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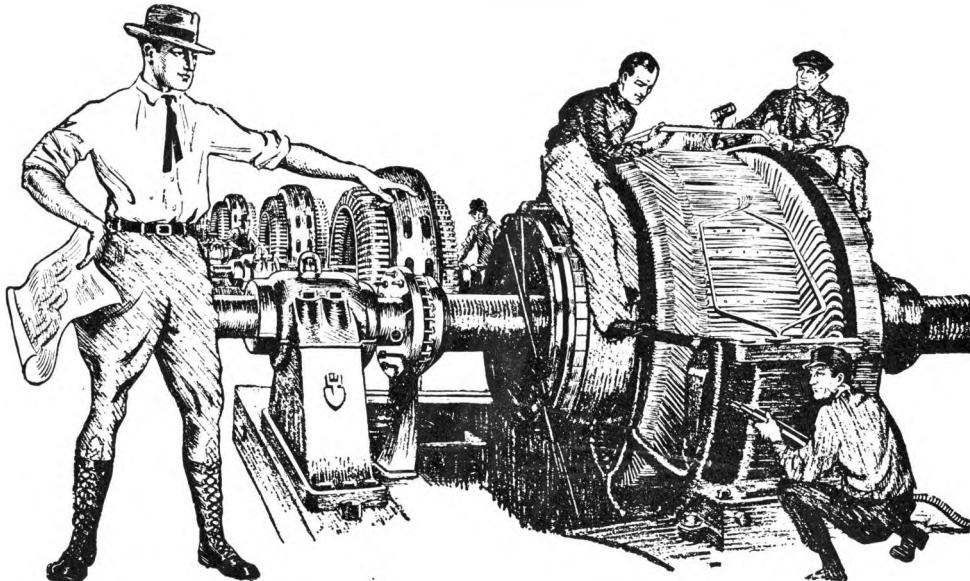
NOVEL OF THE ALABAMA WOODS BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK  
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Published  
MAR. 7, 1921

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume LIX  
Number 4

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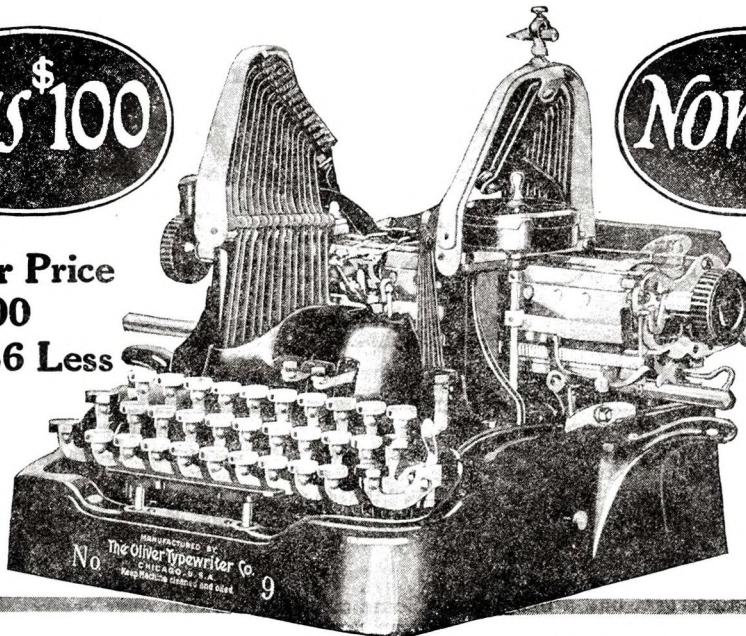
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Vol. LIX. No. 4

CONTENTS

March 7, 1921

<b>Rainbow Landing.</b> A Complete Novel, . . . . .	<b>Frank Lillie Pollock</b>	1
It was a stern purpose that took Lockwood into the pine woods of Alabama. He found that the price of vengeance may be too high—but fate played the hand that circumstance dealt him.		
<b>Two Tickets for Paradise.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Thomas McMorrow</b>	55
Kenton proves that even in the real-estate business truth is valuable—if used judiciously.		
<b>On His Own.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Henry Herbert Knibbs</b>	71
Cash Wainwright had a bad name. Some of his townsmen were ready to hang him for it, until an exciting event exhibited him in a new rôle.		
<b>The Lord Provides.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Roy Norton</b>	84
David and Goliath were worried about Old Harmless, but the patriarch's Partner provided a way out.		
<b>The Dude Wrangler.</b> A Two-Part Story—Part II., . . . . .	<b>Caroline Lockhart</b>	93
Wallie and Pinkey find that the dude business has drawbacks—lots of 'em!—and decide to enter a line of endeavor where the margin of loss isn't quite so large.		
<b>Caught in the Net.</b> Editorials, . . . . .	<b>The Editor</b>	136
Our Wealth. Coal Competition. Our Changing Manners. The High-Price Tide. Trade With Russia. Popular Topics.		
<b>Cocktail, Sar?</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>H. de Vere Stacpoole</b>	141
Cassidy was a gambler and also a gentleman—a combination of qualities that made him grateful for liquid refreshment after a week in Java.		
<b>In Bonanza.</b> A Five-Part Story—Part IV., . . . . .	<b>William MacLeod Raine</b>	148
Scot McClintock enters politics, forty-fives roar, and Sam Dutch starts on a journey.		
<b>Stop Thief!</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Roy W. Hinds</b>	167
Pete Stem's gang weren't desirable neighbors, but a visit from them always livened up Pine City.		
<b>Heads and Tails.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>H. Mortimer Batten</b>	173
Lightfoot's loss was a heavy one but it didn't make him lose his speed.		
<b>"Fish" Kelly, Jonah.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Robert McBlair</b>	179
That man "Fish" sure was hard luck for Lawyer Little, even when the latter had his fingers crossed.		
<b>Jeering Birds.</b> A Short Story, . . . . .	<b>Arthur Tuckerman</b>	185
In the jungle Tremain learned what fear was, but he had plenty of reason to.		
<b>A Chat With You</b> . . . . .		191

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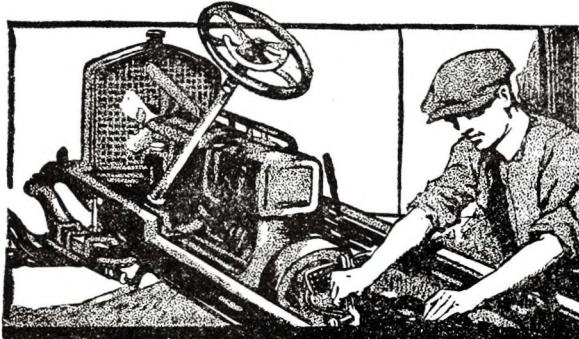


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By J. E. Greenslade, President, N. S. T. A.

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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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MARCH 7, 1921.

No. 4

## Rainbow Landing

By Frank Lillie Pollock

It was a grim chase that led Lockwood to Alabama's pine woods to work in a turpentine camp. But when he found his man he also found some one else who made him forget his desire to kill for something better. There is a relentless grip to this story from beginning to end. The action is machine-gun action. Incidentally, when you have finished this tale you will know a mighty interesting lot about Alabama's turpentine industry. You will remember Mr. Pollock as the author of that remarkable novel, "Poison Key."

(A Complete Novel)

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE END OF THE TRAIL.

LOCKWOOD slept badly. In fact, he had slept badly for several years, and he found nothing soothing to-night in the endless *crash-crash* of the steam-boat's stern-wheel paddles under his head. It was dull to stay up; the saloon of that Alabama River boat emptied by nine o'clock, and even that was late for the farmers who made up the passenger list.

It was not like the old days when planters gambled bales of cotton upon poker hands; and Lockwood, bored desperately, went out upon the desolate darkness of the deck.

The night was pitchy black, and a little fog hung low on the muddy surface of the Alabama River. The glow of the boat's deck lights showed the passing shore close at hand, a sliding series of bald white sycamore trunks, bare cypresses, water maples, clumps of mistletoe, depths of unending swamps such as skirt the river for most of its sinuous length. The powerful searchlight at the bow shot ahead like an inquiring finger, touching the stream far away, shifting, lifting, throwing into uncanny brilliance a clump of trees on the next bend a mile away, as the pilot picked out his landmarks for the deep channel.

Occasionally the whole boat vibrated and

shook with the terrific blast of the whistle, a powerful siren made to carry twenty miles over the swamps, to let every landing know the boat was coming, and give plenty of time to meet her.

The air was full of dampness and fog and a woody, musky smell of rotting vegetation from the vast swamps. No light, no sign of human occupation showed anywhere along the shores. Lockwood returned to his state-room, wearied and mosquito bitten, lay down in his berth and tried to read yesterday's Mobile paper.

He could not read any more than he could sleep. He had a singular feeling that something was going to happen at last. Perhaps the boat would run on a sand bar, or blow up her boilers; they were directly under him, but he felt highly indifferent. Some one else was sleepless as well as himself, for in the adjoining cabin he heard a soft sound of movement, a rustle of paper, the click of a suit case being opened and shut. He did not know who was in there. The door of that cabin had remained closed ever since the boat left Mobile that afternoon, and the occupant had not come out for supper.

Lockwood had no curiosity about it. He was brain weary, but not sleepy. He felt desperately tired that night—tired of everything, tired particularly of the long trail he had followed so far without success, which

he was still following, which he would continue to follow as long as he lived, for he had nothing else to do with his life.

He had no anxiety, for he feared nothing and loved nothing, he thought. He felt that he was even tired of hate, which, he considered, was the only emotion left for him on earth—the only emotion, that is, except that great final one which he was seeking, and which would last not much longer than the flash of a pistol shot.

He was tired, and perhaps he was so tired that he even dozed a little after all, for he came to himself suddenly, shaken by the enormous bellow of the boat's siren. It blew again; he heard the clang of a bell. Probably they were approaching a landing, and he got up and opened his door upon the side deck. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was nearly two o'clock.

Down below him in the gloom there was a great stirring and shouting of the negro roustabouts who were getting out the freight. No port was in sight, but far ahead he saw at last a flicker of a fire somewhere far ahead. The searchlight found it, quenched it for an instant with its white intensity, then shifted, giving a glimpse of trees, of a wooden shed. Undoubtedly this was a stopping place. Again the whistle roared tremendously.

A negro steward came out from the saloon carrying a couple of suit cases.

"What place is this?" Lockwood asked him.

"Dis yere's Rainbow Landin', suh."

A white man had come out also, and was looking over the rail a yard away. As the boat came up, the landing seemed to be a landing and nothing more. There was a wide, open space on the bank, inclosed by cottonwood trees, and a large wooden building with a platform on the riverside. Some one had lighted a fire ashore. He could see three or four dark figures moving about it. A boat emerged from the gloom and nosed about the warehouse. The searchlight reconnoitered carefully, swept the shore, and lifted to the bluff rising behind it. Lockwood caught a glimpse of a bare clay face, streaked with fantastic strata of crimson and green and white.

A bell clanged. The clumsy boat slowed and turned her nose inshore. The branch of a big cottonwood brushed over the upper deck, as she rammed the warehouse platform with a force that set the structure quivering. A negro leaped ashore with a

hawser. The bell clanged again. The boat stopped and swung back, her hawser taut against the current.

A man in the open warehouse door shouted sonorously and unintelligibly up to the pilot house. Two long gangplanks were run ashore, and instantly a stream of negroes shouldered boxes and bales and started to land the freight at a trot, calling, laughing, singing. The searchlight steadied on them like a watchful eye.

In the glare of the electric light Lockwood watched the wild spectacle, the dark river flashing yellow by the boat, the margin of the immense swamp, the grotesquely brilliant streaks of the colored clay, and the fire looking like the camp of some lost expedition. There was a flash of negro eyes and teeth; it was like a midnight scene on the shore of the Kongo, and the roustabouts wailed a wild and wordless crooning as they hauled the freight ashore.

From his elevated position Lockwood could see the packages, and he was surprised at their number, for this wild and isolated spot, and still more at their character. In the brilliant light he could see the crates of fruit, the boxes marked "Fragile" from Mobile, the cases and cases of liquor and cigars, addressed to a name that he was unable to make out. Alabama at that time had not gone "dry," but dozens of champagne, cognac, and liqueurs were surely no common cargo to land in the swamps.

Somebody must live in those swamps who had a cultivated taste and money to spend, that was clear. Lockwood was watching with some curiosity, without noticing the other passenger a yard from his elbow, when the latter's voice reached him.

"Seems like they've got a heap of freight to—"

Lockwood never heard the rest of that sentence. For a moment the whole wild scene reeled around him; he turned deaf and dizzy; he felt for an instant as if he had been suddenly dipped in ice water, and then his blood rushed flaming hot.

He had not heard that voice for over five years, but he knew its first word. It had come—the meeting he had pursued for four years, through unimaginable discouragements and hardships and distress. Through sleepless nights he had imagined it a thousand times, but he had never expected it to come like this; and now at the crisis he was aston-

ished to find that he felt no fury of hatred, but only a dead stupefaction.

He collected himself, muttered some answer. He ventured a glance, and met the man's eye. It was McGibbon, right enough, and not greatly changed; his eye rested casually on Lockwood, and then shifted back to the landing. Lockwood was not himself afraid of recognition; for years he had guarded against that danger, and those years had changed him greatly.

It flashed upon him that McGibbon must have been the unseen passenger in the next cabin, since he had not been visible on the boat before. No wonder Lockwood had been sensible of something ominous in the air! And evidently McGibbon was going ashore here as soon as the gangplanks were cleared of freight, for the two suit cases stood beside him, and the deck steward was hovering about, fearful of losing his tip.

Had it not been for this negro, Lockwood could have shot the man unseen, as they stood there. His hand unconsciously crept toward the little automatic that he had carried for years in his hip pocket, awaiting this day. He could slip ashore in the darkness, hide in the swamps, reach the railroad. But the steward loitered behind them, and Lockwood waited, his head still awhirl, waiting for the situation to develop of itself.

McGibbon said nothing more, and in a few minutes he beckoned to the negro and they started down the stairs to the lower deck. Lockwood saw him come out on the gangplank, make his way between the roustabouts, pass into the dark warehouse at the other end. With a shock Lockwood realized that he had let his opportunity pass. In a panic he plunged back to his cabin, snatched up his own suit case and dashed out, and down to the lower deck.

"Hol' on, captain! Dis yere ain't whar you gits off!" the porter cried as he headed for the plank; but Lockwood brushed past, through roustabouts, and into the warehouse. It was dimly lighted by a couple of lanterns, showing the piled freight, the sacks of oats and cotton seed and fertilizer, the crates and barrels and cases. But McGibbon was not there.

There was an open door at the other end. He set down his suit case and hastened toward it. Outside was the flat, sandy shore space, backed by the woods and the rainbow-colored hill. A road led slantingly up the bluff. He saw a lantern swinging in the dis-

tance, and still farther was a white glare that could be nothing but the lights of a motor car on the higher ground.

He was furious with himself now for his delay. He had never dreamed that he was going to flinch at the critical moment. With the pistol in his hand he rushed madly out of the circle of the searchlight and toward the landward road. But he was too late once more. He heard a sound of loud talking, then the car started with an enormous roar, broke into what seemed sudden, reckless speed, and its lights vanished into the encircling woods.

McGibbon must have gone in it, but to make sure he went on to the top of the hill, and found no one there. He could dimly make out the commencement of a very good road, and far away now he could see the lamp rays of the flying car. He turned back, sick and almost weak with the reaction, and slipped the automatic into his pocket again.

A horse hitched to a buggy was tied to a live oak on the shore, and there were a couple of men beside it as Lockwood came down to the bottom of the road again. One of them was carrying a strong flash light, and turned it on the stranger. Its ray also revealed a row of rough barrels, and something crunched under his feet with a familiar feeling. He had worked in the turpentine woods before, and he knew rosin barrels when he saw them.

"Was that car from the turpentine camp?" he inquired, by an inspiration.

"No, sir; I reckon not. Must have been the Power boys' car," came an answer in a soft Alabaman voice from behind the electric ray.

"Sure was," confirmed another drawl. "Reckon it was here to meet Mr. Hanna. I seen him get off the boat. He's stayin' with the Power boys."

Hanna? McGibbon had changed his name, then. But that was to be expected; and Lockwood himself was not carrying the same name as five years ago, when he and McGibbon were partners.

"Where do the Powers live?" he asked his almost invisible interlocutors.

"'Bout two mile from here, past the post office. Goin' that to-night?"

"Oh, no," Lockwood exclaimed. "In fact, I'm going to the turpentine camp. But I've got to find a place to stay to-night."

"Ain't but one, I reckon. Mr. Ferrell at the post office takes in travelers sometimes.

It's a right smart ways from here, but I've got his hawse an' buggy, and I'm goin' that way, so I can carry you, if you like."

Lockwood accepted gladly. It was too dark for him to see much of the road as they topped the rising ground, but he made out the loom of immense woods against the sky. The road dipped again; mist lay thick and choking close to the ground, full of the swamp odor of rotting wood. Innumerable frogs croaked and trilled, and though it was a warm spring night the air in the hollows struck with a poisonous chill.

The road rose again. The woods fell away; they passed several negro cabins and cornfields. Then it wound through a belt of dense forest, but this time scented with the clean, sweet aroma of the long-leaved pine. The mist vanished, and he could see the crests of the big trees palmlike against the sky.

"You a turpentine man, sir?" inquired his guide, after a long period of silence.

"Yes, I've been in the turpentine business," Lockwood answered truthfully. He was afraid to ask directly about what most filled his mind, but at last he ventured to inquire:

"Has Mr. Hanna got anything to do with the camp?"

"Hanna? No, sir. I don't reckon he knows anything 'bout turpentining. He's just stayin' with the Power boys. Been with 'em ever sence they come into their good luck, I reckon—brought it to 'em, some says."

It was a new thing for McGibbon, or Hanna, to bring anybody good luck, Lockwood thought; and he asked:

"What sort of luck?"

"All kinds—money, mainly. Well, right here I've got to turn off. But you keep right straight down the road, and you'll come to the post office in 'bout a quarter mile. They'll all be asleep, I expect, but you kin roust 'em out. They won't mind—no, sir!"

The road indeed forked here, and the buggy proceeded down the other branch, as Lockwood started to walk in the indicated direction. A moon was just beginning to show above the pines now, and he could see a little more distinctly. Presently he saw a group of three or four middle-sized buildings close to the road.

Undoubtedly this was Mr. Ferrell's post

office. Lockwood hesitated; he did not much care to attract attention, considering his mission; and lodging was immaterial to him, after all. It would be only a few hours till daylight, and he had never felt less inclined to sleep in his life.

He sat down on a log opposite the dark and silent group of houses. Nothing moved in that whole wilderness landscape. The moon crept up; its light fell white on the sand of the road, crossed by the intensely black shadows of the water oaks. Restlessly Lockwood got up and walked on again. The Power boys' place was not much farther, he understood, and he desired above all things to see the spot where his enemy had gone.

The moon was growing brilliantly clear now. The road passed through a strip of pine woods, a series of partially cultivated fields. Then there was a fence on the right, with a great grove of some stately trees behind it, oaks or walnuts, planted with symmetry. Within a hundred yards he came to a pair of heavy gateposts, from which a broken gate hung askew. He looked within and stopped, taken aback.

Fifty yards within, at the end of a long and wide drive, stood a great house, fronted with a Colonial portico, looking like pure marble in the moonlight. The earth of the drive was of silver-white sand. The faintest haze of mist hung in the air, transfiguring the breathless scene to magic. Not a leaf stirred on the trees. It was a spectacle of black and silver and marble, half theatrical, half ghostly, but seeming wholly unreal, as if it might vanish at a breath.

## CHAPTER II.

### RESPITE.

The sheer unearthly beauty of the spectacle was so thrilling and unexpected that Lockwood stepped back, breathless. A sense of deep peace that was as strange and poignant as pain sank into his heart. He felt himself and his grim purpose to be a blot on this exquisite earth.

But this was certainly where McGibbon lay, or Hanna, as he called himself now. This was certainly the Powers' place. There was no light at any window, no sound or movement anywhere about the place. Afraid of being seen from the house, he moved a little way up the road, and sat down on a fallen tree trunk. The live-oak leaves were silvery and still overhead, and a whip-poor-

will reiterated its monotonous and musical cry from among the deep leaves.

But memory had broken the enchantment of the night for Lockwood. To meet McGibbon on the river had been the last thing he expected, still less to find him landing in this wilderness of swamp, bayou, and pine forest. He had traced the man to Mobile from New Orleans, from Pensacola, and had heard a rumor that he might be in Selma. He had taken the boat instead of the train; it was cheaper, and he was short of money, and for once his poverty had proved his fortune.

It was a three years' trail that had come to an end here at Rainbow Landing, a trail that had led from Virginia to Washington, and halfway across the continent, and south to the Gulf Coast. The search was all he had to live for—if he could dignify by the name of Life the wretched and ruined years which seemed all that were left to him.

He was not the first man who has been ruined by a business associate, but it is not often that the ruin is so complete and sweeping. Looking back now, Lockwood was continually filled with an increasing amazement that anybody could ever have been so incredibly trusting, so almost criminally young as he had been.

And yet that far-away, foolish, and happy life dated only seven years back. It seemed twenty; but three of those years had been the life of a dog, of a wolf; and two of them had been spent in prison for a crime that was not, at least willingly, his own. He remembered well the day of his release, when he saw the aged and pallid face in the shop-front mirror, and barely recognized it as his own. He did not care. It was a more effectual disguise, and he had already determined what he must do. Luckily he had a little cash now to help him—a small legacy of a thousand dollars left him during his imprisonment. With this he established his "gold reserve."

McGibbon, he found, had ventured back to Melbourne to pick up the last profits from Lockwood's once-flourishing business, which he had first inflated and then wrecked. Afterward he had gone with the plunder to Washington, and this was where Lockwood first took up the trail.

McGibbon was flush then; he spent his money freely, and he left his tracks in the capital, and afterward in Pittsburgh and Buffalo. Here the money must have run

short, for he went to Smithfield, Illinois, where he became interested in a small printing concern, remained there six months, and left, leaving the printing shop bankrupt.

He left under a cloud, which for some time Lockwood could not pierce. His own money became exhausted. He had to seek work, and he took what he could get. He became an unskilled laborer; he was a department-store salesman. It never occurred to him to seek office work, or in his own field of real-estate dealing. When he had again accumulated a stake, he renewed the search, and eventually found that McGibbon had gone to Ohio.

But he was still a year behind his quarry's movements. McGibbon had left Ohio, had gone west. In Colorado he was concerned in a sugar-beet factory, which had its safe blown open and several thousand dollars taken. The track was lost again. Lockwood fell into grievous straits in the West, but his determination only blackened and hardened. McGibbon moved East. Lockwood might have come up with him, but he was crushed under a motor car in St. Louis and in the hospital for six weeks. He found that his man had gone down the river, possibly to New Orleans. Lockwood followed to that city, and secured a job in a motor-sales establishment. He understood automobiles, and had a knack with machinery.

McGibbon, who now used another name, had left his mark unmistakably in New Orleans, where he had been tried on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses. He had been acquitted, had left the city apparently, but all that had happened a year before Lockwood unearthed the facts. He spent months in fruitless investigation during the time he could spare from his work at the motor shop. Finally he imagined a clew leading to Pensacola and West Florida. Lockwood spent three months in a turpentine camp in the pine woods, returned to New Orleans, went to Mobile, and finally thought he had information of his man in Selma. up at the navigable head of the Alabama River.

The moon wheeled and sank low over the vast swamps as he sat half drowsily on his log, wondering at the strange chance that had cut his wanderings suddenly short. He could scarcely believe that the end was so near, that the forces accumulated for years were about to burst.

He tried to think out a detailed plan. It

was useless. He would have to learn Hanna's habitual movements, learn the geography of this wild country, plan his escape in advance. At the moment he had to admit that he did not feel equal to the situation. He felt none of the wild and vindictive exultation that he had anticipated. He felt merely empty and tired and anxious for rest and delay.

It was partly due to a sleepless night and lack of food, as he knew. But the moonlight had gone, and a gray dawn was breaking. The oak leaves looked cold and dead, dripping with heavy dew. The east began to glow and flare. Somewhere he heard a negro voice chanting weirdly. The South was waking up. He arose from his seat and began to walk slowly back toward the post office.

The Power house was still silent and asleep when he passed the gate again. It looked slightly dingy in the morning light, and its magic had gone. But when he reached the business settlement at the post office he found everything wide awake. Smoke was rising from the stone outside chimneys of the three houses, and the two or three negro cabins in the background, a negro was chopping wood by the road, and the door of the postal station already stood wide open.

A signboard over the door said "Atha," the official name of the office, and a larger and almost obliterated board was painted "T. Ferrell, General Merchandise." The store was a long, unpainted plank building of one story, with the end toward the road, finishing in a square, roofed "gallery," whence steps led down. Farmers could drive up alongside this gallery and transact their business without leaving their buggy seat or saddle. Heavy plank shutters, now thrown back, defended the front windows that displayed a dusty collection of most miscellaneous articles.

Lockwood went in. There was something of everything in the dim recesses of that store. There was hardware and guns and ammunition; bananas and oranges and snuff and tobacco; patent medicines and millinery; boots and shoes and plows and harness and carpentering tools and cotton and silk and ribbons. One corner was walled off by a partition with a wicket and a window. This was the post office, and here Lockwood found Ferrell slowly sorting letters, evidently for an out-going early mail.

"Why, yes, sir; I certainly reckon so,"

he said in reply to Lockwood's request for breakfast. "Sam! O-oh, Sam! Run up to the house and tell Mrs. Ferrell there's a gentleman goin' to eat breakfast with us." He dropped the last of the letters into the pouch, came out from his inclosure, and looked the stranger over genially. He was a middle-aged man with a stubby beard, long, untidy, brown hair, and wrinkled, kindly, simple eyes.

"Come in on the boat last night?" he inquired. "I heard her blowin'. She was right late, wasn't she? Where'd you stay all night?"

"They told me to come here," Lockwood explained. "But it was close to morning then and I didn't like to wake you up, so I sat by the road till daylight. It was only two or three hours."

"Shucks! You oughter just given us a holler. Mighty glad to have you. Breakfast'll be ready right directly. What did you say your name might be, sir?"

Lockwood stayed chatting with the merchant while they waited for the breakfast. He ate with appetite, and it occurred to him that this might be the last meal he would eat in safety for a long time. Afterward they went back to the store. Lockwood was eager to obtain information, but he hesitated to ask questions, and for some time they smoked on the gallery in the level, early sun, exchanging indifferent remarks.

"Reckon you're a turpentine man, ain't you?" Ferrell said at last.

"Well, I've worked in the turpentine woods," Lockwood admitted. "There's a big camp down this way, isn't there?"

"Sure—Craig's camp. I just 'lowed that's where you were bound for. I reckon you're the new woods rider that Craig's expecting."

"Well—I might be," said Lockwood cautiously. "He's expecting one, is he?"

"Sure. Burns, the other woods rider, he got throwed from his horse last week. Hit against a pine stump hard, and was hurt right bad. It's the busy season now, and Craig needs a man bad."

"Yes, I was going down to see Craig," Lockwood responded carelessly. "How far is the camp from here?"

"Couple of miles, straight down past the Powers' place. Cross the bridge over the bayou, and take the trail into the woods."

"The Powers' place?" said Lockwood. "That's——"

It was the opening he wanted, but at that instant a farmer drove up in a shaky buggy drawn by a mule, got out, and came up the steps. He passed the time of day, was introduced to Lockwood, took a chew of tobacco, and finally went into the store, where he spent half an hour.

"Well, you'll likely find Charley Craig at the camp 'bout noon," Ferrell resumed when the customer had gone. "Not much before. He's out in the saddle by daylight and don't get back to the camp till dinner time. But if you're a turpentine man, he'll sure be glad to see you."

The mail rider came up then and took away the pouch, starting on his round of twenty-five miles through the isolated post offices of that river region. Another farmer came up, sat for some time on the steps, and departed. Three men went by in a frightfully dilapidated Ford car. More people loafed in; a little group formed on the gallery; and Ferrell introduced Lockwood to them all with punctilious ceremony, with the air of presenting an honored guest.

It was an attention with which Lockwood would willingly have dispensed. At this rate, he thought, every one in the neighborhood would soon know his face.

He sat back, saying little, listening to the slow drawl of talk and the low-pitched laughter. They were unlettered and ragged and sunburned, these Alabama farmers, but they had the courtesy of gentlemen and the leisure of aristocrats. He heard the gossip of the country—of the rise in the river, flooding out the bottom lands, of the weather for cotton, of a nigger who had been stealing hogs, and of a man who had been shot near Nadawah.

He gathered an impression of the district from it all, an isolated, almost primeval country of forest and swamp, of scattered farms, of the overgrown ruins of once great estates, of great timber mills and turpentine camps, the industries of the forests. It was thirty miles to the railroad, twenty to the telegraph, though a rural telephone line intersected the district.

He lingered and waited, hoping to pick up something of importance. There was a sense of deep peace and rest on that sunny veranda in the sweet, hot May morning. Among these gentle-voiced Southerners there seemed neither hurry nor strife. Negro women went by in gay ginghams, shuffling their bare, black feet in the amber dust.

The air was like a caress to the nerves, and for the first time in years Lockwood felt his tension relax. He was within sight of the end, he told himself, and he could afford to take breath.

### CHAPTER III.

#### POWERS' LUCK.

Lockwood had already resolved to accept the hint of the turpentine camp. It was absolutely necessary now that he should have some excuse for his presence. He was sure he could get work in the camp, now that the rush of the season was in full swing, and it would give him time and countenance.

So he waited, till it should be time to find Craig at his place. Whites and blacks came and went in a slow dribble, leaving always a residual group on the gallery, but toward the middle of the forenoon he espied a large car in the distance, driven up the road at a furious pace. It swerved up to the store, skidded wildly in the sand, and brought up in front of the steps.

Lockwood coveted that machine. With its aid he could make a hundred miles in a night, and an escape would be easily arranged. With acute interest he turned to look at the two young men who leaped out and came up the steps, passing loud and cheerful greetings by name to almost every one on the store gallery.

"'Mornin', Mr. Power! Howdy, Jackson! Good mornin', sir!" went round, and Lockwood noticed that everybody looked pleased and interested. He was more than interested himself. These were more than the owners of the coveted car. These were the men he most wanted to see—McGibbon's new friends.

Both of them were extravagantly well dressed for that place. They wore expensive outing suits, with silk shirts and gorgeous ties under their soft collars. Silk socks of brilliant hue showed above their canvas shoes, and each of them sported a heavy watch chain.

One of the flashy motorists might have been twenty-five, big and heavily built, with a florid, good-natured face and a thick, brown mustache. He wore a large, scintillating stone in his tie, which might truly have been a diamond. His brother appeared much younger, perhaps not twenty, slim and dark and handsome, also decorated with a diamond pin and a flashing ring on his left hand. The faces of both of them expressed

reckless good humor and an untutored exuberance of life.

These did not look like confederates or associates of such a man as McGibbon. Lockwood's suspicions melted away, and the new idea came into his mind that these might be McGibbon's victims.

The brothers got their mail at the post-office wicket, and came out on the gallery again. They were duly introduced to Lockwood and shook his hand heartily, and talked with everybody.

"We're goin' down to the landing," said the eldest. "Got to see about some freight that came in last night. You-all want to ride with us?"

Two of the idlers accepted, and the big car went off in a whirl of sand.

"Them boys certainly are goin' the pace," some one said.

"They shorely are," a second concurred. "Well, I reckon they've got the price, and they're both of 'em good fellows."

"Best in the world," said Mr. Ferrell. "I hear the old man don't like it, though. Says he can't live up to autymobeels and champagne, and he's goin' back to live in the woods."

"They've come into money, have they?" Lockwood inquired.

"Yes, sir. I dunno how much. Nobody does. I don't reckon they know themselves, nor cares, so long's it lasts. Anyhow, they say they didn't git half, nor a quarter of what was comin' to 'em by rights."

"They was livin' 'way up the river in the swamps, an' never heerd on it," drawled another lounger. "Might have died without knowin' nothin' bout it, ef it hadn't been for that smart lawyer down in Mobile."

"Some says Hanna had something to do with it," said Ferrell.

"What's the story?" Lockwood ventured to ask openly.

"Why, this here property—the old Burwell plantation—used to be one of the big estates here one time, before the war," said the postmaster. "There was the house; you'll see it when you go by to the camp, and maybe a thousand acres with it. Most of it was timbered, though, and pine wasn't worth nothin' in them days; but there was two or three hundred acres of good light land, and some bottom land, and they used to run fifteen or twenty plows, and raise right smart of cotton, I reckon."

"But then the whole Burwell family died

out, all in one generation, you might say. Some kind of a third cousin got it, and he hadn't no kin, and died without marryin'. There wasn't no heirs then nowhere. A good few people put in some claim, I guess, but they couldn't make good; and the whole place laid idle, and most of the plantation growded up with blackberries and dogwood. And so, of course, the State took it at last.

"Most of the timberland was sold then. Charley Craig, the turpentine man, bought some of it, and leased some more to turpentine it. Gradually the State land agents sold most all of it off in bits, all but the house and about a hundred acres of sandy land that wasn't no good for anything. They rented that to a fellow from Munroe County, and he tried to farm it. I reckon he never got rich on it, but the Powers sure ought to be thankful to him for keeping the brush cut off.

"Then this smart lawyer in Mobile got wind of it and started to dig up an heir. He figured that the Burwells must surely have some sort of kinfolks somewhere, and sure enough he located old Henry Power, three years ago.

"Power was livin' up the river then, as I said, in a cabin in the swamps, not much better'n any nigger. I didn't know 'em much then, but I reckon they was a tolerable rough lot. The boys was up to most kinds of devilment, and some said they was mixed up with 'Blue Bob's' river gang. I dunno; likely there was nothing in that yarn; for they was mighty good boys, if somewhat lively, and everybody liked 'em, pore as they was.

"It sure must have jolted old Henry Power when he heard that the Burwell property was coming to him. But it took close to a year to get it. The legislature had to pass a bill; but that lawyer had things fixed up hard and fast, and there was no getting away from the evidence that Power was the right man.

"But he didn't get the whole estate—not by a heap. In the first place, the State couldn't give back what it had sold, and it wouldn't give up but half of what it got from selling the timber, and then I guess the lawyer got about half of that again for his share. But, anyhow, I've heard that Power got a haul of close on to fifty thousand, besides getting their clear title to the house and what was left of the land."

"I see," said Lockwood, more interested

than he cared to show. "And now they're enjoying it!"

"They shorely are. You seen that big autymobel. They've got a fast motor boat down in the bayou, too—cost a thousand dollars, I hear. Champagne at ten dollars a bottle is what they drink."

"Old Henry Power don't drink none of it," drawled a farmer. "Says corn liquor is good enough for him yet."

"Mebbe so. I reckon so. Anyway, the boys is some high rollers these days, and not stingy, neither. Any man what wants a loan can get it there. And there ain't nothing too good for Miss Louise."

"Their sister?"

"Yes, sir. She's been away in N'Orleans, they say. Earnin' her own livin', likely. But she come back last fall. The old man wanted her back, and she had to have her share of what's going."

"And how about Mr. Hanna?" asked Lockwood. "Has he been here long?"

There was a short silence.

"Sharp cuss, that Mr. Hanna!" said a man sitting on the steps.

"Why, I reckon he's all right," said Ferrell indulgently. "Great friend of the Power boys. He come here soon after they got the place. Northern man, seems to be, and knows his way round all the big cities, I reckon. Likely it was him put the boys up to all them fancy drinks. They never knowed nothing about such things before."

"Well, I'd like to know the Power boys," Lockwood remarked carelessly.

"Why, you do know 'em!" Ferrell exclaimed with amazement. "Wasn't you introduced to 'em both right here? They'll expect you to go and see 'em—visit 'em if you can, and stay as long as you like. We ain't got no Northern ways down here in the piny woods."

This theory of reckless hospitality did not, however, deter Mr. Ferrell from accepting fifty cents from Lockwood for his breakfast. Lockwood waited and smoked on the gallery as the forenoon wore on. He wanted to get another look at the Power boys; certainly he would call on them if he saw any opening. He was not afraid that McGibbon—or Hanna—would recognize him. His face was thinner and darker and had, he thought, totally changed in expression. His hair had grizzled. In the old days, too, he had worn a small, pointed

beard and mustache; and he now went clean shaven.

But the big car did not return from the landing. As he waited and meditated, the balance of Lockwood's purpose changed a little. He thought he saw light in the situation. There might be good hunting here after all, for a bird of prey. He imagined Hanna arriving in this wilderness, suave, dignified, experienced, swooping down upon these newly rich poor whites, and he imagined the tremendous weight and influence the man would carry.

Even so McGibbon had swooped down upon him at Melbourne, seven years ago—handsome, dignified, wise, with an apparently vast experience of men and affairs, and Lockwood had fallen under the impression, though he had had considerable experience of men and affairs himself. He had a real-estate business at that time in Melbourne, Virginia, a fast-growing city, and his business was growing with it.

The two men became friends, and soon were in practical partnership, though no legal partnership was ever established. Lockwood was an excellent salesman of real estate, but a timid speculator, and incapable of the intricacies of office detail and bookkeeping. It was in these last that McGibbon excelled. In fact, the expert accountants at the trial had been obliged to confess themselves baffled by some of the extraordinary complications of figures with which McGibbon had covered up his tracks.

Looking back, Lockwood saw that the man must have been bleeding the business all along, though to this day he did not understand all the methods employed. Nor did he yet have any positive proof that Maxwell was McGibbon's confederate—Maxwell, smooth, hard, close-mouthed, but with eyes and ears open for real-estate opportunities. He had got them, too. McGibbon had seen to that.

It was Maxwell who had come forward when the crash arrived. Lockwood's whole assets were tied up in a block of speculative building; a business depression had killed the market, and he could neither finish the half-built houses nor sell them as they stood. He was obliged to accept Maxwell's ridiculous valuation; and Maxwell had finished the houses, held them for a few months, and then apparently turned them over to McGibbon, who had sold them at an immense advantage. The method of the freeze out

was plain enough now. But Lockwood had known the latter part only by report, for the prison doors had closed behind him.

McGibson had been also indicted as an accessory, on the same charges of fraud and misappropriation of funds; but he had no difficulty in clearing himself; and with apparent reluctance he had given damning evidence against his partner.

And now Lockwood believed that he had caught the bloodsucker in the act of attaching himself to another prey. It was poetic justice, it was no less than providential that he should have arrived at that moment at Rainbow Landing.

Noon approached, and still Power's car did not return. Lockwood grew restless and uneasy. He got up and walked back down the amber and yellow road. He might go to the turpentine camp; at any rate, he was anxious to have another look at the house where McGibson had managed to establish himself.

He passed the great grove of walnut and oak and reached the entrance. The white colonial house wore by no means its moonlight air of mystery and grace. In the blazing sun it showed sadly old and weather-worn; its white paint was scaling off, a sickly and dirty gray; the fence was broken down in many places; the rickety gate hung by one hinge. Rubbish of deadwood, a tin can or two and rags of burlap littered the white sand of the driveway. None of the family was in sight; but at the front door a negro was holding two saddled horses, and Lockwood walked quickly on.

He had not gone fifty yards when he heard the trample of the horses' hoofs behind him, and stepped aside. He had a glimpse of the shining coats of the animals, and the glitter of new leather, but his attention was all for the riders.

A girl was riding past him, sitting astride, in a gray skirt and a white waist. He knew instantly that it must be Louise Power; he had only a flash of brown hair under the black hat, of dark eyes, of a sweet and slightly opened mouth, but it roused a dim stirring of recollection in him.

She was gone before he could analyze it, and McGibson rode close after her. Lockwood had raised his hat, and McGibson acknowledged the salutation curtly, with a casual glance at the pedestrian. The horses went ahead at a canter, and were presently small in the distance between the pines.

It was McGibson, beyond any doubt. Lockwood recognized him even more certainly than the night before. He looked after the riders with dark satisfaction. He knew where to have McGibson now; he could take his time and choose his hour. But his mind involuntarily and uneasily turned to search the problem of where he had already seen the girl's face.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A MISFIRE.

He could not place the recollection; it was lost somewhere in the shadowy past. But the sight of his enemy in the clear light of day had stirred up all the bitterest depths of his memory and his hate. McGibson—or Hanna, as he must now call him—seemed to have changed little; he looked as handsome, as suave, as dignified as ever, and Lockwood imagined what an imposing presence he must appear to this pretty girl of the backwoods.

The riders were out of sight now, but he continued down the road almost unconsciously, deep in plans. He took no notice of how far he had walked, until he felt planks resounding hollowly under his feet. He had come to a bridge, an immensely long bridge of timber, crossing a small creek bordered by dense swamp. He crossed the bridge and perceived a road, apparently not greatly in use, that led away to the left into the woods.

He remembered Mr. Ferrell's directions. This must be the trail to the turpentine camp, and now that he had come so far he determined to go on and interview Charley Craig. A job in the pine woods would exactly suit his purposes in every way just then, and he needed the wages it would earn. This was no moment to break in on his gold reserve.

He turned down the road to the left, which curved off uncertainly among the pines. The ground was marked here and there by the ruts of heavy wagons; he detected also the corrugated imprint of a motor's tire, and within a few rods he began to see traces of the turpentine industry.

The ground was rising from the creek swamp into pine land, grown with pines of all sizes, from bushy shrubs to immense trunks rising arrow-straight and without a branch to the feathery, palmlike crest a hundred feet from the earth. Nearly every pine of more than eight inches in diameter

had a great slash of bark chipped from one side, showing the bare wood smeared and frosted with drops of gum, oozing, dripping or crystallized into solid white or bluish masses, looking livid and diseased. At the lower edge of this slash a tin gutter was fixed, collecting the slow ooze of the gum, and leading it into a large tin cup that hung from a hook.

All this was very familiar to Lockwood, and he regarded it with something of an expert eye. Under the stimulus of the hot weather the gum was flowing freely. Many of the cups were nearly full of the intensely sticky, whitish mass that exhaled a sharp, wholesome odor. Everywhere he looked the trees had been turpentined; the camp was evidently running at full blast; and a little way farther he came upon a negro "chipper" who was taking off a fresh slice of the bark with his razor-edged tool like a light adze.

The road wound about through the pines, crossed a gallberry flat, and then he heard voices and came out into the clearing where the camp itself was built.

There were thirty or forty negro families living in the camp, and women and children swarmed about the cabins, staring at the stranger. Lockwood approached the still—a huge brick furnace with a built-in copper retort, sheltered by a corrugated iron roof and topped by a tall chimney. Lumps of rosin littered the earth; empty and full rosin barrels stood everywhere; there was a powerful smell of pine and tar and turpentine, but the still was not working that day.

No white man was in sight, but he picked out a house of superior quality, painted green and with curtained windows, which must be the quarters either of Craig himself or of the foreman. Close to it stood a long, low building, much resembling the Atha post office, which was undoubtedly the commissary store. This place is always the real center of a turpentine camp, and Lockwood went in to make inquiries.

A young man without coat or vest, smoking a cigarette, greeted the visitor with lazy affability. Lockwood inquired for the chief.

"He's just now come in," said the clerk, and he knocked at the door of the inner office, and then opened it.

A tall, spare, oldish man sat within, writing at a plain table. Charley Craig was a well-known figure in central Alabama, and is so still. All his life had been spent in contact with the long-leaf pine; he had tur-

pentined the trees, lumbered them, run sawmills. The rosin of the gum must have preserved his youth, for he was past sixty, but still able to ride, run, or fight with almost any of the young fellows he employed.

"I understand you want a woods rider, Mr. Craig," Lockwood explained himself.

Craig searched him up and down with piercing gray eyes.

"You understand the turpentine business? Come in and take a seat," he said. "I may need another man for a while. One of my men got hurt. You've done this job before?"

"No, I never rode the woods," Lockwood admitted, "but I think I understand what the job is. I've worked in camp in west Florida. I know something about the still, and how to run a charge—"

"Can you ride?"

"Yes, after I get over some saddle soreness."

"Know how to handle the men? The turpentine nigger is a special sort, you know—tough devils, and hard to manage."

"I've lived among niggers all my life, and I reckon I can handle most of 'em."

"What wages do you want?" Craig asked, after a little thought.

"Well, I don't claim to be a first-class turpentine man," said Lockwood, "but I want to learn to be one. It's possible that I may go into the business myself next year with a partner. Wages aren't the main point with me. I'd like, though, to be able to get a day off now and again, when things aren't too busy."

"I dunno. I'd rather get an experienced man," said Craig. "Stay and eat dinner with us, anyway, and then we'll look over the camp."

Lockwood ate a large, hot, and homely dinner at the house of the camp foreman, in company with the foreman, Craig, the store clerk and the "stiller"—the principal white employees. Afterward Craig took him out, smoking innumerable cigarettes which he rolled up with a single deft twist, and conducted him over the camp, about the still, the storehouse, the cooperage workshop, the grindery where hundreds of axes and "hacks" were kept keen, the mule stables, the quarters of the negroes. Apparently pointing out these details, Craig shrewdly elicited all Lockwood knew of the turpentine process. Afterward they walked into the woods, observed the run of the gum, and the work of the chippers. Craig looked at his watch.

"I've got to be on horseback," he said. "How about two dollars a day and board, until my man gets out of the infirmary?"

Lockwood accepted instantly. In fact, he would almost have worked for a week for his board alone—his board, and the local standing which the regular job would furnish.

He was to start work the next day, and meanwhile he had to bring up his suit case from the landing, where he had dropped it in the warehouse the night before. He loitered at the commissary for some time, cementing his friendship with the store clerk, and it was past the middle of the afternoon when he started to walk back to the landing.

The Power boys had come back. He saw their big car standing by the front door when he passed the house, but no one was in sight. He hurried past; the great, white dilapidated old mansion seemed already intensely familiar to him, and intensely significant—the theater of a coming crisis.

He went past the post office without stopping to speak to Mr. Ferrell, who nodded from the gallery. He retraced the road that he had traveled in the night; the creek rushed swirling over glittering pebbles, shut in by thickets of ti-ti, glossy-green bay leaves, cypress and gum, lighted up by huge, blazing-red, trumpet-shaped flowers that hung in clusters from tangling vines. Beyond the swamp the road rose into pine woods again. Then he came to the crossing road, and turned toward the river.

Far in the distance he caught a glimpse of the Alabama River, like a pinkish streak through the brilliant pine foliage. It was still more than a mile away, and the corduroyed road ran through depths of swamp for the most part, skirted lagoons of stagnant black water, crossed sluggish-brown bayous, went over a higher and drier ridge of "hammock land," and came down at last to the landing.

The warehouse was open, and there were a few men about it. A couple of buggies were hitched to a tree, and a wagon was loading with cases of freight. It was a wagon from the turpentine camp, he discovered, and he had his suit case put aboard, glad to be saved the trouble of its weight.

The river was high, carrying planks and rails and drift of all sorts on its flood. Wisps of mist clung to its surface, and the water boiled strangely brown and pink and muddy strawberry. On the other shore rose the clay bluff, crowned with pine, striped with

that bizarre and brilliant coloring that must have given the landing its name.

Lockwood turned back slowly up the swamp road, in no hurry to return to the turpentine camp. The air in the swamp was hot and heavy and enervating, and at the top of the ridge he turned aside into a trail that seemed to run parallel with the river.

Pine woods bordered it, high and dry, and he walked aimlessly for some distance. Through rifts he occasionally caught glimpses of the river rolling greenish-pink between its highly colored shores. The trail turned slightly down the slope and came out into a field of perhaps twenty acres, running almost to the river. It was a piece of rich, black bottom land, one of the gambles of Southern farming, capable of growing an immense crop of cotton or cane, but running an even chance of being flooded out by high water. This year no one was gambling on it, nor did it seem to have been plowed the year before, for it carried weeds and bushes that must have been the growth of more than one season.

He walked down to the end of the field, almost to the belt of willows and cottonwoods that screened the margin of the river. This was the worst country for his projects, he thought, that he had ever seen. It was settled just enough to make a stranger conspicuous; it was wild enough to be hard to get out of. He had no idea how the roads ran, nor whither; and he fancied himself hiding in the swamps, bitten by snakes, devoured by insects, hunted by bloodhounds. He would have found more secrecy and cover in a great city.

Another trail went wandering down the river bank, and he turned into it from a reluctance to go back by the way he had come. It was a mere footpath, worn probably by the tread of negroes, cutting through thickets of ti-ti, opening into glades of vivid green, crossing creeks on fallen logs, and he followed it until his absorbed meditations were suddenly broken by a sniff of smoke and the sound of a voice.

With a criminal's instinct of caution he stopped short. There was a wide opening on the shore just before him, and he caught the loom of a whitish mass through the willows. He edged forward till he could see clearly.

A large house boat was of much the usual model, a mere cabin built upon a scow, the rusty and squalid floating house used by

the river vagrants that hang upon all the great waterways of the South. But this boat was a little superior in quality; she was painted, though the paint was gray and weatherworn; there was a considerable deck space at each end; and, most important of all, she carried power. There was a small gasoline engine and propeller.

Half tramp, half criminal, Lockwood knew these river dwellers to be, devoured by malaria and hookworms, too tired to work, living on nothing, by a little stealing, a good deal of fishing, and some begging. The three men he saw looked true to type, sallow and malarial-looking, sprawling on the ground as they smoked and spat. Two of them were young fellows, one a mere boy, but the third was a heavily built man of middle age with a tangle of brown beard and a stupid, savage face. They all wore "pin-check" cotton trousers, loose shirts, sleeves rolled up, dirty canvas shoes, and they were watching a very light-yellow negro who was cooking something in a frying pan over a small fire.

Lockwood was armed, and not in the least afraid of them; but he did not want to be seen. He wormed his way into the jungle and edged slowly past the camp, tearing himself on thorns and stepping into deep, black mud, till he was safely past. He got through without being observed, as far as he knew, came out into the path and started more briskly down the river again.

The sun was almost down. In another half hour the sudden, Southern darkness would be deep in the woods, and he made haste, walking soundlessly on the soft, damp earth. But within a quarter of a mile, as a long vista opened before him, he caught a glimpse of some one else coming toward him up the twilight path.

His first thought was that it was a fourth of the river men returning to camp, and he did not wish to seem to have been spying. He stepped instantly into the thickets, behind a screen of bamboo vines, to let the man go past. But as he came nearer, Lockwood saw that it was Hanna.

He still wore the gray suit and the leggings of his morning ride, and he walked carelessly, whistling between his teeth, looking ahead as if he expected to meet some one. Evidently he was going to the house boat. In a moment the whole possibilities of the situation flashed upon Lockwood.

From where he stood he could drop Hanna with a single shot, and the slight, sharp

crack of the smokeless cartridge would be heard by nobody. His death would certainly be credited to the river men, and their record and reputation would probably make the charge plausible.

Almost without knowing it, he drew the little automatic he had carried so long, and pushed back the safety. Hanna was coming on carelessly, still whistling. Through the leaves Lockwood had the bead drawn unwaveringly on his chest, when he found that he could not shoot. A mighty force seemed to stay his finger on the trigger. The great moment he had desired for years had come, was passing, and he could not use it! He did not hate Hanna less, but he did not want to drop him dead in his tracks. Hanna went by unconsciously, within a yard of the blue muzzle.

Lockwood lowered the pistol, and found himself shaking and sweating. He looked helplessly after his enemy's back, watched till Hanna was out of sight, and then turned on his own way. He swore under his breath; he felt as if he had failed in an imperative duty; he was full of disappointment and disgust. It was not till he had almost reached the turpentine camp that he thought to wonder why Hanna should be going to visit the river pirates. But when he thought of the problem it seemed full of perplexity and interest.

## CHAPTER V. THE WOODS RIDER.

The next morning Lockwood was assigned the brown horse and saddle outfit that had been used by the injured man, and he began active work as a turpentine woods rider. The "orchard" which he was to supervise covered an irregular area of perhaps a couple of miles, in a long strip around to the south and west of the Power property. All of it had, indeed, originally belonged to the Burwell estate. The ground was level, or very gently rolling, broken only by occasional strips of dense creek swamp. Nearly all the underbrush had been cleared out the preceding year, and the woods were easy and pleasant for riding.

About thirty negroes worked on this orchard, each assigned to a definite "furrow," or allotment of trees, which had to be freshly chipped every week when the run of gum was good. It was Lockwood's duty to keep these men up to their work, to see that the cups did not overflow or become displaced,

that things went rapidly and smoothly, and, above all, to see that no dropped match or cigarette started a fire, for a fire in a turpentine orchard is as disastrous a thing as can be imagined.

For three days he rode the woods, growing very saddle sore at first, but gathering his ideas and reconstructing his plans, which seemed to have fallen into chaos. He thought of his astounding failure to act on the path by the river, but it did not seem astounding now. He had to realize that assassination was a method barred to him; he would never be able to bring himself to do it. He thought of other means.

He might discover himself to Hanna; he had no doubt that the man would instantly accept the challenge to draw and shoot; and the issue would be self-defense. Lockwood was not afraid of the chances; he had practiced endlessly with the little blue automatic, and the weapon had grown as familiar to him as his own fingers.

During those first days he did not leave the turpentine tract, and he saw nothing of either Hanna or the Power boys. He heard a good deal of them, however. In the evening there was always a group of white men at the commissary store, employees of the camp, and occasional visitors from the neighborhood, and bits of gossip were continually dropped regarding these *nouveaux riches* of the woods. They were the chief objects of attention of the whole district, but it was an extremely friendly attention.

Nobody grudged them their good luck, though they told amused and admiring tales of the wild pace the boys seemed to be setting. The motor car had cost seven thousand dollars; cases of wine and liquor were coming in at a hundred dollars apiece—figures which Lockwood could only regard as wild exaggerations. Tom Power had driven the car to Flomaton, thirty-five miles over sandy roads, in less than an hour.

They talked of Hanna with less freedom, and he seemed less popular. Now and again Louise was mentioned, but it would have been beyond their code of courtesy to discuss her. They said she was "a mighty sweet girl," and let it go at that.

Lockwood heard curious and amusing tales of the swamp country at these gatherings, of flooded rivers and hurricanes, of bears and alligators, of extraordinary snake superstitions, and shootings and outlaw negroes and river pirates. There was a good deal of talk

of the house boat Lockwood had seen; it had moved down to the mouth of the great bayou that bordered the turpentine orchard and passed directly below Power's house. It belonged to "Blue Bob's gang," Lockwood heard—a crew that seemed to have made a reputation for themselves farther up the river. Craig did not care to have such a party camping so close to his establishment; there had been a proposal in the neighborhood to "run out" these undesirable vagrants; but the Power boys had spoken in their behalf.

Lockwood followed the course of this bayou every day on his rounds, and only a couple of days later he heard the muffled thud-thud of a motor engine. His first impression was that the house boat was coming up, but the noise came on far too fast for that clumsy craft. He edged his horse behind a ti-ti thicket, and in a moment saw a motor boat come round a swampy curve of the waterway and recognized the figures in it as Hanna and Louise Power.

The girl was at the wheel, and Hanna appeared to be giving her a lesson in navigating the boat. She steered crookedly and uncertainly. Hanna had his face at her shoulder, and seemed to be talking fluently. Lockwood thought that Louise looked uneasy and nervous, as if she were having difficulty with the mechanism. He tried again to remember where he had seen that face, certainly pretty enough to be recollected. and just opposite him the engine stopped.

The boat drifted a little, while Hanna tried to start it. Then the propeller swished and the boat got under way again, moving slowly past him for thirty yards, and sheering in toward shore where the bank was low and dry enough to land. Hanna got out and held out his hand. Miss Power shook her head. Lockwood could not hear what was said, but the next moment the engine broke into faster explosions, the boat backed off and came flying down the bayou again, leaving Hanna ashore.

Hanna shouted something laughingly and expostulately after her, but she paid no attention. The boat drove past Lockwood, sending a great wash of waves up the clay bank, and disappeared around the curve.

The laugh died out of Hanna's face as he looked after the flying boat. He glanced up and down the bayou, and Lockwood chuckled maliciously. He was on the wrong side of the water; he would have to go by

the turpentine camp and up to the bridge over the creek in order to get home—a full three-mile walk, and it was a hot day. Hanna looked dubiously at the muddy water as if he thought of swimming; once across, and it was not a mile in a bee line to Power's house. But he thought better of it, and turned into the woods.

Still greatly amused, Lockwood rode on his route which led down the bayou shore. He guessed that Hanna had annoyed the girl by his talk, and had been rightly served. Then as he rode round the curve of the bayou he was astonished to see the boat lying motionless not far ahead and close inshore.

Miss Power was leaning back in her seat, doing nothing—waiting perhaps, Lockwood thought, for Hanna to come after her. But when he came a little nearer he saw that the boat had run a third of its length upon a sand bar projecting into the channel as it curved, and was fast aground.

He rode down to the margin and took off his hat.

"Can't I help you? I see you're aground," he said.

"I certainly am," answered the girl without embarrassment, and she gave him a quick smile that almost seemed to imply an understanding. "But I don't know whether you can help me much or not. I can't start the engine to back her off."

"Well, I can try, anyhow," Lockwood responded, dismounting. He hung his reins over a gum-tree bough, and splashed through a little mud and water to the stranded boat.

The sound of the girl's voice deepened the certitude that he had somewhere met her before. She had a soft, slurred Gulf-coast accent that you could cut with a knife—not that this surprised him, for he was used to it, and he had a fair share of Southern accent himself. He took a quick, sharp look at her as he got into the boat. She must be about twenty, he thought. Her dark hair was tucked under a red cloth cap, and she was wearing a raw-silk blouse with a wide, red-embroidered collar, showing the fine, somewhat sunburned curves of her neck.

"I ran on this sand bar without seeing it. I was coming down the bayou pretty fast, and I'm not used to this boat," she explained.

"Yes, I saw you going by," said Lockwood.

"You could see me? You saw—" she

exclaimed, startled; and he fancied she turned the least shade pinker under her tan.

"Going and coming," Lockwood nodded, manipulating the levers. The engine burst suddenly into intermittent explosions. It missed frequently, but the propeller tore up the water, failing, however, to pull the boat off the sand.

"I reckon you can manage to get home with it," he said. "But I'll have to get out. You'll never get clear with so much weight in her."

He stepped out, and the lightened boat slid slowly back and floated clear, backing out into the bayou, and then the throb of the engine ceased.

"Oh, it's stopped again!" Miss Power exclaimed hopelessly.

From the shore Lockwood directed and advised. Nothing worked. The boat veered slowly on the almost imperceptible current, while the girl fumbled with the levers.

There was only one thing to do. Lockwood waited till the bow swung nearest land, then splashed out, only a little more than knee-deep, and got carefully into the boat again. He applied an expert hand to the machine, produced a few explosions, and then again obstinate silence.

"If I could have this thing for an hour I'm sure I could put it in order," he said, growing irritated. "As it is—"

"You've surely had experience enough with motor engines, haven't you, Mr. Lockwood?" said Louise, smiling at him.

Lockwood absolutely jumped with the shock of it, and turned quickly to look at her.

"You know me? I knew we had met. But I couldn't—"

"You don't remember Lyman & Fourget, in New Orleans?"

"Of course. I worked in their salesrooms and repair shop."

"I was in the office. I recognized you at once when we passed you the other day on the road. But I don't suppose you noticed me."

"Of course!" said Lockwood slowly. "Of course, I remember now."

Really he remembered very hazily. Miss Power must have been one of those girls, stenographers and bookkeepers, in the glass-enclosed office in one corner of the main floor.

"Of course. I remember you perfectly now," he said, not quite truthfully. "Strange

that I didn't place you at first. How did you remember my name? Of course, you're Miss Power. I guessed that anyway."

"Yes, everybody knows me about here." She looked at him with candid curiosity. "And I reckon everybody knows you by this time. Strangers are rare, you know. What are you doing up here in the woods?"

