chair.

"All you do, Ed, is make a little deposit. Now, this plan—"

"Wait a minute," I says. "Did you mention about deposit?"

"Yeh, you make a deposit. It's a little security."

"What kind of security?"

"It's security for a garage. You get this garage, and your fortune's made. No limit to what you can make."

"That settles it," I said, getting up. "You don't need to go any farther. When you said garage, you said enough. The garage which you mean is the bankrupt, deserted, broken-down Skinner Garage, or I have made a mistake."

"That's the one," he said, slapping me on the back. "The Skinner Garage, out on Kingston Road. You can get it at a bargain, because I've got it for sale, and you're an auto mechanic, so it's just what you want. The price is five hundred. No investment, though. Not a penny! You just deposit five hundred in the bank, so that it will be businesslike, and if you don't pay for it some time, then the money is the security. You leave that to me. That garage is a money-maker if you run it right."

"Where'd the fellow go that run it before?" I asked.

"That's all right. He's gone."

"He is, eh? Who is that fellow the

undertaker brought in the other day in a box, and the town buried him?"

"Which one?"

"I mean the one which they said he starved to death."

"How'd I know who he is?"

"Didn't he come from somewhere out around Kingston Road?"

"Maybe he did."

"Thought they said he used to run a garage out there somewhere."

"Yeh. Guess he did."

"Which garage'd he run?" I asked, looking him in the eye.

"What's the difference, which one?"

"Did he used to run that Skinner Garage?"

"Well, he's gone now. Let bygones be bygones."

"So he did run it, eh? You bet he's gone. What kind of a hot deal you cooking up for me, Jake? You doing me a good turn, or are you splitting up with the undertaker, because I wouldn't put it past you! You aint going to get me starving to death waiting for no business in a run-down hermit's garage on Kingston Road. Leggo my coat!"

He tried to catch me by the arm, and started talking fast, but I jerked away from him, and got out on the street. Before he could get out after me, I turned up a alley and was out of sight. I came out the alley on Chester Street, and just as I did so, a big muddy-looking touring car pulled up to the sidewalk and a man got out. The license plate said Pennsylvania, so I see he was a traveler.

IN the back seat was a woman which I guess she was his wife because he didn't pay much attention to her, and beside her is a young woman looking like she might be about twenty-some, and probably his daughter. A couple of trunks was packed in between the seats, and the extra space filled up with suitcases, bundles, and one baby which squawked.

"What town's this?" the man asked, giving me the once-over.

"This is Junction City, Iowa," I says. "U. S. A."

"What's the population?"

"Eighteen hundred's our story, and we stick to it."

"Many garages around here?"

I give him a close look, because when he mentions garages, it gives me a jumpy feeling, thinking how close Jake thought

he come to doing me outa my five hundred.

"Not many," I answers. "Why?"

"We're driving through the country looking for a location," he explains, "and at the same time getting the benefit of the trip. We keep our eyes open, and when we find the right place, we're going to settle down. I aim to start a garage out here, or buy one if I can strike a good bargain. Plenty tourists going through here, so it ought to be a good spot."

I sure did eye him up and down something skeptical. I been skinned so many times that I feel like a ready-to-cook eel, and when a prospect to buy a garage drops in on me like this, right after Jake has just finished priming me up that's he's got one to sell for five hundred, I begins looking for a catch. On the other hand, this goof looks like a bona fide stranger, and I don't think Jake knows him; besides which, a squawling kid in the back seat is one kind of props a con-man don't lug around.

"You mean," I says, handing him a fishy look, "that you might buy a garage if you can find a good one at a bargain rate?"

"That's the idea," he says. "Do you know of any such place?"

I certainly done some quick hard thinking. I'm a auto mechanic by trade, which you know how dumb they usually are, but I am one who has got a head on him, and I see here's a chance for me to turn over a smooth business deal in a workmanlike fashion, copying after the slick methods of Jake. If I could buy that garage from Jake for five hundred, and sell it to this bozo for, say, a thousand, I wouldn't lose any time going ahead. At the same time, I wouldn't pay Jake a penny until I already collected in advance from my client with the goggles, because I wasn't born last month myself, and if it's a graft game I'm ready for them.

"What's your name?" I asked in a shrewd way.

"Bite," he says.

"You will, eh?"

"That's my name. Henry Bite."

"Well, how much you figure you could pay for a good garage, Mr. Bite?"

He looks interested, and I thinks maybe I can poke on a extra couple hundred for good measure.

"It depends on the place," he says. "Have you got one to sell?"

"I got a garage to sell," I told him, not

saying whether it was mine, or was I only selling it.

"Where is it?"

"Look here, now," I says, getting his eye and holding it like Jake does when he starts hypnotizing you into buying something you don't want, "if you are on the market for a excellent garage at a low-down price, you have sure come to the right party, because I am the one which has got it."

"Show it to me," he says, "and maybe we could talk business. Of course, I couldn't pay too much."

"This one I have got is worth two thousand, but you can have it for one thousand cash, because you look like a man which needs that kind of merchandise."

I KEPT watching him close to see would he bat an eye, but he didn't. I saw the game was coming in my direction, and I know how to push things. I been out to the old Skinner Garage on Kingston Road enough times and know where it is; besides which, since the last bird that run it pined off with starvation, the garage is boarded up and nobody around. I figures right away I can jump into this bird's car with him and drive out and show him the joint, talking it up big to him on the way out, and then when I have landed him for one thousand and got cash down, I could pay Jake his five hundred and have the papers fixed up, and the deal closed.

"Business is business," I says. "We'll get into the machine and drive right over. It's about five miles down the Kingston Road, and I know the way."

"Get in," he says. "If I like that place, we're going to make a deal; because I been riding far enough."

I wasn't much stuck on the idea of soaking off that busted-up garage on a unsuspecting stranger like this, but business is a hard game, anyhow, and as I been stuck enough times myself, I figure I better beat somebody else while I got the chance. Besides, if I don't sell it to him, Jake soon will, and as I been living long enough so I heard about the early bird caught a worm. The big trouble with the Skinner Garage is that it used to be on the main highway, but on account they elected a new highway commission they straightened out the road, and the only way you can now get to it is by a half-mile detour. Not more'n one tourist in a thousand ever straggles up that way, and when they do,

it's only by a accident. The building itself which the garage is in is enough to knock you flat to look at it. The roof leaks, and the sides cave in. It started out as a house, and after twenty years turned into a inn, and in another twenty it got to be a blacksmith shop, then a barn, and last a garage. All it now needs is a good wind to make it a wreck.

I got skeptical when I thinks of charging him a thousand for such a layout, but you got to have a nerve like Jake has if you're gonna make money, and the way I begins to boost for that tumbledown dump he thinks he must be gonna see a Government mint which he could run it for a month, and then retire on the dividends.

"You sure I could do a good business in this place?" he asks when he was almost there.

"Business," I says, loud. "You'll be surprised."

"I'll bet I will," he says. "Is it on the main highway?"

"You don't need to worry. They built the main highway square past its door," I answered, not telling him they afterward changed the road.

"It oughta be good, then," he says.

"You bet it's good. You'll be satisfied to stay there. Live and die there, like the fellow did who run it before."

"Did he die there?"

"Oh, yes."

"What'd he die from?"

"Well, he couldn't eat," I says, kind of vague-like.

"Why couldn't he eat?"

"Don't know. About the time they elected the last highway commission, he quit patronizing the grocery store, and started living on roots which he pulled up out in the back yard."

HE give me a queer look, but didn't say anything, and just then we turned the bend, and there she was before us. I was relieved, with the high wind we been having lately, that we didn't find it blowed over. He gets out, and with his eyes popping wide open he gives it the long once-over. The kid in the back seat must a took a slant at it also, and it set up a howl you could hear a mile.

"Say," Bite says, giving me a doubtful look, "is this the shack you been talking about?"

"That's the one," I answered, enthusiastic; "which if it aint much for looks, it

sure has got quality, and you can look for a rushing business here."

"I can look for it, eh? Looks like it must of stood there a century."

"That's right. The pioneers built it, and that's why it's a good job."

"Is that the wall bulging out there on one side?"

"That's the way it was built," I told him. "They laid it out cockeyed. You can't expect too much. Business is what you got to keep your mind on."

"Is that a hole in the roof?" he asks, as we start walking toward the door.

"No, that's only a speck of dirt on the glass of your goggles. You needn't waste time looking at the outside, because it's all O. K."

"How's the inside?"

"Do you want to go in?"

"That's what we come for."

I saw the door was locked with a padlock, but I could tell there wasn't anything solid about it.

"Look the other way," I told him.

"Where?"

"Over there by the bushes."

"What is it?" he asks, turning around and eying the bushes I had pointed at.

While he was busy looking at the bushes, I raised my foot and come down with my heel hard on the padlock, which the board it was fastened to was so rotten that the whole thing fell off, lock, board, clasp, and all, and I pushed open the door and walked in. He followed me, rubbing his chin.

"This is the insides," I says. "Look it over. Did you ever see a equipment like this?"

"No, I never did," he answers, running his eyes over the walls looking for more holes, and finding plenty.

"You might need to do a little extra patching on the walls here and there," I says; "but I wouldn't hammer on them too hard."

"I don't like to waste time patching walls," Bite says. "But I suppose I'll have a little spare time."

"You'll find time, all right. There's the bench, and there's your tools all ready for you."

He blinked at them, and counted them—all four of them.

"Not many of them, is they?"

"It's enough," I says. "Are you a mechanic?"

"No, I figure on hiring a good mechanic,

and maybe two or three if business picks up."

"You got the right idea," I says. "I can see you are a business man. This is a first-class garage, Mr. Bite, with a excellent equipment as you can see it. There's a bicycle pump in the corner. Things is a little dusty now, but you once get the doors open and business started, and you'll begin to see things, because it's a excellent location, and I don't have to tell you what a gold mine such a place ought to be."

BY the time I got him outside again I saw he was getting enthusiastic.

"Henry," the woman in the car hollers to Bite, when we got back to the car, "don't it look awful quiet around here, and not many cars passing? In fact, none."

"It's a holiday," I answered, quick. "Now get in the car, and we'll get back to town and get this deal finished, as that's the way I do business."

I hustled him into the car, and we stepped on the gas for Junction City, where he could cash some travelers' checks at the bank, and turn over the thousand, which five hundred of it would be clear profit to me. This is one deal, I figures, which I am not the goat. We got started back for town, and the woman in the back seat leaned over and tapped Bite on the shoulder.

"Henry," she says, "do you notice how thick the grass grows on the middle of this main highway? S'funny, with so much tourists traveling that it wouldn't get wore down."

"Ha!" says I quick, before Bite could speak up. "That's the kind of grass which we have in this country. Sturdy! You can't keep it down. In town it even grows up through the cracks in the cement sidewalk."

I wondered would I get away with a line of applesauce like that, but she seemed satisfied, and quit talking, so I changed the subject and let it go.

Setting sideways in my seat, though, I begun noticing something. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mrs. Bite keep twisting her head and looking back over her shoulder, or else poking her head out to one side and looking up and down the road like she was expecting to see somebody. I also now remembered she had been doing the same thing on the way out, and something about it begun to look suspicious.

"Henry," she says finally, tapping Bite on the arm, "I think I saw them just now."

"Who's she talking about?" I asked Bite.

"Ha! That's only my wife talking."

"I know it's your wife talking, but what's she stretching her neck out both ways for, and looking up and down the road?"

"She's looking at the scenery."

"Then what makes her keep eying the road back of us, where we come from?"

"She's looking for somebody."

"Who?"

"Anybody."

I DIDN'T like the way this sounded, because there was something fishy about it, or I made a mistake. I kept my eye cautious on Mrs. Bite the rest of the way to Junction City, and soon's we got in town, I hustled them over to the bank. I was looking for a catch at the last minute, but everything went on working smooth.

The banker said a good word about my reputation to Bite, and in a few minutes Bite cashed up some travelers' checks and came over to the table where I was, carrying with him a fist full of hundred-dollar bills that made my eyes pop out to look at them.

When I at last got the thousand dollars in my own fingers, I knocked on wood, because I been in many a deal in this town, and this's the first time I ever pulled off anything which I wasn't the one who was it and got stung.

"Now," says I, "I will skip over to the Metro pool-room and get a friend of mine who will then fix up the papers, and you know I'm all right because the man at the bank window said so."

"All right," he says. "Let's get it settled quick."

I found Jake still in the pool-hall, because that's his hang-out, and so I walked in slow and stood around a minute or two thinking he would again start the old show about trying to sell me the Skinner Garage, which I would then pull out the five hundred and buy it. He was squatted in a chair in the corner though, and didn't give me a tumble even when I walked past him twice. I finally sat down careless on the next chair to his, and I begins to yawn and pick my teeth. But not a peep out of him. It begun to look funny.

"Well, Jake," I says at last, "I been thinking over that garage proposition which

you made it to me, and as I am a first-class auto mechanic and need a garage, and as I also have got that five hundred which was left me, I made up my mind I would help you along, and here's the five hundred which is the price you asked."

I reached for the money, but he held up his hand.

"Wait a minute. What you talking about?"

I give him a hard look, because something was beginning to look like a slip somewhere.

"I'm talking about that garage which you offered me. I got the five hundred here, and you're sure lucky somebody like me will take it off your hands. Here's the five hundred."

"Ha!"

"What you mean, ha!"

"You mean you want to buy one-third interest in that Skinner Garage. That's what I offered you for five hundred. If you want to buy the whole garage, it's fifteen hundred cash, and not one cent less!"

You could of knocked me flat.

"Look at here, Jake," I says, squaring myself around to him, "you know darn well you offered me that garage for five hundred, and you didn't mention no funny business about a one-third interest. Now, here's the five hundred."

"Put it in your pocket. It's fifteen hundred cash."

"You mean that?"

"You bet I mean it!"

The way I stood there looking at him was a holy fright.

"Jake," I says at last, "you're a under-hand crook! You found out I got a customer for that garage, and now you're trying to hold me up. I already sold that place, and the fellow's waiting for me to come over and fix the papers. All I got out of it is one thousand, so how'm I going to pay you fifteen hundred?"

"Well, you still got that five hundred legacy."

"D'you think I'd give you that!"

"Why not?"

"Do I look like a sap!"

"You needn't mention what you are, because I know already."

JAKE has got a crust that nobody can dent, and I saw it's wasting time to talk with him.

"You're trying to squeeze me out of that deal and make the profit yourself, Jake, but

I'm going to put a wrinkle in that scheme, and don't you forget it. That bird's waiting at the bank for me now. I'm going over there and give him back his thousand, and when I get through handing him out the true facts about that lopsided garage with no business, you couldn't sell it to him for fifteen cents! I am not the kind of a one which is going to let you swindle a stranger out of his money, because if anybody is going to do him, I am the one, as I saw him first!"

I was mad, and Jake knew it. I walked out of the pool-room and back to the bank, and my mind's made up that I'll spill the bag of beans out on the floor, and that'll end Jake's chance of getting a nickel out of a deal which he might have made something by treating me right.

"Mr. Bite," I says, pulling the thousand out of my pocket and laying it on the table, "there is the money you give me for that battered-up dump on Kingston Road, and you're in luck to get it back. I got a conscience, and I can't sting a stranger, as it's against my principle. That garage is a fake. It's a half-mile off the main highway, and you couldn't make a dime there in ten years, because the last fellow which had it starved plumb to death and they buried him in a wooden box. Now you got the truth, and I will say you are one bird which is in luck, and also if anybody else tries to sell you that place you know how to tell him where to get off, as he ought to be licked anyhow."

Bite was setting at the desk eying me close, but making no move to take back the thousand.

"You're singing a different song and dance now," he says, suspicious.

"You bet I am; and you got your money back. Why don't you put it in your pocket?"

He kept looking at me.

"Thought you said I could make a mint out there."

"I only said that. You couldn't make a dime!"

For a long time he set looking at me, and finally folded up his arms like it was a decision.

"You're trying to talk me out of my garage," Bite says, "and I aint gonna to stand for any deal like that."

"Put that money in your pocket," I says, "and shake hands with yourself."

"Not on your life. You can't beat me out of that garage. It's mine! I bought

it and paid for it! I got witnesses! You put that money in your pocket, and you get them papers fixed up with a deed and good title like you said, and you also get some swift action on yourself about it, or I will see if there is a law in this county!"

I FELT my tongue getting dry as I saw what kind of a raw pinch I was sliding into.

"Look at here," I told him. "I'm doing you a favor! This is a streak of good luck for you to get that thousand back, if you only knew it."

"There'll be a streak of bad luck for you if you don't get a hump on and fix up that title. I mean business!"

I saw he had me, and there's nothing left to do but turn up the cards all over the table, because I was certainly beginning to feel shaky inside.

"Now see here, Henry," I says, calling him by his first name, thinking that might help, "I'll tell you the truth."

"Ha!"

"The truth is I don't own the garage. When I sold it to you it wasn't mine, so there's nothing to do but give you your money back and call it square. Now put it in your pocket."

"You mean you been selling property which aint yours!"

"That's it. Put that in your pocket, and now we're square."

I kept poking the money toward him, hoping he'd pick it up automatic, but every time I shoved it forward, he shoved it backward and added a inch.

"So you been committing fraud, eh!"

I opened my eyes and looked at him, because he was by this time reaching for his hat and standing up.

"Which street does the sheriff live on?" he asked.

FOR a couple of minutes my tongue wouldn't work, and when I finally got it to wagging, I pulled Bite back in the chair. When anybody starts talking about which street does the sheriff live on, it's time you begin getting out of a bad scrape even if it costs you money to do it.

"Wait till I see this friend of mine in the pool-room," I says, "and we'll settle this without butting into any sheriff."

"I'll wait ten minutes," he says. "Now you hustle!"

"Jake," I says, when I dashed back into the pool-room and pulled him in a corner

by himself, "I'm in a bad fix about that garage, and I know you aint going to stand by and see a old friend get done. I sold that garage for a thousand, and now I got to deliver it, as he insists on it, and is now talking about where is the sheriff. You said you want to do me a good turn, so I know you aint gonna make me pay you fifteen hundred for a secondhand garage when I have already sold it for only a thousand. Are you, Jake!"

I wondered would he stand by me like a friend.

"Sixteen hundred or nothing!" Jake says.

"What!"

"You heard it. Sixteen hundred."

"You mean fifteen hundred."

"No, sixteen hundred."

"You jacking up the price another hundred on me!"

"Business is business."

"You bullet-headed sneak!"

"That's my price."

I wondered should I pay him the money, or had I better sock him a swift one, because it never failed yet—when I deal with Jake, I come out of it flat busted.

"Jake," I says, "one of these days that crooked nose of yours is going to be knocked more crooked than it already is, and I got a good idea who is it that's going to do it."

OUT of one pocket I pulled the thousand Bite had given me, and I put it in Jake's hand, which he had it open wide. Out of the other pocket I dug up the five hundred legacy money and put that in the same place with the other money. Jake counted it over careful.

"Only fifteen hundred here," Jake says, finishing counting.

"That's all I got, and you know it, except some change."

"How much?"

"Two dollars."

"Shell it out."

"Take it," I says, handing it over. "You might as well make a clean sweep."

"And for security for the balance," says Jake, "I'll take that watch and chain which you got hanging to your vest."

When Jake starts out to clean up, he always makes a slick job of it, and it's no use trying to hold out on him. I give him the watch. We made quick time from then on getting over to the bank, and fixing up the papers so Bite could take possession. With the deed in his pocket, Bite walked over to his car which it stood in front of the bank, with the wife and family in it, and the kid still squawking.

"What about it?" Bite asks me for the third time, while Jake stands on the sidewalk looking on. "Gonna take that job as mechanic which I offered?"

"Do you want company to starve with?" I ask, sarcastic.

Just then the wife hollers excited:

"Henry, there they are now!"

A car stopped in front The Commercial Hotel, and three men gets out.

"Who are they?" I asks.

"They're surveyors," Bite says. "They are the ones which the wife was stretching her neck trying to see them this afternoon, because they are laying out a new bend in the main highway, and we're in luck, as it's gonna pass square past the Skinner Garage door."

"How'd you know it is?" I asks, madder than ever.

"Ha! How do I know! I forgot to mention it to you that the new highway commissioner which he was elected, is my brother-in-law."

I gives up and climbs into the car.

"Don't you assault and battery me," he hollers, putting up a feeble defense. "I'm offering you a good job at six smackers a day!"

"I'll take that job," I says, "because I'm flat busted and got to!"

The engine popped; the baggage rattles, the baby howls, the car moves, and I gives Jake a last dirty look which that's all I had left to give him anyhow, so I might as well let him have it, and did.

Calvin Ball will next month offer "The Fist Fright," another joyous tale of eager Edward, who was a demon garage mechanic but a fall guy in matters of money and matrimony. Don't miss it.



ROBERT J. CASEY

A FIGHTING, writing Irishman from South Dakota—that's Bob Casey. He was writing editorials for a metropolitan daily when the war broke; he started after a training-camp commission, but that seemed too slow, and so he enlisted as a private and won his captaincy and a citation or so in action in France. During the Occupation he gathered material for a notable book, "The Lost Kingdom of Burgundy." A recent trip through the Near East is to result in another. The story which begins on the opposite page comes from his some-time residence in the Black Hills country



Contraband Ore

The author of the famous Fancy Dan stories here contributes a deeply interesting story of a Black Hills mine and the curious treasure therein.

By ROBERT J. CASEY

THOMAS MARONY, scientifically flattened in the lee of a porphyry dike, reached out cautiously for his hat and surveyed the path carved through the crown by the bullet that was now a starred splotch on the rock above him. He swore with all the gentleness and zeal for detail that come of a long life in mining camps, and he spoke eloquently toward the hole into which had disappeared Sandy MacTavish, his chemist.

"I could kill a man with a disposition like that," admitted Mr. Marony with fervor.

"Aye, wi' proper safeguardin' an' unreasonable luck, you maht have a chance to do it," came a peevish voice from the hole. "But wi' so many men havin' reason to eeliminate you, it maht be a treefle hard deescoverin' his name."

Mr. Marony swore again.

"A new hat it was," he lamented. "And the such-and-suched whatchecallit that took the shot at me had to pump it right across the crease—four holes instead of two."

"Aye, that's the worst of it," agreed Mr. MacTavish from the hole. "The shootin'

ahnt what it used to be in the Black Hills—prohibeetion, I suppose. Four inches lower, an' your hat wouldna ha' been marked.

"At least, you wouldna ha' been talkin' abaht it. An' wull you na stick your head up an' see is the assassin gone? It's a wee bit cramped in here."

"It's a damsie crampier in a grave," responded Mr. Marony, and he considered awhile.

THERE was little protection on this side of the hill save in the crevices of the dike whither they had dropped at the beginning of the target practice. Behind their ledge Terry Peak rose to blue-gray heights in a white-blue sky. Cirrus clouds drifted in tufts between the buttresses of limestone needles and cast puny little round shadows here and there over the dusty rock and dull green verdure. There was no shelter above for anyone who wished to avoid the wary eye of a pot-shooter.

Below the dike, a gulch suddenly cleft the hillside and fell away sheer for two

hundred hazy feet. The opposite wall of the cleft rose to a ledge, almost the counterpart of the one against which Marony had effaced himself. And the shot had come from beyond that ledge.

"I don't think I'd better be movin' around much," decided Mr. Marony. "It may be only a murderer practicin' his nefarious trade. And thin ag'in, it might be some hunter who thinks we are guides mistakin' ourselves for elk. You can't be sure. . . . Oh, well, I suppose we'll have to knock him off in self-defense. Stick up your gun so the sun'll hit it."

MacTavish grumblingly shoved the rifle up over the rim of the hole. Marony nodded appreciatively as the light glinted from it in a sudden sparklike glare.

But his critical survey was brief. Across the gulch a rifle cracked, and almost before the 30-30 bullet was spreading out over the porphyry, a second crack blended with the echoes. Through a wisp of gray that spiraled from the muzzle of Marony's gun, he saw a brownish shadow quiver in a clump of piñon, and a browner figure arc suddenly forward.

"Got him," reported Mr. Marony. "And I hope the blatherskite has a good hat."

STILL exhibiting a worthy caution, Mr. MacTavish lifted himself out of his hole. The pair waited for a moment to make sure that the marksman in the piñon had been unassisted. Then they made their way down the face of the cliff and up on the other side. Fifteen minutes after Mr. Marony's ruse, they were looking into the white face of a man who lay sprawled ludicrously across a gun.

"Gimp Williams," said Mr. MacTavish. Mr. Marony, who was studying his quarry in obvious puzzlement, hesitated before he answered.

"What, Nell, do you make of that?" he inquired.

"Me, Ah'm nae good at puzzles," replied MacTavish. "However, Ah'm not sae bad at mathematics that Ah canna add twa and twa. Gimp Williams never had a job in his life except wi' the Gold Ledge clique. If he took a shot at you, it was because Andy Martin told him to. He never did anything except what Andy Martin told him to do. An' you canna do better than tie to that."

"But," objected Mr. Marony, "why should Andy Martin be after wantin' to bump me off? He sold me the Golden

Buck mine at a high price for honest money. An' if your hunch is any good, he bit me."

"Oh, aye! I'm nae denyin' that. The Golden Buck is what its name implies, a species of cheese. But it's nae use denyin' the obvious facts. Andy Martin's friend here spoiled your hat, an' it wasna because he has any interest in promotin' the millinery business in Deadwood."

The man on the ground stirred uneasily—as a man might whose backbone is laid over the bolt of a rifle.

"He's alive," diagnosed Marony in an aggrieved tone. "You certainly can't be sure of people like that—they're that deceivin'."

"We could pitch him over the cliff an' make him deader," suggested Mr. MacTavish. But Marony shook his head.

"I have a better plan," he said. "Killin' this bird any more would just be makin' more work for the sheriff, an' aside from my humanitarian instincts, which I'm after gettin' from my great grandmother in Athlone, I'd much rather be killin' Andy Martin."

"Oh, aye, have it your way," agreed Mr. MacTavish. "I'm a' for cuttin' out further bloodshed, but it could just as weel be cut out by chokin' him to death wi' his ane socks."

ANDREW BENTON MARTIN was a person of consequence in Deadwood. By reputation he was a mining engineer, by practice a skillful poker-player and by innuendo a sprightly bit of investigation for the first grand jury that should care to look into his varied pursuits. He owned shares in a bank, held a partnership in a garage, had auditing rights in a bookstore and restaurant, and boasted of a major interest in a thing up Belle Fourche way which he euphemistically called a hotel.

He had a suavity of manner that casual acquaintances ascribed to a calm conscience. He danced well and picked his clothes each year at the Omaha style-show. He was a gifted *raconteur*. He could be shrewd in a business transaction. He liked music to the point of sending flowers to the pianist at the Deadwood opera house—she was a widow and comely. And he could distribute bribes with a marvelous technique.

As for his antecedents, Deadwood was hazy. It was said that he had graduated from Harvard—or maybe the Rapid City

school of mines. Rumor had it that his father had been one of those pioneer Argonauts who pulled the golden spine out of the Comstock Lode. It was whispered more maliciously that his father had been shot one dark midnight in another man's corral, and that Andrew himself had risen to affluence through pilfering sluice-boxes at the south end of the Hills. This latter charge was grossly libelous, for in the territory mentioned the chief industry was not the robbery of sluice-boxes but the etching of artistic designs on the haunches of orphan cows.

Mr. Martin had a bungalow well up the hill from the town in the direction of Gold Run. There, of a summer's evening, he was entertaining a few hardy business men whose current names appeared more or less convincingly on the stocks, bonds, mortgages and letterheads of the Gold Ledge Mining and Milling Company.

To any inquisitive visitor who might have strayed up the driveway without being shot, the party might have appeared to be an ordinary poker-game—so far as Mr. Martin's poker-games might ever be said to be ordinary. But the cards lay undealt in the center of the table, and not a chip had changed hands since the banker issued them.

ABOUT the board sat Arthur Hepworth, engineer of the Gold Ledge Company; Peter Nelson, the popular undertaker; Michael Slattery, Omaha bond-broker; Henry Q. Witherspoon of the Forest Service; and Francis V. Goetz, with whom banking was a sort of side-line, and the penitentiary a seemingly unattainable objective.

"And as I was saying," remarked Mr. Goetz with a shake of his benevolent old white head, "you made a mistake, my dear boy—a very serious mistake."

Mr. Martin's habitual suavity for a moment showed signs of ruffling. But he was calm enough when he replied:

"And as I have said repeatedly since this deal came off, I disclaim any responsibility for any mistake. I sold a hole and twenty dollars worth of gold leaf to one of the shrewdest mining men who ever came into these hills, and I brought you twenty thousand dollars cash in the transaction."

"Oh, yes, my boy," interposed the old man somewhat hastily. "Don't misunderstand me. We all of us appreciate what you have done. You have shown consum-

mate skill, and I should be the last one to deprive you of your credit. But you sold the mine to Marony; and that, my boy,—as I have tried to point out to you inoffensively and speaking as man to man,—that was a hellish error."

There might have been a sharp reply had not Mr. Nelson joined the discussion actively.

"What is done is done," he declared with the air of a philosopher who has just discovered some astounding truth. "There is no use crying over spilled milk. Who is responsible makes no difference to us now. We got to sit tight and work out some scheme all together. A rolling stone—"

"Say," interrupted Mr. Martin, "what's the Pierre Medical College paying for corpses this season?"

"Fifteen dollars," snorted Mr. Nelson, suddenly forgetful of the Gold Ledge and the mysterious mistake that so concerned its supporting syndicate. "Fifteen dollars or I'm a liar, and that isn't all. There's more yet. All is not gold that glitters. They don't pay the express no more, and for a corpse that comes high—"

"Cut it out," growled Mr. Hepworth, glaring at Mr. Martin. "Stick to business."

"I am sticking to business," explained Mr. Martin patiently. "As I was about to say, without committing myself to any responsibility, I am not the man who makes mistakes—"

"Yeah," snarled the engineer. "In view of the circumstances, I certainly am glad to meet you. The guy who never bought a pencil with an eraser on it!"

Mr. Martin ignored the gibe.

"If you will permit me to say it," he continued, "I am not the man who makes mistakes that cannot be rectified." The entire group suddenly manifested a renewed interest. "It struck me as soon as I was aware of the trouble into which your blundering reticence had plunged us, that the factor which had to be eliminated was Marony. I said as much to Gimp Williams. I said it to him last night, and Mr. Williams is not with us tonight. Mr. Williams has a way with him, and I think we may trust him to see us out of our difficulty."

"I only hope," said Mr. Goetz piously, "that he doesn't take offense at Marony's mannerisms. Deadwood is civilized now, and I should regret any roughness."

"Gimp Williams busted all the glass balls at the Little Eagle shooting-gallery

last week," repeated Mr. Nelson reminiscently.

"Gimp Williams will take care of himself," said Mr. Martin assuringly. "He ought to be getting along here pretty soon now. Marony and that chemist of his were going to camp up under Terry Peak today—just to take another look at their property. Williams went after them. I think I may promise you some news shortly."

"Good!" ejaculated Messrs. Witherspoon and Slattery, joining in the conversation for the first time.

And then the front window crashed in.

THE poker players leaped up in surprise and stood arrested like figures in a snapped film. Mr. Martin had the grace to reach for his pistol, but he got no farther. Hiram, his chauffeur, lately on duty as guard at the end of the drive, came vaulting over the low sill under obvious propulsion. He landed cursing in the shattered glass. And from the darkness behind him came a booming voice:

"Here's your property, Martin! Catch it!"

Another hurtling figure struck the floor close by the chauffeur—a white-faced, scared-looking person whose bloody shirt had been torn away to permit the bandaging of his right arm.

Shocked into action at last, Martin leaped to the window, and quickly, but with due caution, edged his way to the low porch. He was too late. An automobile was swinging down the driveway, and Martin knew that the two shots which he sent after it went wild.

IN some subtle fashion Deadwood knew that Thomas Marony and the respectable directorate of the Gold Ledge Mining and Milling Company were involved in a serious warfare. The cause of it required no clairvoyance in the seeking. Marony had bought a hole in the ground, and the Gold Ledge clique had sold it to him. . . . Thus far, a good joke on old Marony. But there were rumors of an unbelievable lawlessness out there in the hills—stories that the fair repute of Deadwood had been threatened by a recourse to gunnery. And that, in an age of hard roads, scientific street-lighting, prohibition and automobiles, was incomprehensible.

In the old days the lobby of the Franklin Hotel was the rendezvous of gold-seeking adventurers from South Africa to

Nome. There came gaunt ascetics questing for manganese; tanned engineers who could tell by the dust on a wool shirt what mine a man was working in and what he had found there; easy-mannered cowboys who had wandered not so far from home; locomotive salesmen, assayers, government geologists, inventors, prospectors, promoters. And by night—even a July night when the cool winds came down Gold Run—they sat about the fire in the big open fireplace and talked of the buried treasures that lay just at the finger-tips of the hard-rock men.

That colorful crew is gone from Deadwood—or at least it gathers no more in the Franklin lobby. Instead a scattering of lawyers preempts the leather chairs and talks in a monotone of the venality of certain officials at Pierre. A doctor tells the night-clerk of his hopes for a new hospital. There is a beauty shop in a corner of what was once a well-patronized bar-room. Two graybeards who are thinking of going to California roost on a bench far from the lawyers and converse spasmodically of the calendar's lost leaves—"When Seth Bullock was elected sheriff for the first time—"

INTO this cloistered atmosphere came Thomas Marony and Sandy MacTavish. There were audible snickers from the lawyers, who, like all denizens of the Hills, were mining persons by association of ideas, albeit they could not tell a buddle from a cyanide egg. Mr. Marony glared promiscuously but encountered no confessing eye. Only the night-clerk, emboldened by long years of acquaintance with Marony, dared venture a remark on the subject that was concerning the arm-chair adventurers.

"Hello, Tom," he greeted. "How's your post-hole farm gettin' along?"

"Pretty good, John," Mr. Marony replied without a trace of animus. "She still assays two thousand pounds of rock to the ton."

John grinned.

"The most gilt-less gold mine in the Black Hills," he commented. "I could have told you that before you bought it."

"Sure, and you never know," argued Marony still jovially. "There's a felly named Gimp Williams—you know him: he thought there wasn't anything up on that hill either. And faith, an' he went prospectin' there today, an' he damn near

picked up a gold harp an' a pair o' gold wings. . . . He was that close, he had his hand right on 'em. But he let go. . . . He didn't want to be leavin' Deadwood just to prove his title to 'em."

The clerk's grin had vanished, and more than one startled face peered over a leather chair-back. Deadwood was not too large, nor too cosmopolitan, to prevent the bulk of the populace knowing that Gimp Williams was on the pay-roll of the Gold Ledge.

"What was he doing out there?" demanded the clerk.

"How should I know?" replied Mr. Marony.

"There isn't any gold there?" This was more of a positive statement than a question.

"I bet twenty thousand dollars that there was something there."

"I know a man who voted for La Follette—"

"An' keepin' closer to the subject, I know another man who paid a bet he'd been after puttin' up on Wilson in 1920. . . . You never can tell."

The clerk suddenly grew more serious and lowered his voice so that the sensitive ears about the fireplace were disappointed.

"I'm tellin' you something, Tom," he said. "If I were you, I'd charge off the twenty thousand dollars and forget about it. How you happened to buy an empty artesian well thinkin' it was a gold mine I'll never guess. But it aint worth sheddin' blood over. And you'll never in the world get back the money you put into it."

A HEAVY-SET man, with a rolling jowl and a somewhat loose physique, pushed up to the desk and turned to Marony, ignoring the clerk.

"Mr. Marony," he said without introduction, "if you own the Golden Buck property, I am prepared to give you twenty-five thousand dollars cash for it at once." The clerk's amazement was emphasized by an exclamation that died in his paralyzed throat. Twenty-five thousand dollars for that hole—the hole that the silliest man in Deadwood had laughed about. The Black Hills country was still a region of miracles.

But the clerk was to learn that no miracle is so great that there cannot be one more startling. Marony proved it.

"My dear sir," he said genially, "I'm after thankin' you for the offer. But the

Golden Buck aint for sale. An' it aint for rent. An' if any o' the Gold Ledge crowd come snoopin' around it, they may stay there—permanent-like—an' you can tell 'em so."

"I'd not waste any tears if they did," replied the stranger evenly. "I haven't the misfortune of knowing any of the Gold Ledge clique. My deal is with you as man to man."

"Then my answer is the like," returned Mr. Marony. "I'm not sellin'."

The clerk shook his head sadly. He realized that Tom Marony was getting old. Here were symptoms of an aggravated senile dementia.

THE news of that encounter was not long in getting abroad. It changed few opinions in Deadwood. Men who had believed that Marony knew what he was doing when he took title to a claim that had gone begging since the days of Harney and Crook, saw in the generous offer of the stranger a proof of their suspicions. On the other hand those who, like the clerk, thought that Marony was losing his grip, quoted somewhat exaggerated reports of the negotiation as evidence of their own skill in diagnosis.

The stranger disappeared the next day. A chemist from the Gold Ledge made some veiled but interested inquiries about him and learned that he had been registered as Partin Peevey, Cripple Creek. And apparently that ended it. But Buck Smith, the sheriff, did not attend the poker-party at the Mines Club that night—nor the next—nor any other night for many a day after. Instead he sat by a telephone in his office, a gun within easy reach.

OUT into the Hills rode Marony and MacTavish—quickly, for they had no reason to underestimate the willingness and skill of the Gold Ledge clique; cautiously, for there was no telling how fast news might have traveled over the strange wireless of the open places.

MacTavish was grumbling. Marony was singing a ballad that had something to do with the warfare of certain cats who had lived in a place called Kilkenny. One who knew the pair must have observed from this that the affairs of the preceding night had made no great change in their regular routine.

"I'm after wonderin'," said Mr. Marony, "if there mightn't be some gold up on our

hill, after all—not much of it, you know, but a little.”

“Gold,” snorted the chemist. “Gold! There isna more gold up there than you’d expect to find in an Eskimo’s teeth.”

“That lad in the hotel last night wanted to buy the mine. An’ like this an’ like that, a man doesn’t be after wantin’ to buy somethin’ without a reason.”

“Ah shouldna say that. What reason did you have for wantin’ to buy it? Not only the wantin’ but the buyin’? Answer me that eenigma.”

Marony grinned.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” he said after a pause. “I had the reason, me bucko. I bought it because I heard some o’ Martin’s crowd tryin’ to get hold of him to keep him from sellin’.”

MR. MAC TAVISH whistled. “So that’s how it was! You had a reason! Then you werena just a plain fuil, after all.”

“I’m sorry to be disappointin’ you, but that’s just exactly how it was. I could have told you earlier, but it would have plumb ruined your whole week if you hadn’t had somethin’ to beef about. I knew that the Golden Buck was a sort of upended tunnel without sight nor light of color in it. Man alive, I knew a high-grader who took the cream outa that mine when it was doin’ its best, and he was after starvin’ to death. I knew Martin had been tryin’ to wish it onto some sucker for a long time. I heard from St. Louis that he was tryin’ to unload it on a sap he’d found there. ‘Well an’ good,’ says I to mesself. ‘It aint up to me to take care o’ nobody who lives in St. Louis.’ An’ then one day I was roostin’ in the corner near the fireplace in the Franklin lobby, an’ old Goetz an’ this Witherspoon come in.

“They’re talkin’ plenty. I get it they’ve been tryin’ to get a long-distance connection with Martin, who’s supposed to be in Keystone. He has the power-of-attorney from everybody else in the Gold Ledge syndicate to peddle this Golden Buck, an’ from what they’re sayin’ I gather that they aint so anxious as they was to have any St. Louis talent hornin’ in.

“Well, that woulda been the whole story under ordinary circumstances. For I don’t care a hoot what they do with their junk. But just about then I remembers that Martin aint in Keystone.

“I’d seen the coot when I was comin’ into Deadwood. He was out on the Icebox

Cañon road tryin’ to revise the carburetor on his flivver. ‘Well,’ I says to mesself, suddint-like, ‘well, it might be worth while copperin’ this bet—whatever it is.’ So I beats it out to Icebox Cañon.

“Sure enough, I finds Martin—he’s a rotten mechanic. I stops to chin with him awhile. The conversation aint what you’d call brilliant, because at first he thinks I’m tryin’ to kid him about the carburetor. But then I changes the subject by askin’ him right straight from under the hat what he’s gettin’ for the Golden Buck. I aint sure what he tells me, but I tells him it isn’t enough—I mentions casual-like that you been after prognosticatin’ around that hill, an’ that you think the Homestake Lode crops out there somewheres.”

“What rot!” exclaimed Mr. MacTavish indignantly.

“Yes, I guess so,” admitted Mr. Marony. “But it gets him thinkin’. He knows, just as I know, that the Golden Buck aint nothin’ but a perforation in an otherwise interestin’ landscape. But he starts to tell me how good it is. I begins to hedge a little, which shows him right away that I might be thinkin’ o’ buyin’ it on the strength o’ your report an’ in spite o’ my better judgment. An’ then he makes me a price, an’ says, says he:

“‘That’s A-No. 1 property, Mr. Marony. But they’ll never be a dime taken out of it till some minin’ man gets a hold of it. These Deadwood shoe-salesmen don’t know nothin’ about gold mines.’ Which I guess is the only truth that spalpeen ever told in his life. ‘A man like you could do somethin’ with that property, Marony. Why don’t you buy it yourself?’

“An’ I says: ‘I’ll bite—why not?’ An’ so I bought the thing. He seems to be thinkin’ I played him a dirty trick.”

“It’s a meestery to me,” said Mr. MacTavish with a shake of his red head. “I canna imagine anybody bein’ so fay as all that. But there’s some deevilment in it that we ken nothin’ about.”

“Maybe it’s not gold they were after. How about other minerals—manganese, cement, graphite—or somethin’ like that?”

“Not a chance. You wont find cement there, nor manganese, nor graphite, nor tin, nor zinc, nor lead, nor tantalum, nor diamonds, nor banana oil, nor other valuable products of the soil. I ken the geology of that quadrangle as weel as I ken my own face. An’ it’s abaht as virgin a territory as you’ll ever find within a day’s ride of a

real minin' camp. You dinna think they might be makin' sport of you?"

"Faith, an' I did think just that until the new lad cuts himself in last night. That's one o' the reasons I wasn't talkin' about it much. But this new birdie doesn't fit in. He said he wanted to buy, an' I'm bettin' he meant it."

"Oh, aye, an' he did that," admitted Mr. MacTavish. "He wanted to buy a' richt—which proves something—I canna say just what."

THE Golden Buck looked its reputation.

It was a scrap-heap of corrugated iron buildings over which a rusting desolation had sat undisturbed for long and many a day. The timbering about what had been its main hoist was weathered and crumbling. Its tailings-dump had stood so long in wind and rain that a green verdure had taken root over most of it. Bent and rusted tracks curled through long grasses about the ancient stamp-mill. What was left of half a dozen ore-cars presented a drunken vista of wheels askew in a scattering parade down the hillside.

But in the midst of this wreckage sat two men with rifles across their knees. And smoke was rising from a repaired shed near what had been the separation plant. That was the mark of Marony. Men who had followed this eccentric Midas in many a sanguinary campaign were here at his bidding—had been here a few hours after Martin had completed the transfer of the claim. Marony, having made his play, was protecting his bet, for he knew that so insignificant a detail as property-ownership would not deter the gentlemen of the Gold Ledge from what violence they might find necessary to undo the work of their hasty agent.

A thin-faced young man in puttees, riding breeches and a flannel shirt came forward to greet Messrs. Marony and MacTavish as they alighted from their battered car.

"Mornin', Skeets," said Mr. Marony. "Any casualties?"

The young man shook his head.

"I hate to apologize for the shootin' of Tommy Ryan," he said. "But he's a new man with us, and I guess he's a bit nervous. There'd 'a' been a casualty if he'd allowed just a leetle might more for windage in takin' his sights."

"One man?" inquired Marony.

"One showed," reported Skeets. "But

of course that aint sayin' how many he had with him."

"When?" pursued Marony.

"Last night," replied Skeets. And he started to roll a cigarette.

"This bird was circulatin' around near the old shaft-house when Ryan spotted him. Of course the light could have been better. But then, Ryan wasn't so far away. . . . Five shots—missed him."

"What did he want?"

"Search me. At any rate, he didn't get it. I saw a horse grazin' up on the mountain this mornin'. Whoever it was is still waitin' around here."

"All right," said Mr. Marony cheerfully. "We'll get him next time. . . . But maybe it might be just as well not to kill him. Whatever he wants, I think I'll be after wantin' myself."

"The shaft-house," repeated Mr. MacTavish. "I shouldna wonder if it mightna be well to go down into that hole again an' take a look around."

"I was thinkin' that myself," agreed Mr. Marony. "Skeets, see if you can rustle up a couple o' slickers an' an electric torch."

And so it came about that Mr. Marony got a black eye with which to study an amazing puzzle.

THE journey into the depths of the Golden Buck was anything but pleasant and far from safe. A new pulley had been rigged at the mouth of the shaft, and a sound bucket on a strong rope provided a means of descent. In addition to that, a rope ladder swung from the frame of the windlass to the dripping cavern where the shaft came to an end two hundred feet below. But emergency repairs were scant insurance in a mine so long neglected as this one, and Mr. MacTavish prophesied a speedy and direful end to their explorations as he stepped into the bucket.

The square of blue at the top of the shaft closed in upon itself and presently became a luminous turquoise on a limitless expanse of black velvet. The air became damper and cooler, and the quiet, even though the falling bucket had a way of scraping against the sides, was that of a deep, but none the less circumscribed grave. . . .

From the unseen deeps of the hole came a sudden crash. Automatically Marony grasped the signal-cord that was slipping through his calloused fingers. But the only tangible result was a burned hand.

The clang of the bell in the shaft-house was so unexpected that the man at the winch delayed two full seconds before reaching for his levers. By that time the bucket had hit the bottom of the shaft, and Marony and MacTavish spilled out. They had barely alighted when the belated mental reactions of the operator above were transmuted into action. In another instant the bucket was shooting upward once more.

Neither of the pair spoke. Two muffled clicks in the darkness bore witness that a single thought had prompted both of them. Two unseen automatics were off "safety" and ready for whatever emergency might lie ahead of them.

Neither Marony nor MacTavish missed the light of the torches which they did not care to turn on. They had been through the stope that lay ahead of them many times before, and they knew its every turning—the "squeeze" some twenty feet from the shaft, the fallen boulder beyond it, the dangerous place toward the end where the rotten timbering had wearily ceased from its Atlas-like labors years and years ago.

For a moment the men stood silent in the shadow beyond the dim light that came down from the distant pit-mouth. They held their breath as they listened to the *drip-drip* of water and the whispering of air-currents. They peered into the stope as if hoping to make out at least a shadow in that unplumbed black. There came a slight sound as of a slide of small stones. Marony guessed that it could have come only from a spot beyond the fallen boulder, and he ventured a whisper.

"What the what?" he inquired.

"Somebody must have bumped the prop of that emairgency timbering and knocked it down," replied Mr. MacTavish.

"It might have fallen down by itself," suggested Mr. Marony.

"I hae me doots," commented the chemist. "There's somebody ahead, an' he has nae business bein' there."

"Well," said Mr. Marony, "let's smoke him out." And he lay flat on the floor of the tunnel and began to snake his way into the dark quickly and quietly. Behind him crawled MacTavish.

THE Golden Buck mine was the product of days when the success of the Homestake had fostered the belief that cyanide might work alchemy—that scientific low-grade processes could make gold out of

hard rock and optimism. A hopeful syndicate of men who did most of their mining at desks in New York and Chicago had spent thousands of dollars sinking this hole, and despite the fact that its grudging yield had been only a few mills on every dollar invested, the exploration of its possibilities had been thorough. In point of the lineal geography it covered, there were few larger mines in the Black Hills.

Test tunnels cut into the rock from the main stope at frequent intervals, and this added to the difficulties of the task ahead of Marony and MacTavish. They painstakingly crawled into one lateral after another, hopeful that in a sudden encounter with their unknown quarry the impossibility of his escape might cause him to be reasonable.

But they found nothing until they had penetrated half the distance of the stope. There, as Marony felt for a solid passage over fallen rock, his hand encountered a bit of cloth—whether handkerchief or piece of haversack he was unable to tell in the darkness. There were some soft substances in it—scraps of food, he judged—bread and a bit of meat. And the bread was fresh. Silently he felt for MacTavish's hand and pressed this evidence into it. Then in a whisper so low that it might not have been heard by a listener a foot away, he asked:

"How many more laterals between here and the end of the stope?"

"One," said Mr. MacTavish. But he had made a mistake. There were two.

THEY pressed on more cautiously now, and presently came to the cavern where the stope widened and the timbering ended. They explored this chamber on hands and knees, then straightened as high as the low ceiling would permit and made another circuit of the irregular wall. Marony drew a deep breath.

"Well," he said audibly. "There goes nothin'."

And he pressed his left thumb on the button of his flash-lamp.

A pistol exploded.

It was so close that the flash seemed to burn his eyes, and his ears tingled and went numb. He felt a pain in his left shoulder and dropped the torch. MacTavish's gun barked at his side, and he too opened fire. The battle was a thing of flashes in the dark, and noises that mingled with the pent echoes in a continuous deadly

roar. All sense of time was lost. Marony, on his face, with his right arm stretched as far from his body and as high as he could raise it and still pull a trigger, aimed almost without thinking at each spear of flame that showed the presence of the unknown gunman. It seemed that he had been there a long time—and yet, firing with no pause between shots, he had still three cartridges in the magazine. . . . Something happened to MacTavish. His pistol fell on his partner's aching shoulder. Then came a grunt and a groan from the chasm of dark, and Marony realized numbly that his fire was not being answered. Dazedly he lowered his pistol. He felt about on the floor for MacTavish.

His touch encountered a set face covered with a warm moisture. He tried to raise himself to his knees. The floor seemed to waver. Simultaneously there was a crash that flattened his lungs. A smothering shower of rock poured down upon him.

THE air was still choking with powder-smoke when Marony came out of the haze of stupor into the deeper blackness of consciousness. His head ached, and his left arm seemed to have fallen off. There was a numbness all down his left side. Something was dripping onto his face—a cold moisture. He awakened fully with a start.

With painful difficulty he worked his way out of the rubble that had fallen over him. And as he emerged, his hand touched the flashlight that he had dropped at the beginning of the fight. He turned it on.

MacTavish, creased across the head, and even more than ordinarily unbeautiful, was stirring to consciousness. As the light struck him, he attempted to brush the blood from his eyes with his fists. He was complaining bitterly—and that was a good sign. At the edge of the halo cast by the electric torch a man lay dead.

Marony noted with no surprise and no immediate concern that the dead man was Hepworth, recently engineer for the Gold Ledge Mining and Milling Company. A small battery lay overturned beneath his stiffening hand. . . . The moisture that had roused Marony was trickling down the wall from a crevice that apparently had been opened by a shot of high explosive. . . . Funny! The stope had never leaked at that point before.

Marony started to remove the shattered rock from the back of the incoherent Mac-

Tavish. . . . There were lights back in the stope. The guards were coming to investigate the cause of the recent target-practice.

MARONY was seated on a rock at the top of the ancient tailings-dump when MacTavish limped out of the bunkhouse to join him. MacTavish was turbaned with a bandage and carried an arm in a sling, but his vocal prowess seemed to be in no way impaired.

"What next?" he inquired.

"I'm after wonderin' that myself," said Mr. Marony. "But it is now late in the afternoon o' the same day, as they say in the movies, an' Skeets must 'a' got into Deadwood four hours ago. If I had any gamblin' blood in me, I'd be bettin' that pretty soon now we'd be havin' a visit from somebody belongin' to the Gold Ledge." As he said it, he waved a hand toward a crescent of road that followed the cañon away from the foot of the Golden Buck hill. "Seems to me there's a flivver turnin' the corner down there now. . . . Too bad I didn't get up the bet."

Without comment MacTavish turned suddenly about and started hastily toward the bunkhouse.

"Where you goin'?" inquired Marony.

"I'm going to get a gun—two guns," answered Mr. MacTavish. "If that's Martin, he's mine. I'm geevin' you fair notice."

"Come back here," commanded Marony. "I'm gettin' to be an' ol' man, an' I'm tired o' this shootin' an' crawlin' around holes in the ground. If that's Martin,—an' I have a mind it is,—I'm goin' to peddle him back his interestin' property with my blessin'. His arguments are too danged convincin'."

"What!" roared MacTavish. "You're geevin' in to them?"

"That's what," said Mr. Marony cheerily. "An' I was right about the flivver. . . . It's Martin."

"You're a yellow dog, Tom Marony," said Mr. MacTavish. And he strode wearily up the hill.

"WELL," said Mr. Marony as Martin came up to him, "I see you've been gettin' my message."

"Yes," admitted Martin. "What does it mean?"

"Just what I told Skeets to tell you. . . . I'm tired o' this business, an' I'm ready to sell the mine back to you as is—with your engineer down in the basement

an' everything. The price is thirty-five thousand dollars an' a verdict that Mr. Hepworth shot hisself while cleanin' a gun."

"That's giving you a pretty big profit, Mr. Marony. I'm not so sure that my syndicate would be willing to pay you more than your original purchase price."

Mr. Marony yawned.

"Have it your way," he acquiesced. "If they don't want to buy, they don't have to. The syndicate is gettin' thinner day by day. Today Hepworth; yesterday Gimp Williams—although I do be after admittin' that the shootin' could 'a' been more accurate in Mr. Williams' case. . . . An' the price, Mr. Martin, is like I said: thirty-five thousand dollars plus extras. I'm warnin' you she's a rotten gold mine, an' you probably will get stuck. But if you want her, take her at thirty-five thousand."

"It's a buy," decided Mr. Martin hastily, and he followed Mr. Marony into the bunkhouse to make the transfer in strict legal form.

MACTAVISH was silent for a long time as Marony, driving very creditably with one hand, picked a way over the rough road back toward Deadwood. A severe jolt threw him against the side of the seat, and he cursed in spite of his effort to maintain his dignity.

"If you're after thinkin' you can drive this car better, then drive it," suggested Mr. Marony.

"I wouldna be ridin' with the likes o' you if I could walk," said Mr. MacTavish bitterly. "I thoct you were a mon."

"Well, there's bound to be differences of opinion about anything," said Mr. Marony. "But would it be strainin' your principles any if I was to ask you did you never hear o' the Henning bull-train?"

Mr. MacTavish sat as upright as a strained back would permit, and stared at Mr. Marony blankly.

"Oh, aye," he admitted. "But what has that to do with it?"

"What is it that you know about the Henning train?"

"Just what everybody knows. Jim Henning started in here with twenty wagons from some place in Wyoming twenty years ago. He got to the north end o' the Hills, and then some braw lads jumped his train. The drivers—most o' them showed up afterward in Montana, but nobody ever found out what become o' all his calico an'

crockery an' such that he was carryin' in his wagons. Isna that the way of it?"

"Close enough," agreed Marony. "An' now I can tell you the rest of it. The lads who held up the train stowed the loot in an old gold-mine—an' that same mine was the Golden Buck. A stoep caved in after they got the stuff placed, an' they never were able to get it out again. . . . The Gold Ledge bunch didn't find out about it until after they'd sold out to me. Meantime a gang o' highbinders in Omaha get wind of the cache through one o' Henning's old drivers, an' then the great fight is on with all the plays you know—up to an' includin' Hepworth's try to dynamite a hole into the part o' the stoep behind the cave-in."

Mr. MacTavish snorted.

"You're tryin' to tell me anybody was fay enough to start a gunfight at two paces an' give his life tryin' to get at a lot o' calico an' frumpery that's been buried in a wet mine for twenty years. Tom Marony, you're daft."

"You're after bein' right in most o' what you say," said Mr. Marony. "Right in everythin' except the calico part. It wasn't calico Henning was tryin' to bring into the Hills. It was hooch—ten barrels to the wagon—twenty wagons to the train."

The shocked surprise in Mr. MacTavish's face was pitiful to see.

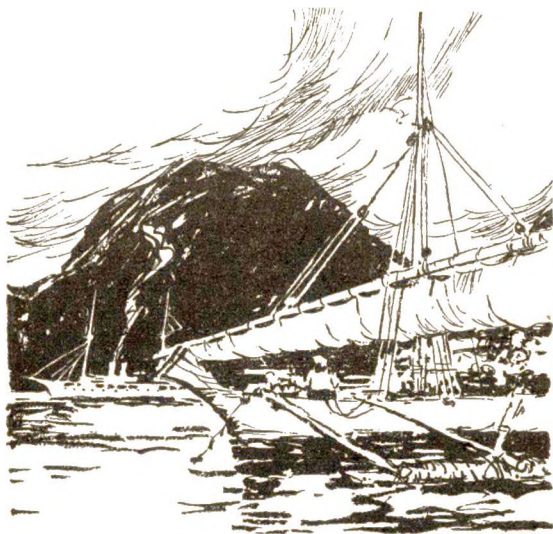
"Whusky," he repeated. "Whusky! A treasure like that! An' you ken it was there, an' you sold it back to these scoundrels o' the Gold Ledge. My heart bleeds for the shame o' you, Tom Marony."

Mr. T. Marony grinned a wide grin.

"You're after makin' the same mistake they made," he said. "They thought it was whisky too—but it wasn't. It was wine that Henning bought from some sap who was startin' a vineyard. I found that out when Hepworth's dynamite busted open some o' the casks. I tasted it, me lad. An' while you were wanderin' out o' your head this mornin', I went down an' tested every keg o' what's left.

"It wasn't very good to begin with, me bucko, an' it got no better fast. It aint even wine that the Gold Ledge bought for thirty-five thousand dollars, Mr. MacTavish. It's vinegar, an' there's quite a lot of it."

"Tom Marony, you're a better minin' engineer than I am," said Mr. MacTavish. And all that long trip over the rough, painful trail to Deadwood he apologized and apologized.



Enter the White Girl

The same fine fiction-writing talent that produced "Flood" and "The Rebellion of Sadud" is responsible for this colorful and authentic story of the East Indies today.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

TROUBLES never arrive singly. Raynor was so used to that beastly habit of them in the government of a native Malay state that he was not surprised when a man of the sea entered the audience hall, interrupting their conference on the Sakai war that seemed about to explode in Kota Sembilan. The sailor bore a letter in his hands, and his eyes immediately sought out Raynor, where the Resident sat in a chair beside the throne of Siti Ishtar. That letter meant more trouble; otherwise it would have come in the Residency mail from Singapore, and have had a stamp and a postmark, and not be carried by an obvious pirate from the uneasy coast-line of Kota Sembilan.

"One moment, Your Highness," he interrupted the Queen's argument, and beckoned the sailor to approach.