"I'm a turpentine man, too—I'm all kinds of man. The fact is, I wanted to get out of the city for the summer. I've been in Mobile and Pensacola. I left New Orleans late last fall."

"Yes, I left not very long after you did. I was glad to get out of New Orleans, too, and papa wanted me to come home."

She stopped suddenly, and glanced at him with some keenness. Lockwood, sitting with his hand on the useless wheel, as the boat slowly veered on the drift, thought of what he had heard in casual gossip—how this girl had escaped from the primal squalor and discredit of the family life "up the river," and had gone out to mold her own fortunes. Certainly she had not failed in it. She must have been drawing a fair salary at Lyman & Fourget's; and she had taken on a tone of city smoothness and culture, a very different manner from the rollicking roughness of her brothers.

"But how am I going to get home?" she cried plaintively. "We're drifting that way, aren't we? About an inch an hour."

"I'll try again," and once more he managed to start the engine into a splutter of activity. For a few yards he navigated the boat, and then turned.

"If you'll allow me, I think I'd better drive her home for you. She might last, though more likely she'll play out again."

"I wish you would. One of the boys will drive you back in our car. But what about your horse?"

"He'll do where he is. Everybody knows who that horse belongs to, and I suppose I can be back in half an hour."

He was really in no hurry to get back, and he almost wished the engine would give trouble again. He wanted to talk with this girl; he was anxious to get on some sort of terms with her; he desired very much to know on what sort of terms she stood with Hanna.

"Not a very cheerful place to come for an excursion," he said, as they rounded a bend of raw clay banks, and saw a water moccasin slide off into the bayou.

"Mr. Hanna was teaching me to run the

boat. It's easier in this still water than out in the river. I expect," she added with some hesitation, "that you saw how I left him ashore."

"I did."

"I'd no idea anybody was looking. It was a joke, you know. He thought I was going ashore, too, but I didn't want to."

"So you made him walk home," said Lockwood, at this dubious explanation. "Well, it'll do him no harm. I expect he's well on the way by this time."

So were they, it appeared. The bayou made another twist, and there was a tiny pier, made of three pine logs, and a rough boat shelter of planks. Lockwood steered in, and they landed.

"We'll go up to the house and get the car," said Louise, as Lockwood paused dubiously. "You must meet my father besides. He knows about you, and I think you've met my brothers already."

They went up a path for a couple of hundred yards, through the strip of pines, across a garden of collards and cabbages, and into the great, smooth, sandy expanse of the back yard, which an old negro was just sweeping with a huge broom of twigs. Louise opened a gate in an arch smothered in roses, and they passed through into the front yard, equally hard and sandy and swept, and they came to the steps of the wide gallery that ran around two-thirds of the house.

Lockwood was in tense expectation of meeting Hanna, of the critical moment of introduction, of speaking, of possible—though unlikely—recognition. It was with a sensible letting down of the strain that he saw only old Power on the gallery, his feet cocked up on the railing, half somnolent, holding an unlighted cob pipe in his teeth. On the steps young Jackson Power sat huddled up, still wearing his expensive clothing, but coatless and with his sleeves rolled up, looking half dead with boredom.

He jumped up joyfully as the pair came in. Henry Power awakened completely, and they gave him so delighted a welcome that it was plain they were overjoyed at anything to break up the monotony of life.

"Mr. Lockwood, sir! You're Craig's new woods rider, I believe. I've heerd of you. Come up on the gallery an' have a chair where it's cooler."

Mr. Power had adopted none of the extravagant habits of his sons. He wore a blue cotton shirt without any collar or vest,

strong brown trousers whose leather suspenders were very conspicuous, and he had no shoes on. His speech was a little shaky with age; he must have been far over seventy, for he had been in the Civil War as a mere boy, and he had almost as rich and slurred an Alabama accent as any negro. He had no grammar, and he looked what he was—a barbarian from the big swamps, but a trace of old-time courtesy and "family" hung about him yet.

Jackson meanwhile had hurried to bring out a bottle and glasses, and was apparently appalled when Lockwood declined any refreshment. He took a drink himself, while Louise, dropping into a rocking-chair, explained Lockwood's interposition, rather magnifying the assistance he had given.

"You'll have to drive Mr. Lockwood back to where I found him, Jackson," she said. "You can pick up Mr. Hanna as you come back."

"O Lordy, sis!" Jackson exclaimed. "You ain't gone and made Mr. Hanna walk all that ways round to the bridge?"

He laughed, and yet looked uneasy. If Hanna had offered his sister any insult, he would have to be shown the door, or perhaps thrashed, or perhaps shot. But Louise laughed easily.

"He preferred to come that way," she said, and Jackson looked relieved.

"Sure I'll drive you back," he said to Lockwood. "But you ain't in no such hurry, surely. Say, why can't you stop and eat supper with us?"

Lockwood pleaded his duty and his horse left in the woods. He was not yet prepared to meet Hanna, to sit at table with him. But he felt a conviction that he would have to face it sooner or later.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MEETING.

Lockwood rode his rounds the next day with a queer feeling of change. It had been coming on for days, that feeling—in fact, ever since the night when he had watched that magical moonlight on the white front of the colonial house; and it had culminated in the meeting of yesterday. Memory came back to him slowly and in scraps. He certainly recollected Louise in New Orleans. He remembered having spoken to her casually as she passed him; he had once had some dealing or other with her in the office;

but he could not remember a single word she had ever said to him. Evidently, however, she had remembered him, and the thought brought a stir of warmth to his blood.

He wondered anxiously what Hanna's relations with the girl might be. It made him furious to think that he should have any relations at all. But what, indeed, were Hanna's relations with the whole family?

In a broad way, Lockwood thought he could answer that. It was undoubtedly a confidence game that was being worked. Hanna was winning the money at cards, perhaps, or appropriating it in some even more crafty manner. Lockwood chuckled rather grimly as he thought how opportunely he had arrived. It would put a fine edge on his vengeance to spoil Hanna's game before killing him.

The next morning a thunderstorm passed crashing over the woods, with torrents of terrific rain that lasted for twenty minutes. A jet of hail followed it. Lockwood and his horse sheltered in a deserted negro cabin, and immediately afterward the sun burst out again with torrid heat. The earth steamed and reeked.

In this hot weather the turpentine gum had been running very fast, and the cups filled rapidly. "Dipping" was going on in Lockwood's area. At intervals through the woods he came upon a sweating, half-naked negro staggering with one of the enormously heavy wooden "dip buckets," filling it from the gum cups. At intervals empty barrels had been set down, into which the buckets were emptied, and mule wagons were slowly making the rounds, hauling the full barrels to the camp and leaving empty ones. In a day or two the still would be at work.

Lockwood had a continual, unreasoning expectation of again seeing Louise in the motor boat every time he went by the bayou. He took pains with his costume; he polished his boots, removed some of the gum stains from his khaki breeches, and put a green tie under his low collar. But she did not come.

On the third day afterward, however, he did hear the throbbing of the motor boat coming up the water, and his heart jumped. He was fifty yards back from the bayou, but he drove his horse hastily forward, just in time to see the boat come in sight. It was the Powers' boat certainly, but all it held was young Jackson Power. Lockwood rode down to the shore and hallooed a greeting, and the boy steered in at once.

"Engine running all right now?" Lockwood inquired.

"Seems like. I don't reckon there was nothing wrong with her really. This boat sure ought to run good. She cost three thousand dollars."

"What?" exclaimed Lockwood.

"Yes, sir. We got her in Mobile."

Lockwood scrutinized the boy, suspecting a stupid lie.

"Well, I think you paid too much," he said. "You could have got it for fifteen hundred at the outside if you'd gone to the right place."

"Well, it did seem a heap of money to me," Jackson admitted. "But Mr. Hanna said it was all right. It was Mr. Hanna sent the order."

The boy looked reflective and sober for a minute, and then glanced up at the rider.

"You know something about motors, I reckon. How much would you think our new car cost?"

"I don't think," said Lockwood. "I know just what the catalogue price of that car is—or was last fall. I could have got you that car in New Orleans for three thousand eight hundred dollars."

"Well, she cost seven thousand," returned Power.

Lockwood preserved a wise silence.

"Looks like the dealers knowed we didn't know nothing, and hit us all around, don't it?" said Jackson with an easy smile. "Well, I reckon we kin stand it—once or twice. But Hanna sure must have picked out the dear places."

"Don't tell Mr. Hanna what I said, you know," Lockwood added hastily. "I might be wrong. I expect he knows what he's doing."

"I'll bet he does," said Jackson. "You don't know him, do you? Well, you're goin' to see him to-night, I hope. I was just makin' for the camp to find you. We-all want you to come over and eat supper with us to-night. Sis sent you a special invitation."

"Sure, I'll be mighty glad," said Lockwood.

"I dunno what she's fixed to eat, but we can certainly give you something to drink. I'll come over with the car and carry you across."

"No, don't trouble. I can ride, or walk," said Lockwood.

Lockwood returned to camp rather earlier than usual that afternoon, shaved with care, and changed his clothes. It had come—the moment for confronting his enemy, and a last-moment fear of being recognized overcame him. He examined himself in the mirror, and then from his baggage he rummaged out a small photograph, which he scrutinized in comparison.

The picture showed a rather boyish face, with a short, soft, pointed beard, and hair worn just a little longer than usual. He had had a fancy in those days for looking artistic. That was less than seven years ago, and it might have been twenty, he thought, looking at himself in the glass. The absence of the beard and mustache threw out the strong, rather hard lines of the mouth and chin. The hair was short now, and slightly touched with premature gray—prison gray. The face was crossed with scores of tiny wrinkles—prison wrinkles. The expression had changed; it was no longer the same man. There was little chance that any one from his former life would recognize him.

A little before six o'clock he reached the broken-down gate of the old mansion. From the driveway he discerned a row of men in rocking-chairs on the front gallery—Henry Power and his two boys, and a fourth, Hanna himself.

The boys shouted a welcome to him at twenty yards, and a negro rushed up to take his horse. Old Henry shook hands with him in a ceremonious fashion, making him welcome in old-fashioned phrases; and then he was introduced to Hanna. He had braced himself to the ordeal of shaking hands, but at the last moment he could not bring himself to it. He created a diversion by dropping his hat, which rolled down the gallery steps.

A selection of chairs was offered him, but Tom Power beckoned him mysteriously into the house with a wink. Inside, signs of age and neglect were plain enough. Evidently the Powers had done little in the way of repairs; but there was a new and gorgeously gaudy rug on the hard-pine floor, and a magnificent hall lamp hung by gilded chains from the ceiling. When Tom led him into the dining room there was the same incongruity—a new table and sideboard of magnificent mahogany, worthless new pictures on the walls in blinding frames, and cracked windowpanes and plaster and smoked ceiling, and a vast old-fashioned fireplace, big enough

to roast a whole hog, yawning black and sooty over its hearth of uneven red brick.

The table was already laid for supper, shining with new china and silver. At that moment Louise came in hurriedly on some affair of preparation. She gave a startled exclamation, shook hands charmingly with Lockwood, and looked slightly disapproving as her brother led him toward the sideboard. Then she disappeared again toward the kitchen.

"What'll you take?" Tom inquired. "We've got 'most everything."

The sideboard indeed resembled a bar. There was a row of all sorts of bottles—plebeian native corn whisky, liqueurs, gin, cocktails, even aristocratic gold necks. Lockwood was about to decline anything at all; but he saw Tom's shocked and mortified expression, and he accepted a very small cocktail. Tom himself took a rather large one, and it was plainly not his first that day. But he still could not be called anything but sober, and they went back to the gallery, lighted now by the sunset, and Lockwood found a chair as far from Hanna as possible.

## CHAPTER VII.

### POSSUM AND POKER.

Henry Power was detailing to him in a low and gentle voice a series of reminiscences of lurid, old days along the river. The old man had no sort of objection to recalling his submersed past, and Lockwood was beginning to get interested, when supper was announced.

That was a meal never to be forgotten. It was served on china with a magnificent amount of gold decoration, and three glasses and a champagne bottle stood at every place but two—those of Louise and of her father. A sumptuous boiled ham appeared immediately, along with a baked possum and sweet potatoes; and in a torrent, it seemed, with these came sweet potatoes boiled, fried and preserved in sirup, mashed Irish potatoes, okra, rice, olives, salad, hot biscuits, and several kinds of corn bread.

Jackson Power opened the wine, with a great popping and joviality. It was extremely effervescent and sweet, and was native to California, though the label was mainly printed in French. The boys drank it in quantity; Hanna more sparingly. Louise took only water, and old Henry consumed large cups of strong black coffee.

Hanna sat directly opposite Lockwood, and the woods rider compelled himself to meet his enemy's eye with coolness. Hanna had changed little since he was McGibbon; he was handsome as ever, and as suave and dignified, but Lockwood had the key to that face now, and he read behind the hard mouth, the hard, watchful gray eyes. Hanna, for his part, had been observing Lockwood with a good deal of unobtrusive curiosity, though they had hardly exchanged three sentences. At last he said, across the table:

"You're not an Alabama man, Mr. Lockwood?"

"No. Blue-grass Kentuckian," Lockwood answered.

"I know that country well. Were you ever in Virginia?"

"I've been in Richmond and Norfolk."

"There are Lockwoods in Richmond. No kin of yours, are they? No? Well, it's not an uncommon name."

The conversation turned, but Lockwood caught Hanna's slightly puzzled expression turned upon him at intervals. Some chord of memory had been touched, if not fully sounded. The danger had perhaps been greater than he thought; but he thought it was past now; and he was not afraid of being severely catechised at any Southern dinner table.

For he was evidently the guest of honor to-night, and they watched over his welfare assiduously. Preserved figs, pie with whipped cream, and an ethereal sort of pudding finished the repast; and then Tom passed a box of cigars and one of cigarettes. The men drifted back to the front gallery to smoke, and Louise disappeared somewhere. It was dark and warm on the gallery now, and fragrant with honeysuckle. Lockwood found no enjoyment in the situation; he was afraid that Hanna would come over to talk to him, and when he had finished his cigar he spoke of leaving. At the camp he had to be out at daylight.

"Hold on," Tom objected. "It ain't late, and we-all are fixin' to play a little poker to-night."

"Well—" Lockwood hesitated.

"Mr. Lockwood'll play or not, jest as he damn well likes," said Henry effectively.

"Then I reckon I won't play to-night," said Lockwood, who had heard too many tall tales of the sort of poker played in this house. "I'll watch you for a while, maybe."

Shortly after this there was a halloo down the road, and they heard the soft trampling as the Fenway boys rode into the yard—a pair of brown-faced, handsome young giants, in careful black coats and collars, the sons of a well-to-do planter five miles back from the river, where the land was better. Thereupon the whole party, excepting the old man, returned to the dining room, where the table had been cleared.

Drinks were handed round, cards and chips produced. Lockwood declined a hand, but sat back and looked on with interest. It was no large game—a ten-cent ante and dollar limit—but from the first it was apparent that Tom Power was disposed to force the pace. He lost a hundred dollars in half an hour; then won a jack pot of sixty dollars, and began to regain, and to go ahead. Corn whisky was going now, and he was recklessly ready to make or break himself or anybody else.

But it was Hanna's game that Lockwood watched most closely. He had a suspicion that Hanna was playing the card sharper in this house, winning great sums from the Powers, but he was forced to admit that he could see no indication of it to-night.

Luck was tending to drift toward one of the Fenway boys, who accumulated a great stack of chips before him. Tom cursed freely but cheerfully, and took another drink. Lose or win, he was enjoying himself. His brother was playing recklessly also, but winning a little. The room was growing thick with smoke, in spite of the open windows; the players were all inclined to grow a little noisy, and eventually Lockwood's interest waned.

He went to the open window to breathe, and on the dim gallery he perceived Henry Power, his feet on the railing, a pipe in his mouth. A little farther away he saw the gleam of a white dress in the faintly sweet darkness.

He went quietly around to the door and upon the gallery. It was a hot, dark evening, with the moon not yet arisen. Overhead the stars glowed like white fires, and low in the south, over the vast pine forests, there was a rapid intermittence of distant, silent lightning.

"May I come out?" he asked, feeling for a chair. "Aren't you a poker player, either, Mr. Power?"

"Papa's asleep," said Louise in an undertone. "He doesn't very often play cards,

except a very small game sometimes with old friends. Not like *this*."

"It does look like a pretty fast game to-night," Lockwood admitted. Louise turned her face toward him, and even in the gloom he thought it looked extraordinarily serious. Through the open window came a tremendous burst of laughter. Somebody's bluff had been called.

Away from the gallery the night lay black and hot and impenetrable. At moments of stillness in the cardroom the silence was like a material heaviness. Then suddenly and sweetly, far away through the woods, sounded the mellow, musical call of a horn, a hunter's horn, such as is still used in southern Alabama. The nocturnal fox hunters use them—a horn made of a cow horn scraped thin, without reeds or anything inside it. It needs training to make it sound at all, but an expert can make its note carry five miles. The long, plaintive call sounded again, curiously repeated; and then Jackson came out upon the gallery.

"Didn't I hear a horn a-blowlin'?" he asked, "Reckon I'll just give 'em a call myself."

He took down a horn that Lockwood had noticed hanging by the doorway, and went down the steps, listening. A third time the distant call blew, and Jackson answered it in a series of rising and long-falling notes that echoed far away through the pine woods. There was another blast from the distant hunter, and the boy came back and replaced the instrument.

"Show 'em that somebody else kin blow a horn," he said cheerfully; but as he passed into the light Lockwood noticed that his face was serious. Perhaps he had been losing heavily.

The far-away blowing of the horn of the invisible hunter, the extraordinary wildness and remoteness of the whole scene, the whole episode struck Lockwood's imagination powerfully.

"Not much like New Orleans, is it?" he remarked, thinking of the rattle and racket of the street past Lyman & Fourget's motor shop.

"I was thinking of that," said Louise. "It all seems so strange, though I was brought up in these woods. I never thought it would seem so strange when I came back."

"How long were you in New Orleans?" he asked.

"Mr. Lockwood, what have you heard about me?" she countered suddenly.

"Why—not much," he stammered. "I heard that you went away to the city, some years ago. Mighty courageous thing to do, it seems to me."

"A wild and rash thing, you mean. So it surely was; but it turned out all right, and I'm glad I did it. Of course you know our story. All the country is talking of it. We lived ten miles up the river, in a cabin, very little better than niggers. I couldn't stand it. There was no life for me, no future. I was only seventeen when I went away. I never expected to come back. Think of it—a country girl from the big swamps. I'd only once been on a railway train in my life. It makes me tremble to think what might have happened to me, but I must have had luck, for I never had any great amount of trouble. Everybody was nice to me—almost. It's only in the South that a girl could have got through so well."

"And you found the life you wanted?"

"Well—not to perfection. You were at Lyman & Fourget's, too, you know. But it was a better life, and I might have stayed. But then came the great change in our fortunes. But it wasn't the money that brought me back. Everybody thinks it was, but it wasn't. There were more reasons than one. But I knew that papa and the boys wanted me back, and they needed me mighty bad—worse than when we were poor. Mamma has been dead for years, you know, and I don't know what this place would have come to, if I hadn't taken the helm."

In the dining room there was another great burst of laughter, and a crash of falling chips. The pungent cigar smoke floated out through the window.

"And you like it here?" said Lockwood gently.

"Yes—but I didn't think it would be like this," with a gesture toward the open window.

"Poker?"

"Yes—everything. You've seen something; you'll see more. I can't blame the boys so much. They're the best fellows in the world. But they haven't a thing to do; they grew up idle, and now their pockets are full of money, and they're bursting with life, and they're always looking for something new to play with. And Mr. Hanna——"

"Yes?" said Lockwood, with intense interest.

Just then old Power awoke with a sudden snort. He took down his feet from the railing, yawned and looked about confusedly.

"You-all must 'scuse me. Reckon I've sure enough been asleep. I'm used ter goin' to bed with the birds an' gittin' up with the sun. I reckon I'm a-goin' to bed now. You'll 'scuse me, Mr. Lockwood, sir. You young folks stay up long's you want to. Good night, sir."

He went indoors, yawning. But the thread of confidence was broken, and a not quite comfortable silence ensued.

"I have to be up at daylight, too," Lockwood said at last. "So I reckon I'd better slip quietly away without disturbing the card party."

The girl did not make any objection. She arose as he did.

"Well, I hope you'll come again to see us," she said, just a little hesitatingly. "You must get to know the boys better. You know, they've both taken a great liking to you."

"And I like them both immensely," Lockwood assured her sincerely.

"The fact is," she went on, "I do hope you get to be friends with them. I think it would be good for them to have you for a friend. You'll think it's strange for me to say this, but after all we've known each other a long time—in New Orleans. You see, Mr. Hanna is the only friend we have here who knows anything of the world. I know far more than the boys do, but, of course, I'm only their sister, and they wouldn't take my opinion on anything. But Mr. Hanna——"

"You don't trust his opinion?"

"No—no! I don't say that. But still, two opinions are always better than one, and I'd like the boys to get your view of things. We can't have too many friends, anyway."

"I'll certainly be delighted if your brothers will count me a friend," said Lockwood. "And I hope that you, too, will count me so?"

Louise did not make any answer whatever to this. Lockwood secured his hat and prepared to go, feeling that he had perhaps said too much. But she gave him her hand at the steps with a charming smile, and answered him.

"Certainly I'll count you as a friend, and we'll expect you to drop in at any time, whenever you happen to be riding past. The boys will look for you."

"And you, too?"

"Of course!" she laughed. "Since I'm inviting you."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NEW FORCES.

Lockwood rode the woods dreamily that next forenoon.

It was going to be impossible to kill Hanna, unless in the heat of sudden self-defense. He wondered at himself, for life had suddenly come to seem once more valuable to him. The old black purpose that had driven him so long was fading away. Not that he had forgiven his enemy; he was as determined as ever to defeat Hanna's purposes, to see him sure of prison, if possible—not that he had any objection to taking his life, but he was no longer willing to wreck his own life to compass Hanna's death. He had, in fact, developed an interest keener even than that of hate.

His horse trod almost without sound on the deep carpet of pine needles, and as he came to the bayou he perceived the loom of a great, gray bulk. Coming nearer, he recognized it as the house boat he had seen before, moored now directly across the bayou from him. It had not been there the day before. It must have been brought up early that morning.

A small fire smoldered on the shore by the mooring, with a coffeepot and iron frying pan beside it, but there was no one near the fire. On the little railed deck space at the stern a man sat fishing and smoking. It was the bearded pirate Lockwood had seen before. His bare feet were propped on the deck rail; he tilted back in a rickety chair; he smoked his pipe with his hands in his pockets, and the fishing rod was wedged into a crevice of the deck. His hat was off, and Lockwood could see a great bluish stain or scar covering much of one side of his forehead, which might have been a powder burn from a pistol fired at close range. For some moments the two men stared at one another in silence across the muddy water.

"Ho-owdy!" the riverman drawled at last.

"Good mo-ornin'!" Lockwood responded with equal languor. "You stopping here?"

"For a while, mebbe." He examined the horse and rider. "Reckon you're one of the turpentine riders?"

"Yes. And I expect you're Blue Bob."

"Mebbe some calls me that. My name's

Bob Carr. This hyar's my house boat. You reckon Craig's got anythin' ter say 'bout hit?"

"I reckon not," said Lockwood amiably, "so long as you don't interfere with his camp."

"Ef nobody don't bother us none we don't bother them none," growled the river dweller, returning Lockwood's grin with animosity; and the woods rider turned his horse into the pines again. He had nothing whatever to say to the river pirate, but he promised himself to keep a watchful eye on that boat.

He sighted it again that afternoon, apparently deserted, but next morning he did not go to the woods. The turpentine still was set going, and he remained at the camp to assist in "running a charge." The copper retort bricked in on the top of the furnace was a large one, and a "charge" meant a good many barrels. One by one the shouting negroes swayed the heavy barrels of "dip" up to the platform around the retort, emptying the gum into the mouth, together with a due allowance of water, anxiously watched by the expert still man. The cap was then screwed down, and a carefully regulated fire of pine logs set going in the furnace below.

The spiral worm went off from the shoulder of the retort, passed through a tank of cold water, and ended in a tap below. In due course steam began to issue from this orifice, then there was a slow, increasing drop of liquid. The still man watched it carefully, collected the drops and tasted them. It was turpentine. The spirit was coming off, and a bucket was set to catch it.

Being more volatile than water, the spirit came off first. The slow drops quickened to a stream. The bucket was filled and emptied many times, filling one barrel after another, while the furnace fire was kept at a steady glow. Too much heat would boil off the water as well as the turpentine. It went on for hours, until at last the experienced eye and nose of the "stiller" detected that what was coming through the worm was not turpentine but water. He closed the tap. The turpentine was done. It was the rosin next.

Three negroes dragged open a large vent in the lower side of the retort, and a vast gush of blackish, reeking, boiling rosin tumbled out into a huge wooden trough. It was the residue of the distilling, less valuable than the spirit, but still valuable. It passed through three strainers—the first of

coarse wire mesh to catch the chips and large rubbish, one of fine mesh, and lastly a layer of raw cotton, known technically as a "tar baby." As the trough filled, the still intensely hot rosin was drawn off at the farther end and poured bubbling and reeking into rough casks. Here it slowly hardened into rocklike solidity, to be headed up finally for shipment down the river.

It was hard, hot, dirty, delicate work, though Lockwood was not capable of any of the skilled part of it. His duty mainly was in seeing that the negroes brought up the gum barrels promptly, handled the rosin with exactitude and kept the fire right. After the retort was screwed up, everything had to go with precision, or the whole charge would be ruined.

When the rosin was cleared, the fire was drawn and the still allowed to cool. Late that afternoon Lockwood made a hasty round of the woods to see the run of the gum, but he was tired and dirty and sticky, and he felt in no condition to pay a visit upon the Powers.

The next day, however, there was no distilling, and he was able to take a couple of hours off in the afternoon. It was rather a failure. Hanna was not at home, but neither was anybody else, with the exception of old Henry, who sat as usual upon the gallery in his rocking-chair. He urged Lockwood to stay and "eat supper," when the rest of the household would probably be back; but Lockwood had to return to the camp.

Next day the still was run again—a day of terrible heat, when the bare sand of the camp seemed to glow and burn white-hot in the sun, and even the tough turpentine negroes complained bitterly. Lockwood's own head swam, especially as the blazing hot rosin poured out in the blazing sun, but he kept going until the charge was run; and then everybody suspended work, and, dripping with sweat, got into the shade.

A violent thunderstorm broke that night and cooled the air. The whole atmosphere next morning seemed fresh-washed and alive with ozone, and that afternoon Lockwood rode again to the Powers' house, arriving more fortunately. Louise was there; so were the two brothers, apparently in their customary state of intense boredom in lack of any violent amusement. After a few minutes' general talk on the gallery the girl disappeared, leaving him with her brothers.

Tom glanced aside at the bottle from which he had had one drink, and yawned dismally.

"Cawn-plantin' time," said Jackson indolently.

"What are you doing with your farm? Doing any planting?" said Lockwood.

"Plantin'?" laughed Tom. "You ain't never seen this farm, I reckon. Yes, we've got a nigger plowin' down in the bottom field. Come down and see it, if you wanter."

It was something to do. They all three strolled slowly down through the oak grove, past a small frame barn where a few hens scratched among corn shucks, and reached the bottom field, of about ten acres. The soil looked like almost pure sand. It turned up like brown sugar from the share, and where it had dried it was almost white.

"This yere's the poorest land on yerth," said Tom. "You can't make five bushels of cawn to the acre. We done put forty dollars' worth of fertilizer on this yere field, and I'll bet we don't get cawn enough to pay for it."

"The whole farm's like this yere," agreed his brother.

"Fact is, I never was cut out for no farmer," Tom admitted. "I always wanted to be a steamboat man. When we-all got this yere money, my notion was to buy a river boat, and run between Mobile and Selma."

"Well, I thought we oughter go into the cotton-brokerage business," said Jackson. "But dad, he wouldn't hear of it. He likes the swamps, seems like, and he was just bound he'd come and live on his old place."

"You could grow peanuts on this light soil" Lockwood suggested. "With the peanuts you could raise hogs."

"Why, we did get some registered Duroc Jerseys" said Tom. "But they ain't doin' no good. Takes more cawn to feed 'em than they're worth. Fact is we ain't got no hog-proof fences on this place and I reckon it'd take two hundred dollars to put 'em up. It's more'n it would be worth. Can't make nothin' outer this farm. It's the poorest land on yerth."

"It shore is!" Jackson agreed.

It did look like it. Lockwood was amused, however, at this economical spirit in the face of the wild spending that was continually going on; but the explanation was clear.

The Power boys were not "cut out for farmers," as Tom said. They took no sort

of interest in this plantation, a rather discouraging proposition for anybody. They did not need the corn crop; they had more money than they had ever dreamed of possessing.

Previous to getting it they had been desperately poor, but they had never worked hard. From what Louise had told him, from what the boys and old Henry had said, Lockwood was able to picture their life—the three-roomed cabin up the river, a little corn planting, hunting, fishing, drink, and gambling—a reckless, squalid, perhaps lawless existence. No wonder Louise had wished to escape from it; the marvel was that she had succeeded so well.

And now they had all escaped from it. They seemed to believe themselves everlasting-ly rich. They were flinging away money with both hands. And now entered Hanna—a mystery which Lockwood was not yet able to penetrate.

He was not winning the boys' money at poker; he was not inducing them to cash checks for him, nor borrowing money, so far as Lockwood had gathered. What was he getting out of it?

Lockwood reflected that he would like to know through whose hands went these orders for motors, wines, and jewelery, through what medium they were filled. And he knew that in time he would find out.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PASCAGOULA OIL.

But discoveries were slow in coming, though he rode over to the big house several times in the next ten days. Twice he found Louise alone on the gallery and had half an hour's talk with her, but she did not recur to her confidences of the night of the poker party.

Once he found no one there but Hanna, and he spent a difficult twenty minutes before he felt that he could leave. Lockwood had firm faith now in his disguise; he felt sure that Hanna had not recognized him and could not; but there was an instinctive antipathy between the two men, though they talked politely about the weather, the land, and the river. He soon excused himself and escaped.

His time was much taken up at the camp. A great accumulation of rosin and spirit had been collected, to be shipped up the river to Montgomery, and Lockwood went down to

see it loaded on the boat. The boat was at the landing when he arrived, discharging cargo, and there was as usual a good deal of freight for the Powers. Tom was there watching it carried ashore, and he had his car and a mule wagon to transport it home.

Lockwood saw the crates and boxes, and on his next visit to the house the family exhibited the contents to him with a great deal of pride. There were two immense leather library chairs, a mahogany table, a hanging lamp, and a case of table silver. There was a gift for Louise, a pearl necklace, which she brought downstairs to show. Tom mentioned what he had paid for it, and the price did not seem exorbitant, if the pearls were as real as they looked.

He also had received a quantity of motor-car literature by post, and he mentioned that he was thinking of buying a small, light car, better for the sandy roads than the big one. Lockwood perhaps looked a trifle startled.

"I reckon you think we-all is shore goin' the pace," said Tom, a little defiantly.

"It's all right to go the pace if you can stand the speed," Lockwood returned.

"Oh, I reckon we kin stand it. We ain't blowin' in all our money, not as you think—no, sir, not by a long shot! Fact is, there's more comin' in than goin' out. We're saltin' it down."

"Investing it?"

"That's what we're doin'. If you've got a few hundred dollars, I kin shore put you up to a good thing—or I dunno, neither. Afraid it'll be about all taken up."

"Did Mr. Hanna put you up to it?" Lockwood asked, with assumed carelessness, though he had the sense of an approaching revelation.

Tom glanced doubtfully at Jackson and at his sister. Neither Hanna nor old Henry were present.

"I reckon you can tell Mr. Lockwood about it," said Louise. "It's all among friends."

"Shorely. Well, then—did you ever hear of Pascagoula Oil?"

Lockwood shook his head, foolishly imagining some brand of motor lubricant.

"It's an oil mine—an oil well—down on the coast, somewhere round Pascagoula way. They're keepin' it dark; only a few folks in it; but they'll be pumpin' millions of gallons of oil directly. They're pumpin' some now. Hanna knew all about it from the start, an' he got us in on the ground floor."

"I see," said Lockwood, with heavy foreboding. Louise was watching his face anxiously. "Do you know much about the well?"

"Shorely we do. We know all about it." He went into the next room and brought back a bundle of papers. "Look yere. Photografts of it, from their first drillin' up to now. Here's the story of the whole thing, tellin' how much oil there is, an' everything. Take this stuff away with you an' read it, if you wanter."

Lockwood glanced over the badly printed prospectus, and the pictures, which might have been pictures of an oil derrick anywhere.

"So Mr. Hanna got you in on the ground floor, did he?" he said slowly. "Háve you got much stock in it?"

"Well, that's the worst of it. We couldn't git enough. Only fifty shares, five thousand dollars. Hanna's got a wad of it, near three thousand shares, I reckon. Oh, it's all right—don't have no suspicion about that, sir. Why, it's payin' dividends right now. Yes, sir! Five per cent every quarter—twenty per cent a year. We've got back already near a thousand of what we put in.

"And that ain't all! We could git double for our shares what we paid for 'em. I know we could. I've had letters askin' me to sell, offerin' all sorts of prices. And I sold once. Yes, sir, just to see that it was genuine I sold one of my hundred-dollar shares, an' got two hundred dollars for it. What do you think about that? Some investment, eh?"

"Yes, it does sound good," said Lockwood. "But, Tom, if I were you I'd go down there and see the oil wells myself, before I put any more money into the thing."

"I did speak to Hanna about going down," said Tom. "He didn't seem to want to go much. Say," he added, with an inspiration. "Supposin' you an' me go, eh? We'll stop in Mobile, an' have a hell of a time. It won't cost you a cent. You know all about Mobile, I reckon?"

"I know it a little."

"You know, I never was in Mobile but once, an' then I was with Hanna, an' we didn't have no fun. I reckon you an' me, we'd have a better time by ourselves."

He poked Lockwood in the ribs. Lockwood glanced at Louise, who was smiling faintly.

"Sure we'll go, Tom!" he said. "Just as

soon as work slacks up a little at the camp. By the way, you'd better not say anything to Hanna about it."

"You bet!" returned Tom, winking. "Likely I hadn't oughter told you nothin' about this yere oil mine. He said I wasn't to let it out. But it'll be all right. Most likely he'd have told you himself later."

"Just between friends," suggested Lockwood gravely, and Tom innocently assented.

Lockwood carried a memory of Louise's anxious smile as he rode away. He thought that he had got at the heart of Hanna's scheme at last. A fake oil well—the crudest of swindles, but good enough to impose upon these unsophisticated children of the big swamps. Easy also to expose!

The position looked plain; the only problem was as to how he should attack it. Hanna's standing in that house was far more solid than his own; the boys liked him, but they would believe Hanna first. Louise indeed might trust him; passionately he wished it might be so. But he could not interfere in this game until he knew the cards in his own hands. He felt confident of the fraud that was being practiced, but he would have to have the proof. He would have to go to Pascagoula, either with Tom Power or alone.

Then would come the exposure, the explosion, possibly the killing. The Power boys themselves would be quick enough to resent being victimized, and from stories he had heard they had drawn pistols before. But the exposure would almost certainly involve his own exposure. Louise would learn that he had been in prison.

He shrank hotly from that revelation. He thought it over all the next day, while he sweated about the smoking still, and the day after while he rode the woods. He hung back from visiting the Powers; he hesitated to act.

He saw the house boat as usual that afternoon, still moored where he had first found it, where he had since seen it almost every day. To-day, he heard a sound of voices in strong altercation on the house boat, and guessed that thieves had fallen out. He approached the bayou, his horse treading softly on the pine needles and mold, pulled up just beyond the line of willows, and listened.

Nobody was in sight ashore or aboard the boat, but a sound of quarreling came out violently through the open, glassless windows of the cabin. He could scarcely distinguish

a word, but he almost immediately recognized one of the voices as that of Jackson Power.

He was startled and shocked. At least two other voices joined, but they were so intermingled that he could make out nothing. Then Jackson burst out clearly:

"I won't do it. I ain't had——"

"You cayn't prove nothin'!" interrupted another.

"Then let him do it, ef he——"

The voices dropped again to confused wrangling. Once more they rose to angry exclamations and profanities. So fierce it grew that he expected to see a knot of fighting figures roll out of the cabin door, or to hear a crash of shooting. But again the altercation subsided, and comparative quiet ensued.

Still Lockwood sat his horse silently behind the willows, puzzled, but resolved to hear the last of it. But there was nothing more to hear. The rest of the conversation was inaudible; and in the course of fifteen minutes young Power came out of the cabin, jumped ashore, and made off up the bayou toward his home. He looked angry and greatly upset.

Lockwood was just about to ride away, when another man came out from behind a ti-ti thicket near the mooring, where he might have been ambushed all the time, and quietly went aboard the boat. It was Hanna.

Again Lockwood listened. A mutter of low voices came from the house boat, but no words were distinguishable. Lockwood rode on after a few minutes of vain eavesdropping, but as he turned away he noted an object that gave him a sharper thrill than anything.

Whether it had merely escaped his notice before, he knew not; but hanging outside the stern wall of the cabin was a hunter's horn of curved cow horn—the same sort of horn as Jackson had blown in reply on the night of the poker game. Lockwood began to see possible depths of intricacy in the situation which he had not suspected.

## CHAPTER X.

### AN ALLIANCE.

The sight of the hunter's horn had impressed Lockwood's mind powerfully. He remembered the blowing and response of the night of the card party. It had been extraordinarily like a concerted signal. Young

Jackson's presence at the house boat, his quarrel with its crew, made the shadowy probability stronger. Yet he could not conceive what intimate connection the Power boys could possibly have with the disreputable river gang. More likely, he told himself, the wrangle had merely related to a stolen hog, or some such matter.

But Hanna had listened to overhear, and afterward gone to talk to the rivermen, for the second time to Lockwood's knowledge. Lockwood lost himself in conjectures. He rode over to the Power house a day or two later, and found nobody at home. Then the next day Louise called him on the telephone while he was at dinner at the camp.

The telephone was in the commissary store, and by a series of rural wires it ran to Bay Minette. From the turpentine camp you could get connection with Mobile, if you waited long enough—with New York, for that matter. Craig had once rung up New Orleans to get a quotation on rosin; it had taken him nearly all day to get through. Lockwood had used the telephone himself, but he did not know that the Power house was connected.

He hurried over to the store and answered. The machine buzzed indistinctly. He could barely understand, but he recognized Louise's voice, asking him to come over early in the afternoon, if he possibly could.

Nothing but some great emergency would have made her summon him, he knew, and he announced to Craig that he was taking an afternoon off. He finished dinner with a rush; one of the negroes brought his horse up, and he galloped up the trail through the pines, over the bayou bridge, and along the orange and yellow road to the Power gate.

Louise was strolling among the oaks, near the fence, evidently on the watch for him. She looked excited and worried, anxious and glad; flushing slightly, she attempted to apologize for calling him.

"I'm awfully glad you did. It was just right," he said. "What's happened?"

He tied his horse to the gatepost and began to walk with her in the shade of the big trees, as she showed no intention of taking him to the house.

"I hardly know," she replied. "No, nothing has actually happened, but I'm afraid something might. I wanted to see you; you promised to advise me, you know. I knew everybody was going out in the car

after dinner. I was to go, too, but I made an excuse. It's—it's that oil well, you know. Papa and the boys are thinking of buying more stock."

"How much more?"

"Perhaps twenty or thirty thousand dollars."

Lockwood whistled softly.

"But I understood that no more was on the market."

"Yes. But a member of the company has just died—so Mr. Hanna says—and his shares are to be sold. He showed us the letter. They want one hundred and twenty dollars a share now. Mr. Hanna said he could get two hundred dollars, but he wanted to let his friends in first. There are about three hundred shares, and the boys are wild to have them."

"I see," said Lockwood dryly. "But nothing has been done yet?"

"They talked it all over last night. Mr. Hanna didn't urge it much, but he said it was the chance of a lifetime; he thinks the shares may be worth five hundred dollars in a year or two. I said all I could against it, but it didn't do any good. The boys don't think a woman knows anything of business, but they do think a great deal of your opinion, and I wish you'd give them some advice."

"Well, there's only one thing I could say—that I don't believe the stock is worth a cent, that I don't believe there is any oil well at all, and perhaps not even any company. But I couldn't say that without some definite information to back it up."

"And, of course, Hanna would deny everything you said, and I suppose papa and the boys would take his word," said Louise in distress. "That man seems to have bewitched them all. Wish he had never come here. And he tormented me so in New Orleans—"

"In New Orleans!" Lockwood exclaimed.

She hesitated, clasping and unclasping her hands. Then she looked at him frankly.

"He was a nightmare to me. He persecuted me—followed me. That was partly why I left and came here—to get away from him."

"Ah!" said Lockwood, with a long breath between his teeth. "And he followed you here?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. He came up on the boat and stopped a day or two at Ferrell's. He was supposed to be looking for

a chance to buy timberlands. Tom brought him home to dinner, and asked him to stop with us. I was terrified when I saw him. I nearly told papa what I knew of him—but then the boys would probably have shot him, and so I didn't know what to do, and said nothing."

"But Hanna behaved well. The first chance he got, he apologized to me very nicely for all the past; he said he was afraid he had been a nuisance, but that he wouldn't trouble me any more. And I must say he didn't—not till just lately."

"That day on the bayou?" asked Lockwood.

"Yes. I had to put him ashore. He was trying to be persuasive. But I'm not much afraid of him here, in that way. The boys will take care of me, and he knows it. But I'm afraid of what he's doing to the boys. He taught them to mix new drinks, and he gave Tom a tip on the cotton market that cleared eight hundred dollars, and then he put them up to getting the big car, and all these things. I can't imagine why Hanna is always proposing new things for them to buy. What good does it do him. He won't let them give him anything, I know. I believe they'd let him have the handling of everything they own, if he asked for it—and now this oil business has come up."

She spoke hotly, disconnectedly, in great distress, a boiling over of all the accumulated grievances of months. Lockwood took a sudden resolution.

"Listen, Miss Louise!" he said. "I didn't intend to tell you now, but Hanna is no stranger to me, either; and I didn't come to Rainbow Landing by chance, any more than he did. Hanna is a high-class swindler, a mere confidence man. I ought to know. He got my confidence and robbed me of everything I had in the world."

They had stopped walking and stood facing one another, oblivious of everything but the intensity of these mutual confidences.

"It was years ago," Lockwood went on. "I've been after him ever since. I've been through horrors in that time, but I didn't mind them. I had only one idea. I was going to find Hanna and kill him."

"Oh!" Louise murmured, but she did not flinch. The idea of such a vendetta was not unfamiliar to Miss Power's Alabaman experience.

"I tracked him to New Orleans—that was when I met you. Then I traced him up the

river. I nearly shot him the first day I was here, but I didn't have my escape ready. And then, I saw you; I heard something of your family, of Hanna's doings. I guessed something of his game, and I made up my mind to wreck it first. And then——"

"What then?"

"And then—what shall I say?" exclaimed Lockwood. "I got work here. I met you and your people. Something changed in me. I hadn't valued my life a particle, but lately it's come to seem that there might perhaps be something in living after all. I'm as determined as ever to break Hanna, but I don't believe now that I'd be willing to ruin all the rest of my life for the sake of killing him. In fact, I think I've found something stronger in life than hate."

She had been looking at him intently; now she dropped her eyes, coloring. Then she turned slowly and began to walk again.

"You mustn't ruin your life," she said gently. "It's worth a great deal. Your coming here has meant a great deal to—to all of us. It has saved us, perhaps, from dreadful things. And you have a great deal to live for, I know. And as for Hanna—I don't blame you for wanting to break him or even kill him; but if what you say is true, you should be able to put him in prison, and that ought to satisfy you."

Prison! That word came like an icicle into Lockwood's hot indiscretions. A terror seized him. He could not be thankful enough that he had not confessed further.

"I think, perhaps, we can do that," he answered her. "But there's just one thing to do now. I must go to Pascagoula and find out the truth of this oil company."

"Would you really do that? But it's too much to ask you. Why couldn't Tom go?"

"Tom's going would give the whole thing away. Besides, I'm afraid it needs some one with more than Tom's experience of crooked business to probe this. No, I'll go myself. You needn't be grateful. Remember, this is my quarrel, too."

"But I'm more than grateful," she exclaimed. "But I don't think you need go to Pascagoula. The office of the oil company is in Mobile—Maury Building, Royal Street, Room 24. I remember the address."

Lockwood made a note of it.

"The real struggle will come when I try to expose Hanna," he warned her. "He'll fight. See if you can't prepare your father's

mind a little; possibly hint at Hanna's behavior in New Orleans."

"I'll do all I can—and wait for you to come back!" she promised. Her eyes met his, full of gratitude and confidence. In Lockwood's heart there was a sudden uprush of something vital and sweet, that washed away almost the last of the old black bitterness. He held her hand somewhat tightly as he took his leave, and suppressed a great many words that came into his mouth. For the present they were allies—no more.

## CHAPTER XI.

### OPEN WAR.

Lockwood got three days' leave of absence from Craig with some difficulty, and only by alleging business in Mobile of the utmost importance. The camp was busy; Craig did not want to let him go, and was much afraid that he would not come back. He valued his new woods rider; and he had remarked to the camp foreman that Lockwood was naturally cut out for a turpentine man and he was going to hold on to him.

By good luck the camp motor car was going over to Bay Minette, and Lockwood went there in it. The afternoon train was crowded, full of the well-dressed people and the stir of life from which it seemed to him that he had been long exiled. He reached Mobile late in the day; the sunshine lay low on the palms of Government Street as he walked up from the Louisville & Nashville depot, and he knew that it was too late to make any investigations that day.

He lodged himself at the St. Andrew Hotel, and he sat that evening and smoked under the live oaks of Bienville Square, where the fountain splashed and gurgled. Only four blocks away stood the Maury Building, where the office of the "oil company" was said to be. In the morning he would find out if there was any oil company there, and, if not, the secretary of the board of trade would probably tell him all he wished to know.

He spent an impatient and restless night in a stifling hot hotel bedroom, and shortly after nine o'clock next morning he went up in the elevator of the Maury Building. The door of No. 24 was locked. There was no sign, no lettering on the ground glass, nothing but the uninforming number. Disappointed, he went down again, and sought

information from the colored elevator boy, passing a quarter.

"Who's in Number 24?"

"Numbah twenty-fo'? Dat's Mr. Harding's room, suh."

"What time does he generally get down?"

"Why, he ain't noways reg'lar, captain. Sometimes he don't come down at all. Mostly he's here 'fo' noon."

"I see. Is the office of the Pascagoula Oil Company in this building?"

"Dunno, suh. Ain't never heard of 'em."

Lockwood returned toward ten o'clock, finding the office still closed, and it was not till past eleven that he at last found the door of No. 24 unlocked. He went in without ceremony. The room was quite unfurnished, but for a shabby flat desk and a couple of chairs. There were cigar stubs on the floor and a strong odor of stale smoke in the air. Behind the desk sat a well-dressed, heavy-faced man of middle age, smoking and reading the *Mobile Register*.

At the first glance Lockwood had a flash of memory from his past life that was like a shock; but it was vague, and he could not localize it. He stared in silence at the man, who had put down the paper and was looking at him.

"Are you—are you Mr. Harding?" Lockwood got out at last, trying to recover himself.

"Yes, sir. That's my name," replied the cigar smoker, in distinctly Northern accents. And at that moment Lockwood's memory found its mark.

He had a painful vision of his own real-estate office long ago, of McGibbon, of Maxwell sullenly stating the forced terms that meant ruin. Yes, it was Maxwell, it was Hanna's old confederate, here in Mobile, here in the rooms of the "Pascagoula Oil Company;" and a great flood of illumination swept over Lockwood's whole mind. It was through Mobile that the orders for the Powers' reckless purchases had gone. Ten to one it was through this office, leaving a fifty-per-cent commission.

"I am," Lockwood stated, "a piano salesman."

"Well?" returned Harding, who was plainly far from recognizing his visitor.

"I've just come down from Rainbow Landing. I guess you know the Powers there?"

"I've heard of them."

"They're thinking of buying a piano. I

called to see you. I believe the order will go through you, won't it?"

"Who told you that?" Harding queried roughly.

"I guessed at it. There are all sorts of discounts and commissions, you know."

The man picked up his cigar again, looked at it, hesitating visibly; then spoke:

"I don't know how you've got this idea. I'm not in the piano business. If you want to sell the Powers a piano, why go ahead. But this is a law office."

"Oh, a law office!" said Lockwood, inwardly tickled at the word. "I thought you represented the Pascagoula Oil Company."

Harding was visibly taken aback this time, and stared hard at his interlocutor.

"Never heard of it," he returned.

"But," Lockwood insisted, "this is the address given on their stationery and literature."

"Hum!" said Harding reflectively. His manner softened a good deal. "Come to think of it, I do believe I've heard of 'em. I've only been in this office a couple of months. I guess they were the people here before me. But they're gone. Yes, sir, they've moved. But I can find 'em for you. Ain't they in the telephone book? Well, I can find out, anyhow."

"I wish you would."

"I certainly will," said Harding, growing more genial. "Are you located in town? At the St. Andrew? Good! I'll telephone you just as soon as I find the address."

They parted with great mutual cordiality, and Lockwood chuckled when he was on the street again. He chuckled with success; he was almost certain now; but to make absolutely certain he called at the office of the Pascagoula Land and Development Company, whose name he had accidentally heard that day.

Their offices were decorated with semi-tropical fruits and vegetables of every description, and he learned from the manager that oil was almost the sole natural product which their territory could not furnish. No oil had ever been discovered in that county; no boring had ever been done; and he could not be in error, for he had spent his life there.

It was merely what Lockwood had been certain of all along, but he felt that the matter was now clinched. He planned to take the midnight train back to Bay Minette. He returned to his hotel, and, to his ex-

treme surprise, was handed a note which Harding had sent over by messenger an hour before. He had located the Pascagoula Oil Company, Harding said; if Lockwood would call again in the Maury Building the next morning he would receive the information he wanted.

Of course Harding could very well have put the address in his note, but he evidently had planned some move, and Lockwood was sufficiently curious to wait over. He spent another night at the hotel, and it was with the expectation of an extremely curious and interesting conversation that he opened the door of office No. 24 the next morning. Harding was not there, but Hanna sat looking across the desk at his entrance.

Lockwood paused, bewildered, and then remembered the long-distance telephone. Undoubtedly Harding had sent a hurry call. Hanna had had just time to motor to the railway and catch the Mobile train.

The nerves thrilled down his spine. It was going to come to a show-down at last. He felt the pressure of the little automatic at his hip—not that this office building was the place for pistols, with the click of typewriters, the coming and going of people in the adjoining rooms.

"Well!" said Hanna curtly. "Have a chair. So you've been looking into oil stocks."

"I didn't need to look much," Lockwood returned, without sitting down. "I got my material for a report without much trouble."

"And you're fixing to make a report?"

"I surely am."

"What do you expect to get out of it?"

"I get *you*, out of it, Hanna."

"I see!" said the crook reflectively. "Well, that's a good stunt. Blackmail, hey? Ever since you came to Rainbow Landing I've been trying to figger out what you came for. Course I seen right away that you wasn't there for the turpentine business. For a while I did think you were after the girl."

"The girl is neither your affair nor mine," said Lockwood.

"Well, I thought you might be sweet on her," went on Hanna, looking keenly at his opponent's face. "I was sweet on her myself, one time. Fact is, I could have her now, if I wanted her. But I've got other fish to fry."

"I know you're lying, Hanna!" Lockwood returned.

"Well, that's neither here nor there,"

Hanna resumed, with no air of resentment. "You'll find out soon. But I was going to say that we might do a deal. I'll let you alone with the girl, and you let me alone with the rest of 'em. I could block your game in a minute, you know. What I say goes in that family."

"Not so much as you think. But I'm making no such deal."

"Well, then, what's your figure?"

"For what?"

"Why, suppose you don't go back with any report on oil stocks. In fact, you don't go back there at all. Supposing I fall for your blackmailing scheme. Supposing I pay into a bank—say at Chicago—two thousand dollars, and you go there and draw it."

"And leave you to clean out the Power bank roll?"

"Not so bad as that. I'm not going to put them clean out of business. They'll still be rich compared to what they were before. Those people are bound to get skinned. They're begging for it. If I don't get it, somebody else will."

"Still, when I make friends with folks I hate to rob them," said Lockwood cautiously.

"Maybe, but it's the way of the world," Hanna returned. "I happened on them by chance. Say, you've no idea of the state I found them in. Money was burning holes in their pockets, and they hadn't the faintest notion how to spend it. I expect you've seen through my game. You know they paid about double for everything they bought. The orders all went through me. But still, Lord! I did let them have something. Most men would have turned them inside out."

"Well, that's what you're planning to do now."

"I don't know," Hanna replied thoughtfully. "Sometimes I've thought of settling down and spending the rest of my life on that plantation. Why not? But, anyhow, I'm the dog in the manger—see? You've got to keep out, and I'm prepared to bonus you for it."

"Suppose I reported all this talk to our friends?"

"They wouldn't believe you, son," said the bandit with assurance. "I won't deny that you might make me some little trouble, if you came back with a fishy tale about my oil well. I might have to take Tom down the coast and show him some oil derricks. There's heaps of 'em near Mobile. But you

might bother me some, and so I say, what's your figure? I'll make it five thousand."

"Not enough!" said Lockwood.

"Why, I won't clear much over twice that!" Hanna complained. "You're a devil of a hard man to do business with. I'll go six thousand, and that's my last raise, by gad! It'll be paid you in Chicago, and you'll have to sign a statement that you've investigated my oil well and found it all right, and that you've left Alabama for good."

Lockwood shook his head stolidly.

"Then what the deuce do you want?" Hanna demanded.

"Ten thousand cash, or a certified check payable to Henry Power. I figure that's about the amount you've got out of him so far."

Hanna exploded a tremendous and astonished oath. His eyes and forehead wrinkled up like a bulldog's, and he stared at Lockwood venomously.

"What's your game?" he exclaimed. "Who are you, anyway? I know I've seen you outside of Alabama."

"No, you don't know me, Hanna," said Lockwood with equal animosity. "My only game is to beat you and break you. You'd better not go back to Rainbow Landing yourself. Or go, if you like, and I'll meet you and beat you on your own ground."

"That's to be seen," Hanna returned, resuming apparent coolness. "I could blacken your name so that the boys would shoot you on sight. But no use quarreling. I've made you an offer. I'll split the game, but I won't spoil it. What do you say? It's your last chance."

"It's yours," said Lockwood. "Will you disgorge, or are you going to go back to Rainbow Landing and risk it. You'll be jailed or shot."

Hanna grinned at him across the desk without saying anything. Lockwood walked to the door, opened it, and turned back. If he expected Hanna to back down at the last moment, he was disappointed. The confidence man still grinned derisively, and Lockwood went out.

He felt agitated and flurried now, sorry, too, that he had become involved in a wordy wrangle, sorry that he had showed his hand. His great need now was to get back as fast as possible to Rainbow Landing, for he knew well that Hanna would waste no moments now. There was a train at three o'clock, and his watch said that it was now noon.

For greater certainty he determined to get into touch with Louise at once. There was no telegraph connection, but there was the telephone, and he went to the city central office, and asked to be put through, but at last he had to give it up. There was just time to get his suit case at the hotel and go to the depot. When he arrived there he learned that the time had been changed, and that his train had been gone half an hour.

However, it was boat day, and the steamer would leave for upriver points at five o'clock. Considering the long drive from Bay Minette to Craig's camp, and the uncertainty of being able to obtain a motor, he thought that his chance was probably better by boat than by rail.

The boat, as always, was an hour late in getting off. Lockwood did not sleep much that night. He did not undress, but he lay down in his berth for a few hours, marking each landing as they passed it. The great searchlight swung its long finger of light ahead; the cypress swamps, the marshy headlands, the ghostly line of sycamores and live oaks slipped past. A heavy, hot smell of vegetable decay came off the land.

The lumbering steamer made good speed that night. Shortly after midnight they came up to the colored bluffs of Rainbow Landing, and hauled in to the warehouse, amid the usual shouting and excitement of the negroes. Lockwood was the only passenger to land, and there were no more than three or four waiting figures ashore. He had hardly stepped off the plank when one of these figures stepped forward to meet him.

"Mr. Craig sent me over to meet you, Mr. Lockwood. His car's busted a tire, but I've got my buggy to drive you to the camp."

Lockwood could not see the man's face in the gloom, but he guessed it to be one of the farmers of the neighborhood. They all knew him by this time, and he had met most of them, though he could hardly have remembered their names.

"Thanks—all right!" he said gladly. "How did Mr. Craig know I was coming on this boat?"

"I reckoned you sent him word," said the man, leading the way to where a horse was hitched back in the darkness. And when he thought of it, Lockwood believed that he had told Craig that he would be up on the first boat. They drove away at a fast trot through the swamp, up to the crossroad, down past the post office—all familiar

ground now. They passed the Power house, wrapped in complete darkness.

"Do you know if Mr. Hanna is back?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. Seen him this evenin'," the driver answered.

Hanna had beaten him then. Lockwood was revolving this fact anxiously when the driver pulled up suddenly, got out and went behind the buggy, uttering a disgusted curse. They had just reached the bayou bridge.

"Wish you'd please git out, sir. Tire's done come off."

Lockwood swung out. He had one foot on the step and one on the ground, when there was a silent and ferocious rush upon him out of the darkness. Something fell like thunder upon his skull. Fire flamed over his brain, and vanished suddenly in black darkness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAST CHANCE.

Of what happened immediately afterward Lockwood had no knowledge.

It seemed that almost whole days had passed before he half started up in semi-lucidity. He could move neither his hands nor his feet. It was still dark. He could hear the thud and wash of engines and waters, and he imagined himself still on the river steamer. He smelled the heavy, decaying odor of the swamps. His head ached terribly, and seemed swollen to enormous dimensions. He could not think nor collect himself, and he relapsed into dizzy unconsciousness.

But when he recovered intelligence there was light in his eyes. He lay on his back; there was a ceiling of pine boards above him. Still dreaming of the river boat, he tried to move himself, and found that his arms were tied fast at the wrists, and his legs at the ankles.

He turned his head sideways, growing dizzy with the slight movement. He was in a long room, perhaps ten feet by twenty. Opposite him a couple of bunks were built into the wall, empty except for frightfully tattered rags that might once have been called blankets. At each end of the room was an open door, where the sunlight shone in, and he had a glimpse of green thickets, and he smelled swamp water. Outside the door human figures moved indistinctly.

Now he knew where he was. He was in

a house boat, probably the boat he had grown familiar with on the bayou; though how he had got there he could not at the moment imagine. His head was too painful for thought; he lay back, crushed down with unspeakable defeat and weakness and despair.

The door darkened. A big figure came in, and Lockwood saw a face brought close to his own—a bearded, brutal face, with a great bluish stain or scar on the forehead.

"Done woke up, air ye?" said Blue Bob.

Lockwood stared back, incapable of speaking. The riverman laughed a little and went out, returning with a lump of corn pone and a tin cup of coffee.

"Here, swaller this," he said, "an' you'll feel better."

Three more men came in, and stood staring at the prisoner with the stolid curiosity of animals. Lockwood's wrists were loosened; the food put into his hands. He could not eat the corn bread, but he drank the bitter, black coffee, and it did stimulate him. His head cleared. He looked round at the ring of hard faces.

"What's this for? What are you going to do with me?" he demanded weakly.

"Dunno," said Bob. "We're goin' to take right good keer of you, so you won't git away."

Lockwood shut his eyes again, beginning to remember, to understand—slowly, painfully piecing out the situation. Hanna was in alliance with the river gang, just as he had half suspected. It was a winning alliance, too. Lockwood could not but feel that he had lost his game—for the present. He was not much afraid for his life. The pirates might have murdered him very easily, but they had spared him; they said they were going to "take good keer" of him. Hanna wanted him out of the way until the oil deal could be put through.

His coat was gone, his boots, his cambric shirt. There was not much left but his trousers and underwear. His pistol was gone, of course, and his pocketbook and his watch, even his handkerchief. But the money belt was there. They had not thought to search him to the skin. He felt the familiar rasp of the leather and the hardness of the ten-dollar gold coins inside, and it gave him hope; so much does money seem to be power.

He asked to be let up, but they refused; and really he was better where he was. He

spent the rest of the day in the bunk, dozing fitfully into nightmares, sometimes feverishly awake, too sick to know how the hours passed.

Twice more they brought him food, fried catfish and corn pone and the same black coffee, strong as oak-ash lye. He drank, but he could not eat; and after a time he found the cabin in darkness again. Some one tied his hands up without any regard for his comfort.

A loud chorus of snoring went on from the pirates in their bunks. Thus unguarded, he might have tried to escape, but he was far too ill to think of any such thing. He slept himself instead, and was the better for it. He awoke next morning with the swimming sensation almost gone from his head, and even a slight appetite.

That day they let him out of the bunk, greatly to his relief, for the place swarmed with fleas, and probably with worse vermin. His ankles were still loosely hobbled, but he was allowed to sit on the open stern deck.

His first glance was for familiar landmarks. He found none. The boat was lying in a little bay or bayou, perhaps a creek mouth, surrounded by dense thickets of ti-ti and rattan. Through a tangle of overhanging willow he thought he saw the Alabama River outside, but anybody might have passed down the stream within fifty yards without suspecting the presence of the house boat, or even of the harbor where it lay.

He did not know the place. He was sure it was no part of the bayou near Craig's camp. He recollects the thudding of engines he had heard or felt soon after being kidnaped. The house boat was moving then. They must have taken her out of the bayou, down the river for some miles, and laid her in this hiding place, which they had probably used before.

The boat was moored against a huge log that made a natural wharf. On an open sandy space ashore a cooking fire was burning. Not far from it two of the gang lay flat on their backs in the shade. Blue Bob stayed aboard, with the fourth of the party, a young man, little more than a boy, with a vacuous, animal face, and long, youthful down sprouting from his chin.

"Well—going to let me go ashore?" Lockwood remarked, by way of being conversational.

"Naw!" Bob growled, staring stupidly.

Lockwood tried again, getting no answer.

Studying his captors, he decided that it was not so much animosity as sheer lack of words. They spoke little more to one another than to him. He observed them all that day with growing amazement; he thought he had never seen men so devoid of all the attributes of humanity. His amazement grew to a sort of horror. He felt as if he had fallen into the hands of some half-human animals, some soulless race without either understanding or mercy.

They spoke mainly in drawled monosyllables; they played cards and shot craps endlessly, but without excitement—perhaps having no money to stake. No doubt they were all devoured with malaria and hookworms; but all the same they could handle an ax with masterly dexterity, and on occasion they could be as quick as cats.

Half asleep as they generally seemed, Lockwood felt their eyes perpetually upon him. At every movement, some one turned his head like a flash, and every one of these men carried a gun, the handle protruding shamelessly from the hip pocket. Bob had two—one of them being Lockwood's own automatic.

After several futile attempts, Lockwood gave up trying to get on any sort of relations with them. He watched them with dread and repulsion as they rolled dice on the dirty deck. One of the "bones" fell through a crack in the planking, and, trying to loosen a board to reach it, the youngest of the men broke the blade of his sheath knife. He tossed away the shortened blade with a curse, but the broken tip remained on the deck and Lockwood fixed his eyes on it.

It was scarcely two inches long, but was the nearest approach to a cutting tool that had come anywhere near his reach. He managed to shuffle near it; he put his foot on it. Eventually he sat down on his heels, got the triangular bit of steel into his hands, and transferred it to his trousers pocket. It was not much, but it might be something.

The day dragged on. That afternoon something went by on the river outside, invisible through the trees—probably a raft of timber. Toward evening they fed him and put him back in his bunk, tying his hands once more at the wrists.

A clammy white fog from the swamps drifted smokily through the doorways. The whole cabin was hazy and damp. The pirates had a big fire burning on the shore; he

could see the red reflection of it; and then, faint and rapidly increasing, he heard the distant drumming of the engine of a motor boat coming down the river.

Every nerve thrilled in him. It was destiny that was coming, he knew. He heard the boat slacken, then scrape through the willow boughs that masked the bayou, and then a bump upon the house boat, and a voice.

His heart sank. It was worse than destiny; it was disaster.

"Got him safe?" said Hanna.

"Got him alive," returned Bob. "Ruther hev him dead?"

"I sure would," said the other earnestly.

Then there was a long, hoarse mutter of talk which Lockwood could not make out. Hanna was arguing something. Then silence fell. Feet trampled the deck outside, and Blue Bob came into the cabin, carrying a flaring torch of fat pine, which filled the foggy room with resinous smoke and a lurid light. Hanna followed him, and looked down at Lockwood in his bunk.

"I've got no time to fool with you now," he said curtly. "You asked for this and you've got it. Now these fellows'll float you down to Mobile, and Harding'll give you a ticket to Chicago and fifty dollars. Right now you'll give me the signed statement I mentioned, saying that you've looked into my enterprise and consider it quite sound."

"Nothing doing," said Lockwood.

Hanna stepped closer and looked down at him curiously.

"What's wrong with you?" he said. "You haven't got a ghost of a show now. You're down and out. I've told the Power boys things about you. They'll shoot you at sight if you ever turn up there again. I don't need to do anything for you, but I felt as if I ought to give you a last chance. That's what's the matter with me—got too tender a conscience.

"These boys ain't troubled that way, though," he added, indicating the boat's crew. "I'll just leave you with them. Let's get out of here, Bob. It's hotter'n hell."

He half turned and bestowed a piercing glance on the prisoner.

"It's your last chance," he said. "Well?"

"No," said Lockwood.

"Well, you've had a run for your money, anyway," returned the crook, and he went out.

For another five minutes, perhaps, the men talked on the rear deck.

"Ain't takin' no sech chances. Do it yourself," he heard Bob say.

"You done it once, I guess," replied Hanna. "Hush!" as the pirate uttered a loud oath of denial.

The talk sank again; and then the motor boat throbbed away into silence. Hanna was gone; but the pirates talked long among themselves, while the river fog drifted ghost-white over the boat. From time to time some one came and looked at him through the misty doorway.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE FOG.

He had never known the river men so excited; he would not have thought it possible for them to have had so much conversation. He guessed what they were discussing. From moment to moment he almost expected the attack, the shot, or a crushing club stroke. He was tied, helpless as a sheep.

"If we-all do this hyar job," he heard Bob say, "we gotter git cl'ar off'n the Alabama fer good. We kin sell the boat in Mobile, an' go——"

Some one interrupted indistinctly. Bob swore and insisted.

"All same, Bob, this yere's a heap safer'n that other time, an' you got outer that all right," another voice drawled.

"Outer what?" Bob snarled savagely. "Outer nothin'. Jackson Power knows he done it—thinks so, anyways. Mebbe he did. Everybody was lettin' off their pistols at once, an'——"

"Shucks, Bob. He was shot with an autumatic, an' nobody hadn't no autumatic that night but you."

"Ef you says I done it, I'll cut your liver out!" Bob threatened. "I tell you it shore was young Jack Power."

"Well, jest so long's he thinks so! Shet up, Bob! We've got to touch up young Jackson again, anyways."

"Sure we will," said Bob. "A thousand this time, and Hanna don't git none of it. Then with what we gits fer——"

Echoes of some old affray, it seemed, that still had power to terrify. The familiar mention of Jackson Power's name startled him, recalling what he had seen or heard himself; but he had no thought just then to spend

upon that wild youth's connection with the river gang.

How long had he to live?—what chance had he? were the only problems that his brain could hold. He could not possibly doubt that his fate had been decided upon. Was it to be to-night, while he lay tied, helpless as a sheep?

If he had had some weapon, even a stick—even if his hands had been free, he could have faced it better. He strained at the rope that bound his wrists behind his back. It was dark in the cabin; no one could see what he did; and the knots slipped and gave just a little. Not nearly enough to release his hands, but with the tips of his fingers he could feel the bit of knife point in his trousers pocket.

He worked it around, point against the cloth, and pressed it through the slit it made. It must be sharp, he thought with satisfaction; and at that moment the pirates from the deck came crowding in.

He fancied that it was his last moment. But no one paid him any attention beyond a casual glance. They tumbled into their bunks, all but Blue Bob, who produced a long tallow candle and lighted it. He set it in the middle of the floor, squatted down on the floor himself, with his back against a bunk, took a chew of tobacco, and fixed his eyes on the prisoner.

Lockwood realized that the death watch had been put on him; but the realization came with relief, for it meant that nothing was intended for that night. But this night would certainly be the last.

The thick fog drifted and coiled about the pale candle flame burning straight in the windless air. The air was full of moisture, steaming hot. Mosquitoes buzzed thickly. Far ashore he heard the calling of owls. He hoped that Bob would doze off, but the pirate remained tenaciously awake, chewing tobacco like a machine. Lockwood had a wild instant thought of trying to bribe him with the gold in his belt. Madness! Blue Bob would take the gold, and dispatch him even more certainly afterward.

Once outside, in that darkness and fog, they would never recapture him, either on land or water. He held the bit of steel between his fingers, behind his back. By twisting his fingers back he could just touch the knife edge to the rope at his wrist. He might cut it, but in the face of that black stare across the cabin he dared not move a muscle.

He shut his eyes and pretended to sleep, peeping occasionally through his lashes. Unceasingly Bob chewed his quid. Lockwood's brain ached with the nervous tension. He groaned and half turned, as if sleeping restlessly, and for a moment Bob's jaws stopped working.

At last he must really have slept, though he seemed to be always conscious of the candlelight and the fog. But he came to himself with a sense of waking, not out of but into a nightmare. The candle still burned, but it was low now. The fog banked in wet clouds about it; and Bob was gone. Another man had taken his place.

This watcher also chewed tobacco, but Lockwood saw at once that he was less vigilant. He presently fetched a fresh candle and lighted it from the first, then, sitting down, yawned loudly. He had been wakened from his first sleep, and had trouble to keep from relapsing.

Lockwood lay with closed eyes, but tense, wide awake now, peeping at intervals. The man kept firmly awake for fifteen minutes. His lids drooped; he rubbed them with his knuckles and stared straight ahead; then he shifted his position, sighed, and blinked heavily.

Holding the bit of steel between finger and thumb, Lockwood began to saw at the cord with noiseless, imperceptible movements. By twisting his fingers he could just reach the rope, but he could bring very little force upon it. Fortunately the knife was almost razor sharp. Once he cut his own flesh; twice he dropped the knife and had to feel for it among the rags and corn shucks; but he could feel the strands parting, and at last his hands went freely apart.

The guard was dozing, blinking, evidently dazed with sleep. Lockwood sighed, snored, and drew his heels up to his body as if restless. The watchman paid no attention, and Lockwood reached down with his left hand and ripped through his ankle cords with half a minute's quick work.

Then he hesitated, as a man may when his life depends on the dexterity of the next minute. The pirate had a sudden spell of wakefulness; he knuckled his eyes and stretched, and it was full twenty minutes before he relaxed into drowsiness again.

Lockwood gathered up the ragged blanket, and rose on his elbow, measuring the distance to the doorway. He slipped his shoeless feet over the edge of the bunk—and then

suddenly caught the wide-open, amazed eyes of his guard.

Before the man's open mouth could produce its yell Lockwood flung the blanket over the candle, and bolted, crouching low, for the door. Black darkness fell behind him. There was a howl, a shot exploded with a deafening crash, and then an uproar of stamping feet, ejaculations, and another shot as he dived through the door. But then he was out and had jumped ashore upon the big log.

He halted bewildered. The dense fog lay all around him like a gray wall. A low fire on the shore made a pale blur. That second of delay almost ruined him. A man plunged after him from the boat, running square into him. Lockwood caught him a heavy uppercut, putting all his energy of vindictiveness into it. It lifted the pirate clean off his feet, and he crashed over backward with a grunt.

Lockwood rushed down to the other end of the boat. He was afraid to try the woods in that smother of dark and fog. He almost collided with another ruffian who was leaping ashore from the stern. The man grabbed at him and fired; but Lockwood had ducked, dropping flat. He smelled the water close to him. He swallowed forward, into thick, deep mud, then into deepening water.

"Hyar—hyar he goes!" he heard Blue Bob bellowing. "Git pine splinters! Make a blaze, d—n you! He can't git fur!"

Lockwood tried to sight the small canoe that usually trailed beside the house boat. He had counted on it, but nothing was visible. If he could secure it—but there was no use looking. Even the house boat was a mere blur of blackness. He crawled forward into the gloom and, getting into deeper water, began to swim with a long, noiseless stroke.

He was a good swimmer, and was practically stripped but for his trousers. Leaves, branches rustled over his head. He had come to the screened mouth of the bayou. He strove to push through without sound, but some snapping branch must have betrayed him. A perfect volley of shots were fired at him, ripping the leaves, driving up the water, but not one of them touched him. Careless of noise now, he struck out strongly and went through, and felt the powerful pull of the big river current outside.

Back in the bayou was an uproar. Fat

pine torches were flaming, so that the whole foggy place seemed a great glow; and then he heard the splash of paddles and saw something like a spot of lighted haze coming out. It was the canoe. He stopped swimming and floated soundlessly. He struck something—a half-submerged snag, and clung to it. The canoe dashed nearer, without outlines, a moving blur of light; and he ducked completely under, holding his breath.

It passed so close that the glare of the torches shone on his eyes through the water. But for the fog he would certainly have been detected. The blur faded. He put his eyes and nose up. The boat was circling away downstream, and a shot blazed suddenly from it, probably at a drifting log. The pirates were taking a chance at anything. Lockwood let go and floated again. The canoe came about and sped upriver. He could hear the talking, clear through the thick, wet air.

"I'm sure he's hit. I saw him plain one minute."

"Ef he ain't drownded or dead we'll find him wounded on the bank somewhere in the mornin'!"

"Not a particle of use lookin' in this yere fog."

They kept on searching, however, going some distance up, and then down again close to the shore. Lockwood risked swimming again, heading out into mid-river. The twist and shift of the currents bothered him. They seemed to set in all directions, and he lost track of which way he was going.

The canoe went some distance downstream and then came back, reentering the bayou mouth. He lost sight of the torch glare. Both shores were invisible, and there was nothing around him but the gray wall of fog and the suck and gurgle of the treacherous currents.

To his surprise he felt bottom suddenly. He thought he must have been carried shoreward, but it proved to be a sand bar, with about three feet of water over it. He stood up gladly to rest. He was an excellent and strong swimmer, but the weight of the gold belt was coming at last to make itself felt.

He meant to gain the shore some way downstream where he could lie in the woods till daylight. Then he could find his way to a road, a house, where he could hire a horse, a mule, or a car to take him either to Craig's camp or a railway station. But he was puzzled by the currents, which

seemed to set in opposite directions at the ends of the sand bar. He knew how treacherous are the shifts and eddies of the Alabama; but, selecting his direction at last, he waded deep and swam again.

For perhaps half an hour he struggled with the river, floating, swimming, once clinging to a floating log and drifting for some way. Darkness and fog made him feel lost in an illimitable ocean, but at last he touched bottom again, and detected the faint loom of trees. He waded ashore, stumbled through a tangle of swamp, and came into a vaguely open space.

It was a field of growing corn. He made his way through the stalks to the other side. The ground rose into pine woods. The wet chill of the river air lessened a little. He dropped on the pine needles, quite exhausted, intending to rest a few minutes, and fell into a deep sleep.

Daylight was mixing with the fog when he awoke. High overhead he saw a yellowish glimmer of sun. He went on through the pines, while the night fog lifted and melted. He came suddenly upon a sandy country road, little traveled, and, looking back, he saw the river through the trees. For a moment it seemed to be running the wrong way. Then he realized that he was on the other side. The twist of the cross currents had brought him across the river, to the shore opposite to the bayou.

All the better! he thought, after his first astonishment. The surface of the stream was empty. He could not make out where the bayou opened, probably a long way upstream. Taking to the road, he tramped for a mile without seeing any trace of mankind, and then lay down in the warmth of the sun and slept soundly again.

He awoke refreshed and intensely hungry. After some reflection he opened his belt—for the first time. Taking out five of the coins, he put them in his pocket, cut off the remains of the cord loops on his wrists, cast aside his tattered socks, and started barefoot along the sandy road.

Within an hour's walking a ramshackle store presented itself, but it was able to provide him with a meal, a suit, and hat and boots of the coarse material worn by negroes. Lockwood clothed himself afresh, discarding every stitch of his former muddy outfit, and set out again, being told that a farmer two miles up the road had a car to hire.

Two hours later he was at the railway station at Jackson, where he had time to be shaved and to improve his toilet a little further. Spirit had come back into him with food and cleanliness. It was a question of getting back to Rainbow Landing as fast as possible. So far from having lost the game, he had all the cards. He had all the evidence against Hanna that could be desired by anybody. Better still, Hanna doubtless believed him at the bottom of the river, and would be off his guard.

He thought of confiding in Craig and enlisting his help. Craig had shown every disposition to be friendly and had no love for Hanna, as Lockwood knew well. Craig was a man of standing, a business man, whose backing would mean much.

The first thing was to get to Craig. He caught the afternoon train for Selma, and had to wait there overnight, for there was no train down the other side of the river till next morning. In this quietest and most charming of little southern cities Lockwood elaborated his plans. He bought a better hat; he bought another automatic pistol to replace the one that Blue Bob now carried. He slept soundly at the hotel, fortified with hope, and took the morning train for Bay Minette.

It rained in torrents during the night, and rained nearly all that morning as the slow train wound down the line, through the hills and pine woods, past scattered cotton and cornfields.

The rain had ceased when he reached Bay Minette, late in the afternoon, but it threatened to recommence at any moment. There was a motor repair shop that he knew, where a car could usually be hired, and he made straight for it. He wanted desperately to make Craig's camp that night; and he had no more than entered the shop than he perceived a mud-covered car that he knew well, being worked over in the repair pit.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE PAY CAR.

The car was fearfully incrusted with red, yellow, and white mud, but Lockwood recognized it at once as the light car that Craig used for sending out to the railroad. A moment later he espied, sitting stiffly upon a box in a corner, not Craig, indeed, but Williams, the camp foreman.

"Hello!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Just

what I wanted. What are you out for, Williams? I'll ride back with you."

"Howdy, Lockwood!" responded the foreman, looking almost equally pleased. "Where you been? Where'd you get them clothes? Craig's been gettin' right anxious about you. This is Friday, you know. I come out to the bank."

Lockwood had lost count of the days. On Fridays the car went out to the bank at Bay Minette to bring back the thousand dollars or so for the weekly pay roll.

"I oughter been back two hours ago," the turpentine man went on, "but the roads—O Lawd! I skidded every way—hadn't no chains on—and last thing, I skidded right inter a tree, and shook something outer gear."

"But what's the matter with you? You didn't get hurt?" asked Lockwood, observing Williams' constrained attitude.

"Kink in my back—strained it someways. Ch, I can drive all right, but I was wonderin' what I'd do if I had to get out to crank her. But you can go back with me, and it'll be all right."

It was after five o'clock when they started, with a little rain falling once more. They both sat in the front seat; the curtains were all closed, and the satchel containing the bank roll was wedged tightly between them on the seat.

Williams drove cautiously, squirming occasionally as he wrenched his lame back. Lockwood offered to take the wheel, but the foreman refused; he said he was used to this kind of road. But they had to proceed at the slowest pace to get any sort of security; at every turning the car skated sideways, and once almost turned end for end. Even more dangerous were the hollows, where the mud was deep, almost bottomless, it seemed. There was a chance of being "bogged down," so that it would take a team of mules to free the car. The creeks were up, too, spreading widely out of their channels, and occasionally an overflow crossed the road, so that they splashed through it half-hub deep for a hundred yards.

The rain increased a little. It was plainly going to get dark early.

"Got to get on faster than this," said Williams. "I wouldn't like to get caught in the dark, with the roads this way."

He increased the pace, taking chances, escaping accident by a continually narrow margin. It was not more than five or six

miles to the camp now; he began to recognize familiar landmarks. But it was one of the very worst bits of road, and they were driving slowly through a sea of liquid-yellow slime, when a man came out from the trees, a little ahead, with the evident intention of speaking to them.

Lockwood thought he wanted a lift, a thing usual enough. He wore a long, waterproof coat to his ankles, the high collar turned up to his nose, and a dripping, black hat pulled down to his eyes. Hardly an inch of his face could be seen. Williams slowed the car almost to a stop, to let him aboard. The man stepped on the running board, and pushed his head and shoulders through the curtains, with his hand thrust forward.

"Hand out that money you're carryin'!" he said in a hoarse, obviously disguised voice.

The hand held a black revolver. Lockwood glanced at it, and caught one flash of the great, glittering ring on the finger against the stock. He snatched open the side door and hurled himself like a projectile at the highwayman, clutching him around the neck.

They toppled off the car together, wallowing in the deep mire. The car rolled slowly past them. Lockwood heard a yell from Williams. Lockwood had the robber under him, fighting like a wild cat, and he thrust his mouth against the man's ear.

"You d—d fool! Run for your life!" he hissed at him, and jumped up, letting him go.

The road agent bounced up also, stared for one second, and then bolted into the dripping border of bay-tree swamp. Lockwood fired twice, aiming deliberately wide. Williams had stopped the car now, and was hobbling back, waving a gun.

"You didn't let him get away?" he called furiously.

Lockwood turned, mud from head to foot. "Couldn't help it," he said. "He had his gun on me. I wouldn't get shot just for Craig's pay roll."

"Well, I reckon you saved the pay roll, anyway," said Williams. "He had me plumb paralyzed just for a minute. Did you get a look at him?"

"Not so that I'd know him again. Hadn't we better move on? He might take a crack at us from the woods."

"Wish I could get a crack at him!" the foreman grumbled, peering at the dismal swamp edge. "Well, let's go. This'll scare Craig some. First time anybody got held

up here that I can remember. This here's a rough country, but there ain't no crime in it."

Lockwood had his own opinion about that. Crime seemed to be the only thing he had met since coming into the swamp country. And this unexpected encounter had suddenly changed all his attitude. He no longer dared to confide anything in Craig—not, at least, until he had seen Jackson Power again, and learned why the heir to a fortune came to be holding up the turpentine pay car. Very likely it was sheer criminal instinct, he thought. He did not see how it could be anything else; and he sickened of the whole loathsome tangle.

He was sick of it. He wanted to get out of it all, but he wanted to take Louise with him. She ought to be glad to go, too, he thought—almost as glad as she had been when she fled in girlhood from a home that was perhaps more squalid, but surely not more criminal.

They could go to New Orleans. As the car jolted and splashed, his weary mind hazily dissolved itself into dreams. He could always earn a living. Or they might settle on the Gulf coast. He liked the South; there was an ease and balm about it that was medicine to the soul—only not here, not at Rainbow Landing. He could plant a grove of Satsuma oranges or figs or pecans. He might get a partner and go into turpentine; he knew the business now and liked it. He would forget his past life. He would forget everything, even his revenge. If Louise would go with him he would leave Hanna and the rest of the Powers to swindle one another as they pleased, a nest of criminals together.

The glare of the lamps through the mist showed a pine tree by the road with a great livid blaze on its trunk. They were getting into the turpentined region. They turned down the woods trail to the camp. There was a great uproar at the news of the attempted holdup, when the car stopped at the commissary store. Lockwood got praise and welcome, but he could not talk. He was deadly tired, and every nerve and muscle seemed to ache. He got away to his old room as soon as he could, took a heavy dose of quinine and went to bed, where he fell as instantly asleep as if the medicine had been a knock-out drop.

He slept all night, and awoke feeling rested and considerably more optimistic. To

his astonishment, it was after eight o'clock, and a fine sunny day. He thought hard as he ate his breakfast, and then went to the store building and called the Power house on the telephone. At that hour Louise was likely to be there and alone.

"That you, Miss Power? This is Lockwood, just got back. I'm at the camp. I've found out things. I hope nothing has been done yet about the oil stock?"

"Not yet." Her voice sounded startled and tremulous. "But I thought you had gone away—left Alabama."

"Did Hanna say that? Has he been saying things about me?"

"Yes."

"I expected it. Would it be safe for me to come to see you?"

"I—I don't know. I'm afraid not."

"Well, I've got important things that I simply must tell you. That oil proposition was a fake, just as I thought—and other things, too. I must talk to you for ten minutes. I wonder if you'd mind meeting me somewhere—say down on the bayou, by the motor-boat shed?"

There was a silence. The telephone buzzed and whirred emptily.

"Yes," she said at last, in a somewhat cold voice. "If you have anything really important to tell me, I can see you. When will you be there?"

"Any time you like. Say in an hour."

"Very well." A pause. "In an hour, then. Good-by."

Lockwood changed his clothes and had his horse saddled and brought around. In half an hour he started for the rendezvous, fording the bayou, and riding down the opposite shore. No one was in sight about the little wharf where the motor boat was laid up. Over the treetops he could see the roof of Power's house, but it was nearly ten minutes before Louise appeared, coming down the path among the pines. He thought she greeted him with an air of distance, but he was not unprepared for this sort of reception.

"I'm sorry I had to ask you to come here —" he began, but she stopped him with a little impatient gesture.

"It doesn't matter. You had something important to say. What is it?"

"Hadn't you better tell me first what story Hanna has told you?" he suggested.

"No. How can I know— Oh, please say what you were going to."

"Very well." And Lockwood went on in brief and businesslike phrases to tell her of his investigations in Mobile, of his discoveries, and of Hanna's proposal.

She searched his face as he talked. Her brown eyes penetrated as if they would read his soul, but he could read nothing in those eyes, except that she was judging him and weighing every word.

"Hanna told us," she said slowly at last, "that you had tried to blackmail him, and threatened to ruin him unless he paid you a large sum of money. He declared that he had forced you to leave the South, under a threat of arrest. I never expected to see you again. Still, I didn't think you were that sort of man. I thought there must be some mistake. But the boys believed it. They were furious."

Lockwood was irritated at her cool and almost indifferent tone. It was for this that he had risked his life, and built his castles in the air!

"Well, I came back three nights ago on the boat, with all this information," he went on, in a recklessly casual tone himself. "Hanna had his friends to meet me—Blue Bob and his gang. They sand-bagged me and took me down the river in their house boat. Hanna came down to see me, and made me some more proposals. My finish was fixed for yesterday, I think. But I made a get-away."

Louise was looking at him now with wide eyes, with a different expression.

"You mean they nearly killed you?" she exclaimed. "You went through all that to help—us?"

"I didn't go through any more than I could help. It was my own feud, anyway. But now you've got Hanna where you want him. Tell your father what I've said; he's full of good sense. Tell him to telephone the Mobile board of trade about Pascagoula Oil—or maybe the chief of police would be better. Or, if you don't want to believe me so far," he went on recklessly, "I'll meet Hanna myself. We'll settle it as I meant to at first—a bullet in him or one in me."

Louise half turned away, putting one hand blindly to her throat.

"Oh, don't torture me!" she murmured. "You make it so hard—"

"What—to believe me?" Lockwood demanded pitilessly.

"To disbelieve you. Yes, I do believe everything you've told me!" she exclaimed

impulsively. "In spite of what anybody says."

"Remember, mine is not an impartial verdict," he warned her. "It's an enemy's word against Hanna. I've been trying to get him for years. Perhaps you'll think I'm little better than he is. I'm traveling under a false name, like him. Yes, my real name isn't Lockwood. I've thought of nothing but murder for years. And—you'll have to know—I've been in prison."

He did not know whether her wide eyes were full of horror or pity.

"It was a bank fraud. McGibbon—that is, Hanna—was my partner. He cooked the books and statements, drew money that I never knew about. It was my carelessness. I was no accountant, and I trusted him. I knew nothing about it, but I was legally responsible, and I was arrested. Hanna's testimony helped convict me, and he and his confederate got away with everything I owned in the world, while I went to jail.

"Listen, now. I've said too much not to say more. I'll have to tell you the whole wretched story, whether you want to hear it or not."

He told it rapidly, briefly, almost fiercely.

"I came here like a wolf," he said. "I was savage. I saw everything red and black. And then—"

"You came here like a powerful friend," said Louise. Through his excitement and doubt he felt a quality in her look that made him tingle. "I always believed in you. I think I'd believe in you through anything. You've passed through years of horror. They're over now. And now—"

She halted inarticulately, and seemed to sketch a little gesture of consolation.

"You'd believe me through anything, Louise?" he stammered. "You can't mean all that—all that—"

He found himself inarticulate, too. Groping for words, he took both hands of Louise. She let him have them; she was close to him, with her head thrown back. There was no resistance left in her—almost no life, it seemed, except that her eyes lighted with a wonderful glow, and when he kissed her he felt her lips cling passionately to his.

While that minute lasted the whole world spun round him. Then Louise stepped away from him, with an intense, quick exclamation of fright. Jackson Power was coming down the path among the pines. He had certainly seen them.

## CHAPTER XV.

## COUNTER PLOT.

If he had to be interrupted at that moment there was no man whom Lockwood would rather have seen. Young Jackson came on slowly; he was wearing his gay summer clothes, with his hands clenched in his coat pockets, perhaps on a pistol, and his face looked wretched and haggard.

He gave Lockwood a glance of mingled doubt and defiance, and turned upon his sister.

"What you doin' here, Louise?" he said. "You better go back to the house."

She hesitated, speechless, looking from one to the other of them in terror.

"Yes, you'd better go, Miss Power," Lockwood put in. "I want to have a talk with your brother. He's just the man I wanted to see—about the things we were discussing. Don't be afraid. It'll be all right."

Louise still hesitated, not reassured, and then started without a word up the pathway. Lockwood saw her looking nervously over her shoulder till she was out of sight.

"Now what's all this about? How come I find you here like this with my sister?" demanded Jackson, trying to be aggressive.

"Say, Jackson, do you want your sister to marry Hanna?" Lockwood asked.

"Nuther him nor you! What's that got to do with it. I heard of the dirty trick you tried to work on him down in Mobile."

"And you believed it?"

"Course we did. Why not? Tom'd shoot you on sight if he saw you. Good thing it was me come down here 'stead of him."

"Well, it was all a d—d lie," said Lockwood. He looked the boy over with a smile. He felt too exultant, too excited in that moment to have the slightest resentment. In spite of his bravado Jackson looked like a defiant and frightened schoolboy, and Lockwood half smiled at him with sympathy and liking.

"Sit down on that log," he said. "I want to talk to you. You young devil, what sort of scrape have you been getting into now? Of course, I knew you on the road last night. What did you try to hold us up for? You didn't need the money."

The boy sat down heavily on the log and took his hands out of his pockets. His aggressiveness evaporated suddenly.

"I reckon you've got the whip hand of me," he said sullenly. "Course I knowed

you knew me when you turned me loose. Well, how much do you want? Seems like I've got to buy off the hull earth."

"You haven't got to buy me, anyway. Who have you got to buy off? I don't want anything. I'm in this as your friend, and I believe you need one mighty bad. See here! I'm going to tell you something. For over three years I've been looking for Hanna to kill him."

Jackson glanced up doubtfully, but with a flash of interest—possibly of sympathy.

"What's Hanna done to you?" he asked.

"Everything. He got all I had in the world, just as he's trying to do to you. He got me sent to prison on the top of it."

Once more Lockwood told the story of his wrongs and his long hunt for vengeance.

"Now I've got the brute cornered," he finished, after describing his escape from the house boat. "I've spoiled his game, and he knows it. You talk to your sister. Take her opinion. She's seen a bit of the world. You don't want Hanna to skin you alive, do you? Will you back me up?"

"I reckon you've both got me—you an' Hanna," said Jackson wearily. "I reckon it looked bad to you, last night, didn't it? It wasn't as bad as it looked, though. My gun wasn't loaded. I didn't want to hold up that thar car."

"Then what the deuce did you do it for?"

Jackson scrutinized him with gloomy, boyish eyes, eyes so like those of his sister that they moved Lockwood's heart.

"Say, Lockwood, I always kinder took to you," he said. "I couldn't hardly believe them yarns Hanna told about you. I dunno hardly who to believe now. But I reckon I might as well tell you. Looks to me like it's got so bad now that it won't end till somebody's killed—you or me or Hanna or Blue Bob."

"So Blue Bob is in it," Lockwood remarked.

"Sure. It's him is at the bottom of it. He made me do that holdup. You know I used to run with Bob's gang a whole lot, when we was pore an' lived up the river. I was up to most any sort of devilment them days—didn't have no more sense. Them boys sure was a rough crew. They used to raid warehouses along the river. But I never was in any of that."

"I reckon," he went on after a dubious pause, "you've mebbe heerd about Jeff Forder gettin' killed. You ain't? It was

three years ago, an' they ain't never yet found out who killed him. Jeff was a lazy, no-count piny-woods squatter from 'cross the river, an' we was all playin' poker on Bob's boat. The boys had considerable money that night an' I was a-winnin' it. Jeff had brought over a gallon of corn liquor, an' liquor always did make Jeff right mean. First thing I remember, Jeff an' me got to cussin' over a pot, an' the next thing was that everybody's guns was all a-goin' off at once. An' there was Jeff laid out stiff.

"I dunno who shot him. I know I pulled my gun an' blazed like all the rest. They all said it was me. I reckon likely it was. Anyways, they told me to get outer the State an' lay low. Bob said he'd keep it dark. I went an' hid in the swamps for a week, an' most starved, an' then went home. Nobody never was indicted for that killin'. Bob told me they sunk the body in the river, and it was all safe. Mebbe I'd never had no trouble if we hadn't come into that money.

"After that, Bob kept hangin' round. He touched me up for a hundred dollars. I didn't mind givin' it to him. Shucks! Bob was an old friend, an' he'd got me outer a scrape, an' what's a hundred dollars? But then he touched me up again, an' he kept right on. At last I kicked, an' then he told me right out that he knew I killed Jeff Forder, an' I just nachrilly had to give him what he wanted."

"So you've been buying him off ever since?"

"I sure have. He must have got two or three thousand outer me, all together."

"Did Hanna know anything about this?"

"Yes, he did. I dunno how. But he always stood by me. He helped me get money outer the old man on some excuse or another, when I had to pay Bob. Hanna surely helped me a whole lot. Bob used to come and blow the horn for me to go down an' meet him in the woods, and I had to blow back. Lots of times I used to get Hanna to go to meet Bob 'stead of me, 'cause I was afraid to be seen near that cursed boat. Yes, Hanna sure helped me a whole lot there."

"Yes, I reckon he did!" said Lockwood with irony. "I'll bet Hanna got his rake-off on that blackmail. But how did all this bring you to hold up Craig's car?"

"Why, Bob blowed for me yesterday and said he'd got to have a thousand dollars. It was the last time, he said. They was all

goin' to Mobile, an' then way up the Warrior River, an' clear outer the Alabama for good. I was sure glad to hear it. But I didn't have no thousand dollars. I couldn't raise it that day noways. Then Bob put me up to stoppin' the car. He said Williams was all alone, with twelve hundred dollars on him, and it'd be dead easy. I was that desperate I didn't care much whether I got the money or Williams shot me. I ain't seen Bob since. I dunno what's goin' to happen when he finds I ain't got the thousand dollars, but I'm right in a corner now, an' I'll fight."

"That's the talk!" cried Lockwood. "I'll see you through. Don't be afraid. That river gang would never lay any information against you. They're scared themselves of —why, look here!" he exclaimed, as a flash of opportune memory came back to him. "I believe I've got it! Did you carry an automatic pistol the night of that killing?"

"No, I had a .38 Smith & Wesson."

"Then I'll bet you never shot anybody. It seems that you were all drunk. You don't know what happened. But here's what I heard on Bob's boat." And he repeated the snatches of accusation and recrimination he had overheard.

"That's right! Bob did have an automatic. He gave it to me afterward. But I never knowed that it was an automatic bullet that killed Jeff," said Jackson. "Lord! if that's only so! I'd be a free man again. I've felt the rope around my neck for three years."

"I'm sure it's so. Bob gave you the automatic afterward, you said. He'd have sworn that you'd had it all the time."

"I'll kill him for that!" Jackson burst out hotly.

"No, we don't want him killed. But you can bluff him now; you've got the cards. He's got no hold over you. Tell him so. Get it all over."

"Bob was expectin' me to blow for him to-day," said Jackson. "If I don't call him, he'll sure come after me."

"Call him up to-night, then. Do you know where he is? Is it far?"

"Not so very far. I could make him hear. But say! If I'm goin' to meet Bob's gang, you've got to come with me. There's liable to be shootin'."

"I'm afraid there is sure to be shooting as soon as Bob sees me," said Lockwood. He shrunk from going aboard that fatal house

boat again. "All right; I'll go along. But I'd better keep back where they won't see me unless it's necessary."

"Bring a gun," the boy advised. "And what about Hanna?"

"There'll be no trouble with Hanna, if you stand by me. He'll have to give up all he's got from you. He's got the money put away somewhere. Everything'll be all right then."

"And what do you get out of it?" the boy grinned a little. "I reckon I know what you're hopin' to get."

"I reckon you do."

"Well, if it all turns out as you say, you'll sure deserve to get it." He reflected, dismissing this triviality from his mind. "I s'pose we might as well do as you say, an' get it over. I could meet you here at the motor boat. No, we'd better take the car. The road's bad, but I could drive it with my eyes shut, I've been over it that often. The place is only about two miles, an' I'll blow for Bob from there."

"Can you meet me somewhere? I can't come here."

"I'll get you at the camp. The road goes down that way. I'll be there about nine o'clock. And say!" he added, with a last suspicion, "if there's anything crooked about this, you an' me don't both come back alive!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE AMBUSH.

Lockwood was waiting a long time before nine o'clock, walking slowly up the trail as he waited, until he reached the main road. He was afraid that Jackson would not come after all. He was relieved and almost surprised when he saw the lights of the car glaring down the road toward him.

"Glad you come up here," said Jackson, stopping. "We'll do better to go round a little. This woods road is no good after a rain."

They went straight down the road, with its sand almost hard and dry again after a day of blazing sun. Jackson drove at a recklessly fast pace, smoking a cigarette, watching the road that glowed and vanished under the lamp rays. A little mist was rising.

"I had trouble to get away," said Jackson. "Sis wanted to know where I was goin'. I wouldn't tell her. Reckon she thought it was a poker game somewhere. Hanna saw me, too, but he didn't say nothin'."

They passed a group of buildings, a deserted house and small barn. To the left a dim opening appeared among the pines, apparently a mere trail.

"Here's where we turn off," said the driver. "Lucky it's a sandy road."

For a few hundred yards they went between pines, mostly scarred with Craig's turpentine mark. The wheels splashed through a tiny, unbridged creek. The pines gave way to cypress and sycamore and bay trees, tall black shapes whose branches almost met over the roadway. The wheels ran noiselessly on the stoneless ground. The sky seemed black as the earth; there was nothing but the long bars of brilliance cast through the haze by the lamps, falling on unending tree trunks, peeled white trunks, dark trunks overrun with creepers, tall spikes of bear grass, jungles of ti-ti.

Lockwood lost all knowledge of where he was going. The trail wound and curved, but young Power seemed to know it like the palm of his hand. Then the road rose a little. Lockwood caught the ghostly gleam of trees marked with the turpentine gash, and Jackson stopped the car.

"We're close there now," he said. "Reckon we'll leave the car here. Better turn her round, though," he added. "An' I'll leave the engine runnin'. We might want to get away right quick."

There was a little open ground at one side, and he ran the car off the trail and turned it around. They left it behind a clump of small pines, and groped forward on foot. Within fifty yards the road widened. There was a breath of cooler air. A wide-open space lay ahead. As he advanced he saw that it was the dark expanse of the river.

There was a clear space of perhaps half an acre on the shore, closed on three sides by dense woods, except where the road entered. It was a small, seldom-used landing where cotton and sirup were occasionally shipped, and a square, board warehouse stood on high posts close to the water.

"This here's where I generally meet 'em," said Jackson in a low voice. "Reckon Bob's got his boat not fur away. I'll give him a blow."

From his pocket he produced the hunter's horn, put it to his mouth and blew a long, melodious blast that echoed for several minutes from far-away over the woods. They listened. Away down the river a deep, dis-

tant roar came as if in answer. Jackson laughed.

"Guess that ain't him. That's the boat comin' up. Forgot she was due to-night. Hark! There he is!"

A mile or two away—Lockwood could not guess the distance—another horn blew musically, rising, falling, dying into silence.

"All right. Bob'll be here right soon," said the boy. "Better fix what we're a-goin' to do."

Lockwood walked back to the dark warehouse.

"I'll stay back here," he said. "I'll hear and see what goes on, and I'll be by you in a second if you need me. Just let Blue Bob know that he's done fooling you, and he'll give in."

Jackson nodded somewhat dubiously, and walked out into the open space before the warehouse, while Lockwood leaned against the corner of the building, and they waited.

Miles away again they heard the roar of the river steamer. Looking down, Lockwood caught a glimpse of her searchlight over the trees, like sheet lightning on the sky. The river surged past at his feet, running strong with the recent rains. Drift of plank and timber went dimly by. Fifteen or twenty minutes passed nervously. They seemed an hour. Jackson had lighted a cigarette, and walked up and down as he smoked, invisible but for the moving spark of fire. Then there was a faint, low call from the edge of the woods. The boy stopped sharply, answered it; and then a trail of moving shapes came out into the clearing. Bob had brought his whole boat's crew.

Jackson stepped forward to meet them. There was a low mutter.

"No, I ain't got it," he heard Jackson say.

There was an explosion of oaths. Some one went back to the woods, came back with something, struck a match, and instantly there was a flare of light. He had stuck the match into a turpentine cup half full of gum, and it burned with the fierce flare of a torch, rolling black smoke and casting a red glow on the woods and the three sinister figures that fronted young Power.

Lockwood stepped farther back behind the building. He could not come near enough now to hear ordinary talk, but he could at any rate see. The four men had their heads together, talking rapidly. He saw Jackson gesticulate defiance. The group surged

apart. Tensely ready, Lockwood drew his automatic, and then—he did not know how it happened—half a dozen shots seemed to crash at once.

Jackson jumped back, his hand spouting flashes. Some one knocked over the turpentine cup. Darkness fell, except for the burning streams of liquid gum that flowed over the sand. Lockwood leaped out of his ambush. As he did so, swift as machine-gun fire, four shots flashed from the edge of the woods. In the flashes he saw Hanna's face plainly behind the pistol. Jackson spun round and dropped. He struggled to get up, tumbled again and lay still.

Lockwood had instantly turned his own pistol on the ambushed murderer, now invisible. He fired three—four times into the darkness where he had seen Hanna's face, running forward as he fired, into the light of the gum that smoked and flamed on the ground. He had forgotten the river men for a moment, till he heard a roar of amazement and fury from Blue Bob.

The next moment the darkness was criss-crossed by gun flashes, springing from shadowy hands. Lockwood found himself firing wildly at those leaping flames. Something knocked the pistol out of his grasp with a shock that almost paralyzed his arm. At the same instant there was a fierce burn on the top of his shoulder.

He dropped to his knees, confused and stunned. He groped dimly with his left hand for the pistol. A clump of weeds caught from the creeping fire and flared suddenly high. In the swift illumination he saw Jackson's body lying still with outflung arms, the face unrecognizable with blood. He saw the river pirates ten yards back, and they saw him. There was a simultaneous crash of pistol shots. Sand flew into his face. He made a dive back toward the warehouse, and the brief blaze of the weeds went out.

Lockwood dodged around to the rear of the building in the pitch dark. He heard Bob shouting to relight the gum cup; and then the loose ground caved under his feet, and he plunged unexpectedly. Water went over him. The swift inshore eddy dragged him out, rolling him over and over. Half blinded and dazed, he saw a great flare of light arising on the shore; the torch had been lighted again. Instinctively he ducked under, holding his breath. Coming up, the bulk of the warehouse shut off the light. He

was getting his wits back now, and he struck out, aiding the swift current with his arms and legs.

His right arm was still numbed, however, and of little use. His wet clothing weighted him heavily. Desperately anxious to get out of pistol range of shore, he swam with all his strength, and then something went over him in the dark, crushing him down, scratching his face.

He fought his way up through a tangle of wet twigs, clutched a large branch, and found himself clinging to the branchy top of a dead tree that was drifting fast down the stream. Dimly distinguishing its outline, he worked himself along to the trunk, got his head and shoulders on it, and rested.

He heard the deep, distant bellow of the river steamer again. On the shore, now a hundred yards away, he saw a group of men bending over something on the earth, in the lurid glare of the gum torch. He could not see whether Hanna was among them; he thought not.

The scene went out of sight as the current swept him behind a wooded point. It was the end of poor Jackson. If he were not shot dead he would be presently finished; and his body, too, would go rolling down the Alabama eddies. It meant the end of Hanna, too. Lockwood had a vague plan of heading a lynching party, if he ever got ashore. But Hanna's downfall had cost too much.

The tree drifted and swirled about on the twisting currents. He clung to it for life, for he felt now that he would surely go to the bottom if he let go. Twice again he heard the tremendous nearing blast of the steamboat, and occasionally saw the wavering, white ray of her searchlight playing among the treetops. He was numbed and cold and half stupefied; and clung to the treetop with the instinct of desperation.

He was roused suddenly. A blinding glare like the sun was turned into his eyes. It shifted; down the next curve below he saw the white bulk of the steamer, magnified by the mist, like a vast mass of incandescence, poking out the long tentacle of her searchlight. She glowed all over with electric light, reflected from her white paint, and on either side she carried the low, black bulk of a loaded barge.

Lockwood thought of trying to signal, but they could not see him without turning the searchlight on him again. The crash of her stern paddles drowned the shout he set up.

She might pass him—she might run him down—she might grind him up in her paddles. He could do nothing to affect his destiny. He watched the white bulk looming larger, hearing the increasing crash of her machinery.

For a moment he thought she was going right over him. The bluff prow seemed aimed straight at his head. Then she veered a little. He could see the pilot high in his glass box; he caught the red flash from her furnace on the lower deck; and then she surged ponderously by, and the bow of the left-hand barge brushed smashing through the twigs of his tree.

He made a scrambling leap. The side of the barge was not two feet out of water, and he caught the rough planking, held on, and dragged himself aboard. Nobody was on the barge. He dropped behind the heaped crates and barrels and lay there.

The boat crashed and swallowed up the river. He saw the warehouse at that fatal landing as they passed it. No light showed there now. The tragedy was over. He fancied the murderous scattering in the darkness. In an hour Blue Bob's house boat would be driving full speed for Mobile. He did not care about Blue Bob, but he was determined that this should be the end of Hanna's rope.

Within fifteen minutes the boat blew for Rainbow Landing, still two or three miles away. Lockwood's head was clearing, his strength coming back. He lay quietly in the dark behind the freight until the boat rounded in to the warehouse opposite the scarlet-striped bluff. When the gangplank was down he made his way through the roundabouts and went ashore, without any one having detected his stolen ride.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RESURRECTION.

He slipped through the warehouse and up the hill to the road. It was intensely dark, but he knew the way this time. He hurried, full of the driving energy of revenge. Then for the first time the horror came upon him of the difficulty of going to the Power house with the story of their son's death. Jackson had been the favorite of his sister and of his father. It would look as if he had led the boy into an ambush. But it could not be helped; the story would have to be told. Within an hour they would have a posse out.

It was late for that country district, but he saw unexpected lights in the houses he passed. From Ferrell's store a couple of riders dashed out and tore past him, shouting something back in the darkness. A buggy drove out from a farm lane and turned in the same direction rapidly, not hearing Lockwood's shout for a lift.

He pounded along the road, short of breath, dreading more and more to reach the end, but at last came in sight of the Power gateway.

He had expected to find the house dark, but it was all ablaze with lights. In the front yard the lights of a big motor car glared, and he saw several horses tied to trees before the house. Dim figures were moving on the gallery before the lighted door and windows.

Amazed, but too breathless to think, he ran through the yard and up the steps. There were rifles leaning on the gallery rail. The hall seemed to be full of men; he guessed instantly that his news had somehow arrived before him. Nearly all were men he knew. There was a sudden dead silence, and every face turned toward him with a look of startled incredulity, as if his appearance were something supernatural.

It checked the words on Lockwood's lips. Puzzled, he took one step into the hall, and almost collided with Tom Power, hatted and dressed for riding, with a great revolver slung at his belt. For one second Tom also stared open-mouthed; then he clutched Lockwood's throat with a leap, crushing him back against the wall.

"You d—d murderer! Where's Jackson?" he snarled between his teeth.

It broke the spell. The crowd surged forward, with a growl like an awakened beast. Lockwood wrenched away Tom's grip on his neck.

"What's the matter?" he began chokingly. "I came to tell you—Jackson's shot. I came to raise a posse."

"The nerve he had to come back here!" somebody said at the edge of the crowd.

"Saves us a heap of trouble," was the reply.

"We've got the posse," said Tom grimly. "You needn't bother about no posse. All you need's a rope."

"Here's the rope," some one called out. Old Henry Power pushed his way in, also belted with a gun. His eyes were blood-

shot; he looked wrinkled and aged, but as deadly inflexible as fate.

"Do it all in order, boys," he said. "He'll git what's due him. Let him say what he wants ter."

Lockwood cast his eye desperately over the mob. He wondered where Louise was—doubtless shut in her room. He looked for some members of the turpentine camp. They were all his friends, but he saw none of them.

"You're making some awful mistake!" he cried. "I didn't shoot Jackson. I saw it all. It was Hanna—Hanna and Blue Bob's gang. Give me a chance, won't you? Phone over for Charley Craig."

"We don't need none of the turpentine men in this," said Tom. "Look for his gun, some of you-all."

"He ain't got no gun," a man reported after exploring. Lockwood's automatic, in fact, still lay by the river shore.

"Must have throwed it away. Never mind. Git him outer this."

"Plenty of good trees right in the yard," a voice called.

"No—no, not here. We'll take him down the road a ways," said Tom hastily.

He was hustled out of the gallery. Lockwood had never before met the hostility of a mob. It is something that cows and crushes the spirit. He lost his head; he tried stumblingly to tell his story as they were shoving him down the steps. Nobody paid him any attention. His words sounded weak even to himself. He saw a man carrying a heap of loose rope over his arm.

At that moment Hanna came hastily out from the rear hall, wearing hat and leggings, and carrying a rifle. At sight of Lockwood he stopped dead, a sort of wild amazement on his face, changing to a fire of victory and vindictiveness. He crowded forward close to the prisoner.

"Where'd you get him?" he exclaimed. "He didn't come here himself?" He thrust his face close up to Lockwood's. "Thought you played a sharp trick!" he said in a piercing undertone. "But I knew I'd beat you! I've got you on the end of a rope now—you fool!"

Lockwood faced those malevolent eyes, and their fierce exultation whipped his scattered wits together.

"Listen, all of you men!" he shouted. "This is the man that killed Jackson—this Hanna here. He was ambushed by the

river; he fired four shots. I saw him as plain as I do now. What lie has he told you?"

"Tell him. Tell him, Hanna. Let him hear what's agin' him," said two or three voices.

"Well, I was ambushed there sure enough," said Hanna easily. "I'd seen Jackson starting down the river road in the car with this fellow, and I guessed he was up to no good. So I got a horse and rode after them. You-all saw me go," nodding to Tom and his father. "I wasn't long behind 'em, but I wasn't quick enough. Just as I came to the landing this fellow shot Jackson twice in the back, and slung his body straight into the river. I yelled and emptied my gun at him. Looks like I touched him, too, for he slipped or jumped into the river himself. I couldn't see anything of either of 'em. It was pitch dark. I got on my horse and rode back here quick as I could to get some men out. I left the car. I reckon it's there yet. I ought to have brought it, but I was badly rattled. I guess that's proof enough to hang him, ain't it?"

"Proof?" echoed Lockwood, with the energy of final desperation. "It's his word against mine. That man would do anything—he'd swear to anything, to put me out of the way. I know too much about him—I've been after him too long—I've got evidence to send him to prison for the rest of his life, and he knows it."

"Do you know who this man is, Henry Power, and you, Tom? He's a professional criminal, a crook, a confidence man. I've got his record. He's been bleeding you ever since he's been here, charging you double for everything you bought, planning to get your last cent with his fake oil stock. I found out all about that oil stock. Telephone to Mobile before you doubt me. It isn't the first time he's played this game. It's his trade."

He turned fiercely upon Hanna, who was listening with a fixed half smile.

"You don't know me, do you? But do you remember Melbourne, Virginia, and the real-estate business that you wrecked there? Do you remember the papers you forged and the lies you swore to to get me jailed while you got away with everything I had? I've been after you ever since. I followed you all over this continent. I knew you the minute I saw you here. I ought to have shot you that minute. Do you know me now, Ed McGibbon?"

The smile had died from Hanna's face. He stepped slightly back, his jaw half dropping, staring as if a ghost had risen before his eyes. Every man's gaze was turned on him now. He made an obvious effort to recover himself, moistening his lips.

"He did give me a start," he said. "Yes, I know him, but I thought he was dead years ago. He was once in partnership with me up North, but he turned out a crook and a grafter, and he got into jail, as he says. I did all I could to save him. Looks like he's been going from bad to worse ever since."

"You liar!" Lockwood vociferated. "Look at him, men. Look at his face! He daren't front me. Get the whole story—both sides—or put me up against him right now with a gun—with a knife—"

"This is foolishness!" Hanna broke in. "I ain't going to fight a murderer. I saw him shoot young Jackson. You're not going to let him get away with that, are you? Where'll we hang him up?"

Nobody replied. The crowd gazed curiously at both men. The furious vehemence of Lockwood's attack had made its impression. Even Tom hung silent, fumbling with his pistol butt. In the hush sounded the beating of a motor car traveling up the road.

"Who's that comin'?" some one spoke.

The car crawled laboriously, it seemed, through deep sand, and turned in Power's gate. It wabbled drunkenly as it came up the drive. The glare of its lamps flashed across the group of men as it curved, steering wildly as if it was going to run through the lynching party. It stopped with a jerk. Lockwood saw that there was only one man in it, huddled over the wheel. He made an unsteady effort to rise, to get out, and fell almost doubled over the door.

"My Lawd A'mighty!" muttered the nearest man, in an awed voice.

"Jackson!" shouted old Henry, with a tremendous oath, rushing at the car. He tore open the door, threw his arms around the collapsed figure, half lifted it out, with broken, blasphemous ejaculations. Lockwood was just behind him. He caught a glimpse of the hatless, pallid face of the boy, grotesquely streaked with blood, the wet, torn clothing. The crowd surged up behind them, forgetting both Lockwood and Hanna in the amazement of this apparition that was like a resurrection from the dead.

Tom, his arm about his brother's shoulder, was crying in his face:

"Who done it, Jackson? Who done it? Who shot you?"

The boy's face worked. His eyes opened, and he rubbed his wet sleeve across them.

"Got yere!" he mumbled with the ghost of a chuckle. "They done throwed me in the river, but I got out. Knowed I could drive home ef I could start the d—d cyar. Hello, Lockwood!" catching sight of him. "Did they git you, too?"

"Not quite," said Lockwood, speaking distinctly in the boy's face. "Tell them who shot you, Jackson. Could you see?"

"Sure I seen him," said Jackson faintly. "Seen him in the gun flash. I seen—— By glory! thar he is now!"

He had caught sight of Hanna's scared face as the crowd shifted. He seemed to collect himself with a vast effort, and swung up his arm, the hand closed, as if he fancied it still held a gun. For two or three seconds Hanna faced that unsteady, wavering arm; then his nerve broke. He gave a swift glance to right and left, ducked under the arms of the men next him, and bolted, disappearing toward the rear of the house.

There was an instant yelling rush in pursuit. Gun flashes split the darkness. Lockwood was left alone with Henry Power, still supporting Jackson's almost inert body.

"Must get him into the house—put him to bed," he said.

Between them they carried the boy into the hall and up the stairs. On the upper floor a door opened and Louise came out, carrying a lamp. She looked drained of life and color, dead-white, her eyes wide and liquid and terrified.

"It's all right," Lockwood said quickly. "Your brother's back—not badly hurt, I think. We'll get him to bed. And Hanna's bolted. Everything's going to be all right now. Will you telephone for a doctor?"

Louise gave him a wonderful, luminous look, seemed to try to speak, and choked.

They laid Jackson on his bed. He had a wound through the upper left arm; a bullet had torn one ear and gashed his cheek, making a terrible bleeding, and there was a bloody furrow across the top of his head, which probably had most to do with his state. But none of these hurts appeared serious.

And as Lockwood bent over the patient he heard down on the bayou the rapid, sharp explosions of a motor boat, diminishing to a distant drumming.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE LABYRINTH.

The men were straggling back, talking loudly and excitedly in the darkness. As he ran down the stairs Lockwood met Tom on the gallery, hot, furious, defeated.

"How is he?" asked Tom.

"Jackson's not so bad," returned Lockwood. "Think he'll be all right. We've phoned for the doctor. Hanna got away?"

"Yes, in the motor boat. He was a-scootin' down the bayou 'fore we could git near him. But we'll git him!" He hesitated. "Reckon there's all kinds of apologies comin' to you, Lockwood. I'm mighty sorry——"

"Sure, we're all mighty sorry," put in Postmaster Ferrell. "We never——"

"Never mind about that! I know where he's gone," said Lockwood instantly. "He's after his friends—Blue Bob and the house boat, down the river. Can't we get another motor boat?"

"Nearest motor boat's at Foster's Mills," said Ferrell. "It's eleven miles."

"Get into the car!" cried Tom. "We can git there 'fore he does. Come on, Lockwood. Got a gun?"

Somebody handed him a revolver. He jumped into the front seat beside Tom. Three men piled into the rear—Jim Ferrell, the son of the postmaster, one of the Fenway boys who had played poker at that house, and a third man whom he did not know.

Tom drove at a reckless clip. Down the hill they went, over the creek, up past the post office to the crossroads, and then turned south down a road that Lockwood had never before traveled. Leaning over, he sketched his story half breathlessly into Tom's ear, the words jolted from his teeth by the speed of their travel.

"I dunno why that young fool didn't tell me the fix he was in," said Tom. "Between us, we'd have fixed Blue Bob. Hanna was playin' us all for suckers, seems like."

The road seemed to be following the river. Twice Lockwood caught a glimpse of the wide, black water. Halfway, and a tire blew out. It took ten feverish minutes to place the spare one. They rushed through an endless swamp, where the road wound in short, dangerous curves, and then came in sight of Foster's Mills—a little village of cabins and frame houses around the great sheds of the sawmills, all utterly dark.

Springing out, Tom rushed up to Foster's

own dwelling and beat on the door. A window opened; there was a startled exclamation, and in two minutes Foster came out at a run, in shirt and trousers.

"Sure you-all can have the boat!" he exclaimed, starting toward the river. "Here, this way! I heerd something goin' down the river with engines, I reckon not quarter of an hour ago."

"A motor boat?" cried Lockwood.

"Mebbe. Sounded heavy for a motor boat, though. I didn't look out, and it was too dark anyway to see nothin'."

"Bob's house boat, you bet!" exclaimed Ferrell.

"Never mind. She can't make six miles an hour," cried Lockwood.

"We'll never find nothin' in this dark—an' there's fog, too!" Tom muttered. "Well—come along!"

Packed together in the boat, they put out, with Power at the wheel. The glaring lights of the car on the landing went dim. There was a little mist lying low on the water, mixing with the darkness, making obscurity doubly blank. The river surged and gurgled about them almost invisibly, and overhead the stars looked few and lightless.