Siti Ishtar was not pleased. She relapsed on the huge ivory and ebony throne, a gorgeous little jewel of pouting womanhood. Her big brown eyes were fixed with disfavor on the messenger, and her graceful hands gripped the arms of the throne as if she would like to slay him with the

jeweled dagger in her girdle. Raynor, as British Resident, was finding her difficult to manage. She could not help having been born the daughter of Haroun Mahomet, greatest of the Acheen pirates, a mighty chieftain with five hundred galleys of war under his command that had taken the entire Dutch colonial navy ten years of fighting to subdue.

Siti Ishtar seemed to Raynor to have inherited in full measure the great sultan's force of character and vigorous decision and taste for fighting. She was proving herself a fighting queen for the Malay state of Kota Sembilan. She ruled. She came to court in state every day, took an active part in everything that went on, was most difficult to thwart when she wanted anything. Of the two men who advised her, Ibn Yaïd, her popular Arab *muntri*, had need of all his horse sense and ironic humor; Raynor used tact, principally, precept always, and sometimes just plain man-made deception, which is often the only way to circumvent a woman.

This conference of theirs had to do with a neat little war brewing with the Sakai ab-

origines up in the interior. Siti Ishtar was for attacking them immediately with all her elephants and fighting men; Ibn Yaïd was for capturing the ringleaders by a small and secret expedition; and Raynor was for "just going up there and talking some sense into 'em"—which sufficiently reveals the mental attitudes of all three. And this interruption of the man with the letter was most inopportune, for Siti Ishtar had been quite ready to begin her battle right now—with her two advisers as the first enemy to be subdued!

RAYNOR fingered the letter placed in his hands, eying curiously its exterior as he sat at ease, a handsome figure in his starched tropical cottons, in the Resident's chair beside the throne. The envelope bore a pair of crossed yacht-club burgees in color on its upper left-hand corner, and engraved under them the legend: "*S. V. Varuna.*" It was addressed: "*To the British Resident, Kwala Djelan, per Messenger. Private and Confidential.*" The writing was firm and heavy, made with a stub pen.

"Hm—Americans, Your Highness," said Raynor. "I happen to know that left-hand burgee. It is the pennant of the New York Yacht Club."

Siti Ishtar tossed her head. She knew nothing about New York save that it might be some dependency of Kota Sembilan with a queer name, or perhaps it belonged to that great nation of white men that her Tuan Raynor represented.

"Why stop for a matter of no importance when we have these dogs of Sakai to deal with?" she sniffed.

"Again begging pardon, Highness. Must see," said Raynor gently.

Siti Ishtar subsided, and Ibn Yaïd got up from his stool on the other side of her throne to have a look at the letter. The Arab vizier knew something of the Resident's thoughts, and approved. They had to do with abolishing, as inconspicuously as possible, the piracy that still existed along the turbulent coasts of Kota Sembilan. He himself had written numerous letters to traders in far-off Arabia soliciting the return of those dhows that had long ago left the East Coast severely alone. Raynor's hope was, first and last, to develop the country, induce capital to enter here, establish rubber plantations, teak lumbering, open up gold and tin mines. Explorers had come and been welcomed.

But it was essential first to have the coast safe, and it had been most difficult to make Siti Ishtar see that her sea-rovers were anything else than the bravest and most exalted of all the sons of Allah.

Raynor opened the letter and read:

Sir:

I am being held up here by a preposterous war-proa mounting two brass guns and what appear to be four old-fashioned caronades. Her captain is, I presume, a pirate. At any rate he has presented me with a bill for what he calls port charges that amount to nothing less than robbery. I put in here to investigate certain reports of my engineers, and this is the reception I get! Your presence here would, I am sure, alleviate any further difficulties. Hoping to see you in person as soon as may be, I am,

Yours truly,

CYRUS WARDMAN.

In port, Kwala Laut, Kota Sembilan.

Raynor and Ibn Yaïd looked at one another a moment understandingly, and then Raynor read the letter out loud.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Siti Ishtar disdainfully. "A man of weak liver, Tuan Raynor! Why does he not up anchor and cut this proa down? *That* for a man of no fighting blood!" She snapped her fingers.

"They are Americans, Your Highness," said Raynor. "She probably carries no guns. Yet all our own yachts do in these waters."

SITI ISHTAR laughed haughtily. "Guns! Has he not steam, and a sharp iron cut-water? Once I saw a yacht of your people, Tuan—and I would have given my crown jewels to have owned her. Guns, *she* had—four!"

Raynor cleared his throat. It was a difficult thing that he had to say, but now was the time.

"Your Highness, don't you see that this amounts to plain piracy taking place in one of your harbors? You should not permit it, nor countenance it in any way, if we are to develop this country. Let me counsel prompt action in this matter—as prompt as you wish this expedition made against the Sakai. I would hang the *datu* of this proa to his own yardarm and issue a *firman* warning all others. Only so can we put down this sort of thing, once for all. Until we do, no ships of my people, nor of Ibn Yaïd's people, will come here to trade. It is for the good of the state, Your Highness."

Siti Ishtar looked at him tenderly.

"Harken, great and good friend! When I was a chit of a girl, sometimes I did not set foot on the land for years at a time! Always the Sultan, my father, sought battle on the sea as a rover. Those we met we conquered, if we could; sometimes we were beaten, for the men of Deli will fight all day and then beg for more. All were merchants too, in those days; but we all went armed, guarding the goods in our holds with a strong sword and stronger cannon. Your people called us pirates. I do not know what that means. Is a proa a pirate because she carries cannon, and her men crises and swords and spears? On the seas we sailed, from island to island, bearing goods for trade, fighting off those that attacked us, conquering those who showed themselves weak and cowardly. It is the law of the great sea, Tuan—and would you now take away the weapons of my sailors and have them wear women's *slendangs*?"

Raynor leaned back helplessly. It was indeed a knotty problem that she had put to him. To disarm the adventurous sailors of Kota Sembilan, who put forth from its tiny harbors in proas of not over seventy tons and sailed for Borneo, Cambodia, Macassar, even the distant Sulu Islands—why, it was to leave them at the mercy of any junk or dhow or proa they met! What was piracy, anyhow? Well, lawlessness on the sea. It had nothing to do with going armed. The proas *had* to, in these seas. And if this American yacht was foolish enough to put into a port like Kwala Laut without any visible guns, she had only herself to thank if some adventurous *datu* held her up. Confound the man! Why hadn't he nerve enough to up-anchor and ram her! To a modern yacht that proa couldn't be very formidable with her old brass muzzle-loaders.

"Saw you this *fire-api*?" he asked the messenger.

"In truth, Tuan Besar. Long and white she is, a craft more lovely than any these eyes have seen," replied the sailor. "There was an old *tuan* on her decks who gave me this *surat* and many rupees that I might put to sea and bring it to the Presence."

"How many on board did you count?"

"Thy servant counted eight, Tuan Besar; and with the *orang kaya*" (rich man) "was a white girl, tall and beautiful as an houri—"

Siti Ishtar's eyes flashed.

"Peace, slave!" she commanded. "Take thou message to this white *tuan* to be a

man and send no more whining *surats* to me! The seas are free. Let him up anchor and go! Also, he should have come here in the first place."

RAYNOR pondered. The time was not ripe to open up this question of piracy, he perceived. Siti Ishtar had no patience with people who would not do their own fighting on the high seas! To make her issue a *firman* disarming her people's proas at this time would be to invite an uprising that would cost her her throne. He would have to manage this alone, without any commands from her to this pestilent *datu*. He nodded in acquiescence to her decree; and, "Tell the *tuan* I'll be up to see him tomorrow," he added.

Siti Ishtar shot him a questioning look.

"It's this girl, Highness," explained Raynor. "*She's* the reason they are afraid to rush this proa! I'd write him, only I cannot afford being mixed in it officially, either. It's this girl, you see."

Again Siti Ishtar tossed her head. Beautiful, she was, and now a proud and disdainful expression sat on those delicate Malay features of hers. "Not so when I was a girl and sailed with the Sultan!" she exclaimed. "I could not wield a sword, but I could at least fire a pistol when the Deli men came upon us."

Raynor thought that Siti Ishtar herself was still hardly more than a girl as he eyed the slender little figure of her on the great ivory throne—also that she was actually jealous of this white girl; but then, that never could be, as it was a foregone conclusion that Ibn Ya'id was the man. He side-stepped with tact any direct opposition, and sat back in his chair twirling his heavy mustache and thinking up some way to slip out that night in the Residency launch up to Kwala Laut.

"Thou art needed here, Tuan," said the queen. "My warriors say there is a good trail leading into the mountains from Kwala Lekas up the Djelan River. We can get the elephants up there by boat, and by them carry our cannon into the interior—"

Raynor let her plan on. It would be a good thing to establish a strong stockade up in the mountains of the Sakai country, and she had put her finger on the way to do it. His own brain was busy with speculation over this yacht. The first capital to venture into the country! Cyrus Wardman's name he knew, a millionaire, captain

of industry, a big name in mining. One of his explorers had been in here the year before. The great man had evidently put in here for a look-see during some cruise down from Hongkong to Singapore.

And the girl? How long it had been since he had set eyes on a girl of his own race! Three years buried up here, doing his day's work—interesting and big, all of it, but no companions one could talk to of home. Siti Ishtar, brilliant, beautiful, and lovable in her way; Ibn Yaïd, a man's man, shrewd, keen, a delight to think with and plan with, wise as an Arab in his counsel; *datus*, proa-captains, head-men of the interior—these were the people of his daily life; seldom a white man, never a white woman. Raynor was thirty-three and still unmarried, nor could ever hope to be until this foundation-work of empire-building was through, and he had either retired home or made this place a safe and livable country for white people.

The voice of Siti Ishtar brought him out of his reverie. "Tuan! Tuan—do not go!" she was appealing to him earnestly. Her eyes were glowing upon him with unutterable fires in their depths. Raynor would have thought she was making love to *him*, had she been anyone else than a Malay queen! He looked around with a start. She had clapped her hands all unheard by him, and had dismissed the entire court. They were alone in the vast audience hall.

"No woman is worth the sacrifice that girl will require of thee, Tuan," said Siti Ishtar. "Here, all about thee, is a strong man's work, counseling us where we are weak, guiding us where we are strong. To that girl all this is but jungle squalor, and I, the queen, but a figure in a play. She will require of thee, Tuan, to leave it all and go home to her country."

IT was nearing fowls-take-their-perches time, and far off in the jungle they could hear floating through the hills the petulant *Auoumm!* of a tiger. It usually caused no comment; all was part of their daily lives. Now it was significant.

"That!" said the queen. "Thinkest thou thy white houri would long stay here? For my sake, Tuan, for my people's sake—do not go!" she appealed vehemently.

Raynor grinned. "Why, 'Ku!" he said, using the affectionate diminutive of her rank when talking with intimates. "Who said I had any idea of marrying her, or even losing my heart to her?"

"Tuan!" said Siti Ishtar passionately, "know I not the empty heart? *Aiee!*—since my lord the Sultan was slain by Shaitan Sadud, whose soul may Allah blight utterly! Him I avenged, but still there is the ache, the empty yearning, the longing for a man, to be his delight."

Raynor looked down uneasily, her eyes were so luminous upon him.

"There is Ibn Yaïd," he said gently, "and he loves thee devotedly, O Queen."

She blushed prettily, a rich rose flushing the olive tints of her complexion. "Oh, Ibn Yaïd!" she pouted. "He knows too much! . . . But *thy* heart, Tuan; it is empty too, and this girl will rush in and fill it, all of it. Thou wilt see nothing but her, hear no one but her, be blind to reason, judgment, all that makes sense in this world. And thou wilt sacrifice for her thy work, this that is all thy life, this that men will judge thee for as having not lived in vain—"

"By Jove! Not with the right girl, 'Ku!" interrupted Raynor warmly. It made him uneasy, the very thought of chucking all this that he stood for before all the world at the behest of the girl he married.

"Some day—"

"It is a dream, Tuan! Not this girl, anyway. Oh, go not!"

"Well, I can't promise, Highness," said Raynor. "I would do anything in the world for you, but this may be beyond my control. You seem to worry, 'Ku. Please don't!" he grinned reassuringly. "Not a hope! No danger! This one is an American girl, and the daughter of a man so rich that he could buy this whole state and never know it—what would she think of me but just what I am, an obscure official of our empire? Never fear! She'd not so much as look at me!"

"*Wouldn't* she!" disagreed Siti Ishtar, and looked up admiringly at his big figure, for they both had risen. "Tuan, thou art a babe where women are concerned, I perceive!"

HIE bent and kissed her hand as she gave him tacit permission to go. He left her looking queerly over her shoulder at him as her slight figure stood poised in its golden robes of state before the throne.

That night the Residency launch slipped down the Djelan and crossed the bar to the open sea. Raynor eyed the choppy waves over the shoal with disfavor. That was one

of the things he wanted his government to attend to—dredging these bars. They kept steamers, and even moderate-sized brigs, out of all the Kota Sembilan harbors. Well, while the Colonial Office was deliberate enough to break the heart of a man, Cyrus Wardman would not be long in dredging out Kwala Laut if he went into this mining proposition! And then the ice would be broken for shipping. It was danger to navigation even more than sporadic piracy that really kept the ships of the world out of Kota Sembilan.

He tried to put the girl out of his mind. As Siti Ishtar had said, she was a menace to his life's work. He was quite certain what *he* was going to do, fall in love with her at sight! But that couldn't be helped, when a man hadn't seen a white girl in over three years. The danger was that she might reciprocate, take him romantically for a knight of the empire fighting civilization's battles in the remote jungles of the world—"and all that rot," as Raynor put it in his thoughts.

The moon had risen when the launch reached Kwala Laut some twenty miles up the coast and had crashed in over the bar. Raynor drew short his breath with vexation, and, "My sainted Malaya!" he muttered as he looked ahead into the shining and placid lagoon they were entering. A pirate, as any shipmaster in the world would view her, lay guarding the entrance, a specimen of what might be called the naval power of Kota Sembilan, a gaudy proa with her two big lateens slack in the breeze, her gunwales of spreading bamboo net mounting two carronades in broadside, and under a thick slanting teak gun-shield in her bows, two long brass eighteen-pounders.

The yacht, a long thing of grace with two slender masts and a buff funnel, lay anchored beyond her; and back of her was the black jungle, with a tiger yowling somewhere in the hills, and rows of cocoa palms on the beach leaning over the straggly bamboo houses of the Malay village.

The proa was a perfect engine of piracy of the old days, and perfectly able now against Chinese junks and Cambodian catamarans. With those two long guns and her speed, she could lie out of range of any such marauders and pound them to pieces, then swoop down and board firing her carronades with grape at close range. She was not so bad against this modern yacht, either—and instead of protecting her

visitor, she was now watching her like a cat!

Electrics lit up the decks under the yacht's awnings as Raynor passed the proa with a gruff shout to her serang's hail, and steered for the gangway light. A ruddy man in uniform met him, evidently the yacht's captain.

"This way, sir; the owner's aft. You'll be the Resident at this poisonous place, I take it, sir?"

RAYNOR nodded and followed along the deck, leaving his Sikhs in the launch. A large and leonine man in India linens met him before a group of cane deck-chairs and tables aft of the mahogany superstructure. "Glad to see you, sir! The British Resident, I presume?" he said in a heavy bass voice as he offered his hand. "This way. —Hop Sing, a couple of iced stingers, boy," he ordered of the deck steward.

Raynor gathered information swiftly as he shook hands with the capitalist. The Chinese deck-boy had Hongkong written all over him, and that "stinger" told him Wardman knew Singapore, where a half-and-half is called just that, from the Malay *stenga*. The man himself looked like a fighter, one not easily to be opposed, but was perhaps not used to enforcing his will outside the law-and-order limits of civilization.

"My daughter Varuna, Mr.—ah, yes, James Raynor, British Resident," said Cyrus Wardman, referring to the card in his hand.

A tall girl had risen lazily from one of the deck-chairs. She was a magnificent creature, with a superb body, and she did not seem to stop rising until her eyes were nearly on the level with Raynor's own. Then, under the wide floppy hat that she wore, he saw her face as she offered a slim hand that graced a long and cool bare arm.

"Glad to meet you, I'm sure, Mr. Raynor," she said in a rich contralto voice. "Wont you sit down and join us?" All in the most casual way in the world, as if he had come to tea instead of to pull them out of an awkward and delicate situation.

Raynor sat down on the cane deck-chair. The girl sank back and regarded him out of large gray eyes while her father talked. She was wonderfully groomed; no doubt of there being a French maid on board!

"This is the first thing of the kind in *my* experience, Mr. Raynor!" Wardman was saying in a thick and somewhat ironical

voice. "That fellow out there presented a bill of about a thousand dollars, as near as I can figure it, for what he calls port charges. He threatens to use his cannon on us if I don't pay up by tomorrow. In my opinion he is just a plain pirate; and I'll see him in—well, a mighty hot place, first!"

Raynor laughed. "Oh, well, y'know—it's not so bad as all that, is it? I'll go over and talk to the beggar tomorrow, if you like."

Varuna Wardman sat up in her chair with interest. "You're not going over *alone* to that ship full of pirates, are you?" she asked incredulously.

"Rather!" came back Raynor with enthusiasm. "Never show fear before the natives, y'know. You make him a present, say a hundred dollars Straits, sir, may I suggest? Be quite all right, I assure you."

"What for?" growled Wardman belligerently.

"Well, it's a bit hard to explain. These chaps all go armed, you see. They have to. Chinese pirate junks, Bugis catamarans, Cambodian brigs—you never can tell what you meet on these seas. We can't ask them to disarm just yet—not for a long time, in fact. We've got a fair patrol from Pahang south, but hardly up here yet. None of our own merchantmen to protect as yet, if it comes to that. Our government never was exactly altruistic, y'know." Raynor smiled broadly.

"All right. As I understand it, you are all alone up here, Mr. Raynor? Barnes, my explorer, told me that. Sort of beginning a government, and a native queen ruling the state."

"That's it, exactly. She's a good sort, Siti Ishtar; and her *muntri*, Ibn Yaïd, the Arab, has no end of common sense. With their help I'm getting some sort of order in the country, and we hope to develop it. Barnes told me there was good tin and some gold up in these mountains. I was glad indeed, sir, to hear you were thinking of going into it."

"Yes. With this result!" said Wardman sardonically.

"Oh, that!" Raynor chuckled as he glanced over at the *proa*. "Really, sir, it would be a rare bit of tact just to smooth him out this time. Later we can change all that; but—well, it's just like baksheesh, you know. Ever been wheedled out of it, by a boatman who had no shadow of right to more than his legal fare? These beg-

gars see you coming in here totally unarmed, and they feel it somehow isn't fair—no expense for powder and cannon and extra men for gunners and all that. That fellow there would fight, quick, to protect *you* if a Chinese junk came along—not that you'd need it with your speed, sir—but there's the idea. You ought to pay somebody something, as that *datu* sees it; and he's right, y'know."

"Nonsense!" said Wardman huffily. "It's piracy to carry anything but a saluting cannon, and you know it!"

RAYNOR grinned. "Oh, come now, sir! There isn't a British yacht in these waters that hasn't four good rifled one-pounders somewheres below decks. We can't ask our cruisers to watch after every pleasure-boat in these seas. You see the point, don't you, now?"

"Maybe," said Wardman, stroking his heavy gray mustache. "But damned if I see myself greasing this fellow as you suggest! Not at all!"

"*Father!*" spoke up the girl indignantly. "I think Mr. Raynor's perfectly right, and don't be an old tight-wad! We come in here with nothing but a popgun of a saluting cannon on board, and then you want Mr. Raynor to order up a gunboat or something because the natives think you are silly and *ought* to pay something for it. If you don't want to pay, why don't you up-anchor and run out, and not try to bring the British Government into it? I'd run the man down if he tried to stop me!"

"Yes, and get a shot through your boilers trying it," said Cyrus Wardman dryly.

"Why, *no*, Father!" protested the girl. "With our narrow iron bows, the two shots he's got would just glance off, and then we'd have him. All it needs is a little nerve!"

Raynor smiled on her admiringly. "Just what I'd do myself, Miss Wardman. However, I'll go over tomorrow and see what we can do. It's a delicate matter, Mr. Wardman, as Kota Sembilan is still an independent state, and my government has as yet little real authority here. And of course we have to avoid any cause for war. Tact does it, I've found."

"Well, I'll have to think this over," said Wardman heavily. "I'll bid you good night, sir. Of course you are staying on board. You'll find your stateroom ready."

Raynor rose at the hint, but Varuna stayed him.

"Don't go, Mr. Raynor. I'm dying to talk. And you're the first Resident I've ever met. How interesting! Tell me all about that native queen, and your work, and everything."

Raynor sat down and felt the toils closing about him. An evening with this glorious creature—and moonlight, and the soft tropical breezes! What havoc wouldn't they play with his heart!

He told her all the long romantic story—of his appointment from Singapore as Resident, of his first cholera and of the grudge of Ya Israng, of the insurrection of Shaitan Sadud, who fell violently in love with the queen, of the coming jungle war with the Sakai to make the back-country safe, of his hopes and plans for future development, mines, plantations, capital, banks, roads, harbors.

AND the girl listened, her breath quick with excitement, her gray eyes starry under the big hat, her body now leaning forward intently, now lazing back while she watched him with half-closed lids.

"Oh, it's great! Simply great!" she cried when he had finished. "Oh, how I wish I could do something like that! Work! Something worth while, instead of plugging around in this old yacht and meeting people I don't care about. How I'd love it!"

"Oh, but you wouldn't," Raynor assured her quickly. "No dances, no music, no theater; no roads, even, to drive a car on! You'd be frightfully bored, in no time."

"Oh, I don't know," hesitated the girl doubtfully. "Those people would be intensely interesting to me."

"All tawdry and fustian, once you get over the novelty," said Raynor. "Same old jungle, jungle, jungle! Only thing new from day to day is the preposterous things they are always trying to do."

"That's just it," insisted Varuna. "There's your interest! I think I'd love it."

Raynor felt like telling her she could have all she wanted of it, but he contained the raging hunger for her that possessed him. "The madness," as the Malays called it; it had gotten him, as it surely would with a first talk with a white girl in three years! And she was beautiful beyond any imaginings of his, beautiful as Siti Ishtar, but in a different way of course, tall and superb, nearly as tall as himself.

But he kept down his heart firmly; and,

"Would you?" he retorted to her outburst. "Well—perhaps. Let's hope you can see something of this country!"

"Good night," said the girl, rising. "Gracious! We've talked till nearly one!" she added lazily, glancing at the jeweled wrist-watch on her arm. She led him below, and they had a nightcap in the sumptuous saloon before she showed him to his stateroom.

NEXT morning he arose fit and radiant. "The madness" had been working. He looked about for her, but she was nowhere on deck; yet it was now nine o'clock. He had breakfast alone; these yacht people evidently did not take kindly to the early risings of the East.

He felt somewhat hurt, as he stepped into his launch, that she had not even yet appeared when he was taking his very life in his hands to go over aboard that proa—for her sake. But with the generosity of the lover he forgave her; milady was accustomed to sleeping late. He was filled with conquering thoughts, for her. He would lay down the law to this *datu*! Native customs and prejudices be damned! It was wrong; and Cyrus Wardman was going to stay here unmolested—and Varuna with him! He would order over elephants from Kwala Djelan, and they would do the jungle trip to the mines in style, with a tiger-beat, perhaps, on the side. She would learn to know and love this country as he did. He would be her knight of the empire; in fact, she *would* be Lady Raynor when the coveted "Sir" was conferred upon him, as it soon would be. It was big work he was doing here, and he deserved it. . . .

A black and gold *datu*, in the exceedingly tight trousers and jacket of the Orang Laut, greeted him from the proa. His hard and seamed face looked down at him without emotion as his arm signaled his sailors to raise the trapdoor in the net and lower a ladder.

Raynor made to climb up it, but Rana Singh, his Sikh sergeant, broke the silence of military discipline to say: "Come we not too, Heaven-born? Consider, two good rifles at thy back!"

"Oh, rather not, *havildar*!" said Raynor confidently. "A display of force would be a bad move on our part. No, I'll just talk to this chap. If you hear a row, you and Ranjit Khan come up swiftly. Otherwise stay here in the boat."

He went up the ladder, and the trap-door fell back behind him. On deck the Malay captain was bowing courteously and inviting him aft to the cabin for coffee. As nothing could be got on with without that formality, Raynor went with him and was presently squatting on sumptuous silken cushions while coffee was brought and served in tiny silver cups on a stand of mother-of-pearl. They went through the usual formula:

"Deign to accept."

"May you live!"

"A double health."

"Upon thy heart!"

"And now, Datu," said Raynor sternly, "I have come to talk thee from a great folly. Know you, if you fired but one cannon at yonder fire-boat of the white *tuans*, there is not a tiny harbor in all the islands of the sea where thou couldst hide but that the warships of my people would hunt thee down. And they would hang thee, Datu, to the yardarm of this thy proa!" he added with force.

"*Insh' Allah!*" (God willing), replied the *datu* mildly and also evasively.

"It is our custom, Tuan Besar. The fire-boat has no *miriams*" (guns); "should he not therefore pay them that have? It is so little we ask, great white friend."

RAYNOR growled impotently. To tell him flatly that it was wrong and henceforth forbidden would be to open up far-reaching questions—an order, in fact, that would shake this native state to its foundations and inevitably bring on war, gunboats from Singapore, a landing brigade, a jungle war and a naval war at the same time in which many, many natives and many white men would be killed. All this could be better done by ways of peace, and his soul hated it. Besides, he knew Siti Ishtar. She would go with him far on the road to good government if guided, but would fight to the last man if opposed by force. No; he could not press the point now.

"It is as I have said," he returned at length. "The Queen has given me no order. But my own people will not hear of this with patience, Datu. They will send warships that will blow you out of water if you fire on this yacht. My counsel is to let her go."

"Said the white *tuan* who owns her nothing of baksheesh?" asked the *datu*, still not telling by voice, tone or gesture of what he proposed to do.

"He did not! He is a white man. He goes where he pleases on the high seas, and the warships of my people protect him—*everywhere*, Datu!" said Raynor significantly. "And," he added with still more significance, "it will be my duty to protect him too."

THE *datu* grunted and said nothing. A messenger appeared at the cabin door, and the *datu* excused himself and went out. And then suddenly the cabin door was slammed to with a bang and was locked outside. Raynor sprang to his feet and hammered at it in impotent rage, then jumped to the walls to find some way to get out. He realized, too late, that all this had been nothing but a suave trap. The room was not only the captain's cabin; it was the citadel of last resort against boarding parties. It was loopholed all around with narrow slits for muskets, and its teak walls were at least six inches thick. There was nothing inside save pillows and mats and that insignificant little ornamental table. He could not batter down the door, nor do anything but yell for his Sikhs. Raynor spent some futile minutes doing that. There was no response from Rana Singh, he realized with bitterness, after a period of furious yells with no answer from overside.

The *datu's* motive in thus shutting him in he could understand, as he paced the room trying to think. He was going to take that yacht before his eyes and in spite of his counsel. It caused Raynor agony of soul. All his dreams of capital coming to the country, of peaceful development, faded before this ugly fact. And there was Varuna, now at the mercy of wild Orang Laut sailors! He looked out the loophole toward the yacht, shouting impotent warnings at her. There was but one thing for her to do now, up-anchor and go, running this asinine *datu* down if he dared to interfere. He hoped some one on board her would have the nerve to do it!

And then he danced on the teak floor with grim glee. Her anchor was appearing out of water under her forefoot! There was smoke pouring from her funnel, and she was moving!

"Topping!" he cried, snapping his fingers with joy. "Varuna! It's you—you—*you!*" You made them do it, by Jove!"

But he could see nothing of her, either on the bridge or the deck, as the yacht gathered way and headed toward them, her

keen bow now a mere thin line with the slender bowl of the yacht rising in sharp curves around it. Raynor watched, holding his breath. He listened in silence, expecting to hear a commotion on the proa, sharp military orders in Malay for men to man those two long guns. But there was nothing save utter silence. Raynor jumped to a forward loophole. The crew were idling at the rails, and the *datu* stood motionless a short distance from him, merely watching her with a set and stern expression on his face.

The yacht swept by at close range, all her long sheer of gleaming white paint and brown awning and polished brass and glass and mahogany. Raynor looked in vain for signs of Varuna. She was not on the bridge, nor in any of the cane deck-chairs, nor anywhere. "Most mysterious!" fumed Raynor as he watched, unable to do a thing one way or the other about it.

And then the yacht swept on out to sea and was gone, while not a move to stop her had been made by anyone on the proa.

RAYNOR sat down utterly nonplused. He could make nothing of this at all. Surely his own wise counsel to the *datu* had not prevailed at the last moment! He knew Malays well, and one thing was quite certain, his logic had not convinced the *datu* in any particular nor budged him at all. Raynor scratched his head stupidly. Anyhow, *she* was safe—though he would probably never see her again.

A voice, mild and placating, sounded outside—the *datu*.

"It is to talk, Tuan Besar."

"You wont be able to talk when I get out of here!" ripped out Raynor wrathfully. "This is an outrage, *Datu*! It's not done, you know."

"Perhaps. God alone knows—may His name be exalted!" said the *datu*. "But look you, Tuan—the Queen's ring!"

A brown hand appeared before the slot, and on the little finger flashed a huge diamond set in a barbaric mounting of red Malay gold.

"The messenger who bore this is not to be disobeyed," said the *datu's* voice. "But—verily we be poor men!" he added with a broad hint not to be overlooked.

Raynor collapsed. He saw it all in a flash, now. Siti Ishtar, at the risk of her throne, had sent this order—doubtless also another to Cyrus Wardman, Esquire, bid-

ding him get out and lose no time about it!

And at the same time she had saved him from a great folly, he began to perceive, "the madness" that would have inevitably come between him and his work. For how much did Varuna Wardman really reciprocate this sudden passion of his—this passion that had led him, right on this proa, to sacrifice his usual common sense in dealing with native problems, for her sake. She had been playing with him, pretending; girls of her station in life were good at that, so long as there was a man and his ideals present to be played with. Eyes, gush, a certain impulsive sympathy and admiration: that was all. It would never accept the test of life in a jungle town!

And as he saw it now with open eyes, she had not even appeared on deck to see how matters were faring with him when the yacht went out, but had slept in her cabin through it all, to all hours of the morning, as was the custom of her sort.

"The Presence is humbly craved mercy in that we had to shut him in," said the *datu's* voice after a spell of silent and bitter reflection on Raynor's part. "But how could thy servant let the fire-boat go out, before all my men, and with the Heaven-born as it were commanding that it be so?"

Rare tact, that, agreed Raynor as he grunted noncommittally in answer. Also here was his work again, in all its delicate problems and policies. He welcomed it now with relief.

But the *datu* was still very much afraid. "Touching on thy men, Heaven-sent-to-our-Queen: we gave them cigarettes that were *not* tobacco, but they will awaken soon. It was necessary that the Queen's order be carried out thus and so, the Presence will comprehend."

"Oh, bother! Open the door, *Datu*!" laughed Raynor. "All is well! And as to the baksheesh for thee and thy crew, Ibn Yaïd will send it thee. Such, I judge, was our good queen's thought," he lied cannily.

But as he stepped down into his launch, Raynor had but one impulse, to kiss humbly and with gratitude the hand of Siti Ishtar, who at the risk of her throne had dared send a *datu* of the Orang Laut this order. For it had set him, the Resident, free to face once more the realities of this his life's work.

"Pirates of the Sands," a vivid tale of the Sahara, will be contributed by Warren Hastings Miller to an early issue.



Photograph by Roger Paul Jordan

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

HE hails from Nebraska, and is the son of an Army chaplain, but his career includes many journeys east and west, life on a plantation on the Isle of Pines and recently an adventurous sealing voyage in the waters off Greenland, during which he obtained material for "Vikings of the Ice." Among his other books are "The Story of the Appeal," "The Golden Blight," "Pod Bender & Co.," and "The Flying Legion." And he will be recalled for many joyous stories in this magazine, of which the tale which begins here is typical.



Sir Galahad of Gila

The surprising saga of a knight of the North who strayed to the strange land of Arizona: his adventure; his romance; the destruction of his enemy.

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

"SOME people, they calls me a coward, I know," smokily remarked Pierre Lablague, "but I guess I been brave as the next one. And anyhow, I kills my man, that time at Gila. It aint every man, ba golly, can say he kill his—w'at you call?—his rival for a gal. No sir!"

Pierre nodded affirmation as he leaned far back in his rough plank chair. He squinted at the lumbermen's socks and moccasins that hung steaming on the wire over the roaring stove in Mackenzie's lumber-camp on the headwaters of the snow-bound Androscoggin.

"No, ba golly!" he continued. "I aint always been cook on a lumber-camp, same as now. I been out West, one time, me. Long time ago, that was. Star-X Ranch, Mister, with four t'ousand sheeps, near the Gila River. I aint say why I walk on that ranch, one day, and ask for a job. Mebbe I *did* borrow a horse on the next State, and keep her too long. That aint nobody's business, now. Anyhow, they aint never ketch me. They follows the horse's tracks, after I turns her loose, and I gets clair.

"So then, I comes on the ranch, goes to the kitchen door; and the boss' wife, he's do a washin' on the back porch.

"'I'll do that washin' for you, Missus,' says I, polite. And the wife, he's kind of sick that day—awful hot day, I tol' you!—and he's let me. I do 'em good for the lady, and hang 'em all out on the line for him. *Sure* I can wash, and iron too. I can wash just so good like any womans or Chinamans, neither. Collar, stiff bosom, boil-shirt, aint make no difference. I can do 'em so good, you'd just as soon have a regular laundry as have 'em.

"Well, I hangs out them clothes, and while I been work at that, the woman's daughter he's ride home, on the yard. My golly, that gal, he's w'at you call one peach! She's got eye on him blue like the bluin'-water; long hair on his head, gold like one canary-bird; and w'en you talk about the shape, *bon Dieu!* That gal got a shape like a pippin!

"He aint use no paint, that gal, but got fat cheeks on him, red like a boil' lobster. And w'en he's jump off his pony and smile at me, while I'm hang out the wash, his

teeth shines whiter like her old man's shirt w'at I just been finish, me!

"Hello, stranger!" the gal say, just like that. 'Who's you, and w'at you do here?'

"Hello, youself!" says I. 'That don't matter who I am, but I knows pretty gal w'en I sees him!'

"By that she's laugh, and go on the house. And my heart, he's beat like flivver engine. Don't matter if I do have one, two wife somewheres in Canadaw. That been years ago, and I aint hear nothin' from him, long time. Mebbe dead; how I know, me? Anyhow, I been Frenchmans, and m' heart he's go like you step on the gas.

"**T**HAT gal, I sees him look out the window at me, and I know he's ask his mother 'bout me. Oh, I knows how the womens do, you bet my life!

"*Pauvre* gal!" I thinks. 'He's fall in love with me, already. Aint over nineteen year old, but he's want to get married. If I only have the money, that's all right. But I aint got one red cent. 'Pierre,' I says to myself, 'you got to work hard in here, get some money, not leave poor gal wear his heart out for nothin!'

"And I makes my mind right away, that gal he's goin' be Mrs. Lablague Number Tree. Four, mebbe. I forget which.

"Pretty soon I gets all the wash hang out, and go on the house again. The woman, he's cook big supper, and the gal he's help some.

"Looks like you got lots cookin',' says I.

"That's right,' say the lady. 'We got ten in the family, and twenty-four hired hand. That take some grub!'

"I'll help you, lady,' says I.

"Can you cook?' say the gal.

"Sure!" says I. 'Cook, ba golly, good like any womans! Cook all kinds things, specially woodchuck!'

"Woodchuck?" say the gal. 'W'at's that?'

"Aint that ignorant for you, Mister? Not know woodchuck! But out West, I shuppose they aint have 'em.

"Woodchuck," says I. 'Why, he's grow everywhere in Canadaw, like big mushrat. You take a fat one, skin her and bake her good with sweet patate and plenty gravy, and I just so soon have chicken as have her. Or any odder man!'

"They laughs, and the gal say:

"I'm glad I aint live in Canadaw, eat mushrat, me!' But all the time, I see he's crazy 'bout me. And I thinks:

"Well, mebbe you go Canadaw with me, after all, *hein?*'"

"The woman, she's say his name is Mrs. Rawlins, and the gal, he's Polly Rawlins. And I tol' 'em my name, too. Only I aint give my real name, on account of how I borrow that horse, and somebody been hunt me. I tol' 'em my name been 'Poleon Lamoureux. That's a good name, aint it? Lamoureux mean, in French, a man w'at been in love. And I sure been in love with pretty Polly Rawlins. She aint know w'at Lamoureux mean; but never mind, I goin' tol' her, soon enough. Just now, they talks 'bout cookin'.

"If you can cook,' says Mrs. Rawlins, 'I like to have you help us with some doughnut.'

"Sure!" says I. 'Doughnut, I can cook him better like any womans. How many you want? Four, five dozen?'

"How long you think five dozen she's goin' last on this ranch?" says Polly. 'We fry her by the barrel, out on the yard. I show you, me!'

"I like to have Polly show me anyt'ing, so I say all right, and we mix up great immense batch dough, and take her out on the yard. They got big kettle out there, on some brick oven. I make one grand fire, and fry hundred doughnut all to one time. Fry more than barrel doughnuts. And Polly, he's come out once in a while to see me, and by the way he's laugh, I know he's love me 'most to death.

"You like sometime go Canadaw?" I ask. 'That's where they make doughnuts better as anywhere else, and have the Canadaw high-wine, and—'

"And mushrat!" she say. 'No sir!'

"Then he's go on the house again, but I know he aint mean *no*! W'en womans say no, he mean yes, aint she? Most all my wives says no, but they marries me just same. And me, fryin' doughnut on the yard, by the big cottonwood-tree, I know Polly he's just so good as mine, already!

"**W**ELL, Mister," Pierre continued after tamping his pipe with an unseemly thumb, while cruel winds whirled snow over the camp, "after I fry doughnut 'bout one hour, some of the ranch mans begin to ride on the yard and come home for supper.

"They most all aint pay no 'tention to me. But one big feller, more than six foot high and strong like bull, he's stop by the fire and look me over. He's all sunburn.

that man, and got black eye and big mustache, with guns on his belt. And he's say:

"Who the devil *you* been, Shrimpy?"

"I been the new cook," says I. "And if I aint friendly with a man, he's goin' get some slow pizen every day on his tea."

"I'll shoot your block off!" say the man.

"Shoot quick, then!" says I, and dips up a scoop of the hot grease. "Can you shoot quicker'n I can throw b'ilin' fat?"

"He aint dare shoot. And some more of the men, they laugh, and he's go on the house, mad like hornet w'en you bust his nest down.

"You wait, you French jumpin'-jack!" he say. "My name been Rattlesnake Sam, and no Frenchman goin' talk back to *me*. I ketch you away from the ranch, some day, and you goin' to be bait for coyotes!"

"I only lift my shoulder, 'cause why do I have to go away from the ranch? So long as my Polly, he's stay in there, I goin' stay too. And after we been marry, aint I been the boss? I guess Rattlesnake Sam wont stay long, then!"

"Supper-time, I helps Mrs. Rawlins and my Polly wait on table, and I spills some hot tea on Sam. The rest of the mans, they aint let Sam shoot me. And after supper, I helps wash the dish, and w'en the womens go for make up some bed, I says:

"I help you make the bed, me!"

"W'at?" says my Polly. "You know how to make the bed, too?"

"Sure!" says I. "Aint no woman make a bed better than me!"

"That's true, too. I run lodgin'-house in Trois Rivières, one time, with my wife Number T'ree or Four—I forgets which—and make lots beds. So I helps the womens, and I sees Polly he's laugh and love me more than ever. 'Cause why not? Aint I the handy husband for a gal? Wash the clothes, wash the dish, fry doughnut, do the cookin', make the bed, do everything! Where you get American feller do all that? Or any odder man!"

"Me and my Polly has some talk, and he's told me his father's been away to Santa Fe with big lot of sheep, and wont be back in quite a while. And Polly say:

"You been a wonder, 'Poleon. You'll make one good man for some womans, aint it?"

"Sure!" says I. "I'll make the best husband on the world for some pretty gal. And I knows who that gal is, too!"

"Then I look at Polly, hard, and he's got red on the face, like he's try hard not

to laugh. But I know that aint the real reason. It's the love in his heart for me, as do that. Ba golly, *oui!*

"After a while I go on the bunkhouse, have a smoke with the men, and sing some Canadaw song—'*Alouette, Genti' Alouette,*' and '*En Roulant Ma Boule, Roulant,*' and like that. The men, they clap their hand an' call me fine feller. But Rattlesnake Sam, he's look mad and swear.

"Howl away, you Canadaw timber-wolf!" he say. "You aint goin' howl very long. I soon put you out o' your misery!"

"But I only laughs at Sam.

"Look out you don't get put out o' your misery, *you*'self!" says I. "On my country, we eat feller like you, most every mornin', before breakfast!"

"And by that, I turn in my bunk an' goes to sleep, and dreams about my Polly. I dreams I been the Prodigal Son, w'at get the fat calfs. Aint Polly got 'em? Ba golly, yes!"

"MIDDLE of the night I wakes up and sees some spirit lights. Eh? Oh, sure, I believe on the spirits w'at comes back. I sees 'em often, me! One of my wives, she's often come to see me, in the shape of a light, so I knows one of 'em been dead, anyhow. Though I aint sure which one. Most always, that light been white. But that night, she's green. So I knows my wife been jealous on Polly, and is goin' make trouble for me if he can. But w'at I care? Aint no green light goin' stop *me!* Red light, mebbe I stop, look and listen. But green light, no sir!"

"Shine away!" says I. "Burn all you wants to. I'm goin' make you greener than that, before I'm done!" And I go sleep again, very happy to think at least *one* wife can't make no trouble for me and my Polly.

"Next mornin' I gets up early, help make the breakfast, do big lot of work on the house, and all the mens ride away. Polly, he's mighty nice with me, and I see how the love been burn in his heart. He's laugh and laugh at me, like gal do w'en he's love a feller. I most make up my mind to ask him marry me right off quick; but no, no.

"Better wait few day," says I to *myself*. "Aint no use tryin' to rush a gal. Gal, he's like a mule. More you try hurry him, more she aint go. Take him easy, little while—then w'en you got him where you want him, lay the whip on, and she's *go!* Aint I know, me?"

"FEW days," continued Pierre, relighting his pipe with a splinter of blazing pine, "I make everything to help the womens, on the house. And Rattlesnake Sam, he's jealous like a dog w'at see somebody get his bone away from him. 'Cause he got his eye on my Polly too. Anybody can see that, easy. Sam, he's wait to ketch me away from the ranch, so he can make coyote-bait with me, like he say.

"So, for a few days, I aint even go outside the ranch yard. 'Cause if Sam kill me, they mebbe goin' to hang him for murder, and I aint want to see *no* man get hang. I don't believe in hangin' people, me, not since that time I borrow the horse. And I aint want to bust Polly's heart, neither.

"'Pierre,' I thinks, 'you got to take good care you'self, and not get hurt. Not make this pretty gal cry his eye out, and die.' I know Polly's goin' die, if I get kill. 'Watch you' step, Pierre!'

"After 'bout a week, though, I gets tired stayin' on the house and the yard. It been awful hot in there, and I wants to go out on the country, an' get some air. So I says to my Polly:

"'I got all the work done, for today,' says I. 'You aint got nothin' for do. W'at say me and you take horseback ride out on the hills?'

"'Can you ride horse?' say the gal.

"'Sure!' says I. 'Ride better like any Buffalo Bill. You come 'long with me, Polly, and we have little gallop somewhere!'

"'Aint you scare Sam goin' ketch you,' she's say, 'and make you feel like a lead-mine?'

"'No, ba golly!' says I. 'I aint scare of *nothing*! Aint I tol' you I come from Canadaw? No Frenchman from Canadaw been scare of nothing!'

"How can I be scare, Mister? I know Sam he's ride away ten, fifteen mile to some sheep-camp on the Gila River. So the coast is all clair.

"'Come along, Polly,' says I. 'Let's go!'

"POLLY, he's admire me 'cause I been so brave, and he's say all right. I been mighty glad, 'cause now I'm mebbe goin' ask her to marry me. Out on the country, I'm goin' ask dat gal, sure!

"We gets guns, and a couple of the best horse, and rides off down some little valley. We rides on some hill, and most of the time I'm almost keep up with Polly. After a while, Polly pull the rein and wait for me,

and we gets off the horse and walks on the the sagebrush.

"'Polly,' says I, 'now I got something for ask you.'

"'Wait,' she's say. 'Before you ask it, I got something to show you. Sam, he's got his own little private cimetry up that hill. He's plant quite a few there, w'at ask me questions. You like to see that cimetry?'

"'Sure!' says I. 'Mebbe if she aint full, that cimetry, I'll do the best I can to fill it—with Sam!'

"Polly, he's laugh, and we start up the rocks. But before we gets on the cimetry—*bon Dieu!* w'at a snake I see! That been a rattlesnake, Mister. It make a man rattled to see one, all right. She's got her head up and her teeth open. Her tail, seems like she's shake dice with it.

"W'en I sees that snake, I leaves Polly and runs away. Polly, he's shoot at the snake. You know 'bout rattlesnake—if you shoot 'em, they every time ketch the bullet in its mouth. This snake, he's ketch the bullet, but the bullet take his head right off too, tryin' to stop it. So the snake get kill. Then Polly's tell me come back. Shoot? Mister, that gal, he's the best shot, except-in' me, anywheres round there. He can throw bottle on the air and bust 'em, shoot bird flyin', anything. W'en I comes back, he's mad, and call me a coward.

"'No sir, I aint no coward, me!' says I. 'All I run for is make the snake run after me, and get her tired out. Then I ketch her alive and carry her on the ranch, for Sam!'

"Polly, he's laugh, and I sees how he's love me more and more.

"'You been my noble knight!' she's say.

"'Night or day, all same to me, I'm yours!' says I.

"'My Sir Galahad!'

"'No gal I had ever been half so pretty like you!' I says. 'You been the only gal I wants!'

"She take and explain to me w'at Sir Galahad been. That aint got nothin' to do with no gal he ever had. No sir! This Galahad, he been one brave feller w'at ride round with a cook-stove on him, for clothes; and if anybody say somethin' to a gal, he knock his block off and bury 'em up, quick.

"'All right, Polly,' says I. 'I'll be your Sir Galahad, and perteck you from all danger. Let the danger come!' says I, and gives the snake a kick. 'You aint got to

be 'fraid of nothin', so long I been on the job!

"'Thanks, 'Poleon!' she say. 'But don't never run away no more. Promise me that!'"

"'I promises,' says I. 'Not even if I has to give up runnin' so as to tire out a rattlesnake!' And then I been just goin' ask Polly be my wife, w'en—ba golly, if Sam aint come out from behind some rock, and ketch us!"

"**V**ES sir, that's w'at Sam do! He aint honest, that Sam. He make believe he's ride to Gila River, that mornin'. But he aint go in there, at all. No sir! Like one damn coward, he's hide himself on the hills. And w'en he's see me and Polly ride away from the ranch, 'bout five mile, he's come ridin' on his horse out from behind some big rock, and draw his gun, and say:

"'Now, you French son of a pup,' says he, 'we goin' to have first-class funeral, and you aint goin' for smell none of the flowers, neither. I gives you one minute, by my watch, to say you' prayers!'"

"Polly, he's get white like de snow in Canadaw, and say:

"'Stop, Sam! You can't shoot a man in cold blood, like that!'"

"'Can't, eh?' says he, and take out his watch. 'In sixty second, this French jumpin'-jack, here, goin' over the Big Divide. And the seconds is goin' fast too. He better pray, some lively!'"

"W'en I hears that, I shivers like it been winter in Canadaw. Must be I got a touch of the—w'at you call?—malaria, and aint took enough quinine. Seems like I got the chills and fever, mighty bad. And w'at I do, me? I turns my horse round, and rides on the odder side of Polly, so she's between me and Rattlesnake Sam.

"'Cause why? 'Cause I wants a little more time. I can't say all the prayers I know, in one minute!"

"'Look at the damn' coward!' says Sam. 'Hidin' behind a gal's petticoats!'"

"'Excuse me,' says I, 'but it aint no petticoats, at all. Can't you see, you'self, she aint got none on? She's got ridin'-pants on, and you can't call that no petticoat!'"

"'Don't make no difference,' say Sam, mad like a dog. 'Petticoats or pants, you can't hide behind 'em. Hurry up and pray,' he say. 'Your minute been half gone, already. In thirty second there's goin' to be a new fireman in hell!'"

"'Sam,' say my Polly, all shakin' like a custard w'en the kitchen door slam, 'you

shoot 'Poleon, and it's goin' to put double the housework on me. If that's all you love me, Sam, wantin' to make me work twice as hard like now, I got my 'pinion of your love!'"

"Sam, he aint know w'at to say. He's kind of swaller, get red on the face, and put away his gun.

"'Oh, devil!' he say. Then he turn round and kick his horse with the spur, and ride away fast, with me laughin' after him.

"Polly, she's nearly faint, and get all weak. I got to hold her up, round the waist. You bet I aint mind that, much! But w'en I try for get one kiss, she's push me away, and ride toward the ranch.

"By that I sees Polly love me more than ever, and I remember w'at she say 'bout how she can't afford to have me get kill, 'cause I helps her much with the work. And I rides after her, and says:

"'Polly,' says I, 'that aint no place for a peach like you to bloom, on this here Gila ranch. Not with all them rough mens, and you workin' like some slave for 'em! I'm willin' to marry you any time,' I says. 'And if you got the car-fare, we go back to Canadaw and run lodgin'-house togedder. And every dollar we make, I gives you five cents for you'self! W'at more can a brave feller like me offer? Or any odder man?'"

"She's stop her horse and look at me, and I aint know if she's goin' laugh or cry.

"'Oh, 'Poleon, this is so quick!' she say. And I'm goin' for kiss her, but she's say: 'No, 'Poleon, not yet! No, my hero, my Sir Galahad of Gila! Wait till we been married,' he's say. 'I aint let no man kiss me, till the ring been on my finger!'"

"'That aint the way we does it in Canadaw!' says I, and keeps on tryin' to get one kiss. But pretty soon Polly, he's look like he get mad, and tol' me not to be one big fool. Gals all time talks dat way, don't they, to man they loves? Anyhow, she aint let me kiss her, so I says:

"'All right, Polly, I'll wait. Few days more, that don't matter. But I tol' you, gal, all the kiss w'at I aint get now, they bearin' mighty big interest, for later!'"

"She's only laugh, and we rides back on the ranch. And my heart, Mister, she's happy like a duck in a lake full with tad-pole!"

THAT night," Pierre drew his romance toward its end, "after all the housework been done and I been goin' on the

bunkhouse, Polly he's meet me in the dark. Meet me out by the corral, and whisper:

"Don't make no noise, 'Poleon! Keep quiet. I tol' you somethin'!"

"You mean you goin' run away with me, tonight, and we get marry right away in Las Vegas?"

"Listen!" he's say, breathin' like he's run a mile. "Sam—you know w'at he do?"

"Don't know, and don't care!" says I. "But after me and you been marry, I goin' fire him pretty quick!"

"No, no, you can't!" Polly say. "'Cause Sam, he's goin' kill you, right away tomorrow!"

"How he can kill me?" I ask. "If he do, you have two times as much housework!"

"No I aint," Polly say. "For Sam, he's send to Chaperito for one Chinamans, to do the housework. W'en the Chinamans get here, tomorrow, Sam goin' to have your funeral, right off."

"That so?" says I. "Well then, ba golly, me and you better get marry, tonight. Then I'll be boss here, and fire Sam, and hire you two Chinamans, myself!"

"No, Galahad, no!" say Polly. "You go away quick, now. If you loves me, get away before the Chinamans get here, w'at Sam hire. Go to Las Vegas, take the first train you can get. Go quick, and don't stop goin' till you're in Santa Fe, anyhow!"

"You meet me there, in Santa Fe?" I ask.

"Oh, yes, yes, anything!" she's say. "Only hurry, hurry! Somebody might see me tellin' you to go. Then Sam, he wont wait for the Chinamans to get here. He'll start your funeral quick!"

"NOW, Mister, I aint want no funeral, 'cause I got no good clothes with me, on the ranch. And w'at Frenchmans can have funeral without no good clothes? So I says:

"All right, Polly, I'll go. I'll take a horse and skidoo. But, you goin' for meet me sure, in Santa Fe, after two, t'ree day?"

"Yes, yes!" says Polly. "But don't take no horse, whatever you do. Sam, he'll be sure to find it out, and call you horse-thief. And then all the men here, they'll help him string you up on the big cottonwood!"

"I can see, myself, I don't want that. 'Cause I got awful tender neck, me."

"You got to walk away, and run," say Polly.

"How I can run away?" says I. "You make me promise, only today, I'll never run away no more."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't argue," she's say, all trimbly, 'or you'll be a dead man. Run, I tell you, like you never run before or since! Don't let no sagebrush grow under you' feets, tonight, or you' life aint worth a grasshopper on a chicken-yard!"

"It's been t'irty-two mile to Las Vegas," says I. "How a man can run t'irty-two mile in one night? They aint do like that in Canadaw!"

"You'll do it, or die!" say Polly. "You got any money for car-fare, after you gets there?"

"Not one red!" says I.

"The gal, he's jam a bill on my hand, and push me toward the gate, in the dark, with the big star lookin' down on us like eyes of one million lucivee."

"Good-by, 'Poleon!" he's say. "Good luck to you!"

"Not one little kiss?" says I. "Not one, till we been marry in Santa Fe?"

"No, no!"

"All right, then," says I. "I aint go away! Sam, he can have my funeral, all he want to; but without one little kiss, I goin' for stay right here, ba golly!"

"She's laugh, then, kind of like she's got the high-strikes, and puts up his mouth, and I'm gave him one good smack. Then he's push me through the gate, and run back on the house. And me, I'm beat it out on the country, along the trail to Las Vegas."

"WELL, Mister," continued Pierre, puffing the rankest of smoke toward the pendent socks and moccasins on the wire, "I walk and run, run and walk. My feets been get awful sore, but my heart been light like the bakin'-powder biscuit I make. 'Cause pretty soon I know my Polly, he's goin' to be anodder wife o' mine. And Sam goin' to be so mad he's drop dead."

"But I hopes Sam aint drop dead, 'cause I wants to come back on the ranch with my Polly, and fire him. And the kiss I give dat gal, he's stay on my mouth. And how a man goin' get tired and thirsty, with a kiss like that?"

"After four, five mile, I stops to rest, and lights a match, and looks at the money Polly's gave me. *Bon Dieu!* Twenty-dollar bill! Aint that luck? I rolls me a smoke, sits on the trail a few minute, and goes on."

Walk and run, Mister, run and walk, hours and hours.

"You aint never know how far is t'irty-two mile, no sir, till you been walk and run 'em all in one night. The sweat, he's come down on my eye till I'm most blind. The bottom, she's come off my shoes, and I got to stop and tie 'em on with a strip tore off my shirt-tail. I get blister on the heel and toe, and my leg she's been so sore like one scalded pup.

"I been pantin' like dog I hear about, w'at chase rabbit in Death Valley, and it's so hot there, Mister, even though both dog and rabbit was go fast as they can, they was both walkin'. My tongue, she's pretty near drag on the ground. Seem like million mile; and by the time it come sun-up and I gets on the railroad station, I can't crawl not one more foot, no sir, not for ten million dollar!

"Well, after while I gets to Santa Fe, and waits for my Polly come marry me. But that gal, he aint come. Four day, five day, one week I waits, but no gal.

"'Ba damn!' says I. 'Somethin' funny 'bout that! Somebody keep that gal from come and get marry with me. I got to go back on the ranch and save that *pauvre* gal. Sam may kill me, but no matter. I been one Sir Galahad for my Polly, so I got for go rescue her!

"Well sir, I go on the station to take train back to Las Vegas. And while I'm wait for the train, I pick up newspaper on the seat and read her. Oh, yes, I can read pretty good, if she's got big letters and the word aint too long. First thing I see—what's this?—*miséricorde!* It's somethin' in big letter on top of the paper, w'at happen on the Star-X ranch!

"'Hello!' says I. 'W'at now? I got to see 'bout this!'

"So I pays a boy five cents for read me that piece on the paper, all the small letters. And w'en I hears it, oh, Mister, seem like I goin' for die!

"W'at happen, Mister? W'at *aint* happen? Everythin' happen! Rattlesnake Sam, he's find out, that night, how I run away. And he's jump on his horse and chase me. He's chase me 'bout seventeen mile. He's just get near me, w'en his horse she's step in one prairie-dog hole and bust her leg. Sam, he's have to shoot her. And then he's run after me on foot.

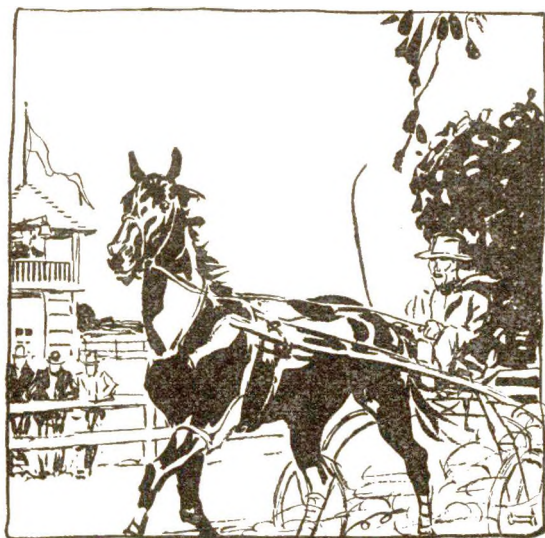
"But he aint never ketch me. 'Cause why? 'Cause he's have a few drink, and the heat been too much for him, to run in them heavy leather pants he got on. He's fall down—that's how the newspaper say it must of happen—and one Gila-monster bite him on the neck. You know Gila-monster; fat lizard with pink and brown bead all over her, like lady's hand-bag. If she bite you, that lizard, *bon soir!* So they finds Sam on the trail with the Gila-monster bite on him, dead like nail on a door.

"So that's how I kill my rival for Polly. I run him to death, Mister, with the help of one Gila-monster. And that aint all, too, Mister. No sir, ba golly! A funeral on the ranch aint all they has. They has a weddin' too. Polly, she's up and marry a New York feller from Pinos Altos, w'at she been engage' to a long time. He's finish up his business in Pinos Altos and come on the ranch. And they has a big *mariage*, big celebration and barbecue. And the paper say they winds up the celebration by shootin' one Chinamans w'at been come to cook on the ranch, only few days ago.

"*Sacré nom d'un chien!* Can you beat dat, Mister? I'm askin' you!