"Not a bit of use in this," said Tom, after running a couple of miles. "We can't see nothin', and they'll hear us comin', and just lay up by the bank and let us go by."

He stopped the engine. The boat drifted, and in the silence they all listened, but vainly, for the sound of another motor.

"But by daylight they'll be all the way to Mobile," Lockwood objected.

"I reckon not. I reckon they'll be makin' for the delta. That's where them river pirates always hides out," said Fenway.

Power steered toward the left bank, skirted it a little way, and ran in at a place where there seemed to be high and dry land. They scrambled ashore silently, with a sense of being checked. Two of the men groped for wood and lighted a smudge to keep off the mosquitoes. Tom sat down humped at the foot of a tree, his chin almost on his knees.

Lockwood was tired, hungry, overstrung, but he felt no need of either sleep or rest. He walked up and down in the darkness for some time, smoking intermittently, anxious only for light that they might go ahead. Flashes from his past misery and hatred passed over him, mixing feverishly with his visions of the future. He remembered the

wonderful look Louise had given him; he remembered Hanna's exultant, vindictive face. Both filled him with the same passion of action. He was boiling with exultation and vindictiveness himself.

It was scarcely an hour past midnight. Young Fenway was snoring, lying face down on pine needles. Lockwood felt of a sudden desperately weary, and lay down. He did not think he could sleep, but he slept. He roused two or three times from vague nightmares, and slept again, till he was awakened by Ferrell shaking his shoulder.

Within five minutes the boat was thudding down the river again. Daylight was in the air. The mist had vanished even before the dawn, and clung only in pale streaks on the water or lay white over the great swamps ashore. For half a mile they went straight downward, and then Tom steered across to investigate a creek mouth where a boat might lie hidden.

But there was nothing in it. Down they went again, sweeping around one after another of the vast curves of the river, empty always of life, looking as deserted as it must have looked when De Soto's canoes first sailed it.

"They've sure made for the delta," he heard repeated more than once.

They had lost time in zigzagging investigations from one shore to another, and it was still more than half an hour before they actually came in sight of the low swamps of the delta itself, where the Tombigbee River joined the Alabama, both streams splitting into a multiplicity of channels, bayous, creeks, flowing sometimes in opposite directions, through a wild tangle of swamp. Few white men claimed to know the delta, and few men had explored it except some half-wild negro hunters, and the house-boat men who made a refuge of its intricacies.

The river swept away to the west in a great curve. A second channel split away, possibly at one time the main channel of the ever-shifting river. It was a crooked, deep, sluggish backwater now, flowing between white, dead timber, and a jungle of ti-ti, black gum, and bay tree. Tom surveyed it dubiously.

"Blue Bob'll shore get off the main channel," said Fenway. "Looks like this is just his place."

He steered into the shadow of the swamp. Fog still seemed to linger here, with a heavy, malarial smell. Great curtains of gray, Span-

ish moss hung over the rotting channel. Blackened snags of cypress thrust up from the bottom, and mosquitoes attacked them in clouds, with the worse-biting yellow flies.

No boat was anywhere in sight. A little farther a second channel seemed to open, but it extended only a hundred feet, and ended in a mud bank where half a dozen snakes aired themselves. The tortuous waterway doubled on itself. The woods ceased. They came into a deep, still channel between a great tract of tall weeds and reeds, backed by forests of vivid pine.

There was no concealment for anything there. The power boat rushed through one cross channel after another to the edge of the woods again. At the very margin, something swift and invisible went tingling through the air so close that everybody ducked. Whack! it struck a tree.

"Where'd that come from?" cried Tom, stopping the boat instantly.

Nobody had heard the report, drowned by the noise of their own engines; but as they listened tensely they heard the diminishing thud-thud of a motor launch. Impossible to say where it was. The sound seemed to spread and echo indefinitely in that maze of trees and water. It was dying away. Tom started the boat fast ahead into the swamp. Within fifty yards the crooked channel was blocked by fallen timber. He turned with difficulty, ran back to the great green meadow, and drove through the crisscross channels seeking a way out. He found one and they raced through it; but the distant thudding had long become silent, and now not one of them had any idea in which direction it had gone.

"Might hunt through this d—d place till you lost yourself, an' find nothin'!" young Ferrell growled.

For nearly three hours the boat wound in and out this ghastly labyrinth of swamp and bayou and jungle. It was certain now that the enemy was somewhere in the delta, but it seemed to Lockwood that anybody with the slightest cunning need never be caught in that place at all.

The other men, bred on the Alabama as they were, were almost as much at a loss as himself. Not one of them had ever explored the delta so deeply; perhaps no other white man's boat at all had treaded it so far. Time and again they had to turn back; continually they diverged into fresh, mysterious tangles. They came out once more into the

Alabama, went clear around the tip of the "delta" and some way up the Tombigbee, then cut into a wide, briskly flowing stream that seemed to connect the two rivers.

It really brought them to the Alabama again. A bayou diverged from it parallel to the latter river, a hundred feet of swamp between them. The bayou crooked like an elbow; it was impossible to see far, and Tom steered the boat into it. Both banks were grown up with thickets of ti-ti and bay tree, tangled with rattan and trumpet flower, and they thumped slowly down the muddy water, peering ahead to see around the bend.

They were just at the tip of the elbow, when Ferrell threw up his arm, pointing at the shore alongside.

"What's that yander?" he yelled. "Stop her—it's—"

Lockwood's startled eye caught the loom of something gray and houselike behind the screen of shrubbery. He saw the unmistakable varnished glimmer of the motor boat; and then all the greenery suddenly spurted smoke.

The air was full of a whiz and tingle. One—two bullets ripped the boat's side. The Fenway boy reeled over, clutching his arm that ran blood. Ferrell let off both barrels of his shotgun wildly, and Tom, putting on full speed, ran ahead out of the storm and down the bayou. Dropping revolver shots followed them, falling astern. A hundred yards down Power eased the boat, drawing close inshore for shelter.

"Well, we've done found 'em!" he said grimly.

The boat had two holes through her, but Fenway was the only casualty. His was not a serious wound, but it was his right arm, and he was henceforth out of the fighting.

"They'd 'a' let us run right by ef we hadn't seen 'em," said young Ferrell. "Just one second, I seen the boat plain."

"And I saw the motor boat. Hanna's there," said Lockwood. "We've got them—but how are we going to get at them?"

Their boat had been drifting slightly, and was now a good hundred and fifty yards from the point where they had been fired at. Tom headed slowly out into the channel to reconnoiter. Instantly a high-velocity bullet sang overhead, another zipped into the water just astern, and the boat hastily backed into the cover of the shore again. Most of the shooting had been from revolvers, but there

was evidently at least one rifle aboard Blue Bob's craft.

"If we try to rush 'em they'll put us outer business before we kin git near 'em," said Power anxiously. "We ain't got but four men fit to shoot now, and they've mebbe got five."

"Couldn't we get around behind them—take them from the land side?" Lockwood suggested.

Beside them the swamp was too tangled and boggy to land. Tom let the boat drift down for fifty yards, crossed the channel with a rush, drawing another shot from above, and sped around a curve out of range. After a dozen twists the bayou wound back to the Alabama again. They coasted up the low shore, a wall of shrubbery and creepers, and Tom ran in beside a fallen tree.

"They must be just about opposite yere," he said.

Lockwood was nearest the log, and stepped upon it, forcing his way in through the thicket. At the end of the log he jumped upon a partly dry spot of ground. Beyond lay a welter of wooded bog. The house boat might lie on the bayou across this jungle, but nothing could be seen of it.

Tom had edged his way in after Lockwood.

"Can't git through here—no use tryin'," he said, after an expert glance. "Liable ter go clean outer sight in the mud."

"Couldn't we set fire to it, and burn them out," Lockwood was inspired to suggest. "The wind's blowing the right way."

Tom looked up at the tangled treetops.

"Dunno as it'd burn—too wet. Might smoke 'em some, though." He glanced overhead again, and half grinned. "No harm to try. It's a good deal dead cypress and gum tree through here, after all. Pull down all the dry branches an' vines you kin reach, an' pile 'em against this here dead cypress."

While Lockwood was doing it, Tom went back to the boat and secured a tin cup of gasoline from the tank. He poured this on the dead tree, lit a match and tossed it.

There was a flash like an explosion. Fire rushed up to the top of the tree and spread in a sheet. The hanging rick of moss and dead creepers seemed to catch like paper. A roaring flame went through the treetops like a blast, driven by the light breeze, and the two men scrambled hastily back to the boat with flakes of fire falling around them.

From the interior of the jungle came an in-

tense popping and crackle. Volumes of smoke rolled up, mixed with jets of light flame, but it did not last long. The force of the conflagration seemed to fail; the smoke lessened.

"Gone out. I thought as how it was too wet," growled Power.

It was not out, though. Smoke still rose persistently though not so dense; the sharp popping of twigs had died to a low crackle. Lockwood went ashore and looked through the thickets again. The whole jungled interior was dense with smoke, but he could see flickers of flame creeping along the cypress trunks and through the branches. The light stuff had burned away in one flash, but the dead treetops had caught.

He went back and reported. If the solid wood got well burning the fire would go right across to the house boat.

"They'll have to cut loose an' clear out. Let's get back to where we was before, an' watch," said, Ferrell.

Tom turned the boat, ran downstream, and into the twisting channel again, back to the spot where they had first stopped. By this time the fire was making visible headway. Clouds of smoke rolled over the position of the ambushed house boat and went drifting up the bayou.

Trusting to the smother of smoke, Tom moved the boat up closer, and closer still, without drawing a shot. In the burning woods a tree crashed down heavily. Snakes came wriggling out from all directions, and hurried into the water. Once fairly going, the dry trees burned furiously, and already they could see the orange glow through the smoke at the very spot where the house boat must be lying.

"They'll slip away upstream. We'd never hear nor see them in all this smoke and noise!" Lockwood exclaimed.

A blazing tree fell crashing through the ti-ti thickets, half its length in the bayou. Fire was streaming out in plain sight now.

"I dunno!" muttered Tom. "No—git ready, boys! There she comes!"

Something shouldered heavily out through the smoke cloud. It was the house boat, catching the current and swinging slowly about. She was on fire at both ends, and the cabin roof was ablaze. She came down like a huge, dying bulk, turning helplessly end for end, and there was no man in sight aboard her.

A couple of burned rope ends trailed

alongside her. There was no sign of any motor boat. She sagged across the bayou, grounded on a mud bank, swung her stern around, and lay there, crackling and blazing.

Tom Power exploded in a loud curse, and ran the boat up to her. He jumped aboard, revolver in hand, but boarding was hardly needed. The decks were clear, and nothing could have lived in that smoke-filled cabin.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DEEP WATER.

With a furious face Power drove the motor boat up through the choke of the smoke clouds, leaving the deserted house boat ablaze on its mud bank. Blackened and half suffocated, they came to the upper entrance of the bayou, into the channel that joined the two rivers, and looked this way and that.

Nothing was in sight either way. Tom suddenly silenced the engine. They were well away from the roar and crackle of the fire. A dead hush fell, and through it they heard a faint, distant beating, faint and elusive as the beat of a dying heart.

"That's up the Alabama! They've headed up again!" everybody spoke at once.

The turn of the bayou checked the view. Tom started again at full speed and tore out into the wide water of the Alabama. Nothing was visible for the half mile they could see. They rushed up this reach and around the bend, and caught one glimpse of a flying black object rounding the next bend, a couple of miles ahead.

"There they go! I knowed they was headin' up!" cried Ferrell.

"But there wasn't no five men in that boat. One or mebbe two at the outside," said Tom.

"Hanna's put the rest ashore. They're scattering," exclaimed Lockwood. "Never mind. It's Hanna we want."

"Dunno ef we kin git him!" returned Tom. "That boat he's got is the fastest thing on this river, and she ain't carryin' half the load we are."

But he put Foster's boat to all the speed she was capable of. But she was certainly a heavier, clumsier, less powerful craft than Power's racer. Weighted as she was, she sat low in the water; sheets of dirty spray drove back over her as the waves wallowed from her bow. When they swung round the next curve there was no boat in the visible mile of water ahead.

Lockwood had a sudden suspicion that Hanna might have taken to the woods. He remembered his own escape. The man might be making for the railway on the west shore. But probably he had no money. All his possessions were at the Power house. Was it possible that Hanna was doubling back to Rainbow Landing?

There was no telling—no guessing, even. But the rounding of the next bend still showed no boat ahead.

For half an hour they tore along, half through, half under the water, while no living thing appeared on the river, nor any human being along the shore. Foster's landing came in sight again. The tall chimney was smoking now, and there was a shrieking of saws from the mill sheds. They had been seen coming, and Foster himself was at the landing with news.

"Missed him, didn't you?" he cried. "A motor boat went up past here not half an hour ago—going lickety-split, water flyin' clear over her. Only one man in her. Your man wouldn't go back to Rainbow Landing, would he?"

"I never thought of it!" exclaimed Power, looking startled. "Jackson's there, alone with sister and dad."

"Hanna's hunted and desperate. He'd do anything now for money—or revenge," said Lockwood.

Tom jumped out of the boat.

"Where's that car we left here?"

The car had been run under a shed. Its gasoline tank had to be replenished, its radiator filled. It was ten minutes before they were headed up the road again, leaving the wounded Fenway boy at the mill. But now they had a speed machine that no boat could match.

If Tom had driven recklessly on the way down, he drove murderously now. A negro with a mule got out of the way just in time, and stood trembling and swearing. A dozen times the car seemed about to turn turtle, but it was heavy, and heavily loaded, and rebalanced itself.

They reached the main road that led to the landing, and swept into it with a skidding swerve. A light car was jogging on ahead. They passed it like a flash, Ferrell leaning out, shouting and gesticulating for it to follow. The two men in it did speed up in pursuit, but they were hopelessly outdistanced.

The Power house came in sight, peaceful

among its great trees in the blaze of sunshine. The yard was empty, no one in sight. Tom swept in the open gate and up to the house. Jerking open the doors they scrambled out of the car, and Lockwood was immediately aware of a thundering from the upper part of the house like some one beating on a closed door, and then an unmistakable scream.

With a rush they went over the gallery, into the hall, up the stairs. A shot crashed. Lockwood saw Louise at the door of a room; she had a revolver half raised in her hand, and he caught a glimpse of a man bolting toward the rear of the hall.

"Down there! The back way!" Louise was screaming.

The other three men rushed down the hall, toward the back stairs. Lockwood alone had the inspiration to plunge back down the front stairs again. As he darted out the door he saw Hanna running forward from the rear entrance, carrying a large leather club bag.

Lockwood fired twice, hurriedly, excitedly, missing him clean. Then the pursuers poured out from the rear door also with a yell and a burst of shooting. Hanna stumbled and dropped the bag. He recovered himself, made a limping rush for the car that still stood throbbing with the running engine.

Lockwood ran to cut him off, shooting again in vain. Hanna dived into the front seat, and, as the car started Lockwood sprang on the running board, and leaned over with the pistol not a foot from his enemy's head.

He caught the queer, sidelong, startled look that Hanna turned on him as he pulled the trigger. There was no explosion. He pulled again—again, with only a series of soft clicks. The gun was empty; and it flashed upon him that it was a borrowed one, and he had no cartridges.

The car was speeding down toward the gate. Lockwood clutched the top supports and hung on, holding the useless pistol. Hanna never glanced aside. He went out the gate at high speed, turned to the right, and dashed down the road.

Lockwood had a glimpse over his shoulder of his companions running across the yard to the road. The light car was just coming up. They were stopping it, getting aboard, but he could spare no more attention.

He could not attack, but he would not let go. He had to cling with both arms to

avoid being pitched headlong. There was deep sand on the road, and Hanna tore through it like a madman. The big car reeled and skidded. Hanna never once glanced aside, bending low over the wheel, and they clung there within a yard of one another, as if unconscious of each other's presence.

He might have clubbed the man with the gun butt, but he was afraid to touch him; it would turn the car over. He made an effort to get into the rear seat; but the catch stuck, and the curtains were down.

He thought dizzily of getting his hands on Hanna, of throttling him from behind. A violent lurch of the car nearly flung him off. For a minute he clung trailing by his hands, till he could get footing on the running board again.

He was determined not to let go. He caught a glimpse of the other car racing behind. They were shouting at him, motioning him to jump. He was in their way. But he knew that Hanna's car could outdistance anything on the road, and if he let go he was sure he would never sight it again.

Jets of dust flew up from the road, instantly passed. He heard the reports. They were shooting at the tires. A bullet ripped the top. The light car was falling behind. Bullets were their only chance; and now the heavy sand was past, and Hanna let her out a little more.

The bridge over the bayou was just ahead. A distant crash of firing came from behind. The fabric top r-ripped. A great splintered star flashed into the glass wind shield. The planks of the bridge roared under the wheels, and then a long, white streak flew up out of the steering wheel under Hanna's very hands.

Like a flash the great car swerved, so violently that Lockwood was jerked loose, flung to the other side of the bridge. As he went sprawling, he heard a crash of breaking timber, a vast splash, and a sheet of muddy water flew high and rained upon him.

The light car was up and had stopped before the waves had ceased frothing. Twenty feet of the bridge railing was torn away. It was floating on the bayou below, but Hanna and the big car were deep down.

About sunset that day four powerful mules dragged out the car with grapples from fifteen feet of mud and water. It was upside down, and Hanna's body did not come with it. An elaborate search might have recov-

ered it, but there was a tacit disposition to let it remain where it was.

Louise had not heard the boat come up, nor Hanna enter the house. She was sitting quietly with her brother, who had gone to sleep after having his wounds dressed. Old Henry was also asleep, having been up most of the night; and Hanna had quietly secured the key and locked the old man in his room.

"I thought once or twice I heard somebody moving in the house," Louise said, "but I supposed it was one of the niggers. I was standing by the bureau; I had my back to the door, when I saw Hanna in the mirror. He was wet and blackened, and he had that valise in his hand.

"I'm ready to go," he said. "I've got to talk to you. I want you. You've got to come with me."

"I knew there was a little revolver in that bureau drawer, and I slipped my hand in and got it as I turned around. Hanna started into the room, and I aimed the little gun at him. He stopped, and then laughed, and dared me to shoot. I don't know whether I'd have shot or not, but then I heard your car coming, and I screamed. Hanna ran for the back stairs. The gun went off in my hand. I hope I missed him."

"He didn't git what he come for, anyway," said Tom, who had the club bag. It was locked, but he slit the leather open.

There were shirts, collars, ties in it, a man's ordinary traveling outfit. But under these was a thick packet of hundred-dollar bills, and in the bottom of the bag a mass of loose jewelry—pins, cuff links, a watch, a diamond ring—all the loot he had been able to pick up in his hurry, out of the expensive luxuries he had persuaded the Powers to buy.

"Yes, this was what he came back for," said Lockwood. "He hadn't any money with him, and he had to get this. Likely he's had this ready for weeks, in case he had to bolt at any moment. Let's see how much there is."

The packet contained seven thousand one hundred dollars. Of this, five thousand dollars was undoubtedly the proceeds of the sale of the "oil stock;" the rest was of unknown origin, perhaps his commissions on the Powers' purchases.

"I reckon that two thousand one hundred

dollars is yourn, Lockwood," said Tom. "Seems that Hanna done you worse'n any of us. Dog-gone it, here, take the hull lot! You shorely do deserve it!"

"Hold on! I'm not going to take Hanna's plunder," Lockwood laughed. "Wait. You're going to need all your money."

"Well, I certainly ain't goin' to buy no more autymobiles," said Tom. "I'll git this one fixed up, mebbe. Nor no more wine nor two-bit cigars. Fine-cut an' corn licker's good enough for me, an' not much of that, neither. I'm shore goin' to buy some plows, though, an' a couple of good mules, an' some hawgs. This yere's the poorest land on earth, but I reckon it'll grow somethin'. We might buy that fifty acres 'cross the road. That ain't quite so pore. I been thinkin' of what you said 'bout raisin' hawgs an' peanuts."

Lockwood smiled, looking from the gallery across the road to the woods, all mellow now in the late afternoon light. Deep peace slept on the landscape. It might be poor land, but he had grown to love it, that country of yellow sand and green pine. He had come there as an outlaw, and it had made him over—or was it something else?

He met the amused glance of Louise as she leaned back against the railing, and he moved over beside her.

"My usefulness is past," he said in an undertone. "You wanted me to influence the boys to industry, and now Tom's taken such a turn to the right that he'll have to be held back. And Hanna's dead."

His own words gave him a shock. Hanna was dead—McGibbon was dead! That long bitterness was ended. He had hunted his enemy to death, though he had not drawn one drop of his blood, through all the fighting and chasing. It was hard to realize. His life called for new adjustments.

"And now—what?" he muttered abruptly. "I'm neither a farmer nor a turpentine man. Do I go back to the cities now, with nothing but a memory of Rainbow Landing—and of you, Louise?"

She glanced up at him for a moment, and then looked down, and a slow flush spread over her face.

"If you do go," she said, "come back again to Rainbow Landing—and me!"

# Two Tickets for Paradise

By Thomas McMorrow

*Author of "Percentage," "The Bad Samaritan," Etc.*

You will sit right up at this story of the ins and outs and humors of the real-estate game. Kenton may have been slow on the start, but, once on his way, he knew where he was going. When he got there he certainly had "arrived." You will be anxious for more of Mr. McMorrow's real-estate tales

**S**IT down, Kenton," said Barrimore, sales manager for the Ordway Organization, in his deepest chest tones. "I want to talk to you about salesmanship." And he pulled up his keenly creased trousers, settled his tortoise-rimmed spectacles on his pudgy face at an impressive tilt, and lay comfortably back in his swivel chair.

He was about to give advice. He was about to impart the secret of success in the business of selling real estate on commission. He was sales manager because he was himself a success, a howling success. He had succeeded in putting more square families into round houses, leaving them to howl, than all the rest of the Ordway Organization. It was certainly fine of Barrimore, thought Kenton, to give away his bag of tricks.

As a matter of fact, imparting the secret of success to a discouraged salesman was just duck soup to Barrimore. It was his way of boasting. He knew that his advice would not do the salesman any good. It was a Barmecide invitation, a generous gesture by which he showed how clever a fellow was Barrimore. Solomon writing "Proverbs," Machiavelli his "The Prince," McLoughlin on tennis, Bennett his "Truth About an Author," and Barrimore talking on salesmanship—the thing is always done with the tongue in the cheek.

He adjusted his tortoise shells leisurely, like an entomologist about to inspect a bug. Jim Kenton, the discouraged salesman, who was sitting near enough to the great and only Barrimore to reach out and twist his fleshy nose, felt that he had been deftly picked up, chair and all, and set down on the brink of a yawning chasm within bare earshot of his superior on the opposite bank.

"The secret of salesmanship, Kenton," came the rolling and aggressive voice from across the abyss, "lies principally in having a good selling talk. Your prospects never know anything about real estate or they wouldn't be trying to buy, so don't be afraid to lay it on thick. When they do buy it's once in a lifetime, so stick them good and plenty while you're at it, for you'll never get a crack at them again.

"They're suspicious and scary and pretend to be wise; but don't respect them for their caution, for they are just as liable to shy away from a good thing as from the awfulest lemon that ever insulted a landscape. What they want is for you to inoculate them with confidence, drag them into the office, slam them down in a chair, wet the pen and stick it in their fist, and then slap them on the back and give their elbow a jog along the dotted line! That's salesmanship.

"You got to point them at their future home, and then give them the needle and shoot them full to the eyelashes of love for that house, of eagerness to grab it, of terror lest it get away, of gratitude to you, and satisfaction in finding the one house that they'll never leave again until they go feet first. And how are you going to make them feel like that?"

"I—don't—know," said Jim Kenton baldly.

Barrimore's eyes wandered over the salesman's hand-me-down suit, dull and wrinkled shoes, washable tie. His eyes always wandered; even in his most fetching bursts of selling talk, while his hand was going into his breast for fountain pen and contract, he never looked his victim squarely in the eye. It went against his grain.

"I'll tell you, Kenton," he said. "Before you sell anybody else you've got to sell your-

self. You must shine in personal appearance, and radiate hope, prosperity, magnetism, until the prospect will reach for you like you were a new twenty-five-cent piece. And you got to believe what you say.

"Suppose it's a remodeled barn—you got to just look at that barn, and look at it, until you can see with your own eyes that it's not a barn at all, but a snug, old English farmhouse. Supposing it's a good three miles from nowhere. You visualize that distance, you get a bird's-eye view of it, until you can swear it's a brisk eight minutes' walk. Do you get me?"

"Three miles in eight minutes," nodded Kenton brightly. "That's brisk enough to suit almost anybody!"

Barrimore looked at his salesman sharply. It was a most inane remark. "Let me see your list, Kenton."

Jim Kenton dug into his seedy bosom, and produced the typewritten list of the houses which the Ordway Organization had for sale in his territory.

"Take Number 221," said Barrimore. "Three rooms, bath, and attic, on Shankstretch Lane, near Hickstown—price eleven thousand dollars. How does that impress you?"

"It's a mere chicken coop up an alley—so much in the shadow of the gas works that the milkman doesn't leave the milk until eleven o'clock," said Kenton.

"A very false idea," said Barrimore. "I listed that house myself. It's a quaint little vine-clad cottage by the side of the road, hard by a quaint little town. Don't forget it. What about Numbers 300 to 317, home sites at Sunken Ground? How do you describe them to your prospects?"

"Oh, gosh," said Kenton. "I never even mention them. That place is only a swamp full of garter snakes and tadpoles!"

"A very false idea, indeed," said Barrimore hotly. "As a matter of cold fact what you call a swamp is a chain of pretty lakes, well stocked with fish. Here we have Number 805—an old ancestral home beneath stately trees, full of the charm of long ago—price twenty thousand dollars. What do you say to that?"

"Let me look at that one," requested the salesman puzzledly. "I don't seem to recall — Oh, my very good gracious! You don't mean that old railroad boarding house that was abandoned on account of the plumbing? If that place ever had any charm,

I'll say it was long ago! Why, they arrested a tramp up there last week for breaking into that house to sleep, and the tramp said he got in by mistake and was really breaking out. You don't mean—"

"I'll tell you what it is, Kenton," said Barrimore, with a flash of temper. "You got to take a brace, or we'll have to part company. You're here to sell houses—get that inside your head and let it roam around and knock out some of the nonsense. You may be highly ornamental, which is a matter of opinion, but we don't hire you just to decorate a pay roll. Hump yourself! Get a good line of selling talk, chew it over, and then shoot it through your teeth! And believe every word of it, too!"

"Well, Mr. Barrimore," said the salesman earnestly, "I sure need the job, and I'll try to follow your ideas. Down where I come from in Pennsylvania we're plain farming people, and we believe a fellow ought to use his gifts, but it don't occur to us down there that that applies to a born liar. However, I'll work along and try to get to feel that there's a house somewhere on that list that's worth the money."

"That's the talk," said Barrimore. "You'll get along fine so soon as you get rid of that hayseed conscience. And, inasmuch as you talk like a regular fellow, I'm going to do you a good turn. You're getting salary and percentage now—fifteen dollars a week and twenty-five per cent, isn't it? Well, I'm going to put you on the same basis as the men who have been with us for years. Hereafter you're going to work on straight commission, fifty per cent, so that when you make a sale you can cut some real money. How's that?"

"That's handsome of you, Mr. Barrimore," acknowledged Kenton, wondering internally how he and Mary were going to live at all, now that their only steady income was cut off.

"Don't mention it," said Barrimore. "You can always depend on me to do the right thing. And I'm going to do something else for you! I'm going to give you an exclusive territory! You've been gunning all over Westchester County from the Pelhams to Mamaroneck, and, while that's the happy hunting grounds all right, it's just overrun with brokers. Now, I'm going to put you over on Long Island, in that beautiful section back of Bayview, and you'll have it all to yourself!"

"Back to Bayview?" Kenton got up and opened an atlas of suburban Long Island. "Let's see. Here it is—Hogs Back! It that the name?"

"Used to be," said Barrimore. "It is now Paradise Parkways. Kenton, you're now the sole representative of the Ordway Organization in Paradise Parkways! I advise you to get right to work on your territory now, and go over it with a fine comb, house by house, and get all the dope. It won't take you more than a couple of months this fine weather. Then you'll be in a position to sell houses in the fall, if you're still with us. It's your chance!"

Jim Kenton left the room. He disclosed his luck to his fellow salesmen in the outer office. To his surprise it made them angry.

"A fine comb is right," growled Jack Saunders. "It's the lousiest section on the island! It's so lonely out there that the only reason the trains hoot their whistles is to keep up their courage. They got grand train service—twenty trains a day each way, only none of them stop. Paradise is correct! Nobody ever lived there since Adam and Eve got the gate for talking to the snakes!"

"And isn't it just in Barrimore's best style to put a new man on straight commission, and then set him to collecting information!" exclaimed Pete McArdle in disgust. "Any time that skunk gives anything away you'd better soak it in a pail of water and notify the bureau of combustibles. I'll tell you what, fellows, if it wasn't for the pleasure of seeing him take the tumble that's coming to him I'd chuck it. Out in the suburbs they don't know this office as the Ordway Organization any more; they call us Ali Baba and the forty brokers."

"Ah, shut up," growled old Heffely, the dean of the office. "If you don't like him, get to work and beat him selling! Ordway don't like him any better than you do, but he got his job because he sold houses, and he keeps it because you fellows don't! Don't mind these bellyachers here, young fellow, and don't get downhearted. The way things look to open up in the fall you could sell an Eskimo igloo in Florida, and get paid all cash before the house ran away. You just make him sign his John Henry to a six months' contract on straight commission with Paradise Parkways for you and nobody but—and then get out and hustle!"

Jim Kenton took the tip, and when he went home to the furnished room and Mary

that night he had the exclusive agency for the erstwhile Hogs Back, and a contract from the Ordway Organization agreeing to pay him nothing until he sold a house.

Mary was tickled to death.

"It's just like being in business for yourself, Jim," she chuckled. "Except that you have all the prestige of Ordway behind you and you just starting out! We don't need to worry about money, Jim. We have still nearly two hundred dollars in the bank—look, here's a notice that our account has fallen just below that—and I'm going to take a position as waitress in Kidd's."

"You won't be angry if I let you do it, Mary?" asked Jim Kenton.

"You old Jim!" He was dragged to the room's one armchair, pushed down into it, and made to hold his wife upon his knee. She gave his neck an ecstatic squeeze, shook her curly brown head, and began to build a six-room castle in the air.

"And then, of course, on account of having sold so many houses, Mr. Ordway must make you sales manager in place of that lovely Mr. Barrimore. Oh, dear, that seems too bad! Well, then, he must remain as your first assistant, after me. Meanwhile you will have seen all the houses in the world about, and you will be able to pick out just the one that would suit us best.

"It must not be too big or too small, too far or too near—it must be near plenty of good stores, but not near a town, because towns are so smoky. It must have excellent transportation, but not be near railroads or trolley cars on account of the noise.

"It must have a lovely view, but not be on a hill on account of the cold. The rooms must be large and spacious, but small enough to make easy housekeeping. It must be heated by electricity like that house at the Home Exposition, but not to cost more than stoves. We must not have a mortgage on it, because mortgages make worry, and the seller must take a little down and wait for the rest like a gentleman."

"Well, if that isn't the most extraordinary thing!" cried Jim, slapping the arm of the chair. "I got half a dozen orders for that very house right now!"

"But you won't sell it to them, Jim, will you? No, you won't sell it, will you?" she pleaded anxiously.

"I will not!" he said. "Not if they have to sit on the curb and let their feet hang for want of a home!"

Jim Kenton drew five dollars from their little store, the next morning, kissed his wife, and took the elevated down to the Pennsylvania Station. He caught the only train that had any possible notion of stopping at Paradise Parkways that morning.

"If it's flagged," said the young lady at the information booth in the Pennsylvania Station. "It will if it's flagged. But you'll have to hire a special, if you want to be sure to get there—if you really want to be odd and go to Paradise Parkways by train."

"Why, what kind of a place is this I'm going to?"

"Search me," she said. "You're the first man ever went there. It was only put on the map last week. Going to sell beads and bright-colored trinkets to the natives?"

The decrepit cars meandered slowly along, stopping every little while to wheeze and cough. It was a sunshiny day, and enlivening to old bones and irons, else Jim Kenton might be still stalled on the road he had taken to fame and fortune. He was having a nice outing, anyhow. He had paid ninety cents for a round-trip ticket, and it took him two hours to reach Paradise Parkways. Luckily there was a flag; else Jim Kenton must have disgraced that train by stepping off.

There was an open shed fifteen feet long beside the track. Some one had nailed a new board on top of it, and had painted *Paradise* on the face. He had stopped right there, being touched by conscience or a sense of humor.

"Paradise Parkways!" sneered the old tike who was station master, porter, assistant station master, assistant porter, flagman, and oldest inhabitant of this thriving community. "Yah!" he scoffed. "Going to make a gash-dinged summer resort of old Hogs Back, are they? Going to wake us up, and put us on the map. Yah! You let me see all them boarders coming. Just watch me when they begin. Maybe they think we don't know nothing out here. I'll learn them! Ain't ten years ago since I was over there in Bayview, and seen them coming in and beginning. This here place is Hogs Back, young fellow, and don't you forget it, and go to straw riding around here, and having barn dances and clambakes and all such tomfoolery. We won't stand for your crowd in Hogs Back, young fellow."

"Do you see a crowd?" asked Jim Kenton. "I thought I was the first arrival."

"No, you ain't, nuther," said the old fellow testily. "A fellow got off that there very train only last week—one of these slipper tongues he was. Started to paint a new sign up there, when I run him off the premises. I know what the people in Hogs Back want, young fellow, and I'm a-going to give it to them. I'm in charge of the Long Island Railroad in these parts, young fellow, and if I'd athought you was conspiring to get off of that there train I wouldn't of flagged it, not if Dave Cornell had to walk to town."

"Look here, pop," said Jim. "The fact is I slipped and fell off that train, and I'm right sorry, and won't never do it again. I'd dearly enjoy it if you'd let me hide my head around here somewhere until the cars come back."

"Ye can sit down in that there station," agreed the old codger. "Remember, though, I got my eye on you!"

Jim sat himself down under the little shed, while the station master returned to his little box where the country road crossed the tracks.

Jim sat there one mortal hour, and never a living creature passed along that road. The woods fenced the tracks in for nearly half a mile on either side of this extraordinary place, the only break in the walls of green being the right of way, except for the forsaken highway. Wonder gradually rose in the real-estate salesman. He remembered with incredulity that he was within fifteen miles of the Pennsylvania Station, perhaps even within the corporate limits of the city of New York!

The solitude would have been a stark wonder to the average New Yorker, who never leaves his beaten streets, and does not know that even his tight little island of Manhattan holds within it a sizable and rather primeval wilderness. It afforded Jim a smile and reassurance to recall now a Sunday he had passed lately with Mary, clambering up to a table-land on Manhattan Island, and wandering then, for a matter of two miles, through a pathless forest.

He felt now that he had done penance enough for the crime of arriving in Paradise Parkways, so he arose and sauntered over to the station master.

"Have a cigar?" he said, pushing the offering into the little box in which the station master sat.

"Thanks," said the guardian of Hogs Back. "I ain't had a cigar in I don't know

when." And he spat out his tobacco, bit off half of the cigar, and put the butt in the pocket of his ancient uniform.

"Nice place," said Jim, gazing around approvingly. "Nice lively little town, I call it."

"Yep," agreed the station master, chewing with relish.

"The excitement gets to sort of wear on one after a while, don't it?" suggested Jim.

"No," ejaculated the station master, pulling his whiskers. "Ain't no call to get ate up with excitement, less'n a fellow loses his head. It's always dangerous round trains, young fellow, less'n you're experienced. Them there cars begin to whistle a mile down the road, and they don't scare nobody no more, less'n some country fellow who ain't seen much, and even he calms down after he's run a mile or so and sees the cars ain't after him."

"You must have some great characters around here," said Jim.

"Depends on who's talking about them, young fellow," said the station master. "Ask me and I'll tell you they're the finest people in boots. But listen to them danged New York papers and you'd think our people out here were just a lot of slickers. It's scandalous the way they talk about the nicest people in Hogs Back!"

"The New York papers?" grinned Jim involuntarily.

"Why, look here!" The old fellow produced a metropolitan daily with a scare head. "Look at that there story about old Peter Rockabilt! Calls him a 'bandit of finance,' it do. And here's a lot of lies about that bachelor dinner young Reggie Knickerbocker gave up to his place Fairways last week. I was at that dinner myself—things looked slow up and down the tracks and I took time off—and there weren't no such goings-on nohow."

"Rockabilt!" exclaimed Jim Kenton. "Knickerbocker!"

"Finest people on God's footstool," asserted the station master. "Ain't more than a hundred people living within four miles of this here spot, and they own every inch of the land. They don't want no company, no merry-go-rounds or Ferris wheels or such fashionable goings on. Nice, quiet home-bodies they are; ride about in their own automobiles like decent country people, and got no use for trains."

"That's the reason there ain't no train

service, young fellow. They don't want no locomotives rearing and snorting round here, and scaring their blooded cattle. And they give me strict orders that I should run all summer boarders ragged, and throw strangers into the creek, and if the president of this here railroad don't like it just tell him they said so, and they'll take his railroad off of him and give it to one of their little boys. That's us in Hogs Back, young fellow!"

And the old man threw back his head until his goatee pointed right between Jim Kenton's eyes.

"Pretty large order," said the salesman. "This railroad belongs to the Pennsylvania."

"Yep," nodded the station master. "Which just goes to show you! But it didn't used to! It belonged to a fellow called Peters, and they took it off him!"

"It's certainly interesting to hear the inside story of these big deals," admitted Jim. "You don't think any of these Hogs Backers would want to sell out, do you?"

"Sell?" repeated the station master. "Sell? Why, what could you give them? They own pretty nigh the whole danged United States already!"

But he continued to stare at the salesman as though the strange conception did, nevertheless, hook up somehow with ideas already familiar in his bald head. He sat down suddenly.

"Well, I swan," he muttered.

"So that's what this here 'Paradise Parkway' means—and people offering to get off of the train in broad daylight, and threatening to have the law on me! So that's what young Reggie meant when he said he wouldn't come back to Hogs Back with the wife! And them surveyors I caught trying to get into the Chumley place! Well, well, of all things!"

"Where does this Reggie Knickerbocker live?" asked Jim Kenton.

"Two mile up that road you'll see a stone gate with a lion on top. That's the Knickerbocker place."

"Is that a public road?"

"Well, I suppose it is," grumbled the station master grudgingly. "But if you're going sight-seeing, young fellow, don't expect me to hold the train for you longer than half an hour! Be back in not more'n two hours from now or you'll maybe miss it."

Jim trudged away up the road.

It was a finely built automobile highway,

though obviously little traveled. On either side was the unbroken woods, though Jim now saw that here was no natural tangle of trees, but the cunning work of the landscape gardener. The trees were well pruned; many were of species unknown to him, and they were grouped in colorful masses, ranked in defiles, opened out into bosky dells, so that the eager eye ranged freely through charming vistas, and dwelt restfully on purple distances. The ground underfoot bore no rank tangle but was spread with a carpet of living green, close-cropped by grazing herds. Far in the heart of this magic wood his farmer's eye caught the delicate silhouette of a stately buck at gaze, and the limpid eyes of does over the flanks of their lord.

"So this is New York!" he murmured.

He saw no one during the two-mile walk, except once a gamekeeper, shotgun on shoulder, and togged in Lincoln green, who was properly crusty toward this vagrom man in a derby hat.

Jim was already following the downward sweep of the rounded promontory, which gave the country its bizarre name, when he came to the stone gate of the family Knickerbocker. He had passed other gates, but none with a lion, and here on top of the arch across the private road crouched a veritable troupe of lions, in stone.

He followed the winding avenue into the private domain. Five minutes brought him around to the front of a building which had turned its back to the highway in aristocratic aloofness. He looked it over speculatively.

"Now, what do you suppose it is?" he asked himself.

It had a severe and public look. All the pickpockets in the New York subway, at any given moment, could have been marshaled on the front steps for a group photograph. Its every window was as big as the wall of Jim's furnished room. It had cupolas turned like a charlotte russe, slits in its walls for archers, and a round tower with a wicket gate.

"It can't be a station," he decided confidently. "I don't think it's a courthouse. It looks something like a jail. Ah, I have it. I'll take a quick flash at it, and get directions for finding Reggie Knickerbocker's."

Before entering he glanced about for the object of his quest. No other building of note was in sight. A sunken garden lay before the house of mystery, and, through the

trees beyond it, Jim caught flashes and ragged ends of silver.

The Sound lay there, the workaday Long Island Sound, plowed by plebeian excursion steamers, littered with barges and scows, darkened by clouds of smoke vomited from the funnels of grunting tugs. It was something to see that the mighty men of Hogs Back had not quite abolished the twentieth century and to know that so near at hand he could step out again from this laboriously wrought imitation of darkest Europe.

He stepped up to the great double doorway and proceeded to ring the bell. He had proceeded inch by inch over the entire door, and the casing around it before he was assured that there was no bell to ring. It did not immediately occur to him that the chased iron bar with mallet in the shape of a wolf's head, which hung from the middle panel, had any relation to the absence of a bell. Down Pennsylvania way the folks were old-fashioned, likewise the houses, but they had come some distance from the door-knocker age into which Hogs Back had retreated.

He lifted the knocker, and let it fall with a clang upon the bronze plate. The door was opened by a nice-looking old lady in a black dress with a white lawn collar.

"Good afternoon, madam," said Jim. "And is the museum open to the general public to-day?"

"The museum!" she repeated. "Of all things! This is the residence of Reginald Knickerbocker, young man."

"So I thought," said Jim hastily. "And is Mr. Knickerbocker at home?"

"What did you think?" she pursued him. "That Mr. Knickerbocker lives in a museum? There is nothing extraordinary about Mr. Knickerbocker, young man. And he is not at home. He is on his honeymoon with Miss Kathie Jones, that was. Is there a message?"

Jim presented the business card of the Ordway Organization. He was a simple fellow, but it proved just as well that he did not tell a whooping lie à la Barrimore, nor even a cheap little one so as to gain admission. Besides, while he was afraid of all young women, including his wife Mary, he was always quite at home with old ones, and found that they were the same with him.

"Ordway Organization," read the lady from the card. "Why, that is the sign I've

seen along the roads all over the country. What is it, young man?"

"A firm of real-estate brokers," explained Jim Kenton.

"Excuse me," she said. She stepped back into the foyer and called aloud. "El-len!"

She was answered from abovestairs.

"Look at the list, Ellen, and see what we are to do with real-estate brokers! Just a moment, young man. Yes, that was for book agents, beggars, tramps, and bill collectors—we were to set Toss and Tear on them. No, the young man does not want to inspect the plumbing, fix the gas range, look at the roof, or go down into the cellar, so you don't have to call the constable! I say he is a real-estate broker! I should fire the shotgun at him through the window, you say? Just a minute, young man. I'm sorry to keep you waiting. Broker, I said, not burglar! He is not on the list?"

"Ellen says you are not on the list," she said to Jim severely. "I don't know what I should do to you, but I am sure it should be something unpleasant. What did you want exactly?"

"I heard this house was for sale," explained Jim. "I wanted to buy it."

"Well, I do declare," she exclaimed. "Ellen! The young man wants to buy Fairways!"

A duplicate of the nice-looking but rather dreadful old lady appeared behind her.

"Of all things," said Ellen. "The master told us as a black secret that he was going to sell Fairways only the day before yesterday, and here the first tramp that comes to the door knows all about it!"

"If you think he is a tramp," said the first old lady, "I will go downstairs and unleash Toss and Tear. It is a shame to keep them tied up, I am sure. The poor dears have chewed an oak plank to splinters, and that six-pound steak I gave them last night didn't do them a particle of good."

"No, please," requested Jim Kenton. "I'm not a tramp, honest. I'm a real-estate broker. I dress this way because I'm eccentric—I'm a queer fish—I'm flattered that you actually mistook me for a tramp. But as I'm not really a tramp it would be dishonest of me to try to claim any of a tramp's rights under the master's list. It would be very mean."

"Just imagine some poor downcast Weary Willie coming up that path. He sees before him the many lights of Fairways, shin-

ing like the lights of home. He knows that there is a warm welcome for him behind those lights—that his place is prepared for him except for the detail of that six-pound steak and oak plank—yawning for him, gaping for him, licking its chops for him!

"He hurries forward with a hoarse cry of joy. And then—to be turned away—to be told that his place is filled, gorged to repletion by an impostor. Can you see him going away into the shadows with his frayed cuff to his eye? Or at best proceeding down that noble avenue at a lumbering trot, with two logy beasts waddling at his heels? Where the glad view halloo, the hunter's call, the chase sweeping grandly onward in full career, hounds and quarry stretched to their magnificent utmost powers?"

Jim Kenton's voice was very sad.

The old ladies sniffed.

"I do not know what you are talking about, young man," said Ellen. "But I feel that most tramps would not have spoke so lovely. Grace, I have a feeling in my heart that this young man will not murder us if we let him in."

"Then we will let him in," said Grace, as she did so.

"But really Mister—Organization, is it? Or Ordway? Mister Kenton—yes. But really we have no right to sell the house like this behind the master's back. We have some old clothes we could sell you, in very fine condition. But no! I am afraid we better not. You remember, Ellen, how cross the master was when you sold his plum-colored suit to Cohen, even after he said he didn't like it?"

"That's perfectly all right, madam," said Jim Kenton. "I didn't expect to take anything home with me to-night. If you'll be good enough to give me the name of his man of business, or his lawyers?"

"His lawyer's name is on a card in the table drawer there," said Grace. "Here it is—Mister Whitney Webb, of No. 606 Wall Street."

Jim Kenton took the card with a word of thanks.

"And now could I look over the house?" he asked.

"I do not think we should let you," said Ellen. "As I'm sure you will not like it. I have that kind of a feeling. However, as you have behaved very proper and have not offered to murder us, I think we could give you a peek."

"This is the foyer. I do not know how big it is, but that rug under your feet is twenty-five feet square and cost seven thousand dollars. You see this foyer is open right to the roof; those glasses and skylights up there are real Italian glass, imported from Tiffany's.

"The rooms let off from this foyer on all sides, and that balcony going around it up there gives into the master bedchambers, except that one door which is the smoking and card room. There is the drawing-room, the music room, the library, the billiard room, the dining room, the breakfast room, the smoking room, and that is the pantry. Beyond the pantry is the kitchen, the servants' hall, the cold-air chamber, and the ice room."

And so she led him about, marveling within himself at the provision for spacious and elegant living. He had seen enough houses in his short career as a broker to be able to appreciate measurably a mansion such as this one. Still, withal, he was almost immediately conscious of something lacking here. He looked more closely at the enormous crystal chandelier which hung in middle space twenty feet above his head.

"Electricity?" he said.

"Oh, dear, no," said Ellen. "Candles, wax candles! It's rarely lit, and, when it is, it's got to be done with a taper on the end of a stick from the balcony, and it's an awful business replacing candles with a long ladder. There's not so much as a gaslight in the house; even in the kitchen we use charcoal.

"There's no steam heat like in a Christian house, not even hot air, or a good warm stove, but just them big ogres of fireplaces that give such a suck at your skirts, of a cold night, as if they'd fair draw you up the chimney like a cinder! If it wasn't for the shivering and shaking I'm sure we'd be froze to death."

"Any—bats in the master's belfry."

"No, nothing like that, thanks be. Rats there are, enough for anybody, and so big we have to be careful what we stoop down to pet after dark. But no bats, Mr. Kenton."

"I mean—was the master all there—the old man, I mean—the old 'commodore'—or did he occasionally have to collect himself?"

"Oh, I understand you. To tell the truth, we servants never could make up our minds

as to that. He was an aquarium, yes, Grace, an ant-aquarium, and a great authority he was on it, too. He wrote books on it, Mr. Kenton, and he would send all over the world to get beautiful furniture to put in the attic.

"At first we were seventeenth century, and then he took everything out until we were sixteenth century throughout the house. Then he went through again and put us into the fifteenth century.

"Then he died, and Doctor Knowles said it was lucky as he would have taken away the house next, being that America was discovered that year. You should see this place when the young master came into it two years ago. Miss Kathie Jones, that was, said it give her a positive turn, and she wouldn't live here under any conditions. So now the house and all Fairways is to be sold off."

"And very fortunate he is to have the Ordway Organization right on the spot," supplemented Jim Kenton. "I'll have to run along, ladies. And by the way—put real-estate brokers on that list; I'm sure the master didn't mean to leave them out. All except the Ordway Organization, of course."

"What shall we do to them?" asked Grace.

"Fire the shotgun at them out the window, and if that doesn't discourage them—rent them Fairways for the winter! Good-by!"

Kenton told Mary of his adventures that night, and was properly commended for his address, courage, invention, and politeness to ladies. On second thought she amended the description of Grace and Ellen and said they were two bloodthirsty old hags, which made Jim laugh until she grew impatient with him.

His constant and pensive smile aroused curiosity at the office of the Ordway Organization, which he very properly refused to satisfy. Shortly after his connection with the firm he had consulted Barrimore about a prospective sale, and had learned through seeing the commission snapped out of his fingers that information is a broker's stock in trade.

He had not adopted the customary smoke screen thrown out by his brothers of the trade to hide their small activities—their talk of million-dollar deals impending, of commissions of fabulous size, of interviews with Wall Street magnates which forced them to hurry away. Jim Kenton liked to tell the truth. He was not fanatical about

it, he knew that lies had their place, regrettable but necessary. But as between lying and truth-telling as a habit he preferred to stick to the facts. Therefore, he imparted no information concerning his doings at Paradise Parkways, and was immediately set down as having none to give.

At eleven o'clock he called up the office of Whitney Webb, and requested an appointment with the lawyer. It was given him, and the hour set for one o'clock that day.

He looked more presentable as he entered the lawyer's office. Mary had rescued his one decent suit from the tailor; it was neatly pressed, his hat was brushed, and he had even spent a nickel for a shine in a parlor he had discovered on Church Street.

Whitney Webb was of an old and wealthy New York family; his folks had had place and money so long that he had quite forgotten the overwhelming importance of either possession in the minds of ordinary men. Hence he was democratic, affable, quite unpretentious. He was not a man of intellect, nor of any great capability; he kept several brainy scrubs in his employ to handle the vast business which his social connections threw to him. He was just the business getter—a decent fellow who took people as he found them, and never remembered that he was a gentleman.

He shook hands pleasantly with Jim Kenton and inquired his errand.

"Well!" he laughed. "You're not asleep on the job, I'll say that. I was talking to Reggie only last night at the club, and he told me he was going to sell Fairways. He said he'd made his mind up only two days ago, that he had not told anybody. And here a broker has been over the place from turret to foundation stone. Great Scott—that's action! We have a doctrine in law," he added, "which holds that the vigilant deserve the prior lien. You say you're of the Ordway Organization?"

Jim Kenton nodded. "I'm in exclusive charge of that entire section of the country. Still, I thought it was due to you for me to come here personally."

"Very nice of you, I'm sure. I know Frank Ordway. I'll give him a ring, if you don't mind. Oh, Miss Pierce—get me Frank Ordway on the wire. This you, Frank? Whitney Webb. Say, Frank—I have one of your—ah—exclusive salesmen down here with me, man by the name of Kenton, James Kenton. He's asking me questions. Oh,

sure—I'll give him everything but the key of the strong box, if you say so. Good-by, Frank!"

He pulled some papers from a pigeonhole, turned them over thoughtfully, and looked at Jim Kenton.

"Just how near are you to Frank Ordway in his office, Mr. Kenton?"

"Right next to him," said Jim Kenton, which was the literal truth. His desk was right alongside of Mr. Ordway's, although the partition of the boss' private office intervened. "I'm nearer to him than any other man in the whole organization."

"Very good." Whitney Webb tapped the desk with a show of irritation. "There was something I wanted very much to say to Frank just now, but didn't care to on the telephone. At the same time I don't want to hand him this business without his getting the message, too. Here it is: he has a rotter up there by the name of Barrimore, and the next time he sticks a friend of mine on a deal Frank Ordway and I do no more business. It was touch and go with me whether I'd cut the connection right now when I saw that name on your card. I'll tell Frank myself, when I get him alone, but I'd like him to get the message with this business, too. So that's that!"

He sorted the papers.

"Here's a description of the place. Besides the main building, which is early Renaissance, there are fourteen other buildings. All of these other buildings including the stables are lighted by electricity, have hot and cold running water, and hot-water heat. Old Commodore Knickerbocker's veterinarian insisted on that, so the cattle are living about as far ahead of 1920 as the people in Fairways are living behind it. The stock are going to be sold off separately by Fish & Carroll, so you're not interested in them. The furniture is to be auctioned next fall by the Anderton Art Galleries.

"The main house consists of thirty-two rooms, with three baths in the servants' quarters. There are no bathtubs in the master's parts of the house, as the commodore claimed the bathtub was an American invention dating from 1842; neither is there any plumbing, not even hot water; when he wanted to shave the water was heated over the only brazier on Long Island."

"He must be at home in his tomb," suggested Jim.

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Whit-

ney Webb. "The mausoleum is steam-heated to preserve the carven interior!"

"Here is a blue print of the estate. It consists of two hundred acres, all beautifully landscaped in exact replication of a Cistercian Abbey in Bavaria, except for the sunken garden which is early Italian. It fronts half a mile on Rocky Road, and backs up on the Steven Chumley property. I think this blue print and this description of the house are about all you need."

"What's the price?"

"Six hundred thousand dollars. It stood the commodore in a good three million, and is worth twice that to anybody mad enough to want it. If you're familiar with values through there—land values—you'll know three thousand dollars per acre is cheap."

"It seems a steal," said Jim without a quiver. "Let me have authority to offer it, will you?"

Whitney Webb called a stenographer, and dictated a letter empowering the Ordway Organization to offer Fairways for sale. He shook hands again with Jim Kenton, and bowed him out.

"Just one thing," he said at his office door. "I don't want any Barrimore methods applied to the sale of Fairways! The Knickerbockers don't have to sell, and don't want to be subjected to the slightest annoyance. This property is not to be peddled! I'm going to put it into the hands of two other firms, each as responsible as Frank Ordway, and if I hear of any other brokers offering it I'll know that you've been peddling it around, and I'll revoke that authorization like a shot. Don't offer it except to a principal—a bona-fide prospective buyer. If you don't find a real buyer then don't offer it at all, and you'll at least keep my good will—and you'll know exactly what my good will is worth if once you lose it!"

Jim Kenton now had hold of one-half of a tremendous deal. He had a property to sell. In the old days getting the property would have been considered a very small part of the broker's task, for country estates were a drug on the market, and could be bought—like Fairways—for twenty per cent of what they had cost, even when they were—quite unlike Fairways—up to the minute in every detail. In the old days it was a buyers' market, the man with money could pick and choose.

But the war had blown all that away, the boot was now on the other foot, it was a

sellers' market now. The owners held their properties stubbornly at two and three times the former values, and were actually getting such prices. It was not a matter of intuition or judgment on the part of the owners. Houses were scarcer than hens' teeth, and the man who sold was very likely to find that he could not buy again at any price, and had simply no place to live. Barrimore's ridiculous prices were the profiteer's inevitable answer to a ravenous demand.

Fairways was not, indeed, a property to be sold to the man in the street. Jim Kenton recognized that. He knew that it is harder to sell a Persian carpet than a ham sandwich—but considerably more worth while. His broker's sense made it a fascinating property; it was an oddity, and oddities are worthless—or priceless, if properly merchandized.

He went in to see Frank Ordway.

His employer could always be seen; courteous, polished, rigidly just out of calculation, openly self-serving, Frank Ordway was a typical high-class business man. His was one of those handsome, cameo-cut faces common among descendants of artistic people—rarely marking the man preoccupied with beauty in itself. An artist is a ruthless fellow, careless of precedent, slighting authority, scoffing at reputations; he has within himself the divine light and fire; he sees with his eyes and not with his ears like commonplace persons.

Ordway's father had been held down to two suits of clothes the best days of his life; his son professed a hearty contempt for art in its every manifestation, but brought to the fight for money, in his chosen field, all the ruthlessness, the piercing perception of things as they are, the iron will to have his way, which had made his father posthumously famous.

Our Ordway wanted results. Barrimore had given them, and had been made sales manager. But Ordway's mind never crystallized; he was always open to suggestion, always in touch with the last man in his employ. Could the office boy but have seen it he carried a sales manager's baton in his humble wastebasket.

"Sit down, Mr. Kenton," he said agreeably. "What did Whitney Webb call me up about?"

"About the Knickerbocker property at Paradise Parkways, or Hogs Back," said Jim. "I went over the property yesterday, and I

saw Whitney Webb this morning to get the particulars."

Ordway nodded attentively.

"I have the necessary details here to offer it for sale, together with an authority from Whitney Webb." And Jim produced them and laid them on his knee.

Ordway pushed a button. "Send Mr. Barrimore in here!"

The sales manager entered.

"What is this, Barrimore, about property being for sale at Hogs Back?"

"Nonsense," said Barrimore, with a scornful grin and flirt of the hand. "There's no property for sale in Hogs Back, Mr. Ordway. Never has been any! You know that section down there. Every foot of the ground is in the hands of multimillionaires. All immense estates, being added to all the time! Nonsense!"

"But Mr. Kenton here says he has a place for sale, the Knickerbocker place—Fairview, or Fairleigh, or some such name."

"Oh, that!" Barrimore's grin became more self-appreciative. "Mr. Kenton has been with us four months, and in that time he's sold only one house, and the commission barely paid his salary. You know we ordinarily keep new men on salary and commission until they find their feet; a matter of a year or so; but I thought it would be a good idea to cut the overhead just now so I put Kenton on straight commission.

"So as to be sure he'd do his own share of nonpaying work I sent him to Hogs Back to gather material for our files. We ought to have those houses on our books, no matter what they ask, or at least a statement up to date that there is no house for sale. From something I said to encourage him he must have jumped to the conclusion that property in Hogs Back was in the market."

Ordway tendered Barrimore the authorization from Whitney Webb.

"Seems to me I'd jump myself, if I saw that. Very well, Mr. Kenton. I'll put a couple of our best men onto this right away, and I'll see that they pay you something if they make a sale. Barrimore will put you back on salary and commission at once."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Ordway," said Jim, "I'd just as soon stay on straight commission, now that I'm there. And Mr. Barrimore was just about to tell you that I have the exclusive agency for Hogs Back for the next six months. He gave it to me in writ-

ing yesterday. Inasmuch as I'm receiving no salary you can't object to my going my own gait about selling, and I'll keep on working at the other properties down there. But if a sale is made by this office at Hogs Back it must be made through me."

It was an ultimatum; the best of employers need one now and then; but it was phrased and spoken as pleasantly as its uncompromising nature admitted of. For all that it was yet a thrown glove, and, though Frank Ordway's smile lost none of its courtesy, it became a trifle set and his gray eyes brightened.

"Very good, Mr. Kenton. And now let me consult with Barrimore."

When Barrimore emerged he was flushed, but not with victory. He spoke brusquely to Jim Kenton as he passed his desk.

"Come into my office!"

He seated himself in his swivel chair; he did not lay back comfortably nor evolve epigrammatic periods on salesmanship.

"Look here, Kenton," he growled. "You've had a chance stroke of luck, such as might happen to the biggest bonehead that ever bought a brief case and wrote on it 'John Dumb-bell, broker.' Sheer luck!"

Jim Kenton waited politely.

"If you had the brains you should have been born with," said Barrimore, "you'd turn this thing over to somebody to handle that knows how. If you insist on handling it yourself, it's your funeral—which we'll all gladly attend inside of six months!"

As he provoked no answer he turned to business.