"No, Mister, you can't beat that," Pierre sadly concluded, knocking out his pipe-ashes, now dead as his romance of the long ago. "Nobody can't beat that. A gal, you take a gal, now. They makes all kinds promises, says they loves you, and calls you Sir Galahad. And then you turns your back round, one minute, and I just so soon have 'em as have the devil! Or any odder man!"

Bartholomew Bennington, most sanguine of all suburbanites, makes a new venture and encounters fresh blows from sardonic Fate in Mr. England's forthcoming story. Watch for it in an early issue.



Lamentation

The first of a delightful group dealing with horses and men who were, according to their natures, fast, slow or—uncertain. You will remember Mr. Brooks for "Ketch as Ketch Can" and other sports stories.

By JONATHAN BROOKS

"TIMES have changed," remarked Lum Bagley gloomily.

"An original crack," I said, grin-nin' at him as we jogged along the dusty dirt road. We have to take the side roads because the pavements on the main highways are too hard on Lamentation's feet. "They *have* changed, for better or for worse. But what's on your chest?"

"I was thinkin' of Richard the Third," he said, between frantic puffs to keep a cornucopia stogie going.

"Richard the third what?" I said.

"Richard, King of England, ignorant!" he said. "He made the highest known offer for a horse. Once in a battle he lost his pony, just when a long-distance, sprintin' charger was what he needed most. So he hollered out, 'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!'"

"Did he make a trade?" I asked after cluckin' to Lamentation.

"He did not," said Lum, "but that's not the point. The guys with all the horses thereabouts already had his kingdom sewed up—see? They didn't need to dicker with him any further. But if a king now-

adays made such a proposition, he'd get laughed outa court, see? Horses are worth more'n kingdoms. In fact, a horse for a kingdom nowadays would constitute a record modern price for a kingdom."

"Oh, I don't know about that," I said. "I'd like to see some king offer me a swap for old Lamentation, here. He'd of bought a horse before he knowed it."

"Provin' you don't know much about horses or kingdoms, either." And this long, lean Lum Bagley sorta laughed. "Lamentation is blind, and fourteen years old, but she's a good livin', at that. Which is more'n most kingdoms nowadays."

"You tell 'em, Lum, you've had the livin'," I said, sorta sour. Picked up this forlorn bum back in Ohio, where the county fairs are not as tolerant of shell-games as they used to be. Flat broke, he was, and while he's been handy to have around, he's not entitled to more'n he's been gettin'.

"Well, I'd buy Lamentation myself," he said.

"If you had as many dollars as you've got words, and was as free with 'em, we'd talk business," I said, and let it go at that.

I KEEP the jack for this three-cornered—uh, four-cornered firm, myself. Besides Lum, Lamentation and me, there's old Tommy Tharp, curled up in the back of the buckboard, draggin' a rubber-tired bike behind. Tommy used to drive, before he got both legs broke, lost his nerve and got too old. He "swipes," trains, and feeds for us. Do my own drivin'. We don't do so bad with old Lamentation, at that, even as Lum says.

County seats are only about twenty to thirty miles apart, and even in these changed times, as Lum calls 'em, with autos crowdin' horse-flesh onto the back roads, there's darn few county seats that aint got at least one sport with a hankerin' for a fast trotter. So we make these county seats, loaf around long enough to get us a horse-race, put up some of our limited capital, win one way or another, and then clear out. Right this minute I've got between eleven and twelve hundred dollars pinned in my shirt, besides the old meal-ticket herself, joggin' along there ahead of us.

Lamentation, she's blind, and fourteen years old, but still a blame good trotter. Turn a mile on a half-mile track in two-twelve any day, just from force of habit. Had her two years now, and I'm real attached to her. Clever old mare. Only one bad habit, and that's an asset. If she's trottin' a good clip, and the crowd begins to yell, she jumps and runs. Gets excited—loses the race, right there.

But we cash on that, same as on her looks, which are sad, lonesome and sorta homesick. She carries her head low and her tail the same. Acts like some gay dog of a horse had broke her heart, years ago, and she can never get over it. Anybody seein' her would think she was too discouraged to trot a lick, and there's where they're fooled. She plays our game, every minute, every way.

"Hey!" pipes up old Tommy Tharp, stickin' his head up over the back of the seat. "This is Bilboa, comin' here. I'd know the town anywhere, even if I aint been here in twenty years. If old Addison Buckley still lives here, we'll git a hoss-race before old Lam's rested up from her trip."

THAT'S the tip-off. We're lookin' for Bilboa, corn country county seat, where's a few sports and plenty of dough, thanks to a big crop. And this is Bilboa. Edge of town, I give Lum Bagley a ten-dollar bill, and he gets out o' the buck-

board, to mosey on into town by himself. Tommy and me, we hunt up the fair-grounds, with Lamentation and the bike.

"Sure we can give yuh stable-room," says the caretaker of the fair-grounds, lookin' us over sorta suspicious. "Winter here, if yuh like—cash in advance," he says.

"That's good business on your part, I'm sure," I said, wavin' my hand, "seein' you don't know us at all. Here's half the winter charge, twenty dollars—that right?" I said, shovin' him two tens.

"Cert'nly," he says, takin' the jack. "Yuh see how it is—we can't let any bums come along, use the track and the stables, and then leave between two days, with us holdin' the bag for our rent," he says, apologizin'.

"Good business," I said.

So we put up old Lamentation, and Tommy rubbed her down and rustled up some straw, hay and oats, while I got my pipe lighted and inquired about rooms and board in a good respectable house.

WE hang around three or four days, during which I brush up acquaintances at the hotel, in and around the poolroom, and find out who are the leading barber-shop sports of the town. Bilboa's gone to seed on movies and such. The only bettin' they do here is on such hot questions as where balloon tires are or are not all they're cracked up to be—good, safe wagerin' with no chance of a decision. I'm beginnin' to think that horses have gone out, along with the kings they used to be the sport of.

"If this Richard traded his kingdom for a horse," I said to Lum Bagley, when he came sneakin' into our stall at the fair-grounds the evening of the fourth day, "why, he'd be hooked. People don't know what horses are for, nowadays. But if it was a three-lunged flivver he was yellin' for, that would be something else."

Tommy Tharp's swipin' down old Lamentation. I've had her out on the track joggin' off her soreness after her long drive on the road. It's late, beginnin' to get dark. But even so, Lum's terrible careful. He stops at the door of the stall, and looks back outside, to make sure nobody has seen him.

"Well," he says, stickin' out his chest, confident he's got in without anybody knowin', "I've found one."

"Yeah?" I said. "What kind o' bait d'yuh use? And what d'yuh ketch?"

"Man name of Addison Buckley," Lum

announces. "Grain-dealer—sells coal, cement and bricks—hides and wool. Rich as cream, and a sport."

"Carries matches, mebbe?" I said, sarcastic.

"He's the man I been tellin' about," speaks up Tommy Tharp. "Always has a couple trotters. What's he got now, Mr. Bagley?"

"A colt and a roan mare," says Lum. "I don't know much about the horses. Girl I talked to—"

"Ah-ha, woman in the case!" I said. "Lum's always fallin' for some dame and blowin' the jack I give him. "Can she support yuh in the style y're accustomed to?"

"This girl," Lum says, offended, "is a right nice girl. Easy to look at, too. Her brother takes care of Buckley's horses, see? Mamie says—"

"First-namin' her already," I said. "Yuh work fast."

"She says her brother says the colt will be a world-beater next year, and the old mare has win the free-for-all trots around here for so long the county fairs have abolished the race. Can't get anybody to start against her," says Lum.

"Roan mare, h'm?" grunts Tommy Tharp. "Must be by Jason, son of Jay-bird, 'at Buckley used to drive himself, eight, ten years ago. He was a roan."

"All right, what next?" I said. "Does she want to bet a box of candy that Buckley's mare can beat us?"

"Aw, lay offa me," grins Lum Bagley. "I'll say this for him—yuh can't get under his hide. It's too thick—and tough. "I got a hunch old man Buckley will be out here in the morning. If he's not, Mamie's brother will, I'll bet a cookie."

"Ready to talk business?" I said.

"How do I know?" asks Lum, indignant. "I bring in the lamb. The slaughter's *your* job."

"All right, fair enough," I said. "Keep things movin'. Costs money to hang around this burg."

"That reminds me," begins Lum, shiftin' on his feet and leanin' his other shoulder against the door.

"Here's another ten," I said. "Don't blow it all in one place. What'd yuh do with all 'at other dough I give yuh?"

"If you was any tighter,"—and Lum grins again, takin' the ten,—“y'r skin would crack in eight places. Well, so long. Gotta be goin'. Date with Mamie tonight. Movie."

He sticks his head outa the door, looks all around, and finally sneaks away. Can't be too careful. If it was to look like he worked with us, we'd never get anywhere—especially when it seems like we've got a customer on the string. Lum's already spilled the news there's a coupla tramps at the fair-grounds with a trotter, to spend the winter—see.

NEXT morning I go out to the track with Tommy after breakfast, and he harnesses old Lamentation. Then he throws a blanket over her, and keeps her in the stall. I sit down on a bale of hay out in the sun, front of the stall, and after a while here comes the fly walkin' right into our parlor. Anyway, it's the fly's ambassador, or messenger boy. Young fellow, drivin' a roan mare to an exercise bike. He jogs past, nods to me and goes on over toward the track.

"All right, Tommy," I said, and we bring out old Lam and hook her up to the sulky. I climb aboard, and jog around the grounds. After while I turn in onto the track, and sure enough, here's this young guy, jogging his roan mare. He comes by me. "Morning," I said. "Great day for a work-out."

"Yeah," he says, short, and goes on around the track, while I turn around and go up to the head of the stretch. Fiddle around awhile, and he comes around again.

"Mind if I jog along with yuh?" I said.

"Help y'rself," he says. So I speak to old Lam, and we trot along beside them.

"Nice place to winter here," I said.

"Yeah? Think so?" he says. "Strangers here?"

"Why, yes, but my pardner used to hang out in these parts," I said. "Tommy Tharp. Know him?"

"Never heard of him," says the boy.

And so we jogged along, and talked about this and that. Worked a half. And then in the second half, after the boy's been kinda sizin' up old Lam outa the corners of his eyes, I notice he's beginnin' to loosen up his roan mare.

"Well, I guess I'll be goin'," he says. "Wanta brush on home?"

"Don't care if I do," I yells at him. He's already a length in front of me. Goin' around the far turn, I push old Lam up to his shoulder, and hold her there. She's stiff as a board, but we're not step-pin' very fast. Headin' into the stretch. I take old Lam up beside him, and he starts drivin'. Pulls away from me, while

I pretend to be pushin' Lam. He beats me.

"Nice little brush we had," says the kid, when we've slowed down past the grandstand.

"Yeah, but my mare's sore," I said.

"Can she do better'n that?" he asks.

"Can she? Boy, this mare's good," I said. "In half an hour, soon's I can give her a rub-down, she can take 'at mare of yours."

"I'll be here," he laughs. "Gonna rub-down this mare myself. See what y'r old bunch of bones will do."

"She is kinda thin," I said. "Aint much on looks, but she can sure step. We'll take yuh, a mile, for five beans."

"You're on, for five dollars," he says, right quick. And I can see he figures he's picked up five berries. Which he has, because half an hour later, he takes his roan mare out and beats us two full lengths, trottin' around a two-sixteen clip.

"Too bad, old-timer," laughs this fresh brother of Mamie's. "Hate to take the money."

"Don't mind payin', on'y for two reasons," I said, handin' him a five spot. "One is, my mare's not as good as I thought she was. Other is, your roan is better."

"Yeah? Well, so long," he says, and heads outa the grounds. "Any time yuh wanta spend some more dough, lemme know."

THIS whole set-up looks too easy. Fact, I feel sorta 'shamed of myself. And old Lam, who's been through it as many times as I have, looks positively disgusted. Hangs her head down low while Tommy's rubbin' her. Tucks her tail in between her legs, and kinda sags all over the stall. Tommy don't say anything, for a long time. But finally, when he's got old Lam's legs bandaged, and a blanket over her, he speaks up.

"That mare is a Jaybird, all right. By Jason, which was a good trotter," says Tommy. "Can't remember the mare's name, but she's got a mark around thirteen, half-mile track. And if old Addison Buckley aint out here in the morning himself, I'm a liar."

"Does he know you?" I said.

"Don't think he does," says Tommy. "No reason why he should. I only know him by reputation, and by sight."

Kept an eye out the rest of that day, and all evening downtown, for Lum Bagley, but

I guess he's busy givin' this Mamie the grand rush. How he does it, with only those two tens, is more'n I can figure. Not that I'm gonna hand him any more, y'un-derstand. You don't see me wastin' any money on women. Buy 'em candy, and they eat it up. Buy 'em clothes, and they wear out. What's the use? Endless chain.

But to get at the details of this crime. Addison Buckley did show up next morning, and we went through the whole show all over again. Only he took ten dollars away from me, instead of five, and had three times as much kick out of it as the boy got. What? His roan mare, Red Bird, beats old Lam and me at a mile, with old Addison Buckley himself up in the pilot-house. I give 'em a run down the backstretch, just far enough to see what his roan mare's got, and then I'm satisfied. He goes on and takes us.

FROM that time on, things get all clotted up, they happen so fast. Some of the information I get from Lum Bagley, who by this time has got acquainted with Buckley, as bein' Mamie's beau. Part of it, I get from the boy, Buckley's trainer. And part of it comes from old Addison Buckley himself, a big, fattish kind of man, with a red mustache and a gold tooth.

The Bilboa Merchants Association is holdin' its annual Fall Festival a week from Saturday. Football game, pie-eatin' contest, band concert, and a corn-shuckin' championship—all under one tent, ladies and gentlemen, for the price of a single admission, twenty-five cents. To top off the show, the Merchants Association wants Addison Buckley to bring out Red Bird, his roan mare, for a match race with any trotter that can be produced, meaning my poor old Lamentation. Offer a purse of one hundred dollars for the race. The idea bein' to get all the farmers for fifteen miles around into town on Saturday, and sell 'em everything they'll need for the winter—before and after the program.

"What do you say?" says old Addison Buckley, who's come with two other men from the Merchants Association, to hunt me up at my boarding-house.

"Well, I don't know," I said. "Of course, I like it here in Bilboa, and I'd like to oblige you gentlemen. But my old mare's had a hard season, and the purse of a hundred dollars is not very large—"

"If that's what's holdin' yuh back," says Addison Buckley, prompt enough, "you

and I can easily fix that up between ourselves."

"You mean a side-bet?" I said. "I don't know about that. I'm not a betting man, and I can't afford to risk much, besides. 'Fraid I'm not in your class, Mr. Buckley."

"Oh, I'm no plunger, Mr. Perkins," he says, stickin' out his big chest. And then he adds, to impress these two small-town merchants: "I'd not wager over a thousand or so, myself."

"Too much for me," I said carefully. "Maybe two hundred and fifty, if I should decide to race my mare. But she's had a hard season, and—"

"Make it five hundred on the side," says Addison Buckley, givin' me the grand rush. "And the purse offered by the Association. How's that?"

"I'll have to think it over," I said.

"But Mr. Perkins," speaks up one of the committeemen, "we'd like to know, so we will have plenty of time to get out our publicity and advertising. A match race like this will bring a big crowd out, and we'd like to have as many people as we can get. Why can't you agree now to make the race?"

"In case," I said, real cautious, "in case I should want it done, could yuh keep the race out o' the papers? Yuh see, I can't afford to have it get all around that my mare—"

"Sure, sure," interrupts old Addison Buckley. "We'll keep it out of the papers. I don't blame you for not wanting it advertised that your mare has taken a beating. And it don't mean anything to me, for everybody around here knows how good my mare is. One more winning race wont mean much to her reputation."

"Well, in that case—" I begun.

"Fine, fine!" exclaim both the committeemen at once. "Then we'll call it settled! And we'll get our advertising out. Big crowd, lots of excitement. Cert'nly appreciate your cooperation, Mr. Perkins."

"Don't mention it," I said. And I hoped they wouldn't. This business we're in don't stand much advertisin', and the reason is not the reason old Addison Buckley plopped out, either. "And about that side-bet, Mr. Buckley, I'll have to let you know—"

"Might as well settle it too, with these men as witnesses," he says, anxious to have it all arranged.

"Oh, well—uh, five hundred?"

"Or more, if you like," he says.

"No, we wont make it more than that. Five's enough for me," I said. "Two heats in three. County fair judges to handle it, I suppose?"

AND so we let it stand. I was glad they went out about that time, for I wanted to laugh so bad I blame near broke a rib. When they had gone, Tommy Tharp heard me, and come in from his room. He didn't say a word. Just raised an eyebrow.

"All set," I said. "Your friend Addison Buckley is a very careful, experienced gambling man, Tommy."

"Yes," says Tommy thoughtfully. And I don't know to this day whether he got my sarcasm or not—any more than I know what really happened in the case of Lum Bagley, the long-legged fool.

As far as I could see, Lum Bagley was throwing us down, hard and flat. Come the day of the race, and there's a whale of a crowd out. Every farmer in twenty miles is here with his family, and half the town of Bilboa is on hand besides. Ballyhoo, brass bands, balloons and everything. I've got my five hundred dollars up against Addison Buckley's. And I've gave Lum three hundred more to bet wherever he can, on old Lamentation at even money, or better if he can get it.

"Lam's in good shape today," says Tommy Tharp. "Never seen her better. She oughta take this track around two-twelve, easy."

"Hope she can," I said. "She may have to step that fast to beat Addison Buckley's roan mare."

"She can do it," says Tommy. He's rubbin' Lamentation down after her early work-out. The old mare seems as full of pep as she ever seems. But she hangs her head, and clamps her tail down tight, like she was ashamed to be caught in such doin's. Of course, bein' blind, she can always offer up her excuse that she can't see what she's trottin' through; but then, old Lam never has any alibis. Honest, straightforward old mare. Nothin' dishonest about her except her owner.

I look around for Lum, because he oughta be reportin' on his end of the game. It's two o'clock, and we're scheduled to go out for the first heat at half-past. No sign of Lum. At a quarter after, I take a walk through the grounds, but see nothin' of him. At twenty-five minutes after, I go back to the stall, givin' up Lum for lost, strayed or stolen.

"If he didn't have three hundred of my money," I said to Tommy, "I should worry. Good riddance!"

"Yeah," Tommy says, gabby as a fish.

"Well, let's hook up old Lam," I said. "Time to get out on the track."

BUT just as I was goin' in her stall to bring her out to the bike, here come Lum Bagley, the long-legged boob. And what was more, here come this girl Mamie he'd fell for so hard! Can yuh beat that? Bringin' this gal, whose brother trained old man Buckley's mare, right around to our stall! I could of kicked him. And I guess he saw how I felt, because he kinda ducked when I looked at him.

"Well, hello, Mr. Bagley," I said, sarcastic. "How's things?"

"Slow, slow," he says, givin' me the wink. "Lemme introduce Miss Porter, Mr. Perkins. Mr. Perkins, this is Miss Porter, a friend of mine. How are you, Perkins? Didn't know you were in these parts."

"Not so good," I said. "Stopped off here in Bilboa to winter with my mare, and they've dragged me into a race. Pretty busy," I said. "Due on the track right now."

"Oh, is that the horse that's to race against Mr. Buckley?" asks this Mamie, a tall, willowy-lookin' gal, with great blue eyes. Small-town vamp, playin' the baby stare stuff. Oh, I got 'em catalogued. And Lum's fell for her!

"Is that your mare, Perk?" says Lum. And he turns to this Mamie. "Yes, that's her. Lamentation's her name, Perk? Yes? Queer name for a horse." And he waves his hand to indicate Miss Porter can give a look.

"Do you mind?" she says, turnin' to me.

What could I say? In the hole, I had to admit she was welcome, when I'd have seen her anywhere else first. She went in the stall, like she'd been raised right around horses. Tommy was out gettin' the bike backed around ready to hook up. When she went inside to say hello to old Lam, I grabbed this boob Bagley.

"Listen," I said. "Got that money up?"

"We-ell, no," he said. "Yuh see—"

"Then listen, yuh pore fish!" I said. "You drop this skirt in a hurry, and get out and place it somewhere. Think I'm racin' for fun? Hurry, and I'll stall around on the track to give yuh time."

"But listen, Perk, I can't throw her down," says Lum. "Wait, wait—yuh see,

I'm figurin', if yuh lose the first heat, I can get two to one for the money."

"Say, felluh," I says, "I'm not guarantee-in' I'll win the first heat. But you take it from me, I'm gonna try. This Buckley's mare's good. I can't work any funny stuff here. I'm out to win in two straight heats, and nothin' else. You beat it, and get that jack down, quick."

JUST then Miss Porter, this Mamie, come out o' the stall. Tommy went in to bring out old Lam, and the track marshal for the day come rushin' up in his flivver to demand that we appear for the race.

"Mr. Buckley's already on the track, sir," he says, very important.

And there you are! I'm tryin' to figure a stall.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Perkins," says this Mamie, full-moonin' me with them big blue eyes. "Good luck, but I'm rooting for Mr. Buckley, you know. Thanks for letting me see your horse." And she sorta smiles, like a cat that's just stole the cream.

Takin' Lum's arm, she slouches away, while I stand and scowl after 'em.

"Well, Mr. Perkins, shall I report to the judges you are ready?" says this important track marshal.

"Quick as we can hook up," I said. And I turned to Tommy. "All right, let's go," I said. "Bring out the mare, Tommy."

We hitched up, and I clumb onto the bike. Generally lead the mare out, but we were late, so I drove on the track.

"Everything O. K., Tommy?" I said. "Is the cotton in her ears?"

"Yep," says Tommy.

Well, old Lam and me got quite a reception when we drove down in front of the grandstand. This big crowd, favorin' the home horse, would of roasted anybody's trotter, but when they saw what a poor, starved figure old Lam cut, they begun razzin' us to a fare-you-well. Laughin', jokin', hootin' and whistlin'! But we're used to it.

"Mister, git a hoss," yells one boy, and the crowd laughs.

"Don't pay any attention to them, Mr. Perkins," says Buckley, drivin' alongside of me, back up the stretch. "They don't know any better."

"Don't mind it, except when they say, 'Git a hoss,'" I said. "That makes me sore because I got a horse. Second to none, and they'll find it out in a minute."

"Think so?" he says, good-natured.

"Absolutely," I said.

"Think so another five hundred dollars' worth?" he says, sharp.

"Of course," I said. And then I wished I'd never said a word—because, s'posin' Lum Bagley gets my three hundred up? That would leave me shy the dough to settle if I should lose. See?

Take a long breath, and we turn around and score. Go down even, and both of us nod to the judge. He lets us go, and I start right out to win 'at race right there. Old Lam's feelin' like a reg'lar Lou Dillon, and we go right away from 'at roan mare like she's tied. I grab the rail, and make Addison Buckley and his roan eat our dust. First time around, we look great. Crowd sits dumb, not used to seein' anybody trim that roan mare. Parade!

I cuss Lum Bagley every step. And same time, hope he's got 'at money bet. Thirteen hundred win, and the hundred-dollar purse—that boosts my stake from eleven hundred beans to darn near twenty-five hundred. Not so bad, in ten days, for three tramps and an old blind mare, hey?

So we come trottin' down the stretch the second time. I look over my shoulder. Buckley's drivin', now. Here he comes. I let out a wrap on old Lam. The crowd begins to root. Buckley comes up till his mare's head reaches my side. The crowd goes crazy. It shrieks, screams, whistles, hollers and stamps its feet. You'd think here was the Kentucky Derby, from the racket. But I only laugh to myself until—
Bloolie!

Up jumps old Lam, from a trot to a run. I jerk her down quick as I can, but the wire's right here, and the heat's finished, Buckley's roan mare leadin' us by a head!

Good night! It happens so quick I can't do a cussed thing. And while I'm tryin' to figure out what's the trouble, that fool country town crowd's givin' me the razz so hot and heavy I can't hear myself think! When we pass the grandstand on the way back up the track to the stables, the crowd takes up the hootin' and razzin' again, and old Lam tries to break and run away with me. Skittish as a colt—and then I've got the answer.

With my thousand dollars, the last cent I've got in the world, at stake, I've been double-crossed! Dirty work at the cross-roads, I'll tell the world, and when I get hold of Lum Bagley, I'll jerk him loose from his big Adam's apple or my name's not Perkins. Nor never was! And like

as not, he's gone and put up the other three hundred, too, so's I'm out more'n I've got money to pay. Here's the jail, yawnin' for me. I'll kill 'at guy yet.

"Tommy," I said, as quick as I could get back to the stall with him and old Lamentation, who's lookin' sad and ashamed of herself. "Tommy, look in the mare's ears!"

He did, and then he looked at me like he oughta square himself.

"But I put that cotton in there, Mr. Perkins," he says, solemn. "On the level—"

"I'm not doubtin' you for a minute," I said. "But d'yuh s'pose that girl could of been wise?"

I looked at Tommy, and he at me.

"A regular Delilah trick, I'd say," says Tommy after a long time.

"How's that?" I said.

"She comes right in here and shorns us of our strength," he says.

"Shorns is right," I said. "But here, let's get busy. Rub the mare down, walk her out a little, and then when we hook her up again, let's be sure about that cotton. These crowds and their terrible noises sure do worry a sensitive old girl like Lam."

"If you was blind and somebody drove you head on into pandemonium," says Tommy, slow, "you'd act up too."

WELL, sir, I never said anything to that, because Tommy was right, dead right. And so was old Lam, the next time out. The crowd give us the razz, for fair, but we should worry. I made my race just the same way as I had the first time. Buckley had the pole again, and I was outside. We scored, and I shot out with old Lam like we was goin' to a fire. She clamped down her tail and lowered her head like she was bustin' head on into a storm, and raced fair and true. First time around, we passed the grandstand two lengths to the good. Crowd laughed and booed, expectin' us to come a cropper again.

Second time down the home-stretch, with old Lam clickin' it off steady like a clock, I looked around for old man Buckley.

"I'm comin'," he yelled.

"Make it snappy," I said. "We wont wait long!"

And we didn't. Not any! He swings wide to come up outside us, but he never come up. We went away from there, Lam trottin' a two-minute clip. And when the crowd got up on its hind legs and roared,

and clapped, and screamed, and whistled for the roan mare, old Lamentation stepped it off under the wire as if nobody was noisier'n a kitten on a rug.

Boy, I breathed a lot easier. And I swore I'd beat Lum Bagley's head off if he didn't get that money placed.

THE third heat? Nothin' to it. We took 'em, like Grant took Richmond, only a darn sight quicker.

So I collected my hundred from the Merchants Association committee chairman, up in the judges' stand, and he handed over my five hundred, and Addison Buckley's too. But when I went out to look for old man Buckley, he was gone. Didn't find him at the stall where his mare'd been. Left Tommy to take care of Lam, and went downtown. He wasn't at the hotel, and he wasn't at his ice-and-coal office, either. Called up his house, and he wasn't there.

Hustled around to my room to get my things and Tommy's. We have to leave, yuh see. Never stay around a town very long after a race. And when I get to my room, here's a pencil note from Lum Bagley, the long-legged boob.

"Mr. Buckley will be around in a minute with the sheriff," he says in this note. "I'm sorry I cannot stay. Next stop ecos."

While I was cussin' him out as quitter, and tryin' to make sure that "*ecos*" meant the next eastern county seat, I heard somebody downstairs on the front porch. And then the landlady knocked on my door. Company to see me, she said. So I took my nerve in my hand and went down.

Sheriff of Owosso County, big as any house, and uglier'n most! Old Addison Buckley, mad as a motorist minus gas in the country.

"There he is, there he is!" busts out Buckley as I go in the room.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself," says this sheriff, standin' up so's I could see he's six feet four. Believe me, I had to think fast.

"Who'm I talkin' to?" I said, tryin' to be pleasant when my knees was knockin'.

"Shur'f of this county," says he.

"And he's got a warrant for fraud, alii sworn out, this minute," growls Buckley.

"What fraud, and for who?" I said.

"What fraud—who?" screams Buckley, lookin' like he'll have apoplexy in a minute, or sooner.

"Yes," I said, cool. "I was just goin' out to look for the sheriff myself."

"**M**ean to say you didn't drag me into this thing, and then stuff your mare's ears with cotton, and take it out, and jockey around like a crook to trim me?" yells old Addison Buckley.

"Wait," I said. "The sheriff can ask the Merchants Association committee who dragged who into this race. They'll say you suggested it, and insisted. I didn't wanta race, and said so. As for cotton in my mare's ears, there's no law against that. She's blind, and when she hasn't got cotton in her ears, big noises upset her."

"Yes, but takin' it out, and rimmin' me for another bet, and at odds, too, and then puttin' it back, so's she'll trot—"

"Wait a minute," I said, and I turned to the sheriff. "Do you know Miss Mamie Porter, sister of the boy who trains for Mr. Buckley?"

"Yes, I do," he growls.

"Well, all I've got to say is, that this girl come to my stall, and while I was talkin' to another party, she goes in the stall and takes the cotton out of my mare's ears. I can prove that, but you just ask her. Ask her if she got orders from Mr. Buckley, will you?"

And with that I turns on old man Buckley and give him glare for glare.

"If it comes down to fraud," I said, "I've got a complaint of tamperin' with my horse. Poor old Lamentation's blind, not to mention bein' fourteen year old. I do the humane thing by puttin' cotton in her ears, to protect her against panic and a possible runaway if she should hear the noise of all this big crowd rootin' for you and your roan mare. Then your trainer's sister comes snoopin' around, and takes the cotton out of poor old Lam's ears. S'pose I file a complaint with the trottin'-horse association! S'pose I tell the newspapers what good game sports there are in Bilboa, where the whole county turns out against one guy and his old blind mare. S'pose—"

But just as I was gettin' warmed up for fair, old Addison Buckley caves in. He gives this bull of a sheriff the high sign to wait outside. And then he says to me:

"Perkins, this thing still looks fishy to me, but I'm whipped. What do you want?"

"Want? Want?" I said. "W'y, listen, since yuh mention it, I'm not askin' a thing. Except, of course, you'll remember we had a little bet on this race, and—"

"Oh, of course," he says, sorta tryin' to act the good felluh and square himself

with me. "I've got the money right here with me." And he counted out five hundred in fifties. "You're good, Perkins. If you're gonna stay around here, you and I oughta do some business—together."

"Wouldn't wonder myself," I said. "Look me up Monday."

BUT Monday, Tommy, Lam and I were camped down soft for a rest at Veedleston, next county seat east. Didn't care to stay in Bilboa while Addison Buckley thought things over. Tommy was out at the Veedleston fair-ground. Old Lam was hangin' her head, sorta 'shamed and tired. Lum Bagley?

Mebbe yuh think I didn't brace him when I found him in the hotel poolroom! I cert'nly laid him out for fallin' for this Delilah Mamie Porter, who shorned us of our strength and blame near spilled the beans. And for failin' to get that money up.

"Oh, now, Perk," he says, drawlin', "have a heart. This Mamie was a right nice girl. Sympathetic, too, and kind-hearted! When I told her about the cotton in Lam's ears, she couldn't stand it. Said it was cruel."

"Wait, wait," I yelled. "You told her?"

"Sure," he says.

"Tried to queer our game, hey?" I said. I got ready to crown him, at that.

"No, tried to boost it," he said, grin-nin'. "Figured Lam would break, we'd lose the first heat, and then mebbe I c'd get some odds on the race."

"Well, then, why *didn't* yuh?" I demanded, hot all through.

"Did," says Lum. "Three to one, and collected nine hundred!"

He relights his old stogie while I try to get my breath.

"From who?" I said finally.

"Addison Buckley," says Lum, blowin' out a cloud of stale smoke. "That's what made him so mad he got the sheriff out."

"Nine and eleven are twenty—two thousand," I said. "Not so bad for ten days in these times when horses are fadin' outa the picture. What was that crack yuh made about the Third Richard?"

"He didn't want a blind horse," says Lum, laughin'.

"Nor wouldn't get any, either," I said, "for any kingdom he had to swap."

"The Gentler Sexs," another amusing story by Jonathan Brooks, will appear in early issue.

The Strong Cord

An intensely real and convincing detective story of a new sort, by the author of "Two and Two at Too Dry."

By WILLIS

JOHNNY WATTERSON burst into the engine-house, breathless with running and with excitement, to report the murder of Grandma Eng, at a moment critical to Cap Moulton.

"Grandma Eng's—"

"Shut up!"

Johnny Watterson shut up.

Cap Moulton needed four points in his smear game to go out. He had the jack, ten and deuce of diamonds. If the jack stood up, it would count for high, and with the deuce for low and ten for game, he would make his four points, and the fire chief would owe him ten cents.

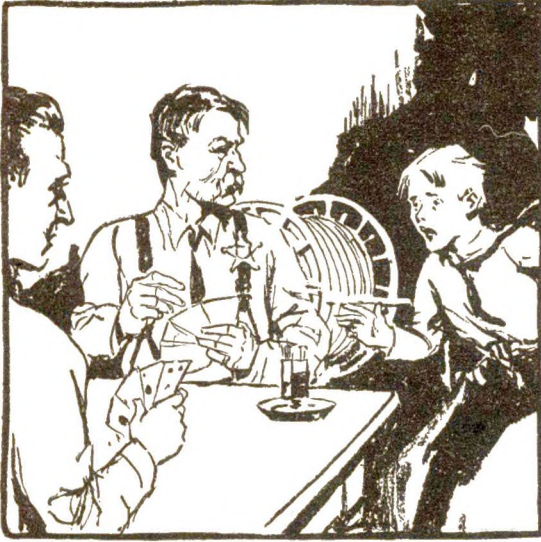
Cap slammed down his jack. The unfortunate fire chief trailed with a six, his only diamond. The game was won. Cap collected ten cents and turned to Johnny Watterson.

"Grandma Eng's dead!" Johnny Watterson exploded.

"Well, it's about time," Cap commented, without emotion. "Your deal, Fred."

"But she didn't die natural." Johnny danced in his excitement. He was about twelve, freckled, barefooted. "She was strangled."

"Huh?" Cap half turned his great bulk which bulged between the rounds of the ancient bar-chair in which he sat. He regarded Johnny Watterson with terrible severity. Boys of twelve, freckled and



BRINDLEY

bareheaded, have been known to play jokes on town marshals.

"My mother, she went in to do her up, and she found her with her head by the fireplace and all dead—strangled. She says you will please come quick."

Cap got up, not pleased. Always something—

"Remember, it's your deal, Fred, when I come back. Guess I'll have to go with this kid."

HE started then, lumbering behind Johnny Watterson, who danced ahead. It was hot, and the Marshal wore no coat. His badge of authority was pinned to wide-web galluses, and an enormous revolver swung at his right hip in a holster. A big man, slow but impressive. A small crowd followed, as he made his way to the residence of the late Mrs. Eng. A vacuum-sweeper agent stared. Housewives shaking out dust-mops gaped. Joe Butler, the postman, passing on the other side of the street, waved a hurried greeting. Cap and his gang proceeded.

A knot of curious had gathered at the house, which was a small frame cottage, decked in the gingerbread of the late eighties, but sadly in need of paint, set far back in a weed-grown yard, behind a fence from which pickets were missing and whose gate swung crazily by a single hinge.

Mrs. Watterson, mother of Johnny, stood guard at the front door, her large, aproned person nearly filling it.

"I told 'em all that nobody was to enter this house until the authorities had been here," she said, "and not a person's been in. You can see her just where she lays."

"That's right, Mrs. Watterson." Cap climbed the steps, pushing through the crowd. "You can all go home now, all of you. I'll let you know when there's any news."

They went, a little way, but hung about the gate—all but Johnny Watterson, who, taking to himself privileges as an insider, ducked under his mother's arm and into the house. Mrs. Watterson flattened herself against the door jamb to let the Marshal squeeze by, then followed him in.

A long, narrow hall led to a rear room—a room sparsely furnished with a big old-fashioned walnut bed placed so that the occupant could see the door, an old walnut chest of drawers cornerwise in one corner, two splint-bottomed chairs, a rag rug.

A dead fireplace in the end wall opposite the bed, and in front of it a heap of something covered by a quilt. This was Mrs. Eng, or had been. Cap Moulton turned back the quilt. The dead woman's shrunken neck showed clearly the mark of a rope or cord which had been used to strangle her, and a bruise at her throat might have been made by a fist, used as a tourniquet.

CAP MOULTON pawed around, looking for the rope, but found none. He turned the quilt back over the face, and sank, creaking, into one of the splint-bottom chairs. Mrs. Watterson found another, and wiped her damp brow with her apron. Johnny stood, wiggling.

"It was Elmer done it," Mrs. Watterson said. "God deliver me from such a son."

"Yes? Bad egg, I guess. What makes you think it was Elmer?"

"He was here, last night. I saw him." Mrs. Watterson leaned forward in her excitement. "I saw him—anyway, his shadow on the shade. I could see him shaking his fist at her, but she wouldn't let him have it, and after a while he went away, reeling-like, as if maybe he was drunk. But he came back afterward, that's clear, after he'd got a few more drinks, and done it."

Cap Moulton drew a cob pipe and tobacco from a hip pocket, loaded up and

lighted, while Johnny Watterson watched, entranced.

"Bad egg, I guess. You didn't see him come back, I suppose?"

"No—I went to sleep; but he could easy have came back, and none the wiser, she living here alone, although many and many's the time I've told her she had no business to, her with money and could have afforded to have somebody look after her decent."

"She couldn't get around much, could she? Kind of crippled up, wasn't she?"

"She had a fall, two years ago—her hip broke, and she could just barely move around. I did for her, mornings, and I'd drop in and see her now and then. Poor soul, nobody hardly came to see her."

"I see. Well, what time did you come to see her this morning?"

"This morning! Why, Captain Moulton, you don't think I—"

"No, I don't think you killed her, but somebody did. Now, just when did you come in, to—to do for her, to do up her morning chores? What time did you come this morning?"

"This morning? Why, this morning I didn't come till after ten—till after the postman had gone. This is the first of the month."

"Oh," said Cap, "I see. Only I don't just see, Mrs. Watterson. What's the first of the month got to do with it?"

"Why, that's when Ike Blum pays his rent for the Bon Ton Store. A hundred dollars it is, every month, and always on the first. He mails it, in new bills—five new twenty-dollar bills, in a thick envelope. And of course I don't come in to do her up that morning until after he's gone, because she wouldn't want me to know where she hides it."

"I see," replied Cap. "And where did she hide it?"

"I—I don't know. Johnny, you shut up."

Cap Moulton swung on the boy, piercing him with a devastating eye. Johnny's lip quivered. He made rings with a bare toe on the dusty floor.

"You better tell me, Johnny."

"Kin I?" Johnny looked at his mother. She nodded, worried.

"I peeked once," he said in a strained, scared voice. "I peeked through the winder—the shade wasn't clean down. There's a loose brick, and a money-box behind, and she took down the brick and pulled out the box and counted the money,

and they was millions and millions of dollars in that box. I seen 'em."

Cap Moulton smiled.

"Let's look now."

JOHNNY ran to the fireplace, and with the point of a knife-blade wiggled a loose brick in the upper right-hand corner of the facing. This removed, he reached in and drew out a small, narrow tin box, similar to the boxes used in safe-deposit vaults. Cap Moulton took it from him. The box had no lock. Cap lifted the lid, while Johnny and his mother crowded close. There was nothing in the box.

"Elmer asked me once, but I wouldn't tell him, you bet," said Johnny. "Elmer's a bad guy. Gosh, I don't see how anybody could kill his mother, do you?"

"Well, it is kind of hard to believe. This Elmer, now, was all the boy she had, wasn't he? I remember that old man Eng died eight-ten years ago. This Elmer was always pestering her for money, wasn't he? What seemed to be the trouble with him?"

Mrs. Watterson, hands crossed on ample stomach, rocked in the splint-bottom chair. Now she stopped rocking, and leaned forward, tight-lipped.

"Drink—and his father before him. She'd let him have a little money, sometimes, but he hadn't been here, before last night, for months. And do you know what I think? I think he's been in jail."

"More'n likely. Well, now, you're sure the postman was all that's been here this morning? Sometimes these yeggs, you know, let on they're gas inspectors, or water inspectors or census men."

"I know. But nobody was here this morning. I live right next door, you know, and I was watching, myself. She's always worried, you know, for fear Ike Blum wont pay his rent, and—"

"You were just a little curious, so you watched. But the postman came all right, did he? Why do you suppose he didn't find the body?"

"The postman? Why, he didn't go in, at all. He'd walk into the house, you know, and down the hall to her room, and knock, and she'd let him in, and he'd deliver the envelope and have her sign the registry receipt thing—that red card, you know. But this morning she didn't answer when he knocked—dead, the poor thing; she couldn't answer. I saw him come in, and after a while he came back, and he saw me, and called to me, and

he looked kind of funny like a body would and said: 'I couldn't get in, Mrs. Watterson. Do you suppose there's something the matter? Have you been over this morning?' And I told him I didn't know, and I hadn't been over, and he said he'd try again on the afternoon delivery."

"I see. Well, then what did you do?"

"Why, I didn't do anything for a while, and then I thought she must be sick, being old and all, and Johnny and I came over, after half an hour or so, and we knocked, and she didn't answer, so finally I opened the door and—she was lying there." She shuddered, covering her face with her hands. "She was just in her night dress, in a heap like that. I covered her with a quilt, and Johnny went for you. Hadn't I better send for the undertaker, to do for her?"

"No, I guess not—not yet. But you go on home now—you've had enough. I'll wait around a bit, and I guess Johnny can stay. Boy like that comes in handy at times, for errands and such."

"We-ell." She got up to go, hesitating. "You'll be careful with Johnny—he has bad dreams sometimes. —And Johnny, you do just exactly what Captain Moulton tells you—just exactly."

Johnny contrived a dutiful "Yes'm." Cap Moulton said nothing. For a long time he sat perfectly still, in the creaky splint-bottom chair, smoking and looking into the dead fireplace. An old clock ticked reverberantly. A cat came from the adjoining kitchen, looked around, circled the room, and returned to the kitchen.

"Kind of poke around in the ashes, Johnny, and see if you find anything," Cap said at last.

GLAD to be doing something, Johnny hopped to it. He felt with bare toes, got down on hands and knees and pawed around with his fingers, discovering sundry bent and half-consumed nails, a small piece of glass from a broken bottle, the corner of a red card, a fragment of brown envelope with a canceled stamp on it. These latter exhibits the Captain examined with interest, grunting. He knocked out the heel from his pipe, and spat into the grate.

"I reckon we better be looking around for something to eat. Getting on past dinner-time."

"We could have dinner at our house," Johnny suggested, "or Ma could bring us something over here."

"Well, I guess not. We'll slide into the kitchen and maybe pick a snack of something, though it will be lean picking, I reckon. I imagine the old lady warn't such a hearty eater."

They found bread, and some sickly cheese, and the heel of a piece of sausage. No coffee, and Cap wouldn't bother with tea. Johnny ate the sausage, and some crackers that had been opened too long. Cap poked around a cupboard, discovering old fruit-jar caps, sick rubber washers, corks with the narrow end squeezed and discolored, a short piece of heavy cord.

They finished the unsatisfactory meal and returned to the room in which the dead woman lay, and Cap resumed his seat in the creaky splint-bottom chair. For a time he slept, breathing heavily. Johnny killed a few flies. It was getting pretty dull for him. Looking up the street, he saw Joe Butler, the postman, going up on the other side. At the corner, he knew, he would cross the street, and turn back. Maybe Captain Moulton ought to be told. Johnny shook him gently, and told him.

"All right," Cap said to that. "I guess I'll ask him in for a bit, and I'd a little mite rather you weren't here, or anyway in sight. Suppose you climb over that chest of drawers and slip down into the corner behind, and if you sneeze or anything, I'll brain you sure."

HE went to the door then, and lounged in it, waiting for the postman. The curious, discouraged, had left the front yard. It was hot, and dead quiet.

The postman crossed the street at the corner, turned back. Nothing, Cap reflected, stops a postman. Having rounds to make, he makes them.

Now he stopped at Mrs. Watterson's, leaving a bulky catalogue, and then, with his quick, jerky stride, stepped along the short flagged path to the cement walk and turned left. A lithe, active man, his face swarthy florid, shaved blue—too lively, you would have said, for a postman.

"Oh, Joe," Cap called to him. He turned in, but hesitated halfway up the weedy path.

"I've got a registered letter, but—you want to sign for it?"

"Yes, I'll sign for it. Come in a minute."

The postman came, unhurriedly.

"I heard about this, of course—terrible thing, isn't it? She didn't answer when I

knocked this morning, but I never dreamed—”

“Come in a minute.”

Cap Moulton held the screen door open, and the postman walked into the hall, and then, as Cap jogged him, down to the room at the back of the house, and into it. He drew back in horror at sight of the huddled heap covered by the quilt.

“Is that it? Why don’t you get her out of here? Sign this and let me get gone. Gives me the creeps.”

“Yes, I imagine it does.” Cap Moulton signed the red card, and took the letter, in its brown envelope bearing the return address of the Bon Ton Store, Ike Blum, Prop. “Sit down a minute.”

“I’ve got to be going.”

“Sit down!”

Joe Butler, the postman, sat down, gingerly, on the edge of a splint-bottom chair, moving his pack into his lap.

“I suppose you don’t read detective stories much, Joe. No? Well, they’re interesting, some of them, and have some good ideas in them. I been thinking about one that I read a few nights ago—about a French boy, this was. Seems this boy had a job delivering meat for a butcher, and he used to deliver every day to a rich old geezer that lived alone—kind of a miser, only he fed himself good.”

The postman squirmed unhappily, but Cap went on with it.

“Well, this miser lived alone, and cooked his own meat, fixing it up with the finest kind of sauces, so that it must have smelled awful good to that poor kid, who hardly ever had anything decent to eat himself. And the miser would let the kid watch, while he prepared the meal, and then let the kid watch him eat it, and he never gave the kid so much as a bite. The kid got to brooding over it, and figuring how it wasn’t fair for this rich man to have all the good eats, and one day, when the miser had finished cooking his fine dinner, what do you suppose that kid did?”

The postman started to rise.

“Sit down! Why, the kid just picked up a sharp knife, when the miser’s back was turned, and stabbed him with it, in the neck, and then ate the dinner. Perfectly normal thing for him to do, I’d say.”

THE postman was leaning forward, staring. Now he leaned back, moistening his lips.

“I been sitting here figuring out what might have happened in this case, Joe—just what might have happened. We’ve got a kind of similar case. Here’s an old woman with no proper need of money—just herself and a no-account son, and she gets a hundred dollars every month. The man who delivers it is a family man, and underpaid. He gets to brooding over it, and it don’t seem right to him, and so he figures out a little scheme.”

The postman contrived a laugh, but not a happy one.

“I’m beginning to get it. Go on.”

“I’m going to. Well, it wasn’t just easy in every way, and yet not altogether hard. He had the big advantage of being the one person nobody’d suspect. He could come to the house on a legitimate errand—to deliver a letter. But of course, if he actually delivered the letter, that fact would be evidence that he’d been in the room. He must account to Uncle Sam for that letter, because it was a registered letter. Also, it wouldn’t be worth while just to steal a hundred dollars—he needed the whole pile that she’d been saving, and he didn’t know where she kept the pile. It was kind of a tough one, wasn’t it?”

The postman laughed again.

“Small-town stuff, Cap.”

“Maybe. Well, the postman finally figured out a way. He made a dummy letter, which was easy—just picked up one of Ike Blum’s envelopes when he was in his store one day, and put five twenty-dollar bills in, having first addressed the envelope on a typewriter. Then he hooked onto one of Uncle Sam’s red cards that a person has to sign as receipt for a registered letter, and filled it out. How does that sound?”

“Dream on.”

“Well, it was a good scheme, but it took quite a while to get up nerve to work it, but one day he heard that the old woman’s no-account son Elmer was in town, and he figured that suspicion would naturally turn to him, so now was a good time. So the postman marched up the steps like always, and down the hall to the room where the old woman lived, and knocked, and she let him in, and he delivered the dummy letter, and got her receipt on the dummy card, and then he walked out and down the hall and opened the front door again, and slammed it—but from the inside! Then he just waited a minute or two in the hall, and sneaked back to the door and

opened it quick, and there was the old woman with the loose brick out of the fireplace and the money-box in her hands. And she swung around scared, and he—"

"That's a damn lie!"

"Stay where you are. This is my story. Well, she was old and weak, and it didn't take but a minute, and he had a stout cord in his pack that he used for tying up letters that was handy for the job. And after it was over, the postman burned the envelope of the dummy letter and burned the dummy card, and put the empty box back into its cubbyhole in the front of the fireplace, and put the brick back into place, and went on his way. And on his way out, he saw the woman next door, which was luck, and told her how he hadn't been able to deliver the letter, because the old woman didn't answer his knock."

The postman was leaning forward, hands clenched. A cold perspiration stood out on his forehead. He moistened his lips, but did not speak. Cap Moulton got up, creaking, and lumbered over to where the body of Mrs. Eng lay, covered by the quilt. He turned back the quilt, until head and neck were exposed.

"Look, Joe, you can see where the cord bit into her neck."

The postman stared, moistening his lips, but still he did not speak.

"I don't know, when you get right down to it, that it matters so much. She was about done, anyway, and nothing much to live for, and yet we've always been opposed to murder in this country."

HE walked over to the fireplace, and with the point of his knife, worked the loose brick back and forth until he could take it out, and then removed the tin box from the cubbyhole.

"It's a funny thing, Joe, but no matter how carefully a man plans a thing, he's pretty sure to overlook something. When we opened the box, the money was gone. Would you like to see what's in the box now?"

"No."

"Well, I'll tell you, and then you can take a look, Joe. There's nothing in the

box but a little piece of strong cord—just a little piece that maybe broke off, and the murderer dropped it in by mistake. Look, Joe, look!"

He held the box forward, low, so that the sitting man might look into it, and he looked. Then he leaped to his feet, and yelled:

"It's a lie! That's not my string! My string is brown, and that's red!"

HE sank back into his chair, quivering. Cap stood over him.

"All right, Joe. That's not your string—I found it—out in the kitchen. But you killed the woman with your string, didn't you, Joe?"

"Yes—no, no, I didn't kill her. I don't know who killed her. You can't hang a man on stuff like this. What if I did kill her? But I didn't kill her. Let me out of here."

"We wont argue about it, Joe. Johnny, you can come out from behind that chest of drawers now. I knew you'd admit it, Joe, and I knew you'd deny it afterward; but the admission is what counts, and a twelve-year-old boy with freckles can remember things straight, and makes the best kind of a witness."

Johnny Watterson stood before them, heaving with excitement.

"You wont forget what you heard, will you, Johnny?"

"No! Oh, gosh, no, I couldn't ever forget. He did it."

"You can take the postman's pack to the post office, and tell the postmaster he'll have to get somebody to deliver what's left in it. Joe's going with me. And tell your mother she'd better be seeing about an undertaker."

"All right. I will. Gee, he admitted it. Who'd ever of thunk it? But say, Captain Moulton, how was it you didn't think it was Elmer did it?"

"Elmer? Well, son, Elmer had a reasonably good alibi. I picked up Elmer last night, drunk as a fiddler's goat, and threw him into the jail, so that Elmer, he couldn't have done it. Elmer, he probably don't know his mother's dead."

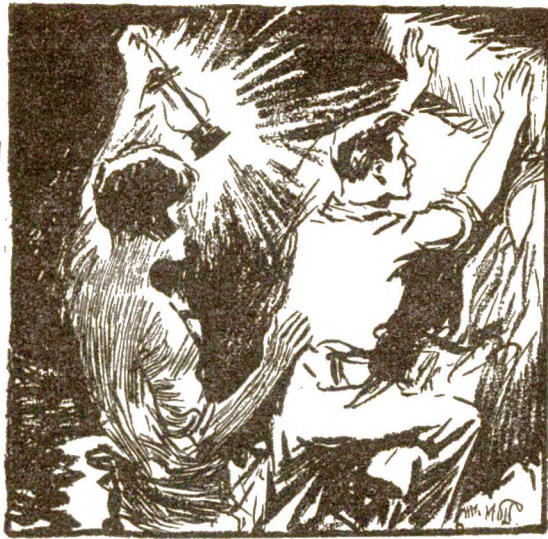
FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE, author of the famous *Buried Alive Club* stories, has written for *The Blue Book Magazine* a novel of exceptional interest—a story wherein his celebrated character Larry Redmond, star reporter, is a central figure. Be sure to read this absorbing story, which will be published complete in the next, the October, issue.



Photograph by Maurice Goldberg

ARTHUR MASON

SARGASSO or Arctic, it's all the same to this man, for he's tried them both and hasn't any choice. He ran away to sea when he was fourteen from his father's home in Ireland, and the call of the open is ever sounding in his ears. He's frozen on the Alaska tundras and fried on the Nevada desert, and the stories and books he writes are all drawn from the deep well of his own experience. Thus the story which follows has the true salt flavor of the sea. At the moment he is in Devonshire, England, writing another novel.



The Syncopated Sailor

A storm at sea—the small-boats smashed, and water gaining on the pumps: then it was that the freak of the forecstle showed his mettle: a fine story by a real sailor, author of "Aboard the Lazy Wave."

By ARTHUR MASON

WHEN the bark *Dragoon* sailed away from San Francisco, outward bound to Australia, she carried, in addition to her crew, the owner and his daughter. The Golden Gate was cleared and every rag was dragging to a northerly breeze, and the course was laid to the south'ard and west'ard when the first meal was served in the cabin; and as Dorothy Ryan took her place at the table, she realized that she was going to have a rather monotonous voyage.

The self-conscious officers, bashful in her presence, hung their heads, spooned up their soup, and said nothing. They even refused a second helping of bread pudding, an unheard-of luxury aboard that ship. With the red showing through the tan of their cheeks, they got up from the table and awkwardly made their way to the deck, where they sighed in relief.

"It aint fair to a sailorman," said the mate, "to bring womenfolk aboard of a ship. A man can't express himself properly with them around."

The second mate walked over to the

main hatch and slivered a toothpick off a batten. As he joined the mate again, prepared to comment on the situation, they were startled by hearing whistling up the mainmast.

Now, this was something out of the ordinary. For a man to jazz through his teeth in the fo'c'stle was distracting enough, but for such sounds to float down from the ship's rigging high up the mainmast was a thing not to be borne at all.

The mate's eyes glinted dangerously on the instant, and groped aloft, settling finally upon the spraddled form of a young sailor who was crawling down over the maintop, whistling a tune with jazz variations as he came.

"That's one of the fellows we shipped in Frisco," said the second mate. "We'll take that out of him before we cross the line."

"I don't know so much about that," said his superior officer. "With *her* on board, we can't trim them like we ought to."

The sailor whistled his way down to the deck, and the officers raked him with their eyes.

"I had a bit of a tussle with him," said the mate, "when I was catting the anchor."

"You did, eh?"

"Says he: 'Mr. Mate, you're behind the times.'"

"What," says I, 'the likes of you giving guff to *me*!' Then I looked aft and saw her walking the poop."

"That settled it," said the other.

"Aye, that it did. The nerve of him is what got *me*."

"You aint bringing that anchor up right," says he. 'This is the way to do it.' Damned if he didn't heave it up his way while I stood there speechless. Why, he just took my breath away!"

"He's one of them fo'c'stle lawyers," said the second mate with a grin. "His gab wont get him much with *me*."

"Well, I never felt so mortified in all the twenty-five years I've been going to sea," whined the mate.

"How does he size up with the crew?"

"They run at his bidding; he drowns them with words, and him not aboard a night yet, not even a night."

PETER RYAN, owner of the *Dragoon*, was a man of about fifty years, paunchy and square-shouldered, with a kindly eye, a bald head and a generous-looking mouth. He had two-reasons for making the voyage; the bark wasn't paying of late, even with high freights, being slow on the seas, and so eating herself up in overhead—an evil that he wanted to observe for himself. Then there were wool interests out in Australia that he had his eye on; who could tell how one pocket might be filled from the other?

Dorothy, his twenty-year-old daughter, care-free, wanted to go along.

"You'll die with lonesomeness," he told her. "I know sailors; they're all well and good ashore, but at sea they're no comfort to a woman."

"Oh, Father," she pleaded, "all I need to keep me happy is you and the stars and the sunsets."

He melted at that—who wouldn't, for Dorothy had her share of good looks; but she, knowing that she was not telling the truth, had the grace to turn aside her dark hazel eyes, veiling the light of conquest that glowed in them.

Now, as she walked the main deck and saw the two mates apparently unmindful of her presence, she saw that the world was a bleak place for a poor girl after all,

for a girl with a heart, and that on board ship all was taxation without representation. This thought being unbearable, she approached the mates.

"Isn't it a wonderful evening?" she said impartially, and they answered together:

"Yes, it is, mem." And together, without another word, they turned and mounted the steps to the poop, leaving her standing there. Moisture of disgust started to form in her eyes, but was checked by a sudden sound—the music from a phonograph. She saw the tiny musical thing setting on the fore hatch, and a sailor jazzing in front of it. Then she laughed, for she saw the eyes of other sailors peering around the nose of the forecandle, searching aft for trouble.

The music reached to the after end of the ship where the old hairy captain was deep in conversation with the owner. Their cigars dipped simultaneously in their jaws, and the mates, struck with awe, cocked their ears fearfully, wondering what the outcome would be.

Matters went altogether too far when, to the horror of the crew, the young sailor waltzed aft to where the girl stood, holding out his arms. Their weasel eyes blinked, and they sniffed as though there were pepper in the wind, when they saw him whirl her away to the roll of the bark and the piping of the phonograph.

Up and down the deck they danced until the music died away in the sunset, and the mate shouted:

"Hang out the sidelights!"

AN hour later, under the stars, Peter Ryan asked his daughter if she knew the sailor.

"No, Father; I never laid eyes on him until this morning."

"Well, Dorothy," said her father, "it seems to me you are carrying things pretty far, dancing with a common sailor. What will the captain and the officers think of you? It'll destroy discipline; it'll—"

"But, Father," she interrupted, "he's a nice man, and such a lovely dancer."

"He may be, my dear, but he is also an ocean hobo, and I mean to see that you do not dance with him any more."

He was angry; he went up to the mate, and spoke gruffly to him:

"Send that dancing sailor to *me*."

"He's a bad one, sir," said the mate enthusiastically as he made his way forward. Then he shouted into the forecandle:

"Tom Haines, go aft. The owner wants you."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you. Go aft and get what's coming to you; you deserve it."

The mate's eyes looked red in the smudge of the fo'c'stle glim. An old withered sailor whispered to the young man as he stepped out on deck:

"You're going to get beat up, young feller. Slip a belaying pin in yer pocket; I know many's the time I got it for less."

Tom smiled at him.

"Take care of those records till I come back, and don't worry about me," he said, and went his way to meet the owner, where he stood, aft by the mainmast. Tom held out his hand.

"You want to see me, sir?"

Peter Ryan ignored the proffered hand.