"Now, as to selling this white elephant," he said briskly. "There's just one way to go about it! You'll let me have that description and blue print, and I'll have fifty copies made right away. We'll send a copy to every broker's office in New York, we'll cover the entire territory from Harlem to the Battery, so there won't be a cloak-and-suit manufacturer, a war profiteer, or a downright damphool in the six million that won't be canvassed inside of forty-eight hours! Of course, we'll have to split the commission with the broker that lays his hands on Rumpelstilskin, but half a loaf is better than none—and better than half sometimes when it's up to us to cut it!"

"So far good! Then we'll get a permit from Webb to inspect the premises. We'll have that permit mimeographed, so we can hand out duplicates. And we'll organize

special excursions with free tickets for next Saturday and Sunday mornings. Of course, a fine group of bandits will ring in on us, and probably carry away half of the furniture under their coats while on tour through the house; that can't be helped.

"I can also arrange to get a free page in a Sunday paper, with a history of the comodore done by one of their funny men, and a photo of Reggie and his bride to lend heart interest. It's up to you to get the picture. We'll also——"

"Just a minute," interposed Jim. "All that's strictly against Mr. Webb's instructions. And what's more, I don't shade my fifty per cent a five-cent piece."

"Oho!" grunted Barrimore. "What a long tail our cat has! You'll do what you're told, understand me?"

"That depends on who's telling me," said Jim. "You'd better see Mr. Ordway again, before starting a quarrel."

"You sit right there," enjoined Barrimore. And he arose and stalked across to Frank Ordway's office.

He came out in a minute.

"I'm through," he snarled. "Go ahead and queer it in your own way!"

Jim strolled back to his own desk. He got out his old jimmy pipe, filled it up with sawdust and molasses, seated himself squarely on the back of his neck—and thought.

In other times he would have offered such a property to the big suburban development companies as so much acreage. But while the land was well worth the price asked for the entire property these development companies were in no condition to take on such a large operation. The market phenomena which had given such a mighty lift to the prices of houses had correspondingly depressed the value of vacant land; the high prices of material and labor were prohibiting building.

And the long-continued depression in vacant land had taken the speculator in that commodity out of the market. He was already loaded to the gunwales with properties he had taken on immediately after the war, when the wise men forecasted an imminent building boom. Fairways then could not be sold for its land value, present or speculative.

And who in the name of thunder wanted to live in the fifteenth century?

He arose, put on his hat, and went down

into the street to walk with his problem. Slowly he crossed Forty-second Street until he came to the open square where stands the New York Public Library. A memory of something that had been said to him at Fairways came back to him, and he went around and climbed the long flight of steps facing Fifth Avenue.

"I understand you have all the books in the world here," he said to the attendant at the desk.

"We have them all," she said cheerfully. "From the smallest book of cigarette papers up to the largest volume of wall-paper samples!"

"Have you got any books by a man called Knickerbocker?"

"Certainly. 'Knickerbocker's History of New York.' Very comical book."

"No, that won't do. It's some kind of a history, I imagine, and it's by Knickerbocker, and no doubt it is very comical, but it is not about New York. It's about away back."

"New Rochelle?" suggested the librarian. "'Why Cox will be our next president?' 'Ten Barrooms in a Night?' 'Hindenburgh's March into London' from the German?" How far do I have to go?"

"The fifteenth century," said Jim. "This Knickerbocker was an antiquarian."

"Oh, so? Jane! Show this gentleman into Mr. Connoly's room."

Eventually Jim Kenton was seated before a small pile of sad-colored books. He went over them carefully, endeavoring to the best of his ability to avoid clogging his sharp-set, twentieth-century brain with any of their curious and better-forgotten lore, while he scanned the inscriptions, looked for references, pored over prefaces. He noted down several names, and ceased his inquiry into "The Renaissance and Interior Decoration," when he read the short dedication behind the flyleaf: "To my honored Colleagues of the American Society of Antiquarians."

"Here's the whole kit-and-bedlam of them at once," he muttered gleefully.

He went again to the helpful lady at the desk, and got the address of the society's New York building from the Blue Book of Clubs. He was pleased to see that the address given was a prominent corner of Central Park West. This volume referred him to the yearly manual issued by the Antiquarians, which was forthcoming on demand. He opened it, propped the Social Register at his

elbow, and went through the lists of members, patrons, founders, and benefactors; checking the names against the Social Register.

He wanted to elide all poor though worthy brethren, all college professors, all delvers and probers into the past who had not secured behind them a warm and comfortable retreat in the present. He secured a long string of names prominent in the history of railroad-wrecking, soap-making, cheese-paring, fish-mongering, garbage-disposing, dollar-shaving, stock-jobbing, mine-salting, rent-racking, body-snatching, beef-embalming, oil-sucking, booze-selling, train-robbing, and like leading industries of America.

He had now his leads. Here was his philosopher's stone; he had only to try the name of a prospect against that list, and it would at once develop whether the fellow was gold or gilded copper. Any one on the list would be willing to live in Fairways, perhaps could even be induced to 'pay through the nose for the doubtful privilege. And every last one of them was rich enough to indulge a morbid craving if smitten.

He returned to the office with the tale of his chosen people, and went straight to the application book wherein the homeless of New York had entered their names for a dole of shelter.

Buyers of six-hundred-thousand-dollar estates are not thick as blackberries, nor even as New York thieves, at the best of times, but they were never so plentiful as in the two years following the war. New York millionaires had doubled, according to the income-tax returns, and while the tax collector's records are not infallible yet the taxpayer in making out his return usually restrains himself from boastfulness. And because of the rapid increment of values people were not only scandalously rich but thought they were richer every day. And as an imposing establishment is the most gratifying exhibition of a man's wealth, the application book of the Ordway Organization showed the names of no less than thirty citizens who professed a desire to spend from a million down for a vine and fig tree.

Jim worked the application book against his telltale list.

When he had done, he had struck out the name of a dollar-a-year man whose single talent had bravely fructified, of a government inspector who had done his bit passing supplies for the army, of a keyman who had

been too important to fight, of a manufacturer who had sold a thousand aeroplanes to the war department and had delivered a trial balloon and a box of monkey wrenches, of a submarine maker whose boats would float or sink but not both, of several good men and true who had been helped by God—if the proverb is so—very liberally during the tumult and the shouting, and finally of some runty fellows who had a bank account before the war. Three men remained who did not care what they spent for a home, so long as there was no place like it, and the three were on the list.

He wrote to his three best bets, and told them to come and get it at the Ordway Organization on Forty-second Street. This was against the proper procedure; he should have gone around to their offices, and cooled his heels in an anteroom, rubbing elbows with flash promoters, missionaries, relatives, and earnest-faced men who only asked to get within a stone's throw of the plutocrat without having taken off them the melon-shaped objects they carried under their shabby coats. Jim Kenton banked on curiosity, the stock lure of the hunter. He knew they would come if they wanted to buy, and that a man who gives himself up to the vice of making millions has dispensed with petty pride.

He wrote his letters, filled his jimmy pipe with more sawdust and molasses, sat down again on the nape of his neck, and waited. He had done his part; the event was with the money gods.

Three days later Barrimore came out of his office sweating like a frightened horse. He spoke to Jim Kenton.

"Look here!" he whispered. "Did you write to old John Chew and tell him to come in to see you?"

Jim sighed, knocked the heel out of his pipe, got up, and stretched.

"I did," he said.

"Then trim ship for squalls," said Barrimore. "Ordway has been walking backward before him dusting the floor with his hat, and apologizing for belonging in this shop. Have you any notion in your bumpkin head of who old John Chew is? Do you know that he's the People's Service Company of New Jersey? And do you know what that means? Do you know it means he is every trolley car, ferryboat, gas house, electric light, water plant, and tollgate in

the State, besides being the biggest insurance company that side of the North River?"

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Jim Kenton. "How did they jimmy him into the building?"

"Wait," grunted Barrimore. "They won't have to jimmy you out. You'll be so small they'll have to look for you. What are you going to do now? Bust right in there? Come over here! Ordway is in there now rubbing him down, and I told them you'd be back in a minute so's I'd have a chance to prime you up."

"Now listen. Get me right. You're a dead man right now, but you're entitled to my advice as sales manager, and you're going to get it if only to preserve the business."

"The first thing you do on going in is to beg his pardon for your infernal impudence. Explain that it was only because you're absolutely positive that you have the very thing he wants that you asked him to come here. Say you tried forty times to get an appointment with him. Do you get me?"

"Then open up with the selling talk. Roll your eyes when you think of Fairways. Shout! Tell him milk is a nickel a quart out there—that he can live for a year on tick at the stores, because they only collect accounts over twenty dollars, that the town owns its own gas well, electric plant, and waterworks, and bill them on the taxes which don't run over twelve dollars a year. Inoculate him with confidence. Shine! Tell him the express trains push each other out of the way, so that he won't even have to break step going from his house to business. Tell him that an eight-year-old can jump from his front porch into a schoolroom, and that he has an unsurpassed view from every window for miles and miles—"

"Thank you, Mr. Barrimore," said Jim, tugging at his coat lapels. "You'll stand right behind me, won't you? Good—somewhere where I can't see you."

He entered Barrimore's office.

Jim Kenton's quiet manner and deferential voice masked a man of coolness and resource—at times of unabashed impudence. But just now he understood quite the feelings of the fisherman who had evoked the genie. Except that in bottling up in this little office a man who spread naturally all over the sovereign State of New Jersey he had not imprisoned the danger, but merely concentrated it.

Frank Ordway was leaning against the window sill, hands in pockets and feet crossed, smiling placatingly at a little old man who sat motionless in a chair.

"Give him the needle!" hissed Barrimore from the rear.

The little old fellow had the unblinking self-possession of a bald-headed eagle. His fully opened gray eyes were at once understanding and unsympathetic. They invited straight talk, and promised nothing. He was a man to bring out the sweat from a confirmed double dealer like Barrimore, but he would not have frightened a child.

"This is our Mr. Kenton," said Ordway.

Jim Kenton jerked his open hand toward the blue print lying unrolled on Barrimore's desk.

"There it is, Mr. Chew," he said. He stood and waited.

"Tell me about it, Mr. Kenton," said John Chew. Practice had modulated the natural rasp of his voice, but it was much this side of being sweet. "I suppose there is excellent transportation?"

"The worst in the world," said Jim promptly. "It's only a flag station."

"Um-m," hummed John Chew. "That's bad. There are plenty of good, cheap stores around there, I suppose? Nice, cheerful amusements for the evening—moving pictures, and perhaps a nice amusement park with a brass band and a dance hall, and a searchlight to show the pretty scenery?"

"There's not a store nearer than New York, nor a shed or shack to house a squirrel. It's the deadliest place in the State, including Calvary and Greenwood," answered Jim Kenton.

"Um-m," hummed John Chew again. "That's bad."

"Oh, well now, look here, Mr. Chew," blustered Barrimore. "You mustn't go to think the place is anything like that. I'll tell you a thing or two that will open your eyes—"

"You were there?"

"Well, I wasn't there exactly, but I'm in charge of this office, and—"

"I'll talk to you when I want to buy the office. Yes, Mr. Kenton. What about the house? It has all modern conveniences, no doubt? Lots of telephones, and bells ringing all over when you step on buttons in the floor—beds that fold up into bookcases—all the necessities of life?"

"It's a regular stoneyard," said Jim.

"There's not even a doorbell. There's not a bathroom in the house except for servants, no heat, no plumbing, no light. It's an exact copy of Ramses' pyramid, done in the Renaissance style, only more uncomfortable to live in, seeing that Long Island gives Egypt a handicap of eighty degrees Fahrenheit every winter.

"It's got every unnecessary inconvenience that the fertile mind of man could devise in the fifteenth century—which you will recall was the age of the Inquisition—donjon keeps and luxuriously appointed torture chambers. I want to give the place a fair chance, but I was frightened away before I saw all of it, so you'd better glance over that description, and I'll let you know how much of it I can swear at."

John Chew blew moaningly through his thin lips. He picked up the typewritten description, and ran his eyes over it. His depression visibly deepened. "Awful," he whispered. "The worst I ever heard of. It's strange such a place is ever placed on the market."

"It belonged to Crumpton Knickerbocker, I see," he said, shaking his head. "I knew him well. Had a foot frozen once, sitting at dinner with him with our feet in the rushes. And to think I've lived to be wiled and inveigled into buying Crump's home. Man is born to trouble. When he isn't he goes out and buys it. It's a strange world."

He emitted these remarks in a sibilant monotone, while he conned the five pages of description.

Barrimore could not contain himself. "Now, see here, Mr. Chew," he broke in loudly. "This man's got no right to ruin the reputation of this office by bringing you here on a fool's errand. I'll tell you—"

"Thank you, thank you," said John Chew softly, glaring at him. "I appreciate your sympathy. Sit down. I know I'm a fool. Don't mention it."

"The price is six hundred thousand dollars—all cash?" he asked Jim Kenton.

"All cash," nodded Jim. "They won't shade it. I offered them five-ninety-five only yesterday. That's why I sent for you, Mr. Chew, because this place is about to be sold, and I thought you might want it."

"Thank you," said John Chew. "Sit down. Take up that telephone, and get Whitney Webb. Tell him that I must have a bathroom, a Dutch stove, and an electric oven in the kitchen. That I will pay him

exactly five hundred and ninety thousand dollars, and that my name is John Chew."

"It wouldn't be a bit of use," said Jim easily. "They don't care if they sell or not. If they sell, it'll be for six hundred thousand dollars, with ninety-nine cents and ten mills in the last dollar."

A habitual truth-teller has certain unfair advantages over us sinners. One of them is that when he tells a lie he gets away with it. John Chew looked right through Jim Kenton. He saw nothing but shining honesty.

"Very well," he said, standing up. "If such is the case I am losing my time. I will bid you good day. Please—"

"Oh, now—look *here!*" broke in Barrimore. "An offer like that—"

"Sit down!" The snarl was tigerish. No one familiar with Frank Ordway's studied suavity would have recognized the voice as his.

"Yes, young man?" John Chew could put enough balm on his vocal cords to draw out fishhooks. He was beaming coaxingly at Barrimore. "You were about to say something?"

No answer was volunteered.

"I was saying," he continued, "when interrupted for the third time by this helpful person, that if you will please call up Ridley & Burlinson, my attorneys, and arrange to have a contract drawn, we can sign it tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock. The price will be six hundred thousand dollars—all cash."

He shook hands with Frank Ordway, ignored Barrimore, but paused beside Jim Kenton, and looked at him severely. He shook his head.

"Um-m!" he hummed, and walked from the office.

Frank Ordway seized Jim by the hand. "Well, Kenton," he chuckled, "you were some time coming, but I'll say you broke the ice with a splash! You know what our commission will be, of course?"

"Five per cent," grinned Jim. "Thirty thousand dollars—of which I cut fifteen!"

"Thank Barrimore for that," said Frank Ordway. "By the way, where in Christendom did you learn to deceive people by telling them the naked truth? It takes most men twenty years of business experience to learn that."

"Down where I come from in the Pennsylvania country," said Jim, "we farm for

pleasure, and swap horses as a business. I'll admit we never made any money. But one thing we learn early is to stick to the facts, and let the other fellow do the lying to himself. The truth, not all the truth, but nothing but the truth—that's our principle. I was getting plumb discouraged over this real-estate game, as the other fellow never seemed to know anything about what he was buying, so if you told him some truth he couldn't guess the lies. I sure like to do business with men like old John Chew.

"I had to lie to him in the end, of course, so as to keep him from dickering around and trying to cheapen the property, and maybe getting cold on the deal. Now, this is how we lay down a lie in the Pennsylvania country: first we feed our man up with the most ghastly truth. We don't ask him to believe anything that we can prove—we prove it!

"If we say the horse weighs sixteen hundred pounds and six ounces we put him on the scales at the hay-and-feed store. If we say he's five years old we show an affidavit from the veterinary that saw him born. We carefully point out to the buyer a shoe gall that he has overlooked, and a healed-up cut that the horse took from a stone thrown against his fetlock. Now, the buyer's mesmerized. He knows in his heart and soul that he's met one honest horse trader.

"And then we tell him that that plug can do one-fifteen on a dry track—and then we shut up. We don't say whether it's a furlong in one minute and fifteen seconds, or a mile in one hour and fifteen minutes, or a mile in one day and fifteen hours. The buyer picks out the lie that pleases him best!"

Frank Ordway laughed appreciatively.

"I suspect, however, that this deal was prepared for a little more recently than down in the Pennsylvania country, Kenton. It smells to me like a put-up job, which most of these strokes of wonderful luck are.

"Now, as to your selling talk, Mr. Barrimore, I'm not satisfied with the principles you're inculcating in the office. They seemed to go big at first, but they won't pan out in the long run. I'm going to try another sales manager, and let you go back to selling. How about it, Kenton—would you like a whack at the job?"

"I'd rather not, Mr. Ordway, if it's just the same to you. I'm a new man, and I wouldn't have the good will of the office. If you'll let me make a nomination, I'd say give the place to Ed Heffely.

"There's another reason, too. I've got a six months' contract with you for Paradise Parkways, and I'm going to work that place for all it's worth. We've broken in down there now, and we've got the inside track, and it's dollars to doughnuts that we'll sell right and left. There's no end of a market for the stuff, so long as it's this side of Christopher Columbus."

Jim Kenton got the contract from Ridley & Burlinson the next morning, and carried it over to Newark for John Chew's signature. He managed to have five minutes' conversation with the proprietor of the State. It had to do with a handsome and modern eight-room bungalow just inside the private park at Fairways. Jim had noticed it when visiting there and had gotten a detailed description from the papers supplied him by Whitney Webb. He left John Chew's den with a contented smile.

Mary cried as though her heart would burst for joy. It's no joke to be lifted from a furnished room, to a furnished house just off Easy Street. It makes one cry.

"Now, don't misunderstand what kind of a place you're going to," he admonished her. They were eating lunch in an upstairs spaghetti foundry near a window through which Mary could make faces at the Kidds' restaurant across the way. "There are no stores within miles. If you buy anything in the neighborhood you'll pay three prices, as they only cater to millionaires. The house is shut in by trees, so there's no view. The rooms are just big enough to make work without being spacious. They charge four dollars a ton to deliver coal, but we won't be cold, as I'm giving John Chew back a mortgage that's big enough to keep us sweating."

"Oh, *lovely!*" she exclaimed with sparkling eyes. "It's just the house I always said I wanted!"

They hurried down to the Pennsylvania Station right after lunch. Jim slapped down a dollar and eighty cents.

"Two tickets for Paradise!" he ordered.

*Look for another real-estate story by Mr. McMorrow, "Sharps and Flats," in the next issue.*

# On His Own

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

*Author of "The Double-Cross Brand," "A Horse Deal in Hardpan," Etc.*

When "Cash" Wainwright returned to his Montana home after a term in prison he found one person who believed in him. Thereupon hectic happenings began to test the justification of this belief

CASH WAINWRIGHT was young, and somewhat of an optimist, despite the three years he had served in the State penitentiary for running horses across the border into Canada and selling them to buyers who did not ask where they came from. Cash had considered it an interesting game of both skill and chance. His partner in these transactions was an old-time whisky runner who, when finally caught, had turned state's evidence. Cash had been the goat, a young goat and a wild goat, but never a mean goat.

When released, with much time off for good behavior, Cash determined to go straight. And to him, to go straight did not mean simply to leave the country, change his name, and make a fresh start. Cash never did things by halves. To go straight meant to return to his native village in Montana and prove, by his presence and future conduct that he meant to live down his old reputation and build up a new one. It did not occur to him that often those who have not obviously sinned against their fellows are the greatest sinners. But he was to find that out.

"To him that hath shall be given." Cash recalled the preacher's quotation. Men in the pen took their Sunday sermon along with their other hardships, silently. Cash could understand that half of the quotation. But "To him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath—" Cash could not digest that portion of the scriptures. He wondered how any one, or any power could take something away from nothing.

Of course Cash was thinking of material things. He had left the penitentiary, and, as the saying goes, he had no reputation, which is the same as saying he had a bad reputation. "To him that hath shall be

given—" He had a bad reputation, plus—in the event of folks taking him for what he had been—it was too much for Cash. He decided that he would forget all quotations and simply do the right thing as his conscience dictated. Quotations were all right to listen to, but they were pretty hard to work by. He was too young to realize that the so-called helpful quotations are seldom helpful until maturity has lived them and digested them with the aid of the salt of experience.

Straight to his home town he traveled, arriving on a winter night—a Sunday night—the Sunday before Christmas. He whistled as he strode briskly up to his brother's house and unlatched the gate. Cash lived with his brother, the hardware merchant of the town. The Wainwright boys had been left orphans when children. Homer, the elder brother, had been employed in the hardware store, finally through thrift and industry becoming owner of the business. Homer Wainwright was steady, serious, and a pillar of the church. Cash, who cared nothing for hardware, aside from his six-gun, took to the range when a mere boy and battled his way through to his earliest ambition, that of becoming a real "hand," a puncher, a waddie—the word "cowboy" being alien to his vocabulary.

While riding the plains he met old man Davenport, erstwhile whisky runner, and notable as a horse thief who had never been apprehended. Just how Davenport induced Cash to become his partner in crime would make a long story in itself. But he did, possibly because Cash was not let into the full details of the transaction until after he had returned from across the border. He had simply gone along, at a more than generous wage, to help old man Davenport deliver some horses to a buyer in Canada. Cash

had enjoyed the trip, and was flattered by Davenport's apparent trust in his judgment.

Cash unlatched the gate. He did not notice that the house was dark until he was at the front step of the porch. Then it flashed through his mind that it was Sunday night and that his brother and his brother's wife were at church. Cash turned and strode out, paused at the gate and finally, shrugging his shoulders, he plodded across the street and down it till he came to the little wooden church on the corner. The long, arched windows were aglow with light. The steps to the church creaked with frost as he tiptoed up. He opened one of the double doors and peeked in. Finally he summoned up his courage, recalled his good resolutions, and stepped into the bare entrance. He had meant to take a seat at the back; but an officious brother of the vestry was upon him and led him to a seat far down in front before Cash could remonstrate. In fact, remonstrance would have been awkward. The back seats were all filled.

It happened—and it has happened before—that the minister had chosen a text having to do with lost sheep strayed from the fold, which in itself did not serve to make Cash comfortable. He felt that he was being preached at, despite the fact that the minister could not have known of his coming. Yet Cash paid strict attention to the sermon and the formalities of the service, with the exception of contributing to the collection. He had nothing to contribute, having spent his last cent in railroad fare. But he knew that would not make any difference. His brother, a regular and earnest church member, would be glad to see him there—and be it known, for the first time. Then, the citizens of Snowflake would doubtless be glad. Many of them had tried to induce Cash to join the fold in years past. It would all turn out all right.

Yet, as the service neared its conclusion, Cash began to feel nervous. He would have to face many of the people present before leaving the church. And then, he had glimpsed the face of Nellie, as he passed up the aisle. Nellie had always believed in Cash, even when she heard of his imprisonment. And somehow or other, Cash knew that she believed in him. They had been great friends; had danced together, and upon one or two occasions he had taken her for a drive. But he had not seen her often,

especially after he left to ride with the Bar-C outfit. Church would soon be out. Now, if Nellie would only stop and speak to him—

The minister was new, a stranger in the community. He was a good young man, and not afraid to shake hands with a returned convict—but he did not know that Cash was a returned convict. Homer Wainwright and his wife knew it, however, and they whispered together just before the close of the benediction. Cash was back again! And he had unblushingly entered the church and taken a front seat! What would people think? Cash had never been in church before. And he had disgraced the name of Wainwright—"be with you—and remain with you always."

Cash raised his head. People around him shuffled their feet, got into overcoats and stumbled out into the aisles. Cash was crowded along. Some one touched his arm. It was Nellie. She smiled and offered her hand. "I'm glad to see you, Cash," she said and smiled, just as though nothing had happened! Cash mumbled a greeting, and flushing, shuffled on out. Homer Wainwright had not stopped to speak to his ex-convict brother—not in church, but he was standing at the foot of the steps, alone. "When did you get in?" he queried, turning to indicate that they were to walk along.

"Where's Jenny?" queried Cash.

"She went on ahead."

Jenny was Homer Wainwright's wife—Cash's sister-in-law.

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm back—and—" Cash hesitated. He did not feel like avowing his good intentions, just then. His brother seemed to be walking unusually fast. He slowed up, however, when they were out of the stream of churchgoers. "What did you come to church for?" queried Homer.

"Why—" It was a question hard to answer just then.

"Looks like you wanted to brazen it out," said Homer.

Cash flushed in spite of the cold. "That was it," he said quietly. "And you didn't have the nerve to meet me in front of those—those Christians, in there. That lost-sheep stuff must have sure made a big dent in your soul."

"Jenny—that is—well, you know how it is—"

"Yes. I know how it is. Tell Jenny that I feel right sorry for her, but a dam' sight

sorrier for you. And listen, Homer. I came back here figuring to go straight. I kind of counted on you to look at me, even if you didn't say anything. But you beat it out as fast as you could, knowing I was up there in front among the folks that knew me. I'm going to give you some real dope. You're scared to be a man when Jenny is around. Now don't get sore. You know it's so. Jenny's got your goat, right! And another thing: You two Christians figure I've disgraced you. Let that ride. But what I done up North ain't a whisper to what I'm going to do, and I'll use the name of Wainwright going and coming. I sure wish you a Merry Christmas."

"Now, see here, Cash, if you need any money——"

"I'll go get it. Just smoke that, for a starter."

"Jenny said to have you come up to the house."

"Thanks, seeing church is out."

"If you're going to take that tone," said Homer, "why, I can't help you."

"Help me! Say, Homer, you never could see a joke. You missed your chance to help me when you turned your back on me in church, there. Let me tell you something: Nellie Stewart was the only soul in that shack that said a word to me. She wasn't afraid of what folks would say, or think. That's what I call thoroughbred. One thoroughbred among a corral full of mongrels, including yourself. Help me! Why, you can't help yourself without asking Jenny if it is all right. You're a hell of a brother!"

"Now, see here, Cash——"

"I'm leavin', right here at your gate. And just curl this and smoke it. 'To him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' Dope that out for yourself and keep your eye on the papers and mebby you'll learn something."

Without a glance at the house, Cash turned and strode down the street, bending his head against the keen wind that blew from the open prairie and whistled through the wires overhead. Without hesitation he marched to the livery stable, thumped on the office door and, finding that no one answered, opened the door and stepped in. The stove was red-hot. Cash drew up a bench and warmed his hands.

Presently the liveryman came in, shook hands with Cash, jokingly referred to his absence, and then, being somewhat of a

horseman and therefore human, asked Cash if he had had supper. Cash replied frankly that he had not. The liveryman got back into the overcoat he had just taken off and without a word marched out into the night. He returned with a bundle and a pitcher of hot coffee.

"Didn't see you at church," said Cash casually as he took a thick mutton sandwich from the package.

"Church? Say, Cash, try a new joke."

"How's business?"

"That's more like a joke. Rotten. Always is this time of year."

"That's tough. I wanted to borrow a little dough."

"Oh, it ain't so rotten that I couldn't let you take a grubstake. How much you want?"

"Would a couple of tens crimp you bad?"

"No. I can let you have that much."

"But I didn't see you in church," reiterated Cash.

"Oh, now I get you! 'Course you didn't. You'd have to be there to see me—if I happened to be there."

"Something like that. No. Put your money back in your pocket. I was just trying out an idea I got. Livery stables and churches ain't in the same class."

"Say, Cash, you feelin' sick?"

"Sick! I should say not! I feel like a two-year-old."

"Well, I never heard you talk like that before. You're lookin' fine. Did they feed you good up—up North?"

"Pretty good."

"I see Davenport got his. Somebody fixed him after he done his year. I guess he had it comin'."

"He did, till you told me that. I didn't hear."

"Yes. Somebody got him, over to the Bend."

"Well, then I can't kick. But I never would 'a' squealed on him in a hundred years."

"I know you wouldn't. And any time you want a little dough, and I got it——"

"That's all right, Bill. I know it. I expect to have some dough, right soon. I may want to celebrate Christmas."

"You're young yet, Cash——"

"Thanks, Bill. I get you. I'll stick around a few days. To-morrow I'll clean out the stalls and feed; and you can sleep, if you want to."

"You're welcome to hang your hat here as long as you like," said the liveryman. "And say, Cash, I did figure on going over to see uncle Frank, to-morrow. Didn't know just how I could make it with no one around to look after the stable. But now you're here——"

"I'll stick. Anything going out to-morrow?"

"Traveling man wants a team and the buckboard at six. He's going over to Big Falls. But I'll be here till seven-thirty. There's two horses in the far stalls that belong to a couple of strangers that are staying over to the hotel. They paid me in advance up to to-morrow noon. It'll be all right to let 'em take their horses. There's nothing else, unless somebody phones in for a rig."

"It's right cold weather to be riding the country," said Cash casually.

"That's what I thought. Say, come on and take a look at those horses. They didn't come from this part of the country, and I couldn't see no brand on either of 'em."

Old Bill rose, picked up his lantern, and hobbled out to the stable floor. Cash followed him, shivering a little at the sudden change in temperature.

Bill held the lantern high while Cash sized up the two horses. They were big animals, built to carry weight and make time. One was a dark-gray and the other a bay. Cash examined them for brands. They apparently were unmarked. He was about to return to the office when he paused and turned back. Stepping into the stall of the gray he patted the horse on the flank and, moving forward, lifted his mane. "Fetch the light in," he said to old Bill.

"Sure as you live!" exclaimed Bill. "And I been in the business for eighteen years. That 'D' must mean something."

"Dixie Ranch. He breeds good stock. But what these two horses are doing down this way——"

"And the men that own them——"

"Let's look at the bay," suggested Cash.

The big bay carried the same brand. Bill lowered his lantern.

"They paid in advance, till to-morrow noon," reiterated old Bill.

Cash had nothing to say.

Later, however, just before he turned in, he asked Bill if the through trains were running on time. Bill told him that both east and westbound schedules were 'way off be-

cause of the snow in the Notch, some forty miles below Snowflake. "From two to three hours late, coming west," said old Bill.

"When do you figure to be back?" queried Cash.

"About nine, to-morrow evening, if the westbound is on time."

Cash threw back the blankets of the camp cot and crawled in. Old Bill put out the lantern. The box stove showed a thin, red line of light around the edges of the door; a line which brightened and grew dim as the wind tugged at the stovepipe. Cash pulled the rough blankets over his ear and closed his eyes. In imagination he visioned the westbound express toiling up the long grade to the Notch. He could almost hear the exhausts of the heavy locomotive. He opened his eyes and watched the thin, red line around the stove door flare and fade with a pulsing regularity. The stove, owing to the rush of wind, seemed to be puffing regularly like a locomotive. It roared softly. Cash grinned. So much for suggestion.

Then he thought of the church, of his brother Homer, and of Nellie. Yet across his waking vision of Nellie the blurred semblance of the westbound express came and went. He could not keep from thinking of the train, and of the two strangers who had left their horses at the livery. He asked himself what the two men were doing so far south, riding horses in such weather. If they were visiting local cattlemen in the district, it was a queer way to make a visit. And it was evident that they were not of the local district, or old Bill would have known them.

Through his reasoning came the steady pulsations of the wood stove in the office. Then a puff of smoke flirted from the crack round the stove door. "Wind is changing," thought Cash. "Most like we'll have a thaw to-morrow."

And, incidentally, he realized that to-morrow would be Christmas Day. Again he thought of Nellie Stewart; of her greeting, and her smile. She had not been ashamed to shake hands with him, an ex-convict, in front of all those people in church. And she had been the only one to publicly recognize him. "I don't belong in this town," Cash told himself. Then he added humorously, "Wonder where I do belong?"

Again Cash thought of the westbound express—and of the possibility of holding it up, at the Notch. He would sure gain

a "rep" by holding up the train single-handed. He had the name. Why not have the game?

Monday morning saw a change in the weather. The ridges of the roofs showed black, and the south wind brought the smell of melting snow. Cash was up and out, hooking up the team for the drummer, at five-thirty; and at six the drummer came, with a man from the hotel to drive for him. Old Bill and Cash had breakfast at a little eating house near by. After leaving some change with Cash, old Bill departed on the seven-thirty local for Rockford. He told Cash that there would be no business after twelve that day, as most folks had made their arrangements for Christmas; that Cash could close up at noon if he wished, or make himself at home in the office.

Cash busied himself cleaning out the stalls and feeding the horses. At nine o'clock he was through. He found an old magazine in the livery office and was reading it when a boy stepped in and asked for him.

"Right here," said Cash.

"I was to give you this," said the boy, and he handed a note to Cash.

The note was brief and at first puzzled him until he had read the signature. "I know everything is going to be all right," it read; and it was signed, "Nellie."

"How did you know where to find me?" queried Cash.

"Nellie said I was to bring it here. I'm her cousin, from Arlington. We came up to spend Christmas at Nellie's. Last night we saw you through the window here, talking to the man that owns this place. We was coming from church. I saw you in church, last night, up in front."

"Yes, I was up in front," said Cash, smiling. "You just tell Miss Stewart that I said everything would be all right. And thanks for fetching the note."

The boy departed, whistling. Cash sat back and gazed out of the broad window. Across the street was the local hotel where the men were stopping who owned the horses with the Dixie brand. Cash wondered what the men looked like, where they were from, and what business called them to use saddle horses at that time of year. The Dixie brand was a brand of the North, up near the border, and a long way from Snowflake. Again Cash caught himself imagining that there was something peculiar about the pres-

ence of the strangers in town. He had almost threatened his brother Homer that he would hear something startling—and now Cash was planning a holdup in his own mind, with the two men over in the hotel as the principals. He laughed to himself. The men were no doubt there on a perfectly legitimate errand. The soul of the scheme of holding up the train was his own.

Cash heard the ten-o'clock train pull in and depart. Presently a short, stocky individual, wearing blue jeans and a heavy blue cloth cap, such as riders wear in cold weather, plodded across from the station to the hotel. "Puncher," said Cash as the other bow-legged up the steps and entered.

Cash leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes against the glare of the sun on the snow through the window. One of the horses in the far end of the stable began to kick and raise a racket in his stall. Cash stepped to the office door and called to the animal. The noise ceased.

Cash stepped back to his chair and sat down. Again the horse began to fret. Cash rose and walked to the end of the stable. The animal had somehow managed to get its foreleg over the tie rope. Cash slipped into the stall and untied the rope. The horse quieted down. Cash was just about to re-tie the horse, and step out into the runway when he heard voices. He caught a glimpse of three figures in the open doorway of the stable. They were outlined sharply against the white of the snow in the street beyond. Cash hesitated. "Reckon I'll tie you shorter," he said. Footsteps sounded in the stable, and the three figures came along gropingly, half blinded by the glare of light from the snow. "Can't see a dam' thing!" exclaimed one of the men. "These the hosse?"

"No. Down at the end—two end stalls."

"This thaw will cut the snow in the Notch," said a voice.

"And melt down hoss tracks, later," said another voice.

Cash drew back in the stall and slowly stroked the horse's neck.

"Hey!" called one of the men, "anybody runnin' this joint?"

Cash was about to answer, but something held him silent. That remark about the thaw melting down horse tracks had set him thinking.

"The old man must be out, liquorin' up, somewhere. This is Merry Christmas, Jake."

"Merry hell! It's goin' to be a long, cold ride——"

"Just that hoss pawin'," said another voice as the speaker hesitated.

"We got the dope," said a third voice. "You leave the hosses at the bridge and hop the freight. We'll be waitin' for you."

"Yes. It'll take the three of us to turn the trick. No use goin' over that again."

"All right. These are the hosses. Just take 'em when you're ready. We paid the bill."

"And don't let your foot slip," said another voice. "We'll want them hosses bad, when we do want 'em. You play safe. Just step over to Rockford off the train, scared stiff because you been stuck up. You get your third of the rake-off for just ridin' these hosses down to the bridge and tyin' 'em there."

"And entertainin' the passengers while you go through 'em."

One of the men laughed. Cash held his breath, fearful that, accustomed to the dim light of the stable, they might discover him as they left. But they passed the stall without glancing his way. He heard them pause in the doorway at the front of the stable and imagined they stopped to see if there was any one in the office.

Waiting until assured that they had left, Cash stepped out and strode to the office. He thought of telephoning to Rockford or wiring the authorities to be on the lookout for something startling. But he had no positive evidence that anything startling was about to happen. And moreover, his name would not count for much. Everybody in the county knew he had been in the pen. No, if any one was to handle the matter, he would handle it himself.

The idea appealed to him. If he had misinterpreted the conversation in the back of the stable—although he thought he had not—and went on a wild-goose chase, it would be his own doing and the laugh would be on him. Youthful pride kept him from speaking to any of the authorities in his own town. It would look—so he thought—like trying to curry favor, make good by peaching on men of his kind. And he did not care to be known as a man who had "squealed" on any one. If the three men he had heard talking, *did* rob the express and get away with it, no one would know that he ever knew of the proposed robbery. If, however, he took a hand, and blocked their game, it

would show that he was playing on the right side of the law, at least. But Cash decided not to block their game. That would be hazardous, in that he might be considered in league with them. He knew that risk.

No, he would do better than that. He would be at their rendezvous at the bridge, when they had "the goods on them." It was a long chance, two against one, but he would take it. Evidently their plan was to hold up the westbound express, go through the train, and then take the horses and ride either north or south from the bridge. But the Notch was some thirty miles from the bridge. Cash wondered just how they would get from the Notch to the bridge. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "I've got it!" he exclaimed.

His experience in running horses across the border stood him in good stead. He knew that the men, for instance, would not ride north from the railroad after holding up the train. The snow-covered hills to the north made a quick get-away impossible. They would ride south, toward open country, and open weather. Evidently the plan was that two of them should take the noon train for Rockford, hide somewhere near the Notch and await the coming of the third man on the local freight. And the third man would have left the saddle horses securely tied somewhere in the river bottom near the bridge. The bridge was some thirty miles west of the Notch; yet Cash thought he knew how they would manage to cover that thirty miles.

It was an excellent plan, from a criminal standpoint. The third man would simply make his way to Rockford after the holdup, go to a hotel, and if questioned, claim that he had been a passenger on the westbound express and that the highwaymen had taken all his money with the exception of enough to pay his night's lodging. It would be easy enough to explain that the robbers had overlooked some bills in his vest pocket. He would be unsuspected and could size up the situation and inform his pals of the movements of the posse, if necessary. They would doubtlessly head for some southern town and, if this went well, call for mail at the general delivery. The one difficulty that appealed to Cash was to find where they would leave the horses. Well, the horses were at present in the stable. Cash decided that he would watch the third man and see which way he rode.

Pretending to read his magazine, Cash tilted his chair back and watched the hotel opposite. Just before the noon train arrived, he saw three men come from the hotel. The short man came directly across to the stable. The other two turned and strode toward the railroad station. Cash kept on reading. The short man pushed the office door open. "I came for them hosses," he advised.

"Help yourself," said Cash. "The bill is paid."

Cash feigned a deep interest in the magazine. The short man in the blue cap sized Cash up for a young fellow who had been hired to take care of the livery on Christmas Day and was indifferent to the custom of personally seeing that horses called for were either harnessed or saddled for his customers. And Cash wanted the man to think so. A little later Cash got up and strolled indolently to the door as the short man brought up the two horses, both saddled, and ready for the road. "Want to sell 'em?" queried Cash.

The short man shook his head.

Cash watched him ride away leading the bay horse. He rode east.

Meanwhile the noon local had steamed in and departed. Cash waited until the rider had time to get well out of town. Then he closed the double doors of the stable, climbed to the loft, and threw hay to the horses, locked the rear door, and, stepping to the office, opened the locker. He selected a heavy, sheep-lined short coat and a pair of buckskin gloves that old Bill kept for everyday use in cold weather. He took down old Bill's gun and belt and laid them with the coat and gloves. Then he locked the stable doors on the inside and went out through the office.

The station agent was just closing up to go home and eat his Christmas dinner when Cash arrived on the platform.

Cash asked the agent, casually, if the old lady carrying the black satchel and the two men in sour doughs and caps had not taken tickets to Arlington. "I wanted to see those fellows a minute," he added.

"Nope," said the agent. "Mrs. Hamley took a return to Arlington. But the two fellas, they took singles to Rockford."

"Any train going to Rockford this afternoon?"

"Nope. Nothin' but the local freight. She is due about three. She most likely

will be late, at that. You might try to get a lift in the caboose."

Cash thanked the agent and strolled back to the livery. He rolled a cigarette and smoked, gazing out of the window. What if the men did hold up the westbound? That was their business and not his. And he wondered what had set him to thinking, even before he had heard them talk together, that they might hold up the train? He came to the conclusion that he had thought of that possibility because the idea had been in his own mind. He had reasoned that if he had the name he might as well have the game. But was such a game worth the risk? Of course, if a man got away with it—but to serve from ten to twenty years in the pen—Cash knew something about that. And then, there was Nellie. She had shaken hands with him. She believed in him: and had sent a note saying that she knew things would turn out all right.

"I'll take just one chance," said Cash. "If I fall down this trip, then it's me for Texas and the border."

Cash stepped out and watered all the horses and led them back to their stalls. Then he strode over to the hotel and left the key to the livery with the hotel proprietor, explaining that he had been called away for the afternoon but expected to be back that evening. The team and buckboard that had taken the drummer to Fairmount would no doubt be back before six that evening.

Back in the livery office, the pass-key of which Cash had retained, only locking up the main stable, Cash waited impatiently for the arrival of the local freight. Suddenly it occurred to him that he had not eaten anything since breakfast. He had forgotten his noon meal in the watching of the men and in shaping his own plans. He ate at the restaurant near by and returned to the stable.

He was impatient to be doing something. He knew every foot of the country between Snowflake and Rockford, and just where the local freight would make good time and where it would have hard going. He had his theory as to the three men, and being both curious and adventurous, to say nothing of being free to play any game he chose, he felt that the risk he ran—and he realized that he ran a considerable risk—would be more than offset if he were successful. If he failed, he would simply disappear. Or, if the men got him—— He paused in his

cogitations. If the men got him folks would most naturally surmise that he was implicated in the robbery. Almost automatically he searched in the office desk for paper and a pencil. "Got a hunch three men are going to hold up the westbound to-night. I aim to get them if I can. Cash Wainwright," he wrote.

He left the note unaddressed, on the office desk.

Shortly after three o'clock that afternoon the local freight pulled in, cut out two cars, and departed with Cash in the cupola of the caboose. It was Christmas Day and the crew were good-natured and quite willing to give Cash a lift as far as Rockford; especially as he had explained that he had missed the noon local and some folks that he wanted to see were in Rockford. At best the local would not make over twenty miles an hour on the average, between Snowflake and Rockford. If he failed to see any one board the freight, he planned to ride on through and come back with old Bill.

From the cupola he had a clear view of the train, and he watched as it lurched and clattered down the long, easy grade toward the distant bridge. Then came the dip and the up grade. The freight slowed as it climbed the rise toward the trestle. Ahead, the engine thundered across the bridge. Cash watched the flicker of the side rods, leaning far out from the cupola.

The trestle beams marched past. The train was gaining headway again. Then, when Cash had given up all hope of seeing any one try to board the freight, a figure stepped quickly from the bushes along the track and running, swung up on a gondola and disappeared between it and a box car. Without explanation Cash dropped from his seat in the cupola, and was out and off the caboose before the astonished crew knew what he was about.

He dove from the track into the brush and squatted down. When the train had rounded the next bend he rose and searched for the tracks of the man who had boarded the freight. He found them and back-tracked to the river bottom, where he discovered the horses securely tied and sheltered in a little clump of willows. The afternoon sun was low. The river looked steel cold in the fading light. Its snow-edged banks were crumbling in the current. Cash examined the saddle pockets on the bay horse and found a package of food and a

flask of whisky. He was not surprised at this find. It still further fortified his theory that the man, whom Cash now designated as No. 3, was an old hand and knew his business.

There was a ford below the trestle, and from the ford a little-used road meandered south. With food and whisky, and two such horses as were tied in the willows, the men could be a hundred miles south of the railroad in twenty-four hours. They had planned cleverly. A posse would start out to search for them from the spot where the robbery had occurred, and hardly from the bridge, for it was almost certain that no one had seen the lone highwayman hide the horses in the willows. They could not be seen from the bridge above. Cash made sure of that fact by climbing the bank and peering down. The local freight would take the siding at Rockford for the westbound express. And there the third man would drop off and join his companions.

Cash built a small fire, ate some of the food, and drank a little whisky. The shadows were growing long and the chill from the winter river nipped at his cheeks.

"Everything will turn out all right." Cash wondered if it would.

It was almost dark and growing colder. Cash disliked to give up the fire but he did, kicking snow over it and tramping it out. Then he stepped to the willows, untied the horses, and led them down to the south side of the ford and tied them again. If the men did get by him they would not find their horses right away. Then he came back to the bridge, climbed to the track, and kept himself warm by walking up and down between the rails. He had learned a sort of grim patience in the penitentiary. He plodded back and forth, thinking of his brother Homer and of the folk in Snowflake; and his thought included Nellie Stewart. She believed in him. Well, she would have good reason to believe in him if things turned out as he had planned.

One thing troubled him. It would be blacker than the inside of a pocket when the men came for their horses—and to stop two train robbers under such circumstances might entail some unexpected difficulties. One thing was in his favor. They would not see him till he was on them; and they would not expect to be apprehended at the bridge.

For three weary hours Cash plodded up and down the track, ever alert for the sign

which would tell him that his chance had come. He figured that it must be about nine.

Another hour of plodding and swinging his arms to keep his fingers warm, when, as he was about to turn and plod back toward the bridge, he saw the headlight of a locomotive swing round the bend. He jumped and ducked behind some brush. The long shaft of light straightened down the track as the engine struck the grade toward the bridge. From the sound of the exhaust Cash surmised that the engine was running light. He was not surprised. He had figured that the holdups would cut out the engine and make a dash for their horses. The long shaft of light spread, grew nearer, and shot past. The engine slowed down and stopped. Cash rose and ran down the track as a dim figure dropped from the cab step. He crouched behind the tender.

"This way," said a voice.

"Wait till I turn her loose," said another voice from the cab, and Cash stepped round to the far side of the tender cautiously. The big locomotive's wheels spun as the man in the cab pulled the throttle wide open. Then the drivers took hold and the locomotive moved off, as the man in the cab crossed to the riverside and dropped to the ground.

"Bill, you cover that one and I'll take care of this hombre," said Cash.

One of the men, bending over something on the ground, suddenly straightened and fired at the sound of that unexpected voice. Cash heard the buzz of the bullet past his head. He "opened up" in true puncher style. "Get him, Bill!" he cried to a supposed companion. But the other man didn't wait. He started to run down the track toward the bridge. Cash's man was down.

Cash heard the running man stumble. Then came a shout and a splash. He had slipped on the ties of the bridge and had plunged into the icy river.

"He's done," muttered Cash. "Nothing can save him."

Cautiously Cash approached the dim blur on the tracks. But the dim blur did not move. Far in the western distance Cash could hear the runaway locomotive. It flashed across his mind that he had seen the door of the fire box open as it passed him coming up to the bridge. In that event the cold winter air would soon kill the fire and the locomotive would slow down and stop for lack of steam. And, no doubt, that had been the plan of the holdup men. They would

reason that a posse would search for their tracks near the Notch and also at the place where the locomotive would be found.

"The headlight will show up strong," said Cash to himself. "If there's any down trains, they'll see it in time, on the straight-away between here and Snowflake."

Then Cash gathered brush and built a fire. By its light he examined the man who was down. He was not dead, but gravely wounded. Two of Cash's shots had hit him. Underneath the man Cash found a gunny sack—and he knew, before he examined it, what it contained. Cash's former experiences with officers of the law had taught him shrewdness. Instead of tying the gunny sack to one of the horses, he carried it far back in the brush and, digging a hole, buried it. He knew that his tracks would show; but he intended to be on the spot when the sack was recovered.

Leaving the wounded outlaw, Cash got the horses and led them back to the track. He tied the wounded man across the saddle, mounted the spare horse and set out toward Snowflake. "And if he lives through it, all the better," he murmured.

He rode slowly on account of the led horse and its burden. And occasionally he got off and walked to get warm. Arrived in Snowflake, Cash rode straight to the livery and found a group of riders there, summoned together by wire from Rockford, and instructed to watch for the outlaws and the light engine. Cash's appearance was received in a questioning silence. Many of the men present knew him, and some, Cash's intuition told him, suspected him of complicity in the robbery. One of them, an undersheriff, had Cash's note. He indicated that he would like to hear an explanation. Cash did not like the other's tone. "Here's one of my explanations," said Cash indicating the wounded outlaw. "The other I make to the sheriff, when he asks for it."

His answers to their questions were brief. He did, however, volunteer the information that if they cared to get busy they would find a light engine somewhere between Snowflake and the bridge. The road he had taken had swung far from the tracks and he had not seen the engine.

After the wounded outlaw had been taken care of Cash stepped over to the station and sent a service wire to Rockford. It was addressed to his friend old Bill and contained information describing the third outlaw.

While Cash was in the station the undersheriff entered. His manner had changed. He intimated that he had nothing whatever against Cash. That he simply wanted to get enough information to enable him to start out and round up the train robbers.

"They're rounded up," said Cash. "One is over to the hotel, where you took him. Another is in the river. He fell off the bridge, and I reckon he didn't get far. The third one is most like explaining to the sheriff in Rockford why he is there—and as I told you, when the sheriff shows up I'll tell him the rest."

"The wire to me said those guys got away with the dough," stated the undersheriff.

"Mebby they did," said Cash. "Mebby the fella that slipped off the bridge had it on him. I never seen him after he started to run."

"You figure to get all the glory out of this you can," said the undersheriff sarcastically.

"I sure do. I didn't take the long chance for fun."

Just then the operator began to take a message from Rockford. "They got the third man!" he said as he wrote rapidly.

"Who got him?" queried Cash.

"Old Bill—and the sheriff. The guy was at the Elkhorn House. Claimed he was innocent. Rockford says that when they searched him he couldn't show a ticket—and he claimed he had a through ticket west. Ought to claimed he was just travelin' local. Funny how those guys almost get by, and then let their feet slip."

"I can tell if he's the right man," stated Cash. He turned to the undersheriff. "You might just as well unsaddle and call off your war dogs, sheriff. There's nothing left to hunt, but that stray engine, down the line. And I reckon the railroad'll take care of that."

"You'll stay in town?" said the undersheriff to Cash as he left the station.

"Yes. I'm sleeping at the livery. Glad to see you any time."

About midnight the westbound, pushing a dead engine ahead of her, arrived in Snowflake. And on the westbound came the sheriff of Rockford and old Bill, with a local newspaper man, from Rockford. In spite of the cold, several of the posse organized at Snowflake were hanging about the station, anticipating—some of them—the arrest of Cash Wainwright. Cash had a bad name.

He had served time. And it seemed mighty strange that he alone should have known so much about the robbery. Moreover, Cash knew where the money and jewelry was, if any one did. It was an example of the old attitude of the presumably righteous toward the unrighteous: "Give a dog a bad name—and then throw stones at him, simply because he has a bad name."

It was noticeable that Homer Wainwright did not put in an appearance, although he must have known of the robbery and of his brother's return with one of the bandits gravely wounded. The fact was, Homer was inclined to suspect that Cash had carried out his threat to make the name of Wainwright more notorious than it was—and had, by some turn of chance, managed to cover his tracks and appear as a hero.

Old Bill, the liveryman, seemed to be the only citizen of Snowflake who was willing to "talk up" for Cash.

The sheriff of Rockford, however, was too wise to be influenced by the attitude of Cash Wainwright's own townsfolk. Naturally the sheriff knew Cash's record, and the sheriff also knew that some of the most law-abiding and forceful citizens of the State had youthful records that they had lived down. So without any argument the sheriff marched to the livery and there in the office he held a private session of inquiry and comment.

Cash told all he knew about the affair, from the moment that he first suspected the men to the last act of that squalid tragedy, at the bridge. The sheriff listened and nodded. He knew that Cash was talking straight, yet he had a question to ask. "Why did you do it?"

"Darned if I know," said Cash, smiling.

And for some reason or other that answer seemed to please the sheriff. Then: "Where's the stuff?"

"I'll take you to it, alone," said Cash.

"What did you write that note for?" queried the sheriff.

"Oh, in case something went wrong."

The sheriff nodded again, pulled out his watch, and glanced at it, and seemed to be comparing it with the round clock on the livery office wall. He rose abruptly. "I'll see you in the morning," he said quite casually, to Cash. Then, "Bill, it's late, but do you think we could get a drink over to the hotel?"

Old Bill blinked, caught a look in the sheriff's eye and nodded. The two old-

timers buttoned their coats to the neck and plodded out and across the street. The newspaper man came in, lit a cigarette, and took out a pencil and notebook. Cash glanced at him sideways. The reporter began to talk. Cash listened.

About a half hour later old Bill entered the livery office. "Sheriff would like to see you," he said, indicating the reporter.

Cash, left alone, took off his coat and boots and lay down on the cot. He needed rest and sleep, yet he did not feel sleepy.

Meanwhile the sheriff had a talk with the reporter. The result was that the reporter promised to forward no news of the present status of the train robbery until the sheriff gave him permission. "And you won't lose by it," concluded the sheriff. "You'll get first innings on the right story, with trimmings."

"You mean that the news of the robbery has already got to the papers—but the fact that the train robbers have been caught isn't ready for publication yet?"

"That's it. And I'm holding it—to help that boy, Wainwright."

"Great idea!" said the reporter. "And I guess the company can afford it."

"But you can't afford to tell all you know about it yet," said the sheriff, "and stay around Rockford."

"You promised me an exclusive story—and that's good enough," stated the reporter.

Then the reporter and the sheriff decided to go to bed. Old Bill walked downstairs and over to the livery. Cash was asleep on the cot. "Better get under the blankets, son," said Bill. Cash wakened and complied grumbly.

The wire that the sheriff had expected arrived at Snowflake at nine in the morning, relayed from Rockford by one of his deputies. The wire authorized the sheriff to post a notice of reward for the bandits. It was signed by an official of the railroad company. The sheriff tucked the wire in his pocket and strode to the livery. Cash was helping old Bill clean out the stalls and feed the stock. "When you get through," said the sheriff, without preamble, "you might saddle up one of those horses and go get that money. I'll wait here for you. You can go and get back, I reckon, before we could get there on the local—and back again."

"Suppose I keep on going?" said Cash, grinning.

"Suppose you do?"

6A P

Cash finished his work, saddled up the big bay he had ridden the night before, and rode out and down the street. The sheriff and old Bill forgathered in the livery office and had a long talk. Cash made the ride, twelve miles down and twelve back, in a little less than four hours. When he turned the gunny sack over to the sheriff, the latter asked him how much the bandits got from the passengers.

"Darned if I know," said Cash.

"Well, we'll see, right now." And while old Bill and Cash looked on, the sheriff counted the silver and bills and gold and the number of watches, rings, stickpins, and brooches in the haul. "I'd figure about twenty-five hundred, all told," said the sheriff. "The company has offered a reward of five thousand for the capture of the holdups."

"By gosh!" exclaimed old Bill—and that was all he said. Bill had a way of keeping silent that was worthy of a diplomat.

"And I guess you get it," continued the sheriff. "And it's some Christmas present."

Five thousand dollars would mean a real start in life for Cash, and he had no sentimental ideas of refusing to take it. But the realization of becoming possessor of that sum, suddenly, did not benumb his shrewdness. "How comes it that the company offered a reward after those fellas were—were all in?" he queried.

Old Bill could not refrain from glancing at the sheriff, who showed a "poker face" that was worthy of a higher cause.

Cash caught the glance and recalled the newspaper man's sudden exit the night before, at the request of the sheriff. "I figure you fellas framed something," said Cash, smiling.

"I promised that reporter that you'd give him the whole story, with trimmin's, this morning. He's over to the hotel, sleepin' off our hospitality of last night. But he'll be over for the story, with trimmin's."

"That's fair enough," said Cash. "Only, that five thousand is going to be cut three ways, when we get it. Bill, and you, and me—"

The sheriff slowly pulled a piece of crumpled paper from his pocket and spread it out on his knee. He read it and passed it to Cash. It was Nellie Stewart's note which Cash had somehow dropped from his pocket the day before. "I know everything is going to be all right," he read.

Cash flushed and glanced up at the sheriff.

The sheriff still maintained his poker expression. "That would look to me kind of like a promissory note which might have to be met, some day. Seems to me if I was a young fella, startin' in life all over again, I'd figure that five thousand wasn't too much money to meet that note with. Think it over while I go and send a wire to Rockford."

"And just forgit me," said old Bill, when the sheriff had departed. "All I done was to give your telegraft to Jim, and he did the arrestin'. You just take that there money. You sure earnt it."

Cash picked up his hat and started toward the door. "I'll be back, in mebby an hour. Tell that fella from the newspaper office to wait, if he shows up." And Cash departed hurriedly.

Fearful that the impetus of his resolve would evaporate if he tarried to think about it, Cash strode down the street and, turning a corner, strode halfway down a side street and knocked at a door. A pleasant-faced woman opened the door to him. "Could I see Nellie for a minute?" he asked impetuously.

Mrs. Stewart ushered him in, and somewhat to his surprise offered her hand. "You rushed past, in church Sunday evening, and Mr. Stewart and I didn't get a chance to speak to you," she said, smiling.

"I—I reckon I did rush," stammered Cash.

"I'll call Nellie." And Mrs. Stewart left the room.

Presently—it seemed hours to Cash—Nellie came in, alone. Cash rose and shook hands with her. "I want to ask you a question," he blurted.

"Yes?"

"About some money. I didn't know who to ask, except you. I got your note—but I guess I was too busy right then to write an answer. I—"

"We heard about the robbery," said Nellie.

"That was it. You see——" And Cash told Nellie the whole story, not concealing his own feelings, nor any detail that led up to his journey to the bridge. He told her of the reward money and that he did not know whether to take it or not. "I feel like I needed that money—and I guess I earned it," he said. "But I wanted to know how you felt about it."

"But why me?"

"Well, you were the only person that noticed me or said a word to me—that night—and I thought, mebby, you could kind of advise me——"

Nellie smiled rather wistfully and shook her head. "I'd like to help you decide, Cash, but I can't. You'll have to decide, yourself."

Cash misinterpreted her meaning. And, being young, and headstrong, bridled a bit. "Oh, all right. I'm sorry I bothered you, Miss Stewart."

"I'm glad you came to see me," said Nellie. "And I'm glad that you asked my advice."

Cash was puzzled. And he was disappointed. It had taken considerable courage for him to call and speak as frankly as he had.

"I guess I'll be going," he said, and stepped toward the door.

Nellie barely touched his sleeve. He stopped, his eyes questioning her. "I think I know how you feel," she said quietly. "And I think you don't realize how most of the people here feel toward you. It was a fine thing for you to come to church, Sunday evening. That took real grit. And I knew you hadn't come to see me. You came because you wanted your brother, and your friends to know that you meant to start all over again. You were angry because you thought the people didn't recognize you. You rushed out of church, after I had spoken to you——"

"Well, I guess you would have, too, if you——"

"And you didn't realize that many of the people would have spoken to you if you had given them a chance. Most of them were so surprised to see you there that they could hardly realize it *was* you, until you were gone. Have you gone right up to any of your old friends and spoken to them, Cash?"

"No."

"Well, try it, and see how many of them will say they are glad to see you back again. You mustn't expect them to hunt you up. I know it will be hard for you to do, but try it."

"By gosh, Nellie, I'll do it! I'll start right now." And he shook hands with her vigorously. "And that five thousand can ride till I figure out what I'm going to do about it. I haven't got it, yet, anyway."

As Cash hastened down the steps he

glanced back, and waved at Nellie who stood in the doorway. "I—we'll be at church, New Year's Eve," said Nellie. And she closed the door.

Cash put in a busy week reestablishing himself socially in his home town. And incidentally he became more cautious as to how he used the word "friend." Heretofore he had never differentiated the words "acquaintance" and "friend." In his breezy way he had called any one that knew him a friend. He was aware that the train-robbery incident made him popular, but he did not take advantage of the fact. But Cash was decidedly human, and he did not make any overtures to his brother Homer. Neither did he try to avoid him. They met once or twice, nodded and passed on. But it was not all easy going.

For instance, Cash thought nothing of hitching up a rig for the young minister of the unforgettable first night in church, and watching the minister drive off. But an hour later, when the minister passed up the main street with Nellie Stewart seated beside him in the buggy, Cash stared and swore a wholesome oath. So *that* was how things were going? And Cash bitterly denounced all women and all ministers. But as stated once before, he was an optimist, and it is difficult to down a real optimist. Cash did not know that the minister's mission was one of entirely disinterested charity, and that Nellie had gone with him at his request because she could "handle" the folk who were the objects of such charity, visible in groceries and supplies donated by the members of the church. Cash did not know that—and perhaps it was just as well.

But Cash did call at the Stewart's home Thursday evening and invite Nellie to accompany him to church New Year's Eve; and it was not without a sense of quiet humor that he included Mr. and Mrs. Stewart in the invitation. And they accepted.

In the Saturday noon mail Cash received a letter from the railroad company's main office, inclosing a draft for five thousand dollars. The letter mentioned the season of the year as an explanation of the fact that the matter of reward had been put through with unusual promptness. Cash felt

no special elation at having received the draft. He had other matters in mind, just then.

His appearance at the church with the Stewarts, New Year's Eve, created a sensation. And Homer Wainwright and his wife were not immune. Homer's wife sniffed and stared straight ahead. Homer looked guilty, for some reason or other. And these things did not escape the shrewd eyes of the townsfolk near Homer's pew.

And because human nature at best, has a weakness for siding with the popular view, many of the churchgoers made it a point to shake hands with Cash after the service was over. And because Homer Wainwright still felt guilty, although he did not know why, he made it a point to shake hands with his brother right there in the aisle. Cash barely hesitated before giving his hand. And because Cash was Cash, he said to Homer quietly: "Glad you came through, Homer. You wouldn't 'a' had many more chances. You see, Mr. Stewart and I are going to California, next month, to take up some land in the Imperial Valley."

Homer had nothing to say. He had rather hoped that Cash would make overture to be taken into the hardware business—as Cash now had some money to invest and the business needed capital. In fact, Mrs. Wainwright had suggested that possibility to her husband. She did not find that her religious views interfered at all with the chance of promoting the hardware business to a more sound basis.

Cash accompanied the Stewarts home from church and spent an hour talking over their future plans with the family.

Then, because Cash was Cash, he said good night—once to the family and twice to Nellie, at the door; and straightaway made for the livery stable and old Bill.

They sat by the big wood stove in the office and smoked. They did not talk much. Presently the round clock struck twelve. The report of a gun sounded in the distance, and then the church bell began to ring. Old Bill rose and stepped to the door. Cash followed him. From the stalls came the occasional sound of a horse moving. Cash and old Bill shook hands.

*More of Mr. Knibb's work will appear soon.*



# The Lord Provides

By Roy Norton

*Author of "David and Goliath," "Ways of the Orient," Etc.*

The trust which Old Harmless put in his "Pardner" up in the sky  
was justified to an extent that the faithful old soul never knew

**H**EALD, capitalist, financier, and, as the partners David and Goliath called him, "All He-man," sat in front of the log cabin up on the Big Divide and stared moodily at the full August moon, at the silhouette of trees and the barren peaks that cut high above the timber line. His hosts, at whose cabin he had arrived that evening after a hard day's ride, smoked phlegmatically, and waited for him to talk. After a half hour of this voicelessness, David suddenly flicked the stump of a cigarette outward with the deftness of long practice and straightened up.

"Somethin's botherin' you, Heald," he blurted. "You ain't like yourself at all. Most always when you come this way you're—you're sort of free and easy; as if you was glad to be back up here again and shed a lot of things that maybe you was plumb sick of. We ain't seen you before for about eight months, and here you're on your way up to that cabin Old Harmless thinks is his, on that gulch of yours he thinks is his, and—

"That's just the trouble," said Heald, still sitting quietly and staring into the distances of the night. "I've—I've had a bad year. A very bad year! They've been closing in around me like a pack of wolves, all hungry to tear me to pieces. I've had one punch after another that has made me take the count, and—you two know how it is with 'Uncle Bill' Harmon and me."

They nodded in token of full understanding and Heald, as if some reserve had been broken by their undoubted sympathy swung round in his seat, then decided to shift the heavy chair until he could face them, and spoke freely.

"It's a long time ago since you two saved me from an adobe wall down there in Mexico. We've been friends ever since. I can talk to you. Men who have been through what we have, together, never forget things

like—like that. Most always I have to fight alone. You fellows out here, who live quietly and simply and do things your own way, don't understand New York, and those narrow caions where in the cliffs of skyscrapers live men who have to fight harder and more fiercely than did ever the cliff men of ages ago. No, you can't understand it.

"But I'll try to make it A, B, C, and it's about like this: First, I bought all the land up on that part of the watershed where Uncle Bill lives, and sunk a big chunk of all I had in the deal. Second, Uncle Bill fought for the big gulch because he honestly thought it was his. Third, when I went up there and got to know him, and to love him, I hadn't the heart to have him thrown out, or to ever let him know that his valley was the whole key to the big dam and reservoir scheme that my engineers and experts had in mind. It has pleased me to let him still think he owns it. Fourth, I can't sell it without eventually breaking his heart, and—I can't go ahead with it, and—if I don't, I'm afraid I'll be wiped out. Cleaned out!"

There was a full minute's silence and Heald sighed his perplexity.

"Uncle Bill sure does think that valley up there is about as near heaven as anything God Almighty could possibly imagine," murmured David. "Um-m-mh! Yes, I sort of reckon you're right when you say it'd bust him all up to either know the truth about it, or get out. And he thinks a heap of you."

"That makes it all the more difficult!" exclaimed the harassed financier. "I don't quite know what to do about it, I couldn't think more of him if he was my own father. Even to have to let him know that we've fooled him all this time looks to me— Oh, hang it all!—impossible! I must try to pull through without that, if it can be done. I must try to find some way to get him to allow—"

He stopped as if thinking of many things and was not aware that the partners were interchanging mysterious nods and signals until Goliath cleared his throat.

"Dave and me been considerin' things for the last few minutes," the giant said, "and—oh, you tell him, Dave."

"Well, Heald, it's—it's this way. Goliath and me has got about ten thousand in cash, and I reckon we could borrow somethin' on this mine, or sell it, if it came to a showdown, and—if that'll pull you through without molestin' Old Harmless, you'd be mighty welcome to it."

Heald laughed, but there was something deeper than mirth in his tone.

"No, boys," he said gravely, "I'm just as grateful as if I took the whole shooting, lock, stock, and barrel; but ten thousand, or even ten times that, wouldn't turn the tide." He got to his feet and stretched his arms and shoulders as if wearied with a burden. "I think if you don't mind, I'll turn in now. I want to get an early start over to Uncle Bill's and my cabin."

But long after he had rolled into his blankets, and until their mumbling, sympathetic voices lulled him to sleep, he heard them discussing his troubles which they were eager to share. His depression was still evident when in the morning he rode away over the trail that led upward across the still ridges where great trees lifted above him, and thence, still higher, until he struck the barren hills where nothing but an occasional scrub tree, dwarfed by altitude, winds, and scant soil struggled to hold its own.

He paused on top to scan the sweep of forests below, and his eye lighted in appreciation of such vast sunlit beauty. His imagination could fill in the great dream that he had maintained years before, of a mighty reservoir, a veritable lake up there in the deep valley inhabited by Old Harmless, that, drawing an everlasting water supply from the mighty watersheds would furnish power to thriving cities below.

To him it seemed almost a folly that he should let sentiment stand in the way, and then he remembered the patriarch of those hills, whose supreme happiness and mightiest love was centered in that valley where he had once found gold, seen a camp come to life, seen it die, its cabins rot away, its fireplaces fall, and who now lived there alone with the memories of his youth.

"Uncle Bill," he thought to himself, as he

started his horse downward, "believes that the Lord is his partner. He says so. He so lives. I can't fight against such a faith as that, or upset it. I can't! Even if it breaks me!"

It was nearly noon when he began the zig-zag descent into the valley, and sighted far below him the big double cabin with its deep porch where so often he had lounged in lazy comfort when escaping from men and affairs. Vines were growing up over its pillars now, and homely flowers, the particular pride of the old patriarch, lent great patches of color to the setting.

A rumbling detonation that echoed backward and forward across the walls of the valley, as if the high bordering cliffs were tossing it playfully between them, caused him to smile.

"Uncle Bill is still driving that tunnel into the hill, and probably in just as lean rock, but just as confident as ever that some day he will strike it rich," he soliloquized. And then, lifting himself in his stirrups, he cupped his hands and shouted a loud "Hello! Hello—Uncle Bill!"

A tall, stooping, white-bearded and white-haired old man on the far side of the valley stopped, shaded his eyes with his hands, and then almost recklessly plunged down the worn trail from the mouth of the tunnel where for years he had patiently sought fortune.

"That you, son?" he bawled back in a quavering old voice. "By heck! It's a sight for sore eyes to see you again." And then, as they met and clutched hands with a warmth of common affection he growled, "But you might have let me know you was comin' home! I'd 'a' gone down to the cross-roads and laid for the stage to get Hank Patch to bring up some fresh meat for you. Hope you've come to stay all summer this time."

He talked, garrulously for him, as if glad to abandon the habitual reticence imposed upon him by his loneliness, while frying the great rashers of bacon with which he filled the frying pan to capacity as if convinced of Heald's hunger.

"Reckon you remember old Spiggoty-top—that big, leanin' tree up on the corner of the second cliff to the right? And the one I called Miss Mabel, next to it? Well, by heck! last spring after about the hardest rain I ever seed, there was a landslide up

there, and both of 'em come tumblin' down into the gulch.

"Was right cut up about it for a few days, I were. Both them trees been friends of mine ever since I first see'd this gulch in the first fifties. I jest couldn't look up there when I walked outer the cabin mornin's without grievin' fer 'em. But I had to grin when I thought of how 'Kentucky' Smith bet me an ounce of dust, one time, that them two trees'd come tumblin' down in not more'n one year.

"Lord! Think on it! That was more'n fifty year ago! And Kentuck'—poor Kentuck'!—he was one of the first to go with black smallpox, and I had a hell of a time plantin' him all alone, because I was the last able-bodied man left in all my camp. He was a mighty man, he was."

He paused and busied himself with a fork turning over the sizzling bacon whose big, blue curling smoke carried to Heald's nostrils a fragrance more welcome than the far-famed spices of Araby.

"How's the mine, Uncle Bill? Struck anything yet?" he asked.

"Nope. But she's promisin', boy! They's a ledge somewhere in that hill that'll make all other finds on this divide look like fleas alongside of elephants in a menagery. You can bet on that!"

After their dinner Heald dug out from his own half of the great cabin his fishing tackle, his waders, and his old hat. The whirling pools sang all their old songs, and encompassed him with derisive chuckles, and he nearly forgot his cares and perplexities when the strikes came fast and his basket had its fill. It was so late when he returned to the cabin that Old Harmless was out in his garden admonishing in hurt tones a pair of thieving jays that had been feasting upon some particular raspberries.

"Drat ye! Don't I feed you all winter long when you come like a pair of beggars on to my winder ledge? Have I ever been stingy with you? And now you go ahead and find a hole in this here muslin and mop up all them rosberries I been savin' for the boy when he gets here! Good Lord! That ain't no way to treat me, as I can see!"

The jays chirped impudently and flew away when Heald approached.

"I hope, young feller, that you didn't kill no more of my fish than we two kin eat," said Old Harmless, coming forward to look into the basket, and then, relenting to the

demands of his appetite, "Well, it does seem a shame to kill such purty little fellers; but—I reckon we can eat that many, all right!"

After they had "cleared up the dishes" they sat in the two rocking-chairs on the porch, tired, satisfied, reveling in luxurious idleness, the surrounding stillness of placid nature, and the drowsiness of the night. Heald was still pondering over his difficult position. The Forty-niner was bubbling with the happiness of his friend's return. He had detailed all the insignificant happenings of his summer season, happenings of importance to himself alone, in his own queer, whimsical existence, before he noted the abstraction of his guest and then he peered at him and said:

"By the way, young feller, you been awfully quiet since you come back this time. Of course, it's imperlite to butt inter another chap's affairs, but—but—you and me is partners, in a sort of way, ain't we? Well, all I want to say is that if things is worryin' you, you can depend on me. Good Lord! if you was to go broke, you can always come here, can't you? They ain't no place on earth like this, is there?" He leaned forward in his chair and stared at Heald.

"Some folks might think I was a fool, for stayin' here the way I do. They think I want to strike it so's to get money. I do! But it ain't for myself. It's for jest three men left on earth, you and David and Goliath. If I made a million to-morrer, I'd give it all to you three, the only friends I got on earth that I can really love! Nope. It ain't gold at all, but it's just all that out there." He waved his hand in a quite comprehensive gesture. "I sort of reckon you understand it and feel a little the same as I do about it—only not so much, because you ain't watched it all so long as I have. That's why, when I croak—for a man cain't live forever, can he?—this is all goin' to be your'n, Heald—because you're fond of it as it is."

For Heald there was no humor in the situation. But his instinct of kindness prompted him to thank Old Harmless.

"I thought you'd like it!" the patriarch said happily. "I knew you would! And, do you know, you're about the only man I'd give it to. Them two boys, David and Goliath, has always been mighty good to me. They give me that fine phonygraft. But—somehow they don't understand. Why, do you know, they tried to get me to give up my

mine and come down and live with them? Said they wa'n't nothin' in the ledge I'm workin' on, and that they didn't like to have me livin' alone up here through the long winters! Me, as has took care of myself for more'n seventy-five years, and, aside from a leetle rheumatics now and then, is as right as most fellers when they're about sixty!"

He slapped his leg and chuckled then sobered and added, "But it ain't very nice of me to make fun of them boys just because they're so good-hearted. Hadn't orter to do it!"

It was but three days later when, much to Old Harmless' sorrow, Heald bade him good-by and returned across the ridges to David and Goliath's camp where he stopped overnight. The partners eyed him interrogatively, but were too much of the West to ask questions, and bided their time, knowing that, sooner or later, their guest would tell them the result of his visit to the patriarch. He did—that night, as they sat outside in the dusk.

"Well," he said quietly, "Uncle Bill still thinks he owns Harmon's gulch. And what's more, he's going to keep on thinking so. If I can't pull myself together without dispossessing him, I'll go broke. That's better than breaking the great big, kindly heart of an old man like that."

The partners nodded sympathetically.

"We reckoned you'd do—just that," said David.

"Heald, you're plumb white!" Goliath said. "It's tough luck if you can't pull through without this. But what Dave and me said a few nights ago, still goes. If all we can dig and rake and scrape will turn the trick for you, it's yours."

Heald, worried, and troubled, could not speak at that moment, and took refuge in silence and smoke; but the partners understood all his feeling when, contrary to custom, he shook hands with them that night before going to bed.

## II.

Old Harmless checked off a day on his calendar and stared at it through his steel-bowed spectacles.

"By heck! It's only a week ago since the young feller left. Seems like it's most a year. And I reckon Dave and the big chap ain't due for another week yet. Funny how it is that after all this time I'm beginnin' to

git sort of lonesome sometimes and hanker for some one to gabble with!"

And then, as if determined to get the best of any such idle follies, he pulled his ancient hat on his head and sauntered out into the open where the rays of the rising sun had not yet dissipated the purple shadows in the deep valley. He lifted his head and sniffed uneasily and stared toward the east. A dun-colored haze was barely visible against the deep topaz of the sky.

"I don't like that," he muttered. "That's smoke, sure as shootin', and we ain't had a forest fire over that way since the fall of eighty-seven."

He solaced himself with the reflection that on that occasion it had extended no farther than to within twenty miles of Harmon's gulch and laughed at his own apprehensions.

"Nobody knows how she started that time," he soliloquized; "but nowadays they's so many of them dam' campers over that a way that—humph! Orter be a law agin' 'em. Careless cusses, they be."

He took his steel candlestick from the crevice inside the entrance to the tunnel, lighted it, and trudged inward along that long, dark road which, like a cave man, he had patiently burrowed into the mountain through years of toil. He came to a crude little car, pushed it laboriously ahead of him, and began "mucking out," bending stiffly to load the car with fragments of ore and rock that had been rich enough to lure him ever inward, and too lean to pay for milling.

When his drift was clean he gave a big sigh, drank some water from the little stream that was channeled alongside the foot wall to carry away the seepage, methodically put the old condensed milk tin which he used as a dipper back into its niche, picked up his hammer and drill, and as steadily as the ticking of a great clock came the sound of hammer head on steel.

Such was the daily routine of Old Harmless. Seldom was his mind on his monotonous task, for years and years of continuity had rendered its accomplishment mechanical. It is doubtful if Old Harmless could have told of what he thought, of what memories he invoked, of what plans for the future he laid. Sometimes he voiced them aloud, sometimes he sang hymns in his cracked old tenor, timing himself with his blows, pitching his voice to the hammer's tune.

That youth had gone ages before, high hopes failed, friends, comrades, and kin died, did not sadden him, for always in front of him was the thin, lean ledge and the drift. The Lord was his partner, there were still beans and bacon in the cache, a good cabin, five thousand dollars' worth of stock bought in the heyday of prosperity that brought him an income sufficient to buy more beans and bacon, and—that wonderful valley of his!

By the time he emerged from the tunnel at noon he had forgotten all about the haze of smoke off to the eastward, but now he was reminded of it by its increase. It had become thicker, as if it were being blown his way. The air felt heavier, hotter, more oppressive. The disk of the noonday sun appeared larger, but seemed unable to penetrate clearly through the veil. He paused to consider, but again reassured himself with, "She's a pretty gallus old fire, but I'm sure it got thicker even than this in eighty-seven, and that one didn't bust across here."

He was still further reassured when, that evening, a wind from the westward cleared the immediate pall of smoky haze away and made the stars, shining brightly above, visible, as if to assure him they watched over him and his possessions. But he was unaccountably restless and awoke at the usual hour, unrefreshed. He sat up and gasped. It was hot. The cabin was murky and stifling.

He heaved himself stiffly from his bunk and ran outside, peering with troubled, gray eyes upward toward the sky, and eastward toward the place where at that hour the first rays of the sun should be whitening the peak of a great friendly mountain. But it could not be seen. Instead there was a heavy, gray, impenetrable blanket shrouding it and all the range. Worst of all, he became aware that now and then there were fitful puffs of hot wind, as from a distant bellows, and that the wind blew to westward past where he stood.

Ordinarily at that hour, when the air was fresh, the birds were twittering around the eaves of his cabin, flashing happily through the trees, taking swift and cooling baths in the shallows of the stream; but now they were still, as if terrified. He whistled to them, a soft whistle that was his daily greeting, and that was usually responded to by a flutter of cheerful, friendly wings in the air, wings that beat expectantly about him anticipating the handful of crumbs that it was

his wont to throw broadcast. Not the beat of a wing, or the faintest of chirps could he evoke.

Suddenly he heard another sound, violent, terrified, and down from the mountainside crashed two does and fawns to plunge into a pool, rest there a moment, and then resume their flight. They ran past him as if heedless of his presence, scarcely twenty yards from where he stood, and he noted that the fawns were tired as if the flight had been cruel and long.

"By Jehosophat!" Old Harmless exclaimed, now thoroughly alarmed. "This fire's wuss'n that one in eighty-seven. I don't remember any deer comin' down this way then. And all them little birds is gone, and—"

He turned and contemplated his beloved cabin.

"I reckon it ain't right for me to take no chances with Heald's stuff," he said aloud, as if addressing some one within. "What I got don't matter so much, although I'd hate like sin to lose it; but that young feller expects me to look arter his things and—gosh! I wish David and Goliath was here to help me; but I reckon the best thing I kin do is to tote the whole caboodle up inter my mine and cache it there to insure agin' accidents. I don't like the look of things. I don't."

With haste he made a simple breakfast, took the key of Heald's cabin from its hook, and fell to work. He was still methodical, and began his preparations by making Heald's possessions into packs; a huge bundle of clothing wrapped around the precious shotguns, rifles, and fishing rods; a roll of bedding in the center of which were pictures taken from the walls; bundles of books from the shelves, of which, as he tied them up, Old Harmless said, "got to take all of these because he's awful fond of some of 'em, that young feller is; but I can't tell which ones it is."

Burdened with a weight that would have tried the strength of a far younger man than himself, Uncle Bill balanced precariously on the stones over which, dry shod, he usually crossed the little stream; but his foot slipped and thereafter, reckless of wetting his feet, he waded through and climbed the long-worn path up to the side of the gulch that led to his tunnel.

He was panting heavily when he deposited the first load well within, but did not pause

to rest and almost ran back over the trail that, although but a quarter of a mile in length, and smooth, he usually descended sedately to avoid the jar to aged bones and the pull on stiffened muscles and sinews. Under the weight of his second pack, he found it necessary to stop on the way and rest.

When it came to the huge roll of bedding, he had to rest several times, and decided that he was making his packs too large.

"I ain't got none too much time, I'm afeared, and I hate to cut down my loads; but—well—I'll have to go oftener and faster, if I can."

He adopted his new plan, but it failed to make his task easier, and, hasten as best he could, he was aware that his legs trembled, that his breath came ever more shortly, and that it required greater time to recover it. "It must be that plague-gone smoke!" he thought, as he stumbled down the hill once more. "It gits in my eyes till they sort of smart, and it fills my bellers up till I'm coughin', and—hello! More of them pore, skeered little deer, and—what's that. Well, I'll swan! Ef it ain't a bear! Fust one I've seed in more'n three year. Pore little cuss!"

The bear ran with lolling head, shambling heavily, but, with instinct for the easier trails still alive, entered the path within twenty feet of where Old Harmless stood and appeared totally unconscious or unconcerned when the man ran almost at its heels until they reached the stream. Red-eyed, the bear merely turned its head to look at the man and then plunged into a pool.

"That's right. Me and you ain't got no quarrel," said Uncle Bill. "I reckon we're both in a hell of a fix. Think I'll take a drink of that myself."

He plunged down on hands and knees and drank deeply of the cold stream almost within arm's reach of the fugitive, and then, as the bear shambled out and resumed its flight shouted after it, "So long, pardner! Wish I could go, too, but I can't! Wish you luck, old boy!"

But the bear made no reply. He, better than Uncle Bill, knew the desperate brevity of time, and the remorseless speed of that raging terror behind. Perhaps in its brute way, it regarded the man as a fool, or, god-like, immune to flame.

Old Harmless made another round trip, finding the trail longer than it had ever

been since he made it, and regretfully concluded that he could not bring all Heald's belongings to safety. He had given no thought to his own. As he ran out of the tunnel there dropped almost at his feet a great burning ember, the first that he had seen. It fell like a meteor almost at his feet and, startled, he rubbed his eyes and peered up at where the eastern crest should be visible. Another ember fell and fired some dry brush alongside the trail.

Forgetting everything but a few possessions of his own that he must at least try to rescue, now that all hope was lost, he stumbled down the path past the blazing brush, and it was as if the fire, having gained the crest with that incredible speed that a forest fire can malignantly assume, had hurled and belched great volumes of smoke downward, hot and acrid, to blind him, to smother him, to cut off even the return to the tunnel.

Trembling, coughing, he groped through the murk of his cabin to the crude mantelpiece and seized his Bible, and an alarm clock which had been his pride. He must have been distraught with effort and confused, for he paused to consider what else he might take. It seemed as if everything there was too precious to leave behind. His heart was wrenched and torn, for he loved all those inanimate objects, some of which had been prized for more than half a century.

Something fell on the dry roof. He jumped when he heard a fresher, louder roar, made a leap to a shelf, and seized a tin of biscuits, and then made his decision. He clutched to his breast, horn and all, the cheap phonograph and book of records that the partners had given him, and wrenched himself away and outward without another thought than whether it were possible to regain the tunnel.

"Lord! Lord! You got to help me now," he cried. "It's me, old Bill Harmon, that's askin' you. I don't like to bother You, Lord, when You're so awful busy helpin' them pore dumb things and the birds, but if You don't, I'm done! Amen!"

He looked back at his cabin as he ran, and it was as if his heart had broken, for it was to be his last look. Its roof was wreathed in hot, blackish flames, pitch-laden, pitch-fed. Crossing the stream his feet slipped on the boulders at the bottom through his lack of care and he fell to his knees but grimly clung to the things in

his arms, those paltry possessions that, of all he had owned, were all that he had saved. He was even grateful, as he regained his feet, that he had contrived to keep them dry and unscathed.

"Lord, I thank You for that," he said. "It shows You are still with me—my pardner still—as You've always been."

He ran on more strongly, as if encouraged for a final effort, and heedless of the fact that he was pursuing a path that was here and there bordered with flame that singed his long, white hair and beard, that sparks were here and there settling on his clothing, that trees were falling up on the hillside, that the air was vibrant with strange roars and moans and snapping sounds like the discharge of musketry, and that had he been compelled to run fifty yards more his strength could not have lasted.

He was not even aware that he was utterly spent until, plunging headlong into the cool depths of the long tunnel he stumbled over something, fell headlong, still clutching his prized things, and for a time was too wearied to rise.

The cool, fresh air within, that had fought and resisted the inferno raging without, revived him. He rolled stiffly over on his side and stretched out his hands fumbling the familiar surfaces which he had created in his years of toil. He felt the side wall, thence downward until his fingers were laved by the cold stream running in the drain, and now he rolled farther over and drank of it and sluiced his hands, head and face, pulling at the matted singed surfaces of hair, beard, and eyebrows.

He sat on the floor for a time, then took from his pocket the old battered match box, one of the kind that is always guarded and carried by those who work in the dark hearts of the hills, and struck a match. In its tiny light he got to his knees and crawled over to inspect his precious phonograph. The match went out and his hands stole over to the ungainly, flimsy machine and caressed it and fondled it, as a mother might to assure herself that her infant child had sustained no injury from a fall.

"Davy and Goliath'll be awful glad to know that I brung her through safe," he muttered to himself. "If I'd of left her behind they'd of thought I didn't appreciate what they'd bought and given to me. Wisht I could have saved all of Heald's things."

He sat back against the dry side of the tunnel, and sorrowfully enumerated all that he had been compelled to leave behind.

"Plague take it!" he muttered in vexation. "Ef I'd only been forty years younger I could have toted twict as much each time, and maybe saved the whole outfit. An' Heald and me's pardners in a way, and he depended on me to guard his stuff, and now I ain't made good!"

For a long time he gave no thought to his own losses, his great disaster, or what possibly was going on outside his safe retreat. It never entered his mind to consider that he might have fled in ample time, and spared himself all the terrible fatigue, the aches, the burns, his present discomfort and possible peril, or the hardship of the hours to come when he must subsist on biscuits and water in this dark hole. It required too much effort to think any longer. For hours he sat as if stupefied, dozing now and then through sheer fatigue.

"By cracky! This won't do!" he exclaimed at last, his voice resounding hollowly through the labyrinth of drift and drive and crosscut. He struck another match and sought his alarm clock, and was distressed when he discovered that it had stopped with the impact of his fall. He shook it to life again, and its familiar, homely ticking warmed him with a sense of companionship.

"I reckon," he muttered to it, "that I must have been plumb idle for about half an hour, so I'll just set you ahead that much. Then I might as well get to work. It'll maybe keep me from worritin' about things I cain't help. Work's a powerful good thing to take a feller's mind off his troubles. Now, if I can only find that gol-durned candlestick that orter be cached along here somewhere, and—"

He got to his feet and, after considerable search, found it, lighted it, and clumped his way deeper into the long main drift. Coming to the face on which he was at work, he began his monotonous, patient task of drilling holes into the half-barren ledge, to add to that fruitless tally of tens of thousands that he had driven throughout the years. The outer world was forgotten.

Far away in San Francisco that evening a very short, broad man and a very huge, stalwart one, somewhat tired after spending a day in the trying task of selecting and purchasing supplies and small machinery they

required, suddenly read on a newspaper bulletin:

#### DISASTROUS FOREST FIRE DENUDING BIG DIVIDE.

They hurriedly bought the still-damp sheets from a newsboy.

"My God! If this thing's straight, that fire is right up where Uncle Bill's gulch is, Goliath," David exclaimed. "We better hustle over to that hotel where Heald's stoppin' and tell him, hadn't we?"

"On the jump!" Goliath answered.

They ran out into the street and, heedless of the conductor's shouts to wait until a car could be stopped, climbed aboard. When they leaped off in front of the hotel, speculating on whether they might find Heald within, they found that worried gentleman pacing restlessly up and down the rotunda with a folded newspaper in his hand.

"I knew you'd come," he said as he hastened to meet them. "We must catch the first train and get up there at once. If anything happened to Uncle Bill, I——"

He stopped, and the grief and anxiety in his eyes told the remainder. "I've already canceled three business appointments by phone," he went on, "and will meet you at the ferry in just about forty-five minutes. You'll have to run for it if you want to get your luggage from your hotel."

Despite their anxiety and haste, it was nearly forty-eight hours later when in the midst of a heavy and fortunate downpour of rain, as if nature had taken active part in the battle of the elements, the three men stood on the great barren crest of the high altitudes, and looked down into what appeared to be a sea of stagnant, sullen smoke. For a full minute none of them spoke.

"Well, he didn't escape or we should have found him at your camp," said Heald at last. "We must get down into it. If we don't find him in his tunnel, he's—he's gone."

"Yes, our direction was the only one in which he had a chance, and it looks as if he didn't come that way," Goliath agreed.

"Nothing but the ridge on this side and the river on the other kept it from cleaning us out, too," David commented. "That and the rain."

They dropped rapidly down into the opaque murk below, and it seemed to envelop them in its quiescence. Here and there as they progressed great dying trees

still smoldered, and branches in whose green hearts the fire still worked dropped and fell, sending up additional clouds of smoke and sparks. In places they could see short distances ahead disclosing a desolation that can be wrought by a forest fire alone. The smoke seemed less dense, however, as they descended the steep trails that switched to and fro into the depths of the deep valley where for so many years Old Harmless had been monarch. They paused, for a moment, speechless and grave, beside the great heap of charred logs and sodden ashes that had been the homely cabin, and regarded one another with troubled eyes, fearful of what might be concealed in that heat comb.

They trudged across the denuded, blackened space where Old Harmless had planted and nurtured his homely flowers, hollyhocks, and marigolds, foxglove and lavender but of them remained no trace save fragrant ash.

They crossed the stream that was now scarcely more than a rivulet on whose surface were borne whole fleets of charcoal and embers. They had difficulty in finding the path up the opposite hillside and for yards trudged over a heavy carpet of steaming black. They hurried more recklessly as they climbed, well aware that if at this destination they discovered nothing all hope was gone, and all grief unavailing.

"He used to keep a stock of candles just inside—right in the first old crosscut," said David quietly, as if about to enter a tomb. "Better let me go first. I can find 'em."

In a few minutes he reappeared and the three men, with lighted candles, advanced like a procession of acolytes, their shadows bulking against the glistening walls in distorted shapes; their boot heels ringing on the porphyritic floor. They could none of them have explained what thrall of silence held them, why they did not converse.

"Hello! What's this?" David exclaimed softly, stopping and bending downward. The others came closer and peered above his shoulders.

"Great Scott! A bundle of that worthless plunder of mine," said Heald, suddenly lifting his candle upward, and staring into the faces of the others, and then added in an awe-stricken voice, "He stayed behind to save my things! He was ready to die guarding them—or has died doing it!"

He forced his way abruptly in front of them, ignoring other heaps of familiar be-

longings, sometimes spurning them aside with a kick, as if exasperated by their survival when, perhaps, a very valiant old man had paid for them with the cost of his life. And then suddenly he came to an abrupt halt, bent forward, shaded the light, and cleared his throat, as if apprehensive lest his voice remain unanswered.

"Bill! Uncle Bill!" he called gently, and then louder, without evoking response, and the partners, staring downward, grave-eyed, saw that he was bending over a huddled, bent figure on the stone, that had gone to sleep with a worn old Bible for a pillow, and that one of the gnarled and blistered outstretched hands rested upon, as if forever to hold a half-charred phonograph as an emblem of friendship that could not be left behind.

Very tenderly Goliath bent forward, and gathered the prone figure into his arms, and thrust a hand inside the worn old shirt, while Heald and David looked on.

"He's alive, and that's about all," Goliath said, and as if the weight he carried were but that of a child's, began running down the tunnel, peering ahead, and lighted only by the following candles that fluttered close behind.

Out on the tiny flat in front of the tunnel they laid Old Harmless down and Heald trickled brandy from a pocket flask between the scorched lips. They murmured sympathetically when Uncle Bill's eyes flickered, opened wide, and cleared from bewilderment.

"I knowed you'd come," he quavered. "I knowed my pardner up there above the smoke'd see me through." Then as if realizing all the great disaster, he struggled to a sitting posture, peered downward into the valley, moaned pitifully, and looked up at Heald. "Boy," he said, "I done my best, but I couldn't save all your nice things. And now our cabin's gone, and all my forest's gone, and all my birds and—— I ain't got

time to wait for the trees to grow again, or for my birds to come back home! I ain't got the heart to live here any more, and I ain't got no place to go that'd ever be the same as this, and——"

He stopped, leaned over his knees, and covered his singed face with his burned hands as if to shut out despairing sight. Heald bent down and rested a consoling and affectionate hand on one of the gaunt, bent old shoulders. He tried to speak but had to stop and clear a huskiness from his throat.

"Yes, this valley can never be the same, Uncle Bill," he said; "but there are others up there in these high hills, and we'll go there, you and I, and build another cabin of our own—one as near like the one that's gone as time and money can make it. Won't that do?"

For a long time the patriarch appeared to consider this, staring now and then at the ruin below, then at the entrance to his long-promising and never-yielding mine. Then slowly his face brightened, and he held his hands upward.

"I'm, I'm awfully tired, and stiff," he said. "Here! Help me on to my feet, Goliath. I'll be all right purty soon."

He stood, swaying a little, for a moment more, and then the unquenchable optimism, the unbreakable valor, the unbroken faith reasserted themselves and he turned to Heald.

"All right, son," he said. "Me and you'll begin all over again somewhere else. It won't never be the same as this was, but don't you worry none. We'll pull through somehow. We've done got a Pardner who ain't never failed us yet, and who'll stick with us wherever we go. You can bet your boots on that!"

And thus, as if by unexpected reward, after all the years of generous waiting, Heald came fully into his own.

*The next story in this series, "David's Choice," appears in the following issue.*



### MEANING NOT CLEAR

**M**R. JENKINS put down the Roosevelt biography, polished his spectacles, put them on again, looked wise as an owl as he glanced at his wife, and remarked:

"Ho-hum! Roosevelt was undoubtedly a bellicose president."

"Theodore Roosevelt?" queried Mrs. Jenkins. "You mean Mr. Taft, don't you, Mr. Jenkins?"

# The Dude Wrangler

By Caroline Lockhart

*Author of "Me, Smith," "The Man From the Bitter Roots," Etc.*

## WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST PART OF "THE DUDE WRANGLER."

Wallie MacPherson's red blood had become a little pale in the shadow of his aunt Mary and the other ladies at that exclusive seashore hotel, the Colonial, where he spent his summers. He never woke up to himself until Helene Spenceley, from Wyoming, called him "Gentle Annie." That was too much for Wallie—he handed aunt Mary a declaration of independence, and started for Helene's part of Wyoming to prove he was a regular fellow. "Pinkey" Fripp, a very rough diamond, helped him file on a homestead and start dry farming. It was a tough, lonesome job, but Wallie stuck to it until Canby—who possessed the next ranch, a hate on the world, and serious intentions for Helene—persuaded a herd of cattle to use Wallie's first wheat crop for a race track. A hailstorm completed the job. Even then Wallie wouldn't quit. He got a job as a puncher, and became sufficiently hard boiled to catch Canby at a disadvantage and force him to hand over generous damages, with which he and Pinkey decided to start a summer home for "dudes" on the ruined ranch. This news, reaching the guests of the Colonial, started a stampede for Wallie's place—which gave Mr. Cone, the proprietor, a chance to patronize a rest cure.

(A Two-Part Story—Part II.)

## CHAPTER XVI.

### COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS.

THE "Happy Family" of the Colonial had decided to make up a congenial party and spend the remainder of the summer at the Lolabama Ranch, in Wyoming. They were expected on the morrow, everything was in readiness for their coming, and, after supper, down by the corrals, Wallie and Pinkey sat on their heels estimating their probable profits.

Pinkey's forehead was furrowed like a corrugated roof with the mental effort as he figured in the dust with a pointed stick, while Wallie's face wore a look of absorption as he watched the progress, although he was already as familiar with it as with his multiplication tables.

"Ten head of dudes at one hundred dollars a month is a thousand dollars," said Pinkey. "And twelve months in the year times a thousand dollars is twelve thousand dollars. And, say—"

"But I've told you a dozen times they all go south in the winter. The most we can count on is two months now and perhaps more next summer."

"You can't figger out ahead what a dude is goin' to do any more than a calf or a sheep. If we treat 'em right and they get

stuck on the country, they're liable to winter here instead of Floridy. Now, if we could winter—say—ten head of dudes at one hundred and fifty dollars a month for seven months, that would be four thousand seven hundred dollars. The trip through the Yellowstone Park and Jackson Hole country is goin' to be a big item. Ten head of dudes—say—at five dollars a day for—say—fifteen days is—"

"But you never deduct expenses, Pinkey. It isn't all profit. There's the interest on the investment, interest on the money we borrowed, groceries, the cook's wages, and we'll need helpers through the Yellowstone."

"You're gettin' an awful habit of lookin' on the black side of things," said Pinkey crossly.

"If we can pay expenses and have a thousand dollars clear the first year, I'll be satisfied."

"A thousand dollars!" Pinkey exclaimed indignantly. "I thought you had more ambition. Look at the different ways we got to git their money. Two-bits apiece for salt-water baths and eight baths a day—some of 'em might not go in reg'lar—but—say—eight, anyway—eight times two-bits is two dollars. Then ten dollars apiece every time they go to town in the stagecoach is—say—one hundred dollars a trip—and they go

twict a week—say—that's two hundred dollars."

"But they might not go twice a week," Wallie protested, "nor all of them when they did go."

"Why don't you look on the bright side of things like you usta? Do you know, I've been thinkin' we ought to make out a scale of prices for lettin' 'em work around the place. They'd enjoy it, if they had to pay for it—dudes is like that, I've noticed. They're all pretty well fixed, ain't they?"

"Oh, yes, they all have a good deal of money, unless, perhaps Miss Eyester, and I don't know much about her in that way. But Mr. Penrose, Mr. Appel, and Mr. Bud-long are easily millionaires."

"I s'pose a dollar ain't any more to them than a nickel to us?"

Wallie endeavored to think of an instance which would indicate that Pinkey's supposition was correct, but, recalling none, declared enthusiastically:

"They are the most agreeable, altogether delightful people you ever knew, and, if I do say it, they think the world of me."

"That's good; maybe they won't deal us so much grief."

"How—grief?"

"Misery," Pinkey explained.

"I can't imagine them doing anything ill-natured or ill-bred," Wallie replied resentfully. "You must have been unfortunate in the kind of dudes you've met."

Pinkey changed the subject as he did when he was unconvinced but was in no mood for argument. He climbed to the top pole of the corral fence and looked proudly at the row of ten by twelve tents which the guests were to occupy, at the long tar-paper room built on to the original cabin for a dining room, at the new bunk house for himself and Wallie and the help, at the shed with a dozen new saddles hanging on their nails, while the ponies to wear them milled behind him in the corral. His eyes sparkled as he declared:

"We shore got a good dudin' outfit! But it's nothin' to what we *will* have—watch our smoke! The day'll come when we'll see this country, as you might say, lousy with dudes! So fur as the eye kin reach—dudes! Nothin' but dudes!"

"Yes," Wallie agreed complacently, "at least we've got a start. And it seems like a good sign, the luck we've had in picking things up cheap."

Instinctively they both looked at the old-fashioned, four-horse stagecoach that they had found scrapped behind the blacksmith shop in Prouty and bought for so little that they had quaked in their boots lest the blacksmith change his mind before they could get it home. But their fears were groundless, since the blacksmith was uneasy from the same cause.

They had had it repaired and painted red, with yellow wheels that flashed in the sun. And, now, there it stood—the last word in the picturesque discomfort for which dudes were presumed to yearn! They regarded it as their most valuable possession since at ten dollars a trip, it would quickly pay for itself and thereafter yield a large return upon a small investment.

Neither of them could look at it without pride and Pinkey chortled for the hundredth time:

"It shore was a great streak of luck when we got that coach!"

Wallie agreed that it was, and added:

"Everything's been going so well that I'm half scared. Look at that hotel range we got secondhand—as good as new; and the way we stumbled on to a first-class cook; and my friends coming out—it seems almost too good to be true."

With the money he had collected from Canby he had formed a partnership with Pinkey whereby the latter was to furnish the experience and his services as against his, Wallie's capital.

Once more the future looked roseate; but, perhaps, the real source of his happiness lay in the fact that he had seen Helene Spenceley in Prouty a good bit of late and she had treated him with a consideration which had been conspicuously lacking heretofore.

His train of thought led him to inquire:

"Don't you ever think about getting married, Pink?"

"Now, wouldn't I look comical tied to one of them quails I see runnin' around Prouty!"

"But," Wallie persisted, "some nice girl would——"

"I had a pal that tried it onct," interrupted Pinkey, "and when I seen him, I says: 'How is it, Jess?' He says, 'Well, the first year is the worst, and after that it's worse and worse.' No, sir! Little Pinkey knows when he's well off."

It was obvious that his partner's mood did not fit in with his own. The new moon

rose and the crickets chirped as the two sat in silence on the fence and smoked.

"It's a wonderful night!" Wallie said finally, in a hushed voice.

"It's plumb peaceful," Pinkey agreed. "I feel like I do when I'm gittin' drunk, and I've got to the stage whur my lip gits stiff. I've always wisht I could die when I was like that."

Wallie suggested curtly:

"Let's go to bed." He had regretted his partner's lack of sentiment more than once.

"Time to git into the feathers if we make an early start." Pinkey unhooked his heels. "Might have a little trouble hitchin' up. The two broncs I aim to put on the wheel has never been drove."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MILLIONAIRES.

Pinkey was not one to keep his left hand from knowing what his right hand was doing, so the report had been widely circulated that "a bunch of millionaires" were to be the first guests at the new Lolabamna Dude Ranch. In consequence of which, aside from the fact that the horses ran across a sidewalk and knocked over a widow's picket fence, the advent of Pinkey and Wallie in Prouty caused no little excitement, since it was deduced that the party would arrive on the afternoon train.

If to look at one millionaire is a pleasure and a privilege for folk who are kept scratching to make ends meet, the citizens of Prouty might well be excused for leaving their occupations and turning out en masse to see a "bunch."

"Among those present" on the station platform waiting for the train to come in was Mr. Tucker. Although Mr. Tucker had not been in a position to make any open accusation relative to the disappearance of his cache, the cordial relations between Wallie and Pinkey and himself had been seriously disturbed. So much so, in fact, that they might have tripped over him in the street without bringing the faintest look of recognition to his eyes.

Mr. Tucker, however, was too much of a diplomat to harbor a grudge against persons on a familiar footing with nearly a dozen millionaires. Therefore, when the combined efforts of Wallie and Pinkey on the box stopped the coach reasonably close to the station platform, Mr. Tucker stepped

out briskly and volunteered to stand at the leaders' heads.

"Do you suppose we'll have much trouble when the train pulls in?" Wallie asked in an undertone.

"I don't look fer it," said Pinkey. "They might snort a little, and jump, when the engine comes, but they'll git used to it."

Pinkey's premises seemed to be correct, for the four stood with hanging heads and sleepy-eyed while every one watched the horizon for the smoke which would herald the coming of the train.

"Your y-ears is full of sand and it looks like you woulda shaved or had your whiskers drove in and clinched." Pinkey eyed Wallie critically as they waited together on the seat.

"Looks as if you would have had your teeth fixed," Wallie retorted. "It's been nearly a year since that horse kicked them out."

"What would I go wastin' money like that for?" Pinkey demanded. "They're front ones—I don't need 'em to eat."

"You'd look better," Wallie argued.

"What do I care how I look! I aim to do what's right by these dudes; I'll saddle fer 'em, and I'll answer questions, and show 'em the sights, but I don't need teeth to do that."

Pinkey was obstinate on some points, so Wallie knew it was useless to persist; nevertheless, the absence of so many of his friend's teeth troubled him more than a little, for the effect was startling when he smiled, and Pinkey was no matinée idol at his best.

"There she comes!"

As one, the spectators on the platform stretched their necks to catch the first glimpse of the train bearing its precious cargo of millionaires. Wallie felt suddenly nervous and wished he had taken more pains to dress, as he visualized the prosperous-looking, well-groomed folk of the Colonial Hotel.

As the "mixed" train backed up to the station from the Y, it was seen that the party was on the back platform of the one passenger coach, ready to get off. The engine stopped so suddenly that the cars bumped and the party on the rear platform were thrown violently into each other's arms.

The expression on old Mr. Penrose's face was so fiendish as Mrs. C. D. Budlong toppled backward and stood on his bunion that Wallie forgot the graceful speech of welcome he had framed. Mr. Penrose had trav-

eled all the way in one felt slipper and now as the lady inadvertently ground her heel into the tender spot, Mr. Penrose looked as he felt—murderous.

"Get off my foot!" he shouted.

Mrs. Budlong obeyed by stepping on his other foot.

Mr. Appel, who had lurched over the railing, observed sarcastically:

"They ought to put that engineer on a stock train."

The party did not immediately recognize Wallie in his Western clothes, but when they did they waved grimy hands at him and cried delightedly:

"Here we are, Wallie!"

Wallie made no reply to this self-evident fact and, indeed, he could not, for he was too aghast at the shabby appearance of his wealthy friends to think of any that was appropriate. They looked as if they had ransacked their attics for clothes in which to make the trip.

The best Wallie could immediately manage was a limp handshake and a sickly grin as the coal baron and street-railway magnate, Mr. Henry Appel, stepped off in a suit of which he had undoubtedly been defrauding his janitor for some years.

Mrs. J. Harry Stott was handed down in a pink silk creation, through the lace insertings of which one could see the cinders that had settled in the fat creases of her neck. While Mrs. Stott recognized its inappropriateness, she had decided to give it a final wear and save a fresh gown.

Upon her heels was Mr. Stott, in clothes which bore mute testimony to the fact that he led a sedentary life. Mr. Stott was a "jiner," for business purposes, and he was wearing all his lodge pins in the expectation of obtaining special privileges from brother members while traveling.

C. D. Budlong wore a "blazer" and a pair of mountain boots that had involved him in a quarrel with a Pullman conductor, who had called him a vandal for snagging a plush seat with the hob nails. At his wife's request, Mr. Budlong was bringing a canvas telescope filled with a variety of tinned fruits. It was so heavy that it sagged from the handle as he bore it in front of him with both hands, so no one was deceived by his heroic efforts to carry it jauntily and make it appear that he did not notice the weight.

The only stranger in the party was Mrs. Henry Appel's maiden aunt—Miss Lizzie

Philbrick—sixty or thereabouts. Aunt Lizzie was a refugee from the City of Mexico, and had left that troublesome country in such a panic that she had brought little beside a bundle of the reports of a Humane Society with which she had been identified, and an onyx apple, to which it was assumed there was much sentiment attached, since she refused to trust it to the baggage car, and was carrying it in her hand. Aunt Lizzie looked as if she had been cast for a period play—early General Grant, perhaps—as she descended wearing a beaded silk mantle and a bonnet with strings.

"Be careful, Aunt Lizzie! Look where you step!"

The chorus of warnings was due to the fact that Aunt Lizzie already had fallen fourteen times in transit, a tack head seeming sufficient to trip her up, and now, quite as though they had shouted the reverse, Aunt Lizzie stumbled and dropped the onyx apple upon old Mr. Penrose's felt-shod foot.

This was too much. Mr. Penrose shouted furiously:

"I wish you'd lose that damned thing!"

When it came to altered looks, Wallie had no monopoly on surprise. The Happy Family found it difficult to reconcile this rather tough-looking young man with the nice, neat boy who had blown them kisses from the motor bus.

"Now, what sort of a conveyance have you provided?" inquired Mr. Stott, who had taken the initiative in such matters during the trip.

Wallie pointed proudly to the stagecoach with Pinkey on the box and Mr. Tucker standing faithfully at the leaders' heads.

Everybody exclaimed in delight and lost no time in greeting Pinkey, whose response was cordial but brief. To Wallie he said, out of the corner of his mouth:

"Load 'em on. The roan is gittin' a hump in his back."

"We have twenty-five miles to make," Wallie hinted.

"Our luggage? How about that?" inquired Mr. Scott.

"It will follow." Wallie opened the stagecoach door as a further hint.

"I want to get some snapshots of the town," said Mr. Penrose, who had his camera and a pair of field glasses slung over his shoulder.

"What an experience this will be to write

home!" gushed Miss Gaskell. "Let's stop at the office and mail post cards."

Pinkey leaned over the side and winked at Wallie, who urged uneasily:

"We must start. Twenty-five miles is a good distance to make before dark."

"Switzerland has nothing to surpass this view!" declared Mr. Stott, who had never been in Switzerland.

Every one took a leisurely survey of the mountains.

"And the air is very like that of the Scotch moors." No one ever would have suspected from his positive tone that Mr. Stott never had been in Scotland, either.

"I am sorry to insist," said Wallie in response to another significant look from Pinkey, "but we really will have to hurry."

Thus urged, they proceeded to clamber in, except Miss Gertie Eyester, who was patting the roan on the nose.

"Dear 'ittie horsey!'

"'Ittie horsey' eats human flesh. You'd better not git too close," said Pinkey.

Miss Eyester looked admiringly at Pinkey in his red shirt and declared with an arch glance: "You're so droll, Mr. Fripp!"

Since Mr. Fripp thought something of the sort himself he did not contradict her, but told himself that she was "not so bad—for a dude."

"I hope the horses are perfectly safe, because my heart isn't good, and when I'm frightened it goes bad and my lips get just as *blue*."

"They look all right now," said Pinkey, after giving them his careful attention.

Miss Eyester observed wistfully: "I hope I will get well and strong out here."

"If you'd go out in a cow camp, fer a couple of months, it would do you a world of good," Pinkey advised her. "You'd fatten up."

Mr. Budlong, who had gotten in the coach, got out again to inquire of Pinkey if he was sure the horses were perfectly gentle.

"I'd trust my own stepmother behind 'em anywhere."

To show his contempt of danger, Mr. Stott said: "Poof!"

Wallie, having closed the door, climbed up beside Pinkey, who unlocked the brake.

"I always feel helpless shut inside a vehicle," declared Mr. Budlong.

Just then the leaders rose on their hind legs. Mr. Tucker, who rose with them, clung valiantly to their bits and dangled

there. One of the wheel horses laid down and the other tried to climb over the back of the leader in front of him, while the bystanders scattered.

"There seems to be some kind of a ruckus," Mr. Appel remarked as he stood up and leaned out the window.

Before he had time to report, however, two side wheels went over the edge of the station platform, tipping the coach to an angle which sent all the passengers on the upper side into the laps of those on the lower. Aunt Lizzie pitched headlong and with such force that when she struck Mr. Stott on the mouth with her onyx apple she cut his lip.

"You'll kill somebody with that yet!" Mr. Stott glared at the keepsake.

Mr. Appel, who undoubtedly would have gone on through the window when the coach lurched had it not been for his wife's presence of mind in clutching him by the coat, demanded in an angry voice—instead of showing the gratitude she had reason to expect:

"Whatch you doin'? Tearin' the clothes off'n m'back?"

It had been years since Mr. Appel had spoken to his wife like that. Mrs. Appel opened her reticule, took out a handkerchief, and held it to her eyes.

In the meantime the side wheels had dropped off the station platform and the coach had righted itself; but, in spite of all that Pinkey and Wallie could do, the leaders swung sharply to the left and dragged the wheel horses after them down the railroad track.

When the wheels struck the ties, Miss Mattie Gaskell bounded into the air as if she had been sitting upon a steel coil that had suddenly been released. She was wearing a tall-crowned hat of a style that had not been in vogue for some years, and as she struck the roof it crackled and went shut like an accordion, so that it was of a much different shape when she dropped back to the seat.

Old Mr. Penrose, who had elongated his naturally long neck, preparatory to looking out the window, also struck the roof and with such force that his neck was bent like the elbow in a stovepipe, when he came down. He said such a bad word that "Aunt Lizzie" Philbrick exclaimed: "Oh, how dread-ful!"

Mrs. J. Harry Stott and Mr. Budlong, who

had bumped heads so hard that the thud was heard, were eying each other in an unfriendly fashion as they felt of their foreheads waiting for the lump.

Mr. Stott, who was still patting his lip with his handkerchief, declared:

"Such roads as these retard the development of a county."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Mr. Appel, getting up out of the aisle.

"We are going *away* from the mountains --I don't understand——"

Mr. Stott smiled reassuringly at Mrs. Budlong and told her that Wallie and Pinkey, of course, knew the road.

"I don't care," she insisted stoutly. "I believe something's wrong. We are going awfully fast, and if I thought it was as rough as this all the way, I should prefer to walk."

"You must remember that you are now in the West, Mrs. Budlong," Mr. Stott replied in a kind but reproofing tone, "and we cannot expect——"

Mrs. Budlong, who had just bitten her tongue, retorted sharply:

"We certainly could expect a more comfortable conveyance than this."

"When we stop at the post office," said Mr. Budlong in a tone of decision as he clung to the window frame, "I shall hire a machine and go out. The rest of you can do as you like."

If there was dissatisfaction inside the coach it was nothing at all compared to the excitement on the box as the horses galloped down the railroad track. The leaders' mouths might have been bound in cast iron, for all the attention they paid to the pull on their bits, although Pinkey and Wallie were using their combined strength in their efforts to stop the runaways.

"Them dudes must be gittin' an awful churnin'," said Pinkey through his clenched teeth.

"We'll be lucky if we are not ditched," Wallie panted as he braced his feet.

"Wouldn't that be some rank! Even if we 'rim a tire' we got to swing off this track, for there's a culvert somewheres along here and——"

"Pink!"

Pinkey had no time to look, but he knew what the sharp exclamation meant.

"Pull my gun out—lay it on the seat—I can stop 'em if I must."

Pinkey's face was white under its sunburn and his jaw was set.

"How far we got?"

"About a hundred yards," Wallie answered, breathing heavily.

"We'll give 'em one more try. My hands are playin' out. You pop the rawhide to the roan when I say. Cut him wide open! If I can't turn him, I'll drop him. They'll pile up and stop. It's the only way."

Pinkey dug his heels into the foot brace in front and took a tighter wrap of the lines around his hands. He could see the culvert ahead. His voice was hoarse as he gave the word.

Wallie stood up and swung the long rawhide-braided whip. At the same time Pinkey put all his failing strength on one line. As the roan felt the tremendous pull on his mouth and the whip thongs stung his head and neck, he turned at a sharp angle, dragging his mate. The wheel horses followed, and some of the stout oak spokes splintered in the wheels as they jerked the coach over the rail.

The pallid pair exchanged a quick glance of unutterable relief. The horses were still running but their speed was slackening as Pinkey swung them in a circle toward the town. Dragging the heavy coach over sagebrush hummocks and through sand had winded them so that they were almost ready to quit when they turned down the main street.

"If we'd 'a' hit that culvert we mighta killed off half our dudes. That woulda been what I call notorious hard luck," Pinkey had just observed, when Wallie commenced to whip the horses to a run once more.

"What you doin' that for?" he turned in astonishment.

"Let 'em go—I know what I'm about!"

"I think you're crazy, but I'll do what you say till I'm sure," Pinkey answered as Wallie continued to lay on the lash.

Imperative commands were coming from inside the coach as it tore through the main street.

"Let me out of this death trap!" Old Mr. Penrose's bellow of rage was heard above the chorus of voices demanding that Pinkey stop.

But it was not until they were well on the road to the ranch, and Prouty was a speck, that the horses were permitted to slow down; then Pinkey turned and looked at Wallie admiringly:

"You shore got a head on you, old pard!"

We wouldn't 'a' had a dude left if we'd let 'em out while they was mad."

"It just occurred to me in time," said Wallie.

"You don't s'pose any of 'em'll slip out and run back?"

"No, I think we're all right, if nothing more happens between here and the ranch."

After a time Pinkey remarked:

"That lady with the bad heart—she musta been scared. I'll bet her lips were purple as a plum, don't you?"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A SHOCK FOR MR. CANBY.

The morning following their arrival at the Lolabama, the Happy Family, looking several shades less happy, began coming from their tents shortly after daylight. By five o'clock they were all up and dressed, since, being accustomed to darkened rooms, they found themselves unable to sleep owing to the glare coming through the white canvas.

Out of consideration for his guests, whom he remembered as late risers, Wallie had set the breakfast hour at eight-thirty. This seemed an eternity to the Happy Family who, already famished, consulted their watches with increasing frequency while they watched the door of the bunk house, like cats at a mousehole, for the cook to make his appearance.

After wandering around to look listlessly at the ponies, and at the salt-water plunge that was to rejuvenate them, they sat down on the edge of the platforms in front of their tents to endure somehow the three hours which must pass before breakfast.

The dawn was sweet-scented, the song of the meadow lark celestial, and the colors of the coming day reflected on the snow-covered peaks a sight to be remembered, but the guests had no eyes or ears or noses for any of the charms of the early morning.

Conversation was reduced to monosyllables as, miserable and apathetic, they sat thinking of the food they had sent back to Mr. Cones' kitchen with caustic comments, of the various dishes for which the chef of the Colonial was celebrated.

The cook came out, finally, at seven-thirty, and, after a surprised glance at the row on the platforms, strode into the kitchen, where he rattled the range as if it were his purpose to wreck it.

When the smoke rose from the chimney

Mr. Stott went to the door with the intention of asking the cook to speed up breakfast.

A large sign greeted him:

### DUDES KEEP OUT.

The cook was a gaunt, long-legged person with a saturnine countenance. He wore a seersucker coat with a nickel badge pinned on the lapel of it. As an opening wedge Mr. Stott smiled engagingly and pointed to it.

"For exceptional gallantry, I presume—a war medal?"

The hero stopped long enough to offer it for Mr. Stott's closer inspection. It read: UNITED ORDER OF PASTRY COOKS

### OF THE WORLD.

Taken somewhat aback, Mr. Stott said feebly: "Very nice, indeed—er—"

"Mr. Hicks, at your service!" the cook supplemented, bowing formally.

"Hicks," Mr. Stott added.

"Just take a second longer and say 'Mister.'"

The cook eyed him in such a fashion as he administered the reprimand for his familiarity that Mr. Stott backed off without mentioning his starving condition.

At eight-thirty precisely Mr. Hicks came out and hammered on a triangle as vigorously as if it were necessary. In spite of their effort to appear unconcerned when it jangled, the haste of the guests was nothing less than indecent as they hurried to the dining room and scrambled for seats at the table. The promise of food raised their spirits a trifle, and Mr. Appel was able to say humorously as, with his table knife, he scalped his agate-ware plate loose from the oilcloth:

"I suppose we shall soon learn the customs of the country. In a month we should all be fairly well acclimated."

Miss Eyester observed timidly:

"In the night I thought I heard something sniffing, and it frightened me."

Not to be outdone in sensational experiences, Mrs. Stott averred positively:

"There was some *wild animal* running over our tent. I could hear its sharp claws sticking into the canvas. A coyote, I fancy."