"You're a sailor on this ship. Do you know your place?"

Tom took a step closer.

"I *am* a sailor, Mr. Ryan, and I hope that we all are sailors on this ship. That's what is the trouble today—inefficient men fore and aft, officers afraid to carry sail, sailors that don't know how to make a sheepshank, masters that are so old they want to sleep all the time, neglect the ship; long voyages, bad food, poor wages, bilgewater; to get the most out of a man, and no money in the end for anyone."

Tom Haines kept right on talking; it was in vain that the owner tried to get in a word edgeways. The rapid fire of words kept going until Peter Ryan fairly trembled under them. When he finally rushed for the poop, he breathlessly asked the captain if he had a drop of grog to give him.

"I'm sure," said the captain as he handed him the glass, "that you cooked that sailor's goose."

"I don't know so much about that," wheezed the other. "He's more than a sailor, that fellow."

Dorothy came up out of the cabin and rested her hand on her father's arm.

"Did you tell him what was what, Father?" she smiled.

"There'll be no more dancing for you," said her father weakly.

THERE was little change in the weather for the next few days, although a heavy swell was making from the southwest, and the sky had a lazy sullen look about it. It was the time of year when the March winds reach away south to take a slap at

the north. So far, the bark was staggering along under all canvas, with the breeze fair and out of the north'ard.

The crew went about their work happily in the daytime, and in the night watches they'd huddle in the lee of the forecandle and listen to Tom Haines spin yarns of ghosts and sinking ships.

Their faces looked differently now; extensive white areas in contrast with their tan had taken the place of beards and mustaches, for Tom, himself clean-shaven, had undertaken the education of the forecandle in hygiene, and his first ultimatum had been that the whiskers had to go.

"You'll be healthy without those bug-nests," he told them; and the reform spread slowly from an unwilling forecandle to the officers, who dared not be left behind. So far, so good; but when the twenty-six-year-old, gray-eyed dictator substituted alphabetical names for their unpronounceable ones, and gave them bunks lettered accordingly, the air was blue with foreign wonder-terms.

"What is he up to now?" said the mate one evening to the bosun.

"He's bending their backs over the capstan, sir, to limber them up, he says. Whatever else he's planning," went on the bosun, presently, "I don't know; but I hear it said that he's the biggest liar that ever got into a ship's fo'c'stle. He tells them about ships that's sailed on top of islands. Damned if he doesn't almost make 'em believe that he's put sails on top of the trees and sailed the islands away. I heard myself last night, and I aint a man that is afeared of anything. He told a yarn about black coffins, mind ye, aboard of a ship, and I says to myself, says I: 'He aint a-goin' to get me all sweated up.'

"And I filled my pipe, and went to my room, and says I to Chips:

"'Don't listen to that feller: he'll get ye afraid of your shadow.'"

"I knew he was a liar," said the mate venomously, "the moment he came aboard."

"For all that, he is a fine sailor, sir, for the crew to look up to him like they do."

While they were talking, the sails slapped against the masts; the wind from the north had gone. The swell had a swash to it, and the bark, with no wind to steady her, rolled heavily. Sometimes her scuppers scooped a deckful of water.

Away to the westward a semicircle of pale yellow light showed where the last of

an old day was being dragged beyond the vision of a coming night. A little to the south of west clouds shot up, it seemed from nowhere, gaudy in flame linings as they trailed across the sky.

The captain and Peter Ryan stood abaft the man at the wheel. Their heads were together, and their eyes on the southern skies. Dorothy Ryan stood to windward of them, balancing herself with a handhold on the rail, while she watched the squinty eyes and puckered mouths of the watch on deck as, absorbed, they stood on the forecastle head listening to Tom Haines.

This youth, ignoring the distant attentiveness of the girl, was deep in a manufactured yarn about being waist-deep in boiling foam with the mast gone, and the old man aft with a broken leg, and the only food fish that the crew snared with their hands, when the mate's voice rang out through the twilight:

"Clew up and make fast the royals, and haul down the flying jib!"

With his mouth still telling his tale, Tom Haines' supple body was in the rigging before the older men had begun to move, and it was then that the girl clung a little more tightly to the rail, and her eyes softened to match the night.

At about eight o'clock that evening the wind came lifting stiffly out of the southwest, and the sea locked like a cotton-field ready for picking. The bark was snugged down to upper topsails and hauled on the wind to the offshore tack. Dorothy Ryan remained on deck.

"What a wonderful storm!" she remarked to her father.

"You had better go below, girl; it may get worse."

"Oh, Father, I love a night like this; let me stay." And child of the sea that she was, she stood there fearlessly, while the wind plucked at her skirts. To her ears came voices from the rigging, where a thousand devils screeched; and her eyes, shining from salty spray, watched the waves chase each other wearing spotless white caps, and the scud race across the sky looking like huge snowflakes in the light of the stars.

Two hours later, when the ship's bell clanged four, the upper topsails were taken in, and the *Dragoon* hove to. The gale now whipped the sea into humps and hurled them against the bulwarks. The crew found shelter under the forecastle head, sniffing the storm and shaking their heads.

"She's a bad one," said an old sailor. "It's the cargo in her that makes her labor so. There's no give to it; it's just dead in her, I say."

"What is in her hold, anyway?" Tom Haines asked.

"God Almighty, man, there's everything down there!" The old sailor bumped his rubber boot on the deck. "Yes, as I says, there's no lift to it. Now watch her when she goes down by the head, how long it takes her to come back again. I'm about out of breath half the time, waiting on her."

"Is she loaded with steel?"

"Lord no; they's give to that. It's general cargo—little stuff close-packed in boxes, and the bosun says there's missionary stuff for'ard, tinfoil, books and the like. 'Tis the heaviest cargo ever we rigged gear for."

The bark took a plunge and filled her decks, and a volley of oaths came sizzling out from under the forecastle head.

AFT on the poop, the mate and captain stood with their shoulders braced to the gale. Dorothy had gone below to the cabin; her father was still clinging to the wheel-box, getting his first scare at the real touch of the sea, and realizing what it meant to men who followed it. He crawled over to the old captain.

"Say," he shouted, "can't something be done? She'll break up if she pounds much more."

"I can rig up a sea-anchor," answered the captain. "I was thinking about doing it, anyway. It will keep the bulk of the seas from breaking on the beam."

While he was instructing the mate, a wave swept the deck with a thundering roar, the tail end of it foaming around the feet of the men aft. The bark vibrated and shook herself like a live thing, and Tom Haines, appearing on the poop, shouted:

"The for'ard boat is broken into fire-wood!"

The companion-door from the cabin opened, and Dorothy Ryan stepped out onto the deck. Caught off her balance with the pitching ship, she fell and rolled to leeward. Her father screamed and tried to run toward her, but the young sailor pushed him aside and sprang after the girl. He picked her up in his arms and carried her down to the cabin, followed by her father, wringing his hands.

"You sit down there," said Tom sharply. "I'll 'tend to you later. Can't you see her forehead's cut?" And he laid Dorothy tenderly on the settee, while he set about finding a towel to wash her face. That she was perfectly able to do it for herself seemed a matter of small moment to him.

"There," he said as he finished, and before the eyes of her father, he leaned over and kissed her red lips.

"I'll be damned!" said Peter Ryan.

The captain and the mate stuck their heads in through the cabin door.

"I'm 'tending to them, sir," said Tom respectfully; then he added to the owner: "Their places are on deck."

"The gall of him!" said the mate to the captain, as they climbed back on deck.

"Aye," said the captain absently. "He's a gale in himself. I had hoped great things from that boy. But it looks as though nothing much mattered now."

"But the sea-anchor?"

"Well, it may gain time for us; get it out as quickly as you can."

Loud shouts from the men, and the swash of water on deck reached the cabin.

"I'm going now, Mr. Ryan," said Tom. "You need sailors up there, weather like this." And without a backward look he made for the deck.

"I'm not afraid with Tom on board, Father," said Dorothy, and her father muttered something about, "a gas-bag that ought to be put in irons." He rose to his feet, but sat down again suddenly, very pale from the sudden fright of a heaving crash at the side of the bark that sent him clutching the cushion of his chair.

WHEN Tom Haines got out on deck again, he made his way forward. Yells of men floated into the roaring gushes of wind and wave from the spot where the crew, like tenacious ants, had taken hold of a spare spar that lay down along the weather bulwark rail. It was a heavy piece of timber that was for use as a jury mast or yard. Now they were going to make a sea-anchor out of it to keep the waves from breaking directly on the bark, and in this way perhaps spare her life. Heavy rope guys were tied at each end of it to keep it floating parallel to the ship forward of the beam. Blocks and tackles were in the rigging to lift it from the deck. When all was ready, the deck-lashings on it were cut.

"Hoist away!" roared the mate. "And look out for yourselves!"

As is always the case, the worst waves seem to come at the most critical time. The spar left the deck to the ye-how-ing of a frightened crew, and the spiteful-eyed Ocean seemed to watch, that it might send a special wave when the spar was even with the top of the bulwark rail to batter it against the ship.

The crew were swept off their feet, but like spiders on a windy morning, they clung with handholds on the tackle-falls. When the bark shook herself clear of the green sea, the spar was gone, nobody knew where.

"Hold on to your guy-ropes!" The mate's voice had a quiver of horror in it.

"Everything is gone, sir," a sailor shouted.

Then they heard a noise from the spar, rapping against the ship's side, pounding with the weight of the seas behind it. It felt as though it were working its way into the ship.

"My God, men, cut everything away from that spar; it'll sink us!" cried the mate.

Already it had done its damage; the leeway of the ship was greater than that of the spar, and the two drifted apart. But the *Dragoon* was rammed below the port fore chainplates, and water ran into the hold of her. The mate, realizing the danger, sounded the ship for water, and the hearts of the crew sank within them when they heard the command for all hands to man the pumps.

The decks were a raging mass of foam; at times it seemed that they were a part of the ocean. The crew lashed themselves to the pumps; nor was there a pumping chantey out of them, and the crank clicked so regularly that it was a part of the stormy silence.

From time to time the mate sounded the ship. His report to the captain was always:

"The water in the hold is gaining on us, sir."

The man at the wheel struck eight bells; the flaking wind wafted the tones to leeward. It was then that the pumpers missed Tom Haines, and the word was passed around that he must have been washed overboard with the spar.

"He ought to be here helping with the rest of us," they said. "But he was never the man to hold back. Ah, well, we won't be far behind him! She's settling by the stern—do you see that?"

Then, with the viciousness that comes when men want to live, the tarry hands grabbed the pumphandles more tightly, and sweat and brine mixed in the fight to keep the ship afloat.

IN the cabin father and daughter, realizing the danger that their ship was in, each fearing the openness of speech, took refuge in unseen thought. His was of unfinished contracts, unrealized assets, untried opportunities. The fortune he was going to leave—to whom? Oh, why had he brought her with him! Her thoughts, to judge from her gaze at the towel which she still held in her hand, were of Tom, and hopeful, for her eyes sparkled. The father, observing this, thought of the pity it was that he had refused two young things a little pleasure just as the barrier between all classes was being irrevocably lowered.

"You aren't afraid, Dorothy?" he said at last.

"Not a bit, Father," answered his daughter, and he wondered at the strange ways of women.

At half-past twelve the cabin door opened, and the captain in dripping oilskins walked in, his beard and eyebrows showing the slant of the storm.

"How is it now?" the owner asked.

"Pretty bad, sir, pretty bad." The captain shook his head. "All our boats are smashed, and she's filling steadily from a leak where the sea-anchor rammed us."

"Can't anything be done?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. It is out of man's hands now."

"Is—is—Tom Haines—" spoke up Dorothy timidly.

The captain held up his hand.

"Ah, poor fellow! I'm afraid he was washed overboard when the sea swept the spar away."

Without a word Dorothy rushed past the two men, and up the companionway—then down onto the main deck, where the waves boiled and licked the legs of the pumpers. She had hardly gotten away from the bulkhead of the poop when the bark took a dive by the head, and the rush of water to the forward deck carried her off her feet and along with it, floating her past the lashed pumpers unnoticed.

When Peter Ryan, followed by the captain, ran up to the deck after her, he got as far as the rail of the poop, when a barrier of living water met him. He clung to the

rail, his wet voice crying out across the sea: "Dorothy!" Then he sank to the deck, and only the captain's iron-muscle arm saved him, to lead him back to the cabin. There he stayed, crushed and grief-stricken.

The sea that had carried Dorothy forward, as though unmindful of its opportunity to do great damage, deposited her unhurt under the windlass and close to the small forepeak hatch. When her breath came back, she crawled out from under the anchor chains, and knelt for a moment by the hatch, where her idle eyes were suddenly attracted by brightness shining through a crack.

"Fire!" she thought, and tugged at the hatch-cover, lifting it on its hinge, oblivious of the weaving ship and the warping waves, true to that seafaring instinct which counts as nothing all other disaster when fire at sea is to be faced.

But it was not the light of fire that shone up through the hatch, and her muttered, "Thank God!" wafted off through the strands of wet hair that fell about her mouth, and her tears of relief mingled with the spray that jeweled it as she clung to the ladder that led down into the hold to trace up the light of a lantern to the hand that held it.

Watching the roll of the ship, she let her feet down until they rested upon the rungs of the ladder; then starting, she let fall the hatch-cover overhead and climbed down into the cargo. As she went, grotesque and mocking shadows enfolded her, wavering from piles of crates and boxes, noises of distorted straining and squeaking filled her ears, and above and enveloping all came the dreary, wailing sucking of the pumps in the pipes close at hand in the shadows, alternating with the terrible sound of in-rushing water; accompanied by the incessant *slop-slop* of large depths of loose water in the hold that splashed over and then back, over and then back, with the groveling of the ship.

THERE are times when fear is so great that our conscious selves lose command, and we move without any intention through dangers that we could not otherwise drive ourselves into. So Dorothy left the ladder, climbed along the boxes and bales toward the light, led to its companionship through dangers of breaking crates and sliding cargo. As the going became more difficult, she awoke to her own

self, and her shining eyes and steady motions showed that the blood of adventurers had come down to her. But when she came to the lantern, and peering and trembling, saw who it was that held it, and how all alone there in a clearing at the ship's side which he had himself made, he was trying to stanch the inflow of water through a stove-in timber, she gave a great cry and came tumbling and scrambling down into his arms.

"Tom, Tom, Tom!" she sobbed, as she clung to him, drenched and sweating as he was, almost exhausted, and so far ineffectual to block the water that poured in upon him. Hoarsely he spoke to her; then gently pushed her from him and put the lantern into her hand.

"Take this," he said, "and give me your skirt; it's just what I need to pile those bags of flour against."

Without a word she took off her skirt and handed it to him, standing wet and shivering in her clinging clothes, while he spread the skirt over the hole with one hand and with his shoulder heaved sack after sack of flour to hold it fast. Perhaps the companionship of the swaying, tearful girl urged him to superhuman effort; perhaps at last he had thought out the one way to stop the leak; at any rate, the tone of the incoming water changed, and its streams divided and dwindled.

"There," he said at last. "Now we need something to stop the cracks."

"Here's a box of goods broken open; why not use that?" she suggested.

"Righto!" And they emptied bolt after bolt of gaudy calico from a box consigned to the missionaries, and tamped them in between the bags. The flimsy colors ran over their hands and faces and clothes, but as serious as any painted savages, they worked on until the pumps gained upon the water in the hold, and they knew they had won against the sea.

WHEN they started back along the boxes, the ship had a quieter roll to her, and they guessed that the waves outside were retreating too. With greater speed now they gained the ladder, and opened the hatch just as the crew were shouting that at last the pumps had sucked dry. So excited were the men that they went crowding aft without troubling to cast loose from their bodies the lashings that had held them to the pumps. On to the cabin they came in the wake of Tom and Dorothy, each

followed by a hempen tail, and crowded down the stairs, expecting no discipline and getting none from a relieved captain and an owner almost mad with joy. The mates brought up the rear, and only the man at the helm and the lookout had to take at secondhand the tale of Tom's heroism as Dorothy told it to the others.

There was a queer silence of breathing men. Then Tom pointed to the barometer and spoke to Peter Ryan.

"See that, sir?" he said thickly. "It's rising."

Peter Ryan cleared his throat.

"Young man," he said, "I don't know how I can do enough for you for this night's work."

Tom at once resumed his equanimity, and walking over to Dorothy, took her quite casually by the hand as he said:

"This will be enough, sir."

"Oh, it may seem queer to you," he went on, noticing the owner's instantly apoplectic state, "but it don't to me. This girl and I have been shipmates for days that would count for years ashore. There's no time to know your mind like when the wind and sea are against you. That is for a real sailor, and that's what we are."

His lips half puckered as though to whistle. He thought better of it, and observing the black stare in the faces of the mates:

"Don't you think that the officers' place is on deck, sir?" he asked the owner. Dorothy smiled into the eyes of the crew, the same disarming smile they had seen on the night of the fo'c'stle jazz.

Peter Ryan found his voice.

"But Dorothy—" he began.

Tom broke in:

"Oh, she's all right; she knows her own mind. Of course, I suppose, you have a right to speak on your own ship, sir, and to your own daughter too," he added sympathetically. "I was just saving time; that's all. There's a lot to do before morning—"

Dorothy's father, smiling, interrupted him.

"Well, run along," he said. "We'll try to keep you busier after this— Wont we, Dorothy?"

On their way to the deck the bosun nudged the mate.

"Didn't I tell you there was something to that young fellow? He aint like a common sailor."

"No, he aint," the mate answered gruffly.



The Tailings

The town's crooks were snarling at defeat like hungry wolves, but old Hiram Inkwell, the newspaper proprietor, dared to beard them in their lair—and beat them at their own game.

By JOSEPH BLETHEN

IT was a gloomy morning in Ryan's Place. For a desperate twenty-four hours not a safe had been cracked nor a sailor rolled. Hard times had hit the underworld, and now the gentry stood at bay, their deadly fangs bared in snarling hunger. As starving men adrift at sea may veil their sullen eyes secretly to appraise human flesh, so these rats from the red lights sat about Ryan's smoky tables and silently nursed their desire to pick fraternal pockets. They must rob somebody or starve—and that quickly. So each crook covertly eyed the easy gentry about him and dreamed airy plans of treachery. Honor among thieves? Not when ham becomes an issue and eggs a luxury.

A despondent morning, this, after a flood of gorgeous nights. For four years, now, these rats had gnawed at the full purses of the returning Klondikers, and grown fat in their insolent immunity. But now Klondike and Bonanza were two washed-out El Doradoes, and sprawling from Discovery Claim there stretched up and down on either creek only the ugly heaps of sickening tailings. As these slippery vermin of

the underworld sat starving beside this water-gate on Puget Sound, they too were but the tailings of the roaring flood of humanity that had rushed north to seek treasure, and then had crept back owning or bemoaning the Klondike's new riches. They had cajoled, hoodwinked, tricked and robbed through the golden years, and Ryan's Place had come to be their rookery for the comparing of plunder and for mutual felicitations. But now the flood had shrunk to an orderly procedure of commerce, and the ebb had dried to a shrunken retreat of broken prospectors.

Nome, way yonder, was prosperous with its new riches, but its millionaires were too canny to wear their winnings on their sleeves, and its returning laborers too thrifty to paint rainbows around seaboard gambling-houses. The town by the Western Sea was down to its sawmills, its canneries and its commerce. And in the sane procedure of guarded pay-rolls the once fat rats fought over crumbs, and again became conscious of their own protruding ribs. For them the town was on the blink. Easy money was no more, and along the civic

horizon could be heard the rumblings that meant the coming of law and order. A starving town sobering up over its frugal breakfast! For prowling rats it had become a case of the survival of the slickest. A hell of a situation for gentlemen of accomplishment.

Only yesterday Jim Peacock had thrown a new scare into the underworld. He had closed his gambling-house and announced that he would run a dance-hall with a sideline of this new thing called moving pictures. He would glean pennies where he had reaped dollars, but anyhow, he would eat. To the other gamblers of this water-gate, Jim's action meant but one thing. Known to be a thoughtful man and a careful player, he was beating the reformers to a meal-ticket. The starving gentry of the underworld came to Ryan's that morning to rail at misfortune and damn the reformers, but also secretly to admire Jim Peacock's enterprise.

AT a corner table Mat Fancy and Conny Cline, owners of the two surviving gambling-houses of the town, sat moodily over their gin fizzes. "I was talking to Jim last night," observed Mat. "He's dead sore on the town, but he says he's too old to move. He lays it down cold that you and me, we'll be starved out in three months."

"Maybe we'd better consolidate," suggested Conny. "One gambling-house is all this busted town can support."

"You're on," replied Mat. "And the sooner the better! But there's one thing old Jim said that you can't laugh off so easy. It's got me worried."

"Don't let him bluff you," urged Conny, but his own hand shook as he said it. "Jim's lost his nerve."

"Taint no bluff. He's got the dope straight. He says this reform wave is going to swamp us. He says gambling will be closed in this town inside of a year."

"Forget it!" snapped Conny. "This is a seaport town. She's got to run wide open or go flat broke. She's dead enough right now. We'll reelect old Silas Tolt. He's made a good mayor."

"Not so easy," argued Mat. "Tolt went uptown the other day to see old Hiram Inkwell about supporting him again. You know Inkwell—the guy from Denver that owns *The Outlander*. Well, Inkwell said he figured the reform was due, and he wanted to be on the band-wagon."

"The damned old grafter!" decreed Conny. "Somebody ought to hit him on the bean."

"Wait a minute. Jim says old Inkwell told Tolt he was willing to stand for a program of reform, and that we fellers had better get in line or we'd be wiped out in one deluge. He wants to do it like they did in Denver—close gambling first, then close the saloons on Sunday, and then get a chief of police who will drive all the crooks out of town. One thing at a time till the town's cleaned up, but no more wide-open stuff for him."

"Yes," exclaimed Conny, "and for every man they run out, the town loses two good spenders: the man and his woman."

"That aint it," Mat said, trying to explain. "Old Inkwell says we're not producers. He says we live off the people, and it's his duty to drive us out."

"Duty? Who the hell appointed him to run the town?"

"Trouble is, he's going to do it," persisted Mat. "Jim says he talked old Silas Tolt right off his feet. Tolt's scared pink right now."

"Ah! Tell old Silas to go take a drink. He's got a cinch." But even as Conny the gambler said these brave words, his eyes roved nervously about the room.

"No good," said Mat with a sad shake of the head. "Jim says it's in the cards. With the Klondike petered out, the town's got to get Eastern money, and Eastern money don't stand for no wide-open town. That's why the reformers have picked this young lawyer Collin Oldspring for their candidate for mayor. He's got Eastern connections. And the Chamber of Commerce is rearin' up and yellin' for progress. Anyhow, Silas and his bunch are scared stiff, old Jim Peacock has closed up, and my business is rotten. Now, laugh that off if you can."

Conny Cline sat brooding. "It's hell," he sighed. "A carpet-bagger slips in here from Denver, gets rich running a newspaper, and now he turns reformer. Just a damned old crook! The reformers ought to run him out first."

"Well," argued Mat with an attempt at rallying, "why don't we organize? Maybe we can get something on Inkwell."

"Organize?" Conny Cline's tone was sarcastic. He swept the saloon with a forlorn gesture. "Organize *what*? Look at 'em! I'll bet there aint a crook in this dump that's turned a trick in a month!"

"You said it," agreed Mat. "They're a starving bunch, sitting up nights trying to trim each other. But the reformers are starving too. There'll be no money spent in this campaign."

"Aint I tellin' you!" exclaimed Conny. "Aint that why old Inkweller's gone with 'em? If Silas Tolt had a campaign fund to shake in his face, you'd see the old faker yellin' for a wide-open town, just like he used to."

"You're off there," corrected Mat Fancy. "The old man's never been what you could call *with* us. While the Klondike was roaring along, he sort of put up with things. But I'll say I never did expect to see him stiffen up like this."

CONNY CLINE, who could see no good in an editor who could not be fixed, made ready to reply, but his would-be hot words cooled in his own throat. The outer door burst open to admit Feather McGlinn, and with one look at that well-known con-man, the room tightened to silence.

Feather McGlinn was a delicate youth with an angelic face that lent itself well to rôles of confidence. Young McGlinn could be so completely the innocent country lad, down and out and about to go jump in the bay, thereby to end his troubles, that many Klondikers had paused in their revelries to rescue the pitiable youth from his dangerous frame of mind, and sent him to his humble room with a gold twenty pressed in his lily-white palm. Also many a newcomer from the East had listened sympathetically to the hardships of the lonesome youth, read the tear-stained telegrams from the sick father in Paterson, N. J., and had soulfully advanced railroad money for the home journey. In other words, Feather McGlinn—delicate, soft-voiced Feather McGlinn—lived on his angelic face and a threadbare suit of hand-me-downs, his sick father being a myth and his tear-stained telegram a fake. And now and then, by way of diversion, he pulled the old freight-bill gag whereby some traveler, more sentimental than sensible, advanced him money to secure a last-minute passage north for man and outfit, said loan to be repaid next day when the expected draft from home—see telegram—should arrive. Next day the stranger would wait in vain for his soulful-eyed protégé to meet him and restore; and subsequently the police would book one more "turn" to the credit of the light-fin-

gered gentry who capitalize the starved emotions of the credulous rich. Old stuff, yes! But all the successful actors are not found in the Lambs; nor is all the smoothness of the nation confined to the membership list of Bohemia.

One glance at Feather McGlinn, as he burst through the door of Ryan's Place, told the story. He had turned a trick! His smiling face betrayed it. The unalloyed joy in his tones certified it. No soulful, beseeching eyes of a downtrodden innocent shone there. Instead there glowed the cunning of the sleek panther purring over his kill! And the jealous, hungry pack stood back in silent respect. Their eyes blazed, and their lips went dry, but there in the open they dared not touch that gleaming-eyed crook as he stood gloating over his loot.

"A whisky sour," ordered Feather loftily. With a disdainful glance about the saloon, he peeled a ten from a roll of bills and flicked it across the bar. Then he turned his back on the pack and stood waiting.

"God!" exclaimed Mat Fancy in frank astonishment. "He's drinkin' *alone*!"

"The' *hell*!" echoed Conny Cline, and sat in open-mouthed wonder.

To be sure, Feather McGlinn had always hunted alone, but never before since the first news of the Klondike had gone flashing about a humdrum world, had any crook, fresh from turning a trick, come to that bar and failed to pour a libation to the crooked gods of the quaint profession. The insult was evidently intentional. McGlinn was neither excited nor drunk. Through the whole smoky room one great question throbbed: what motive? Had the soulful-eyed con-man pulled a trick so big that it had gone to his head, or had he planned his get-away and merely come to taunt them in their starvation?

As the white-coated barkeeper slid the lonesome drink across the bar, big Pompadour Slim, safe-cracker, got to his feet and lumbered across the floor.

"Turn a trick, Feather?" he inquired lazily, leaning against the mahogany.

McGlinn, a good twelve inches shorter than Slim, looked up insolently. "As usual," he replied, and took a sip from his glass.

"Pretty fat?" persisted Slim.

"Sufficient," drawled the featherweight. "I pulls out for 'Frisco in just twenty minutes."

The room groaned. The play was evi-

dent now. Feather, suddenly in funds, was cutting them cold and making his get-away while the getting was good. More than one hand in the room crept to its gun pocket and fingered the steel. McGlinn felt the tingling, tense silence. But he had expected it, and his cold eyes smiled into the big mirror behind the bar. He took his time over his sipping. He fairly glowed in the consciousness of his own insulting prosperity.

A crook of a higher status would have asked no more questions, but Pompadour Slim was low-caste. Safe-crackers do their work secretly. They are not born actors, plying their trade in the open. No finesse about their craft. He blurted on: "What play'd you make?"

Feather McGlinn finished his glass, pocketed his change, and faced the tables. He flicked the moisture from his lips and leisurely dropped his striped handkerchief into the breast pocket of his faultless coat. He waited, as a magnetic lecturer might wait while his hushed audience felt the grip of compelling eyes. When ready to make oration, Feather spoke.

"Not that it's any of your business," he said insolently, "but just to cheer up you starving crooks, I'll tell you: You been raggin' me some time now, telling me my game was played out and offering to take me on and make a second-story man of me. Well, just to show you that there's business for those that look for it, I've been out and turned my old trick. I—"

"You don't mean the freight-bill gag?"

It was Scotty Henderson, faro-dealer, who had gasped out the question. The room held its breath.

"The same," replied Feather with a condescending smile. "The oldest trick in the box, just to show you bum sports I could do it. And now I'll hand you a laugh. Who do you suppose was the kind old gentleman from way back East who helped the poor kid grab his passage for Nome? Was it the President of the United States who loaned the kid prospector the mazuma, and who will be waiting on the dock for his money tomorrow when the steamer sails? It was not! It was only dear old Mr. Harvey Oldspring, who's come all the way out from Missouri to live with his son, young Mr. Collin Oldspring, who's going to be the next mayor of this dump. And that's why I'll be halfway across Oregon when Father goes down to the dock tomorrow. And now, you bunch of washed-

out crooks,"—Feather's eyes flashed fire, and he swept the room with a free arm gesture of contempt,—"*before you laugh at me again, just laugh that off.*"

And before any one of the dazed gentry could lift a hand, Feather McGlinn had bolted through the door, slipped into a waiting hack, and was on his way to his train.

Mat Fancy was the first man to get his breath. "My God!" he exclaimed. "Roped the candidate's father! Now listen while the Sunday schools raise particular hell!"

THE CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE had stated its case, and now sat waiting. Old Hiram Inkwell, the fighting editor of Puget Sound, made ready to reply.

The committee knew the value of old Hiram's newspaper, and they respected the vitriolic quality of his editorial pen. To put young Collin Oldspring over as the reform mayor of a wide-open city would be some fight at best. Even to put him up for office with old Hiram against him would be but leading a lamb to the slaughter. So the committee held its breath and waited, its hopes, as well as its hats, twiddling in anxiety. At last the Old Man spoke, and his words fell with the deliberation of one of his caustic editorial broadsides.

"When a town goes on a drunk," began Hiram Inkwell, "it's due for a civic headache. And no man nor town has yet learned to substitute another dome to absorb the pain that comes along at the cold gray dawn of the morning after. Just because this town is a new town, and just because the Klondike rush was a new rush, it doesn't follow that there's any new way to avoid consequences. This town has been on its Klondike drunk for about four years, and now that its gin has run out, it's yelling for some one to open a case on the house. But the barkeeper is stubborn. He knows the customers are broke, and he wants 'em to chase out and find some more gold-mines. And that not being so easy, the town is mad. It's mad because the Klondike is a washed-out creek with nothing left but a mountain of tailings. It's mad because it's got to sober up and go back to sawing lumber and canning fish. And it's mad because nobody was able to make it save a bottle for the morning after.

"Also, it's mad at me because I got rich out of the Klondike rush, and it's going to get all the madder when it finds out just how many bottles I've got put away. That

bunch of sourdoughs down at the Arctic Club think I'm a grafter because I got rich by sticking right in town and developing my newspaper, and the birds up at the Chamber of Commerce who stayed at home and didn't grab their opportunities are dead sure I'm the guy who robbed them. No matter which way you look at it, I'm the guy that brought on the headache.

"All of which brings us around to this," continued the Old Man: "The town has had its spree. Now it's got to take a bromo and get back to work. And if it will help its feelings any to jump on me, why, let it jump. I'm here to stay, and help build up the place. I'm the nurse. And if you gentlemen think that this young Mr. Oldspring has the nerve to perform a few needed civic surgical operations, I'll put the sheet behind you and help elect him mayor. Then I'll help him put over some needed reforms."

The chairman of the Oldspring Campaign Committee arose to offer grateful thanks, but the Old Man waved him down. "But don't let him think for a minute he'll have any snap," declared the journalist. "The reform element will be impatient. They will want everything cleaned up on the day after election. And the wide-open element will resist. They will organize and get two or three of their kind on the city council. These men will try to block legislation. The red-light crowd will hire attorneys to retard progress by obstructive litigation. They'll try bribing the police. They'll try intimidation. The new city administration must work slowly and surely, forgetting the impatience of the saints, and kicking the dead-line back inch by inch till it's shoved clear into the bay. We can't convert a mining town into a civic saint in one move, any more than we can get over a four-year drunk in one day. We've a program to put over, and in some ways our decent people will be the hardest to keep in line. The new mayor and I are going to be lambasted two ways. The sinners will sneer, and the saints will snort. I don't mind it. I'm hard-boiled. But a younger man will find it hard to keep his nerve. If you think he's game for all that hell, I'm with you."

THE COMMITTEE agreed completely with Hiram Inkwell and assured him that, with his help, victory in the coming election was a cinch. Its members expressed extravagant gratitude and departed

in high spirits to continue their jubilation at campaign headquarters. But there was no flood of joy at the old editor's desk. He knew his power, but the only flattery that got under his skin was the cold, silent praise of success. He slumped in his chair, visualizing the long campaign to come—a campaign in which the election of the new mayor would be but the opening gun.

Hiram Inkwell had pioneered in Western journalism when the West began at the eastern end of the Santa Fe trail. When, years later, he had trekked on to that little city on Puget Sound, the Klondike was unknown; yet over his graying temples were the scars of two reform campaigns in frontier cities. It had twice been his lot to help guide law and order into hidden corners of his city while he helped pave the streets in the open and safe shopping districts. He knew of old the inevitable clash, between rampant license and guarded liberty, that comes with the holing-in of the civic cliff-dweller. And in his heart there was a deep sympathy for the ex-faro-dealer driven to become a night watchman, and the drab street-cruiser caught in the muddy eddy of oblivion. He believed in giving every rat its chance to run. Then he would keep out new rats by rebuilding the basements.

Hiram's first months at the Pacific water-gate had been mildly exciting. He had found there a water-front town with a lazy regard for water-front liberties. Sailors might have their fling, loggers their spree; but it was nothing to bring a riot call. Occasionally a miner drifted in from Alaska, threw his poke on a water-front bar and dared the world to watch him pay off the national debt. Then the Klondike, with the swelling roar of a tornado, deluged that little town with maddening riches. Hiram Inkwell, from his desk at the water-gate, saw a tide of men rise, flow north, and eddy back. He saw fortune in all its fickleness glut the few and starve the many, and through the four years of that gilded riot he saw his town swell from a plodding, kindly outpost to a gorged, drunken and world-known seaport. Through it all he had sat tight, veiled the bad, praised the good and set up new printing-presses.

And now the carouse was finished. The Klondike millions were but tinkling dimes in the world's purse, and men at the water-gate were holding their heads and asking each other what had happened.

AS the committee departed, the old editor took two letters from his desk and reread them. One was an anonymous threat from the red-light district advising him that he was slated for death and his property for destruction because of his too ardent support of the reformers.

"To hell with you and your ten commandments," the letter read. "We got along very well before you and your Sunday schools butted in. The town isn't big enough to be so damned strict. She'll be all right again when we've burned out your squawking sheet and dumped your old carcass in the bay. So take warning while the warning is good."

The second letter, also anonymous, was from "An Upright Citizen," upbraiding the old editor for his all too evident sympathy for the criminal classes. "You have prostituted your great power, and you shall be punished," the text affirmed. "This city, by the grace of God, shall be cleaned, and you will be swept out with the ungodly element that you love so well."

The old man studied the letters. "There's good English wasted in two places," he mused. "Each of these admirers of mine knows his readin' and writin', but he's wasting his time roasting me. But of the two I like the first one better. It has a vigorous style. It tells me just how I'm to be put away. The other is too indefinite. It leaves too much to the Deity. But each of them overlooked the main point—*me*. They overlooked me and the class I represent—the pay-roll shooters of the community. The crook scoffs at progress, and the church suspects the man behind the bank-balance. But we are the birds that cannot be bluffed off nor starved out. *We* will remake this town, though the saints deride us and the sinners shoot us up. Oh, well—let's go!"

The old editor bent to his desk. His face lit with the joy of combat. But as he sat penning his next day's broadside, his managing editor entered. With the freedom of the craft the younger man laid a few typewritten sheets before the old editor. "Here's a hot story, Colonel," said he. "One of our newest citizens has fallen for the old freight-bill gag."

"Nothing hot about that," corrected the chief. "It isn't even news."

"In this case it is. The man who fell for the play was Harvey Oldspring, father of the reform candidate. The town will laugh its head off."

Hiram Inkwell felt a chill go up his spine. In a flash he saw the potency of the ridicule that would be heaped on the Oldspring name. With a strong candidate needed for a clean-up campaign, young Oldspring would be tagged with this label and laughed to defeat. To be robbed by violence was one thing; to fall for the wiles of the con-man was pure weakness.

"My God," he groaned. "What a cartoon the opposition can pull on that!"

The managing editor caught the implied meaning in the word "opposition." Respectfully he asked: "Excuse me, sir. Are we going to support young Oldspring?"

"We are," replied the old editor. "I was just sketching out my announcement. And now look what we're up against!"

In silence the veteran read the story of the swindle. In silence the managing editor awaited instructions. When at last the instructions came, they came in a flood.

"All right," decreed Hiram. "That changes my program. Spread that story on your first page. Give it a bull line. Rub it into the whole damn tribe of reformers. Show 'em up for the sentimental sissies they are. I'll hold up my announcement and devote tomorrow to roasting the administration. *Then*, when the town has had its laugh, I'll come out for reform—and I'll come out with a roar! I've got to switch this calamity to Silas Tolt and his rotten police gang, or give up politics. I'll have to, or young Oldspring is licked. Get busy. Spread it. And send Twirlby in here. I'll line up some cartoons to follow my announcement."

The managing editor rushed away. The old journalist arose and paced his floor. "Sweet Tobias!" he grumbled. "I'm supposed to jump in here and run a reform campaign, and now I've got to play nurse-girl to the candidate's family. Je-rusalem! These tenderfoot saints will drive me bug-house. What kind of a saphead is this old man Oldspring, anyhow! The father of a lawyer who wants to be mayor, and he falls for a con-man. Great Cæsar, these reformers wouldn't assay an ounce of brains in the whole tribe. If I could find the con-man who turned this trick, I'd give him a job. I'd make him mayor. I'd make him governor. I'd—oh, *hell*! What's the use?"

Turning to his phone, Hiram Inkwell summoned the Oldsprings, father, son, and Campaign Committee, to his sanctum for a council of war.

THE town laughed for a day and then sobered to a shamefaced realization of facts as it read Hiram Inkwell's vivid editorial picture of the town's corruption and lack of efficient police protection. But Silas Tolt's campaign committee got into action. Through their press and their speakers they sought to keep the laugh alive, and what was more dangerous to the reform campaign, they raised a patriotic cry urging the voters to stick by the old guard.

They admitted that the town had been run wide open during the Klondike days, but pleaded that such a situation was but an incident to a gold-rush. Retain Silas Tolt in office, and he would proceed, step by step, to bring the city out of its swaggering, mining-camp ways to a state of decorum fitting the metropolis it was destined to be. For every reform the Inkwell camp demanded, the Silas Tolt campaigners promised two. Empty promises, but clever politics. Mayor Silas Tolt could see his reelection all wrapped up and stowed in his vest pocket.

Even Ryan's Place took on a more cheerful outlook. The profession was ready to forgive Feather McGlinn. Unconsciously that gentle-voiced crook had turned a trick that blossomed into immense political value to the wide-open party. Even Mat Fancy breathed easier, and went cheerfully about effecting the merging of his gambling-den with that of Conny Cline. But old Jim Peacock went right along making ready his new dance-hall.

"You fellers are laughing at a side-show," he advised Mat and Conny. "It's four weeks yet to election, and old Inkwell is just getting into fighting trim. For the sake of pleasantry, I'll bet you two sports a hundred each that young Oldspring is the next mayor."

The two gamblers hastened to cover the bet, and then related the incident to the profession assembled at Ryan's. Gales of laughter greeted their story, and the gang professed regret over their financial inability to swoop down on old Jim and get in on the easy money.

Naturally, the unhappiest man in town was Hiram Inkwell. He realized that the campaign had been robbed of all dignity, that his city was laughing through a comic-opera election that would likely sweep a farcical administration into office. For once he regretted that he could neither write farce nor act the clown. So, in the

seclusion of his sanctum, he paced the floor and cursed the gales of laughter that left men incapable of constructive thought.

Another thing worried the old editor: Suppose, by some fluke of fortune, the Oldspring campaign took a last-minute turn and the reform mayor were seated? What then? How would they clean up the town? First, by proper city ordinances. That meant the necessity of a courageous group of aldermen. Next, by skilled police protection. And who would pay a police chief worthy of the job? A man who knew crooks, and who would run them out of town at sight! Who, indeed! The city treasury could not afford it, even if the city council could be whipped into voting it. In his desperation Hiram Inkwell published an editorial promising to make up the deficit for a proper salary for such an officer, if young Collin Oldspring was elected to the high office of mayor—an offer which brought the town to attention with a jolt, and a political move which the Silas Tolt tribe were unable to laugh off.

Then it was that Harvey Oldspring, the cause of the trouble, proved his mettle. He read old Hiram's editorial promise, did some thinking, and then walked into the sanctum for conference. Hiram received him with tolerance, listened in patience, and then sat up in admiration.

"If you can pull that stunt," said the old editor, his eyes shining with excitement, "you will elect your son to office."

"I *must* do it," declared the aged tenderfoot. "I owe it to Collin, I owe it to you, and I owe it to the town. I realize what a fool I was, yet I'll tell you this: if that smooth boy hadn't looked so much like my own son,—my second boy,—he never would have caught me. Now, maybe, with my boy's help, we can get the last laugh out of this thing."

"All right, we'll frame it," replied Hiram. "And as we can't ask any police protection from Tolt, we'll call in detectives. I'll take care of that end of it. Go shut yourself up with your boy, practice your parts for two days, and then both of you report back here to me. I'll have the detective boss here to meet you, and we'll elaborate the stunt. And meantime, I'll see how much currency my auditing department can scare up for the play."

THE gang was herded in Ryan's Place, sulking away the weary hours of just another dismal, rainy forenoon. Word had

gone out from the mysterious inner councils of the underworld that there should be nothing doing till after election—nothing that old Inkweller could grab and throw in the administration's face. The whole program of gentle enterprise was barred. Safe-cracking, second-story explorations, pocket-picking, holdups and confidence schemes must wait another week till the votes were counted. Then, with old Silas reelected, the lid would be tilted just a little, and the gents would be free to go out and purloin a little eating-money. Not much, at that—nothing startling till the mysterious headquarters threw the lid clear off! And maybe the lid could never again be thrown in the bay and forgotten, as in the Klondike days. Somehow, Jim Peacock's philosophy hovered over the gang like a chilling ghost. The rumbles of approaching reform worried the gang. The barbed-wire fences of law and order were creeping into their former open ranges. So they sulked at Ryan's and dreamed of the big turn that would mean transportation back to the old home town. Dreamed, and damned their jailers!

Damn Jim Peacock for a pessimist! Damn that Feather for a slippery eel! Damn Hiram Inkweller for a meddler. Yes, and damn the Klondike for petering out!

Whatta life!

Mat Fancy and Conny Cline were half-way down their third gin fizz when Jim Peacock sauntered in. Smooth-shaven, well-fed, quietly garbed, the old gambler surveyed the tables with patient indifference, spotted Mat and Conny and then laid a course for their corner.

"Mornin', Jim," observed Mat by way of greeting. "Have a gin fizz?"

"No, thanks," replied the veteran. "I'm selling booze these days, not drinkin' it."

"Correct," agreed Mat, with a feeble attempt at pleasantry. "No offense intended. Just wanted to make the new dance-hall magnate feel at home."

A laugh from the gang greeted this apology, but so far as Jim Peacock was concerned, it was wasted sarcasm. The brutal guffaw caromed off his hard-boiled serenity and died echoless against Ryan's gaudy decorations.

"How about 'rother little bet on election?" queried Conny Cline.

"You're on for another hundred on Oldspring," replied Jim calmly.

"Me too," begged Mat.

"Covered."

Four hundred dollars in good currency of the realm was counted out and handed to Joe Ryan as stakeholder. Four hundred dollars! The gang caught its breath and shivered. Was there that much real money in the world?

"Say good-by to it," said Mat with a grin.

"Want any more?" Jim Peacock's eyes met Mat's grimly. Mat's smile faded. "No, thanks. That's enough for today," he replied.

"If you want more tomorrow, you know where to find me."

They caught the challenge in Peacock's cold tones, and tightened up a bit. There was no more answering laughter. They wondered just what kind of an ace the old gambler might have up his sleeve. Even Mat had a fleeting fear that he had bet too hastily.

THROUGH the conventional monotones of the next few minutes, Jim Peacock's eyes frequently strayed to the front entrance. Finally, Mat Fancy noticed it. "Expecting some one, Jim?" he asked of the old gambler.

"Yes. Old Inkweller phoned me to meet him here."

Inkweller! Coming to Ryan's Place! Coming to beard the wolves in their own cave! The gang caught its breath in surprise, mulled it for a fleeting moment, and then roared in delight. Oh, what they wouldn't do to that old retrograde! Ha! Here would be their chance.

Jim Peacock watched their spasms in amused silence. But he was amused at them, not *with* them. He had operated in Denver once upon a time. His memory still held vividly the day that the Inkweller trail had crossed his in the open ways of that frontier. He knew the old editor as a going concern, not as any new enterprise. He was mildly curious to see how the old scout would conduct himself here in the crooks' front parlor. As to the threats, he held no concern. He remembered a certain story of a young and enthusiastic Inkweller who once dwelt in the city at the water-junction where the Kaw meets and marries the Big Muddy, and detailing how said Inkweller as a landlord collected rent from his tenant, one enterprising bandit—named Frank James. Why worry about yelping wolves? He knew how the lion could roar!

WHEN, in due time, the swinging doors were burst open to admit the invader, the gang felt its pent-up mirth stutter falteringly. Few of them knew the old editor even by sight. Of all their number, only Jim Peacock had lived through personal encounter. What they had pictured might be an editor faded before the vigorous reality that burst upon them.

A man of medium stature, and soft with the plumpness of his years, Hiram Inkwell still moved with the athletic snap that had been born of a hard youth on a hard-scrabble New England farm. His modest overcoat drew tight over the swinging shoulders; the curly gray locks under the edges of his soft hat testified to his years; and the stout cane, firmly grasped in his right hand, waved up and down as a baton keeping time to his sprightly step. Cold, unfearing blue eyes swept the room in impatient search of a familiar face. The whole attitude of the old scout said: "I'm on business. God help the man who keeps me waiting!"

Jim Peacock rose from the gamblers' corner and waved a greeting. "Over here, Colonel." It was both salutation and invitation.

"All right, Jim." Hiram Inkwell's tones were firm. His voice carried with the resonance of a Salvini. He lunged through the narrow lanes between tables, unmindful of soft-fleshed gentry who dodged the menace of the freely swinging stick, and tossed his hat on the corner table. "Glad to see you, Jim," he said heartily, extending a pudgy hand. "Reminds me of old times."

"Glad to see you, Colonel. Meet my friends: Mat Fancy, Colonel Inkwell. And Conny Cline."

Tolerantly, with faint traces of indulgent smiles on their lips, the two gambling-house keepers acknowledged their presence. Not so Hiram Inkwell. He grasped a hand of each and shook it firmly. The tolerant lips straightened to smother gasps of pain. For another hour their soft hands ached from that unafraid grip of a man's man.

"Have a drink, Colonel?" asked Jim Peacock, by way of hospitality.

"Too early," replied old Hiram, drawing up to the table. "I don't start till five o'clock." Then, looking keenly at Mat Fancy and Conny Cline, he went on: "I hear you birds are consolidating your two casinos. That so?"

The two magnates of the red lights nodded a cold affirmation. The gentry around the tables cocked their good ears toward the gamblers' corner.

"Well, take a tip," snapped Hiram. "Don't waste any money on frills. You'll be closed up *pronto*."

The room waited, its eyes dancing from Mat to Conny, and from Conny back to Mat. They saw Mat go white, and then they heard Conny's drawl: "Oh, I don't know. Your Sunday school hasn't opened yet."

"No. And it may never open," replied Hiram Inkwell. "I'm not fooling myself with any dream that young Oldspring's election is a cinch. And even if elected, he may prove a dub as an executive. One of your 'confidential' friends took his old dad into camp in first-class style. Maybe if the young tenderfoot lands in office, one of your friends will drop in on him and talk him into handing over the key to the city. All I ask is, don't come up to my building and start a shell-game. I need my printers to set up my ads."

IN spite of itself the room breathed easier. A half-suppressed, half-guilty smile crept about the tables. There was something breezy about this invader—something contagious in the frankness of this lamb that had been marked for slaughter. Even Conny Cline's hard face softened to a smile.

"You aint betting on this election, then?" asked Conny, with a bit of sarcasm in his tone.

"Not on your life," acknowledged the old editor. "I haven't brains enough to foresee human events, and I haven't money enough to risk anything on games of chance. I'm a plain, middle-class grafter known to the public as a journalist. In private life I just love to turn a dishonest dollar by way of boosting real-estate in a town boom. I've cleaned up three times in my day; twice back East, and once here. I propose to clean up once more before I die. Wherefore, I'm out to boom this town; and wherefore, again, I'm against all forms of swindling that do not show in the bank-clearings."

There was a laugh at that, but Hiram Inkwell's sturdy back continued to present a silent front to the gentry. Mat Fancy leaned across the table. "Well," he demanded of Hiram, "aint that gambling?"

"I'll say it is," replied Hiram. "And

I haven't always played my cards right. But it's my game, and I'm framing to play it again. And if you'll cast your eye down the history of industrial America, you'll discover one underlying fact: prosperous crooks, whether in my line or yours, depend on conservative investors. Swindling becomes more complicated as civilization advances. Train-robbing was once a regular business. Today the Jesse Jameses are at the head of large corporations. There's less whoop and hoorah about it, but the profits are more steady. And this new tribe of banditry hate to see their sons go adventuring in red-light districts; and they don't like to have their daughters scared by midnight burglars. Whereby, again, we daylight marauders aim to illuminate the dark places, and to coax the widows and orphans to put their coin in savings-banks instead of buying wildcat stocks or bucking faro. The march of progress demands that you sure-thing gents take a postgraduate course in deviltry and get up to date. Whereby, again, I'm on the side of reform and a rising market. And whereby, in conclusion, the sooner I see a fighting mayor sitting on the lid of this water-front burg, the sooner I'm able to telephone my real-estate agent to mark up the price of my tide-lands."

HIRAM INKWELLER paused for a breath, and held tight in the silence of the room, as a high-keyed actor might hold a stage picture to nail home an effect. The silence before him and behind him told him that the flippantly turned words of his harangue had carried some unwelcome, undeniable truths to the sulking wolves. He half turned in his chair to look about him, and as he turned, a newcomer came meekly through the swinging doors.

An elderly man, meek of feature, and poorly clad, the stranger brought the odor of the fields, and the peace of the ranch-house into the tint and tinsel of Joe Ryan's hungry saloon. Searching about the tables as if seeking a friendly face, the old farmer's gaze floundered helplessly, till finally it rested on the waiting barkeeper. Then, with a sigh of disappointment, the stranger approached the bar.

"Reckon I'll have a glass of beer," confided the stranger; and the wolves, forgetting the journalist, began sizing him up. Then, as he drew a fat roll of bills from an inner pocket, they tensed. Even Hiram seemed mildly curious at the interruption.

"Lookin' for some one," asked the barkeeper casually, as he skimmed the froth from the foaming glass.

"Yes. Young feller said he'd meet me here this noon. I'm a little early."

A chill crept through the pack, and hard eyes shot startled glances at Inkwell's corner. To the wolves this scene suggested but one thing: some one had turned a trick on the country brother. Instantly each crook in the room began a mental roll-call. Who had been out foraging? And who could have the nerve to send the victim to Ryan's Place for the final curtain on the play?

Through more than one brain there flashed the suspicion that Feather McGlinn had not left town after all, but was, from hiding, still plying his soulful trade at the water-gate.

"Feather," whispered one crook hoarsely to a neighbor.

"Feather," agreed Scotty Henderson, and the hard eyes of the room lit with angry glitters.

Mat Fancy heard the whisper and got its import. Then a great fear seized him. Suppose it was one of Feather's tricks, and suppose at noon right here at Ryan's Place, with Hiram Inkwell looking on, the farmer let out the yell that must be yelled! Mat, as he sat rigid, could see the old journalist hurrying away to turn this latest bit of confidence work into huge political capital. Mat's bets on the election seemed suddenly in grave danger. He cast about for an excuse to get Inkwell out of ear-shot.

"Nice old fellow," observed Hiram, turning casually to Jim Peacock. "Darn fool, though, to show that roll of bills in a place like this."

"Oh, he's safe," replied Peacock. "The boys wont try any rough stuff with you sitting in."

AGAIN the old man ordered beer, and again the United States treasury came into view. Mat Fancy caught at Jim Peacock's sleeve and nodded meaningly toward the publisher. Jim caught the play, but instead of rallying to Mat's aid, he indulged in a bit of comedy on his own account.

"Colonel," said he, "in one way I've got more nerve than you. I've placed several bets on Oldspring's election. I'm out for more. Do you know where I can find any Silas Tolt money?"

Mat Fancy groaned. The stranger at the bar turned about. "I'm bettin' on young Oldspring myself," he said, addressing Jim Peacock. "Reckon I'll get busy while I'm in town and place a little more. Got quite a little with me, and my young friend'll be here at noon to pay me what I loaned him. Got to make hay while the sun shines."

A loan! The pent-up passion of the wolf-pack exploded in a roar. Forgetful of Inkwell's presence, forgetful of their own hunger, they laughed and cursed in one breath. Though jealous of the killer, their eyes lit with flame at the sight of prey.

Pompadour Slim, he of the ingrowing curiosity, stumbled over to the bar and stood towering beside the elderly rustic.

"What's your young friend's name?" queried Slim.

"Name's Taylor. Nice young feller from my home State."

"Did you know him back there?"

"No—never met him till yesterday. But I know lots of folks he knows."

Another rumble of coarse merriment swept the room. The farmer looked puzzled. Slim went on: "What did he look like?"

"Well, he's a nice young feller about twenty-two," confided the stranger. "Light hair, brown eyes. He's about—oh, I'd say five feet eight. Kinda sickly kid, and him rushin' off to Nome that way to hunt for gold. I had to help him get his passage. His money's comin' from home today."

As the farmer paused to look at his watch, the pack broke all bounds of mercy and yelled their derisive glee into the rustic's teeth. He had described Feather McGlinn precisely, and Feather's own pet trick, the freight-bill gag. In their appreciation of the trick—so daring at the moment—they forgot their jealousy of the slippery con-man and cheered his nerve. Even Mat Fancy and Conny Cline were swept into the tumult.

Jim Peacock sat coolly thinking. He was sorry for the old farmer, but he sensed that Hiram Inkwell was grimly patching together the pieces of the unfinished tragedy. He saw that the old editor would make capital for the Oldspring campaign. He decided to egg the pack on to its own destruction. Tapping Mat Fancy on the arm, Jim Peacock said tauntingly: "There's easy money for you, Mat. Go bet him his young friend don't show up."

"What's that?" demanded Hiram, his blue eyes snapping.

"Oh, just a little confidence game," replied Jim. "He's been fleeced once. Now watch the sports finish him."

Mat Fancy, at Jim's suggestion, had reverted to form. The temptation to win overcame his fear of Inkwell's presence. He lunged forward to the bar.

"I'll bet you five hundred your friend does not show up," yelled the gambler to the stranger. "Joe Ryan to be stakeholder. Bet to be paid here tomorrow noon."

"What you mean, he wont come?" demanded the rustic.

"I'm bettin' that you've been plucked," said Mat. "You've fallen for a con-man. That freight-money gag is old stuff. Your money's gone."

"Don't get fresh," replied the farmer hotly. "I'm not that easy."

"My money says you are."

"Put it up, then." The farmer drew out the fat roll again. Joe Ryan sauntered back of the bar and stood ready.

Hiram Inkwell went to his feet. "Just a minute," he commanded. "This thing looks rather interesting to me. Suppose you make me the stakeholder?"

THE room laughed nervously. Mat Fancy looked glum. "This aint exactly in your line, Colonel," he objected.

"Of course," drawled Inkwell, "if you are putting up a crooked deal, you are right in being afraid of me. But if your bet is on the level, I'm fully as responsible as a saloon-keeper. Suppose you let the stranger settle it?"

"You look all right," observed the farmer, surveying the journalist. "What's your name?"

The pack had another laugh. Unabashed, the newspaper owner introduced himself.

"Well, I be darned!" acknowledged the rustic. "You're Editor Inkwell. Old Hiram, eh? Sure, you're good enough for me. Here's my money."

Hiram Inkwell took his place by the bar, made a note of the bet and shoved the thousand dollars into an inside pocket. The farmer shook his roll at the room.

"Any more of you sports want in on this?" he challenged.

Conny Cline could not resist. He followed his confederate and bet another five hundred. The pack raised a yell for Jim Peacock, but that worthy waved them

down. "I don't take candy from children," he declared.

Then, the scent of blood in their nostrils, the pack swarmed forward, eager to get a share of the easy money. So sure were they that one of Feather McGlinn's victims had fallen into their toils, so hungry were they for spoils, they forgot the secret orders of decorum and crowded their last dollars into the hands of Hiram Inkweller—the intruder from the reform camp—till the farmer's fat roll was covered, and all bets carefully noted and stowed in the journalistic pocket.

Then, as they stood about, gloating and sarcastic, the outer door admitted another stranger. A slim youth, with light hair and brown eyes, he entered hurriedly, and stood, plainly searching for some one. With one impulse the pack turned to look, and looking, thought for a moment that Feather McGlinn—crazy Feather McGlinn—had come again to taunt them. Then as suddenly they realized that the newcomer was not of their sort. They froze in their own astonished silence. With one overwhelming, startled gasp, they sensed a trick.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed the youth. "Sorry I was late, but I had to watch my stuff till it was loaded. Here's your money, sir. I'm very much obliged." Handing the farmer a roll of bills, the youth bolted from the saloon.

But the old gentleman from the ranches did not count the money. As the pack stood snarling, and ready to spring, their gun hands seeking gun pockets, the farmer handed the roll to Hiram Inkweller. As he did so, four more strangers burst in, two from the front, two from the rear, and all four stood along the bar with the blue-glint of drawn automatics in their hands. The pack quailed, covered in its own tracks.

HIRAM INKWELLER, journalist by profession, and ex-officio campaign adviser to the Oldspring camp, took off his soft hat and mopped his brow. Then, adjusting his hat and taking a firm grip on his walking-stick, he spoke.

"Jim," said he, looking toward Peacock

where that worthy still sat calmly observant in his corner, "I owe you an apology. I asked you to meet me here to talk politics. I should have said that I wanted you to *see me do* a little bit of political trickery. Now, for the benefit of all concerned, I'll diagram the joke:

"These four businesslike gentlemen with the artillery are, as you may have guessed, my friends the detectives. I expect you will see considerable more of them around this town in the next few months. And this old gentleman, who looked so easy to you, is also a friend of mine. Let me introduce him: Mr. Harvey Oldspring, father of the young man who will be the next mayor of this town. The young chap who was here a minute ago is Mr. Oldspring's younger son, brother of said candidate for mayor. And this money that you saw in our friend's hands is my money. As I told you awhile ago, I never bet on games of chance. I only bet on sure things. Out of my winnings from this little performance I shall repay Mr. Oldspring the five hundred he let slip to one of your gang. It's nice of you all to restore it to me. The rest of it I shall hand to the new mayor to help pay the detectives in cleaning you all out.

"Now, gentlemen of the profession, I am profoundly grateful for your practical aid in the clean-up program—thankful also for providing the town another laugh—a laugh which, I think, will sweep Mr. Collin Oldspring into the mayor's chair.

"With these few remarks I will bid you good morning. If any of you want to place bets on Mr. Oldspring's election, I suggest you do it before my paper is on the street tonight. After that, I feel sure, there'll be no one left to bet on Tolt, not even old Silas himself."

A WEEK later the town surged to the polls and laughingly swept the reform ticket to power. In point of fact, the town elected Collin Oldspring mayor, but in intent and in effect it piled up a glowing tribute to Harvey Oldspring, the newcomer from Missouri, who came to be trimmed, but who remained to wash pure gold from rusty tailings.

Another vivid and vigorous story by Joseph Blethen is scheduled for an early issue. You will find it well worth watching for.



The Clapham Cook

Wherein Hercule Poirot out of kindness undertakes what seems a most trivial case, and finds a strange crime at the bottom of it.

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

“‘**A**BSCONDING bank-clerk,’” I read from the pages of the *Daily News-monger*, “‘disappears with fifteen thousand pounds worth of negotiable securities.’ ‘Husband puts his head in gas oven. Unhappy home life.’ ‘Missing typist. Pretty girl of twenty-one. Where is Edna Field?’ There you are, Poirot, plenty to choose from. An absconding bank-clerk, a mysterious suicide, a missing typist—which will you have?”

“I am not greatly attracted to any of them, *mon ami*. Today I feel inclined for the life of ease. It would have to be a very interesting problem to tempt me from my chair. See you, I have affairs of importance of my own to attend to.”

“Such as?”

“My wardrobe, Hastings. If I mistake not, there is on my new gray suit the spot of grease—only the unique spot, but it is sufficient to trouble me. Then there is my winter overcoat—I must lay him aside in the powder of Keatings. And I think—yes, I think—the moment is ripe for the trimming of my mustaches.”

“Well,” I said, strolling to the window, “I doubt if you’ll be able to carry out this delirious program. That was a ring at the bell.”

“Unless the affair is one of national importance, I touch it not,” declared Poirot with dignity.

A moment later our privacy was invaded by a stout red-faced lady who panted audibly as a result of her rapid ascent of the stairs.

“You’re M. Poirot?” she demanded, as she sank into a chair.

“I am Hercule Poirot, yes, madame.”

“You’re not a bit like what I thought you’d be,” said the lady, eying him with some disfavor. “Did you pay for the bit in the paper saying what a clever detective you were, or did they put it in themselves?”

“Madame!” said Poirot, drawing himself up.

“I’m sorry, I’m sure, but you know what these papers are nowadays. You begin reading a nice article, ‘What a bride said to her plain unmarried friend,’ and it’s

all about a simple thing you buy at the chemist's and shampoo your hair with. Nothing but puff! But no offense taken, I hope? I'll tell you what I want you to do for me. I want you to find my cook."

Poirot stared at her; for once his ready tongue failed him. I turned aside to hide the broadening smile I could not control.

"It's all this wicked dole," continued the lady. "Putting ideas into servants' heads, too. All this committee-of-inquiry business. Stop the dole, that's what I say. I'd like to know what my servants have to complain of—afternoon and evening off a week, alternate Sundays, washing put out, same food as we have—and never a bit of margarine in the house, nothing but the very best butter."

"I fear you are making a mistake, madame. I am not holding an inquiry into the conditions of domestic service. I am a private detective."

"I know that. Didn't I tell you I wanted you to find my cook for me? Walked out of the house on Wednesday, without so much as a word to me, and never came back."

"I am sorry, madame, but I do not touch this particular kind of business. I wish you good morning."

Our visitor snorted with indignation.

"That's it, is it, my fine fellow? Too proud, eh? Only deal with Government secrets and countesses' jewels? Let me tell you a servant's every bit as important as a tiara to a woman in my position. We can't all be fine ladies going out in our motors with our diamonds and our pearls. A good cook's a good cook—and when you lose her, it's as much to you as her pearls are to some fine lady."

For a moment or two it appeared to be a toss-up between Poirot's dignity and his sense of humor. Finally he laughed and sat down again.

"Madame, you are in the right, and I am in the wrong. Your remarks are just and intelligent. This case will be a novelty. Never yet have I hunted a missing domestic. Truly, here is the problem of national importance that I was demanding of Fate just before your arrival. *En avant!* You say this jewel of a cook went out on Wednesday and did not return. That is the day before yesterday."

"Yes, it was her day out."

"But probably, madame, she has met with some accident? Have you inquired at any of the hospitals?"

"That's exactly what I thought yesterday; but this morning, if you please, she sent for her box. And not so much as a line to me! If I'd been at home, I'd not have let it go—treating me like that! But I'd just stepped out to the butcher."

"What kind of a woman was she?"

"She was middle-aged, stout, black hair turning gray—most respectable. She'd been ten years in her last place. Eliza Dunn, her name was."

"And you had had—no disagreement with her on the Wednesday?"

"None whatever. That's what makes it all so queer."

"How many servants do you keep, madame?"

"Two. The house parlor-maid, Bessie, is a very nice girl. A bit forgetful and her head full of young men, but a good servant if you keep her up to her work."

"Did she and the cook get on well together?"

"They had their ups and downs, of course—but on the whole, very well."

"And the girl can throw no light on the mystery?"

"She says not—but you know what servants are: they all hang together."

"Well, well, we must look into this. Where did you say you resided, madame?"

"At Clapham—Eighty-eight Prince Albert Road."

"*Bien, madame*, I will wish you good morning, and you may count upon seeing me at your residence during the course of the day."

MRS. TODD, for that was our new friend's name, then took her departure. Poirot looked at me a bit ruefully.

"Well, well, Hastings, this is a novel affair that we have here. 'The Disappearance of the Clapham Cook!' Never, never, must Japp get to hear of this!"

He then proceeded to heat an iron and carefully remove the grease-spot from his gray suit by means of a piece of blotting paper. His mustaches he regretfully postponed to another day, and we set out for Clapham. Prince Albert Road proved to be a street of small prim houses, all exactly alike, with neat lace curtains veiling the windows, and well-polished brass knockers on the doors.

We rang the bell at Number Eighty-eight, and the door was opened by a neat maid with a pretty face. Mrs. Todd came out in the hall to greet us.

"Don't go, Bessie," she cried. "This gentleman's a detective, and he'll want to ask you some questions."

Bessie's face displayed a struggle between alarm and a pleasurable excitement.

"I thank you, madame," said Poirot, bowing. "I would like to question your maid now—and to see her alone, if I may."

We were shown into a small drawing-room, and when Mrs. Todd, with obvious reluctance, had left the room, Poirot commenced his cross-examination.

"*Voyons, Mademoiselle Bessie*, all that you shall tell us will be of the greatest importance. You alone can shed any light on the case. Without your assistance I can do nothing."

The pleasurable excitement became more strongly marked.

"I'm sure, sir, I'll tell you anything I can."

"Well, Bessie, what is your own idea? You are a girl of remarkable intelligence; what is your own explanation of Eliza's disappearance?"

"White-slavers, sir—I've said so all along! Cook was always warning *me* against them. 'Don't you sniff no scent, or eat any sweets, no matter how gentlemanly the fellow!'—those were her words to me. And now they've got her. I'm sure of it. As likely as not, she's been shipped to Turkey or one of them Eastern places where I've heard they like them fat!"

Poirot preserved an admirable gravity.

"But in that case—and it is indeed an idea!—would she have sent for her trunk?"

"Well, I don't know, sir. She'd want her things—even in those foreign places."

"Who came for the trunk, a man?"

"It was Carter Paterson, sir."

"Did you pack it?"

"No sir, it was already packed and corded."

"That's interesting. That shows that when she left the house on Wednesday, she had already determined not to return. You see that, do you not?"

"Yes sir—I hadn't thought of that. But it might still have been white-slavers, mightn't it, sir?"

"Undoubtedly," said Poirot gravely. "Did you both occupy the same bedroom?"

"No sir, we had separate rooms."

"And had Eliza expressed any dissatisfaction with her present post to you at all? Were you both happy here?"

"She'd never mentioned leaving. The place is all right—" The girl hesitated.

"Speak freely," said Poirot kindly. "I shall not tell your mistress."

"Well, of course, sir, she's a caution, Missus is. But the food's good. Plenty of it, and no stinting. Something hot for supper, good outings, and as much frying-fat as you liked. And anyway, if Eliza did want to make a change, she'd never have gone off this way, I'm sure. She'd have stayed her month. Why, Missus could have a month's wages out of her for doing this!"

"And the work, it is not too hard?"

"Well, she's particular—always poking round in corners and looking for dust. And then there's the lodger, or paying-guest, as he's always called. But that's only breakfast and dinner, same as master. They're out all day in the City."

"You like your master?"

"He's all right—very quiet, and a bit on the stingy side."

"You can't remember, I suppose, the last thing Eliza said before she went out?"

"Yes, I can. 'If there's any stewed peaches over from the dining-room,' she says, 'we'll have them for supper, and a bit of bacon and some fried potatoes.' Mad over stewed peaches, she was. I shouldn't wonder if they didn't get her that way."

"Was Wednesday her regular day out?"

"Yes, she had Wednesdays, and I had Thursdays."

POIROT asked a few more questions, then declared himself satisfied. Bessie departed, and Mrs. Todd hurried in, her face alight with curiosity. Poirot brought the conversation round to her husband, and elicited the information that he worked with a firm in the City and would not be home until after six.

"Doubtless he is very disturbed and worried by this unaccountable business?" ventured Poirot.

"He's never worried," declared Mrs. Todd. "Well, well, get another, my dear!—that's all he said. He's so calm that it drives me to distraction sometimes. 'An ungrateful woman,' he said. 'We are well rid of her.'"

"What about the other inmate of the house, madame?"

"You mean Mr. Simpson, our paying-guest? Well, as long as he gets his breakfast and his evening meal all right, he doesn't worry."

"What is his profession, madame?"

"He works in a bank." She mentioned

its name, and I started slightly, remembering my perusal of the *Daily Newsmonger*.

"A young man?"

"Twenty-eight, I believe. Nice, quiet young fellow."

"I should like to have a few words with him, and also with your husband, if I may. I will return for that purpose this evening. I venture to suggest that you should repose yourself a little, madame; you look fatigued."

"I should just think I am! First the worry about Eliza, and then I was at the sales practically all yesterday, and you know what *that* is, Mr. Poirot, and what with one thing and another, and a lot to do in the house, because of course Bessie can't do it all—and very likely she'll give notice anyway, being unsettled in this way—well, what with it all, I'm tired out!"

Poirot murmured sympathetically, and we took our leave.

"It's a curious coincidence," I said, "but that absconding clerk, Davis, was from the same bank as Simpson. Can there be any connection, do you think?"

Poirot smiled.

"At the one end, a defaulting clerk, at the other a vanishing cook. It is hard to see any relation between the two, unless possibly Davis visited Simpson, fell in love with the cook, and persuaded her to accompany him on his flight!"

I laughed.

"He might have done worse," said Poirot. "If you are going into exile, a good cook may be of more comfort than a pretty face. It is a curious case, Hastings, full of contradictory features. I am interested—yes, I am distinctly interested."

That evening we returned to Eighty-eight Prince Albert Road and interviewed both Todd and Simpson. The former was a melancholy, lantern-jawed man of forty-odd, the latter a quiet, inconspicuous young man who displayed little interest in the problem. Neither of them added at all to our sum of knowledge.

ON the following morning Poirot received a letter. On reading it, he turned purple with indignation, and handed it to me to read.

Mrs. Todd regrets that after all she will not avail herself of Mr. Poirot's services. After talking the matter over with her husband, she sees that it is foolish to call in a detective about a purely domestic affair. Mrs. Todd incloses a guinea for consultation fee.

"Aha!" cried Poirot angrily. "And they think to get rid of Hercule Poirot like that. As a favor, a great favor, I consent to investigate their miserable little twopenny-halfpenny affair—and they dismiss me *comme ça!* That is the hand of Mr. Todd. But I say—no!—thirty-six times no! I will spend my own guineas, thirty-six hundred of them if need be, but I will get to the bottom of this matter. First we will advertise in the papers—'If Eliza Dunn will communicate with this address, she will hear of something to her advantage.' Put it in all the papers you can think of, Hastings. Then I will make some little inquiries of my own. Go—go—all must be done as quickly as possible."

I did not see him again until the evening, when he condescended to tell me what he had been doing.

"I have made inquiries at the firm of Mr. Todd. He was not absent on Wednesday, and he bears a good character—so much for him. Then Simpson, he was not absent on Wednesday, either, but on Thursday he was ill and did not come to the bank. He was moderately friendly with Davis. Does that lead us anywhere? It does not. We must place our reliance on the advertisements."

The advertisement duly appeared in all the principal daily papers. By Poirot's orders it was to be continued every day for a week. His eagerness over this uninteresting matter of a defaulting cook was extraordinary—but I realized that he considered it a point of honor to persevere until he finally succeeded. Several extremely interesting cases were brought to him about this time, but he declined them all. Every morning he would rush at his letters, scrutinize them earnestly and then lay them down with a sigh.

But our patience was rewarded at last. On the Wednesday following Mrs. Todd's visit, our landlady informed us that a person of the name of Eliza Dunn had called.

"*Enfin!*" cried Poirot. "But make her mount, then! At once! Immediately!"

Thus admonished, our landlady hurried out and returned a moment or two later, ushering in Miss Dunn. Our quarry was much as described, tall, stout and eminently respectable.

"I came in answer to the advertisement," she explained. "I thought there must be some muddle or other, and that perhaps you didn't know I'd already got my legacy."

Poirot was studying her attentively. He drew forward a chair with a flourish.

"The truth of the matter is," he explained, "that your late mistress, Mrs. Todd, was much concerned about you. She feared some accident might have befallen you."

Eliza Dunn seemed very much surprised.

"Didn't she get my letter, then?"

"She got no word of any kind." He paused, and then said persuasively: "Recount to me the whole story, will you not?"

ELIZA DUNN needed no encouragement. She plunged at once into a lengthy narrative.

"I was just coming home on Wednesday night and had nearly got to the house, when a gentleman stopped me. A tall gentleman he was, with a beard and a big hat. 'Miss Eliza Dunn?' he said. 'Yes,' I said. 'I've been inquiring for you at Number Eighty-eight,' he said. 'They told me I might meet you coming along here. Miss Dunn, I have come from Australia specially to find you. Do you happen to know the maiden name of your maternal grandmother?' 'Jane Emmott,' I said. 'Exactly,' he said. 'Now, Miss Dunn, although you may never have heard of the fact, your grandmother had a great friend, Eliza Leech. This friend went to Australia, where she married a very wealthy settler. Her two children died in infancy, and she inherited all her husband's property. She died a few months ago, and by her will, you inherit a house in this country and a considerable sum of money.'

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," continued Miss Dunn. "For a minute, I was suspicious, and he must have seen it, for he smiled. 'Quite right to be on your guard, Miss Dunn,' he said. 'Here are my credentials.' He handed me a letter from some lawyers in Melbourne, Hurst and Crotchet, and a card. He was Mr. Crotchet. 'There are one or two conditions,' he said. 'Our client was a little eccentric, you know. The bequest is conditional on your taking possession of the house (it is in Cumberland) before twelve o'clock tomorrow. The other condition is of no importance—it is merely a stipulation that you should not be in domestic service.' My face fell. 'Oh! Mr. Crotchet,' I said. 'I'm a cook. Didn't they tell you at the house?' 'Dear, dear,' he said. 'I had no idea of such a thing. I thought you might possibly be a com-

panion or governess there. This is very unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed.'

"'Shall I have to lose all the money?' I said, anxious-like. He thought for a minute or two. 'There are always ways of getting round the law, Miss Dunn,' he said at last. 'We lawyers know that. The way out here is for you to have left your employment this afternoon.' 'But my month?' I said. 'My dear Miss Dunn,' he said with a smile, 'you can leave an employer any minute by forfeiting a month's wages. Your mistress will understand, in view of the circumstances. The difficulty is—time. It is imperative that you should catch the eleven-five from Kings Cross to the north. I can advance you ten pounds or so for the fare, and you can write a note at the station to your employer. I will take it to her myself and explain the whole circumstances.'

"I agreed, of course, and an hour later I was in the train, so flustered that I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels. Indeed by the time I got to Carlisle, I was half inclined to think the whole thing was one of those confidence tricks you read about. But I went to the address he had given me—solicitors they were—and it was all right. A nice little house, and an income of three hundred a year. These lawyers knew very little; they'd just got a letter from a gentleman in London instructing them to hand over the house to me, and one hundred and fifty pounds for the first six months. Mr. Crotchet sent my things up to me, but there was no word from Missus. I supposed she was angry and grudged me my bit of luck. She kept back my box too, and sent my clothes in paper parcels. But there, of course, if she never had my letter, she might think it a bit cool of me."

POIROT had listened attentively to this long history. Now he nodded his head as though completely satisfied.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. There has been, as you say, a little muddle. Permit me to recompense you for your trouble." He handed her an envelope. "You return to Cumberland immediately? A little word in your ear. Do not forget how to cook. It is always useful to have something to fall back upon in case things should happen to go wrong."

"Credulous," he murmured, as our visitor departed, "but perhaps not more than most of her class. Come, Hastings, there

is no time to be lost. Get a taxi while I write a note to Japp."

Poirot was waiting on the doorstep when I returned with the taxi. The note was dispatched by special messenger, and we sped on to Clapham.

"Though, frankly, Hastings, I expect our bird will have flown."

"Who is our bird?"

"The inconspicuous Mr. Simpson, of course. Do not tell me that all is not clear to you now?"

"The cook was got out of the way; I realize that. But why? Why should Simpson wish to get her out of the house? Did she know something about him?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Well, then—"

"But he wanted something that she had."

"Money? The Australian legacy?"

"No, my friend—something quite different. A battered tin trunk."

I looked sidewise at him. His statement seemed so fantastic that I suspected him of pulling my leg, but he was perfectly grave and serious.

"Surely he could buy a trunk if he wanted one," I cried.

"He did not want a new trunk. He wanted a trunk of pedigree, of assured respectability."

"Look here, Poirot, this really is a bit thick. You're pulling my leg."

"You lack the brains and the imagination of Mr. Simpson, Hastings. See here: on Wednesday evening, Simpson decoys away the cook. A printed card and a printed sheet of notepaper are simple matters to obtain, and he is willing to pay one hundred and fifty pounds and a year's rent of a house to assure the success of his plan. Eliza Dunn does not recognize him; the beard and the hat and the slight colonial accent completely deceive her. That is the end of Wednesday—except for the trifling fact that Simpson has helped himself to fifteen thousand pounds' worth of negotiable securities."

"Simpson—but it was Davis—"

"If you will kindly permit me to continue, Hastings! He knows that the theft will be discovered on Thursday afternoon. He does not go to the bank on Thursday, but he lies in wait for Davis when he comes out to lunch. Perhaps he admits

the theft, and tells Davis he will return the papers to him—anyhow, he succeeds in getting Davis to come to Clapham with him. It is the maid's day out, and Mrs. Todd was at the sales, so no one sees him go in. When the theft is discovered, and Davis is missing, the implication will be overwhelming. Mr. Simpson will be perfectly safe, and can return to work on the morrow like the honest clerk they think him."

"And Davis?"

Poirot made an expressive gesture, and slowly shook his head.

"It seems too cold-blooded to be believed, and yet what other explanation can there be, *mon ami*? The one difficulty for a murderer is the disposal of the body—and Simpson had planned that out beforehand. I was struck at once by the fact that although Eliza Dunn obviously meant to return that night when she went out,—witness her remark about the stewed peaches,—yet her trunk was already packed. Simpson attended to that on Thursday. It was he who sent word to Carter Paterson. What suspicion could possibly arise? A maid leaves and sends for her box; it is labeled and addressed ready in her name, probably to a railway station within easy reach of London. On Saturday afternoon Simpson, in his Australian disguise, claims it; he affixes a new label, and addresses and redispaches it somewhere else, again 'to be left till called for.' When the authorities get suspicious, for excellent reasons, and open it, all that can be elicited will be that a bearded colonial dispatched it from some junction near London. There will be nothing to connect it with Eighty-eight Prince Albert Road. Ah! here we are."

POIROT'S prognostications had been correct. Simpson had left two days previously. But he was not to escape the consequences of his crime. By the aid of wireless, he was discovered on the *Olympia*, en route to America.

A tin trunk, addressed to Mr. Henry Wintergreen, attracted the attention of the railway officials at Glasgow. It was opened, and found to contain the body of the unfortunate Davis.

But for Poirot, and his amazing powers of reasoning, a particularly cold-blooded murderer would have escaped scot-free.

"The Cornish Mystery," one of the most intriguing of all these stories of the canny Hercule Poirot, will appear in the next, the October, issue.



JOE MILLS, MOUNTAINEER

HE'S been doing things like this for years, for the mountains regard him as a friend. He's been a mountain man since he was twelve years old and in addition a guide, a hunter and trapper, an amateur runner and boxer and college football coach. Whether he sleeps in a bed or in a snow tunnel above timberline, whether he eats off china or a pine chip, doesn't make much difference to him. The vivid story which begins on the next page deals with a little-known phase of mountain life.



Covered Trails

A mountain summer-resort in winter-time—a strange place to find oneself in. And it was a strange adventure that there befell the hero of this unusual story.

By JOE MILLS

THE last straggling flocks of ducks and geese had gone south on hurried wings; the deer and elk had moved down to lower altitudes; the few bears that had loitered late outside their dens were now holed up for the winter. A storm was coming. Far and wide the news was broadcasted. The animals had instinctively sensed it: now the Government was sending forecasts throughout the region to notify the less sensitive human beings, and radio stations sputtered the alarm. A blizzard, born far up in the Arctic circle, was sweeping down upon the Rockies, carrying heavy snow, and leaving in its wake a white world frozen in the grip of twenty-below-zero temperatures.

One by one the telephone-lines in the Rocky Mountain National Park went out until, on the third day of the storm, it stood buried beneath five feet of snow, miles from the railroad, without a single connection with the outside world.

The mountain sheep had early sought safety from the bogging drifts by climbing to the wind-swept heights above timberline. From their eerie vantage they looked

down upon a world of unbroken, glistening whiteness. Here and there were tiny smoke-threads ascending from the chimneys of distant houses. Along the ridge where the Fall River road was being built were mounds of snow, like Eskimo igloos, which exhaled smoke resembling frozen breath. These were the isolated log cabins of the convict road-building camp, their thatched roofs piled high with snow. Interspersed among the miniature dwellings were the large summer resort hotels, bulking dark against the dazzling background, silent as the snow itself.

Many of these hotels were in charge of caretakers, but one of them, snuggled against the shoulder of Prospect Mountain, was unoccupied. The day before the storm broke, the old man who was looking after it had received an urgent telegram, transmitted over the telephone: "Mother not expected to live. Come at once." It was signed by an older brother, and dated in a little town back in Indiana.

He had packed his bag hurriedly, wondering the while whom he could get to care for the Lodge.

"Guess I'll leave a letter in the post office for Jerry Horton. If he comes in for his mail, everything will be fine. I'm sure he'll go up."

He "snugged up" the place as best he could against the chance that Jerry did not get his letter, and the hotel he left uncared-for. Then grabbing up his bag, he went out, carefully closing the door behind him, and started on his five-mile tramp, arriving just in time to drop his letter in the post office, and to catch the stage which was loaded with baggage and passengers and ready to go. On the way out, the storm overtook them, and made progress slower with each successive mile. Before they reached Longmont they realized that this was no ordinary snow-storm.

The old caretaker was uneasy lest harm come to the untenanted Lodge, and he was anxious to make sure that some one went up to care for it. Jerry might not go for his mail today! He tried to telephone but could not get connections. He thought of the National Park supervisor, feeling sure that that official would send some one up to look after things. He recalled the radio receiving set in the Headquarters building. When he reached Denver, he went to a broadcasting station and explained his business. If luck was with him, the superintendent would pick up his message. It was the only chance.

"We broadcast only at eight each night," the radio operator told him. "It isn't usual for us to send such a message. But then, neither is this weather." He came to a sudden decision. "Sure we'll send it."

At eight that night the caretaker's appeal was picked up all over the country. The owner of the Lodge, sitting before a log fire in a sportsmen's club house far down in Louisiana, heard it and an explanation of the caretaker's sudden departure.

THUS it was that Jerry Horton plodded out to the Lodge that clear November night, his snowshoes creaking protestingly over the hard-frozen crust. It was bitter cold, and the full moon, just skirting the edge of Prospect Mountain, peered down like an evil ogre upon the world below. The wind was booming among the crags but descended less violently across the mountain meadow. There came the squall of a fox, curiously blended with the shriek of the gale, yet vaguely distinguishable from it. Now and again clumps of snow

dropped from the pine boughs, and plumped into the depths below.

Jerry paused at the foot of the cliff to rest, and gazed up at the rambling old Lodge. It stood on the top of a rocky ridge that rose precipitously above the river. Its gray walls, topped by a soft pine-green roof, and studded by many windows looking out upon the great peaks and glaciers of the Divide, shone silvery in sunlight. But tonight, under the glare of that baleful moon, it took on a strange phosphorescence; and the very windows, instead of glowing with their usual hospitable invitation, seemed to threaten Jerry's approach with cold and glittering gaze.

The climber felt something of the inhospitable atmosphere.

"Some pull ahead," he panted, stooping to adjust the thong of his snowshoe. "Think I'll take the shortcut up the trail. It's steeper, but I'd rather make it snappy than to go way round by the road."

Yet it was impossible to make speed, as he struggled upward. And as he topped the last lap of the steep trail, he paused again, and looked out over the meadow below to the range beyond. The arm of an old fire-scarred pine near by was bent grotesquely, and was so contorted as to seem to be pointing toward the frozen peaks which rose wraithlike in the moonlight.

"Gosh! I wish the tourists could see the mountains in winter," he mused. He drew a deep breath of the icy air, then unfastened his snowshoes, and pushing the vestibule doors open, entered the hotel.

The embers of a fire smoldered upon the hearth in the lobby. Jerry tossed some logs upon the coals, and dragging an easy chair close, he sprawled in it gratefully.

"Old Gus left two days ago," he reckoned, thoughtfully. But he did not put his thoughts into further words. He was drowsily tired after his climb, so he curled himself up in his chair and dozed off.

Some time later, after a luxurious nap, he got up and stretched.

"Guess I'll register in," he decided.

He picked up the hotel register, and opening it, thumbed the pages till he came to the last used one. The moonlight was intensified by reflection from the snow, and flooded the room with a brilliance almost equal to daylight.

"Sure, I understand, storm's queered the power-plant." He pretended to be addressing the clerk. "Don't need a light to

write my name anyway," he added agreeably. "Bridal suite, please."

He stepped to the rack and took out a key at random.

"Don't know where it is, but it doesn't matter," he chuckled. "If I don't like the room, I'll kick to the manager. No, I won't leave a call," he answered the silent office. "This is my vacation, and I'll tell the world I'm going to sleep till the day after tomorrow."

He felt his way up the stairs and struck a match in the dim second-floor hall.

"I've got 306. Well, another little flight won't do me any harm," he hummed cheerfully as he climbed to the next floor.

Room 306 faced the Continental Divide. He flung up the shade, and looked out at the ragged range peeping through torn clouds. The room was exactly as the housekeeper had left it several months ago when the hotel closed for the season. Jerry examined the covers to see if there were enough to keep him warm, decided there were not, foraged in the next room for more, and after spreading them over the bed, began to unlace his boots with stiff fingers.

"I hope the management will excuse me," he chattered, "since the heating plant is out of order, if I leave my duds on and slip between these blankets."

Accordingly he slid into bed and was asleep almost instantly.

THE wind which blows almost incessantly in high altitudes came roaring down the eastern slope, kicking up the snow in powdery swirls, and driving it against the pines. It shrieked around the Lodge and rattled the windows, but Jerry Horton slept soundly through it all. He was an outdoor man, indifferent to the whims of the weather.

Early next morning he sat up sleepily and glanced out of the window.

"Still at it," he yawned. "Never felt so harmless in all my life. All alone—nothing to do—wind's wiped out my tracks, and I'm lost to the world. Guess I'll have another nap."

When he finally and fully awakened, the morning was well advanced. He arose, and going downstairs to the lobby, walked directly to the fireplace. The big chair was as he had left it, but the fire had gone out and the room was cold.

"Strange," he puzzled, his boyish forehead wrinkling. "My fire's out cold in ten

hours—and Gus' was still alive after two days."

He passed through the bleak empty dining-room, shivering at the dead chill of it, and entered the kitchen. There were some wet spots upon the floor near the sink. He felt them.

"Wet all right. The cold room, I guess—not frozen, though."

After breakfast he went over the whole house, unlocked and looked into every room, searched the storerooms and basement.

"I'm sure all by my lonesome," he reassured himself. "Still, those wet spots were queer." Suddenly he laughed aloud. "What a boob I am! There's no one else here, or I'd have discovered them."

But in spite of the obvious truth of his statement, he had an uncanny feeling that some one else *was* in the house, and that he was being watched.

THAT night he sat up late reading before the fireplace. The door rattled so peculiarly he could not believe the wind guilty, and so he went over to it to investigate. Just as he put his hand on the knob, a dull thud sounded outside the window. He went to it and peered out. He thought he caught a flash of a cat slinking across the yard.

"Old Tom out hunting," he concluded. "Probably been sitting on the windowsill watching me, and jumped down when I went to the door."

He resolutely resumed his reading. A moment later he put down the book. He listened—got up and tiptoed to the door and jerked it open. The yard was empty. He made a round of the windows, staring out intently. He stepped into the moonlit dining-room, and started cautiously for the kitchen. The floor creaked spookily. The kitchen was innocent of sound or movement, but he lingered there, watching out the windows to see if anything crossed the yard.

Ten minutes later, when he again took up his book, he scratched his head, and examined the volume critically.

"Now, this is the bunk," he grumbled. "I'd swear I was reading 'Huck Finn'—I marked the page, thirteen; this page is thirteen, all right, but it's 'Treasure Island.' Whew!" He whistled softly, then frowned into the fire. "I'm sure going nuts over nothing." He yawned. "Guess I'll get a drink and go to bed."

Grotesque shadows bobbed before him from the flickering candle that lighted him to the kitchen. A loaf of bread which he had found in the box, and of which he had eaten a part, was now nearly all gone. Jerry was positive he had left more than half, but there remained less than a fourth. A glass of jelly which he had eaten a spoonful of, and then set in the pantry, was not there. Two cupboard doors were ajar, as though some one had departed in haste.

"I'll see this thing through." He was wide awake now, and angrily determined. He went to the basement to get a lantern he had seen there when he had gone over the house. Lighting it, he searched an hour, on every floor, through each hall, into every dim corner and dark closet. No trace of company anywhere.

"Never saw the beat of it." He straightened his shoulders and grinned sheepishly. "Imagine hulky old Jerry developing nerves! Plumb loco! Must be the altitude!"

HE returned to the cavernous lobby and put fresh fuel upon the fire. His spirits rose as the logs blazed up cheerily.

"I probably left those doors open myself," he reasoned. "I've likely set that jelly away some place and don't remember where I put it. The bread, though—I planned I could stretch it out three more meals, three slices at a meal. Not more'n two slices left now. Still, when a fellow gets to thinking, he's liable, absent-minded-like, to eat more than he realizes." He took comfort from his practical explanation, and was about to throw himself down on the hearth for a cat-nap, when there came a knocking from above.

Jerry suspended movement and strained his ears to locate the sound. He started to upbraid himself for a nervous old woman, so long was there silence. Then he jumped as three distinct knocks rapped out—"Thump-thump-thump." A pause, then: "Thump-thump-thumpity-thump." Up the first flight of steps he slipped like a shadow. In the dark hallway he hesitated. The thumping had stopped. Soundless as a ghost, he crept up the third flight. "Thump, thump," the sounds boomed out hollowly above his head.

"Something in the attic," Jerry whispered to himself. "I didn't search through all that junk up there, but I looked in. Didn't see—"

RENEWED thumping cut him short. It sounded like croquet balls rolled across bare floors. He cautiously mounted the attic stairs. At the closed door he paused to light the lantern he had snatched up from the hearth. All at once three thumps banged just inside the door. He turned the knob silently. A bell tinkled faintly. It flashed across his mind that the bell must be connected with the door-knob to give warning. He flung the door wide, and stepped inside.

At first he could see nothing but the masquerade costumes that swung gently in the breeze of the opened door—a jolly St. Nick winked at him over his rope whiskers; a Hawaiian maiden intrigued his roving eye; a dignified Martha Washington and a gypsy hung side by side; Columbine and Harlequin pirouetted before him; and the March Hare hung limply from his hook, strangely resembling his skinned cousin fresh from the hunting-knife. Disembodied spirits, all, of lively summer days. Hung among these brocaded and spangled garments were an old-fashioned khaki divided skirt, some worn habits, old hats and coats. Discarded things, and things stored against their owners' return the next season.

The bell jingled again as a big pack-rat went scampering into the gloom. Silence—broken as soon as Jerry could find tongue.

"Huh!" he stuttered lamely. "Huh!" he repeated rather inadequately. "And I didn't recognize a packer!" His glance swept the floor, strewn with bits of tinsel and tiny bells, old shoes and chenille balls, baubles fallen from the costumes, and all dear to that mountain miser, the pack-rat.

"I've always thought those old fellows uncannily wise. Found this attic; pack-rat heaven, all right." Then he grinned. "If it only had some knives and forks or golf-balls, 'twould be seventh heaven," he added as he recalled that he had once found most of his mother's missing silver in a pack-rat's nest.

He turned to go out, bumping into the door—and instantly his hair rose on end and prickles ran up his spine. His hands went clammy. Something had reached over his shoulder and caught him by the collar. When he could control himself enough to look down at his shoulder, he jerked loose in disgust. An abandoned Columbine had reached forth tarletan fingers and buttonholed him! Fragile threads that his imagination had lent the strength

of steel wires! He was so chagrined he didn't even have the face to chide himself.

JERRY went to bed out of sorts. The next morning he was awakened by the ringing of the telephone in his room. He sprang up and answered it. "Hello! Hello!" he called excitedly. There was no sound from the other end of the wire. He rattled the hook savagely, listened—dead silence. At length he hung up the receiver, hurried into his clothes, and raced downstairs to the lobby. The private switchboard in the business office showed no signs of recent use. None of the plugs were in place.

He made a round of the windows, looking for tracks about the house. He could see none. He went back to the switchboard.

"Must be a chart around somewhere," he surmised, and began searching for it, trying to explain things as he hunted. "Burton and his men repairing the line, likely." Burton was the local telephone manager.

But man hungers even in the face of enigmas; Jerry went to the kitchen and set about getting his breakfast, stopping from time to time to listen or glance through the windows. Twice, when he thought he heard a suspicious sound, he dashed through the dining-room, ran up the front stairs, through the upper hall, and down the rear stairs. But he surprised nothing.

All morning he was on the *qui vive*. There were more than a hundred sleeping-rooms in the hotel, besides the lobby, dining-room, kitchen, basement, storerooms, attic, laundry, and servants' quarters. He searched them, room by room, and each room foot by foot, corner by corner, closet by closet, and found not a trace of anyone. Then he put on his snowshoes and made a round of the cabins tucked away in the woods. The annex, an addition which stood near the main building, had no tracks around it; and so he did not enter it—nor the cabins, for the same reason.

"Nothing can get in or out without leaving tracks, that's sure. 'Less it's a spook—aw, rats!" He grinned sheepishly, remembering his scare of the night before and its simple cause, then laughed aloud in relief as an idea occurred to him.

"I've got it! Old packer's the thief that stole the jelly; sure wouldn't put it past him, anyway."

The sun dropped behind Prospect Mountain at three in the afternoon. An hour later, when Jerry went out to the kitchen, he missed the ticking of the little alarm clock. It had stopped.

"Stopped at four yesterday too." He shook it, and it began ticking busily. "Nothing wrong with it that I can see. Wasn't run down." He set it back upon the shelf, but kept one ear cocked in its direction as he prepared supper.

While he was eating, Jerry mulled over all the queer goings-on, and then it was that he had his big idea. In a showcase in the office were various goods left over from the summer, and among them, he recalled, were photographic supplies. So eager was he to test his plan that he left his supper and went to the office, returning in a few moments with loaded hands—a camera, film, a box of flashlight powder.

He finished his supper quickly, studying the lay of the kitchen as he ate. He was glad of his experience in taking flashlights of wild animals. He placed a chair between the stove and the kitchen table, directly in the way of anyone passing to the sink. Then he rigged a string from the chair-leg to the shutter of the camera and to his device for setting off the flashlight, so that the moving of the chair would spring the set and take the picture. He surveyed his "trap-set" gleefully.

"Aint we got fun!" he hummed, and went whistling back to the lobby.

HE was too restless and excited to settle down to reading. He felt something was about to happen. Soon he'd *know* whether there was some one else about, or if all these spooky transpirings were accidental or supernatural. Or just old Packer!

He stepped out into the yard, breathing in the beauty of the crystalline moonlight. After a few minutes he went back inside, and had just settled before the fire, when a drop came down on the switchboard with a soft buzzing sound. He whirled over to the switchboard; sure enough, there was an open drop. He wanted to believe that the hinges were loose, and the drop therefore susceptible to the slight vibration of the wind, but he could not resist plugging in beneath the drop and slipping on the head-set. Unearthly sounds came confusedly, whether voices or just wind, he was not sure. He tore off the head-set and dashed upstairs, checking himself in each hall to

listen. He heard nothing resembling those weird cries. He ran pell-mell downstairs again, put the head-set back on, and listened. He heard a distinct, low wail.

He hesitated a moment, hardly crediting his senses. Then, fearful that the call might be from some one in distress, in the cabins or annex, he slipped on his snowshoes and investigated. Not a sound rewarded his pains.

"Never thought I'd come to this," he mourned. "Ha'n'ts have always been jokes to me. I give up." Then, fiercely, contradictorily: "I'll be darned if I do!"

AT daybreak next morning Jerry was awakened by the ringing of the telephone in his room.

"Heck of an hour for Burton to begin working on the line," he complained, and turned over to go to sleep.

But the persistent ringing made sleep impossible, and though he swore he would not answer it, almost without volition he found himself snatching the receiver off the hook. "Hello! Hello! What do you want?" No answer.

He crashed the receiver down on the hook, and got back into bed. He had just succeeded in dozing off, when he was startled out of sleep by a sharp report as though a gun had been fired close at hand. Dazedly he struggled to a sitting posture, and listened. He decided it was a nightmare.

"Sounded awful real," he defended, not satisfied with his conclusion.

He gave up trying to sleep, dressed and again searched the hotel, once more futilely. But when he entered the kitchen, his eyes lighted happily. The chair had been moved, the flash set off.

"Aha, villain, I have you on the hip!" he mocked.

He rushed down to the basement, grabbed a developing tank from the storeroom, and soon had the film in the developer. He spent an interminable twenty minutes waiting out the period of development, turning things over in his mind, wondering what he would find.

"Why didn't the fellow take the camera?" he wondered. "The flash scared him out, I guess."

The time was up at last; he rinsed off the film, fixed it in hypo, and held it to the light with hands trembling with excitement. The next instant he dropped it to the floor.

"A girl!" he gasped, incredulously. "I'll be blown."

He picked up the film and turned it from side to side.

"Wish I could see her face."

He washed the film thoroughly and suspended it from the utensil-rack to dry. Many times while he prepared and ate his breakfast, he stopped to inspect the drying negative. Each time he turned away puzzled.

"A girl! A girl!" he muttered. "Who in time is she?"

Jerry had been afraid of girls all his life, and his discovery threw him in a panic. He made a half-hearted round of the main building, but passed up the cabins and annex entirely.

"No use," he declared, loath to confess even to himself the reason of his slackness. "Nothing can get in or out without leaving tracks, and there's no tracks anywhere. Either that girl is hidden too well in this house for me to find her, or else she's a spook. Or maybe she's got a magic cape that makes her invisible." This last foolishness revived his spirits. "Pity she doesn't wear it when she's prowling round the kitchen," he jeered. "It'd be more becoming than that old divided skirt and shapeless sweater."

With these careless words a suspicion awoke in his mind.

He went up to the film and scrutinized it closely.

"S'pose that was an old exposed film?" he hazarded, anxious to refute the evidence before his eyes. But the rest of the film was blank. There had been only the one exposure, and that plainly the picture of a girl in riding clothes.

HE was torn between the desire and the fear of meeting his tormentor face to face, now that it developed that she was of the feminine persuasion. But he had the masculine intolerance of being "done" by a mere woman, and that overcame his timidity. He crept quietly up to the second floor, listened; went on up to the third floor, listened; and finally decided to have another look in the attic—a sort of hankering to prove that maybe after all the girl in the picture might be old Packer! He opened the door, and stared stupefied. He felt that the two hooks directly opposite him didn't look the same; he wondered what was the difference, and the sudden realization came to him that they

were empty now, while they had held something before. He couldn't quite recall what, and was groping in his mind for the elusive garments, when it flashed over him that an old khaki divided skirt had hung there and now was missing. Instantly the allayed suspicion awoke.

"Wait till I catch you, smarty! I'll mop the lobby up with you. I'll—" Words failed him.

Nevertheless, after angrily resolving to spend the night in the kitchen, lying in wait for his tormentor, his old fear of femininity assailed him. What if it were a real girl after all? Darned if he'd be run off by a girl. Darned if he'd stay if it were. Didn't care if Gus and the boss were counting on him. The place could go hang. It was possessed of haunts and spooks, anyway. He stuck it out till midnight, then gave up his vigil.

"What's the use?" he complained. "It isn't humanly possible to catch ghosts. Nothing human could have escaped me all this time. Anyway, they're scared to show themselves." He pounded noisily up the back stairs to his room.

MORNING dawned sunny and calm. The mountains stood out sharply; it seemed to Jerry he could reach out of his window and touch them. He had slept late and was dressing lazily.

"Sorter laid down on me, didn't you, little ol' burglar alarm?" he chided the telephone. He was in fine fettle. "Guess the wind was the culprit all the time," he decided complacently, willfully forgetting the flash-light picture.

Whistling, he went down the back stairs to the kitchen. And there his music froze in his throat. For in the stove a hot fire burned, and the kettle was singing cheerily to itself.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" he exploded. "The fire I left would be black out by now. Of course there's some one about."

Just then he caught a glimpse through the window of something moving along the steel cable which was stretched from the icehouse beneath the annex to the kitchen icebox. By it the ice was hoisted and sent over to fill the latter in the summer. The moving thing was screened by a grove of spruce that grew in the gully below. Breathlessly Jerry waited for it to emerge from behind the trees. It was slow coming. A few moments more, and he would see it. If it was a man—his fists clenched.

Then they relaxed—what if it were a girl, after all?

Midway down the cable, behind the screening spruces, the figure halted. It swayed for a moment in midair, then dropped to the ground.

This action brought Jerry to his senses. He whirled away from the window and went downstairs five steps at a bound. A dozen possibilities flashed through his mind. Predominant was his determination to catch the perpetrator of all the annoyances he had endured and have it out with him—or yes, her!

He floundered through a drift to a point directly above the spot where a man crouched, half buried in snow, fastening on snowshoes.

ALL the accumulated ire of his outraged feelings burst forth in Jerry's war-cry as he dived headlong down upon the stranger. All the pent-up energy he had been forced to store up for lack of opportunity to get at his antagonist went into his impetuous blows.

At Jerry's onslaught both men were submerged in the soft snow. Neither could see what manner of opponent he had to cope with. They floundered, each fighting for the top position. Jerry protected his face with his left arm, and swung blindly with his right. Now he was on top, but his adversary writhed and squirmed so that he had difficulty in staying there. The stranger found footing at last, and lifted him high and flung him headlong down the slope, but he lost his own footing, and tumbled after Jerry. Over and over they both rolled, first one, then the other, on top. At the bottom of the gully they stopped. Waist deep in snow, they struggled to their feet and faced each other. There was no opportunity to leap in and out, to duck or dodge. Instead each stood squarely up to the other, swinging, punching, breathing heavily.

They were each content to slug it out, but such ferocious battle could not long endure; neither wind nor strength was equal to the strain.

The stranger landed a full blow flush at the point of Jerry's jaw, and his head snapped back. It rocked from side to side as his antagonist followed up his advantage. Desperately Jerry lunged forward, clinched and hung on.

In his attempt to shake Jerry off, the man lost his footing and went down with

Jerry on top. But only for a second—he soon fought free. The moment of respite, however, cleared Jerry's head.

They resumed their slugging, but Jerry was cool and cautious now. The punch on the jaw had jarred from his mind the notion that he could maul the stranger at will. He changed his tactics—landed straight blows and protected his head. Three times he landed straight hard lefts to the wind while he covered up with his right. Every blow knocked a grunt out of the stranger. The fourth time, as he fainted as though to repeat, the fellow dropped his hands to protect his middle, and Jerry shot out his right to the jaw, solidly, squarely.

His antagonist dropped limp in the snow.

For a full minute Jerry waited, his hands knotted into hard fists. The man finally blinked blankly up at him.

"What's matter? What's happened?" he muttered drunkenly, still dizzy from the blow.

"Nothin' much's the matter—an' nothin' much's happened—yet," returned Jerry belligerently. He was breathing hard. "You've been playing horse with me, and now, by heck, you'll pay for it. Stand up. I can't hit a man when he's down."

The stranger struggled weakly to his feet and gamely tried to fight. Jerry watched suspiciously to see if he was feigning or not. Just then the fellow pitched headlong into the snow, without being touched.

Jerry let him lie. Presently he stirred, shook himself free of the half-smothering snow, and grinned up at Jerry out of half-closed eyes.

"I'm licked—plenty—you win," he stammered, raising fumbling hands to his jaw and swollen eye.

"You've not got half that's coming to you," Jerry spat out venomously. He stepped back, his jaw set, his fists clenched, waiting for the other to recover.

The man got to his feet, swaying unsteadily, and floundered up to Jerry.

"Aw, say, you win, buddy. I'm whipped. Cut out the hostilities."

THEY stood drying themselves before the fireplace in the lobby. At last Jerry put the question that had been consuming him.

"What you doing here?" he snapped shortly.

"Waiting," his guest answered laconically.

"Waiting? What for?"

"For folks to forget me."

Jerry looked at him. He was young, not much older than himself. Well built, too—straight and lithe and quick of movement. Rather good-looking—sort of likable, somehow.

"I might as well tell you the truth," the stranger went on. "Name's Lowden. Been doing time—year to go."

Jerry understood. "You've escaped from the road camp," he said rather than asked.

"Yes."

"You're a fool. Forfeiting all the credit you've earned through good behavior. That's how they sent you to the camp. Trusties—on their honor—no guards. You had to give the warden your word of honor to get—" Jerry halted and looked sharply at the other.

Before that keen look Lowden bowed his head. Jerry had pricked the vital spot. For he, Lowden, had done just that—given his word of honor that he would not try to escape. He had not intended to, but the chance came, he lost his head—now he stood abashed before this young fellow who had defeated him in fair fight.

JERRY, who had been so eager to wallop him, was now just as anxious to save him embarrassment.

"How did you come to do it?"

"We were sitting about the old air-tight in the tent listening to the radio when the caretaker's message came in. Guess every man there had the same thought—a good chance to make a get-away. Snow coming down thick, tracks covered—hole up here till the hue and cry died out—no telephone connections. I'd been up here once and knew—oh, what's the use? I'm here, Lafayette!"

He was so young and blithe and game!

"How much time have you to do?" Jerry asked evenly.

"Almost a year—or was."

"You've got to go back."

Lowden flinched as he hadn't in their fight. The light suddenly left his eyes. He trembled.

"Hell, no! *Never!* I swore when I left camp I'd never go back—alive. I won't. You can't make me. You don't know what you're asking. I'll—" He glanced toward the door.

Jerry did not seem to notice, but stared into the fire.

"The road-camp system is rather Utopian, I suppose," he said presently, apropos of nothing.

"It's a life-saver for the poor boobs," Lowden defended.

"Your escape will make it hard on the others," Jerry went on. "Could you find your way back to camp alone?" he added inhospitably.

"Dunno."

Jerry switched the subject.

"Say," he asked suddenly. "What was the big idea? The tricks?"

Lowden laughed, some of his natural buoyancy returning.

"It wasn't all for fun," he chuckled. "I wanted to scare you out—knew if I did, you'd never tell—wouldn't advertise your being run out by ha'nts." He choked with mirth.

Jerry smiled half-heartedly.

"But the flash—"

Lowden's guffaws drowned out his last words. Irrepressible youth mastered him. When the young outlaw could sober up, he explained:

"When I found your set-up in the kitchen, I couldn't resist having a little fun. I used to work in a picture-shop. I thought maybe the girl disguise might get your goat. I saw the riding habit in the attic—" His laughter pealed forth again. He jumped up, pulled his tattered sweater on either side till it stuck out jauntily over the hips, and strutted across the room with the self-conscious swagger of the horsey, breeches-bisected, flapper tourist, flicking an imaginary quirt against an imaginary boot. Jerry could imagine a jingling spur on a dainty heel.

"Now we've got to get you back to camp without the boss there reporting you absent or sending you back to Cañon for running away. I've got an idea—"

The gentlemanly bandit gave Jerry the once-over beneath keen, level brows.

"You're a good sport," he swore. "And you're on. Put it there."

Jerry reached out his hand. They shook understandingly.

IN silence they snowshoed up the valley, keeping out of sight among the trees. They took turns breaking trail, without a word between them. Behind dragged a toboggan.

After mushing up a steep slope through deep, soft snow, they stopped for breath. Ahead lay the road-camp.

The deputy in charge of the camp came out of his tent in answer to Jerry's hail.

"Got a man here, says he belongs to your outfit," Jerry announced blandly. "Picked him out of the snow—eyes gone back on him." This last with the consciousness of truth. "Look here." He lifted a corner of the bandage.

The warden beheld an inflamed and bloodshot eye.

"Where'd you find him?" he demanded curtly.

"Down the valley," Jerry waved in that general direction. "He was about all in. Crazy as a loon."

"I was just making up my report—didn't know whether to report him as lost in the storm, or—" The warden turned toward the man on the sled. "Glad to see you back, Lowden. Couldn't report you missing or send anyone for you—wires all down."

The man upon the sled lifted his hand toward Jerry.

Jerry grasped it tightly.

A moment later a tent-flap parted, and a battered face gazed out wistfully, devotedly, at the receding figure dragging an empty toboggan.

"THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT," a complete novel by Frank Parker Stockbridge, will be a feature of the next issue of the bigger and better Blue Book Magazine. Like Mr. Stockbridge's widely popular "Buried Alive Club" tales, this novel is a keenly dramatic story dealing with notably real and likable people. Be sure to read it in the next, the October, issue.



Tembo Wanculu

An exceedingly interesting story of My Lord the Elephant, by the man who wrote "Black Nose" and "Tusker and the Vampires."

By HUGH THOMASON

IN the olden time when Rome and Carthage were fighting for the mastery of the ancient world, the great war-elephants were an important part of the Carthaginian armies. No elephant of these degenerate days can compare in size and intelligence with the great beasts who bore the archers and axmen of Hamilcar and Hannibal. Some of these elephants measured twelve feet four inches at the shoulder and weighed ten tons. That this breed of elephants has become extinct there is no doubt. The largest elephant killed in Africa during these modern times was exactly eleven feet nine inches in height. Jumbo was only eleven feet high, with a weight of six and a half tons.

When Scipio Africanus fought the Carthaginian armies on the arid plains around the walls of Dido's great city, riderless war-elephants would break away and escape to the Beled-es-Sudan (the Land of the Blacks). The descendants of these run-aways—*Elephas africanus oxyotis*—crossed with the *Elephas africanus knocenauri* are the largest elephants now to be found in

the world, and may be found around the headwaters of the Nile.

The elephant is an animal that belongs to the remote past. They are so odd that they seem out of place in the present century, with their long trunks, huge shapes and great tusks. When the world was young, when the mountains were new, when those animals called men had not as yet learned to tie a sharp piece of flint to the end of a stick, and before the descent of the second great glacier, which covered Northern Europe, Asia and America for five hundred thousand years, had taught them the meaning of cold, they were the rulers of the earth, but they had been conquered in the struggle of existence. Their great cousins the mastodon and the mammoth are completely gone, and their own tribe can now be numbered by thousands.

ON a beautiful little tributary of the White Nile, in a shady retreat secure from the hyenas and vultures, Tembo Wanculu was born. *Tembo* means elephant, and *Wanculu* means *The Big One*,

in the Ngoni dialect. The Ngoni also call the big tuskers *Nkhlovu*, and the tuskless bull *Kamgwara*.

In his first hour he heard the resonant roar of the lion and the raucous hiccough of the leopard, and far away on the rocky slopes of Mount Kampaia he heard the calls of the elephants of his mother's herd. It is a curious fact that the little baby elephant lifted his ears at the sound and rocked back and forth on his sturdy legs.

Little Tembo would have weighed a flat two hundred pounds at his birth, had there been a set of scales in that part of Africa on which to weigh him. He was all covered with long silky black hair like a Newfoundland dog. His skin was not pinky in color as is usual in baby elephants; it was black, and his ears were mottled with white. By his great size and these markings he was known for one hundred and fifty years to all the savage tribes from Bechuanaland to the Somali coast on the Gulf of Aden.

When Tembo Wanculu was one year old, he and his mother were seen bathing in Lake Rudolph by a band of Gallas. It being starving time with this particular band of Gallas, they set to work at once to dig a trap pit to secure a feed of elephant meat. For two weeks they worked as energetically as it was possible for savage Africans to work, digging up with their broad spears the earth which their women carried away in shallow woven grass baskets and half-gourds. When all was ready, they ribbed it over with joists of slender bamboo and covered over all with earth and grass. The pit was dug with a slope to the center from all sides so that all four feet of the elephant or rhinoceros engulfed therein would be in a bunch at the bottom, rendering it helpless.

On the day following the completion of the trap, Wanculu, trailing his dam down to the lake for a bath, saw her disappear from in front of him down into the pit of the Gallas, where she lay firmly wedged in an upright position, and screaming with impotent rage and fright. The Gallas answered the call and quickly dispatched her with their spears. They would have killed Wanculu also, but for his exceptional dark color and white spotted ears. Instead they captured him and bound him tight with thongs of leopard skin. He stood by and saw his parent devoured to her very bones, and those bones cracked open for the marrow.

The Galla band took Wanculu to their village, where he was tethered by a front leg to a stake driven in the ground.

WANCULU'S second year was some harder than his first one, because he lacked a mother's care. Of course he had reached the age where he could eat such dainties as grass and young sugar-cane, but these things could not make up for the fun he was missing in the hills. He would stand for hours watching the purple tops of the Ruwenzoris against the sky, and his little dark eyes would glow. He would see the tropical storms break and flash above Mount Elgon, behold the rains lash through the jungles, and he was always filled with strange longings and desires that he was too young to understand or follow. He would see the white haze steam up from the labyrinth of wet vines, and he would tingle and scratch for the feel of its wetness on his skin. And often, when the dark mysterious African night came down, it seemed to him that he would go mad. He would hear the wild tuskers trumpeting in the jungles a long way off, and all the myriad noises of the night.

He was fed and watered by a youthful Galla. This boy would cut the tender cane shoots for him and caress him while he was feeding. A great friendship grew up between them.

The Gallas kept Wanculu until he was five years of age. They intended to sell him to the British at Mombassa. He outweighed at five years any calf of his age in all Africa. And at the age of five an elephant is no older than five in a human child; he was still just a baby, even if he did have the wild tuskers' love of liberty.

One night Wanculu heard the sound, long-drawn and strange from the silence of the jungle. He grew motionless. The great ears pricked forward; the whipping tail stood still. It was a call never to be denied. The blood was leaping in his great veins.

He suddenly rocked forward with all his strength. The native rope of fiber, spun tight, hummed and snapped—very softly indeed. Then he padded in silence out among the huts, and nobody who had not seen him do it would believe how silently an elephant can move when he sees fit.

There was no thick jungle here—just soft grass, huts, an approaching dark fringe that was the jungle. No human was awake to see him. No voice called him back. The

grass gave way to bamboo thickets; that never-to-be-forgotten smell of the native huts changed to the wild, bewitching perfumes of the jungle.

Then, still in silence, because there are deficiencies to be observed by animals no less than men, he walked forward with his trunk outstretched into the primordial jungle and was born again.

FROM the very first, Wanculu's reception was cordial. The great bulls of the herd stood still and lifted their ears when they heard him grunting up the hill. But he slipped in among them and was forgotten at once.

It was a compact, medium-sized herd—vast bulls, mothers, old-maid elephants, long-legged and ungainly young males just learning their strength and proud of it, and many calves. They ranged all the way in size from the great leader, that stood ten feet and weighed ten tons, to little two-hundred-pound babies that had been born that season. And before long the entire herd began its cautious advance into the deeper hills.

The first night in the jungle—and Wanculu found it wonderful past all dreams. The mist on his skin was the same cool joy that he had expected. There were sounds, too, that set his great muscles aqiver. He heard the sound that the bamboos make—the little *click-click* of the stems in the wind, the soft rustle and stir of many leafy tendrils entwining and touching together, and the whisper of the wind over the jungle grass. And he knew, because it was his heritage, what every one of these sounds meant.

The herd threaded through the dark jungle, and now they descended into the cool waters of the White Nile. A herd of dark waterbuck sprang from the misty shore-line and leaped away into the bamboos. Farther down, he could hear the grunt of the buffalo and the bellowing of the big bull crocodiles.

It was simply a caress—the touch of the soft, cool water on his flanks. Then they reared out, like great sea-gods rising from the deep, and grunted and squealed their way up the banks into the jungle again.

But the smells were the book that he read best; he understood them even better than the sounds of green things growing. Flowers that he could not see, hung like bells from the arching branches. The very

mud that his four feet sank into emitted scent that told the history of jungle-life from the world's beginnings. When dawn burst over the eastern hills, he was weary in every muscle of his young body, but too happy to admit it.