"A ground squirrel, more likely," remarked Mr. Appel.

Mr. Stott smiled at him:

"Squeee-rrel, if you will allow me to correct you."

"I guess I can't help myself," replied Mr. Appel dryly.

Mr. Stott shrugged a shoulder and his tolerant look said plainly that, after all, one should not expect too much of a man who had begun life as a "breaker boy."

"The squee-rrel or coyote or whatever it was," Mrs. Stott continued, "went pitter-patter, pitter-patter—so!" She illustrated with her finger tips on the oilcloth.

"Prob'ly a chipmunk," said Pinkey prosaically.

"Are they dangerous, Mr. Fripp?" inquired Miss Gaskell.

"Not unless cornered or wounded," he replied gravely.

This was a joke, obviously, so everybody laughed which stimulated Pinkey to further effort. When Mr. Hicks poured his cup so full that the coffee ran over he remarked facetiously:

"It won't stack, cookie."

Coffeepot in hand, Mr. Hicks drew himself up majestically and his eyes withered Pinkey:

"I beg to be excused from such familiarity, and if you wish our pleasant relations to continue you will not repeat it."

"I bet I won't josh *him* again," Pinkey said ruefully when Mr. Hicks returned to the kitchen like offended royalty.

"Cooks are sometimes very peculiar," observed Mr. Stott, buttering his pancakes lavishly. "I remember that my mother—my mother, by the way, Mr. Penrose, was a Sproat—"

"Shoat?" Old Mr. Penrose, who complained of a pounding in his ears, was not hearing so well in the high altitude.

Mr. Appel and Pinkey tittered, which nettled Mr. Stott, and he shouted:

"Sproat! An old Philadelphia family."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Penrose recollects. "I recall Amanda Sproat. She married a stevedore. Your sister?"

Mr. Stott chose to ignore the inquiry, and said coldly:

"My father was in public life." He might have added that his father was a policeman and, therefore, his statement was no exaggeration.

Everybody felt that it served Mr. Penrose right for telling about the stevedore when he was seized with a violent fit of coughing immediately afterward. Wiping

his streaming eyes, he looked from Wallie to Pinkey and declared resentfully:

"This is the result of your reckless driving. The cork came out of my cough syrup in the suit case." The culprits mumbled that they "were sorry," to which Mr. Penrose replied that that did not keep him from "coughing his head off!"

Looking sympathetically at Pinkey, Miss Eyester, for the purpose of diverting the irascible old gentleman's attention from the subject, asked when she might take her first riding lesson.

Pinkey said promptly:

"This mornin'. They's nothin' to hinder."

"That's awfully good of you, Mr. Fripp," she said gratefully.

Pinkey, who always jumped when any one called him "Mister," replied bluntly:

"Tain't—I want ta."

"We'll all go!" Mrs. Stott cried excitedly.

"Shore." There was less enthusiasm in the answer.

"We were so fortunate as to be able to purchase our equipment for riding bronchos before coming out here," explained Mr. Budlong. "There is an excellent store on the boardwalk and we found another in Omaha."

"We have divided skirts and everything! Just wait till you see us!" cried Mrs. Budlong. "And you'll take our pictures, won't you, Mr. Penrose?"

"I don't mind wasting a couple of films," he consented.

They were as eager as children as they opened their trunks for their costumes, and even Aunt Lizzie Philbrick, who had once ridden a burro before the bandits marked her for rapine and murder, declared her intention of trying it. While the "dudes" dressed, Pinkey and Wallie went down to the corral to saddle for them.

"We better let her ride the pinto," said Pinkey casually.

"Her?" Wallie looked at his partner fixedly. "Which 'her'?"

"That lady that's so thin she could hide behind a match and have room left to peek around the corner. She seems sickly, and the pinto is easy-gaited," Pinkey explained elaborately.

"All right," Wallie nodded, "and we'll put Aunt Lizzie on the white one and give Mrs. Budlong—"

"Kindly assign me a spirited mount," interrupted Mr. Stott, who, as to costume, was

a compromise between an English groom and a fox hunter.

Wallie looked dubious.

"Oh, I understand horses," declared Mr. Stott, "I used to ride like an Indian."

"The buckskin?" Wallie asked doubtfully of Pinkey.

Pinkey hesitated.

"You need not be afraid that he will injure me. I can handle him."

Wallie, who never had heard of Mr. Stott's horsemanship, consented reluctantly.

"I prefer to saddle and bridle him myself, also," said Mr. Stott, when the buckskin was pointed out to him.

Wallie's misgivings returned to him, and Pinkey rolled his eyes eloquently when they saw "the man who understood horses" trying to bridle with the chin strap and noted that he had saddled without a blanket. Mr. Stott laughed inconsequently when the mistake was pointed out to him and declared that it was an oversight merely.

"Now, if you will get me something to stand on, I am ready to mount."

Once more Pinkey and Wallie exchanged significant glances as the man "who used to ride like an Indian" climbed into the saddle like some one getting into an upper berth on a Pullman. Mr. Stott was sitting with the fine, easy grace of a clothespin when the rest of the party came down the path ready for their riding lesson.

Neither Pinkey nor Wallie was easily startled, but when they saw their guests the least their astonishment permitted was an inarticulate gurgle. Dismay also was among their emotions as they thought of conducting the party through Prouty and the Yellowstone. Wallie had his share of moral courage, but when they first met his vision he doubted if he was strong enough for the ordeal.

Mrs. Budlong, whose phlegmatic exterior concealed a highly romantic nature and an active imagination, was dressed to resemble a cowgirl of the movies, as nearly as her height and width permitted. Her Stetson, knotted kerchief, fringed gauntlets, quirt, spurs to delight a Mexican, and swagger—which had the effect of a barge rocking at anchor—so fascinated Pinkey that he could not keep his eyes from her.

Old Mr. Penrose in a buckskin shirt ornate with dyed porcupine quills, and a forty-five Colt slung in a holster, looked like the next to the last of the Great Scouts, while

Mr. Budlong, in a beaded vest that would have turned bullets, was happy though uncomfortable. He wore moccasins in spite of Pinkey's warning that he would find it misery to ride in them unless he was accustomed to wearing them.

Simultaneous with Miss Gaskell's appearance in plaid bloomers, a saddle horse laid back and broke his bridle reins, for which Pinkey had not the heart to punish him in the circumstances.

Aunt Lizzie wore long, voluminous divided skirts and a little, white hat like a pâté tin, while by contrast Mrs. Harry Stott looked very smart and ultra in a tailored coat and riding breeches.

This was the party that started up Skull Creek under Pinkey's guidance, and the amazing aggregation that greeted the choleric eye of Mr. Canby on one of the solitary rides which were his greatest diversion. He had just returned from the East and had not yet learned of the use to which Wallie had put his check. But now he recalled Wallie's parting speech to Pinkey when he had started to get the paper cashed, and this fantastic assemblage was the result!

As Canby drew in his horse, he stared in stony-eyed unfriendliness while they waved at him gayly and Mr. Stott called out that they were going to be neighborly and visit him soon.

The feeling of helpless wrath in which he now looked after the party was a sensation that he had experienced only a few times in his life. Pinkey had warned him that at the first openly hostile act he would "blab" the story of the Skull Creek episode far and wide. By all the rules of the game as he had played it often, and always with success, Wallie should long since have "faded"—scared, starved out. Yet, somehow, in some unique and extraordinary way that only a "dude" would think of, he had managed to come out on top.

But the real basis for Canby's grievance, and one which he would not admit even to himself, was that, however Wallie was criticized, Helene Spenceley never failed to find something to say in his defense.

There was not much that Canby could do in the present circumstances to put difficulties in Wallie's way, but the next day he found it convenient to turn a trainload of longhorn Texas cattle loose on the adjacent range, and posted warnings to the effect that they were dangerous to pedes-

trians, and persons going among them on foot did so at their own risk.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### WALLIE QUALIFIES AS HERO.

Pinkey took a triangular piece of glass from between the logs in the bunk house and regarded himself steadfastly in the bit of broken mirror. He murmured finally: "I ain't no prize baby, but if I jest had a classy set of teeth I wouldn't be bad lookin'."

He replaced the mirror in the crack and sauntered down to the cook shack where he seated himself on the door sill. The chef was singing, as if he meant it, "Ah, I have Sighed to Rest Me Deep in the Silent Grave."

Pinkey interrupted:

"How do you git to work to git teeth, Mr. Hicks, if they ain't no dentist handy?"

Like Mr. Stott, no question could be put to Mr. Hicks for which he could not find an answer. He now replied promptly:

"Well, there's two ways: you can send to Mungummery-Ward and have a crate sent out on approval, and keep tryin' till you find a set that fits, or you can take the cast off your gooms yourself, send it on, and have 'em hammer you out some to order."

"Is that so? What kind of stuff do you use to make the cast of your gooms of?"

"Some uses putty, some uses clay, but I believe they generally recommend plaster of Paris. It's hard, and it's cheap, and it stays where it's put."

A thoughtful silence followed; then Pinkey got up and joined Wallie, who was sitting on the top pole of the corral, smoking moodily.

The dudes were at target practice with .22's and six-shooters, having been persuaded finally not to use Mr. Canby's range as a background. They now all walked with a swagger and seldom went to their meals without their weapons.

Pinkey blurted out suddenly:

"I wisht I'd died when I was little!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothin'."

It was plain that he wished to be interrogated further, but Wallie, who was thinking of Helene Spenceley and her indifference to him, was in no mood to listen to other people's troubles.

After another period of reflection, Pinkey asked abruptly:

"Do you believe in signs?"

To which Wallie replied absently: "Can't say I do. Why?"

"If there's anything in signs I ought to be turrible jealous—the way my eyebrows grow together."

"Aren't you?" indifferently.

"Me—jealous? Nobody could make me jealous, especially a worman."

"You're lucky!" Wallie spoke with unnecessary emphasis. "It's an uncomfortable sensation."

Pinkey shifted uneasily and picked a bit of bark off the corral pole.

"Don't it look kinda funny that Miss Eyester would take any in'trist in old man Penrose? A girl like her wouldn't care nothin' about his money, would she?"

Wallie looked dour as he answered:

"You never can tell. Maybe." He had been asking himself the same question about Miss Spenceley, whom he had seen rather frequently of late with Canby.

"Guess I'll quirl me a brownie and git into the feathers," said Pinkey glumly. "I thought I'd go into town in the mornin'. I want to do me some buyin'." He added, as he unhooked his heels: "You want to ride herd pretty clost on Aunt Lizzie. She's bound and determined to go outside the fence, huntin' moss agates. The cattle are liable to hook her. Canby throwed them longhorns in there on purpose."

As Wallie watched his partner go up the path to the bunk house he wondered vagely what purchase he had to make that was so important as to induce him to make a special trip to Prouty. But since Pinkey had not chosen to tell him and Wallie had a talent for minding his own business, he dismissed it; besides, he had more vital things to think about at that moment.

It had hurt him that Helene Spenceley had not been over. Obviously he had taken too much for granted, for he had thought that when she saw he was in earnest once more and in a fair way to make a success of his second venture, things would be different between them. She was the most difficult woman to impress that he ever had known; but, curiously, the less she was impressed the more eager he was to impress her.

But somehow he did not seem to make much progress, and now he asked himself grumpily why the dickens he couldn't have fallen in love with Mattie Gaskett, who followed him like his shadow and had her own income, with wonderful prospects.

He scuffed at the bark and thought sourly of the rot he had read about love begetting love. He had not noticed it. It more often begot laughter, and his case was an instance of it. Helene Spenceley laughed at him—he was sure of it—and, fool that he was, it did not seem to make any difference. There was just one girl for him and always would be.

In time, very likely, he would be a hermit, or a "sour ball" like Canby; he would sit at dances looking like a bull elk that's been whipped out of the herd, and the girls would giggle at him.

The next morning Pinkey was gone when they gathered at the breakfast table. Miss Eyester looked downcast because he had failed to tell her of his intention, while Mrs. Stott declared that it was very inconsiderate for him to go without mentioning it, since he had promised to match embroidery cotton for her and she could not go on with her dresser scarf until she had some apple-green to put the leaves in with!

The morning passed without incident, except that Mr. Budlong was astonished when Wallie told him that his new high-power rifle was scattering bullets among Mr. Canby's herd of cattle more than a mile distant and that it was great good fortune he had not killed any of them. Otherwise Wallie was engaged as usual in answering questions and lengthening and shortening stirrups for ladies the length of whose legs seemed to change from day to day.

Miss Gaskett "heeled" Wallie with flattering faithfulness and incidentally imparted the information that a friend from Zanesville, Ohio, was to join their party in Prouty when the date was definitely set for their tour of the Yellowstone.

"She's a dear, sweet girl whom I knew at boarding school, and"—archly—"you must tell me that you will not fall in love with her?"

Wallie, who now thought of even "dear, sweet girls" in terms of dollars and cents, felt that he could safely promise.

It was a relief when the triangle jangled for dinner, and Wallie looked forward to the ride afterward, although it had its attendant irritations—chiefest of which was the propensity of J. Harry Stott to gallop ahead and then gallop back to see if the party was coming—rare sport for Mr. Stott, but less so for the buckskin. As soon as that sterling young fellow had discovered that he could

ride at a gallop without falling off he lost no opportunity to do so, and his horse was already showing the result of it.

Boosting Aunt Lizzie Philbrick on and off her horse to enable her to pick flowers and examine rocks was a part of the routine, as was recovering Mrs. Budlong's hairpins when her hair came down and she lost her hat. Mr. Budlong, too, never failed to lag behind and become separated from the rest of the party, so that he had to be hunted. He persisted in riding in moccasins and said that his insteps "ached him" so that he could not keep up.

Reasoning that every occupation has drawbacks of some kind, Wallie bore these small annoyances with patience, though there were times when he confessed that the Happy Family of the Colonial were not so altogether charming and amiable as he had thought.

He never would have suspected, for instance, that J. Harry Stott, who, in his own environment, was a person of some little consequence, in another could appear a complete and unmitigated ass. Or that Mrs. Budlong had such a wolfish appetite, or that ten cents looked larger to Mr. Appel than a dollar did to Pink.

To-day there was the usual commotion over getting off, and then when Wallie was ready to boost Aunt Lizzie on her horse she was nowhere to be found. She was not in her tent, nor had she fallen over the embankment, and the fact that she set great store by her afternoon rides deepened the mystery.

Old Mr. Penrose, who had unslung his field glasses, declared he saw something that might be the top of Aunt Lizzie's head moving above a small "draw" over on Canby's lease. Mr. Penrose, who had sought ranch life chiefly because he said he was sick of cities and mobs of people, when not riding now spent most of his time with his high-power glasses watching the road in the hope of seeing some one passing, and he had come to be as excited when he saw a load of hay as if he had discovered a planet.

He passed the glasses to Wallie, who adjusted them and immediately nodded:

"That's somebody in the draw; it must be Aunt Lizzie."

There was no doubt about it when she came out and started walking slowly along the top, searching as she went, for moccagates. Wallie gave a sharp exclamation,

for, in the moment that they watched her, a small herd of the Texas cattle came around a hill and also saw her. They stopped short, and looked at the strange figure. Then, like a bank of curious antelope, they edged a little closer. It might be that they would not attack her, but, if they did, it was certain they would gore her to death unless some one was there to prevent it.

Leading his own horse and dragging Aunt Lizzie's stubborn white pony behind him, Wallie threw down the wire gate opening into the Canby lease and sprang into the saddle.

He kept his eyes fixed on the cattle as he rode toward Aunt Lizzie, making the best time he could, with her cayuse pulling back obstinately on the bridle, but, in any case, he could not have seen Helene Spenceley and Canby riding from the opposite direction, for they were still on the other side of a small ridge which hid them.

Helene had stopped at the Canby ranch for luncheon on her way to pay her long-deferred visit to her whilom acquaintances of the Colonial. Though Canby had not relished the thought that she was going there, he had asked to accompany her across the leases. Pleased that she had stopped without an invitation, he was more likable than ever she had seen him, and he made no pretense of concealing the fact that she could be mistress of the most pretentious house in the country if she chose to.

Helene could not well have been otherwise than impressed by its magnificence. She was aware that with Canby's money and her personal popularity she could make an enviable position for herself very easily, and she was nothing if not ambitious. The traits in Canby which so frequently antagonized her, his arrogance, his selfish egotism and disregard of others' rights and feelings, to-day were not in evidence. He was spontaneous, genial, boyish almost, and she never had felt so kindly disposed toward him.

She looked at him speculatively now as he rode beside her and wondered if association would beget an affection that would do as well as love, if supplemented by the many things he had to offer? Her friendlier mood was not lost on Canby who was quick to take advantage of it. He leaned over and laid his hand on hers as it rested on the saddle horn.

"Your thoughts of me are kinder than usual, aren't they, Helene?"

She smiled at him as she admitted, "Perhaps so."

"I wish you could think so of me always, because I should be very happy if—you ——" His narrow, selfish face had a softness she never had seen in it as he paused while he groped for the exact words he wished in which to express himself. The color rose in Helene's cheeks as she averted her eyes from his steady gaze and looked on past him.

Their horses had been climbing slowly and had now reached the top of the ridge which gave an uninterrupted view across the flat stretch which lay between them and the ranch that was such an eyesore to Canby.

As she took in the sweep of country her gaze concentrated upon the moving objects she saw in it. Puzzled at first, her look of perplexity was succeeded by one of consternation, then horror. With swift comprehension she grasped fully the meaning of a scene that was being enacted before her. Her expression attracted Canby's attention even before she pointed and cried sharply:

"Look!"

Aunt Lizzie was still busy with her pebbles, a tiny, tragic figure she looked, in view of what was happening, as she walked along in leisurely fashion, stopping every step or two to pick up and examine a stone that attracted her attention. The herd of longhorns had come closer, but one had drawn out from the others and was shaking its head as it trotted down upon her.

Wallie had long since abandoned the pony he was leading, and, with all the speed his own was capable of, was doing his best to intercept the animal before it reached her. But he was still a long way off, and even as Helene cried out the steer broke into a gallop.

Canby, too, instantly grasped the situation.

"If I only had a rifle!"

"Perhaps we can turn it! We'll have to make an awful run for it, but we can try!"

They had already gathered the reins and were spurring their horses down the declivity. Canby's thoroughbred leaped into the air as the steel pricked it and Helene was soon left behind. She saw that she could figure only as a spectator, so she slowed down and watched what followed in fascinated horror.

Canby was considerably farther off than Wallie, in the beginning, but the racing blood in the former's horse's veins responded

gallantly to the urge of its rider. It stretched out and laid down to its work like a hare with the hounds behind it, quickly equalizing the distance.

Aunt Lizzie was poking at a rock with her toe when she looked up suddenly and saw her danger. The steer with a spread of horns like antlers and tapering to needle points was rushing down upon her, infuriated. For a moment she stood, weak with terror, unable to move, until her will asserted itself and then, shrieking, she ran as fast as her stiff, old legs could carry her.

Wallie and Canby reached the steer almost together. A goodly distance still intervened between it and Aunt Lizzie, but the gap was shortening with sickening rapidity, and Helene grew cold as she saw that, try as they might, they could not head it.

Helene wrung her hands in a frenzy as she watched their futile efforts. Wallie always carried a rope on his saddle, why didn't he use it? Was he afraid? Couldn't he? She felt a swift return of her old contempt for him. Was he only a "yellow back" cow-puncher after all, underneath his Western regalia? Notwithstanding his brave appearance he was as useless in a crisis like this as Canby. Pinkey was more of a man than either of them. He would stop that steer somehow if he had only his pocketknife to do it.

She cried out sharply as Aunt Lizzie stumbled and pitched headlong. Between exhaustion and terror that paralyzed her she was unable to get up, though she tried. The steer, flaming-eyed, was now less than seventy yards from her.

Helene felt herself grow nauseated. She meant to close her eyes when it happened. She had seen a horse gored to death by a bull, and it was a sight she did not wish to see repeated.

Canby in advance of Wallie was a little ahead of the steer, slapping at it with his bridle reins, Wallie behind had been crowding its shoulder. But nothing could divert it from its purpose. Helene was about to turn her head away when she saw Wallie lay the reins on his horse's neck and lean from the saddle. His purpose flashed through Helene's mind instantly. Then she cried aloud—incredulously:

"He's going to try *that!*" And added in a frightened whisper: "He can't do it! He can never do it!"

Wallie's horse, which had been running at

the steer's shoulder, missed his hand on the reins and lagged a little, so that the distance between them was such as to make what he meant to attempt seemingly impossible. For a second he rode with his arm outstretched as if gauging the distance, then Helene grew rigid as she saw him leave the saddle.

He made it—barely. The gap was so big that it seemed as if it were not humanly possible more than to touch the short mane on the animal's neck with his finger tips. But he clung somehow, his feet and body dragging, while the steer's speed increased rather than slackened. First with one hand and then the other he worked his way to a grip on the horns, which was what he wanted.

The steer stopped to fight him. Its feet plowed up the dirt as it braced them to resist him. Then they struggled. The steer was a big one, raw-boned, leggy, a typical old-time longhorn of the Texas ranges, and now in fear and rage it put forth all the strength of which it was capable.

With his teeth grinding, Wallie fought it in desperation, trying to give the twist that drops the animal. Its breath in his face, the froth from its mouth blinded him, but still he clung while it threw him this and that way. He himself never knew where his strength came from. Suddenly the steer fell heavily and the two lay panting together.

Helene drew the back of her hand across her eyes and brushed away the tears that blurred her vision, while a lump rose in her throat too big to swallow. "Gentle Annie" of the Colonial veranda, erstwhile authority on Battenberg and sweaters, had accomplished the most reckless of the dare-devil feats of the cow country—he had "bulldogged" a steer from horseback!

## CHAPTER XX.

"WORMAN! WORMAN!"

Business which had to do with the cache they had lifted from Tucker detained Pinkey in town longer than expected. He returned in the night and did not get up when the triangle jangled for breakfast. In fact, it was well into the forenoon when he appeared, only to learn that Miss Eyester had gone off with old Mr. Penrose to look at an eagle's nest.

"What did he do that for?" Pinkey demanded of Wallie.

"I presume he wanted her company," Wal-

lie replied composedly, entertained by the ferocity of Pinkey's expression.

"Is he a dude or is he a duder that he has to go guidin' people to see sights they prob'ly don't want to look at?"

"She seemed willing enough to go," Wallie answered.

Pinkey sneered:

"Mebbe I'd better git me a blue suit with brass buttons and stand around and open gates and unsaddle fer 'em."

Wallie regarded his partner calmly.

"Pinkey, you're *jealous*!"

"Jealous! Me jealous of an old Methuselah that don't know enough to make a mark in the road?" Unconsciously Pinkey's hand sought his eyebrows, as he laughed hollowly. "Why, I could show her a barrel of eagles' nests! I know whur there's a coyote den with pups in it! I know whur there's a petrified tree and oceans of Injun arrer heads, if she'd jest waited. But if anybody thinks I'm goin' to melt my boot heels down taggin' a worman, they're mistaken!" Pinkey stamped off to the bunk house and slammed the door behind him.

"Where's Pinkey?" The question was general when it was observed that his chair was vacant at dinner.

"Still reposing, I imagine," Wallie answered jocosely.

Mrs. Budlong commented:

"A night ride like that must be very fatiguing."

"You are sure he's not ill?" inquired Miss Eyester. She had not enjoyed her revenge upon Pinkey for going away without telling her as much as she had anticipated; besides, the eagle's nest turned out to be a crow's nest with no birds in it, and that was disappointing.

Mr. Hicks, who frequently joined in the conversation when anything interested him, snorted from the kitchen doorway:

"Ill? You couldn't make him 'ill' with a club with nails in it—that feller."

"Perhaps one of us had better awaken him," Miss Eyester suggested. "He should eat something."

"Hor! Hor! Hor!" Mr. Hicks laughed raucously. "Maybe he don't feel like eat-ing. Let him alone and he'll come out of it."

Miss Eyester resented the aspersion, the meaning of which was now plain to everybody, and said with dignity, rising:

"If no one else will call him, I shall."

"Rum has been the curse of the nation," observed Mr. Budlong to whom even a thimbleful gave a headache.

"I wish I had a barrel 'of it,'" growled old Mr. Penrose. "When I get home I'm going to get me a worm and make moonshine."

"Oh, how dread-ful!"

"'Tain't!" Mr. Penrose contradicted Aunt Lizzie.

"'Tis!" retorted Aunt Lissie.

They glared at each other balefully, and while everybody waited to hear if she could think of anything else to say to him, Miss Eyester returned panting:

"The door's locked and there's a towel pinned over the window."

"No!" They exclaimed in chorus, and looked at Wallie. "Do you suppose anything's happened?"

"He locked the door because he does not want to be disturbed, and the towel is to keep the light out," Mr. Stott deduced.

"Of course!" They all laughed heartily and admired Mr. Stott's shrewdness.

"All the same," declared the cook, scouring a frying pan in the doorway, "it's not like him to go to all that trouble just to sleep. I'll go up and see if I can raise him."

Even in the dining room they could hear Mr. Hicks banging on the door with the frying pan, and calling. He returned in a few minutes.

"There's something queer about it. It's still as a graveyard. He ain't snoring."

"Could he have made way with himself?" Mr. Appel's tone was sepulchral.

"Oh-h-h!" Miss Eyester gasped faintly.

"Perhaps he has merely locked the door and he is outside," Mr. Stott suggested.

"I'll go down and see if I can notice his legs stickin' out of the crick anywhere," said Mr. Hicks briskly.

"It is very curious—very strange, indeed," they declared solemnly, though they all continued eating spareribs—a favorite dish with the Happy Family.

The cook, returning, said in a tone that had a note of disappointment, "He ain't drowned."

"Is his horse in the corral?" asked Wallie.

Mr. Hicks took observations from the doorway and reported that it was, which deepened the mystery.

Since no human being, unless he was drugged or dead, could sleep through the cook's battering with the frying pan, Wallie himself grew anxious. He recalled

Pinkey's gloom of the evening before he had gone to Prouty. "I wisht I'd died when I was little," he remembered his saying.

Also Pinkey's moroseness of the morning and the ferocity of his expression took on special significance in the light of his strange absence. Instinctively Wallie looked at Miss Eyester. That young lady was watching him closely and saw his gravity. Unexpectedly she burst into tears so explosively that Mrs. Budlong moved back the bread plate even as she tried to comfort her.

"I know something has happened—I *feel* it! When Aunt Sallie choked on a fishbone at Asbury Park I knew it before we got the wire. I'm sort of clairvoyant! Please excuse me!" Miss Eyester left the table sobbing. It seemed heartless to go on eating when Pinkey, the sunshine of the ranch, as they suddenly realized, might be lying cold in death in the bunk house, so they followed solemnly—all except Mrs. Henry Appel, who lingered to pick herself out another spare-rib which she took with her in her fingers.

They proceeded in a body to the bunk house, where Wallie applied his eye to the keyhole and found it had been stuffed with something. This confirmed his worst suspicions. Nobody could doubt now but that something sinister had happened.

Mr. Penrose, who had been straining his eyes at the window, peering through a tiny space between the towel and the window frame, declared he saw somebody moving. This, of course, was preposterous, for, if alive, Pinkey would have made a sound in response to their clamor, so nobody paid any attention to his assertion.

"We'll have to burst the door in," said Mr. Stott in his masterful manner, but Wallie already had run for the ax for that purpose.

Mrs. Appel, alternately gnawing her bone and crying softly, begged them not to let her see him if he did not look natural, while Miss Eyester leaned against the door jamb in a fainting condition.

"Maybe *I* can bust it with my shoulder," said Mr. Hicks, throwing his weight against the door.

Immediately, as the lock showed signs of giving, a commotion, a shuffling, was heard, a sound as if a shoulder braced on the inside was resisting.

There was a second's astonished silence and then a chorus of voices demanded:

"Let us in! Pinkey! What is the matter?"

The answer was an inarticulate, gurgling sound that was bloodcurdling.

"He's cut his windpipe and all he can do is gaggle!" cried Mr. Hicks excitedly, and made a frenzied attack on the door that strained the lock to the utmost.

If the noise he made was any criterion it was judged that Pinkey's head must be nearly severed from his body—which made the resistance he displayed all the more remarkable. He was a madman, of course—that was taken for granted—and the ladies were warned to places of safety lest he come out slashing right and left with a razor.

They ran and locked themselves in the kitchen, where they could look through the window—all except Miss Eyester, who declared dramatically that she had no further interest in life, anyhow, and wished to die by his hand anyway, knowing herself responsible for what had happened.

Wallie, breathless from running, arrived with the ax, which he handed to Mr. Hicks, who called warningly as he swung it:

"Stand back, Pinkey—I'm comin'!"

The door crashed and splintered, and, when it opened, Mr. Hicks fell in with it.

He fell out again almost as quickly, for there was Pinkey with the glaring eyes of a wild man, his jaws open, and from his mouth there issued a strange white substance.

"He's frothin'!" Mr. Hicks yelled shrilly. "He's got hydrophobia! Look out for him, everybody!"

"G-gg-ggg-ough!" gurgled Pinkey.

"Who bit you, feller?" the cook asked soothingly.

"G-ggg-gg-ough!" was the agonized answer.

"We'll have to throw and hog-tie him." Mr. Hicks looked around to see if there was a rope handy.

"Don't let him snap at you," called Mr. Stott from a safe distance. "If it gets in your blood, you're goners."

The cook who, as Pinkey advanced shaking his head and making vehement gestures, had retreated, was suddenly enlightened:

"That ain't froth—it's plaster o' Paris—I bet you! Wait till I get a stick and poke it!"

Pinkey nodded.

"That's it!" Mr. Hicks cried delightedly: "He's takin' a cast of his gooms—I told him about it."

The look he received from Pinkey was murderous.

"How are we going to get it out?" Wallie asked in perplexity.

"It's way bigger than his mouth," said Mr. Appel, and old Mr. Penrose suggested humorously, "You might push it down and make him swallow it."

"Maybe you could knock a little off at a time or chisel it," ventured Mr. Budlong, feeling of it. "It's hard as a rock."

"It's like taking a hook out of a catfish," said the cook facetiously. "Say, can you open your mouth any wider?"

Pinkey made vehement signs that his mouth was stretched to the limit.

"It's from ear to ear now, you might say," observed Mr. Budlong. "If you go to monkeying, you'll have the top of his head off."

"If I could just get my fist up in the roof somehow and then pry down on it." The size of Mr. Hick's fist, however, made the suggestion impractical.

"I believe I can pick it off little by little with a hairpin or a pair of scissors or something." Miss 'Eyester spoke both confidently and sympathetically.

Pinkey nodded, his eyes full of gratitude and suffering.

"Don't laugh at him," she pleaded, as they now were howling uproariously. "Just leave us alone and I'll manage it somehow."

It proved that Miss 'Eyester was not oversanguine for, finally, with the aid of divers tools and implements, Pinkey was able to spit out the last particle of the plaster of Paris.

"I s'pose the story'll go all over the country and make me ridic'lous," he said gloomily. Feeling the corners of his mouth tenderly: "I thought at first I'd choke to death before I'd let anybody see me. What I'll do to that cook," his eyes gleaming, "won't stand repeatin'. And if anybody dast say 'teeth' to me——"

"Whatever made you do it?"

Too angry to finesse, Pinkey replied bluntly:

"I done it fer you. I thought you'd like me better, if I had teeth, and now I s'pose you can't ever look at me without laughin'."

Miss 'Eyester flipped a bit of plaster from his shirt sleeve with her thumb and finger.

"I wouldn't do anything to hurt your feelings, ever."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Then don't you go ridin' again with that old gummer."

"Do you care—really?" Shyly.

"I'll tell the world I do!"

Miss 'Eyester fibbed without a pang of conscience:

"I never dreamed it."

"I thought you wouldn't look at anybody unless they had money—you bein' rich n'ever'thing."

"In the winter I earn my living cataloguing books in a public library. I hate it."

Pinkey laid an arm about both her thin shoulders.

"Say, what's the chanct of gittin' along with you f'rever an' ever?"

"Pretty good," replied Miss 'Eyester candidly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### "KNOCKING 'EM FOR A CURVE."

It had been put to a vote as to whether the party should make the trip through the Yellowstone Park by motor, stopping at the hotels, or on horseback with a camping outfit.

Mr. Stott, after the persuasive manner in which he addressed a jury, argued:

"We can ride in automobiles at home. Than horseback riding, there is no more healthful exercise. We are all agreed that we have had enough of hotels, while camping will be a new and delightful experience. In the brief period that we shall lie next to nature's heart we will draw strength from her bosom."

Everybody agreed with him strongly except old Mr. Penrose, who declared that sleeping on the ground would give him rheumatism, and the fear that bugs would crawl in his ears made him restless. Mr. Stott, however, overcame his objections by assuring him that the ground was too dry to give any one rheumatism and he could provide himself with cotton against the other contingency.

The outlook for a successful trip from every viewpoint was most promising, yet there were moments when Wallie had his doubts and misgivings. He supposed that it was his experience in dry farming which had made him pessimistic concerning all untried ventures. Certainly it had destroyed his beautiful, childlike faith in the teaching that the hairs of his head were numbered and no harm could come to him. He had

noticed that every one who ever had dry-farmed carried the scars afterward. It was an unforgettable experience, like a narrow escape from lynching.

Pinkey, on the contrary, had no somber thoughts to disturb him. He was filled with boundless enthusiasm; though this condition was chronic since he had become engaged to Miss Eyester. Pinkey, in love, was worse than useless. Escorting Miss Eyester was now his regular business, with dude wrangling reduced to a side issue. Therefore, it had devolved upon Wallie to buy teepees, extra bedding, food, and the thousand and one things necessary to comfort when camping.

It all had been accomplished finally, and the day came when the caravan was drawn up beside the Prouty House ready to start toward the Yellowstone.

A delighted populace blocked the sidewalk while they awaited the appearance of Miss Mercy Lane, who had arrived on a night train according to arrangement. The cavalcade if not imposing was at least arresting. No one could pass it yawning. There was no one who had come to see the party start who did not feel repaid for the effort.

First, there was Mr. Hicks, driving four horses and the "grub wagon" and leading the procession. He handled the lines with the noble bearing of the late Ben Hur tooling his chariot. Mr. Hicks dignified the "grub wagon" to such an extent that it was a treat to look at him.

Second in place was Pinkey, driving the tent and bed wagon, with Miss Eyester on the high spring seat beside him. Behind Pinkey came "Red" McGonnigle, driving a surrey provided for those who should become fatigued with riding horseback. The vehicle, like the stagecoach, was a bargain, sold cheaply by the original owner because of the weakness of the springs, which permitted the body to hit the axle when any amount of weight was put in it. This was a discovery they made after purchase. Aunt Lizzie Philbrick was the only passenger, though it was anticipated that Miss Mercy Lane would prefer to drive also, since she had had no previous riding to harden her.

Behind the surrey was the riding party, even more startling than when they had first burst upon Wallie in their beadwork and curio-store trappings. Mr. Stott was wearing a pair of "chaps" spotted like a

pinto while Mr. Budlong, in flame-colored angora, at a little distance looked as if his legs were afire.

Their ponies peered out shamefacedly through brilliant, penitentiary-made, horse-hair bridles, and old Mr. Penrose was the envy of everybody in a greasy, limp-brimmed Stetson he had bought from a freighter. Also he had acquired a pair of twenty-two-inch "eagles-bill" tapidores. He looked like a mounted pirate, and, in his evil moments, after sleeping badly, he acted like one.

Every one was in high spirits and eager to get started. Mr. Stott surreptitiously spurred his horse to make him cavort more spiritedly before the spectators, and he responded in such a manner that the rising young attorney was obliged to cling with both hands to the saddle horn.

When he came back, slightly paler, Wallie said curtly: "You don't need spurs on that horse."

"I'm the best judge of that," Stott retorted.

Wallie said nothing further, for at the moment the crowd parted to permit the passing of the newcomer from Zanesville, Ohio.

As he saw her, he felt willing to renew his promise to Miss Gaskett not to fall in love with her. Wallie was a charitable soul, and chivalrous, but he could not but think that Miss Mercy must have changed greatly since she and Miss Gaskett were schoolgirls.

She wore a masculine hat with a quill in it and a woolen skirt that bagged at the knees like trousers. Her hair was thin at the temples, and she wore gold glasses astride her long, "foxy" nose. Although no average cake would have held the candles to which Miss Mercy's birthdays entitled her, she was given to "middy" blouses and pink sweaters.

"'Merce' has such a unique personality that I am sure you are going to enjoy her," beamed Miss Gaskett in presenting Wallie.

Wallie murmured that he had no doubt of it, and hoisted Miss Mercy into the surrey.

With nothing further to detain them, Mr. Hicks swung his lash and the four went off at a gallop, with the cooking utensils in the rear rattling so that it sounded like a runaway milk wagon.

He had been instructed to drive ahead and select a suitable place for the noon-day luncheon in order that everything should be in readiness upon their arrival, but to the

others Wallie had suggested that they ride and drive more slowly to save the horses.

In spite of Wallie's request, however, Mr. Stott, seeing the cook getting ahead, started off at a gallop to overtake him. In no uncertain voice Wallie called to him.

"You will oblige me if you will ride more slowly," Wallie said, speaking very distinctly when Mr. Stott came back to ask what was wanted.

"Why, what's the matter?"

His feigned innocence added to Wallie's anger.

"I don't want that horse ruined."

"I am paying for him," Stott returned insolently.

"I still own him, and it's my privilege to say how he shall be ridden."

Stott dropped back sullenly, but Wallie foresaw trouble with him before the trip was finished, though he meant to hold his temper as long as possible.

In the surrey Red McGonnigle was putting forth his best efforts to entertain Aunt Lizzie and Miss Mercy, which he considered as much a part of his duties as driving.

A portion of the road was through a cañon, cut from the solid rock in places, with narrow turnouts, and a precipitous descent of hundreds of feet to a sinister-looking green river roaring in the bottom.

"Now, here," said Mr. McGonnigle, as they entered it, lolling back in the seat and crossing his legs in leisurely fashion, "is where there's been all kinds of accee-dents." He pointed with the stub of a buggy whip. "About there is where four horses on a coal wagon run away and went over. Two was killed and one was crippled so they had to shoot it."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Aunt Lizzie exclaimed nervously.

Miss Mercy's contralto voice boomed at him:

"What happened to the driver?"

"His bones was broke in a couple of dozen places, but they picked him up, and sence, he has growed together."

Miss Mercy snickered appreciatively.

"You see that p'int ahead of us? Onct a teller ridin' a bronc backed off there. They rolled two hundred feet together. Wonder it didn't kill 'em."

Aunt Lizzie was twisting her fingers and whispering:

"Oh, how dread-ful!"

"Jest around that bend," went on the en-

tertainer, expectorating with deliberation before he continued, "a buggy tried to pass a hay wagon. It was a brand-new buggy, cost all of two hundred and fifty dollars, and the first time the owner'd took his family out in it. Smashed it to kindlin' wood. The woman threw the baby overboard, and it never could see good out of one eye afterward. She caught on a tree when she was rollin' and broke four ribs, or some such matter. He'd ought to 'a' knowed better than to pass a hay wagon where it was sidlin'. I was one of his pallbearers, as an accommodation."

Aunt Lizzie was beyond exclaiming and Miss Mercy's toes were curling and uncurling, though she preserved a composed exterior.

After setting the brake, McGonnigle went on humorously, gesticulating spaciously while the slack of the lines swung on the single tree:

"On this here hill the brake on a dude's auto-mo-bubbly quit on him. When he come to the turn he went on over. Ruined the car, plumb wrecked it, and it must 'a' cost fifteen hundred dollars to two thousand dollars. They shipped his corp' back East somewhere."

Pale, and shaking like an aspen, Aunt Lizzie clung tightly to Miss Mercy. The scenery was sublime, but they had no eye for it. Their gaze was riveted upon the edge of the precipice some six or eight inches from the outer wheels of the surrey, and life at the moment looked as sweet as it seemed uncertain.

Driving with one hand and pointing with the other, McGonnigle went on with the fluency for which he was celebrated:

"That sharp curve we're comin' to is where they was a head-on collision between a chap on a motor cycle and a traction en-jine they was takin' through the cañon. He was goin' too fast anyhow—the motor cycle—and it jest splattered him, as you might say, all over the front of the en-jine."

Mr. McGonnigle put the lines between his knees and gripped them while he readjusted his hat with one hand and pointed with the other:

"You see that hangin' rock? There where it sticks over? Well, sir, two cayuses tryin' to unload their packs bounced off there and fell——"

A shriek in his ear interrupted the gifted reconnoiteur at this juncture. He turned,

startled, to see Aunt Lizzie with her fingers in her ears screaming that she was going to have hysterics. To prove that she was a woman of her word, she had them, while Mr. McGonnigle regarded her in astonishment.

"She's got a fit," he said to Wallie, who had hurried forward.

"He's scared her out of her wits," declared Miss Mercy, glaring at him.

"Me?"

"You! You're a careless driver. I don't believe you understand horses, and I shan't ride any farther with you."

Red jammed the whip in its socket and wrapped the lines around it. Springing over the wheel he stood by the roadside and declared defiantly:

"I'm quittin'. Hate to leave you in a pinch, Gentle Annie, but I take sass from no female. I'd ruther herd sheep than wrangle dudes, anyhow. I tried to be entertainin', and this is the thanks I git fer it."

Wallie succeeded in pacifying Red finally and suggested that he and Pinkey exchange places. Pinkey consented reluctantly, and Red climbed upon the seat of the bed wagon with a dark look at the "female" who had questioned his knowledge of horses, while he mumbled something about "fixin' her."

By ten-thirty food was the chief topic of conversation, and every one was keeping an eye out for Hicks and the "grub wagon." At eleven the hilarity had simmered to monosyllables, and old Mr. Penrose, who always became incredibly cross when he was hungry, rode along with his face screwed up like a bad youngster that is being carried out of church for a spanking in the vestibule.

By eleven-thirty they were all complaining bitterly that the cook had been allowed to get so far ahead that they should all perish of hunger before they could overtake him. At twelve, the animals in a zoo just before feeding time had "nothing on" the Happy Family when it came to ferocity, but they brightened immediately as they finally caught a glimpse of Hick's camp fire, and grew almost cheerful when they saw him cutting bread on the lowered tailboard of the wagon, where the lunch was waiting for them. The spot he had selected could not truthfully be called ideal, viewed from any angle. There was no shade, and the sand, sizzling hot, reflected the glare of the midday sun as painfully as a mirror.

The "dudes" dismounted stiffly and stood

at a distance, sniffing the bubbling coffee and watching the cook slice ham with a knife that had a blade like the sword of a crusader. Mr. Hicks had an alert, suspicious manner as if he feared that some one would jump forward and snatch something before he had given the signal.

When the operation of bread slicing was completed, Mr. Hicks stuck the point of the knife in the tailboard and, gripping the handle, struck a pose like that of the elder Salvini, while in a sonorous voice he enumerated the delicacies he had to offer. It sounded like a roll call, and his tone was so imperative that almost one expected the pickles and cheese to answer—"present."

"Come and get it!" he finished abruptly, and retired to sit down under a sagebrush as if he were disgusted with food and people who ate it. There Wallie joined him and from the vantage point watched his guests eat their first meal in the open.

If there was one thing upon which the Happy Family had prided itself more than another it was upon its punctilious observance of the amenities. There were those among the "newcomers" who averred that they carried their elaborate politeness to a point which made them ridiculous. For example, when two or more met at the door of the elevator they had been known to stand for a full minute urging precedence upon the other, and no gentleman, however bald or susceptible to drafts, would converse with a lady with his head covered.

Now, Wallie felt that his eyes must have deceived him when Mr. Budlong prodded Miss Eyester in the ribs with his elbow in his eagerness to get in ahead of her, while old Mr. Penrose reached a long arm over Aunt Lizzie Philbrick's shoulder and took away a piece of apple pie upon which she already had closed her fingers.

Mr. Stott with his usual enterprise and shrewdness had gotten next to the tailboard where he stood munching and reviewing the food with an eye to his next selection. He was astonished to see Miss Mercy's alpine hat rising, as it were, from the earth at his feet to crowd him from his desirable position. As she stood up she jabbed him in the nostril with the quill and Mr. Stott gave ground before he realized it. Miss Mercy snickered in appreciation of her own cleverness; as well she might, for she had crawled under the wagon and came up exactly where she meant to.

Aunt Lizzie, to whom accidents of an unusual nature seemed always to be happening, wandered off with a wedge of pie and a cup of coffee and sat down on an ant hill.

While she sipped her coffee and drank in the scenery simultaneously, the inhabitants of the hill came out in swarms to investigate the monster who was destroying their home. They attacked her with the ferocity for which red ants are noted, and she dropped her pie and coffee and ran screaming to the wagon.

Fearful that she would be pursued by them, she got into the surrey where she became involved in a quarrel with Miss Mercy, who was eating her lunch there. Miss Mercy caught a butterfly that lighted on a seat cover and pulled off first one wing and then the other in spite of Aunt Lizzie's entreaties. She dropped it on the bottom of the surrey and put her astonishing foot upon it.

"There," she snickered, "I squashed it."

Aunt Lizzie, to whom anything alive was as if it were human, wrung her hands in anguish.

"I think you are horrid!"

"What good is it?"

"What good are you, either? I shan't ride with you." Aunt Lizzie climbed into the third seat of the surrey, where she refused to answer Miss Mercy when she spoke to her.

The rest and food freshened the party considerably, but by four o'clock they were again hungry and drooping in their saddles. Only Mr. Stott, endowed, as it seemed, with the infinite wisdom of the Almighty, retained his spirits and kept up an unending flow of instructive conversation upon topics of which he had the barest smattering of knowledge. Constantly dashing off to investigate gulches and side trails, Wallie's smoldering wrath burned brighter, as the buckskin hourly grew more jaded.

Complaints increased that their horses were hard-gaited, and the voices of the ladies held plaintive notes as they declared their intention of riding in the surrey when they overtook it. Pinkey was stopped finally, and his passengers augmented by the addition of Mrs. Stott, Miss Gaskett, and Mrs. Bud-long, who carefully folded their jackets to sit on.

At five o'clock Mr. Stott raced forward and returned to announce that Hicks had camped just around the bend of the river.

"You're wearing that horse out, Stott," said Wallie coldly.

"He's feeling good—watch him!" cried the lawyer gayly, putting spurs to the horse and disappearing.

It was a beautiful camping spot that Hicks had selected, though Red McGonnigle grumbled that it was not level enough for the teepees.

Old Mr. Penrose, who had fallen off his horse rather than dismounted, declared he was so tired that he could sleep on the teeth of a harrow, like a babe in its cradle.

"We'll be all right when we get seasoned," said Mr. Appel cheerfully, hunting in his wife's hand bag for the vaseline.

"You couldn't have a better place to start in at," Red commented grimly.

On the whole, the day might be regarded as a pleasant one, and if the remainder of the trip equaled it, there was no doubt but that the party would return satisfied, which meant that they would advertise it and the next season would be even more successful.

Every one carried wood to build a camp fire after supper, but by the time they had it going they were too sleepy to sit up and enjoy it. They stumbled away to their several teepees with their eyes half closed, and for the first time since they had known each other failed to say "pleasant dreams" when separating for the night.

Mr. Stott lingered to regale Pinkey and Wallie for the fourteenth time with the story of the hoot owl which had frightened him while hunting in Florida, but since it was received without much enthusiasm and he was not encouraged to tell another, he, too, retired to crawl between his blankets and "sleep on Nature's bosom" with most of his clothes on.

"I wouldn't wonder but that we'll have to hit him between the horns before the trip is over," Pinkey remarked, looking after Stott.

Wallie said nothing, but his face spoke for him.

Pinkey continued in a tone of satisfaction: "Outside of him, everything's goin' splendid. The Yellowstone Park is the fightin'est place anybody ever heard of. I've seen lifetime friends go in there campin' and come out enemies—each one sittin' on his own grub box and not speakin'. But it don't look as if we was goin' to have any serious trouble—they're nice people."

"And they think the world of me," Wallie reiterated.

"I've been thinkin' I could lose the horses for two or three days and that would count up considerable. Ten dudes at five dollars a day for three days, say. Oh, we're sittin' pretty! We'll come out of this with a roll as big as a gambler's."

"It *looks* encouraging," Wallie replied more guardedly, though in his heart he was sharing Pinkey's optimism.

They kicked out the camp fire and rolled up in their respective blankets, Pinkey to die temporarily, and Wallie to lie awake listening to the roar of the river and speculating as to whether Helene Spenceley had any special prejudice against the dude business.

Of course, he admitted, had he a choice in the matter, he would have preferred to have been an ambassador, or a lawyer of international reputation, or even a great artist; but for a start, as the foundation of a fortune, dudes were at least as good as *herring*.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### RIFTS.

Before the birds had taken their heads from under their wings, Miss Mercy Lane was up and crashing through the brambles on a hunt for Red McGonnigle. The dew on the petals of the wild rose, the opaline tints of a sweet-scented dawn meant nothing to that lady as, without a collar, her shirt waist wrongly buttoned, her hair twisted into a hard "Psyche" knot, she searched for her enemy.

Pinkey she found without difficulty; also Mr. Hicks, who, awakened by the feeling that some one was looking at him, sat up and in a scandalized tone told her to go right away from him. Red McGonnigle, however, whether by accident or premeditation, had repaired with his blankets to a bed ground where the Almighty could not have found him with a spyglass. In consequence Wallie was awakened suddenly by the booming voice of Miss Mercy demanding to know Red's whereabouts.

Her lids were puffed as if she had not closed them, and through the slits her eyes gleamed at him. She looked so altogether formidable as she stood over him that his first impulse was to duck his head under the covers. Since it was manifestly impossible for Wallie to get to his feet as politeness demanded, and it seemed ridiculous to

sit up in bed and converse with a lady he knew so slightly, it appeared that the best thing to do in the circumstances was to remain as he was.

Aiming her finger at him, Miss Mercy declared that deliberately, willfully, maliciously, Red McGonnigle had set her tent on a *hump*. More than that, he had cut down an alder, leaving some three or four sharp prongs over which he had spread her blankets. She would have been as comfortable on the teeth of a hayrake and had not even dozed in consequence. With her own ears she had heard Red McGonnigle threaten to "fix" her, and he had done it. If he was not discharged she would return to Prouty at the first opportunity.

Wallie argued vainly that it was an accident, that Red was altogether too chivalrous to take such a low-down revenge upon a lady, and explained that, in any event, it would be impossible to dispense with his services at this juncture. He declared that he regretted the matter deeply and promised to prevent a reoccurrence.

But Miss Mercy was adamant, and intimated that Wallie was in sympathy with his hireling if not in actual "cahoots" with him. She flung at him as she departed:

"I intend to ask a ride back to Prouty from the first passer-by, and I shall *knock* you and your ranch at every opportunity!"

She returned to her tepee to complete her toilet while Wallie took his boots from under his pillow and drew them on glumly, feeling that much of the joy had been taken from what promised to be a perfect morning.

Mr. Hicks, too, started breakfast in a mood that was clearly melancholy for, as he rattled the pots and pans, Wallie heard him reciting:

"And when my time comes, let me go—not like the galley slave at night scourged to his dungeon—but like one sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust—" He stopped suddenly, and then in a voice that chilled Wallie's blood he shouted:

"Jump-ing Je-hoshophat! Git out o' that grub box!"

He had caught Mrs. Budlong in the act of spreading jam on a cracker.

"How dare you speak so to me?" she demanded indignantly.

For answer, Mr. Hicks replied briefly:

"You ought to know by this time that I don't allow dudes snooping around when I'm cooking."

"You are insulting—I shall report you."

Mr. Hicks laughed mockingly:

"You do that and see what it gets you."

The cook knew his power quite evidently, for when Mrs. Budlong carried out her threat Wailie could only reply that he dared not antagonize Hicks, since to replace him would cause delay, inconvenience, and additional expense to everybody.

Mrs. Budlong rested all her chins upon her cameo breastpin and received the explanation coldly.

"Verra well," she said incisively, "verra, verra well! I shall buy jam and crackers at the first station, Mr. MacPherson, and carry them with me," and she went to report the controversy to her husband.

When they had bathed their faces and hands in the river, the evening before, some one had referred to it poetically as "Nature's washbasin." Wallie, seeing Mrs. Appel with her soap and towel on the way to "Nature's washbasin," was inspired by some evil spirit to inquire how she had rested.

"Rested!" she hissed at him. "Who could rest, to say nothing of sleeping, within six blocks of Mr. Penrose? A man who snores as he does should not be permitted to have his tent among human beings. If it is ever placed near mine again, Wallie, I shall insist upon having it removed if it is midnight. Knowing the trouble he has had everywhere, I am surprised at your not being more considerate."

"To-night I will attend to it. I regret very much—" Wallie mumbled.

Mrs. J. Harry Stott beckoned him aside as breakfast was being placed on the table.

Mrs. Stott had a carefully cultivated mispronunciation of great elegance, when she wished to be impressive, and as soon as she began Wallie realized that something portentous was about to be imparted to him.

"You will excuse me if I speak frankly?"

Wallie gulped, wondering fearfully what she knew and how much.

She went on in a voice which seemed to have hoarfrost on it:

"But the fact is, I am not in the habit of eating with the *help*."

Wallie felt relief surge over him. His face cleared and he laughed light-heartedly.

"I know that, of course, Mrs. Stott, but out here it is different. Camping is particularly democratic. It has never occurred to Red or Hicks that they are not welcome

at the table, and I fear that they would be greatly offended if I should suggest——"

Mrs. Stott drew herself up haughtily.

"That is no concern of mine, Wallie. It is a matter of principle with me to keep servants in their places. You can adjust the matter to suit yourself, but I absolute-ly refuse to sit cheek by jowl with the cook and McGonnigle!"

Wallie grew solemn, as well he might, for along with the tact of a diplomat to a Balkan state it required the courage of a lion to convey the information to one of Hicks' violent disposition that he was not fit to sit at table with the wife of the rising young attorney.

It weighed on his mind through breakfast, and he was not made more comfortable by the fact that Red, stimulated to effervescence by so large an audience, tossed off his borts in a steady stream, unconscious that his wit was not a treat to all who heard him and that his presence was regarded as anything but highly desirable, while Mr. Hicks brought his tin plate and, by chance purely, elbowed himself a place beside Mrs. Stott with the greatest assurance.

Wallie decided to postpone the delicate task of dropping a hint to Mr. Hicks until later in the day, as he had plenty to engage his attention with Miss Mercy's departure confronting him.

Red denied the crime with which he was charged, with a face of preternatural innocence, declaring that he was shocked that any one should attribute to him such a heinous offense as purposely leaving four sharp alder prongs under a lady's blankets. Nobody—bar none—had a greater respect for the sex than Red McGonnigle!

But Miss Mercy was not to be pacified by apologies, however abject, or explanations, however convincing. Implacable, and maintaining a haughty silence, she packed her suit case and put an outing-flannel nightgown—with a nap so long that it looked like a fur garment—in a fish-net bag. Having made stiff adieu to the party, she went and sat down on a rock by the roadside to await some passer-by who would take her to Prouty.

She quite enjoyed herself for a time, thinking what a strong character she was, and how independent. A weaker woman would have allowed herself to be persuaded to overlook the incident, but she was of different metal. For nearly an hour this thought

gave her great satisfaction, but, gradually, the monotony began to pall and she had a growing feeling of resentment that nobody missed her.

The occasional bursts of laughter that reached her were like personal affronts and, finally, she included everybody in her indignation at Red McGonnigle. But, as the time dragged, her mood changed perceptibly. Though she would not admit it in her secret heart, she wished that some one would come and coax her to reconsider. From this stage, while the tents were being dismantled and packed into the bed wagon accompanied by much merriment, she came to a point where she tried to think of some excuse that would enable her to return without seeming to make any concession.

As it happened, the only person who gave Miss Mercy any thought as she waited forlornly by the roadside, was Aunt Lizzie Philbrick. Although she and Miss Mercy had not been speaking since the episode of the butterfly, her tender conscience was troubled that she had not said good-by to her. The more she thought about it the more strongly it urged her to be forgiving and magnanimous to the extent of wishing Miss Mercy a pleasant journey.

With this purpose in view, Aunt Lizzie left the others and started for the roadside. If she had not been otherwise engaged at the moment, Miss Mercy might have seen Aunt Lizzie's white sailor hat bobbing above the intervening bushes, but she was intent on learning the cause of a rustling she had heard in the leaves behind her. It was a snake, undoubtedly, and it flashed through Miss Mercy's mind that here was her opportunity not only to return to camp, but to go back a heroine.

She set her fish-net bag on the stump she vacated and provided herself with a cudgel before starting to investigate. Advancing cautiously, she saw a bunch of tall grass wave in a suspicious manner. She smote the clump with her cudgel, and a large, warty toad jumped out into the open. It was stunned, and stood blinking as if trying to locate the danger.

"Nasty thing!" exclaimed Miss Mercy viciously, and raised her club to finish it.

The blow landed, and Miss Mercy and the toad saw stars simultaneously, for Aunt Lizzie brought down a four-foot stick and crushed in the crown of Miss Mercy's alpine hat.

"You dread-ful woman!" Aunt Lizzie shrieked at her, and it was her purpose to strike again but the stick was rotten, and since only some six inches remained in her hand, she had to content herself with crying:

"You horrible creature! 'Shady' Lane—you belong in an asylum!"

Since Miss Mercy had been told this before, she resented it doubly, and no one can say what else might have happened if Wallie, hearing the disturbance, had not hurried forward to discover what was occurring.

"She was killing a hop-toad!" Aunt Lizzie screamed hysterically. Then her legs collapsed, while Miss Mercy boomed that, if she did, it was none of Aunt Lizzie's business—it was not her hop-toad.

The astounding news passed from mouth to mouth that Aunt Lizzie and Miss Mercy had been fighting in the brush with clubs, like amazons, and every one rushed forward to view the combatants and to learn the details. But the chugging of a motor sent Miss Mercy into the middle of the road to flag it before they could hear her side of the story.

It proved to be no less a person than Rufus Reed, who was transporting provisions on a truck between Prouty and a road camp in the park. Rufus welcomed company and intimated that his only wonder was that they were not all leaving. Miss Mercy clambered up beside Rufus and, without looking back, started on her return journey to Zanesville, Ohio, to soothe the brow of the suffering and minister to the wants of the dying in her professional capacity as a trained nurse.

Pinkey somberly looked after the cloud of dust in which Rufus and the Angel of Mercy vanished:

"That's one chicken we counted before it was hatched," he observed regretfully to Wallie.

The scenery was sublime that morning and the party were in ecstasies, but mere mountains, waterfalls, and gorges could not divert Wallie's mind from the disquieting fact that he must somehow convey the information to Mr. Hicks that his presence at table with the guests was undesirable.

As he rode, he framed tactful sentences in which to break the news to that formidable person, and he had finally a complete and carefully prepared speech which he meant to deliver in a friendly but firm manner.

The result he could only guess at. The only thing that Wallie could not imagine was a calm acquiescence. It would be easier to replace Mr. Hicks, however, than to acquire a new party of dudes at this late season, so Wallie nerved himself to the ordeal.

The passengers who preferred to ride in the surrey had now increased to a number which made it necessary for them to sit in each other's laps, and it devolved upon Wallie to drive their horses. Herding loose horses is sometimes a task to strain the temper, and these were that kind of horses, so that by the time the party reached the noon-day camp Wallie was in a more fitting mood to confront Mr. Hicks than when they had started.

The cook was busy over the camp fire when Wallie determined to speak and have it over.

"Don't let him tree you or run you into the river," Pinkey, who knew Wallie's purpose, warned him jocosely.