This day was the first of many thousand joyous days. The jungle, old as the world itself, is ever new. Not even the wisest elephant, who after all is king of jungle-land, knows what will turn up at the next bend of the trail. It may be a lion, who will slink sullenly into the bush. It may be a herd of wild buffalo, always looking for a fight, or some absurd armadillo-like thing, to make him shake his vast sides with mirth.

IT was now that he had his first adventure.

He was standing by the side of an immense anthill, rocking dreamily to and fro and lazily swinging his trunk. He was so busily occupied in this that he did not observe that he was being stalked by a huge black-maned lion. The lion had crept up and stood scowling like grim death not thirty feet from where Wanculu stood. Then the lithe, powerful body of the great cat began to crouch; his smoldering eyes glowed like fire, and his long tail stretched out behind, lashed slowly to and fro. Just at the moment of the spring something happened. An ant-bear, which had been sleeping six feet underground, suddenly popped to the surface of the anthill. The lion hesitated for a moment and then turning his attention to the newcomer, crouched for his spring onto the aard-vark. The ant-eater, paying no more attention to the lion than if he had not been there at all, kept on at his business. His goggling eyes, however, had not overlooked the smallest movement of his deadly visitor, and just as the lion's muscles quivered for a spring—he was gone. One minute, and he had been plainly outlined in the starlight against the mound; in the next, as the lion shot through the air, there was only a mass of heaving earth and swarming ants to mark where the aard-vark had stood. With one tremendous scoop of all his broad claws, aided by the spadelike tail, the earth-hog had dug himself in beneath the soft, spongy earth. The lion's jaws closed on nothing more substantial than a swarm of biting ants, while his claws buried themselves harmlessly in the soft soil. Beneath, the ant-bear burrowed his way to the very base of the mound. Sputtering, growling and dashing

the earth, with ants hanging from his gaping jaws and slaving lips, the king of the jungle forgot all about Wanculu and made an undignified exit from the hill.

THE herd was never still. They ranged from one mysterious hill to another, to the ranges of the Ruwenzoris and back again. There were no rivers they did not swim, no jungles they did not penetrate, no elephant trails they did not follow, in the whole eastern part of equatorial Africa. Far away they roamed to the upper reaches of the Ubangi in the French Congo, and as far south as Stanley Falls on the great Congo River.

Whether he kept with the herd was by now a matter of supreme indifference to him. He no longer needed its protection. He had his share of adventure; yet he knew that life in reality had just begun. The time would come when he would want to fight the great arrogant bull for the leadership of the herd. He was tired of fighting the young bulls of his own age. He always won, and to an elephant, constant winning is almost as dull as constant losing.

One day as Wanculu lay broadside to the sun a Ngoni crept up to within six feet of him. The Ngoni had intended to loop a strong rope, made from the hairy tails of many cows, about his great feet—the oldest and most hazardous method of elephant catching. But the big one awakened just in time.

And a curious thing happened. The Ngoni could never entirely believe it, and it was one of his best stories to the day he died. Any other tusker would have charged in furious wrath, and there would have been a quick and sudden death beneath his great knees. Wanculu started out as if he intended to charge. He lifted his trunk out of the way—the elephant trunk is for a thousand uses, but fighting is not one of them—and sprang forward. He went just two paces. Then his little eyes caught sight of the red-black figure fleeing through the rank grass. And at once the elephant set his great feet to brake himself, and drew to a sliding halt six feet beyond. He remembered that an upright forked animal used to tie his foot to a stake, and that no harm came of it. He had as yet received nothing but kindness from them, and he was not afraid.

He remembered the days spent in the Galla village when this same kind of black

animal had been his masters. They had given him sweet sugar-cane and bamboo sprouts. Old elephant-hunters and natives of Asia and Africa will tell you that the elephant memory is the greatest single marvel in the world, and it was this memory that saved the Ngoni. Other animals did not get off so well.

ONE day a rhinoceros charged him—without warning or reason. This is a common thing for a rhino to do. They, of all the animals of the jungle, have the worst temper, and would just as soon charge an express train if they did not like the looks of it. Wanculu had awakened the great creature from his nap, and he came tearing down upon the tusker like a tornado.

Wanculu met the charge squarely, with the full shock of his tusks, and the battle ended there and then. Wanculu's tusk, driven by several tons of might behind it, would have pierced a ship's side, and Kifura limped away to let his hurt grow well and meditate revenge. Thereafter, for over a year, he looked carefully out of his bleary, drunken eyes and chose a smaller objective before he charged.

These were the days Wanculu lived apart from the herd. He did it from choice. He liked the silence, the solitary mud-baths, the constant watchfulness against danger.

Month after month he wended his way alone through the elephant trails. Elephants are wonderfully adept in picking the easiest gradient over hilly or mountainous country, for instead of going straight up a steep slope, they will wind about in a remarkable manner when making an ascent. In parts of Africa their paths have been trodden for ages until in many places they have been worn many inches below the level of the surrounding country.

The power of Wanculu was immense, and many patches of country were wrecked by him in trying to get fruit which grew out of the reach of his trunk. A favorite tree was the masuko, which grows a fruit about the size of a small plum, and these are abundant all over British East Africa.

After the elephants have disposed of the fruit near the ground, they break the trees to get what is out of reach of their long trunks, and acres of country have been smashed up by them, the trees either broken off about four feet from the ground, or wrenched out by the roots. The average

tree broken was about twenty-five inches. Wanculu, the powerful, broke one after he had become fully grown that measured, just below the fracture, fifty-two inches.

Sometimes Wanculu went silently and sometimes like an avalanche. He swam alone in the deep holes of the White Nile, and sometimes shut his eyes and stood on the bottom, just keeping the end of his trunk out of the water. One day as he went down into the water to drink and bathe, his foot was seized by a monster crocodile, who seemed determined to bite it off. Wanculu knelt on the broad back of the saurian and drove the long body so deep into the muddy bottom that no living creature ever saw it again.

An elephant's tusks are like a beaver's teeth, created to be used constantly; otherwise they would grow fast like fingernails and curl up so grotesquely as to become absolutely useless in time. So very early in life Wanculu began to look upon his tusks as matters of prime importance. They would take care of him, provided he took care of them—that is, if he used and kept them worn down to a proper length. This he did by giving them daily exercise, uprooting small trees and plowing deep furrows in the ground. With his continued digging, he became a "straight tusk," for his ivory weapons were prevented from attaining great curvature, and were ever sharp-pointed and directed forward like sabers.

THE herd, at such times as he visited it, continued to look upon Wanculu as a baby even after he had attained his eighth year. Leopards and the wild dogs often cast longing eyes upon the youngster. A full-grown elephant was too large for them to manage; but a halfgrown calf was a different matter. One day when the woods rang with the hiccoughing bark of the leopard, he slipped away unnoticed and hurried through the woods in the direction of the sound.

The great spotted cat, crouched full length upon a low-hanging branch, heard the snapping of twigs. A few moments later, a round figure with pillar legs appeared. The leopard's green eyes glistened; his jaws dripped eager expectancy. Wanculu was in his power at last. He crouched motionless and waited. Wanculu drew nearer, sniffing the air and keeping close watch about him. His nose told him that he of the raucous voice was close at hand.

Unfortunately he did not think to look up at the overhanging branch as he passed beneath it.

Suddenly an awful coughing roar rang out. Before Wanculu could collect his startled wits, a black and yellow body descended upon him. The next moment, he was in the clutches of a snarling, raging cat that fastened itself upon his forehead. Wanculu squealed with fear at the suddenness of it all; then a spasm of rage seized him as he felt the big cat's claws piercing his tender trunk. He shook the fury that tormented him, as a terrier shakes a rat. Idzemba lost his hold and fell heavily to the ground. Wanculu knelt and thrust. It was the right idea, but in his eagerness, he misjudged. Both tusks sank deeply into the ground, missing the leopard by inches. Before he could wrench them free, Idzemba wriggled out of danger and beat a hasty retreat, thankful to have escaped with no worse damage than a few broken ribs.

Wanculu's next adventure was with the wild dogs of the jungle. Nothing that lives can outdistance the wild dogs of Africa. So one day when Wanculu heard the cry of the pack behind him, he made no effort to increase his gait, knowing full well that they would be with him in a short space of time. He was not afraid of them, but he disliked being bothered by them. The leader of this pack was giant among wild dogs, a superbeast of his clan, above two and a half feet tall, weighing well over sixty pounds.

Finally Wanculu saw them coming, a score or more of gaunt, dingy forms speeding toward him through the jungle. On they came, mouths wide open, displaying their cruel teeth and blood-red tongues. Wanculu never hesitated, but continued quietly on his way. Surprise held the dogs back at first, instead of fear. They had expected to find an animal of lesser bulk, but empty stomachs drove them on. The fierce brutes crowded closely on Wanculu's flanks and rear. The great leader, Yellow Fang, strode in the van close to the elephant's left shoulder. He crept nearer and nearer with his stride. The pack watched him closely, awaiting their big leader's spring as the signal to close in.

Wanculu jogged on, apparently paying little attention to his unwelcome visitors. But with all his seeming indifference, he kept his eye on Yellow Fang and bided his time cunningly. The big dog edged closer. Another moment, and he would have sprung, when suddenly Wanculu's

trunk shot at him with the swiftness of a python's thrust and seized him by the middle. One agonized howl, and Yellow Fang vanished beneath the ponderous feet. The next moment he reappeared, whirled aloft a limp and bloody mass, and was flung over Wanculu's back to the pack behind him.

The wild dogs recoiled. The sudden and terrible end of their leader, together with the giant's strength and quickness, was not lost upon them. They set upon the body of their slain comrade and devoured it in short order, but they followed Wanculu no more.

WANCULU had attained thirty years of age, and a more magnificent specimen of the elephant could not be found in all Africa. He had reached full maturity. He loved the rains that flashed through the jungles, the swift climbing dawns of the east, the strange, tense, breathless nights. And at midnight he loved to trumpet to the herd on some far-away hill, and hear, fainter than the death-cry of a moth, its answer come back to him.

And now he began to realize his real strength. Of course he had known for many years his mastery over the inanimate things of the world. He knew how easy it was to tear a tree up by the roots, and jerk a strong tree-limb from its socket. He knew that under most conditions he had nothing to fear from the great lions, although a fight with a lion is a painful thing and well to be avoided. But he did not know that he had developed a craft and skill that would avail him in battle against the greatest of his kind. He made that discovery one day beside the Nile.

He was in the mud-bath, grunting and bubbling with pleasure and contentment. It was a bath with just room enough for one. And seeing that he was young, and perhaps failing to measure his size, obscured as it was in the mud, a great "rogue" bull came out of the jungle to take a bath himself.

He was huge—wrinkled and yellow-tusked, and scarred from the wounds of a thousand fights. His little red eyes looked out malignantly, and he grunted all the insults the elephant tongue can compass to the youngster that lolled in the bath. He confidently expected that Wanculu would yield at once, because as a rule young thirty-year-olds do not care to mix in battle with the scarred and crafty

veteran of eighty years. But he did not know Wanculu.

The latter was enjoying the bath to the limit, and he had no desire whatever to give it up. 'Something hot and raging seemed to explode in his brain, and it was as if a red glare, such as sometimes comes in the sunset, had fallen over the Nile Valley before his eyes. He squealed once, reared up with one lunge out of the bath—and charged. They met with a shock.

Of all the expressions of power in the animal world, the elephant fight is the most terrible to see. It is as if two mountains rose up from their roots and went to war. It was terrible to hear, too. The jungle had been still before. The river glided softly; the wind was dead; the mid-afternoon silence was over the thickets.

The jungle people had been asleep. A thunderstorm could not have broken out more quickly, or created a wilder pandemonium. The jungle seemed to shiver with the sound. They squealed and bellowed and trumpeted and charged. Their tusks clicked like the noise of a giant's game of billiards. The canes of the thickets cracked and broke beneath their great feet.

It lasted only a moment. It was so easy, after all. In a very few seconds, indeed, the old rogue became aware that he had made a mistake. There were better mud-baths at other places on the Nile, anyway.

He had not been able to land a single blow. And his wrath gave way to startled amazement when Wanculu sent home his third. The rogue did not wait for the fourth.

Wanculu chased him into the thickets. But he was too proud to chase a beaten elephant for long. He had halted, trumpeting, and swung back to his mud-bath.

But he did not enter the mud again. All at once he remembered the herd and the fights of his calfhood. All at once he knew that his craft and strength and power were beyond that of any elephant in the land. Who was the great arrogant herd leader to stand against him? What yellow tusks were to meet his and come away unbroken?

His little eyes grew ever more red as he stood rocking back and forth, his trunk lifted to catch the sounds and smells of the distant jungle. Why should he abide alone, when he could be the leader of the herd and the jungle king? Then he grunted softly and started away down the

river. Far away, beyond the mountains and villages of the Galla and the Ngoni, the herd of his youth roamed in joyous freedom. He would find them and assert his mastery.

THE night had just fallen, moist and heavy over the valley of the Nile, when Wanculu caught up with his herd. He found them in an open grassy glade, encircled by hills, and they were all waiting, silent, as he sped down the hills, toward them. They heard him coming a long way off. He was not attempting silence.

The old bull that led the herd, eighty years of age and at the pride of his wisdom and strength, scarred, yellow-tusked and noble past any elephant patriarch in the jungle, curled up his trunk when he saw him come. He knew very well what would happen. And because no one knows better than the jungle people what a good thing it is to take the offensive in all battles, and because it was fitting his place and dignity, he uttered the challenge himself.

The silence dropped as something from the sky. The little pink calves who had never seen the herd grow still in the same way before, felt the dawn of the storm that they could not understand, and took shelter beneath their mothers' bellies. But they did not squeal. The silence was too deep for them to dare to break.

It was always an epoch in the life of a herd when a young bull contests for the leadership. It is a much more serious thing than in the herds of deer and buffalo. The latter only live a short number of years, then grow weak and die. A great bull who has attained strength and wisdom enough to keep the leadership of an elephant herd may often keep it for forty years. Kings do not rise and fall half so often as in the kingdoms of Europe. An elephant is not really old until he has seen a hundred years pass over his head. Then he will linger along fifty years more, wise and grey and wrinkled and full of memories of a time no man can possibly remember.

Long years had passed since the leader's place had been questioned. The aristocracy of strength is drawn on quite inflexible lines.

The herd stood like heroic figures in stone for a long moment—until Wanculu had replied to the challenge. He was so surprised that he could not make any sound at first. He had expected to do the challenging himself. The fact that the leader

had done it shook his self-confidence to some slight degree. Evidently the old leader still felt able to handle any young and arrogant bulls that desired his place.

Then the herd began to shift. The cows drew back with their calves, the bulls surged forward, and slowly made a ring. The calves began to squeal, but their mothers silenced them. Very slowly and grandly, with infinite dignity, Wanculu stamped into the circle. His tusks gleamed. His eyes glowed red. And those appraising the bull in the ring knew that such an elephant had not been born since the days of their grandfathers.

They looked him over from tail to trunk. They marked the symmetrical form, the legs like mighty pillars, the sloping back, the intelligent eyes. His shoulders were an expression of latent might. By the conformity of his muscles he was agile and quick as a tiger. And knowing these things, and honoring them, devotees of strength that they were, they threw their trunks in the air till they touched their foreheads and blared their full-voiced salute.

They gave it at the same instant—as musicians strike the same note at their leader's signal. It was a perfect explosion of sound, a terrible blare, that crashed out through the jungles and wakened every sleeping thing. The dew fell from the trees. A great tawny lion, lingering in hope of an elephant calf, slipped silently away. The sound rang true and loud to the surrounding hills and echoed and re-echoed softer and softer, until it was just a tiny tremor in the air.

MEANWHILE the grand old leader stamped into the circle, seeming unconscious of the eyes upon him, battle-scarred and old. Even if this fight were his last he meant to preserve his dignity.

Again the salute sounded—shattering out like a thunderclap over the jungle. Then challenger and challenged closed.

At first the watchers were silent. Then as the battle grew fiercer and more terrible, they began to grunt and squeal, surging back and forth, stamping the earth and crushing the underbrush. All the jungle-folk for miles around knew what was occurring.

The two bulls were quite evenly matched. The patriarch knew more of fighting, had learned more wiles, but he had neither the strength nor the agility of Wanculu. The twilight deepened into the intense dark,

and the stars of midnight rose above the eastern hills.

All at once Wanculu went to his knees. But as might a tiger, he sprang aside in time to avoid a terrible tusk blow to the shoulder. And his counter-blow, a lashing cut with the head, shattered the great leader to the earth. The elephants bounded forward, but the old leader had a trick left in his trunk. As Wanculu bore down upon him he reared up beneath, and almost turned the tables. Only the youngster's strength saved him from immediate defeat.

But as the night drew to morning, the bulls began to see that the tide of battle had turned. Youth was conquering—too mighty and agile to resist. The rushes of the patriarch were ever weaker. He still could inflict punishment, and the hides of both of them were terrible to behold, but he was no longer able to take advantage of his openings. Then Wanculu did a thing that reassured the old bulls as to his craft and wisdom. Just as a pugilist will invite a blow to draw his opponent within range, Wanculu pretended to leave his great shoulder exposed. The old bull failed to see the plot. He bore down and Wanculu was ready with flashing tusk.

What happened thereafter occurred too quickly for elephant eyes to follow. They saw the great leader go down and Wanculu stand lunging above him. And the battle was over. The herd had a new leader.

IN the flat and marshy lands around the small lakes north of Victoria Nyanza, drained by the White Nile, are many quagmires. Into one of these Wanculu aimlessly wandered one day. He was leading his herd along the side of a lake when he heard the spitting cough of a leopard. He stopped behind to meet him, but after a short time the leopard not appearing he concluded that he should be leading his charges instead of wasting his time with a cowardly cat. So he resumed his way, but even while so doing he could not refrain from trumpeting a last defiant call to the leopard far behind him.

Better had he watched the lurking danger ahead than that which skulked behind. His caution slumbered and for the moment he forgot all. Too late came the awakening. His feet suddenly sank into the treacherous ooze. The mire-demon seized him with sucking grip and held on like grim death. In vain Wanculu strained and tugged. He was stuck fast. Here

was no chance for him to make use of his great strength, and suddenly it flashed upon him that an elephant caught in the mire need not expect any assistance from any one. Would the herd help him? He gazed in their direction despairingly; but by this time they had passed over the high ground and were beyond sight or hearing.

The morass which gripped his limbs was a small one. He could almost touch its sides with his trunk. A single forward step and he would be safe. He attempted to pull one forelimb free and make that step. The effort shifted his weight to the hind legs and they sank deeper. Try as he would he could pull neither one of them from the mire. It was like shifting oneself with one's boot-straps. Finally Wanculu gave it up. His escape must be made in some other way.

The morass was a ditch about twenty feet wide, several rods long. Wanculu stood like a bridge across this ditch, and in the center of a thick mass of *sud* and lilies. If these latter were only trees; something substantial, his escape would have been an easy matter. He curled his trunk about a clump of plants in a vain effort to pull himself free. A single tug uprooted them. He flung them down in disgust. He repeated this performance, but with no better results. Wanculu eyed the uprooted rushes gloomily. At the same time the thought was growing upon him that, although the *sud* might be too flimsy to cling to, they might be used in some way to support his weight. It seemed a forlorn hope, but he saw no other, and anything was worth trying.

NIGHT came on. The rain kept pouring down. The body of the mired Monarch might have been mistaken for a large boulder, it stood so still. The head and trunk, however, were in constant motion among the rushes. They seemed to be thrashing about in death agony, although there were no despairing shrieks nor dying groans. Finally head and trunk became quiet and Wanculu lay or, rather, stood as one dead, his legs buried in the mire up to his knees and elbows.

The rain stopped just as the night blackness began changing to morning gray. Wanculu still breathed. As the darkness lifted and permitted a clear view of the morass, it appeared much changed. Most of the rushes and lillies had vanished, or rather they had been mysteriously uprooted

and piled in a great heap beneath Wanculu's chin. The heap was much greater than appeared, for a large part of it had been packed down into the mire, forming a mat supporting the mass above it.

The first gray streaks of dawn had no sooner appeared than the young bull took a deep breath and lowered his head until its full weight rested upon his chin and the green mat beneath it. The mat sank deeply as Wanculu leaned forward and settled the entire front and heavier portions of his body upon it. The whole pit surface rocked beneath this tremendous shift of weight. Muddy water shot up into Wanculu's face as his jaws settled down against his chest. The raft of rushes protested with loud gurgles and sighs, but it held firm.

Wanculu's neck began to bulge. His back and shoulder muscles rose up in huge knots as he strained forward. Cords and tendons tautened and became cables which threatened to erupt through his crinkled hide. The veins stood out on his forehead like tree rootlets. His breath came loud and fast. The morass trembled to its bottom as the huge elephant challenged it to a test of strength; but it still held on. It was as though the captive's feet were clutched by sucking tenacles of an octopus determined to retain its death grip and not permit such noble prey to escape.

But Wanculu's power was now being applied to good advantage, with an even greater grim resolve urging it on. It was a test of strength between giants—Mire versus elephant. The two forces directly opposed to each other and at first no apparent motion resulted, then gradually the tide turned in favor of the determined elephant. Not for an instant did his tense muscles relax. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, one hind leg emerged from the engulfing slime. A loud sucking noise like a sigh and the foot came clear for a forward step. The other hind leg was treated in the same slow and labored way. The struggle then shifted to the front limbs. Trunks and tusks were still anchored on the green mat which, as a point of leverage, had thus far performed its part well. One after another the two front feet were freed and advanced. This was accomplished only after tremendous exertion, for the mire demon held on to the last, straining desperately to retain its hold. The advance, small as it was, brought Wanculu's trunk and tusks within reach

of the pit rim and solid ground. His main task was now completed, although to make escape certain he must repeat his first performance and make another advance. This he did after what seemed to him an eternity of squirming and heaving. Slowly, painfully, but surely he dragged himself out of the trap. The mire demon sighed and groaned, then settled back an inert mass as though acknowledging itself beaten and content to take no further part in the tremendous struggle.

Once clear of the morass, Wanculu turned his attention to the eastern hills. The herd had gone in that direction and he set out to catch up with his charges.

THE herd, again in charge of Wanculu, marched northeast to the borders of Abyssinia. No other bull elephant dared dispute his authority over the herd.

One day he was stalked by a white hunter who was anxious to obtain his long and beautiful tusks. He had often seen the black, forked, upright animals, but never before the white ones. Having no fear of these animals, he allowed this one, with his black attendants, to approach quite close to him. Then he felt a sharp, burning pain followed by a spurt of blood. He heard a detonation like the bursting of a joint of bamboo in the jungle fire. He staggered for a moment and then recovered. A blinding rage surged over him and he charged. He caught the white hunter on the tip of his needle-pointed left tusk and ran it through him into the ground. In his rage he trampled the hunter into a shapeless mass.

Wanculu now appointed two young tuskers to attend him wherever he went, and his wisdom in so doing was soon apparent, for in his next encounter with the white men he came off second best. He was standing between these two young bulls, when the sportsman stepped out from behind some bushes and let drive at him with a heavy rifle at a distance of less than seventy yards. Wanculu fell straight down and his long tusks went into the earth up to the gums, for the ground was fairly soft from recent rains.

When he fell these two bulls instead of rushing off, as one would have thought likely, began to stroke the stricken monarch with their trunks and prod him with their tusks. The solid .303 bullet had failed to reach his brain, but it sent him to sleep for about two minutes.

At last he woke up and after several severe struggles managed to get on his legs, on which he swayed about just like a drunken man. He was still so dazed from the nasty knock on his skull that he almost tottered over several times, and probably would have fallen had not the two small tuskers held him up. They not only prevented him from falling, but they gave him a heave to steady him and keep him from falling.

The two young bulls showed they were nervous and apparently anxious to get away, but they did not forsake him. They rather seemed to be urging him to come on for they jostled him about. At last he started to move, but was still evidently groggy, for he staggered about considerably. He gradually regained and began to step out in a firmer manner between the others.

AFTER these encounters Wanculu led his herd far away to the west in the French Congo—in Oubangui-Chari, one of the four colonies of Equatorial French Africa—the land of the Bandas. *Banda* means *net*. For at the seasons when the horizon blazes with bush-fires, they hunted by means of nets.

Wanculu and his herd had walked out of the frying pan into the fire for the presence of the great number of elephants had set the Banda aflame. They were preparing for a fire-drive, armed with spears, arrows and throwing-knives the band was mustering.

The chief of the Bandas had a head-dress of feathers, his body was stained with the juice of the red wood and anointed with palm-oil—for a hunting day is also a feast day. The Bandas sang as they walked, most of them accompanied by dogs as red of coat as the painted bodies of their masters. . . .

The day was fine. A soft, wet wind, blowing from the place of the sun's rising to that of his setting, cooled the bush. The sun had still far to go before reaching mid-heaven.

A beautiful day!

The little band split at the meeting of two paths which led, one to the village of *Soumana*, the other to the *n'gapou* villages which were under the authority of Yakidji, a former vassal of Senoussou.

Each one rallied to his post, so as to be able to carry out the work fixed for him at the given time. You either watch,

knock down the game, or light fires. Those who hunt, who really hunt, and who kill, are only a small number.

Then some of the men went, as far as the river Dangoua, which joins the Goutia to flow into the Kilimambi. There they had to kindle the fires. Others stopped this side of the river, at the village of Gaoda, the chief *dacpa-yera*, on the banks of the *Massaoua'nga*. Others, again went to their chosen positions. These stretched from the river Goubadjia to the river Gobo.

The provisions were unpacked, the *garabos*, full of tobacco to the top, were passed around. The men ate and drank solidly. Then they started talking of one thing and another, squatting on their heels.

THE chief blew a cloud of tobacco smoke into the air and said: "Some rainy seasons ago, I was at Kemo. This great black elephant with the white-spotted ears that we hunt today was there—Wanculu.

"A great white hunter, who hunted only elephants, was there to meet him.

"He was called Coquelin.

"Coquelin was one of those *boundjous* such as are rarely seen. He was as tall as a *sara* or a *n'gama*, and his eyes, which were the color of fine weather, shone in his face like the sun in the sky.

"He wore his hair long, falling on his neck, and a long beard, and his strength was so great that he could have felled a *gogona* with a blow of his fist.

"We liked him well. He lived like us poor blacks. He ate our food.

"One morning, a herd of *m'balas* was reported to him. This same Wanculu was their leader. They were laying waste the plantations of the *gobou* villages.

"He took only two rifles, one of which he entrusted to the best of his beaters, and kept the other one himself. He then started!

"Luck favored him.

"The same day, just before sunset, he found fresh spoor, which he followed.

"What a row! There they were without a doubt! Cracklings, snapping of branches, and trumpeting! One could hear the continuous rumblings of their digestion. They were wallowing in the mud, spraying themselves with water. For they had fled from the sun into the woods, near a *marigot*.

"Followed by his loader, the white hunter made his way toward them by slow degrees. At last he saw one between

two young ones looking in his direction, having scented him without doubt.

"What an enormous pair of tusks! He aimed at him and. . . .

"Ha! The wounded elephant was on him already.

"You live quickly in such moments as that. If fear does not kill you at once, you only feel it afterwards, when you have time.

"He leaped to one side to avoid the huge beast, did avoid him, stood his ground, brought his rifle to his shoulder once more, pressed the trigger. . . . *Tac!* A misfire!

"What was he to do? His loader? Gone, taking with him his second rifle! Flee? Impossible. He could only await death. And it came, did death. There it was—in those bright little eyes, in that curled and threatening trunk, in those ears, spread open like palm-leaves, in those sharp squeals of rage. Death was there. Death!"

THE sun flamed in mid-heaven. The blackbirds announced the fact on every side. And the three great gusts of wind, rushing in from the colorless horizon, passed as they do at this moment every day, and carried away in wide, whirling spirals dirt, dead leaves and dust.

This wind had blown in from the place of the sun's rising to disappear where the sun sets. And here it was coming back from the latter place as a light breeze.

Then to the right and to the left, from valleys, heights and marshes, trumpets, *olifants*, and *tam-tams* boomed forth. And suddenly a wild clamor:

"*Iaha!*"

The signal! The signal! The hunt is open! The hunt begins!

A smoke rose from the river Dangona. Thin at first, hardly perceptible, its blackish thread grows more distinct, spreads out in the sky.

Spear-heads could be beaten against the blades of throwing-knives.

"*Iaha!*"

Iaha! The signal! The fire is started, the brutal, many-tongued fire, which warms and burns, the fire which turns the game out of their ambush, which destroys snakes, frightens lions and will drive Tembo Wanculu and his herd past many traps and spears out of the land.

And now the whole earth seems wrapped in fire—vast, swift, far-reaching, many-

shaped—it rushes over the bush, over the *kagas*, in wild confusion, its forces streaming with sparks, with that mighty disordered din, heavy with the crackling of the trees that it strikes down.

Who shall tell the song of the bush-fire? It is here and there, and there again, and still farther too. It never stays still. It eats up the lonely spaces in a second. It leaps from plant to plant. It comes nearer. A short time more, just a little time, and you will hear its angry roar, which is over there, everywhere where the smoke is! The fire is coming on, and the smoke is growing thicker. The air is full of the scent of aromatic plants. The natives are sharpening their knives and spears for the last time. Through all this noise and confusion can be heard the *tam-tam* of the *U'nghas*.

Wild cattle terrified by the fire, are galloping toward the village of *Nibani* only to meet more fire. There are in the village beaters and fire lighters who will fire the bush entrusted to their care. Now from the village of *Nibani* smoke goes up—black smoke.

What vultures! What smoke clouds! The sky is no longer visible. The smoke and the vultures have veiled it. They have also veiled the sun. Nothing at present can be seen but the smoke and vultures. The abundance of vultures proves the abundance of game.

THE crowd kept on increasing. The swarm and the chaos increased. The lords and commons of the *m'bis* villages were there. The three *n'gapou* chiefs, *Ouorro*, *Nibani*, and *Yeretongbou*, were also in evidence.

Meanwhile, hastened by the breeze from the plains, the bush-fires and the smoke were gaining on the river *Gobo*, and in front of it driven by the fierce flames came every shape of beast and reptile in the Congo. A spear came hurtling through the air from behind, and would have pierced *Nibani*, for it was badly thrown, but, the space of the flicker of an eyelash before, he had thrown himself flat on one side, to avoid the leopard which came bounding toward him.

When he got up, still trembling all over, the great yellow cat was vanishing, growling and hiccoughing furiously. In contrast, there, quite close, lay *Ouorro*, the *mokoundji*, choking as he breathed, surrounded by a crowd of *M'bis* and *N'gapous*. The leopard, annoyed by that

spear which it had seen coming, and smarting from its burning fur, had ripped open his belly with a stroke of its paw as it passed.

Then came the sound as of distant thunder, as Wanculu's herd of a hundred elephants ran forward through a ragged screen of forked flames, whirling smoke and exploding bamboo to escape the roaring inferno that was twisting along like a tornado behind them. The terrified elephants, stretched out like a skirmish line, accompanied by great lions, who came along in great bounds; wild dogs, snarling leopards and ponderous rhino, all pressing along cheek by jowl. Snakes of all kinds intermingled with other forms of reptilian life were scudding along at top speed before the hot blasts. Every living thing, both great and small, was earnestly seeking to obey the first law of nature.

The elephants were now among the pit-falls and one after another went down to be speared to death. Wanculu and his guard of young tuskers charged the thin line of M'bis and N'gapous spearmen, who promptly fled before the furious onrush.

Many of the herd fell beneath the spear-thrusts of the hunters. Many fell into the pits. The aged, infirm and calves were either overtaken by the flames or killed. Only a remnant of the magnificent herd that he had led into the French Congo escaped; these Wanculu led sadly back to the uplands of British East Africa.

AFTER this stirring event a great number of uneventful years passed away. Wanculu had learned by experience a great number of things. He was a wise and powerful leader. One hundred and fifty years had he experienced in the land of his fathers, but the hand of time lay heavily upon him. He was old and feeble, and his great wrinkled skin hung over his large gaunt frame in large baggy folds. His tusks were near nine feet long with a circumference of twenty-six inches. Collectively they weighed one hundred and ninety-nine pounds. He could hardly carry them along while walking and when sleeping they rested on the ground in front of him. But for the help of the two satellites he would have had great difficulty in marching. But his time was near at hand and none knew it better than he.

Elephants have secret grave-yards unknown to man. Assisted by two tuskers, Wanculu started on his last journey. For

several days they traveled, then struck the trail that they were seeking. The track led around the base of a small hill and beyond it to a broken succession of heights and crags. There was a little stream that came out towards them, and they followed the stream up a valley that became more and more shut in. Then came the darkness that follows rapidly on sunset in that land, and the wind, instead of falling with the sunset, came straight and cold into their faces.

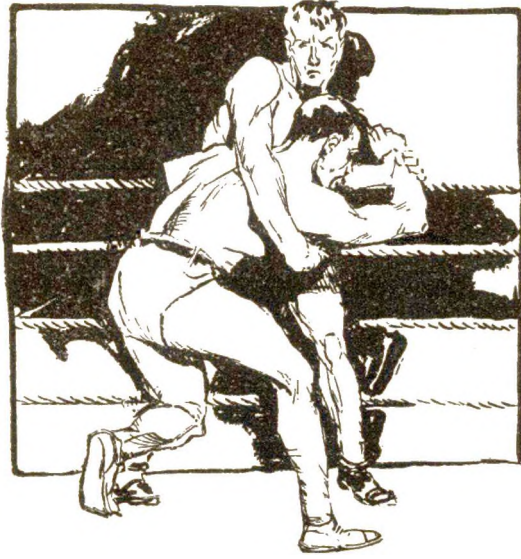
Finally they heard the trumpeting of an elephant, and others took it up, so that the valley in which they walked rang with their noise. These were the elephants guarding the grave-yard.

They continued to advance. The valley narrowed to a sort of cleft, shut in by crag walls, narrowed still more to a gateway between the crags, and what lay beyond they were soon to see.

Before them was the level floor of the valley, and the crag walls shut it in on every side. The valley was locked in save for this one entrance. For at its far end the mountains—the true mountains, not the foothills as those through which they had come—rose up very high, and over them came the light of the moon on to the bones—elephant bones. But a hundred yards away from them a great bull elephant was sweeping up the rank, rich grass for his feeding, and beyond him, they saw yet two more; so were they disposed that no living thing could pass them to get into the valley, without being seen by them or winded if at any time the wind blew in their direction.

Beyond these three sentinal guardians of the valley there were bones, glistening white in the moonlight. Great tusks and the skulls of elephants long since dead—such tusks as the ivory-hunter dreams of finding but does not find. Mighty tusks, some black with age, some white and new-looking. There lay the skeletons of thousands of elephants who had come to the valley to die. Here at last was an elephant grave-yard, known in legend to all the black men.

On a grassy hillock, Wanculu sank to his last, long rest. Nature had conquered at last. The two young bulls touched him with their trunks and then trumpeted with a resounding blast, which echoed and re-echoed from crag to crag. The spirit of Tembo Wanculu had flown to the great elephant god above.



When Abel Razed Kane

This vivid story of the wrestling game is by a man who knows—the author of "Hortense Plays First" and many another popular story.

By JACK CASEY

THE story of the lion and the lamb has been told. This is the story of the tiger and the guinea pig. The guinea pig longed to be a tiger, as guinea pigs will. No fairy, however, could make a tiger out of Izzy Caplan, little East Side tailor; but life atoned for a cruel mockery by sending the tiger to him at an eventful moment. The tiger was the Butcher Boy, a wrestler from Hungary. Young, brawny, handsome and alert, a cat-footed Apollo, he was truly a tiger among men.

Izzy Caplan, as became a human guinea pig, dwelt in a hutch of a basement in a moiling East Side cañon known as First Avenue. Three back rooms, dingy and cramped, were the living-rooms for himself, his wife and his four children, the oldest of whom was Sarah, dark-eyed and twelve. Above Izzy's domicile towered brick flats with fire escapes forever cluttered with bedding, babies or foodstuffs. In the avenue milled Old World races that make of the great East Side a picture hat for Miss Manhattan. Toward a sign in a flat above Izzy's tailor-shop marked "Fur-

nished Rooms," the Butcher Boy, alone and friendless, moved with all he possessed packed in an old portmanteau he carried. He had never heard of Izzy Caplan, nor Izzy of him, tigers and guinea pigs having little in common. But at the third of a flight of five steps something occurred that made them acquainted: there reached the Butcher Boy's ears, from the shop below, the sharp sounds of an explosion and the scream of a woman.

He dropped his portmanteau and darted down, to find Izzy Caplan in terror as flames leaped about him. His wife was unconscious on the floor. In the doorway to the living-rooms stood four horrified children. Terror reduced the little tailor to helplessness. He screamed and attempted a dozen tasks—and accomplished nothing.

The Butcher Boy made three moves that marked an athlete's training of mind as well as body. He tossed Izzy Caplan into the street bodily, carried out his wife, then rescued the four children. In endeavoring to save some of Izzy's household goods and tailoring equipment, he was so badly

burned that the surgeon on a Bellevue Hospital ambulance which came with the fire apparatus ordered him carted away to the hospital.

He spent a week in a hospital cot, with Izzy Caplan and his daughter Sarah daily visitors. The fire caused by a tongue of flame from Izzy's gas-iron licking a bottle of gasoline cost the tailor a pair of new pants he had been making for Schloschinsky the peddler, and a badly scorched and water-soaked shop, but it cost the Butcher Boy his portmanteau, and that had contained all his other possessions. Firemen soaked the tailor-shop, but nobody ever found out who pinched the Butcher Boy's valise.

THE great East Side pays scant attention to heroes. The rescue of half a dozen persons is merely an incident in a busy day. Deaths, births, marriages, explosions, fires, shootings, fisticuffs, ejections, family squabbles, suicides, vendettas and a thousand and one joyful or tragic bits of the stuff of which life is made—these the East Side regards with neither yawn or increase of pulse-beat. Five minutes after the victim of a violent end is carted away, the East Side's interest in the event has departed.

But the East Side is not all New York, nor the greater part of it. When New York newspapers, through their police reporters, learned that a newly arrived immigrant had saved six lives in a fire, editors sent able writers to Bellevue Hospital to get the kind of "human interest" story that forces sweet old ladies in Flatbush and New Jersey to spill tears into their morning cup of coffee. At the Butcher Boy's bedside they happened on little Izzy Caplan denouncing with characteristic gestures the lowbrow "element" that would sneak off with a busy hero's portmanteau. That "made" the story for the reporters. Rescues in New York, in its tenement districts especially, are common enough, but rescues wherein the rescuer becomes the victim of a thief smacks of a story. When little Izzy, furthermore, revealed that the Butcher Boy would now be unable to wrestle because his ring suit was lost, that he possessed not even a change of neckties, and that he was a tiger among men and had proved it by tossing him over the sidewalk clear into the street (bowling over two pedestrians en route), the reporters departed with a handshake and very sincere thanks to "Mr. Caplan."

How ably the newspaper craftsmen furnished the story of the "tiger among men" was reflected the following day when New York revealed the heart it is forever accused of not possessing. The Butcher Boy received at the hospital fourteen new suitcases and valises, each one far better than his own had been, and two trunks; one hundred and some odd dollars in cash and checks, and a single soiled bill from a little old woman who sold papers for a living and wrote she had lost a baby in a fire "so many years ago;" a pair of knitted bedroom slippers from a maiden lady who wrote she "was thrilled" to learn of a "tiger among men;" visits from three wrestling promoters offering matches immediately; offers of help from fourteen charitable organizations; seventeen offers of homes, and fourteen offers of marriage; a stack of mail ranging from a note of praise dictated by a millionaire banker (but *sans* check) to a letter from an office-boy sending his week's lunch-money in stamps; candy and several baskets of hot-house fruit which Izzy lugged home to his appreciative family.

The Butcher Boy left the hospital and went to live with relatives of the Caplans. Izzy saw to that, also saw that the athlete was clothed in an honest new suit of clothes with no cheating on the lining. Followed within a few days the announcement that the Butcher Boy was matched to wrestle "Choker" Stanley, a giant Pole, on Saturday night. The promoters, in posters announcing the event, called attention to the facts that the Butcher Boy was a "tiger among men," a fire hero and was called the Butcher Boy—not because he had worked for a butcher abroad (which was the fact of the matter), but because he butchered opponents in the ring, butchered them before the bulging eyes of a shrinking audience.

WHEN the ticket-sale was gobbled by folks eager to see a human mastodon butchered, the promoters, well-fed males with fat cigars, flabby hands and small hard eyes, laughed until their pink and well-barbered jowls shook. The chances of anybody butchering Choker Stanley was as remote as a Kansan praying for a cyclone. On the other hand, the Choker quite often rendered victims black in the face and temporarily mute and helpless as individual members of society by applying the murderous strangle hold which had won him

his cognomen. The fat promoters were grooming the Choker to replace a champion who had suddenly revealed a prima donna temperament and a tendency to demand about twice what a house would seat for his end of an evening's engagement.

The Butcher Boy, in view of the publicity, they regarded as a welcome sacrificial offering to the progress of their human behemoth. Welcome because he would draw at the gate, and because it was about time, they decided, that the Choker did a little "shooting." He hadn't "shot" in a long time. Pretty soon he would have to have somebody help him into the ring, and then a prompter to tell him what to do when he got there. "Shooting" is wrestling jargon for honest and not fake wrestling. The Butcher Boy, young and ambitious, and new to the wrestling game in America, would "shoot," they knew. In self-defense Choker Stanley would have to "shoot." In doing so, he would get a much-needed workout toward the championship. That he might outclass the Butcher Boy and disable him not only physically but professionally in no wise interested the venal promoters. The Choker was their meal-ticket. The Butcher Boy was just a hole to be punched in it.

In point of casualties, the match was a flop. The only casualty was Izzy Caplan. In a mixed audience attempting to do the Butcher Boy's wrestling for him,—he regarded the Butcher Boy as his especial discovery,—little Izzy ran into a mouse on one eye when a big-fisted Swede unreasonably objected to the tailor's taking a headlock hold on his new derby and then pinning it down on the Swede's ample ears. Unfortunately he occupied the seat directly ahead of Izzy.

But the black eye was forgotten when the Butcher Boy pinned Choker Stanley to the mat for the second straight fall and the match was over. He had been entirely too fast and clever for the big Pole. After the contest, two crestfallen but still business-as-usual promoters sought—not Choker Stanley with proper expressions of sympathy, but the Butcher Boy with a five-year contract. A change of meal-tickets seemed advisable. It was signed while Izzy Caplan waited with bated breath outside the dressing-room door.

Back in First Avenue, the little tailor proudly swept the bulky athlete into the gas-lit tailor shop, where in the presence of his sleepy wife and skinny little Sarah,

he drank homemade red wine to the Butcher Boy's health and future success. And looking from his big-eyed daughter to the pink-skinned athlete, he felt his blood tingle as he experienced the birth of a hope. Some day, maybe—He left the thought unfinished and unexpressed.

FIRST AVENUE soon lost the Butcher Boy, but he left behind with the Caplans a photograph of himself autographed in boyish scrawl, "*To my little friend Sarah from the Butcher Boy.*" After his initial contest, the Butcher Boy had bought Sarah Caplan a gift because she had girlishly told her mother she would weep if the Butcher Boy was defeated. The gift was a writing cabinet for her to study at. On it rested in a five-and-ten-cent-store frame, the Butcher Boy's photograph. Little Sarah Caplan spent evenings at this cabinet, divided between studies and thoughts. Sometimes she would look up at the photograph above her, and her mind would wander. In her girlish heart the Butcher Boy represented all that was noble in a man. Wasn't he big, handsome and brave? Had not he saved her life and those of her family? She did not know love, but she knew worship; and she worshiped the Butcher Boy.

The Butcher Boy went up and down the land, wrestling in and out of New York, and always whenever possible, little Izzy Caplan was in the audience wrestling himself exhausted. When the Butcher Boy engaged in bouts afar, Izzy Caplan read the newspapers. If his hero lost, it was a day of gloom in the little tailor-shop.

The years clicked off, and Sarah blossomed into a handsome miss. First she was fifteen, round-faced, dark-eyed, with a suggestion of fullness at her hips and breasts. Then she was sixteen and seventeen, and a young woman so alive, vital and comely that she appeared to belie existence of the melting-pot she was bred in. Then Rachael, a younger sister, developed consumption, and one day the little tailor-shop in the First Avenue basement was empty and deserted. The Caplans had moved to Kansas.

Two more years passed. Izzy, with savings he had toiled and scrimped for in the East Side, had opened a clothing store in Wichita and had prospered. The sick child in a sanitarium outside the city—the Kansas climate had been recommended for her—had healed and was coming home, bloom

on cheeks that had been sunken and hollow. The hope Izzy Caplan had known but never expressed years ago had rusted but not faded. He still followed the Butcher Boy's contests religiously, and was now a dyed-in-the-wool wrestling fan. Occasional letters came from the Butcher Boy, sometimes to him but generally to Sarah. Sarah was beautiful now, with a throaty voice, and eyes that mirrored the sufferings of generations of ancestors in cruel Russia. Izzy Caplan would look at her with the long-ago hope jerked back into his mind, then shake his head sadly, his little black skullcap threatening to slip down upon his nose, and turn regretfully back to his New York newspaper.

THREE months later the Butcher Boy received an urgent summons one day at his hotel in Chicago to come immediately to the offices of the gentlemen who dictated his destiny. Early in his wrestling career, Abel Posteller—for that was the Butcher Boy—had visioned a career of hard knocks and fierce but honest competition, ending, he had hoped, with the championship in his possession. His awakening had been in the nature of a rude jolt. Champions, he discovered, were made outside the wrestling-ring. Wrestlers had no managers. They worked for promoters, and they did what promoters ordered them to do, or their careers ended abruptly. He protested at first in the flush of youthful indignation, but gradually, when he was taught the futility of defiance, he allowed himself to be compromised and floated with the tide. Now he took orders with as little concern as a locomotive engineer, and obeyed them as implicitly. Wrestling, easily faked, paid big returns. Already the Butcher Boy was rich in money but poor in conscience.

When Sarah Caplan sent him her photograph, taken on her eighteenth birthday, and wrote that he was still her idol, he gazed into the beautiful face and all but wept. At such times he envied tired laborers he saw homeward bound with empty dinner-buckets but with full, clean hearts. For a year he had avoided appearing in Wichita because of his reluctance to face little Izzy Caplan, who worshiped him, he knew, and his fine, clean daughter.

The Butcher Boy had stayed clear of women, and had saved his money. Upon receipt of the summons, he hurried to the promoters' offices in Chicago's busy Loop.

It was a match, he knew. Where, he wondered.

"Wichita," one of the fat men said, gripping a fat cigar in his teeth. "And there ain't no 'no,' this time. They've asked for you and wired nobody else will do or the match is off."

The Butcher Boy protested in vain. Two days later he was en route to Wichita.

A freight wreck held up his train fourteen hours, and he arrived at the Kansas city to barely in time reach the Cornflower A. C., for the main bout of a semi-monthly wrestling card in which he was featured. He had been told in Chicago that the Wichita club manager would give him his orders on arrival, and to follow them; and as was usual, he was to collect the guarantee—always split between himself and the bosses.

Mr. Kane, with a yellow diamond on a fat finger and a gem-set fraternal-society emblem dangling from his vest, hustled the Butcher Boy from the door to a dressing-room in the rear of the auditorium. He said:

"You're wrestling Big Trout, a local product, and you go right on. The semi-final just ended. Let Trout take the first fall; you take the second, and he'll take the last one and the match. Make it look as sweet as you can; we got a good house."

The Butcher Boy nodded and disrobed. Somewhere in the house would be sitting little Izzy Caplan. What a shock it would be for Izzy to see his idol go down in defeat! He shook his head and put away the guarantee money Kane handed him—without counting it, so depressing were his thoughts. He hoped, as he walked ringward, that Sarah Caplan was not in the audience.

His reception in the smoke-filled hall was a vociferous acclamation from an idol-loving public ever eager to welcome athletes as well known in their profession as the Butcher Boy. Beneath the fierce white glare of the ring lights, after throwing off bathrobe and kicking off slippers, he looked a sculptured figure, so lavish had Nature been with her gifts to him. His features were handsome, his shoulders and neck fearful and powerful, his chest deep, and he tapered beautifully to a small waist. His limbs were proportionately perfect, his arms and hands mighty. If his trunks had been white instead of blue, he might have been a Rodin statue suddenly awakened with the breath of life.

ANNOUNCEMENTS over, the referee ready to signal, the Butcher Boy retired to his corner of the ring and standing at the ropes, flushed suddenly when he chanced to look down and discovered in a front-row seat, leaning forward, eyes popped and fists clenched, little Izzy Caplan. A bit older, he seemed, than when the Butcher Boy last saw him, but still the same excitable little Izzy. The Butcher Boy smiled a welcome which was reflected in the clothier's chubby face. But he flushed violently when Izzy turned to a beautiful girl at his side and she looked full into the Butcher Boy's eyes and blushed. A yell from Izzy was the last thing he heard as the referee signaled and he leaped to grips with his opponent, his heart pounding crazily. For a moment he was so disturbed by Sarah Caplan's vivid beauty that he wrestled Big Trout viciously to the floor and had almost trapped him in a headlock and half-scissors, much to that athlete's surprise, before he recalled orders and allowed his opponent to slip away. A shout from Izzy Caplan rewarded this perfidious act, a shout so poignant that the Butcher Boy frowned. For twelve minutes he went through the farce of wrestling; then at the proper moment, when he appeared to be victim of half-Nelson and leg holds he could have broken with ease, he scratched Big Trout under one arm, the union signal, and the fall was consummated.

As the Butcher Boy was pinned to the mat, Izzy Caplan screamed. In his dressing-room for the customary rest between falls a moment later, Kane voiced approval at the neatness of the Butcher Boy's fakery. The wrestler shrugged his shoulders, in no mood for praise. Came a loud rapping at the dressing-room door. It was followed by a cry from Izzy Caplan.

"Open the door," said the Butcher Boy languidly; he had little desire to face Izzy just then, but would not slight him.

"Naw, he's just some nut," replied Kane, not moving. "You don't want none of these fans botherin' you; they're pests."

"I know this fellow," said the Butcher Boy. "He's a friend of mine. Let him in."

"Naw, you don't know him," insisted the promoter. "He's just some nut."

The Butcher Boy, with an angry, half-smothered comment, ended renewed rapping by crossing the room and throwing open the door. Before him stood little Izzy, white and trembling.

"Abel," he gasped, "how come you lose?" "What's the matter, Izzy? Come in," said the wrestler.

"But you lose," cried Izzy, staggering into the room. "You lose, and I bet everything I have in the world you win."

HE spoke passionately in his native tongue. Kane eyed him with furtive eyes, rigid and baffled at the foreign tongue.

The Butcher Boy stood nonplused, his eyes bulged, his body taut. "You bet on this match?" he cried, grasping the little man by his frail shoulders and shaking him roughly.

"Bet?" moaned Izzy, tears brimming to his eyes. "I mortgaged my house and my business."

The Butcher Boy reeled back to the wall, stunned.

"Didn't I know you could beat this big fish Trout?" said Izzy passionately. "Sure! When they say he beat you easy, and offer to bet any amount of money, I laugh. I say it would be like stealing the money or making me a gift but they insist. I bet fourteen thousand dollars. If you lose—" He covered his face with his hands and his shoulders shook.

White-faced, pain in his eyes, the Butcher Boy looked down on the little ex-tailor who had idolized him so many years. His brain hummed with conflicting emotions. Basic of these was the haunting accusation that he had made a mess of a God-blessed life and now stood at the judgment seat of friendship revealed as a Judas.

Before him Izzy Caplan stood and drank in the drama of a troubled soul.

"Abel," he said suddenly, a choke in his voice but the shrewdness of his race in his eyes, "tell me, Abel, you aint *crooked*, are you?"

The Butcher Boy reeled, straightened, flung a hand across his face, then suddenly supported himself on a chair and looked into the face of Kane. "Izzy," he said in English, not taking his eyes from the shifting ones of the promoter, "who did you bet that money with?"

"With him," said the little ex-tailor, turning toward Kane.

KANE paled and reached toward his back pocket as the Butcher Boy leaped. "I thought so," he was saying through clenched teeth as he gripped the promoter by the neck in one mighty hand

and the other knocked a pistol to the floor. "Only a crook with a sure thing would bet that much money in this business." He beat a tattoo on the wall with Kane's hard head.

"A crook," chattered the promoter. "Who the hell are you to talk about crooks? Why, you—"

"Don't say it," said the Butcher Boy, "don't say it. I've faked but I've never robbed widows and orphans or roped a poor little sucker into anything like this to take what he slaved years and years to get."

He pushed the promoter away from him, held him a second with his left hand; then as that terrified individual attempted a weak defense, the Butcher Boy's great right arm described a slashing half-arc from his waist up, and a second later Kane was crumpled unconscious on the floor.

The Butcher Boy motioned Izzy Caplan out ahead of him, locked the dressing-room door and marched into the ring, silent and miserable. Big Trout was waiting. The referee signaled, and they came to grips. The Butcher Boy, with a lunge and fierce pull of his hands, tugged his opponent's head upon his chest, then whispered fiercely: "The arrangement is off, you big bum! You've got to 'shoot,' and God help you!"

A minute and thirty seconds later, as Izzy Caplan and a house full of wrestling fanatics went wild at a display of dazzling footwork and lightning grips, the Butcher Boy lifted his huge opponent high above his head and slammed him to the mat so viciously that he was unconscious for seven minutes.

During the rest which followed the fall, the Butcher Boy sat in his corner in the ring, his brain awl with tumultuous thoughts. At his shoulder leaned little Izzy Caplan. He talked and talked, but the Butcher Boy heard nothing. He sat bent forward, his bathrobe gripped about him. Across the ring Sarah Caplan sat with glowing cheeks, her dark eyes upon him. He was now through as a wrestler. He had defied the bosses. But suddenly sitting erect, he looked across into the girl's eyes, and when she smiled, he felt happy and clean. He would tell her after the match, confess everything. Then with clean heart he would face the world, a new man, renewed with the faith of his mate.

The referee reentered the ring, followed by Big Trout, sick fear in his eyes. Little

Izzy Caplan scrambled to his seat beside Sarah. Near by, the Butcher Boy discovered Kane with a smear of blood across a cheek. He had regained consciousness and apparently forced the dressing-room door or called for help. The crowd suddenly stilled as the referee, after a nod from Kane, raised his hands and in a shrill voice that carried to the farthestmost parts of the hall, cried out:

"Gentlemen, all bets on this match are declared off."

Izzy Caplan's groan carried almost as far as the referee's voice.

An excited hum that grew in volume followed the announcement. It was replaced by a roar when the referee signaled and the combat was resumed. Three minutes of savage gripping, grunts and clash of bodies, and the Butcher Boy with an excruciating crotch and neck hold, forced his big opponent over onto his back and pinning his shoulders to the mat ended his career as a wrestler.

TWO hours later, in the Caplan home, as the Butcher Boy stood with a happy girl at his side, little Izzy Caplan drank homemade red wine to the engagement just announced as years before he had drunk to the Butcher Boy's future success. On his chubby face was written the happiness he felt at his long-ago hope being fulfilled.

"But that dirty loafer having that bet called off!" he suddenly moaned. "And I had planned to open a department store."

"It was dirty money," said the Butcher Boy sharply.

"Dirty money?" cried Izzy. "Hear him, dirty money! Have you any dirty money?"

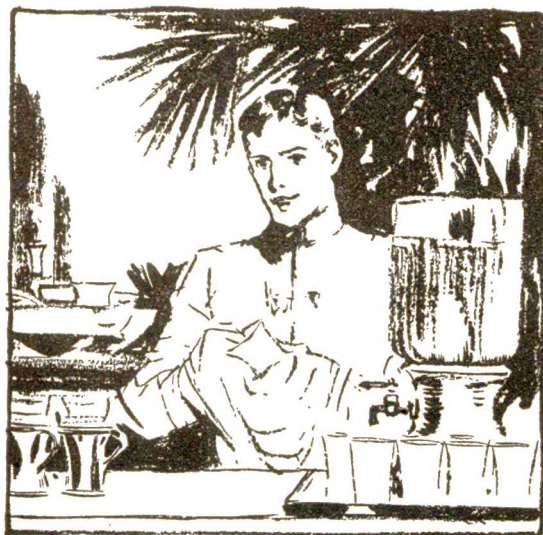
"Twenty-five thousand dollars," said the Butcher Boy calmly.

"Give it me, give it me," cried Izzy excitedly. "I'll start the store, Butcher Boy, and make you my partner."

He danced about the room as the Caplans looked smilingly on.

Suddenly he stopped, and faced his future son-in-law, a warning in his eye.

"Listen, Butcher Boy," he said, waving a bony forefinger in the air. "Just one thing: Some day you and Sarah will make me a proud, proud gran'pop." He smiled as they blushed uncomfortably. "Now, if he's a he," he warned, "take it from Izzy, don't raise him to be a wrestler. Because, my boy, if they can call off bets without rhymes and reasons, that's no business."



The Bubble King

Wherein a glorified soda-fountain clerk becomes a very real business man: an exceptionally worth-while story about several notably interesting people.

By ROGER SYLVESTER

SIDNEY VANCE, custodian of the soda and luncheonette department of Jenkins' Drug-store, headquarters of the youthful members of the summer colony of Seaside, N. Y., polished the final bottle of Bubbles and placed it atop the pyramid display-rack that stood on the back-bar of the fountain.

Then, whistling softly, he dodged lightly around the end of the marble serving-slab, that he might behold his handiwork from the point at which thirsty customers would view it. The morning sun, shining through plate glass at the front of the drug-store, cast varicolored light upon the neat triangle of bottled beverages that radiated joyousness and vigor.

Satisfied, Sidney produced a notebook from his pocket, and penciled:

BUBBLES
The Elixir of Youth
Drink It for Health and Happiness!

This effort his calm gray eyes surveyed critically, a frown gathering on his usually

unclouded youthful brow, and his lips pursed thoughtfully. He gazed again at the rack of Bubbles and lettered:

BUBBLES
The National Fountain of Youth
Smiles in Every Bottle!
Mfg. by
Bubbles Beverage Co.
SIDNEY VANCE, *Prop.*
Seaside, New York

His eyes gleamed brightly while he studied this magic inscription. Then he scratched his neck contemplatively before applying his pencil to paper again, this time to visualize a tender young fountain, as background for his lettering.

"That," he mused, as he walked to the telephone, "is one hundred per cent improvement on last year's labels.

"Give me 457-J, please," he told the operator. "Hello. . . . Simpson Printing Company? Mr. Simpson? This is Sidney Vance, of the Bubbles Beverage Company. We need some new labels for Bubbles—right away. Want to figure on

the job? Yes, we must have them at once. Business picking up. Where can you see me? I—I can't drop down. I'll be at Jenkins' Drug-store all day. At the soda fountain. You'll drop in? All right; I'll expect you."

He hung up the receiver and resumed whistling softly, crossing to the soda fountain.

AS Jenkins, the particular owner of the drug-store, emerged from behind the prescription-case to make his customary morning inspection of the fountain, Sidney picked up a glass and started polishing it vigorously.

"Got enough chocolate syrup on hand?" Jenkins asked.

"Five gallons."

"Sandwiches all made?"

Sidney nodded. Jenkins invariably asked those two questions.

"Guess I'll have something to drink," the druggist remarked. That meant he was satisfied.

"Bubbles?" Sidney asked hopefully.

Jenkins screwed up his lips cautiously. "Buttermilk, if you don't mind." He looked at the rack of Bubbles thoughtfully. "You're a pretty smart young fellow," he observed after a bit, "getting a job at the fountain here and then selling everyone this product of yours."

"But the public demand it," Sidney replied quickly. "Sales increasing every day." He placed a glass of buttermilk before the druggist reluctantly.

Between gulps of it, Jenkins queried: "How long have you been making it?"

"This is the second year." Sidney hummed softly. "I'm improving it all the time," he added after a moment. "How do you like this idea for my new label? *'Smiles in every bottle?'*"

"It's all right, I guess," Jenkins grunted. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe buttermilk from his lips. "You haven't much business yet, have you?" he demanded.

"It's going to be a big thing."

The soda-clerk's assurance nettled Jenkins. "Things look easy when you're young," he said. "I had a formula once I tried to make some money on, but nothing came of it. In fact, I think I lost twenty-five or fifty dollars when all was said and done, and had my work for nothing. It takes an old head to make a success of business."

"This is different," Sidney insisted. "Why—why, Bubbles is the new Fountain of Youth—going to say so on the new labels." He sighed contentedly, as though success were a foregone conclusion.

Jenkins pretended to yawn. He had not failed to note the steady sale of Bubbles at his soda-fountain. It was a "repeater."

"You ought to have an older head in the business, Sidney." He shook his head solemnly. "You're enterprising, but—I'd be willing to give you two hundred and fifty dollars for a half-interest in it."

Sidney laughed. "Why—why, I wouldn't take a hundred thousand for a half-interest in Bubbles. I—I expect to make millions."

Jenkins, skeptical, turned to wait on a customer who required a small package of Buchu leaves. Sidney fished his diary from his inside pocket and wrote:

Offered two hundred fifty (\$250) for half-interest in Bubbles. Turned it down.

Then, reminiscently, he thumbed over a few pages to where previously he had written: "Dorothy arrives tomorrow. Send flowers—if not too hard up."

Now, with a smile of pardonable pride on his lips, he erased back to the word "send," to which he added "carnations."

Sidney loved to read and reflect over his notebook memoranda, made from day to day as events called them forth. Comments, epigrams and ideas filled his diary, along with records of progress and disappointment.

Back in January he had written: "It's a hard world for the ambitious. Wish I knew how to take things easy." A sigh came to his lips when he noted a March entry: "No income tax this year." But his eyes brightened at: "Letter from Dorothy. Friendly as ever. Money doesn't matter much when you're in love. But I'll make a million just to show 'em I can do it. Anyone can do it. What was Cæsar before he saw Rome?"

The philosopher's eye lingered on his writings until a sudden spurt in business, resulting in six customers, interrupted him.

IT was now the second year that the desire to make a million had obsessed Sidney Vance, soda-clerk. His ambition dated from one sunny June day when he first beheld, soulfully, the violet eyes of one Dorothy Cole. Before that Sidney had been satisfied with his material position in the world.

And why not? He was as much matinee idol as soda-clerk at Seaside. Had he not made Jenkins' Drug-store the meeting place of youth and gayety? Was he not ever the center of a joyous, thirst-quenching throng?

But from the day of Dorothy's advent, all had changed. Smiles and ideas that once had run to waste now were saved, that they might be sold. Hence the notebook jottings. But the question was how to use them, how to incorporate them into tangible reality. Out of this need, Bubbles was born. Henceforth Sidney Vance would sell bottled sunshine, he decided—all because of its influence on an auburn-haired girl.

It was three days after the druggist's first overtures that Jenkins' sharp ears brought him into another conversation regarding the future of Bubbles.

"Now," he heard Sidney ask, "you want this shipped to H. I. Larsen, Ocean Grove Casino, by truck every week?"

"Correct," Larsen, a concessionaire at the amusement park, affirmed.

Sidney smiled happily. "That's the first standing order I ever took for Bubbles," he remarked, entering the order in his book. "But you'll have to increase it as the season advances," he added with conviction. "Twelve cases a week wont be enough. The more you serve, the greater the demand becomes. Every bottle sells another."

His tongue tripped lightly over the last sentence, but it clung pleasantly in his mind.

"That idea's worth saving," Sidney thought, and under his memo of the Larsen order he wrote: "Every bottle sells another."

Jenkins edged to the group. "Going to sell Bubbles at the Casino?" he asked, sending one of the soda stools twirling.

"Sure," Larsen's loud voice affirmed. "All the young folks around here ask for it because they know Sid. He must be a real asset to your store. Wish I had him."

"Well, you can't have him," Jenkins said abruptly. "We're just getting busy here."

He sighed, relieved, when Larsen departed without making an offer for his soda-clerk's services. Then he turned to Sidney. "You'll soon be doing more business than I am."

"Oh—just getting started. How do you like this idea?" A dreamy expression crept into Sidney's eyes. "You can't buy too much Bubbles. Every bottle sells another."

"You see, there's no limit to the growth

of Bubbles if that's true," Sidney expanded. "You could never manufacture the last bottle, because every bottle sells another." Visions of bottles, vats, tubs, geysers, oceans of Bubbles fluttered before him.

The little local bottling-plant, which now turned out the product, along with a dozen kinds of pop of its own, would soon become inadequate. An immense modern factory with a great high tower on it would replace it.

In front of it would spray a fountain—the Fountain of Youth. He would have a great electric sign placed the length of the building that one could see from afar at nights. It would read "Bubbles Beverage Company, SIDNEY VANCE, Proprietor."

Jenkins' voice, sensible, even harsh, brought him to earth. "Your ideas are too big—they run away with you," the druggist complained. "I used to have them when I was young too, but I got over them. Bubbles'll be a failure, first thing you know!"

"I'm not afraid of failure!" Sidney's dauntless eyes surveyed the druggist. "A glorious failure is better than the most dazzling success. Failure makes a man of you. But I wont fail with Bubbles! Look at that Larsen order—"

Jenkins bit his lower lip. Desire lit his eyes. If he could get in on the ground floor—"I'll tell you what I'll do," he began cautiously. "I'll give you five hundred dollars for a half-interest in Bubbles."

"But I want to make a success of Bubbles alone!" Sidney protested. "It's a matter of pride with me. I put all my best ideas into it—Bubbles—the National Fountain of Youth—Smiles in Every Bottle—Every Bottle Sells Another.' Gosh! I've got some more good ones too—"

Jenkins moved away in disgust. "You're crazy, young fellow. Jest plumb crazy. But you're a good soda-clerk in spite of that. Stick to it." He choked and added: "The only way you'll ever get rich is to marry a millionaire's daughter. Try Dorothy Cole. She's stuck on you. I watched her lookin' at you last summer, more'n a little, too."

Sidney flushed. The accusation was unfair. Oh, he knew how people talked about him and laughed at his ambitions! But he would never get rich that way—never, never, never!

Jenkins' pessimism rose to even greater heights when he remembered that the bill the New Yorker's family had accumulated

the past season had remained unpaid. "Wish he'd send me a check for his account," the druggist sputtered. "That's the trouble with these rich fellows. They've got so much money they don't think anybody else ever needs any."

But this observation was lost on Sidney. He had regained his composure and was writing in his diary: "Offered five hundred dollars today for half-interest in Bubbles." Then he turned to a page that said: "Send carnations." With great premeditation he erased the last word.

"I'll send roses," he breathed, as he recorded the new decision.

DOROTHY COLE, daughter of "Old King" Cole, famed restaurant magnate, paused to pin a red rose on her striking blue-and-white striped sweater before tripping down the steps of her father's summer palace at Seaside to her own high-powered roadster in front of it.

Swinging lithely behind the wheel, Dorothy gave a pat to Paddy, the Airedale sharing the seat with her, and started toward Jenkins' Drug-store.

During most of her twenty-one strenuous years of existence, King Cole's daughter had been nearly as great a problem to his practical mind as his ever-growing chain of restaurants—now numbering two hundred and ninety-one, with a twenty-five percent expansion program under way for the current fiscal year.

As a child her brain had been too active to make her fit comfortably the mold of the schoolroom. Her mother had died when Dorothy was five; she had grown up under the guidance of many despairing governesses. At eighteen she had disappeared from Miss Heriot's School to join a Broadway chorus, the resulting publicity having made the show a success. This episode had been followed by a brief newspaper career followed by publicity work.

"I may be young in years," she was fond of boasting, "but measured in experience, I'm at least two hundred years old."

Dorothy's turned-up nose wrinkled with a delicious sense of humor as she stopped in front of the drug-store and motioned to a youngster selling papers in front of it to come over to her car.

"Tell the soda-clerk in there to bring out two tall chocolate sodas," she said, pressing a bill into the newsboy's hand. "And drink up the change, sonny!"

Waiting, Dorothy turned to teasing

Paddy, then to rearranging the red rose where Sidney would quickly spy it. At last she decided on stretching lazily in her smart roadster, holding the flower languidly in her right hand.

This pose she maintained consistently for five minutes. At the door of the drug-store, Sidney Vance, bearing the drinks on a black-lacquered tray, caught sight of Dorothy in her elegant attitude.

"Did she send you for these sodas?" he asked, calling the boy to the door. The youngster, who had just finished a bottle of Bubbles, nodded.

Sidney pushed the tray into the urchin's hands. It was altogether incompatible for the proprietor and sole owner of Bubbles, he felt, to be carrying sodas to imperious young ladies.

"Take these out to her," he instructed. "If she asks for Mr. Vance, say he is busy booking orders for the great new beverage property which he is busy putting on the market—"

Sidney hurried to the rear of the store to exchange his soda-coat for one of blue serge. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes," he told Jenkins. "Have to buy a couple boxes of strawberries. Everyone wants strawberry sodas today."

Arrived at the door again, Sidney saw a petulant Dorothy, red rose in one hand, two chocolate sodas on a tray in her lap, staring forward with set jaw and quivering nostrils. He ran up softly.

"Why—it's Dorothy! I didn't know you were here. Were those chocolate sodas for you?"

Dorothy, surprised, forced a smile to her lips. "I—why, yes. I thought—wont you have one of them?" Paddy, urged, hopped off the seat obligingly to make place for Sidney.

"I've got to go down to the Eureka Bottling Works," Sidney said, pretending not to see the penetrating gleam in Dorothy's narrowed eyes. "I'm so darned busy with Bubbles—just like your father with all those restaurants on his hands."

Dorothy's eyes widened. "You mean that pop stuff you started last summer—"

"Pop!" Sidney was indignant. "Why, Bubbles is the Elixir of Youth. Every bottle sells another. I'm so busy I wont have time to dance all summer!"

"I'll drive you down to the factory," Dorothy said, puzzled. She had planned to be the center of interest, but here Sidney was, wrapped up in a ridiculous soft-drink

enterprise. She yawned. "Business always tires me. You want to be a millionaire too, I suppose."

SIDNEY squirmed. There were two things no one could say to him without drawing fire. One was that he wished to be a millionaire, for this cut too close to his great ambitions. The second was that he hoped to marry a millionaire's daughter. This wounded his pride.

"I'll make a success of Bubbles. See if I don't." There was feeling in Sidney's voice.

Violet rays of sympathy welled from the depths of Dorothy's violet eyes. The car slowed to a walking gait. The motor purred softly.

"Some of these folks around town have been saying things," Sidney continued. "Laughing at me! I'm going to show them—Jenkins and all the rest." He chuckled nervously. "I'll make them respect my ideas. I've got the best soft-drink product in the world, too."

Dorothy moved perceptibly closer. "I believe in Bubbles," she declared. "I'll help. I'll make everyone in Seaside drink Bubbles this summer until they're half drowned." The roadster stopped at the bottling works.

Sidney left to enter the office. He had no business to transact, but the trip made him feel important, and somehow he wanted to be important in Dorothy's presence.

"They'll have to enlarge the plant to take care of my orders," he observed when he returned, with a casual nod at the one-story brick structure.

"How much are you selling now?" Dorothy asked, the shrewd light business men discerned in King Cole's eyes appearing in those of the daughter.

Sidney hesitated. "Well—there's the Larsen order. Twelve cases every week. And of course I sell a lot myself in Jenkins' Drug-store. That's the only reason I'm staying there. I'm selling so much Jenkins wants to buy an interest in Bubbles. He's offered me the huge sum of five hundred dollars for a partnership."

"Five hundred dollars!" Dorothy's rippling laugh interrupted. "That wouldn't finance a red lemonade stand at a one-ring circus. Why, I'd risk a thousand myself just for the fun of it!"

Her buoyant smile revealed white teeth, each one perfectly molded. "I came into

some property of my own—from my mother's estate—on my last birthday. Oh, Sidney, let me put in a thousand just to help you out—"

"No, no. I—I couldn't do that," he replied hastily, his pride aroused. "I've got to make a success of my venture alone," and he added, after a moment's thought: "To—to find myself! Your father did that with his cafeterias."

"Dad didn't do it alone," Dorothy protested. She directed the car toward the Seaside Golf and Country Club. "As a matter of fact, he gets all his best ideas from me. He knows it too! I've written all his advertising copy for a year. It's making the King Cole Cafeterias famous. Now, if I were to coöperate on Bubbles—"

"I—I might make you an offer later," Sidney cut in nervously.

A roguish twinkle crept into Dorothy's eyes. "What kind of an offer, Sidney?" she asked, and turned an innocent face toward him.

"Oh—oh nothing," he replied vaguely. "I was just thinking. If I could make a great success of Bubbles myself, get it sold all over the country, and make a fortune so I could buy a big country place and automobiles—and everything—oh Dorothy, do you think—" He turned wistful eyes toward her.

Dorothy smelled shyly of the rose. She had parked the car in a shady lane not far from the clubhouse. "Women are always interested in marriage, if that's what you mean, Sidney."

But she stared straight into the future. Sidney was still a soda-clerk, without capital. It might be years before he could accomplish anything as a manufacturer. And girls grew old waiting—

"What if I'd put five thousand in Bubbles?" she began.

"There's some other way out," Sidney said, and then a new idea came to him. He pointed to a flowing figure that adorned the radiator of the automobile. "What's that for?" he demanded.

"It represents the Beauty of Motion," Dorothy told him.

He leaped to the ground and ran to the front of the car to make a closer study of the beautiful silvery female figure.

"It's a symbol of flight," Dorothy added.

Sidney beamed with the enthusiasm of a new idea as he examined it closely. Then he announced soberly: "I'm going to have a lot of beautiful Bubble bottles made,

with the Fountain of Youth flowing up from them just like on the new labels, so that they'll be an ornament to the radiator of any car."

He looked at her triumphantly. "Then, do you see? Every automobile on the highway will carry around an advertisement for Bubbles!"

"You mean you'll place a fancy Bubbles bottle where the winged lady is?" Dorothy concealed the doubt that crossed her mind. Every motorist might not be as enthusiastic about Bubbles as Sidney. Still, she must not discourage him.

"Oh, it's wonderful—just a wonderful idea!" she exclaimed, contemplating him the while with the mature wisdom born of her two hundred years' experience. "We'll start a regular fad of it this summer!"

"It'll go," Sidney assured her. "It's a great publicity stunt. Gosh, I'm glad I thought of it. Everyone's interested in the Fountain of Youth, you know."

Dorothy listened gravely. The way to some men's hearts might be through their stomachs, but to Sidney's she must swim through Bubbles. She would interest all her friends in his new idea.

Sidney dreamed. A streak of red crept into the sky. He looked at his watch with dismay. "Gosh, we've been gone two hours. Jenkins'll fire me sure. I was just stepping out for some strawberries. You'll have to drive me back quick, Dorothy—"

THEY sped storeward. Owing to the necessities of business, Jenkins, during Sidney's absence, had turned soda-clerk. As he bent uncomfortably over tubs of ice-packed vanilla, chocolate and strawberry ice-cream, his tense disposition suffered visibly under the strain.

Jenkins punched viciously at a syrup pump marked "lemon," and a stream of yellowish liquid splashed into his glass. From across the counter a girlish voice chirped: "Change my order to Bubbles, please."

The druggist peered at her with his black piercing eyes that started from under bushy brows, sharply in contrast to the parchment of his skin. Here he was making money for his own soda-clerk, serving this nine-year-old partisan of the Elixir of Youth.

"What about the strawberries?" Jenkins grunted when Sidney returned.

"Why—er—the town's sold out. Couldn't get any. Ordered some for tomorrow."

Sidney slipped hurriedly into his soda-coat, hoping to avoid conversation.

But there was little to do now. The afternoon rush was over. Jenkins' annoyance continued. "Come back here," he said, calling Sidney to the rear of the store. "I've something to talk over with you."

Sidney obeyed.

"I've sold sixteen bottles of Bubbles this afternoon, while you were gone," Jenkins began. "Counted 'em. I suppose you sold a whole lot more while you were out. Too much of your time's going into your own business, young man. We've got to reach an understanding."

Jenkins stuck his hands deep into his pockets, thinking of the valuable sales-space occupied by the Bubbles display on the back-bar of the soda-fountain.

"Old Seth Watson up on the hill," he philosophized, "says you can't be a lawyer and a milliner in the same day and age. I don't want to be hard on you, Sidney, but it stands to reason you can't be a soda-clerk in this drug-store, and a soft-drink manufacturer at the same time successfully."

The druggist shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other and continued: "You're energetic and likable and all that, but you've got to do one thing or the other. You'll have to decide whether you're going to work for yourself or me. I'll give you until the first of the month to do it."

Sidney gulped. "You mean I've either got to scrap Bubbles or give up my job here?" he demanded. A hundred dire consequences of the situation thrust themselves into his mind. Jenkins' Drug-store was his best outlet for Bubbles so far, and if he lost his job, the sale of his product would dwindle. Besides, he needed the work. He must show Jenkins that he, Sidney Vance, was a real asset to him.

"I can easily get another job," Sidney said. "Larsen wants me. But—but—I've got some great new business-building plans for Bubbles, and I want to see you benefit by them. You'll make twice as much on the fountain this year—"

Jenkins fidgeted. Sidney's popularity did keep his store crowded. Soda customers bought other goods. The druggist relished the idea of growing sales. "What are these new plans?" he asked bluntly.

Sidney painted a graphic picture of his radiator-cap advertising idea. "You'll see roadsters, touring cars, trucks bounding along the highways, all carrying the Foun-

tain of Youth at their masthead," he finished.

His enthusiasm warmed Jenkins. "You do have some good ideas," he admitted grudgingly.

"We wont be able to fill all the orders when this gets going," Sidney continued exuberantly. "They'll have to enlarge the bottling works. Happiness discovered at last—and bottled!"

"I'm not much on spending money before it's made," replied Jenkins. "But still this idea of yours will get people talking about Bubbles. A small lot of those radiator-cap decorations might make a good investment. I—I'll put in a round thousand dollars for a half-interest in Bubbles. We'll try out your scheme. We'll run the business together."

"Together!" Sidney started. "Oh—I can manage it myself. I was offered five thousand this afternoon and refused it. Bubbles is my brain-child. I watch it grow like a mother."

"You'll never make a success of it alone," Jenkins retorted, his jaw sagging. "You ought to be glad to have an old head advising you. The poorhouse is full of bright minds like yours. Impractical."

Sidney's face flushed but he gave no sign of yielding.

"If you don't want to let me in on this, you'd better find something else to do," he heard the druggist saying. "I've got to have a soda-clerk that sticks to the job. Be in the poorhouse myself if I don't look out." Jenkins walked to the front of the store, disappointed.

ALONE, Sidney Vance meditated on the injustices of life, the obstacles and unknown quantities of existence. Why couldn't he stay a soda-clerk, he wondered. Ambition was a hard thing to live with.

Toward the middle of the week Sidney managed a trip to New York, where he talked to a manufacturer of advertising novelties about his Fountain of Youth bottles. The interview only brought forth fresh difficulties. There must be an artistic design. He decided to follow closely the new label for this.

There were several technical problems, too, but these he left to the manufacturer. The real rub was the price. The least number it would pay to order, he found, was ten thousand. His initial order, including all first costs of production, would cost him around twenty-five hundred dollars.

The question was how to raise that sum without losing control of Bubbles. But he refused to be discouraged. There was the easy way of accepting Dorothy's offer, of course, but he decided against it.

No—he himself must find the way out! Unless he could make good, he never would have the courage to ask Dorothy to marry him. And he couldn't give her up! She too was a necessary ambition. He must find the way to meet her, on a basis of equality.

FOR a week after his return to Seaside, a maze of figures, plans, and hypothetical solutions of his problem seemed to absorb him. He hadn't seen Dorothy except casually, or telephoned her for days.

"Anything wrong?" she asked, worried, toward the end of the week, coming in for a soda. "You're awfully sober lately. Why don't you come over to the dance tonight?"

"Business," was all Sidney vouchsafed, and turned to wait on other customers. But toward nine that evening, after work, Dorothy's questions came back to him, and he decided to see her.

He found her, a half-hour later, at the Yacht Club, dancing listlessly with a girl partner. During the intermission the three talked together on the veranda of the club. Sidney and Dorothy danced the next fox-trot. Then came a waltz. After that they strolled arm in arm along the beach.

Oh lovely, lovely! The moon's rays kissed the rippling waters; waves splashed. Sidney saw a rapt expression on Dorothy's face. Here was the stuff of dreams, and it couldn't last.

"I—I may have to leave Seaside," Sidney said.

"Not—not going away?" Apprehension clouded Dorothy's soft eyes.

"The first of the month. Jenkins says I've got to choose between working for him, or for myself. And I can't give up Bubbles. I've got to make good on it. So much depends on that."

Dorothy's grip tightened on Sidney's arm. "Oh, why wont you let me help you?"

The sympathy of her voice failed to shake his resolve; instead, it stirred his imagination mightily.

"You're so darned stubborn—" she added rebelliously.

"So was Napoleon," Sidney retorted, confidence surging through him. He saw

himself organizing Bubbles into a great money-making soft-drink property. But that was only the first step. From that he would go on to new and more important ventures.

"We wont argue," he concluded firmly. "My plans are all made. Your proposition is the easy way out. Things that come easy never stay with you—"

Later that night Dorothy wrote a stormy letter to Old King Cole. "Daddy," she asked in part, "what did you do when you wanted your own way about things and couldn't get it? Did anyone ever oppose you successfully?"

SID VANCE whistled through his work next morning. When the proprietor at his usual hour came to survey the fountain, he asked cautiously: "Mr. Jenkins, do you still want that half-interest in Bubbles?" Sidney picked up a bottle of the joy-drink and started polishing it expertly.

"Changed your mind, eh?" Jenkins asked, pleased. The druggist rested on a soda-stool. It wouldn't be bad business, he reflected, to hang on to his soda-clerk if he were also drawing dividends on Bubbles all the time. It would be like killing two birds with one stone. And the sales of Bubbles were increasing constantly.

"I haven't told you I changed *my* mind, have I?" the druggist queried. If Bubbles panned out, he might be able to retire from retail business, Jenkins thought. He had long dreamed of that.

The polished bottle glistened. Sidney held it up before Jenkins' eyes, and pointed to the attractive new label. "One of the nicest products you ever looked at, what? Makes a hit, doesn't it?"

"Looks good," Jenkins admitted. Sidney watched every twitch of his features with apprehensive eye. He controlled his own breathing with effort.

"You can have the half-interest for twenty-five hundred dollars," he said evenly. "That's what I need to buy ten thousand Bubbles Fountain of Youth radiator-cap novelties."

Jenkins looked up quickly. "A thousand dollars was my offer," he snapped.

"I know—but it's worth more. I'm going to make it easy for you to buy it." Laying down the bottle of Bubbles, Sidney produced notebook and pencil from his pocket. "I've got it all figured out," he continued, jotting down figures as he talked to avoid nervousness.

"The twenty-five hundred simply goes into sales-expense. That pays for the novelty bottles. We'll give the dealer a quantity of them free, to distribute to customers. That'll help me get the first orders—"

Jenkins rubbed the palms of his hands together nervously. "What's the use of talking? I can't take twenty-five hundred out of my business here," he interrupted.

"But that's the beautiful part of it." Sidney beamed. "It wont cost you a penny in cash. I've got that figured out too." Mysteriously he drew a white rectangular strip from his pocket. "What I want you to do is indorse my note for that twenty-five hundred. I haven't that much credit myself—yet. You get the half-interest."

He spread the note in front of the druggist, and reached for his fountain pen. "Here it is, all made out. I'll agree to go out and sell five thousand dollars' business in a month's time. I can do it. We make a hundred per cent profit on Bubbles. The first profits go to pay off the note."

Jenkins stared at the paper before him. Sidney handed him the fountain pen. "I'll do all the work—you get the half-interest—" Sidney wet his lips and waited. If he sold Jenkins now, he could develop the rest of his project successfully, he felt. The moment was tense, breathless, silent.

The druggist looked waveringly from the promoter's confident smile to the floor and back again to the stack of Bubbles bottles pyramided like Gibraltar on the back-bar of the fountain. For him, too, it was a grave moment. Then he steadied himself, and solemnly, as though he were affixing his signature to his own death warrant, wrote his name across the back of the note.

FEARFUL that Jenkins might change his mind, Sidney left immediately for the bank, where he discounted the note. That same afternoon he ordered the advertising novelties. Urgent pleadings won a model of the Fountain of Youth radiator-cap from the manufacturer ten days later.

It came securely packed in a fiber carton. Sidney opened it. A thrill of pleasure rushed over him—the beauty of another new idea taking tangible form.

"Mr. Jenkins!" He called the druggist to witness the triumph. And triumph it was, the bottle itself mounted on a nickel-plated base which acted as the radiator-cap. From this, in sheer majesty, rose the

rich purple glass reproduction of the bottle. It bore a single injunction in vigorous yellow letters: "*Drink Bubbles.*" Refreshing silver gobs gurgled from its open mouth, trickling down the neck of the bottle.

Never did Ponce de Leon wax more eloquent over his Fountain of Youth than Sidney Vance over the vision of beauty before him. "I guess that'll make 'em thirsty. We'll see how it looks on your car." He danced to the curb, and replaced the black radiator-cap of the druggist's automobile with the gorgeous thirst-inspiring bottle. Jenkins followed.

"The first Bubblemobile!" Sidney stepped back. "In sixty days the highways will be covered with them. Look—you can't see the car at all. You just see the Bubbles bottle on the radiator—"

Jenkins viewed the marvel and grunted: "We've got to get the business now." He had lain awake many nights over his unwanted speculation, kicking himself for being carried away by the enthusiasm of his youthful soda-clerk. "I'll feel better when you sell that first five thousand dollars' worth—"

But a new idea had sprung into Sidney's mind. "I—you see how wonderfully effective Bubbles looks on your car there?" he demanded. "All the dealers will want to see our advertising novelty. If I could borrow your car, just for the first trip—"

Jenkins hedged. He kept getting in deeper and deeper. "Borrow my car?" he repeated uneasily.

"Sure. I'll take good care of it. We want the business—you want to get your money back as soon as possible, don't you?"

Jenkins hesitated. "You'll be careful of it—and bring back the orders?"

"Sell or bust," Sidney promised.

The druggist yielded.

THAT afternoon Sidney Vance and the Bubblemobile departed Seaside on his quest for fame and fortune. Bubbles already possessed a local reputation. Would he really be able to make it the "National Fountain of Youth drink," he pondered. And yet he must succeed for at least three reasons—for himself, for the druggist and for Dorothy.

"I won't come back until I sell my quota," he told her before leaving. "Bubbles is a new product, but there's a smile in every bottle!"

Before he returned to Seaside three

weeks and five days later, a thousand new and great ideas had come and gone, a dozen epigrams had been added to his store of philosophy, an uncounted flock of new ambitions, vistas and daydreams had haunted the mind of the rising capitalist.

In this brief period he had accomplished much. Soda-fountain proprietors, hotel managers, grocers, druggists and other distributors of beverages had yielded to his importunities to stock Bubbles. Few found themselves able to withstand the sales-talk of this fluent young man with smiles in every bottle of his product. The Fountain of Youth radiator-cap, moreover, roused enthusiasm. When each sale was concluded, he gave minute instructions for distributing the advertising novelty locally.

One great obstacle loomed ahead, and that was Jenkins. Sidney had sold his quota, and so his partner should be satisfied, he reasoned. But there must be no stopping now until the entire world quenched its thirst with Bubbles. The druggist must be made to see this, that Bubbles was for all the world, for humanity. All must drink it for health and happiness!

IT seemed like returning to an old haunt of his childhood when Sidney parked the car in front of the drug-store. So many things had happened; now he lived in a different world.

"Gosh, this place looks funny," he murmured, walking into the store and gazing at the fountain. Could it be that a bare month before he had pulled soda at those shining taps, and ground nut-meats and made sandwiches behind the counter there? He found Jenkins bustling over a file of prescriptions.

"Hello!" Sidney said.

Jenkins reached for a bottle of dark liquid. He poured half an ounce of it into a graduate before answering. "Just get back? Is the car all right?"

"Sure is." Sidney gazed at the unenthusiastic Jenkins. Oh, he, Sidney Vance—alone—must carry Bubbles to the heights of success! "I—I beat my quota," he announced, choking.

"Did you?" Jenkins mumbled, preoccupied. "Wash out a four-ounce bottle for me."

Sidney obeyed automatically. "I—I've got a great business started," he volunteered next. "Everybody's gone crazy about Bubbles."

Jenkins counted out ten drops of sweet

spirits of niter. "Get a cork too," he requested.

Sidney Vance, great promoter, followed orders dizzily. Had he stepped off a cloud to modest earth again? Were his achievements as nothing? But he enforced patience on himself while Jenkins completed the prescription, tied up the bottle in a neat brown paper, and surrendered it to his customer in exchange for a half-dollar.

This series of moves required hours and hours, Sidney thought—time enough at least for another idea to become a settled conviction. He must give Jenkins a good profit for his interest in Bubbles, and have it back again as his own.

"Do you know, Mr. Jenkins," Sidney began when he had the druggist's attention at last, "it seems to me you'll have to give up the drug-business in order to make a success of Bubbles. You remember what you told me—'You've got to concentrate on one thing in order to make a success of it?' That I couldn't be a soda-clerk and a soft-drink proprietor at the same time?"

SIDNEY paused to note the druggist's impassive face. "Well—what I'm getting at is this: you like the drug-business too much to quit it. I can see that. So I'll make you a proposition. If you'll let me have Bubbles back again, I'll pay up that note you indorsed and give you a thousand dollars' profit on the deal—just a cool thousand for helping me out—"

Jenkins' face twisted itself into a smile. "Young man," he confided, "I was never so pleased with any deal I ever made before in my life. I hope you'll go far and forward with Bubbles. You could sell hair- tonic to a bald-headed zebra. And you'll doubtless get the world drinking your product.

"But so far as I am concerned," he continued, thrusting forward his lower lip meditatively, "I've got all the profits out of Bubbles I ever expect to make. I've doubled my money. I'm satisfied."

"Satisfied?"

Jenkins' black eyes glowed. "I sold out my interest two weeks ago for a round five thousand dollars. I don't know whether you'll like your new partner or not. She's pretty and young, and probably light-headed, but she comes from a great business family. She's got just as many bright ideas as you have, and some of 'em are a darn sight more practical, and—"

THAT afternoon Sidney Vance, senior member of the firm and directing mind of the Bubbles Beverage Company, paused midway in his analysis of the sales-strategy he had conceived to place Bubbles among the best sellers of the day, and gazed dreamily at a private yacht at the Cole pier.

"We'll have to get an office tomorrow, Dorothy," he observed. "The Bubbles Beverage Company can't hold its meetings indefinitely in a swing seat on the terrace here. We—we'll never get any work done."

A roguish breeze fanned auburn hair across the junior member's forehead. She pushed it back from her eyes. "I suppose not," Dorothy said. "It's been a month since I've seen you. Hang your sales-plans! We'll talk about them tomorrow. See those clouds up there like a troop of charioteers galloping across the sky?" She gave the swing a push.

"Huh!" Sidney clutched a dozen sheets of paper filled with ideas, figures and notes the wind threatened to blow away. "They look more like truckloads of Bubbles rushing to the thirsty cities. See here, Dorothy, if we're going to make a success of Bubbles together—"

"We've got to concentrate on sales," Dorothy finished. "I know it. You've been saying that all afternoon, Sidney. I know the sentence by heart."

"You had your nerve buying out Jenkins," retorted the promoter, looking at her sternly. "Oh, you've got to work now! You've got yourself into this deal, and now you've got to make good. This is business, not a romance! I'm going now," he added, rising.

"I intend to be strict with you, Dorothy. Show up for work at eight o'clock every morning same as I do. One hour for lunch. Quit at five. In the evening, make plans for the next day's work. If you don't, I'll fire you!"

Dorothy Cole's nose wrinkled maliciously; a twinkle stole into her violet eyes. "You needn't worry about me holding up my end, Sidney," she said. "I've got a deal on that makes those trifling orders that you brought in with you today look rather silly."

She curled up cozily in one end of the swing seat. "You can't fire me, anyway," she observed wisely. "I thought of that, I'm here to stay, I'd have you know. I'm your partner."



H. BEDFORD-JONES

HERE he is—the chap whose stories of adventure in far places you've read in this magazine for so many years. He was born about thirty-eight years ago, and the world is really his oyster. At the moment he's living in Europe, and on the next page begins his latest story of international crime and political intrigue. Others will follow. You might not guess it from this portrait, but Bedford-Jones is six feet high and weighs what he ought to weigh—particularly a man who has more than seventy book-length novels to his credit, together with three volumes of poems.

The Frontier Below

A Complete Novelette by
H. BEDFORD-JONES

"The frontier," observes Mr. Bedford-Jones, "does not always stretch out toward the far horizon. In every great city there is a more sinister frontier which lies below, not beyond, and in Europe this frontier is a meeting-place of strange elements." With this conviction he has here given us a story of that sinister frontier—a story even more picturesque and swift in action than his "Madagascar Gold" or "The Barren Islands."

BARNETT had not been in London quite forty minutes, and was glorying in his liberty. Since the war, he had worked hard and made money; his bronzed features, the alert and capable features of a mining engineer, had been thrust into every dark corner from Montana to the Mexican border. And now, on an unimportant mission for his company to justify such a holiday, he had come abroad for six weeks of freedom. His mission could wait. His first thought was to get in touch with Chenoweth, who, so far as he knew, had no telephone.

Since the war he had not seen his friend, who had been and still remained in the British Intelligence service. They had become fast friends in war days, and corresponded from time to time. It was very odd that Chenoweth had failed to meet the boat-train; he had radioed that he would do so, and Lionel Chenoweth was not a man lightly to fail his word.

Forty minutes in London! Barnett had washed and dressed afresh, and now whistled blithely as he left his Northumberland Street hotel and paused at the door of the taxicab which swung in. The evening was foggy and chill. Barnett was hungry, for he had not yet dined.

"Thirty-nine B Pimlico Road—by Sloane Square," said Barnett to the chauffeur, and entered the taxi. In another moment he was skirting Trafalgar Square and heading down Whitehall. Passing the Cenotaph, he recognized it from pictures he had seen, and saluted; but he observed that the chauffeur paid the memorial no attention. England, thought Barnett, was not what it had been in other days. Perhaps it was only the folk from overseas who took thought for the dead, and for what names these other names brought to mind—how Samuel Pepys had threaded these streets, how those gray stones had felt the touch of Johnson's finger, how sly victorious Marlborough and grim Wellington had ridden down this road to the plaudits of trumpet and throat.

"Aye, Wellington brought peace—and now no man has brought peace, unless the bankers can bring it about," thought Barnett with some bitterness. "I wonder why the devil Chenoweth failed to meet that train? Not like him."

Busy, perhaps; Chenoweth was always busy, somewhere beneath the surface of affairs, for in these days any European government found itself involved in astonishing things, among which government was

only an incident. Whether it were a murder mystery in Italy, a blackmail sensation in England, or a forgery case in Paris and Berlin—government of a country came second to intrigue and crime. Not statesmen made history, but criminals. Among such affairs moved Chenoweth, a master player in the dark game—a quiet man, unassuming, greeted with respectful attention by princes, and yet never appearing in the limelight of the press.

The chauffeur leaned over and jerked the door open with one hand.

"Looks a bit thick 'ere, sir—I'd best draw up 'ere."

BARNETT came to attention as the cab stopped. He descended, felt for coins in his pockets, looked at the darkened street. Just ahead, a small crowd was being dispersed by a number of policemen, and a glance at the house-numbers showed Barnett that the crowd was before the house in which Lionel Chenoweth had rooms.

"Two and six—thank you, sir."

Barnett turned. At this instant he found a man beside him, a man clad in nondescript garments, peering at him from oblique eyes—a Chinaman, apparently, and dark of skin.

"Mist' Ba'nett? My have got one piecee chit fo' you—Mist' Shenwett send."

Barnett felt a paper thrust into his hand, and the Oriental disappeared. He stood staring, blankly amazed beyond words. How had the man known him? What on earth could such a message mean?

He was so astonished that he walked mechanically toward Number Thirty-nine, his hand clenched on the paper. Perhaps the message had been meant for him at the hotel, to explain Chenoweth's nonappearance, and the Chinaman had followed him here—No, that seemed rather impossible. But why bother about it, when he'd be in Chenoweth's rooms in a moment more?

Barnett turned into the entrance of Number Thirty-nine, and found himself confronted by a tall policeman who saluted.

"Beg pardon, sir—are you looking for some one here?"

"Eh?" Barnett stopped. "What do you mean? Yes, I'm looking for Mr. Chenoweth."

The policeman made a motion. Barnett found another towering figure suddenly at his elbow.

"May I ask, sir, if you're a friend of Mr. Chenoweth?"

Something was wrong, evidently.

"Yes. He was expecting me. What's all the commotion about?"

"An American gentleman, 'e is," said the bobby behind the visitor. The one in front stepped aside.

"Sorry to say, sir, Mr. Chenoweth has been murdered. Go right up, if you please—this officer will accompany you. I fancy the inspector will want to have a word with you, sir."

"Eh? Murdered, you say?" Barnett froze in his tracks. "Man, it's impossible! Why, I only just—"

He checked himself. Better not mention that note until he had read it!

"Yes sir," returned the officer. "The inspector is up there, sir."

Barnett found himself quietly but efficiently conducted to the rooms, one flight up, which Chenoweth had occupied for years. He collected himself with an effort, regained his poise, thrust the note into his pocket. It was obvious that any friend of Chenoweth's who arrived at such a moment would be questioned—but Chenoweth murdered! Such a thing was almost past belief, to one who knew the man.

A KNOCK. A door opened. Barnett stepped into a room where three men, two writing in notebooks, stood about a dead body that lay limply half across a table, where it had been writing a letter when slain. The odor of blood was sickeningly strong.

"Been dead two hours at least, but hardly more," said one, evidently a surgeon. "Rigor mortis has not reached the extremities yet."

Barnett ignored the surgeon, looked at the two officers who faced him and heard the explanation of the policeman. One of them, evidently in charge, dismissed the bobby and nodded to the visitor. The other was lighting a gas lamp.

"Very good, sir. I'm Inspector Davidson, from Scotland Yard. Your name?"

Barnett told who he was, why he was here, how long he had been in London. At mention of his name, the inspector's brows went up slightly.

"Your passport, sir?"

Barnett produced it. The two officers conferred. The inspector returned it gravely.

"Quite all right; sorry we had to trouble you, sir, but one never knows. You're an old friend of Mr. Chenoweth, I believe?"

"During war days, yes; we worked together. I was in the American Intelligence. But this—this can't be true—"

He stared down at the body, a little sick, a little horrified. Chenoweth's forehead and upper face had been crushed by some frightful blow; his hands lay outflung on the table, a pen still between his fingers, which were not yet reached by the stiffness of death. Even at this instant, it struck Barnett as a trifle odd that those fingers, limp in death, should have clung to the pen.

On the table, partially reached by the dark tide of blood, was a half-written sheet of Chenoweth's note-paper. The inspector pointed to it.

"It's addressed to you, sir. I'll ask you not to touch anything, but you may read it."

"Do you know—who did this?" demanded Barnett jerkily.

"No sir, was the response. "We'll learn, though."

BARNETT went to the dead man's shoulder, and peered down. In the lamplight he could read what had been written there, evidently in the very moment of death:

My dear Barnett:

Sorry I can't meet your train as I promised, but a matter of vital importance has just turned up. I'm scribbling this in a devilish hurry; shall try to reach you at the hotel tonight, either by telephone or

There death had intervened, abruptly.

Barnett glanced down at the fingers which had penned this message to him, sorrowfully. Chenoweth's hand—the old worn gold seal ring with its crest and motto deeply carven, the long and delicate fingers that had touched so many secrets of governments and peoples, the thumb, lightly scarred by a knife-slash; it was that knife-slash which had doomed the Czar to murder, and except for it, Chenoweth would have saved him—

There was no scar on this thumb.

Barnett looked again, started, checked the words that rose to his lips. No doubt about it. This thumb was not, never had been, scarred. Drawing back, Barnett looked down at the body. So far as one

could tell, it was the body of Chenoweth. The profile of the lower face was that of Chenoweth, all below the red ruin. There was the half-written note, penned in the peculiar and unmistakable writing of Chenoweth.

Yet this dead man was *not* Lionel Chenoweth.

The two officers, as though respecting the emotion of the American, were talking with the surgeon. Barnett saw the moment opportune, and seized it without hesitation. He drew from his pocket the crumpled note and held it in the light. One glance served to give him its message, and he quietly put it away again.

The inspector turned to him.

"You recognize him, sir? It's beyond any doubt, of course, yet as you knew him well, I'd be glad of your recognition. We've had no time to summon his family—"

"Certainly," said Barnett. "There can be no mistake; this is poor Chenoweth beyond any question. He has no family, I believe, except a distant cousin whom he has mentioned once or twice, somewhere in Cornwall. Haven't you any idea who did it, or why it was done?"

NOTHING was known, it appeared, and Barnett took his departure unhindered. As he walked up the darkening street, he carefully tore the crumpled note into tiny fragments and tossed them aside; its brief, almost desperate message, pounded recurrently at his brain:

"For heaven's sake, identify that body! I'll send for you later. L. C."

Why? The word throbbed in him, and had no answer. He could understand only that Lionel Chenoweth was alive and not dead at all—but why? As he walked, vainly searching the lights of a taxi, he heard a voice from somewhere, a maudlin voice rising shrill on the gloom:

Long time plenty work, sampan coolie,
Yangtse river way down Shanghai;
Makee love-pidgin, too muchee talkee,
Welly little plover lady no likee my!"

Barnett came to a halt, stared around, saw nothing. He felt like a man in dream. The lights of a taxi barged up through the darkness, and he signaled mechanically. He was alone in the dark street—yet that maudlin voice had been the voice of Lionel Chenoweth.

CHAPTER II

BARNETT went straight back to his hotel. He reasoned that Chenoweth would either telephone him there, or in some way get a message through to him, as promised in the note that had been handed him.

In this surmise, apparently, he was wrong. It was late when he got back, so late that he ordered a special meal sent to his room. He waited up until two in the morning, vainly, then gave it over and turned in. He was awakened in the morning to receive a stolid policeman, who delivered a formal notice that he must attend the inquest on Chenoweth's body that afternoon at the Bull and Gate Inn, five doors distant from Chenoweth's rooms in Pimlico Road, as the rooms would not accommodate the inquiry.

Three o'clock, said the policeman, and Barnett promised to attend. He reasoned that Chenoweth would now take his own time over getting in touch, and it was useless to keep indoors on the possibility. London awaited inspection; it was approaching the end of a mild winter, and Barnett was in need of underclothing. He remembered the Army and Navy Stores outfitting department, and decided on a walk down Whitehall, round by the Abbey and along Victoria Street—exercise before lunch.

Barnett gained the hotel lobby. A large-built man was studying the notice of air services, and turned to glance at the American. Barnett's mind was alert for trifles; he looked at the big man, was positive he had never seen the person before, and went on his way. Leaving the hotel, he turned to the left, toward Trafalgar Square.

He did not observe that, as he emerged, a taxi suddenly turned out of the rank along the center of the street; the chauffeur pulled down his flag and hauled in toward the curb beside Barnett. Crawling along, the taxi caught up with him just opposite the bus-stop at the top of Whitehall. The driver leaned out toward him.

"American, sir? Taxi, sir? Shilling a mile, sir."

Barnett's heart thumped suddenly, rushed the hurried blood through his veins, as he looked the driver squarely in the eyes.

"Why, I reckon I might," he responded, with an exaggerated Yankee drawl. "I guess you know this burg pretty well, eh?"

"I do, sir," returned the driver, an unkempt, rough-skinned individual.

"Well, I reckon you might as well give me a spin. Sing out when we come to any monuments, and I'll take 'em in."

The driver leaned around to open the door for him, and Barnett caught a quick murmur:

"Watch behind!"

AS he got into the vehicle, from the corner of his eye Barnett saw the big man of the hotel lobby frantically signaling another taxicab to the curb. Barely was he inside when his own machine started off with a jerk and a swift click of gears, flinging him back on the cushions. Barnett looked for the usual speaking tube, found it, and pressed the bulb.

"Man from hotel following—he was keeping an eye on me there. A large man with heavy features," he said. The driver, ear to receiver, nodded comprehension.

Barnett looked around, saw that the taxi setting out in pursuit of them was a large red Renault, an easily recognized car amid fleets of smaller makes. Then a jerk flung him back once more as the machine swerved and turned on two wheels—the driver was losing no time. The taxi sped down Whitehall, just managing to get through as a policeman at the far end put up his hand to halt traffic. Looking back, Barnett saw that the Renault was held up.

On they went down Victoria Street and past the station, following the bus-route to Sloane Square. Here the driver turned into King's Road, threading in and out among the traffic with an uncanny and reckless skill; just before reaching Parsons Green, the taxi swerved to the right, into the Fulham Road. From here, Barnett was completely lost and on unfamiliar ground until suddenly he recognized Putney Bridge, whence he had once watched the boat-race start.

Now he was certain that their follower was shaken off, and small wonder, for his driver was taking long chances. He forgot the ten-mile limit in Putney High Street, took the crossing by the station in high gear, and by the way they rushed the hill, Barnett knew he was sitting behind no ordinary taxicab engine. Where the roads divide at the crest, the taxi swung to the right for Kingston; and then, out on the open of the common, pulled in to the side of the road. The driver alighted and opened a penknife.

Barnett opened the door and climbed out, just in time to see that penknife driven pitilessly into the off rear tire, and to get a rueful grin from the driver.

"It's a sin," observed the latter, "but I'm taking no chances; if we're to stop for a talk, here's the reason." He went to the front of the car, lifted the driver's seat, and got out a jack and roll of tools. "Don't look anything but annoyed," he went on. "Nobody's in sight, bar nursemaids, but if you assume the proper air of disgusted futility it will at least appear—"

"Chuck it!" broke out Barnett, between impatience and amusement. "My Lord, what a sight you are! Rubbed a brick on your face, or is it plain make-up? I think you should be dead, since I'm attending your inquest this afternoon. What's the game?"

CHENOWETH uttered a curt laugh, and went on with his work of jacking up the car and lifting off the tire. They had lost the pursuers, but he took no risks.

"The deceased gentleman, whose name was Trebitsch, made a slight error, and so I'm still on deck. He was ahead of time, reaching my rooms at seven-thirty. I got back for the appointment at seven-forty-five and found him dead—and observed who killed him. They didn't see me, though."

Chenoweth lighted a cigarette, and his eyes bit out laughingly at Barnett. Under the chauffeur's hat and coat, his very square-cut shoulders lost outline, and his reddened features had lost all semblance to the keen-lined face Barnett knew. Only the eyes were the same, cold gray, keen, quizzical with deep humor, ready to harden like steel or soften with a frank kindliness that won men swiftly.

"There's a lot I don't see, either. What about that letter to me?"

"One of several," and Chenoweth laughed. "Trebitsch, like all of them, was hard up. There was a certain letter which he tried to sell me. Others knew of it, evidently. He was struck down on entering my rooms, as the position of the body showed."

"Yes, seated at the table," said Barnett caustically. "Blackmailing affair?"

Chenoweth ignored the query and rubbed his nose with a greasy finger.

"Until the police have seen it, a body can be moved. I knew you'd be around after me, so I scribbled that half-note, ar-

ranged him in the chair, cleaned up the mess by the door—so! They had waited for me in the dark; Trebitsch was like me in build: there you have it."

"I'm no mind-reader," retorted Barnett. "If you know who killed him, why not let the police gather in your precious crowd?"

"Letter wasn't on him." Chenoweth bent to the tire, got the rim off the wheel, rolled it alongside the running board and detached the spare from its holder. "They got it back, thinking they'd killed me."

"How d'you know that?"

Chenoweth waved his wrench in protest at the catechism. "My dear chap, I saw 'em come down the stairs—three of the Queen Street group. Lasalle told the other two that having settled me, they now had to find Trebitsch and settle him. That gave me the idea of staying dead for my own security. I can get that letter far better dead than alive, you see—and getting it is a vital necessity."

Barnett watched his friend get the spare in place. Still he knew nothing of the behind all this, and he would not know it until Chenoweth got ready.

"Anything else you need to discover?" said Chenoweth, not without irony. "The owner of this taxi is my old batman over in France, Benson; you may recall him. I'm Benson now. Driver's license and all that sort of thing in case I get up against the speed-laws. The last man one looks at is a taxi-driver, unless it's a window-cleaner. By the way, ever hear that story about the window-cleaner who mumbled to himself—"

"Many times, thanks," said Barnett grimly. "But there's a lot to this present story I've not heard."

"Right. I've been in a devil of a rush, what with one thing and another—chiefly you. Had to get in touch with you. Managed that through Yen Lo, who saw your picture and was sure to know you again. I had to keep an eye out for Eloise, you know—"

"Confound it, I don't know!"

Chenoweth grinned, took a fresh cigarette, and relaxed.

"Eloise Venitsky brought the letter from—hm! Let's say, from a capital city a good many miles east of England. It contained instructions for a certain gentleman, a Cabinet Minister; whatever his intentions may be now, he's tied hand and foot by his past indiscretions. By the mercy of heaven, he's away down in the country,

and Eloise knows she can't get at him until he comes back to London. Few people knew of the existence of that letter, but Trebitsch ferreted it out. The temptation was too much for the poor devil. He was to sell it to me for two thousand pounds and clear road to Rio, with passage paid. That was the bargain."

Chenoweth went back to work. Barnett watched the fixing of the spare and the placement of the damaged tire on the holder. An international affair, then—no mere blackmail business! Russia, perhaps, or some Balkan state, to judge by the names used; an intrigue of the old Czarist party, it might be, or it might be anything at all. Chenoweth straightened up and flung the American a swift, keen look.

"Well?" he demanded curtly.

"No reason against it," said Barnett.

QUESTION and prompt answer—these two men understood each other perfectly. A look of swift relief came into Chenoweth's eyes; that he would permit himself such a look, showed the tense strain under which he had been laboring.

"Risky," he observed.

Barnett shrugged. "Count me in, gladly, if you want me."

"Badly. I'm a bit on edge—can't risk an ear or an eye anywhere. Half my precaution may be silly rot; the other half may save my life a dozen times a day."

"I'd say, give the murderers to the police. They may slip away."

"They can't get out of England. Chenoweth shook his head. "They're marked, and if any one of the three tried, he'd be held on some minor charge. They're more useful to me as they are, till I can get at Eloise and recover the letter. I can't locate her, but one of them will certainly lead me to her in the next day or two. Then I'll put Parkston on to them and they can go inside."

"Parkston being Scotland Yard?"

"Not much," said Chenoweth. He got out a clean swab and removed some of the grease from his hands, if not from his face. "It's a proverb about having a friend at Vine Street, and Parkston is mine own especial friend at that station. I bribe him at times with things like this—when I get the chance. Since the war, particularly, we of the political branch don't love the ordinary Scotland Yard investigation people; I keep away from 'em. But I love Parkston."

Chenoweth put his tools away and straightened up.

"Now," he went on, "our semi-prohibition rules admit of refreshment—it's eleven forty-five—but our class distinctions don't admit my going into the bar with you. I feel beerish. Therefore, I suggest that you order me to stop at the pub at the top of the hill, on our way back, and you may bring me out a tall foaming glass. Thank you kindly, sir."

Barnett chuckled and climbed in, and the taxi started off. It drew up at the pub as planned, and Barnett brought out the drink to his driver.

"If ever you want taking out again, sir," said Chenoweth heartily, "just ring Streatham 11967 and ask for me—Benson is my name, and I know a lot about London sights. 'Kyew, sir!'"

So they returned to Victoria, and there Chenoweth headed for the station, and drove into the yard. Barnett alighted and fumbled for coins.

"Get a paper at the station bookstall and go home, while I get away," said Chenoweth softly. "Ring up Benson directly after the inquest—I'll be there. Got the number?"

Barnett nodded, handed over a coin, and turned into the station.

Having bought his paper, he decided to omit his visit to the Stores for the present, and seek luncheon. Taking the first taxi he saw, he ordered the driver to Pagani's, in Great Portland street—but all the way there, he felt that the man was crawling rather than driving. After the way Chenoweth toolled a car, an ordinary ride was a tame affair.

CHAPTER III

BARNETT shook things down in his mind as he lunched. Obviously he was being watched and followed, and the enemy undoubtedly knew all about him if they held him suspect, so that he must be cautious. This was London, possibly the most law-abiding city in the world in a general way—but even in London such a game as this was played with life as a subsidiary stake.

The letter that Chenoweth sought, for example, counted far above life. It involved the honor of a Cabinet Minister, at the very least, and was undoubtedly pregnant with national or international consequences. The days had gone by when

government was a matter of straight diplomacy; whatever she had done in the war, England had lost the peace, and the cost was reflected in such absurdities as this, which permitted an unknown woman and a few unscrupulous ruffians to threaten the very center of government itself.

Barnett had heard enough of the Queen Street group to remember them as the mainspring of unconstitutional activities, a party that would go to any length. Most of them had served prison terms; in the circles where such things are discussed, it was pretty generally known that the group derived its cash balance from eastern Europe. Barnett nodded to himself, as he recalled the affair of the jewels in the chocolates.

At the same time, he reflected frowningly, this Eloise Venitsky could not belong to that group, else she had never got into the country, with or without that letter. British present-day methods are far more effective in some ways than appear, and no member of any suspect group could enter or leave the country without stringent investigation. Puzzle: find Eloise Venitsky!

"No, I can't afford to find her," reflected Barnett, repressing his own eagerness with a laugh. "Can't risk spoiling Chenoweth's game by a blunder. I must wait."

AFTER a leisurely luncheon, he took a bus down to Sloane Square for the inquest—his first experience of an English inquiry of this kind. A few words with the spectacled coroner assured him that he was required only for formal identification of the body. Together with the jury, he adjourned from the tavern briefly to view the body, which had been laid out in Chenoweth's bedroom—a sight horrible enough, and from which all were glad to escape. Back in the bare, dusty room at the Bull and Gate, the evidence followed a regular rote.

Barnett testified to this body as that of Lionel Chenoweth, and was followed by Mrs. Woods, who cooked and "did for" the deceased. She stated that she had been struck all of a heap by finding the body. She had screamed and run out into the road, seizing on the first policeman she saw; no, she had touched nothing in the room.

The lady was amusing in her way of giving evidence, and Barnett settled himself on his very uncomfortable chair, resolved to see the thing through.

Mrs. Woods had not seen anybody come in—she hadn't a chance to see anyone come in. She knew there was a gentleman coming to see Mr. Chenoweth that evening; the lodger had told her so, but she didn't know if the gentleman had been. She had been cooking. She couldn't, she stated with some asperity, attend to her cooking and keep an eye on the stairs at the same time—she hadn't got only one pair of eyes.

The coroner bowed a bland admission of this fact, and murmured something about even this pair being of small use. At this point Mrs. Woods became suddenly quite confused, and mumbled something about a letter. She felt in a dingy black bag, which took a good deal of opening, and then produced and held out to the coroner a letter which must have been delivered by hand. It was unstamped. The coroner snapped out a brusque query.

"It was—it come just before I found 'im—Mr. Chenoweth, sir," she stammered.

"Who brought it?" rapped the coroner curtly.

"A—a yellor man—a little yellor man, what I seen come before to see Mr. Chenoweth. 'E didn't say nothin', just give it to me. An' then I puts it in me pocket, an' says to meself that when I goes up to Mr. Chenoweth's room, I'll take it up to 'im. An'—an' later on, when I goes up, why, I was struck all of a 'eap—clean forgot it, sir—"

CONVINCED of the lady's innocence of intent, the coroner tore open the letter, then shook his head. Barnett could see the sheet of paper plainly from his seat. It bore two brushed Chinese characters, nothing more.

"Chinese writing, eh? Must be translated," said the coroner. "I hope, Mrs. Woods, that you are not concealing anything else that might have a bearing on the case."

"S'elp me, sir, I wouldn't do the gentleman no 'arm, even if 'e is dead!" exclaimed the lady in agitation. "I'd 'elp if I could—"

Barnett frowned. There was no possible way of getting hold of that letter; he could only tell Chenoweth about it. Now he lost himself in calculation. Trebitsch had been due at seven forty-five, but had arrived early. Chenoweth had returned at the exact time. Barnett himself had arrived by eight-thirty. The police surgeon had

declared the man two hours dead. That did not chime at all. Probably, however, the surgeon's estimate was inexact. Oddly enough, there flitted across Barnett's mind, just here, the remembrance of that voice in the street and the song in pigeon-English. Why had Chenoweth, since it must have been he, bawled out that old well-known doggerel?

Let it go; the crime itself was the thing, and Barnett found himself visualizing it from his knowledge of the spot. There would be a glimmer of gas on the landing, at the top of the stairs; once Trebitsch passed that, his face would be all in shadow. The three killers would wait in the dark, probably in Chenoweth's rooms, would wait until the door opened, and the tall figure loomed there dimly—

Barnett pulled himself back to realities; it was too ugly. A heavy iron bar, the police surgeon was saying, giving very technical names to very common things. The coroner had been asking if the dead man had enemies. Apparently robbery was not the motive. So the little farce went on, and only Barnett knew that it was a farce. They did these things nicely in England, he reflected. There was a dignified reticence about the police surgeon, about all the functionaries of the law; Mrs. Woods provided a touch of comic relief, though the coroner firmly repressed any laughter at her outbursts. When it came to the summing-up, no one knew more than at the beginning, and the spectators had heard less than they had read in the newspapers. The coroner reminded the jury that they were there to ascertain the cause of death; as to blame and punishment, these might safely be left to the police. A very meek foreman announced the verdict as "willful murder by some person or persons unknown," and so it was ended.

BARNETT had noted one of the reporters eying him determinedly. Now, as he left the place, he was accosted by the young man before he had lighted his cigarette. The resolute and keen air of the reporter gave Barnett full warning that something had been scented on this trail; his business, he knew well, was to draw a red herring across the scent, without delay.

"By the way, Mr. Barnett!" said the reporter. "Would you mind telling me what really is behind all this? I fancy you know. I represent the *Daily*—"

"Yes, yes, of course you do," broke in

Barnett, assuming a hurried and nervous air. "I'm glad to tell you, of course. Mustn't get out. Poor Chenoweth was not murdered at all. He committed suicide."

"Eh? Sir—I—" Confused, the other stammered to a halt.

"What do you want to know?" demanded Barnett abruptly.

"This may be a big thing." The reporter collected himself. "There's something in it. I don't think you ought to joke about it, in the least—"

"My heavens, man, who's joking?" demanded Barnett, his eyes widening. "Death is always a big thing. Suicide is a bigger. This affair struck me as very respectful and neatly handled, though of course if you make any charge of suicide, you'll have to sustain it against the verdict of the coroner. Can't quote me, you know. Your London papers are so used to being given the lie on interviews that you won't dare quote me; we do things differently in the States, where the word of a reporter more than balances that of most politicians. Anyway, the corpse hasn't complained. I'll wish you good day, sir, and I'd be careful what I print about this, if I were you."

Barnett strode off, leaving behind him a sleuth who obviously doubted his sanity and was too nonplused for the moment to assume any offensive. Hailing the first taxi to come along, Barnett paid the man off at his hotel, turned abruptly and walked up to the Strand, and entered Charing Cross station. Entering one of the telephone booths on the platform, he mastered the intricacies of the automatic coin-box and called up Streatham 11967.

"This you, Benson?" he inquired after getting his number.

"Yes sir," came the voice of Chenoweth respectfully. "Where are you speaking from, if I may ask?"

"Charing Cross station—"

The click of a replaced receiver cut in. When the exchange operator asked whether he had got his number, Barnett replied in the affirmative, repressed an oath, and hung up. Coin-boxes, evidently, were not safe—yet it seemed an absurdity. Well, he would try again from the hotel, since Chenoweth had definitely told him to ring up. So thinking, Barnett walked out to the platform. Then, as he passed the book-stall, his glance settled upon it with sudden and intent interest. There, inspecting the array of magazines, was the big man of the hotel vestibule.

CHAPTER IV

AS Barnett left the station, he caught sight of a newspaper extra placard, and sensed the hand of the reporter who had accosted him. "Pimlico Mystery Thickens," it read; and buying a paper, he found a brief paragraph recording the inquest and stating that Mr. Barnett, the American friend of the deceased, had declined any information whatever. His opinion of the London newspapers went up a notch—this was quick work.

When he got back to the hotel, he was yearning for a cigarette, and he opened his bag to get at a carton—only to forget about it next instant. Everything was in order, but not quite as he had left it; Barnett packed systematically, and the slightest displacement of any article would catch his eye. Now he found that some one had gone through that bag, and also through his trunk, as presently appeared. He found that nothing had been left untouched, yet nothing had been taken; even his personal jewelry had been examined, as the cases showed.

"Drew blank there," he reflected with a chuckle.

Probably they would leave him alone now. He was not concerned with the affair of the letter, so far as the Queen Street group could know; their suspicion must be directed at him merely because of his friendship for Chenoweth. The newspaper accounts of how Chenoweth's body had been found, in the very act of writing a note to him, would puzzle them and start their suspicions, and so it was natural that they should keep an eye on him. He remembered and obtained his cigarettes and had just lighted one when a knock came at the door. In response to his call, a bell-boy entered and handed him a note with a typed superscription. Barnett gave the boy a coin, and carelessly tossed the note on his table. The envelope proclaimed it to be from Liberty's, but Barnett had an idea that inside would be something else than a bill from the big London shop.

In this he was right. When alone again, he tore open the envelope and found a note in Chenoweth's writing, brief and to the point.

Maison Lyons, basement floor, to left of the entrance, about 9:30. Sit tight until you've given your order, then get into conversation. Look casual. Get lost on the way there if you can. All news when we meet.

It was already past five in the afternoon. Barnett bathed, dressed in ordinary day attire, and then descended to the hotel lounge, where he ordered a drink. The big man was not in evidence; he might have outlived his usefulness, or have gone off duty to be relieved by another trailer.

WHEN the drink came, Barnett swallowed it at one gulp, and had his coat on before the waiter was out of sight. This sudden activity rather flustered a small, bearded, foreign-appearing man, who so far forgot himself as to rise and leave immediately after Barnett. The American grinned as he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to the Liverpool Street station.

Here, Barnett lingered enough to see the bearded foreigner descend from another taxi, and mentally complimented the man on his smartness. Having taken a ticket for Hackney Downs station, ten minutes away, Barnett now intently studied the notice board of the main line; thirty seconds before his suburban train was ready to start, he bolted for it. He darted into a first-class carriage, and looked back to see his trailer held up at the barrier, frantically arguing with the ticket-collector. The train started.

Barnett sat tight to Hackney Downs, where he got out and crossed to the up side, having a return ticket. He did not return to Liverpool Street, but alighted at London Fields, and here after some delay managed to secure a taxi.

"Gatti's in the Strand, back entrance," he ordered.

Having a couple of hours to spare before his appointment with Chenoweth, he intended to dine comfortably, and not at the Maison Lyons. It was well after seven when his taxi landed him at Gatti's, where he located a corner table in the red room and seated himself for an hour or so of comfortable relaxation.

At his request, the waiter brought him the final edition of an evening paper. It gave half a column to the Pimlico affair, padding out by recounting some of the late Major Chenoweth's exploits in France. It also stated that the police had the matter in hand, and the arrest of the murderer was to be expected within a few hours. With a sniff, Barnett laid aside the paper. Fortunately there was no lack of other sensations, including a big murder trial; the newspapers would soon let the Pimlico

murder die down—which was exactly what all the participants most desired.

At a quarter past nine, the smiling youth at the Strand entrance to Gatti's signaled up a taxi for a very satisfied Barnett; he was driven to the Bond Street subway station, reaching this at three minutes short of the half-hour. He was nearly five minutes late for his appointment, because the door attendant firmly refused to let him enter while a lady vocalist was warbling; judging by the strains which he could catch, he was not missing much.

Chenoweth, very distinguished-looking, with snowy white hair, sat reading an evening paper—reading the account of his own inquest, undoubtedly. He had turned his eyebrows white, too, and made of his nose-mat mustache an iron-gray affair. If Barnett had not been in search of him, he would have passed this man by without a thought that it was Chenoweth. The only other person at the table was a pasty-looking individual who seemed to be dining mainly off toothpicks, by the way he used them.

"This seat engaged?" asked Barnett in a general way, drawing a negative headshake from both. He pulled out the chair between them, facing toward the entrance. The toothpick man very politely handed him a large card bearing the word "Tariff," whereon he saw many things which he did not want to eat; so, when the waitress came hovering, Barnett smiled and ordered lobster mayonnaise, which would do to play with.

THE band ceased from its tumult. The pallid man of toothpicks applauded vigorously, took his hat from under his chair, got his bill, and departed. Chenoweth smiled at his friend.

"No need to say it. We're safe here as on Wimbledon Common, so long as we don't raise our voices. I got the stuff from Yen So; my hair will come out all right in a day or so. He's trailing Lasalle at the moment, trying to find Eloise Venitsky."

"And the game?" asked Barnett.

"Is playing itself." Chenoweth was the soul of calmness. "We can't and needn't hurry it, so long as our politician is down in the country playing golf, or whatever he does down there. The lady can't reach him until he comes back. Meantime—I'll find her."

"You sound confident."

"Bet you six to one, in what you like, I'll have her address by eight in the morning."

"Hm!" Barnett suddenly remembered his news. "By the way, at the inquest your housekeeper produced a letter that had arrived for you the day of the murder. It carried only two characters in Chinese—"

Chenoweth smiled. "A code message from Yen Lo, quite unimportant and not bearing on the present case at all. Thanks. It'll put the police on no end of a false trail."

Barnett frowned a little. "I like the way you play the game here in England. It's so damned cheerfully irresponsible! You taught us how to work it in France, of course, but your system is different."

"Same old system, except that now the rules are a bit stricter and the penalties for breaking 'em are more certain to reach home. Those three who killed Trebitsch might have got away in other countries; they don't stand an earthly chance in this one, and yet they don't realize it. Two of them have been trailing you—I know all about it—ever since you came down to my flat. As a matter of fact, it's the safest thing they could do—diverts suspicion, looks more natural than dodging or hiding."

"And the lady? What about your confounded system of registering aliens?"

Chenoweth smiled. "What's to prevent Mademoiselle Eloise from leaving her registered address, and turning up elsewhere with a full English identity? She's not under supervision."

"Not clear to me," said Barnett. "Supervision?"

Chenoweth glanced around. No one was close by, and between them they commanded both sides of the table against unseen approach. The orchestra was tuning up, for a special number announced by a card on the platform.

"Famous composer, that." Chenoweth nodded toward the card. "Barnett, there are two classes of people in the eyes of the English police—those who are 'known' and those who are not. Once you come under the eyes of our bobbies, commit any act which renders you liable to a criminal charge, you're pigeonholed, labeled for ever more and then some. Until you commit that act, they don't know you, and don't want to know you; they take it you're all right. And so far, Eloise Venitsky has been all right."

"And the letter?"

"Eight people in England know of its existence, including you. If the sender were known, and the name of the man addressed, the contents would next be known—then there'd be a bigger scandal than this country could afford."

"Hm! You put fine men in Cabinet jobs," commented Barnett.

"Yes? Your American politicians are all fine characters too, eh?" Chenoweth chuckled. "He's not bad—merely weak; and for that reason he's wanted where he is. The nominal heads of government are puppets, with two or three strong men pulling the strings. Like others, this chap got tied up just after the war, and now he has to obey his masters even if he lands his country in the mire."

"Ah!" said Barnett. "His name is—"

"If you say it, I'll douse you with mayonnaise! By the holy poker,"—and Chenoweth broke off to glance at the entrance,—"if here isn't Benson!"

A MAN, entering, looked around the place, and regarded Chenoweth doubtfully; then a flicker of a smile came and went on his face. He advanced to their table and took one of the two vacant seats in an abstracted manner. Chenoweth at once reached beneath his chair for his hat, and then spoke.

"Barnett, this is my very good friend Benson; and Benson, this is my very good friend Barnett—he was with me in France after you got your packet and were sent home, and he's with me now."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Benson awkwardly.

Chenoweth, standing and waiting for his check, looked down at his one-time batman.

"Did you get it?" he demanded.

Benson nodded, took an evening paper from his pocket, and laid it on the table before him, in a casual way. Chenoweth glanced down at it. Above the heading was a penciled legend, occupying two short lines.

"I said before eight in the morning, Barnett." Chenoweth's eyes glinted suddenly. "You can pay up on that bet. Number Eighteen, Hanway Street, near Gloucester Road underground station."

"I never took the bet," retorted Barnett.

"Stingy blighter! It was a certainty for me."

"Which was why I ignored it."

Chenoweth took his slip from the waitress, and dismissed her with a shilling and a smile.

"You stop and talk with Benson," he said. "I'm going out alone. We'll meet at Gloucester Road underground station at four tomorrow afternoon. I don't think there'll be any liveliness, but anything's possible. Tra la!"

He departed. Barnett turned his attention to Benson; a short, sturdily built man, with graying hair and mustache, evidently a useful person in any emergency. There was intelligence in his steady gray eyes, reliability in every line of his face.

"Clever work," said Barnett. "How did you discover it so quickly?"

"Discover what, sir?" Benson regarded him with a wooden expression. Barnett looked at him a moment, then broke into a laugh.

"It's your call, Benson; the drinks are on me."

CHAPTER V

IT was close to half-past ten when Chenoweth emerged to the pavement, a big muffler about his chin, his hat pulled well down—the night being chilly enough to admit of these precautions. He achieved a realistic shiver, turned up the collar of his coat, and set off westward toward Marble Arch. He intended to get a taxi for Streatham at the top of Park Lane, and meantime a walk would be beneficial.

So, at least, he intended; but he forgot the one chance in a million which London carefully provides for its residents.

Chenoweth had crossed the street in order to avoid the brilliant lighting of Selfridge's windows, although he deprecated his precautions as rather absurd. He stepped from the street to the curb, just as two men came along past, heading eastward. He paid them no attention. Yet as he passed, he heard a sharp ejaculation come from one of them—a blend of incredulity, of sheer fright, of amazement. Chenoweth turned, and then cursed his lack of care. He knew them at once—Lasalle and Walter James, of the Queen Street group.

"And they spotted me," thought Chenoweth in dismay. He tried to lose himself in the throng turning out from the Marble Arch cinema palaces, yet felt that it was useless.

Those two would follow him, and they would get in touch with Eloise. He could appreciate the shock and alarm that must have filled them at catching a glimpse of him. In thought, he saw Lasalle in a telephone booth, with Eloise at the other end of the wire. Once convinced that Chenoweth still lived, once it was realized what man had actually been murdered in Pimlico Road, the woman would move heaven and earth to get that letter into the hands of its intended recipient at the earliest moment.

There were no spare taxis about, for the picture palace audiences had snapped up all crawlers. Chenoweth accelerated his pace, and at the corner of Park Lane secured a Fiat.

"The end of Hanway Street, by Gloucester Road station—make the best time you can."

There was haste, as he realized. While he rode, he scribbled a note to Barnett in the semigloom of the cab, and paused to address it legibly when the chauffeur had pulled up at the corner of Hanway Street. Then, alighting, he handed it to the man, together with a pound note above his fare.

"Deliver this at once. There's a word inside, telling Mr. Barnett to hand you another two pounds. If he's not back when you get there, wait for him. Get the note into his hands and no others. If it involves any extra expense, he'll pay you."

"Right, gov'nor—and thank you."

THE man drove off, and Chenoweth turned to look about him. The normal night traffic of Gloucester Road went on as usual; Hanway Street, gloomy by comparison with the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare, had but a couple of pedestrian occupants, a man and a girl conversing in the deeper gloom between two street lamps. Of the figure Chenoweth had hoped to see, there was no sign whatever.

"Which is very unlike Yen Lo," he soliloquized. "Still, even a Chinaman must eat at times, I fancy. I don't like it. Leaves me with but one thing to do—so here goes."

He set off briskly up the road, studying the numbers as he went. Eighteen was a long way up, well sheltered from the observation of Gloucester Road, and like its neighbors a staid, dignified house. Chenoweth saw that only frontal attack was possible here, and so he went boldly up the steps and rang the bell. Presently a

maidservant opened, and regarded him in silent questioning.

"Miss Venitsky—is she in?" he inquired.

"I'll see, sir." She stood aside to let him enter the narrow hall. "What name, please?"

"None that she would recognize, I imagine. Tell her that I'm from Queen Street—a gentleman from Queen Street."

The girl left him waiting there, and went up to the floor above. There were letters on the hall stand, addressed to four or five different names; from this, Chenoweth's mind grew more at ease, since he judged the place an ordinary apartment house, let out in single rooms or perhaps floors. There would be little danger here.

Presently the maid returned. "Will you come this way, sir?"

Chenoweth followed her up the stairs, and she opened the door immediately facing him at the top. There had been a complete turn halfway up the stairs, and Chenoweth, accustomed to noting such things, reflected that the room ahead must therefore open on the street. If, at need, he smashed out a window, would Yen Lo be on watch? He frowned, blaming himself for not having made certain of the Chinaman's presence—an indiscretion forced on him, however, that he had not a moment to lose in reaching Eloise.

Except for the knock given by the girl, he entered the room unannounced. And almost on the instant, he knew himself too late.

ABOUT the slim, dark girl who faced him there was, at first glance, nothing of the conspirator or secret agent; she was not the clever, oldish type of woman so frequently encountered in this guise, nor the far cleverer and unmoral type of siren who has nothing particular to lose and shows it.

Here was a girl of perhaps twenty-two, and the only indication of danger about her was the perfect poise which enveloped her. She was quietly beautiful, and that is a rare thing in a woman; mere perfection of the body is easily found, but the other shows the quality of mind and thought as well, and is too seldom seen in the world. Standing before an open fire, she regarded Chenoweth with composure, and if he had not known her name and origin, he would have termed her English of the English. Her voice, beautifully modulated, clear quite unaccented, bore out the illusion.

"Surely you have not come from Queen Street, Mr. Chenoweth?" she said.

Chenoweth was far too old a hand to betray his consternation. "I am here, mademoiselle," he said quietly.

"Perhaps you will sit down." She indicated a chair at one side of the fire. "It might be easier to indicate your—purpose, so."

Was there anxiety in that brief pause? He could not tell, but he was sure enough of the mockery in her voice. Doubtless she had been warned, and was ready for him. So very fair she looked, standing there, so utterly desirable, that even hard-headed Chenoweth felt a little doubtful of his right to browbeat such a woman—for an instant. Her eyes questioned him, a little sadly, her whole pose was one of suppressed protest, as though she, not he, were in the right.

"My purpose can be stated in four words," he said, not moving. "I want that letter."

Her head went back with a certain challenging pride. Despite the cause she served, Eloise Venitsky was not of the people, but an aristocrat, and now her breed showed. "Monsieur!"

The one word only. It bore contempt for his bluntness, scorn of him, utter fearlessness. He had more than a suspicion that she was playing with him, that she held cards yet undisclosed, and he took a swift pace toward her. An imperious gesture bade him pause.

"I do not pretend to misunderstand," she said. "This thing is too great for us to admit any childish folly. Why should I give you what you ask?"

"For one reason," he said, and paused.

He had to master his own growing admiration for her, had to cast out the suggestion in his mind, that she was other than he had thought her. He must fling at her an accusation of which she and he only could know the full import—after all, she was an enemy, and a most deadly enemy.

"You are in England, mademoiselle," he said gravely, "and though we have faults in our handling of affairs, we watch our ports. Since a certain day at Ekaterinburg, when what you know took place in a cellar there, I have said no word—I was never sure, never quite sure! But—but now—"

PAUSES are deadly things, and Chenoweth knew the use of them. Now she did not move, yet she was leaning

forward a little, and her face changed. He had brought fear to her, and for the moment he thought the game won.

"Yes, Mr. Chenoweth?" she breathed, her eyes steadily upon him.

"I want that letter—not the copy that Trebitsch made, but the original." He spoke coldly, steeling himself to the part; seen thus, her eyes wide upon him, lips parted as a flower, Eloise Venitsky was a thing of appealing loveliness. "You will give it to me, mademoiselle. Otherwise—there are Russians of the old régime here in England, with their own organizations. If I tell them what I know, if I give your name—"

Pause again. Now he had no need to steel himself; the memory of that blood-spattered cellar was upon him, and for the moment it seemed that he actually stood again in that dim and awful chamber of death. He glanced down at the scar on his thumb, that scar which had cost the Romanoffs their lives. Then he looked up, took another step toward her.

"And—if you give them my name?" she asked, still in that same hushed manner, as though she knew yet dreaded the response.

"You would die, although this is England," he said. "There are hundreds of your people who lost everything, yet who reckoned their loss as nothing when they heard of what was done on that day in Ekaterinburg—"

She held out her arms in swift, violent, appalled protest.

"Monsieur!" It was a cry of pain, rather than a word. "I had no hand in that! But you must know—I am innocent of that—"

Chenoweth shook his head, a man of stone, inflexible, pitiless.

"Your guilt or innocence is nothing to me. They would hear what I saw there—yes, I was there—and would hear your name; I would let them decide. You know what would happen. You can buy my silence only with that letter."

"We lose," she said. Her composure returned as swiftly as it had vanished, and she was again the slim, stately beauty who had first faced him.

"You must lose," he returned. "I must win."

It was evident, yet he did not fancy his victory. She made a little gesture of doubt, of despair; yet all the while her eyes gripped him steadily.

"Is there anything I can offer you—re-

freshment—courtesy of vanquished to victor?" she asked. "Your English whisky and soda, perhaps?"

Chenoweth smiled. "Is that a trap—or a hope? You think that Lasalle, or Walter James, may get here at any moment? Useless, I assure you. If I am not so courteous as a Latin, I can be as ruthless as a Slav. I want that letter, within the minute."

SHE shrugged a little, realizing the uselessness of protest. Chenoweth, at the despairing droop of her lips, was even hurt by his own victory. His random shaft had gone home; it was only a guess that this girl had assisted at the Ekaterinburg killings, a bolt in the dark—but it had gone home to the gold.

She turned, and moved toward the communicating door which led to the back room of the suite. Chenoweth recalled that there had been another door giving directly onto the stairway, at right angles to his door of entry. He moved swiftly to intercept her, and she paused.

"The letter is in my bedroom," she said with calm disdain. "I must get it for you—let me pass, please."

Her pose, her voice, her eyes, would have ensnared and fooled a better man than Chenoweth—though there were few better. He was trapped on the instant.

"I will come with you," he said coldly.

She gave him an icy stare. "My bedroom, I said," she repeated.

"And I said—I will come with you." He was inflexible. There was a momentary conflict of eyes, and her gaze flickered.

Again she gave the little shrug of futility, and nodded assent. She went to the communicating door and flung it open into the other room, which was unlighted. Chenoweth, at her elbow, glimpsed dimly the outline of a bed, and the ordinary furnishings of a boudoir, and entered at her side.

A heavy rug fell over his head, stifling any outcry.

HANDS gripped his wrists, gripped them beyond appeal. His struggle was swift, desperate, vain. He managed to trip one assailant, the resulting pull flinging him to the floor as well; the surprise had been too sudden—it was hopeless. Lasalle and Walter James had been waiting here all the time, for he was certain that no one had entered the place after his arrival; all

his senses had been at work, listening for just such an entry.

Even as those hands bound him firmly, Chenoweth reflected on the skill with which she had lured him into this trap; her apparent protest had been well done. He had learned something this night. Here was a woman who knew every move in the game, who had even bested him at his own work!

Now the voice of Walter James, smooth and oily, pierced through the muffling folds of the rug about his face.

"One shout, Mr. Chenoweth, and we'll put you past shouting. Better realize that you're out of the way until that letter is delivered."

"Longer," added the voice of Eloise. "In self-preservation! You heard his threat?"

"Heard it all." That was Lasalle speaking, throaty foreign words.

Some whispering ensued, which Chenoweth could not catch, but whose import he could well guess. He was to be quieted forever. It was their only chance.

"But not here," said the girl's voice, raised a trifle.

"The other raised enough row," said James, and Chenoweth guessed that the reference was to Trebitsch. These men were used to killings. Tied like this, he was no more to them than an impediment to be removed; they would make no bones about it. His own fault, too—he had shot too keen a bolt, which had glanced and come back to strike him.

"If you'll see that the coast is clear, and call a taxi, we'll take him down," said the throaty rasp of Lasalle. "Raslov's car is in the garage just off from South Kensington station—we can carry him in."

There followed a little silence, an interminable period of waiting. Then the voice of Eloise came to him softly:

"Mr. Chenoweth, remember that you forced this on me. I regret that it is the only way of salvation."

"Don't apologize," returned Chenoweth, through his muffling folds. "You've beaten me—that should be satisfaction enough, young lady!"

Silence again, then footsteps. He felt himself lifted, then carried down the stairs, and out into the open air. As they bore him down the steps of the house, Chenoweth wondered what had become of Yen Lo, who should have been there to warn him that Lasalle and James were ahead of him.

"I'll break that Chink's neck for him!" he promised himself hotly.

Which went to show that Lionel Chenoweth had no intention of giving up the game as lost—at least at this stage.

CHAPTER VI

"HM!" said Barnett in perplexity.

"Yes sir," returned the attendant in the hotel vestibule—no other than the lordly head porter in all his glory of war medals and gold braid and scarlet. "He said he'd come back in a quarter of an hour—it was most urgent, and you were to give him two pound notes for his trouble."

"It would be urgent, eh?" Barnett chuckled. "Expensive, almost."

"And, sir, there's a—a man waiting for you."

"Eh? Then rush him along, quick!" said Barnett, with a change of manner. One man seeking him was explainable, but if two were in search of him at this hour, there must be something in it beyond the normal.

The 'man,' produced from some region of which Barnett had no knowledge, was shabbily dressed. He had sleek black hair and an indefinite something in his countenance which at once gave Barnett his cue.

"Name?" he demanded curtly.

"Yen Lo."

"Come with me."

Disregarding the curious stares of the attendants, Barnett led the way to the elevator, and so up to his own room, in silence. There, with the door closed and locked, he sat down on the bed and faced the yellow man.

"All right," he said, lighting a cigarette. "What news?"

"Plenty bobbery," was the response. "Mist' Shen'wett say my have trouble, my go to Mist' Ba'nett, this hotel. My think mebbeso Mist' Shen'wett catchee plenty trouble."

"So? Put it down on the floor and let's sort it out. Talk slow."

Yen Lo nodded, his countenance very serious.

"My find Missee Vanisky, send one piecee chit fo' tell Mist' Shen'wett, then stop and look-see. Bimeby come th'ee men, one big man—plenty choke, shove in cab. They thlow Yen Lo out of cab, Meck-Meck-len-balk Place—my watchee sign. My go first-chop look-see Mist' Shen'wett,

he gone, no can do; my catchee this place plenty quick, tell you."

Barnett sorted this out in his mind. "You were at the lady's address, waiting there, when the three men carried you off, eh? In the street, I suppose?"

The other nodded, hands folded in sleeves, feet close together, beady eyes glittering.

"And where's this Mecklenburg Place?"

"Little way off Euston."

"Hm!" Barnett puffed at his cigarette, frowningly. "Looks bad. You sent the address to Chenoweth—I was with him when Benson brought the message. If by any chance he went there, they were laying for him; evidently they had you spotted. Hm! Afraid they've got him this time—"

HE had been talking to himself, rather than to the little yellow man before him. He broke off abruptly, leaned forward, and looked intently at the other.

"Hello, are you hurt?"

Yen Lo was keeping his pose with some difficulty, and now Barnett noted two large blackening patches under his lower jaw, where fingers had been cruelly pressed into the skin and flesh.

"Plenty bobbery," said Yen Lo, his beady eyes blinking.

Barnett leaped up, and was busy with his brandy flask and a glass when there came a knock at the door. He went to open it. A page boy told him that a taxi-driver wanted him below; Barnett had visions of Benson having arrived to aid in this new development, and felt swift relief.

"Good," he exclaimed. "Bring him up here—I'm busy."

He had the little man in a chair, recovering from his stoically borne faintness, when another knock sounded. "Come in," called Barnett. In answer, there entered not Benson, but an utter stranger, with a folded paper in his hand.

"Mr. Barnett, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes. A letter for me?"

"'Arf a mo'," said the other, as Barnett held out his hand. "The gent what give me this said you was to give me two quid, and I've lost nearly that time already, a-unting for you, sir."

Barnett put two pound notes into the man's hand and took the letter. He tore it open and glanced at it, saw Chenoweth's writing, then looked up to see the man still waiting, looking past him curiously at the Chinaman.

"What d'you want now?"

"The gent said if I was put to expense, sir, you'd pay it—"

"What expense have you been put to?"

"My time, sir," whined the man. "'Ere I been waitin' around—"

"For two quid? You're well paid. Get out. I may be an American, but I'm no tourist. Get out!"

THE man departed abruptly. Barnett slammed the door, looked again at the note, and turned to the yellow man.

"You know Inspector Parkston, Vine Street station?"

Yen Lo nodded.

"Take him this letter. Tell him exactly what you've told me. If he's what Chenoweth says he is, that end of it is safe. Nobody but Parkston, though, and get him if you have to raise him out of bed. Need any money?"

A mute denial. Barnett took out one of his own cards, and scribbled on it: "*By courtesy of Mr. Chenoweth. Please interview bearer.*" He handed this over, with the note, and Yen Lo calmly took his departure.

Barnett wrote down that address. He was not five minutes after the Chinaman in leaving the hotel, and beckoned forward the first taxi on the rank. He might be watched and followed, but he must risk that.

"Eighteen Hanway Street, near the Gloucester Road station."

Barnett had very little on which to go, and was on the face of things taking big chances—but behind his actions was the resolve to take no chances at all. Chenoweth's note had said that he was going to Eloise Venitsky at once, that he had been met and recognized by Lasalle; and in case of misadventure, Barnett might look for him at Hung Tze's restaurant, in Catherine Street, Limehouse.

It was now clear enough that Yen Lo had been put out of the way to clear the ground for Chenoweth, who must have fallen into a trap. Barnett, however, knew that Chenoweth would far rather lose his life than lose that letter he was hunting; therefore his great task was to take Chenoweth's place and get the letter at all costs—all costs! If he left the letter and went to the rescue of his friend, Chenoweth would never forgive him; that was not playing the game. The best he could do was to put Parkston, surely an efficient

ally, on the track of Chenoweth, and send him to that address in Catherine Street.

The taxi was a good one, though Barnett found himself longing for that vehicle in which Chenoweth had taken him out to Wimbledon—so short a while ago, if time were to count apart from events! It would be well to make sure of this vehicle, for he might have difficulty in getting another, and he slid open the window behind the chauffeur.

"Good for an all-night job?"

"Quite, sir."

"How about gas? I mean petrol."

Barnett smiled as he translated the word.

"Tank full and two spare tins, sir."

"Good. Take it fast, now."

HE sat back again and pulled up the window, just as Big Ben chimed the quarter past eleven. The driver's going around by Westminster instead of heading straight through the park meant nothing to him—Chenoweth would have spotted the extra-fare attempt at once, but Barnett's brain was leaping and racing ahead.

Calling on ladies at eleven-thirty was not exactly a habit of his, and it was not a London habit either. He foresaw difficulties; but now Barnett was on the job, in the game once more—and the game meant everything. Himself, the man, and what he did—all this was quite secondary. Nothing counted except that the game must be won at all and any cost. Intelligence! The old word leaped through him like a flame. He was no longer Barnett, the American abroad; he was a machine, a thing, driving forward to one end despite all that intervened.

"Here we are, sir."

The driver reached back and opened the door; his words brought Barnett out of his reflections with a jerk. Before him as he descended to the pavement loomed a row of tall houses, all unlighted, silent; except for the taxi, there was no sign of life in Hanway Street. Barnett struck a match to make certain that he had the right number, mounted the steps, and leaned against the bell-push. He rang twice, heard the persistent tinkling somewhere inside, and presently caught the vibration of dragging footsteps that were in themselves a protest. The door opened, and an elderly woman peered out.

"Well?" she snapped unamiably. Barnett slid one foot between door and jamb.

"I want to see Miss Venitsky."

"She'll be in bed at this hour," said the elderly female in a voice of finality and decided ill humor.

"Then she'll get out of bed," retorted Barnett, pleasantly but firmly. He gave the door a quiet pressure, and by dint of personality forced himself inside. "You must understand, madam, that my visit is official. If you do as you're told, all well and good. Otherwise, the consequences may be unpleasant for you."

The woman's manner changed at once, before this hint of officialdom. She cringed visibly, and stood back.

"I'm sure I don't want any unpleasantness, sir," she answered. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll see—"

"No," cut in Barnett. "You'll take me straight up to Miss Venitsky. Has she one room or two?"

"Two and bath, sir—on the first floor."

"Right." Barnett's air of brusque authority was perfect. "Lead the way, straight to her sitting-room. If there's any damage you'll be paid."

His determination awed the woman into abject submission. Without a word, she turned, pulled down a switch which gave light beyond the full turn of the stairs, and led the way. At the landing she paused, gesturing to the door before her.

"Shall I knock, sir?"

"No."

Barnett stepped forward, turned the handle, and flung the door open. He looked into the barrel of an automatic pistol, held steadily in the hand of Eloise Venitsky. Barnett smiled.

"Put it down or shoot—as you like," he said. "The landlady brought me up and is just outside here."

THE weapon vanished. Eloise Venitsky switched on her lights and then stood staring at him, her eyes shining with anger. She was fully dressed. Her beauty struck upon Barnett, but failed to pierce to him. There came into his head that bit of pigeon-English doggerel that Chenoweth had sung in the street—

"Welly little plover lady no likee my!"

Something behind that song—some fund of meaning in it, some warning, had he needed any; this was a woman in a thousand, and a "little proper lady" indeed. Eloise had on a fur toque and fur-trimmed coat, as though she had just come in or had been about to leave; on a small

occasional table beside her was an attaché-case, open, displaying papers and a few slight articles of clothing. She turned and snapped it shut.

"Ten minutes more, and I'd have been too late, eh?" said Barnett, moving forward.

Like a flash, Eloise seized the case and darted for the door, still partly ajar. Barnett whirled swiftly, for he had half anticipated such a dash; his hand fell upon her arm, and his fingers sank deeply, halting her with a wince of pain.

"No, you don't!" he said.

He shoved her aside and went to the door, discovering the landlady still outside. He swung open the door and pointed down the stairs.

"No further need for you, thanks—I'll see this thing through in a way that'll save you all trouble," he said. Then he closed the door, locked it, and put the key into his pocket. He turned.

"You—you—" Eloise choked on the angry word.

"Any choice of names you like," said Barnett cheerfully. "Let me relieve you of that bag."

She offered no resistance when he took it—so the letter was not inside! He quite ignored the weapon she had first displayed, tossed aside the case, and gently impelled the girl toward the couch. Then he halted and regarded her steadily.

"I want two things," he said, "and I want them both so badly that you and I don't part company till I get them. Understand?"

Chenoweth's song had understated the case—she more than disliked him. In her glance was sheer proud hatred, mingled with contempt, and it bit into Barnett. He had never seen such beautiful eyes as these, and only with an effort did he force himself to maintain his hard-boiled attitude. He flung the attaché-case into the corner, roughly.

"If I've got to strip the clothes off you and set fire to this place, I mean to have that letter," he went on with a cold ferocity that was well assumed. Time was short—he would reach Chenoweth if possible, as well as get the letter. "You're up against it—if you try to scream or make a fuss, I'll tie you up. Your last card is lost, so come across."

She looked at him, now with an entire change of expression. Her eyes were soft, humid, appealing, and for a moment Bar-

nett was almost shaken by the richness of her voice.

"Have you no feeling? Is a cause nothing to you?" she demanded. "If I show you how you may still save him,—your friend,—will not that be worth everything? He is in danger—"

He smiled thinly at this play for time.

"My friend's cause is more to me than my friend," he said, then reached out and took her by the arm. "Come! In just one minute by that clock on the mantel, I begin to search."

THE purpose behind his menace could not be mistaken, but she remained motionless, her eyes defiant again and glittering angrily. When the minute-hand of the clock had moved its allotted span, Barnett tightened his grip.

"Hat and furs off, please," he commanded. "The letter's on you—you were just ready to leave. I'll search you thoroughly, young lady."

His steady manner told her that the threat was no idle one. Negligently, almost contemptuously, she removed her fur and toque, and extended them to him. He looked at the shining silken masses of her dark hair.

"Down with your hair," he said curtly. It was an ugly part he was playing, yet he knew that she must surrender. As she hesitated, he went on, more roughly:

"If that letter isn't on you, you'll spend the night in a police cell while I search this place front to back—get that in your mind! And inside ten minutes you'll be on your way to the station."

She gave in, a tidal wave of crimson flooding into her face. She dropped her hands, took the little fur toque from him, and mutely held it up. Barnett caught at it. The outer band of fur, folded back against the crown of the hat, rustled in one spot; he found that it pulled up easily, and beneath it laid bare an ordinary envelope, folded once, sealed.

"Is this it?"

A smile touched her lips. "Would you believe me if I said not?"

"Hm! You may as well come along with me now and get Chenoweth, wherever he is—that's a sure way of discovering if we have the right letter."

She was taken aback by this, and stared at him in a puzzled, frightened way. "Who—who are you? You are not any man I have seen—who are you?"

"Chenoweth's friend," he responded. "That's why I'm forced to treat a lady in this fashion—to save him the trouble. Put on this fur and hat again."

He held the fur, and when she had adjusted it, picked up the attaché-case and took out the key he had pocketed.

"I've a taxi waiting," he said, "and you can tell the driver where to go, to make it look more natural. I know where he has to go; if you tell him differently, we'll stop at a certain police station instead. There are to be no mistakes."

He ushered her out and conducted her down the stairs, keeping hold on her arm all the while. Thus they came out to the taxi, and she murmured the address to the chauffeur who held open the door. Barnett started slightly, then handed her into the cab and seated himself at her side, wondering if she had dared to attempt trickery, even now.

For the address she had just given to the driver was not the one Chenoweth had written down for him. Either he or Parkston was on a wild-goose chase.

CHAPTER VII

"IF I give you my word that I'll make no move of any kind until the cab stops, will you let go my arm?" asked the girl at his side.

Barnett considered. "I'm taking no chances," he said at length. "However, I'll put you on your honor to be good until we're both out of the taxi."

"Agreed. That will be more—more reasonable."

Her voice sounded almost gay. Barnett released his hold, cursing the rôle that he had been forced to play. This girl looked so young, so utterly unlike the conventional adventuress, so wholly different from the usual type of *intrigante*, that he was puzzled. Then he forced her from his mind and gave attention to their whereabouts, for the address given by her had been meaningless to him.

They came to the east end of Knightsbridge and Barnett recognized the Hyde Park Hotel. All the open space of Hyde Park was deserted, save for policemen and stragglers and an occasional taxi—heretofore Barnett had seen it as a bewildering complexity of traffic, and now even the street-lamps looked lonely.

He was aware of Park Lane and the

Marble Arch, and knew that they were in Oxford Street until they reached Tottenham Court Road; beyond that point, the driver kept straight, then diverged from the main route, and Barnett saw tram-lines. Theobald's Road and Roseberry Avenue were new ground to him, and he quite failed to recognize the Angel at Islington.

The driver swung north, slowed, halted, and reached around to open the door and inquire his way. Eloise leaned out and gave the required direction; Barnett sat tensed, but she made no move to escape, and the door slammed again. Now they were in mean, silent streets, lighted so dimly as scarce to show the squalid houses; the occasional policemen regarded the taxi with curious stares, as though it were a rarity in these parts.

"You seem to be accepting the matter calmly," observed Barnett to his companion.

"I should like to get there in time to save him," she responded, and her grave voice impressed him with its sincerity. "You have the letter. I've lost my play. There's no use in sacrificing so fine a man as Mr. Chenoweth; he may be an enemy, but his life—"

She broke off; in her words was a finality, an intonation of certainty, which made Barnett's blood chill.

"Explain, please," he said gently. "I'm not quite sure of what's happened."

"He came tonight to get—what you have obtained," she replied quietly. "He put the alternative to us: the letter, or death. We were forced to master him. You see?"

"No," said Barnett.

"If we had let him go, he would have fulfilled his threat; he set the terms himself, without quarter. But now, since you have the letter and he will not carry out his threat, I do not want his death on my conscience. It is clear enough."

BARNETT was puzzled as he glimpsed her face in the passing glow of a street-lamp. She was smiling a little; they might have been two friends going home together from an evening's entertainment.

"You don't live up to your part," said Barnett after a moment. "A girl like you, to be carrying that letter—"

"We're not at the end yet," she said. "My word holds while we're in the taxi, only."

"Hm! I'd have thought that, and not said it."

"Perhaps I can afford to say it." She laughed slightly, a rippling utterance that was sheer melody. "We're nearly there."

Barnett thrilled to that laugh. "If it were not for Chenoweth," he said, "I think I'd be sorry to see the end of this ride."

"We're not playing *that* game tonight," she returned coldly.

The taxi rocketed over uneven cobbles, and again the driver had to ask directions. Eloise gave them concisely, unhesitatingly; Barnett had a glimpse of water beyond the parapet of a low bridge.

"The Thames?"

"No, only a canal. I thought you knew where we were going?"

Barnett made no response. They swung abruptly to the right, the girl tapped on the window, and the driver pulled up. Barnett opened the door, and alighted. As Eloise followed, he once more took her arm.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's necessary."

The driver leaned over. "How long, sir?"

Barnett took out his pocketbook and handed it to the man. "Take a fiver from that," he said, "and then wait for me."

Having only one hand free, he could not well get at his money. The chauffeur extracted a large note and returned the pocketbook.

"Quite all right, sir."

"Lead on," said Barnett to the girl.

He accompanied her on ahead of the cab. Once they were beyond hearing of the man, he slowed momentarily.

"Your parole is up, and I'll have to remind you that you don't stand an earthly chance of getting clear. I've acquired a certain regard for you, Miss Venitsky, but until I shake hands with Chenoweth and see him free, your first attempt at escape will bring a bullet—and I shoot straight. Without you, Chenoweth is a dead man—in which case you're dead too."

Once more his voice sounded harsh and commanding. The girl nodded a little, made no other response, and kept on. Presently they came to a door in a board wall, before which she halted.

"Here."

The door had no visible fastening, was wide enough to admit vehicles, and in the light from a near-by street-lamp Barnett saw tire-tracks on the wet pavement. Then he spied a small door set in the center of the main barrier, with a handle. Turning this, it gave easily and he stepped through,

keeping hold of the girl's arm as she followed.

The obscurity before them resolved itself into a large yard, piled with timbers for seasoning. Before them loomed the black mass of a long shed.

"In there?" he demanded.

"Yes."

BETWEEN two of the lumber piles he now made out the shape of a touring car, with its top up. He skirted the piles, seeking a means of entry to the shed; rounding its end, they came upon a door, about the edges of which showed a glimmer of light. Barnett drew the girl close to him, and even in this instant the faint fragrance of her hair struck upon his consciousness. An incongruous thing—so, for that matter, was her presence in this spot.

"Come."

He drew her back, swiftly, and led her to the automobile between the piles of timber. There he took the fur from about her neck.

"I'll be back in time to save you from catching cold," he said quietly. "Meantime, no chances! Turn your back and put your hands behind you."

She obeyed without question. He bound her wrists securely with the long fur, led her to the front of the car, and wedged the end of the fur into the headlight bracket so that it would grip. She was firmly fastened, and as he stepped back, Barnett wondered what the expression of her eyes was, just then.

"Hurting you?"

"You are very considerate," she said, a hint of acidity in the words.

Barnett swung away and left her, so. He had wasted no time, yet he felt that he had no time to waste in talk.

That door, betraying the light inside, might be locked; but since the outer entrance had been left open, it was rather unlikely that this would be locked. A voice came to him from the interior, but he could not hear what was said. With an abrupt shove of his body, he reached for the door handle and swung it open.

His big friend of the hotel was standing over Chenoweth's bound figure, pistol in hand; two others were standing by. Barnett fired, and the big man pitched forward; here was death, relentless and swift as the crack of doom. The two others realized it, and flung themselves forward. One hurtled into Barnett, spoiled

his second shot, dragged down his pistol-hand. The second caught him in a grip about the waist, to pull him to the floor; this bearded man had a grip like a steel trap, and Barnett, losing balance, went down with a crash.

In that crash, his pistol went.

Barnett and the bearded man lay struggling; across them the taller man leaned, trying to get in a blow. Both, it seemed, were unarmed. For a moment Barnett came on top of his antagonist, and saw the taller man just reaching for the fallen pistol. He lashed out frantically, and the heel of his boot took the man between the eyes, blood leaping as he fell sidewise. At the same instant, the bearded one drove in a cruel blow that stretched Barnett out, all but helpless, and followed it up with a terrific grip on the throat.

A strangling moment, a moment of suffocation, of iron fingers clamping into his windpipe, throttling him—then somehow he wrenched loose that madman's hold, gasped in air, rolled over and half came to his feet. The other was upon him at once, and he heard Chenoweth's voice shout a warning as the tall man came in from the side. For the first time, Barnett had a chance to use his fists. He met the tall one with a straight left to the heart, and followed it with a right to the mouth that sent the man reeling; before he could recover, the bearded man was upon him again with flailing arms—a wild, oath-venting frenzy of rage like the attack of a maddened animal. Caught in the furious grip, Barnett tried to fight free, and then heard the voice of Chenoweth again, this time rising in shrill, sharp warning—

Too late! A stunning, staggering blow from behind took him across the head, dazed him; and as he turned, it was repeated. With the crash, everything went into darkness. In the very moment when he should have won—they had put him out. The rest was failure.

CHAPTER VIII

THE taller of the two men, his face bloodied from Barnett's boot and fist, was speaking.

"—merely a matter of care that they are shot from a natural angle. Here Raslov is dead; leave their bodies with his, Lassel! It will be evident that he killed one of them—"

"Then was killed by the other, after which he killed the other!" cut in the biting voice of the bearded Lasalle. "I do not make the mistake of taking the English police for fools, my dear James. Don't you think they know who Raslov is? Perfectly well."

Barnett opened his eyes. He felt rather battered about the head, but had been no more than stunned. Now he was trussed up with a length of rope, and very efficiently trussed, too. He lay across the shed from Chenoweth. He wondered dimly if those shots would bring any police—and he was not the only one wondering about that. The tall James wiped blood from his eyes, uttered an oath, glared down at Barnett with an aspect of vicious hatred, and snapped an impatient word at Lasalle.

"Well, what do you intend to do, then? It's wearing on toward morning. Those shots will draw attention—"

Lasalle, who was examining Barnett's pistol, pocketed it and made a gesture of derision. He, obviously, was the leader here.

"My dear James, this is Roxton; no police come down this road except in pairs—and only then if they are compelled. We may stay for breakfast, and it'll be all the same. Those shots have gone unheard and unnoticed."

"Well, we must settle these two."

"Evidently." Lasalle fingered his beard, and glanced at Chenoweth's figure. "This cursed Chenoweth has left us no alternative. He missed his mark when he threatened Eloise; she, of course, had nothing to do with the affair at Ekaterinburg—she was in Italy at the time. How this American got here, I don't quite understand."

So, then, Eloise had not yet been found! Barnett moved in his bonds, and James kicked him.

"Be quiet! What about it, Lasalle? Into the canal?"

Lasalle reflected. "They would sink, if their skulls were smashed first. That would give us two days at least, perhaps more."

"But we must sink Raslov too."

"Naturally. Hm! I'd very much like to know how this American got here—"

The voice of Chenoweth cut in with a lazy, irritable drawl.

"Oh, shut up! Talk, talk, talk—all you damned parlor reformers are alike. You talk like phonographs, and never reach the end of the record. Whatever it is, make

up your minds and get along with it. Do something, for once."

IN that voice was such utter unconcern, such real acerbity at their lack of concerted purpose, that it accomplished its intent; Lasalle turned with a hearty curse, and was diverted from his consideration of Barnett's arrival.

Barnett smiled a little. He thought of Eloise, and warmed to the thought. Then he remembered—unless they searched him, which apparently they had not done, Chenoweth's mission was accomplished, for he had the letter on him. If they discovered Eloise, if she called to them, she would get the letter back. Her silence was reassuring. Probably she could not tell what had passed inside the shed, and would conclude that Barnett was the victor in the battle.

"Well," said Lasalle, coming back toward Barnett and staring down at him, "we may as well get the job over with, clear out of here with the car, and be gone. Hand me that billet of wood yonder."

"Get your own tools," retorted James in surly fashion, "and leave this American to me. It'll do my face good to—"

He broke off suddenly, and made a sweep to pick up the pistol dropped by Raslov. Lasalle uttered a sharp cry, and whirled about—too late. The door heaved open with a crash, and into the shed burst an irruption of uniformed men.

"Hands up!"

James fired, fired again; pistols spat flame at him, and he dropped. Lasalle had no chance to fire, for two of the police had hurled themselves on him, and now they held his struggling figure while his hands were ironed. All in an instant, the shed was in a whirlwind of life and death and motion. Two policemen knelt above one of their comrades, killed by James; another made certain that James was dead.

"Good old Parkston!" said the cool drawl of Chenoweth. "Do you know, Inspector, this would make an excellent melodrama? Allow me to introduce my friend Barnett, over there, who very nearly got the murderers of Trebitsch. You've got 'em now."

Barnett was freed, helped to his feet. For all Chenoweth's air of unconcern, he could scarcely stand, for a few moments, and one eye was bruised and discolored; Barnett was in much better shape to outward seeming. Parkston pointed to the body of Raslov.

"Who shot that man?"

"Barnett did—I hadn't the chance, unfortunately," said Chenoweth.

"Dead, Sergeant?" To Parkston's question, the answer was a nod.

"It's a pity," observed Chenoweth, looking at the body of the dead policeman, "that our friend Lasalle didn't shoot your man there. In such case you might have charged him with the murder, so that the Trebitsch affair might drop out of everyone's mind. Lasalle is the man who actually killed Trebitsch, you know."

"So?" Parkston looked him in the eye for a moment. "But Lasalle did shoot him! This other chap missed completely," he said with quiet deliberation. "How about it, Sergeant?"

The sergeant nodded, without a tremor of surprise.

"Right, sir. I saw the whole thing. That other chap fired and missed. Then Lasalle fired, and Smithson dropped."

Chenoweth turned to Barnett, a twinkle in his eye. "Don't you think our London police are up to your American brand? Shake hands with Parkston."

"They're too good to be true—seemed like it when you chaps showed up!" exclaimed Barnett, shaking hands with the inspector. "But how did you get here? I sent you a Limehouse address, which Chenoweth had given me—"

Parkston chuckled. "I landed a good two pounds of cocaine at that address—a big haul. Old Hung Tze thought that was what I was after, and hadn't time to put the stuff away. Then Yen Lo, Mr. Chenoweth's man, guided us straight up here. In time, too!"

Chenoweth shivered. "And just in time. I say, Parkston, if you've a nip of brandy—"

Parkston had. When Barnett had taken a swallow of the fiery stuff, he accepted the cigarette that Chenoweth thrust at him. Then he swung on Parkston.

"Inspector—did you look at the automobile in the yard, outside?"

"We looked it over, yes."

"Was there—was there anyone in it, or near it?"

"Not a soul."

"I wonder if that taxi of mine is still out in the road!"

Parkston smiled faintly. "A taxi passed us just the other side of the canal bridge, with a passenger. She was sitting well

back, and we didn't see much of her. Never dreamed that—"

"Oh, it's quite all right, Parkston." Chenoweth slipped his hand into Barnett's arm. "Come on outside—too much smell of blood here. We'll wait for you, Parkston."

THE two friends passed out into the yard together. Barnett paused, and stooped, lifting one trouser-leg. From inside his sock he took the letter that had caused all the trouble, and held it out to Chenoweth. The latter took it as silently, tore it open, struck a match, and then held the match to the paper.

"The original," he said. "Thank heaven—and thank you, Barnett!"

But Barnett was prying about the automobile between the two lumber-piles. He found nothing, except a torn scrap of fur wedged into the headlight-bracket. Chenoweth strolled toward him, and he heard the soft, mocking words:

"Makee love-pidgin, too muchee talkee,
Welly little ploper lady no likee my!"

"Hm!" said Chenoweth. "She brought you here—and now the bird's flown, eh? You seem most confoundedly hipped about it! Too muchee talkee, perhaps—"

"Shut up," snapped Barnett.

"Oh, ho! And, by the way, it seems that I did the lady an injustice." Chenoweth's tone had sobered. "Lasalle let that slip. I'd like to apologize to her, and I believe I'll do it. D'you know, I believe there's a story behind her activity? She's not the usual sort—"

"Any fool could see that," said Barnett irritably.

Chenoweth chuckled. "Oh, you want to do some apologizing yourself, eh? Well, you may have the chance one of these days. At least, I hope so."

Barnett made no response. He was thinking of the girl's voice when she had said: "We're not playing *that* game to-night!" And then, as he pocketed the fragment of torn fur, he felt himself flushing in the darkness; for Chenoweth's voice once more lifted to him, singing, and now he could not mistake the malicious, mocking intonation:

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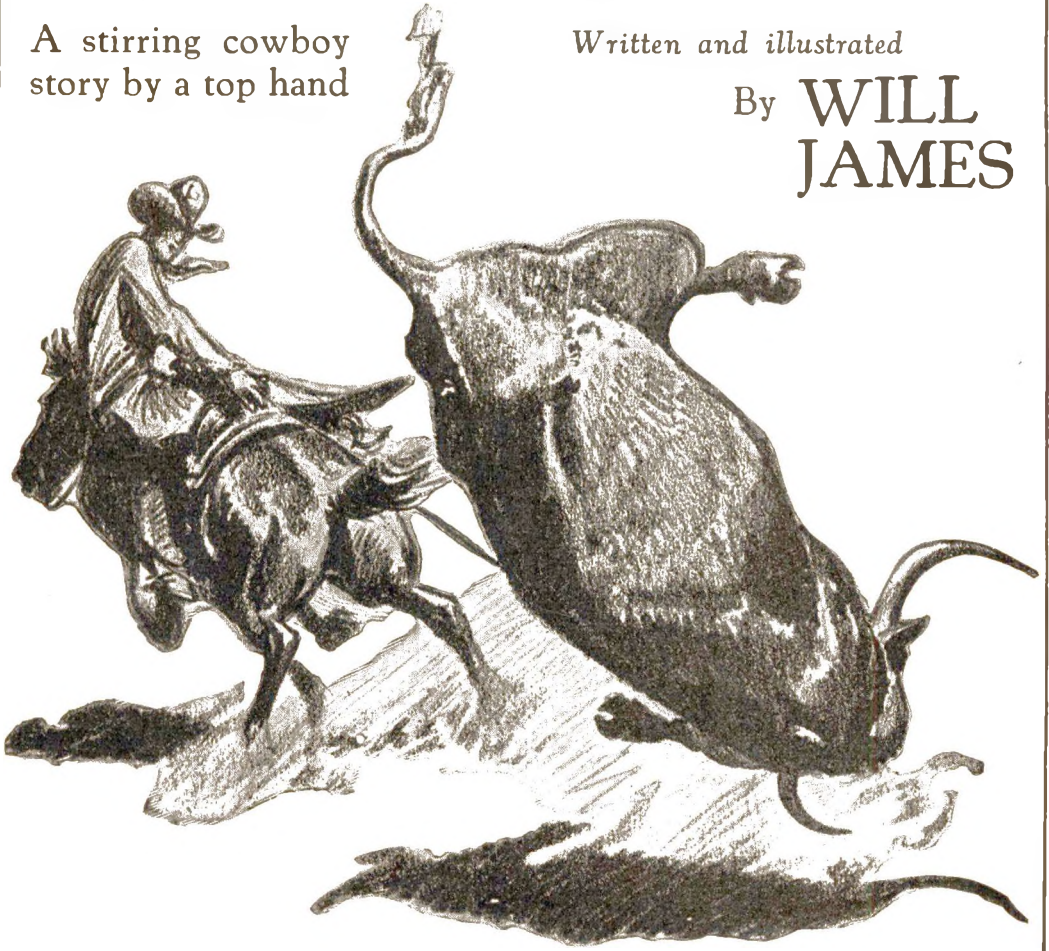
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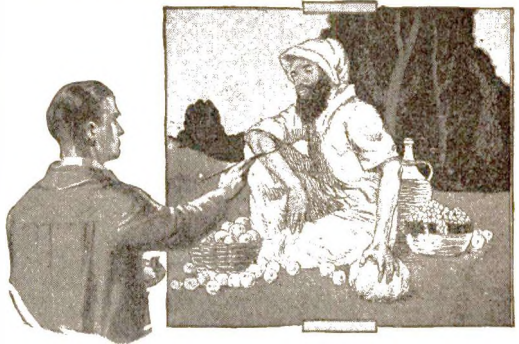
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Present Position.....

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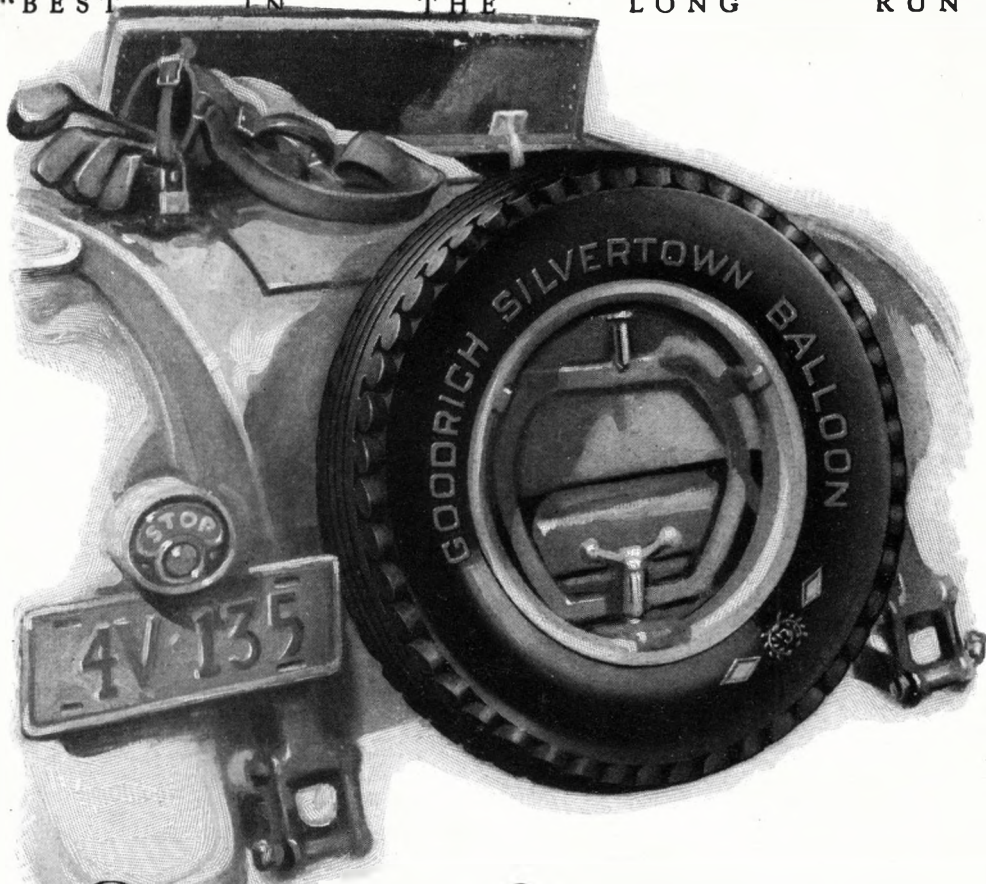
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By ALOIS MERKE

Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York

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