As Wallie drew nearer, through the smoke and steam rising from various cooking utensils, he noted that Mr. Hicks' expression was particularly melancholy and his color indicated that a large amount of bile had accumulated in his system. There was something tragic in the very way he stirred the frying potatoes, and as Wallie hesitated Hicks set his fists on his hips and recited in a voice vibrating with feeling:

"Into the universe, and why not knowing,  
Nor whence, like water willy-nilly flowing,  
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,  
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing—"

It did not seem a propitious moment to "put Mr. Hicks in his place," as Mrs. Stott had phrased it, but Wallie had no desire to nerve himself twice for the same ordeal. With something of the desperate courage which comes to high-strung persons about to have a tooth extracted, Wallie advanced and inquired cordially:

"Well, Mr. Hicks, how are things coming?"

"I am not complaining," replied Mr. Hicks in a tone which intimated that, once he started enumerating his grievances, he would not know where to finish.

"Pleasant people, aren't they?" Wallie suggested.

"So is a menagerie—after it's eaten."

"They do have appetites," Wallie admitted. "I suppose it's living in the open." "I've cooked for section hands on the

Burlington, and they were canary birds beside these Poland Chinas. We had ought to brought troughs instead of tinware."

"You mustn't speak so of our guests," Wallie reprimanded.

Hicks went on wrathfully:

"That fat sister in the cameo breastpin —she swiped a can of potted chicken on me yesterday. If she was a man I'd work her over for that—she's a regular 'camp robber.' "

Wallie interposed hastily:

"We mustn't have any trouble. I want to get through this trip peaceably. In fact, Mr. Hicks, it's along this line that I wished to have a word with you."

Mr. Hicks looked at him suspiciously.

"Has any of 'em been kickin' on me?"

"Not kicking, I wouldn't say *kicking*, Mr. Hicks, but—well, I have been thinking that it might be *pleasanter* for you and Red to have your own table."

Mr. Hicks stopped turning over the potatoes and looked at him for what seemed to Wallie a full minute.

"In other words," he said finally, in a voice that was oily and coaxing, as if he wanted the truth from him, "the dudes don't want the cook and the horse wrangler to eat with them?"

Wallie noticed uneasily that while Hicks spoke he was tentatively feeling the edge of the knife he had been using. Instinctively Wallie's eyes sought a route of exit, as he replied conciliatingly:

"No reflection upon you and Red is intended, Mr. Hicks; it is just that Eastern people have different customs, and we have to humor them, although we may not agree with them."

There was another silence, in which Hicks continued to thumb the knife in a manner that kept Wallie at a tension, then he said with a suavity which somehow was more menacing than an outburst:

"Perhaps it *would* be better for us rough-necks to eat at the second table. It hadn't occurred to me that our society might not be agreeable to ladies and gentlemen. I'm glad you mentioned it."

Hicks seemed actually to pur. His tone was caressing—like the velvet touch of a tiger—and his humble acceptance of the situation was so unnatural that Wallie felt himself shiver with apprehension. Was he capable of putting ground glass in the sugar,

he wondered, or dropping a spider in something?

Red was plainly disgruntled when he found himself, as it were, segregated, and he sulked openly. Hicks, on the contrary, was so urbane and respectful that every one remarked his changed manner, and Mrs. Stott triumphantly demanded to know if it were not proof of her contention that servants were the better for being occasionally reminded of their position.

"I am not a snob," she observed, "but common people really spoil my appetite when I am obliged to eat with them."

Wallie, however, could not share her elation, for there was that in Mr. Hicks' eye whenever he met it which renewed his uneasy forebodings as to ground glass and spiders.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### HICKS THE HUMBLE.

The remarkable change in Mr. Hicks' manner continued the next morning. It was so radical that no one could fail to observe it and the comments were frequent, while Mrs. Stott crowed openly.

From haughty independence he had become so anxious to please that he was almost servile, and his manner toward the wife of the rising young attorney particularly was that of a humble retainer fawning at the feet of royalty. During breakfast he stood at a respectful distance, speaking only when spoken to, and jumping to serve them.

This attitude quickly dissipated the fear which he had inspired in the Happy Family, and by noon they were not only calling him "Hicks" but "Ellery." Then, this stage of familiarity having been passed in safety, Mr. Stott humorously dubbed him "Cookie," and the name was adopted by every one.

Mrs. Budlong ventured to complain that there was too much shortening in the biscuit. This was a real test of the sincerity of his reformation since, if such a thing were possible, he had been even more "touchy" upon the subject of his cooking than his dignity. No one could doubt but that the change was genuine when he not only received the criticism meekly, but actually thanked her for calling his attention to it.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Appel declared that he wished he would not fry the ham to chips and boil the "daylights" out of the coffee.

Mr. Hicks bowed servilely and replied that he would try to remember in future. Mrs. Stott took occasion to remark that his vegetables would be better for less seasoning and more cooking, and Miss Gaskett thought his dried fruit would be improved by soaking overnight and additional sweetening.

Mr. Hicks received these criticisms in a humility that was pathetic when compared with his former arrogance. He looked crushed as he stood with bowed head and drooping shoulders as if his proud, untrammelled spirit had been suddenly broken.

Miss Eyester felt sorry for him and asserted that she could not recall when she had enjoyed food so much and eaten so heartily.

Mr. Stott, however, who was in one of his waggish moods, undid all that she might have accomplished in the way of soothing Hicks' injured feelings, by inquiring facetiously if he would mind rolling him out a couple of pie crusts to be tanned and made into bedroom slippers? Mr. Hicks laughed heartily along with the others, and only Wallie, perhaps, caught the murderous glitter through his downcast lashes.

It developed that the Yellowstone Park was a place with which Hicks was thoroughly familiar from having made several trips around the Circle in his professional capacity. He was not only acquainted with points of interest off the beaten track passed unseen by the average tourist, but he suggested many original and diverting sports.

By the time the party had reached the Lake Hotel they were consulting him like a Baedeker and every question, however foolish, he answered with a patience and affability that was most praiseworthy. Their manner toward him was a kind of patronizing cameraderie, while Mrs. Stott treated him with the gracious tolerance of a great lady unbending.

A disbelief in the ability of the leopard to change its spots made Wallie skeptical regarding Hicks' altered disposition, yet he did his best to convince himself that he was wrong when Hicks went out and caught a trout from the Yellowstone Lake expressly for Mrs. Stott's supper. It was a beautiful fish as it lay on the platter, brown, crisp, and ornamented with lemon. Mr. Hicks offered it much as the head of John the Baptist might have been brought to Salome.

"Thank you, Hicks," said Mrs. Stott kindly.

"I hope you'll like it, ma'am," he murmured humbly.

The mark of favor seemed to bear out Mrs. Stott's contention that inferiors should not be treated as equals in any circumstances. Now, with her fork in the fish, Mrs. Stott looked around the table and inquired graciously if she might not divide it with some one?

Every one politely declined except Mrs. Budlong who looked at it so wistfully that Mrs. Stott lost no time in transferring it to her own plate. She ate with gusto and declared after tasting it:

"It is delicious, simply delicious! I never remember eating another with quite the same delicate flavor. I presume," addressing herself to Mr. Hicks who was standing with arms akimbo enjoying her enjoyment of it, "it is due to something in the water?"

"I presume so," he replied respectfully, and added: "The trout in the Yellowstone Lake are said to be very nourishing."

It was natural that Mrs. Stott should feel a little flattered by this evidence of partiality even from a menial, also she noticed that Mrs. Budlong was following each mouthful with the eyes of a hungry bird dog so she could not refrain from saying further:

"It is such a delightful change from ham and bacon. I am not sure," she averred laughingly, "that I shall not eat the head and fins, even."

"I wish I was in such favor," Mrs. Budlong declared enviously.

"Never mind, Honey Dumplin', I shall go out after supper and catch your breakfast," said Mr. Budlong.

"You ought to get a boat load," Hicks added quickly, "if you find the right place."

"I saw them jumping by the million where I was walking before supper." Mr. Appel volunteered to conduct Mr. Budlong to the spot as soon as they were finished eating.

Every one who had fishing tackle decided to avail himself of this wonderful opportunity, and they all followed Mr. Appel except Mr. and Mrs. Stott, who preferred to fish by themselves from the bridge over the Yellowstone River. They were the last to leave but returned in not more than twenty minutes, Mr. Stott supporting his wife in what seemed to be a fainting condition.

Wallie hastened forward to lend his assistance if necessary.

"Is she ill?" he inquired solicitously.

"Ill! She is sick at her stomach, and

no wonder!" He was plainly angry and appeared to direct his wrath at Wallie.

While Wallie wondered, it did not seem a propitious moment to ask questions, and he would have turned away had Mr. Stott not said peremptorily:

"Wait a minute. I want to speak to you."

Having laid Mrs. Stott, who was shuddering, on her blankets and administered a few drops of aromatic spirits of ammonia, he dropped the flap of her teepee and beckoned Wallie curtly:

"You come with me."

Wallie could not do else than follow him, his wonder growing as he led the way to the camp kitchen where Mr. Hicks was engaged at the moment in the task which he referred to as "pearl diving."

He did not appear surprised to see them in his domain, on the contrary, he seemed rather to be expecting them, for immediately he took his hands out of the dish water, wiped them on the corner of his apron, and, reaching for a convenient stick of stove wood, laid it on the corner of the table with a certain significance in the action.

"Make yourself at home, gents," he said hospitably, indicating the wagon tongue and a cracker box for seats respectively. "Anything in particular I can do for you?" He looked at Mr. Stott guilelessly.

"You can answer me a few questions." Mr. Stott fixed a sternly accusing eye upon him. "Hicks, was, or was not, that trout you gave my wife, wormy?"

Mr. Hicks, who seemed to relish the situation, pursed his lips and considered. Finally he asked in a tone which showed that he had pride in his legal knowledge:

"Will I or will I not incriminate myself by answering?"

"You probably will, if I'm correct in my suspicions. I want the truth."

"Then," replied Mr. Hicks, while his hand slipped carelessly to the stick of stove wood, "if you force the issue, I will say that I've seen a good many wormy trout come out of the Yellowstone, but that was the worst I ever met up with."

Mr. Stott advanced belligerently.

"And you dare boast of it!"

"I'm not boasting. I'm just telling you," replied Mr. Hicks calmly. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that's my motto, and your wife thought I wasn't good enough to eat at the table with her."

"You hear?" Stott turned to Wallie furiously.

ously. "He did it on purpose. I demand that you discharge this fellow!"

Mr. Hicks' fingers caressed the stove wood while he waited Wallie's answer.

Wallie squirmed between the two of them.

"It was reprehensible, Mr. Stott, I am more distressed than I can tell you. I have no excuse to offer for Hicks' action, but the truth is, as he knows and has taken advantage of it, I cannot replace him, and it is impossible to get along without a cook with so large a party."

"You will, then, not discharge him?" Stott demanded.

"I am helpless," Wallie reiterated.

Hicks grinned triumphantly.

"In that case," Mr. Stott declared in a tone which implied that a tremendous upheaval of some kind would follow his decision, "my wife and I will leave your party and continue through the park by motor."

Wallie felt that it was useless to argue with any one so determined, so he made no effort to persuade Mr. Stott to remain, though the defection of two more persons was a serious matter to him and Pinkey.

Without waiting to say good-by to the others, the Stotts paid their bill and departed, walking so erect in their indignation as they started down the road toward the Lake Hotel, that they seemed to lean backward.

It was not yet dark when Mr. Stott, stepping briskly and carrying his Gladstone bag, raincoat, and umbrella in a jaunty manner, came into camp announcing breezily that he had decided, upon reflection, not to "bite off his nose to spite his face." He declared that he would not let the likes of Ellery Hicks upset his plans for touring the Yellowstone and, while his wife refused to return, he meant to carry out his original intention.

But the real reason for Mr. Stott's decision, as Wallie suspected from the frequency with which he had discovered him sitting upon a log in secluded spots counting his money, was that the hotel rates and motor fare were far higher than he had anticipated.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### NATURAL HISTORY.

Mrs. Stott's absence did not leave the gap which she had anticipated. In fact, after the first evening her name was never mentioned and Mr. Stott's marital ties rested so lightly upon him that a stranger would

never have known they existed. He gravitated toward Miss Gaskett with a promptitude which gave rise to the suspicion that he had had his eye upon her, and Miss Gaskett responded so enthusiastically that it was a matter for gossip.

It was noted that she took to doing her hair up at night on "wavers" and used her lip stick with greater frequency, and, whereas she had vowed she meant never again to get in the saddle, she now rode with Mr. Stott daily.

The ladies who had known Miss Gaskett for twenty-five years and nothing to her discredit, were not prepared to say that she was a huzzy and a vampire without further evidence, but they admitted to each other privately that they always had felt there was something queer and not quite straightforward about Mattie.

Miss Gaskett, who looked like a returned missionary that had had a hard time of it carrying the light into the dark places, seemed rather elated than depressed at the aspersions cast upon her character, and by the time they reached the "Paint Pots" she was flaunting Mr. Stott shamelessly, calling him "Harry" before everybody, and in the evening sitting with him by the camp fire on the same saddle blanket.

At Mammoth Hot Springs Mrs. Budlong showed her disapproval by refusing to speak to Miss Gaskett and Miss Gaskett replied by putting on a peek-a-boo blouse that was a scandal.

But Mrs. Budlong herself was not in too high favor, since, to the sin of gluttony, she had added that of lying and been caught at it. It was a small matter, but, as Mrs. Appel declared indignantly, it is trifles that betray character, and Mrs. Budlong was treated with marked coldness by the ladies to whom she had prevaricated.

It was known beyond the question of a doubt that Mrs. Budlong had purchased food and kept it in her tepee. Therefore, when asked for something to ward off a faint feeling before dinner and she had denied having anything, they were outspoken in their resentment.

"There she stood and lied to our faces," Mrs. Appel declared to her husband afterward, "while her mouth was shining. I could smell sardines on her, and a big cracker crumb was lying on her bosom. Indeed, it's a true saying they have in this country that to know people you must camp with them.

I never would have thought that of Hannah Budlong!"

It was because of this incident, and the strained relations which resulted from her perfidy, that none of her erstwhile friends responded to her invitation to join her in a bath in a beaver dam of which Mr. Hicks told her when they camped early the next afternoon.

Mrs. Budlong's phlegmatic body contained an adventurous spirit, and the delights of a bath in a beaver dam in the heart of a primeval forest appealed to her strongly. To Mr. Hicks, who sought her out purposely to tell her about it, she confided:

"Hicks, underneath my worldly exterior, I am a child of nature. I love the simple, the primitive, I would live as a wild thing if I could choose my environment."

Mr. Hicks nodded sympathetically and understandingly, and returned the confidence.

"I am convinced that I was a faun when the world was young. There are times when I feel the stirrings of my wild nature."

Mrs. Budlong regarded him attentively. She never had thought of him as a faun, but now she noticed that his ears *were* peculiar.

Nobody could have been more obliging and interesting than Mr. Hicks as he guided her to the beaver dam and explained its construction. It had long since been abandoned by the industrious animals that had built it, but their work had been so well done that it was in as good condition as when they had left it.

There was nothing to fear from beavers, anyway, he assured her; he never had known a beaver to attack anybody. In this isolated spot she was as safe from intrusion as if she were in her own bathroom, and, after tramping down a spot in the brush for her to stand on, he went away declaring that he was sure she would have an experience she always would remember.

Left alone, Mrs. Budlong felt of the water. It was, as Hicks had said, even warmer than tepid from standing—an ideal temperature. The brush grew high around the pond formed by the back water and made a perfect shelter. No fear of prying eyes need disturb her.

Then a daring thought came to her which made her black eyes sparkle. Suppose she did not wear any bathing suit! What an adventure to relate to her intimate friends when she returned to Mauch Chunk, Penn-

sylvania! It laid hold of her imaginative mind, and the result was that Mrs. Budlong hung her suit on a bush and went in as au naturelle as a potato!

She waded in cautiously, for the bottom was soft and oozy and there were little patches of green floating on the surface that she did not so much like the looks of. Otherwise conditions were perfect, and Mrs. Budlong submerged like a submarine when she reached the middle of it. She came up and stood looking at the sky above her, enjoying the feeling of the sunshine on her skin, and the soft, warm breeze that caressed her. She smiled at an interested blue jay, then submerged again, deeper, and the tide rose so that the water lapped bushes and pebbles that had not been wet all summer.

Her smile grew wider as she thought what the others were missing and was considering how much she dared embellish the adventure without being detected, when, suddenly, a look of horror came to her face and stayed there, while screams that sounded more like the screeches of a lynx or mountain lion than those of a human being scared the blue jay and brought those in camp up standing. Piercing, hair-raising, unnatural as they were, Mr. Budlong recognized them.

"My wife! Help! Murder! Hicks, where is she? Find a weapon and come with us!"

"I gotta get supper," Hicks replied heartlessly.

Mr. Appel, Mr. Stott, and old Mr. Penrose dashed into their tents and dashed out carrying firearms that had been sealed by the park officials, as is customary, while Mr. Budlong in his frenzy snatched a pair of scissors from Miss Eyester and headed the posse which expected to pursue the murderer. He was not a murderer yet, however, for Mrs. Budlong's screams had not diminished in volume, although it was feared that worse than death might already have befallen her. Her shrieks guided them like a lighthouse siren, so they lost no time in taking wrong directions but, at that, it was a considerable distance, and Mr. Budlong, in spite of the agonized thoughts which goaded him forward, was so handicapped by his asthma that he gradually fell to the rear of the rescue party.

Mr. Stott was then in the lead, with Mr. Appel a close second until the latter, who was wearing bedroom slippers, stumped his toes against a rock with such force that he

believed them broken. He dropped down immediately with the pain of it and sat weaving to and fro, clasping his foot agonizedly while the others passed him.

Mr. Stott called that help was arriving as he crashed through the brush in the vicinity of the beaver dam. To his astonishment Mrs. Budlong shrieked:

"Don't come!" and went on screaming. When he reached the pond he stopped short and stood there, where old Mr. Penrose joined him an instant later. Mr. Appel, alternately limping and hopping yet covering ground with surprising rapidity, reached them ahead of Mr. Budlong, who, staggering with exhaustion, huge drops on his pallid face, and wheezing like an old accordion, all but fainted when he saw the wife of his bosom.

Mrs. Budlong stood in the middle of the pool, with her well-upholstered back, wet and glistening, flecked with brown particles that resembled decayed vegetation.

"What's the matter, Honey Dumplin'?" cried Mr. Budlong, shocked and bewildered.

For answer, Mrs. Budlong screamed the harder.

"I know!" piped up Mr. Appel. "She's covered with leeches—bloodsuckers—and can't get 'em off. I got 'em once swimmin' in stagnant water."

When he spoke he called attention to the fact of his presence and that of Mr. Stott and old Mr. Penrose. Instead of being grateful for the information, and for the assistance the others had expected to render, Mr. Budlong turned upon them all furiously:

"Get out of here, you 'PeepingToms' and spying libertines! Haven't you any shame about you?"

He raised the scissors so threateningly that, as soon as they recovered from their astonishment, they retreated, but, at that, their haste was not sufficient to appease an outraged husband. Mr. Budlong picked up a pebble and threw it with such a sure aim that it bounced between Mr. Stott's shoulder blades.

When he had picked off the bloodsuckers that were torturing Mrs. Budlong, the two returned to camp and lost no time in serving notice on Wallie that they were leaving by the first passing conveyance if they had to buy it.

Whether or not Mr. Hicks had known of the leeches was a matter for much discussion, and opinion was about equally divided

as to his innocence. He disclaimed all knowledge of them, however, and went about with the air of one cruelly maligned.

His martyrlike pose was not convincing to Wallie, who could not rid himself of the suspicion that the incident had been planned, though Pinkey contended that he did not believe Hicks was "deep" enough to think of anything like that.

"Anyhow he's cost us three dudes," said Wallie, which remark was sufficient to set Pinkey figuring with a stick.

"Three head of dudes at five dollars a day for—say—eleven days, is—say—"

"They're gone, and that's all there is to it. The thing for us to do is to see that no more leave," Wallie interrupted practically.

"I'm not worryin' about them," Pinkey replied confidently, "if we can jest hold that cook. We've got to humor him till we git through this trip, then after he's paid off I aim to work him over and leave him for somebody to drag out."

But as if to make amends for the loss he had caused his employers, Hicks' manner grew even more saccharine and he redoubled his efforts to provide entertainment for their guests. By the time they arrived at the Cañon Hotel Wallie was questioning his suspicions of Hicks and felt inclined to believe that he had been hasty in his judgment.

He was undoubtedly an asset, for the entire party hung on his words and relied upon him to see that they missed nothing of interest. Mr. Stott was indebted to him for an experience which relegated the Florida hoot owl to the background, though the thrill of the adventure was so intermingled with anguish that it was impossible to tell where one left off and the other began.

Sliding down the snow-covered side of a mountain in a frying pan was fraught with all the sensations Hicks had described when he recommended the sport, and some he had omitted. When they had reached the particular spot which he had suggested for the sport, in lieu of a frying pan, Hicks gave Mr. Stott a well-worn gold pan that he had found somewhere.

Starting at the top with all the party as spectators, Mr. Stott shot down the side like the proverbial bullet, but midway his whoops of ecstasy changed to cries of acute distress owing to the fact that the friction wore the pan through to the size of a dollar and Mr. Stott, unable to stop his unique to-

boggan or endure the torture longer, turned over and finished the trip on his stomach.

Mr. Stott's eyes often rested upon Hicks afterward with a questioning look in them, but the cook's solicitude had been so genuine that, cynical as his legal training had made him, he was obliged to think that it was purely an accident which might not happen one time in a million.

No point in the park had been anticipated more than the camp at the Cañon where Mr. Hicks averred that the bears came in swarms to regale themselves upon the hotel garbage. Their tour thus far had been a disappointment in that the wild animals, with which they had been informed the park teemed, were nowhere in evidence. A deer had crossed the road ahead of them, and they had gazed at a band of elk through Mr. Penrose's field glasses, but otherwise they had seen nothing that they could not have seen in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Hicks' tales of the bears had aroused their interest to such a point that, as soon as the camp site was selected, they loaded their cameras and kodaks and set off immediately to get pictures while the light was favorable.

It chanced to be one of the days, however, when the bears had no taste for garbage and, although they waited until nearly supper time, not a bear put in its appearance. Mr. Penrose in particular was disappointed and vexed about it and, while it was unreasonable to hold Hicks in any way accountable for their absence, he could not refrain from saying disagreeably:

"I think you have exaggerated this bear business, Hicks. I have no doubt that a bear or two may come down occasionally. I have the word of others for it. But as for droves of bears—swarms—I think you have overstated."

"Perhaps I did enlarge a little, Mr. Penrose. Possibly I was overanxious to be interesting. I apologize sincerely if I have misled and disappointed you. I hope, however, that you will yet have the opportunity of seeing at least one before we leave here."

"No such luck," Mr. Penrose growled at him. "I haven't any idea that I'll see even the tracks. It's a good idea to cut in two everything you're told in this country, and then divide it."

Mr. Penrose was so hard on Hicks that Mr. Appel interposed quickly:

"Do they ever come around at night, cookie?"

"So I have been informed," Mr. Hicks replied conservatively.

Pinkey was about to say that bears traveled more by night than in daytime when Mr. Appel declared that he intended to sleep in the sleeping bag he had brought with him but which Mrs. Appel had not permitted him to use because she felt nervous alone, in her tepee. Mrs. Appel protested against Mr. Appel thus recklessly exposing himself to danger, but Mr. Appel was mulish in the matter.

"If, by chance, one *should* come into camp, I would have a good look at him. I may never have another such opportunity."

So, after supper, Mr. Appel unrolled his sleeping bag and spread it on a level spot not far from the supply wagon. Then he kissed Mrs. Appel, who turned her cheek to him, and buttoned himself into the bag.

The talk of bears had made Aunt Lizzie Philbrick so nervous that, as an extra precaution, she pinned the flap of her tent down securely with a row of safety pins; and Mr. Stott not only slept in more of his clothes than usual, but put a pair of brass knuckles under his pillow.

These brass knuckles had been presented to Mr. Stott by a grateful client for whom he had obtained damages from a street railway company for injuries received through being ejected from a saloon six months prior to the date upon which he had fallen off the car step.

The night was a dark one, so dark, in fact, that old Mr. Penrose felt some little hesitation, when it came bedtime, over going off to sleep by himself in the brush where, owing to his unfortunate habit of snoring beyond anything human, they now placed his tepee.

There was not a glimmer of moonlight or starlight to guide him as he went stumbling and crashing through the brush to his rag residence. His thoughts were not so much of four-footed visitors as of footpads and the ease with which they could attack him and get away with his grandfather's watch he was wearing.

Out in the open, Mr. Appel was enjoying the novelty tremendously though he was a little too warm for comfort in his fleece-lined bag. Also, he found the silhouettes on the canvas tepees diverting. But after the last

candle had been extinguished he called to his wife cheerily:

"Are you all right, dearie?"

Mrs. Appel was not to be so easily propitiated and did not answer, so he called again:

"This is great—simply great! I wish you were with me."

Only Mr. Appel and his Maker knew that he screwed up his cheek and winked at the fabrication.

Sleep came quickly to the tired "sagebrushers," and soon there was no sound save the distant tinkle of the bell on one of the horses and the faint rumble of Mr. Penrose's slumbers.

It was eleven o'clock or thereabouts and the clouds had rifted, letting through the starlight, when dark forms began to lumber from the surrounding woods and pad around the camp sniffing at various objects and breathing heavily.

There were bears of all sizes and ages, ranging from yearlings to grandfathers whose birthdays were lost in antiquity. Mr. Appel, who was a light sleeper and the first to discover them, would have sworn on a monument of Bibles that there were at least fifty of them—the size of mastodons. Palpitating in his sleeping bag in the midst of them, he may be excused for exaggeration, although, exactly, there were only eight of them.

The cold sweat broke out on Mr. Appel, and he thought that surely the thumping of his heart must attract their attention. He speculated as to whether the bear that first discovered him would disembowel him with one stroke of his mighty paw, and leave him, or would scrunch his head between his paws and sit down and eat on him?

But once the bears had located the supply wagon, they went about their business like trained burglars. Standing on their hind legs, they crowded about it, tearing open sacks, scattering food, tossing things hither and thither.

Their grunting and quarreling finally awakened Hicks and McGonnigle who started up in their blankets, yelling. Their whoops aroused everybody except old Mr. Penrose who was sleeping with his deaf ear uppermost and would not have heard a "Big Bertha."

Mr. Stott slipped on his brass knuckles and stood with his head out of the tent opening, adding his shouts to those of Hicks and McGonnigle, who, by now, were hurling

such missiles as they could lay their hands on. Instead of having hysterics as might have been expected, Aunt Lizzie Philbrick astonished herself and others by standing out in the open with her petticoat over her nightgown, prepared to give battle with the heel of her slipper to the first bear that attacked her.

It was not until Mr. Hicks got hold of two washbasins and used them as cymbals that the bears paid any attention. But this sound, added to the pandemonium of screaming women, finally frightened them. Scattering in all directions, they started back to the shadows.

Suddenly Mr. Appel let out such a cry as it seemed must not only split his throat, but rend the very heavens. Small wonder! A cinnamon bear, weighing in the neighborhood of eight hundred pounds, planted its left hind foot in the pit of his stomach as it went galloping away to the timber.

In the brush where Mr. Penrose had been sleeping tranquilly other things were happening. In the midst of his slumbers, a dream in which he thought he was being dragged to the fire like a calf for branding, came to him. The dream grew so real that it awakened him. He received a swift and unpleasant impression that he was moving, then he was startled to find that he was not only moving, but moving so rapidly that the canvas bottom of his tent was scraping on the rocks and brush over which it traveled.

Mr. Penrose was enraged instantly. At best he had little patience with practical jokers and none at all with one who had the impudence to awaken him. He called out angrily. The tent stopped moving and there was quiet.

Mr. Penrose, who had raised himself on his elbow, laid down and was about to begin where he had left off when his domicile resumed its journey. Now, thoroughly aroused, he sprang up and tore at the flap fastenings.

"This is going to stop right here!" he cried furiously. "I do not appreciate this odious Western humor. You have chosen the wrong person to play your jokes on!"

He reached for the jointed fish pole which was lying in its case in the bottom of the tent and stepped through the opening. A burly figure in a big overcoat stood in the deep shadow confronting him. Mr. Penrose was barefooted and his soles were tender, but he advanced far enough to bring

the pole down with a thwack upon the head of the intruder.

"Woof! Woof!"

The answer raised his hair and galvanized his whiskers.

"Woof! Woof!"

A great paw fanned the air—he could feel the wind from it plainly as it reached out to cuff him—and the claws on the end of it tore the front of the flannel shirt in which he slept, to ribbons.

"Woof! Woof!" And then a roar that reverberated through the timber.

Mr. Penrose swore afterward that the hot breath of the brute was in his face, but the statement is open to question since at the first "woof!" he had started to fall into his tent backward.

No one dreamed of the adventure Mr. Penrose was having until he appeared among them with his shirt bosom in shreds and trembling like an aspen. In one hand he carried a sizable chunk of bacon.

"This," he cried, brandishing it, "is what I found tied to my tepee!"

The explanation was obvious; some one had baited his tent for bear, and, since there was no way of obtaining evidence against the culprit, Mr. Penrose in his unreasoning rage accused everybody.

"Ever since I came, you have all had a pick on me!" He glared at them. "You needn't think you're so smart I haven't seen it."

Every one was so surprised at the accusation that they could only stare speechless at him. With his white beard, his rags, and barefooted, Mr. Penrose looked like the Count of Monte Cristo telling the world what he was going to do to it as he added, waving the bacon:

"I'm going home to-morrow—to Delaware—back to my peach orchard! If any one of you ever say you know me—much less speak to me—I shall deny it. I'm done with the whole caboodle of you!"

The next morning he packed his bag and started down the road without saying good-by to any one.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SPECIAL MESSAGES.

The departure of the irate Penrose reduced the party to half its original number, and that was bad enough; but when, by lunch time, Mr. Appel had developed a sore-

ness which led him to believe he was injured internally and should consult a physician, the situation became infinitely worse to Wallie and Pinkey.

As a matter of course they expected his wife to accompany him, but what they had not known was that Miss Gaskell had been put in Mrs. Appel's charge by her parents, and in the light of her indiscreet conduct with Mr. Stott it was deemed best that she should return with them.

It was a terrible disappointment to Miss Gaskell who cried bitterly and in an unguarded moment told her age, approximately, sobbing that it was preposterous that one of her years should not be permitted to finish a trip which she was so enjoying. But Mrs. Appel was obdurate, declaring that she did not care to take the responsibility of leaving her without a proper chaperon since Aunt Lizzie was too unworldly to be a safe guardian and Miss Eyester was herself unmarried.

Miss Gaskell was compelled to succumb to the argument, and the three were driven to the nearest hotel after luncheon, leaving Wallie and Pinkey with the sickening knowledge that now it was not possible to "break even" to say nothing of a profit. Every day they were out would put them in debt a little deeper, but they both were agreed they would finish the trip whatever happened.

The evening was a gloomy one as compared to others and, although they built a camp fire as usual, there was none of the customary gayety around it. Mr. Stott sat alone on his saddle blanket lost in meditation of a somber nature, and Pinkcy and Miss Eyester whispered apart.

Wallie was in no mood for conversation, while Mr. Hicks with the delicacy which now marked his every action, smoked alone in the shadow, making no effort to intrude himself upon his betters. Even Red McGonigle, reclining on his elbow staring into the embers, seemed pensive and disinclined to take advantage of the opportunity to hear his own voice which the silence gave him. So only Aunt Lizzie Philbrick remained to give life to the party, and Aunt Lizzie, while a woman of high principle and fine character, was admittedly not stimulating.

Aunt Lizzie had snow-white hair drawn lightly from her forehead and a corsetlike pallor to match it. She could not possibly look any different in her coffin, because so far as appearances went she might have been

dead for a decade. Her manner was helpless, her voice gentle and hesitating, while in repose she ordinarily gave the impression of being in a state of suspended animation.

But to-night she was strangely restless, her thin, white hands fluttered nervously, and she moved her camp chair so often that every one wondered silently what was the matter with her. Finally, during one of her frequent movings, she inadvertently set the leg of her camp chair in a hole and went over backward. Mr. Hicks, who bounded from the shadow, was the first to reach her, and every one was astonished to hear her outcry when he would have assisted her—quite as if he were a leper.

"Don't touch me!"

Every one felt rather sorry for Hicks when he returned to his seat crestfallen, while Aunt Lizzie went off at a stiff-legged trot to her tepee without saying good night to anybody.

When some extraordinary accident was not befalling Aunt Lizzie, who seemed the essence of mediocrity, she was always doing the unexpected. So little was thought of it after the first surprise at her rudeness, and the others shortly said good night and retired also.

Wallie stood alone by the dying camp fire pondering what the morrow might hold for him—wondering if any bad luck could come that had not already happened. If so, he could not imagine it, for it seemed he had run the gamut of misfortune. In this he was mistaken for when they stopped at noon, the next day, he received a blow from the last quarter he had expected—Aunt Lizzie.

The day had not begun too auspiciously, for, when something like two miles on their journey, Mr. Stott remembered that he had left his soap on a rock and, since it was expensive soap, felt he must return for it. He had galloped the distance and back again, joining the party with his horse sweating, and Wallie had warned him curtly that the day promised to be a hot one and he must ride slowly.

"Please do not get ahead of the grub wagon," Wallie had said with emphasis.

Mr. Stott had done as he requested just so long as it suited him, and then, passing Wallie with a little laugh of defiance, had raced to lead the procession. In consequence, when Hicks pulled to the roadside

for lunch somewhat earlier than usual, Mr. Stott did not know it and continued riding.

The heat was terrific and animals and humans suffered alike while the gypsum dust which rose in clouds added to the discomfort. Gnats and mosquitoes, deer flies and "no-see-'ems" attacked in clouds and as viciously as if they had double rows of teeth and rapiers. It was the most unpleasant day they had encountered; every one's nerves were on edge, and there has been more gayety in a mourner's carriage than in the surrey where Red tried vainly to interest Aunt Lizzie.

Wallie was too angry with Mr. Stott to care for luncheon, so after a bite he betook himself to the shade of a tree, and sat down to smoke, with his back against it.

He was thinking of the buckskin and how jaded it had looked that morning and wondering if its already stiffened shoulders would get over it if he pulled off its shoes and turned it into a soft pasture. His speculations were interrupted by Aunt Lizzie who stood before him twisting her fingers in embarrassment.

A peerless beauty could not have passed unscathed through such a morning, but the havoc it had wrought in Aunt Lizzie's looks was nothing short of startling.

Her lids were inflamed and swollen from the bites of the "no-see-'ems," her nose was red and her eyes watered from the gypsum dust which affected her like hay fever; her sailor hat had slipped to the back of her head and her "scalding locks" were hanging like a fringe over a soiled linen collar.

"I have something—very awkward—to say to you, Wallie."

The harried expression which was becoming chronic leaped into his eyes at the introduction, and the furrow that was deep enough to have been plowed there, appeared between his brows as he asked himself what now might be portending.

"It's rather indelicate to discuss with a gentleman," she continued, braiding her fingers.

Wallie was alarmed but, anxious to set her at her ease, he said encouragingly:

"You can talk as freely to me as if I were your—father."

"I fear that I shall have to leave you, Wallie, as soon as possible."

Wallie's wonder grew, but he said nothing.

"I think—I fear—I believe," she stammered, "that Mr. Hicks is of a very ardent temperament."

Wallie could not have spoken now had he wanted to.

"Since yesterday I have found him looking at me frequently in a peculiar manner. Last night he stared at me with his burning eyes until I could feel his hypnotic influence. I hope—I trust you will believe I have not given him any encouragement?"

Wallie's jaw, which had dropped to the point of dislocation, prevented him from reassuring her that he believed her blameless.

"So far, the tongue of scandal has never laid hands on me," she declared, "but I feel that it is a risk I should not take to travel about the country with a passel of men and only an unmarried woman in the party."

Wallie managed to mumble: "You are as safe here as if you were in a nunnery, Aunt Lizzie."

It would have seemed from her expression that she preferred not to think so.

"You understand how I feel, don't you?" she pleaded.

"Perfectly! perfectly!" Wallie replied, too dazed to make any other answer. He would have been only a little less astounded if the old lady had announced her intention of opening a dance hall upon her return to Prouty.

Aunt Lizzie's desertion, and for such a reason, was the last thing he had anticipated. It seemed like the final straw laid upon a back already breaking. He watched her toddle away, and sat down again gloomily.

At the supply wagon, Mr. Hicks was putting the food away, commenting profanely upon the flies, the heat, the tardiness of Mr. Stott, the injustice of things in general, and in particular the sordid necessity which obliged him to occupy this humble position when he was so eminently fitted to fill a higher one.

He threw a stick at a "camp robber" that had flown down and taken a pick at a plate on a stump which contained the lunch he had saved for Mr. Stott, and his expression was so diabolic that it was the first time for many days that he had looked natural.

Red McGonnigle, with his hat over his face, dozed in the shade of the bed wagon. Aunt Lizzie busied herself with preparations for departure. Miss Eyester perused the testimonials for a patent medicine con-

tained in a pamphlet left by previous campers. Insects droned, heat waves shimmered, the horses stood sleeping in their nose bags. It was a peaceful, noon-day scene, but MacPherson and Co., now sitting on their heels discussing their prospects, or lack of them, had no eye for it.

One thought was uppermost, their bubble was punctured, they were worse than ruined, for their horses and outfit were mortgaged almost up to their value, and in addition, they had borrowed at the bank, counting on paying off all their indebtedness when the park trip was finished.

"I s'pose I can git a job herdin' sheep —they's good money in it—but I'll be an old man before I can afford to git married, to say nothin' of the disgrace of it." Pinkey's voice sounded hopeless.

The plaint gave Wallie such a pang that he could not answer, but with a twig played a game of tit-tat-toe in the dust while he thought bitterly that no one could blame Helene Spenceley for preferring Canby to a person who seemed destined to failure in whatever he attempted.

He was another of the four-flushers, he told himself, and the country was full of them, who just fell short of doing something and being somebody. Probably, in time, he would have no ambition beyond working for a "grubstake" in summer, so he could "shack up" in winter.

He would let his hair grow and go sockless and buy new clothes rather than wash his old ones, and eat from soiled dishes and read mail-order catalogues for entertainment and sit in the corner at dances looking like a bull elk that's been whipped out of the herd, and dog-gone it! why couldn't he bring himself to think of marrying some respectable girl like the blacksmith's daughter there in Prouty, who had no chin and a fine complexion and cooked like an angel and never said a cross word to anybody?

Since Wallie was too uncommunicative to be interesting, Pinkey got up and left him to his reflections, remarking philosophically as he departed to join Miss Eyester:

"Well, I never heard of anybody bein' hanged for owin' money, so I guess there's no use in us goin' around with the double-breasted blues over it. We might as well whistle and say we like it."

Wallie looked after his partner almost angrily.

The lugubrious voice of Mr. Hicks declaiming, reached him:

"Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring  
Your winter garment of repentance fling!  
The bird of time has but a little way  
To flutter—and the bird is on the wing."

That was the worst of it, Wallie thought despairingly. The Bird of Time had but a little way to flutter. He was so old—twenty-seven! The realization that he was still a failure at this advanced age increased his misery. He was a fool to go on hoping that he meant anything to Helene Spenceley or ever would; but, just the same—Wallie stood up and squared his shoulders—if he couldn't have the woman he wanted there wouldn't be any other!

A heartache was worse than a headache by a whole lot! Somehow he was so lonely—so inexpressibly lonely. He had not felt like this even that first winter on his home-stead. A lump rose in his throat to choke him, and he was about to turn away lest some one see the mist in his eyes that blinded him, and that he felt horribly ashamed of, when the sound of hoofs attracted his attention and caused him to grow alert in an instant.

He was sure that it was Stott returning, and then he caught a glimpse of him through the trees—galloping.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed that person irritably as he turned off the road and came through the brush toward Wallie.

There was a bright shine in Wallie's eyes as he walked toward him.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to camp in the middle of the morning?" he demanded in his rasping voice as he dismounted.

Wallie returned evenly:

"You know as well as I do that choosing a camp is left to Hicks' judgment. I told you not to get ahead of the supply wagon."

"If you think I'm going to poke along behind like a snail, you're mistaken!" Stott retorted.

Wallie's face went white under its tan, though his voice was quiet enough as he answered:

"You'll 'poke' this afternoon, I'm thinking."

Stott turned sharply:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. Look at that horse!"

The buckskin's head was hanging, its legs were trembling, there was not a dry hair on

it and the sweat was running in rivulets. Its sides were swollen at the stirrup where the spurs had pricked it, and the corners of its mouth were raw and bleeding.

Wallie continued and his voice now was savage:

"You're one of the people, and there's plenty like you, that ought to be prevented by law from owning either a horse or a gun. This afternoon you'll ride in the surrey or walk, as suits you."

Stott laughed insolently.

"Oh, I guess not!"

Wallie calmly loosened the latigo. Stott took a step toward him with his heavy jaw thrust out and his hand sought his hip pocket.

"Don't you take the saddle off that horse!" Stott's tone was menacing.

A machine that had been purring in the distance, passed, slowed up, and stopped a little way beyond the camp. Wallie heard it but did not look to see whom it might be bringing, as in answer to Stott's threat, he dropped the cinch and laid his hand upon the horn.

"If you think I'm bluffing——"

For answer, Wallie pulled off the saddle.

Stott hesitated for the fraction of a second, then his arm shot out and Wallie dropped heavily with a blow beneath the ear that was dealt him. There was a sharp cry behind him, but Wallie did not look around as, still dazed, he got to his feet slowly, with his eyes upon his antagonist.

"I warned you!" Stott chortled, and he put his hand behind him to conceal the brass knuckle he was wearing.

Before Stott could use his cowardly weapon again Wallie sprang for him, and with the force and rapidity of a trained fighter landed blow after blow on the heavy jaw which made a fine target.

"You—horse killer! You—braggart and cheap skat! You—shyster and ambulance chaser!" With every epithet Wallie landed a punch that made the lawyer stagger.

It was not "nice" language; it was not a "nice" thing to do, possibly, and perhaps the "soft answer" would have been better, but the time had passed when Wallie set any store by being merely "nice," and he had forgotten Helene Spenceley's presence, though in any event it would have made no difference.

There was only one thought in his mind as he sat astride Stott's chest when Stott

went down finally, and that was to make him say "Enough!" if he had to hammer him past recognition.

This did not require so long as one would have thought, considering that person's boasts as to his courage. But, at that, Stott might well be excused for wishing to end the punishment he was receiving. In the face above him, almost brutal in the fury that stamped it, there was no trace to remind Stott of the youth who had painted cabbage roses and knit sweaters.

"Let me up!" he cried finally, struggling under the merciless blows that rained upon him.

"Say it!" Wallie's voice was implacable.

"'Nough!" Stott whined it.

Wallie stopped immediately, and the attorney got to his feet, sullen and humiliated. He stood for a moment rubbing his neck and eying Wallie; then with a return of defiance flung at him:

"You'll pay for this, young fellow!"

Wallie's short laugh was mocking.

"Why don't you sue me for damages? I'd be flattered to death at the implication that I had any money. It might help my credit."

With a shrug he turned and walked toward Helene Spenceley. Her eyes were shining and there was a singular smile on her face as he went up to her, but whether she smiled or frowned did not seem to matter much to Wallie.

He was not a pretty sight at the moment, and he knew it. A lump had risen on his jaw and one eye was closing, his hair was powdered with gypsum dust and the sleeve of his shirt was torn out at the shoulder, but he had no apologies to make for anything and there was that in his manner which said so.

Helene laughed as she put out her hand to him.

"Was that a part of the regular program or an impromptu feature of the day's entertainment?"

"It's been brewing," Wallie replied briefly.

"Aren't you surprised to see me?"

"Not particularly."

"Or glad?"

"I'm always that."

"This came yesterday, while I was in Prouty, and I volunteered to deliver it. I thought it might be important." She handed him a telegram.

"That was good of you." His face

softened a little, and still more as he read the message:

Will you come home if I tell you I was wrong and want you? AUNT MARY.

He passed it to Helene, saying softly:

"It must have been hard for her to write that."

"Will you go?" Helene asked quickly.

Wallie did not answer. He stood motionless, staring at the road where the heat waves shimmered, his absent gaze following a miniature cyclone that picked up and whirled a little cloud of powdered gypsum, while Helene waited. Her eyes were upon his face with an expression that would have arrested his attention if he had seen it, but he seemed to have forgotten her and her question.

When he spoke, finally, it was to himself, rather, as if in denunciation of the momentary temptation which the telegram had been to him.

"No!" emphatically, "I'm not going limping back like a prodigal who can't stand the gaff any longer! I won't slink into a soft berth because it's offered, and admit that I'm not man enough to stand up and take what comes to me! I'm licked again—proper. But I sure won't *stay* licked!"

"I'm said to be a good 'picker,' and I've always believed in you, Wallace MacPherson," Helene said slowly.

"You've concealed it well."

"Flattery is bad for growing boys," she smiled mischievously.

"I'm sure you've never spoiled any one by it. You've treated me like a hound, mostly."

Her eyes sparkled as she answered:

"I like hounds, if they have mettle."

"Even when they run themselves down following a cold trail?" he asked in self-derision.

Her reply was interrupted by voices raised in altercation in the vicinity of the supply wagon. A clump of bushes concealed the disputants, but they easily recognized the rasping nasal tones of Mr. Stott and the menacing bellow peculiar to the cook in moments of excitement. The wrangle ended abruptly, and while Helene and Wallie stood wondering as to what the silence meant, Pinkey, with a wry smile upon his face, came toward them.

"Well, I guess we're out of the dude business," he said laconically.

"What's the matter now?" Wallie demanded, so savageiy that the two burst out laughing.

"Nothin' much, except that Hicks is runnin' Stott with the butcher knife and aims to kill him. I don't know as I blame him. He said his grub was full of ants and looked like scraps for Fido."

Wallie looked alarmed, but Pinkey reassured him.

"Don't worry! He won't catch him, unless he's got wings—the gait Stott was travelin'. He'll be at the hotel in about twenty minutes—it's only five miles. What do you make of this, pardner?" Pinkey handed him a worn and grimy envelope as he added in explanation: "I found it stuck in the cupboard of the wagon."

Wallie took the envelope, wondering grimly as he turned it over if there was anything left that could surprise him. There was. On the back was written:

*Ellery Hicks insulted August 3d, this year of our Lord, 1919.*

Below, in pencil, was a list of the party with every name crossed out save Mr. Stott's, and at the bottom ornamented with many curlicues, and beautifully shaded, was the significant sentence, with the date as yet blank:

*Ellery Hicks avenged August —, this year of our Lord, 1919.*

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### "AND JUST THEN—"

Mr. Cone stood at his desk, looking all of ten years younger for his rest at the sanatorium. Indeed, it was difficult to reconcile this smiling, affable host of the Magnolia House with the glaring maniac of homicidal tendencies who had hung over the counter of the Colonial Hotel, fingering the ink stand and hurling bitter personalities at his patrons.

The Florida hostelry had just opened and the influx of guests promised a successful season, yet there was regret and a wistfulness in Mr. Cone's brown eyes as they scanned the register, for in the long list there was the name of but one member of the Happy Family.

As all the world knows, sentiment has no place in business, yet for sentimental reasons solely Mr. Cone had, up to date, refused to rent to strangers the rooms occupied for so many winters by the same persons.

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Ordinarily it was so well understood between them that they would return and occupy their usual quarters that he reserved their rooms as a matter of course, and they notified him only when something occurred to change their plans or detain them. But this winter, owing to the circumstances in which they had parted, his common sense told him that, if they intended to return to the Magnolia House, they would have so informed him.

Nevertheless, so strong were the ties of friendship that Mr. Cone determined to give them forty-eight hours longer, and, if by then he had no word from them, of course there was nothing to think but that the one-time pleasant relations were ended forever.

There were strangers aplenty. The "new-comers" had arrived, and Miss Mary MacPherson, but he wanted to see Henry Appel sitting on his veranda, and Mrs. Budlong and "C. D.," and Miss Mattie Gaskett. In fact, he missed one not more than another.

The Happy Family had been friends as well as patrons, and without friends what did life amount to? The hotel was full of new people, but in spite of his professional affability Mr. Cone was not one to "cotton" to everybody, and it would be a long time, he told himself sadly, before these old friends could be replaced in his affections.

Mr. Cone's generous ears seemed suddenly to quiver, almost they went forward like those of a startled burro. A voice—obstinate, cantankerous—a voice that could belong to no one on earth but old Mr. Penrose, was engaged outside in a wrangle with a taxicab driver!

Before Mr. Cone could get around the desk and at the door to greet him, Mr. Penrose was striding across the office with the porter behind him, round-shouldered under the weight of two portmanteaus and a bag of golf clubs.

Mr. Penrose was the same, yet different in an elusive way that Mr. Cone could not define exactly. There was an air about him which on the spur of the moment he might have called "brigandish"—something about the way he wore his hat, his slight swagger—something lawless that surely he never had acquired in his peach orchard in Delaware. When Mr. Penrose extended his hand across the counter Mr. Cone noticed that he was wearing a leather bracelet.

As they greeted each other like reunited brothers there was nothing in the manner

of either to indicate that they had parted on any but the happiest terms though Mr. Penrose's gaze wavered for an instant when he asked:

"Is my room ready?"

"Since the day before yesterday," replied Mr. Cone, turning to the key rack. Then, generously—

"What kind of a summer did you have? I trust a pleasant one."

Mr. Penrose's faded eyes grew luminous. His voice quavered with eager enthusiasm as he ignored the efforts of the bell boy to draw his attention to the fact that he was waiting to open his room for him.

"Superb! Magnificent! A wonderful experience! The land of adventure! Cone," Mr. Penrose peered at him solemnly from under his bushy eyebrows, "I know what it is to look into the jaws of death, literally!" Mr. Penrose could look into Mr. Cone's jaws also, for he was so impressive that the lower one had dropped automatically.

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes. Alone, unarmed, I defended myself against an attack from one of the savage grizzlies of the Rocky Mountains."

Mr. Cone's eyes were as round as a child's awaiting a fairy tale. If Mr. Penrose had needed encouragement they would have furnished it. He continued:

"We were camped near the Cañon Hotel where the bears swarm—swarm like flies—over the garbage. A remarkable sight. It was a very dark night—so dark, in fact, that I hesitated to go to my tepee, which was placed apart so that I might not be disturbed by the others.

"I had been asleep only a few minutes when I was awakened by the feeling that something was happening. It was. My tent was moving—actually bounding over rocks and hummocks.

"Believing myself the victim of a practical joke, I sprang out and brought my fish pole down on what I supposed to be the head of a fellow disguised in a big overcoat. There was a roar that was plainly heard for miles, and a monster grizzly struck at me.

"If it had not been for my presence of mind, that would have been the end of me. Now it was all that saved me. As the bear, on his hind legs, came toward me with his arms outstretched, to grapple, I ducked and came up between them, and so close to his body that he was unable to sink his terrible claws into me.

"He let out another roar—simply appalling—it will ring in my ears forever—almost deafened me. Again my remarkable presence of mind came to my rescue. I reached up and held his jaws open. It was my purpose to dislocate the lower one, if possible.

"For fifteen minutes—twenty—perhaps—we fought desperately. Writhing, struggling, I could feel the brute's hot breath on my face and his lolling tongue dripped saliva. Finally, his heavy breathing told me he was getting winded, and I knew that if my strength did not fail me I should be the victor. Fortunately, I was in splendid physical condition. Not once did I lose my presence of mind in this terrible crisis. I was as calm as I am this minute, while the bear was letting out roars of rage and pain that curdled the blood of those who heard them.

"At last I made a superhuman effort and backed the brute up against a tree. Gripping his nose and jaw, I had doubled up my leg and thrust my knee into his stomach, which was, of course, cruel punishment—when, just then—"

A slight cough made Mr. Penrose turn quickly. Miss Mattie Gaskett, whose eyes were nearly as large as Mr. Cone's at this version of the encounter, was standing behind him, with Cutie in a wicker basket.

Mr. Penrose looked disconcerted for a moment, and then that presence of mind of which he boasted came to his assistance and he said ingratiatingly:

"This young lady will vouch for the fact that my clothes were in shreds—ribbons in fact—"

"Why—er—yes, you had lost your shirt bosom," Miss Gaskett agreed doubtfully.

Remarking that he would finish the story when Mr. Cone had more leisure, Mr. Penrose "skedaddled" after the bell boy with unmistakable alacrity.

"And how is kitty?" inquired Mr. Cone, beaming upon Miss Gaskett. "Did you take her with you this summer?"

As he lifted the cover and looked in the basket, Cutie's pupils enlarged and she shrank from him. Cutie had a good memory.

"Luckily for her I did not," Miss Gaskett answered. "If I had, I should have lost her."

"Lost her?"

"Coyotes."

"They would have *eaten* her?"

Miss Gaskett nodded.

"Undoubtedly. They were thick as anything. They howled hideously every morning before sunrise, and it was not safe to leave one's tent at night without a weapon."

Mr. Cone's astonishment inspired Miss Gaskett to continue:

"Yes, indeed! And once when I was out walking, ever so far from everybody, I met one face to face. My first impulse was to run, but I thought if I did so it might attack me, so, trying not to show that I was frightened, I picked up a stick, and just then the—"

Seeing that Mr. Cone's gaze wandered, Miss Gaskett paused to learn the cause of it. She flushed as she found that Mrs. Budlong with a smile wreathing her face, was listening to the recital.

"I'll tell you the rest when you are not so busy," Miss Mattie said, taking her key from Mr. Cone hastily.

Mrs. Budlong declared that her pleasure equaled his own when Mr. Cone expressed his delight at seeing her, and there was no thought on the minds of either as to the hotel rules she had violated or the food she had carried away from the table in the front of her blouse and her reticule.

"You are looking in splendid health, Mrs. Budlong," he asserted, quite as if that lady ever had looked otherwise.

"Yes, the change benefited me greatly." A stranger might have gathered from the plaintive note in her voice that prior to her trip she had been an invalid.

"You, too, found the western country interesting?"

"Oh, very! At heart, Mr. Cone, I am a child of nature, and the primitive always appeals to me strongly." Mrs. Budlong hesitated and seemed debating. Having made her decision, she asked in an undertone:

"I can trust you?"

"*Absolutely*," replied Mr. Cone, with emphasis which intimated that the torture chamber could not wring from him any secret she chose to deposit.

"I had a very peculiar experience in the Yellowstone. I should never mention it, if you were not more like a brother to me than a stranger. It is altogether shocking."

Mr. Cone's eyes sparkled.

"Purely in a spirit of adventure, I took a bath in a beaver dam. It was in a secluded spot, and so well protected that I went in—er—I did not wear my bathing suit. The birds twittered. The arched trees made a

green canopy above me. The sunshine sparkled on the placid bosom of the water. A gentle breeze, warm, sweet-scented, caressed me as I stood on the shore for a moment drinking in the beauty of the scene. How you would have enjoyed it, Mr. Cone!"

Mr. Cone agreed heartily.

"Then I plunged in—the temperature was warmer than tepid—delightful. I felt like a nymph, a water sprite, or something, as I swam out to the middle and found a footing. The bottom was rather oozy, and there were green patches floating on the surface, otherwise it was ideal.

"Noticing a brown spot on my arm, I touched it. It was squishy and pulpy. Then it moved! A leech—and it sunk a million feet into me as soon as I attempted to remove it. I was *black* with them, if you will believe me, literally *covered*. And on the end of every one of their legs was a foot sucking my blood like a vacuum cleaner! Repulsive, disgusting—bloodsuckers, Mr. Cone. Imagine my horror."

Mr. Cone tried to.

"Another woman would have screamed or fainted," Mrs. Budlong continued, "but I come of different stock, and ancestry will tell at such moments. I am a Daughter of the Revolution and my father fought all through the Civil War as a sutler. Not a sound passed my lips as I got back to shore, somehow, and, weak from loss of blood, sank down to consider how to get rid of the leeches.

"In emergencies I am a resourceful woman. Recalling that I had a match—only one little match—in my sweater pocket, it occurred to me that I might build a smudge and smoke them off. I scraped some leaves together, struck my match, and, just then there—"

Mr. Budlong, who had stopped to look after the trunks, scuttled in the doorway. Mrs. Budlong dropped her voice still lower and concluded quickly:

"My husband came along and cut off their legs with his pocketknife and the feet worked out themselves, afterward."

Even as the proprietor stood at his desk, wondering if the later train had brought any more prodigals, a commotion on the veranda was followed by the appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Appel.

Mr. Appel was using a stick and walking with such difficulty that Mr. Cone hurried forward and asked with real solicitude:

"My dear friend, whatever is the matter? Has your old enemy, rheumatism, again got his clutches on you?"

"Rheumatism!" Mr. Appel snorted. "You lie on your back with two thousand pounds on top of you and see how you like it!"

Mr. Cone was puzzled, and said so.

Mr. Appel explained tersely:

"A bear walked on me—that's all that happened. A silver tip stood on the pit of my stomach and ground his heel into me."

"Tsch! tsch! tsch!" Mr. Cone's eyes were popping.

"If it were not for the fact that I'm quick in the head my wife would be a widow. I was in my sleeping bag and saw the bear coming. I knew what was going to happen, and that I had one chance in a thousand. It flashed through my mind that a horned toad, when threatened with danger, will inflate itself to such an extent that a wagon may pass over it, leaving the toad uninjured. I drew a deep breath, expanded my diaphragm to its greatest capacity, and laid rigid. It was all that saved me."

Again Mr. Cone's tongue against his teeth clicked his astonishment at this extraordinary experience, and while he congratulated Mr. Appel upon his miraculous escape he noted that he was wearing souvenirs of his trip in the way of an elk-tooth scarfpin and a hatband of braided horsehair.

The same train had brought Mrs. J. Harry Stott apparently, for the elevator was barely closed upon the victim of the picturesque accident to which Mr. Cone had just listened, when the office was illuminated by her gracious presence.

The last time that lady had extended a supine hand it had been to offer him one of the most serious affronts that can befall a self-respecting landlord; now the hand contained only cordiality, and in that spirit Mr. Cone took it.

"You enjoyed your summer?" Mr. Cone passed the pen for her to register.

"Delightful! Altogether unique! Do you know, Mr. Cone, I never before have fully appreciated my husband—his splendid courage?"

"Is that so?" Mr. Cone replied with polite interest.

"Yes, when put to the test he was magnificent. You see, we had a cook, oh, a most offensive—a rully violent and dangerous person. In fact, it was because of him that I left the party prematurely.

"It was plain that both Wallie and Pinkey were afraid of him, and dared not discharge him, so, one day when he had been more objectionable than usual my husband took things into his own hands—he simply *had* to!

"Hicks—his name was, Hicks—was disrespectful when Mr. Stott reprimanded him for something, and then he attempted to strike my husband with a pair of brass knuckles. Brass knuckles, it seems, are not a gentleman's weapon, and the cowardly attack so infuriated Mr. Stott that he knocked the bully down and took them away from him. He still has them. Before he let him up he pummeled him well, I assure you. Mr. Stott doesn't know how strong he is when angry. Such muscles!

"He punished the cook until he begged for mercy and promised to do better. But as soon as he was on his feet he tried to *stab* my husband with a bread knife. Fancy! Mr. Stott took this away from him, also, and ran him down the road with it. He ran him for seven miles—*seven miles*, mind you! The cook was nearly dead when Mr. Stott let up on him. I had to *drag* this story from my husband, little by little. But wasn't it exciting?"

Mr. Cone, who never had thought of Mr. Stott as such a warrior, tried to visualize the episode, and, though he failed to do so, he was greatly impressed by it.

He stood for some time after Mrs. Stott had left him, reflecting enviously that his life was dull and uneventful, and that he must seem a poor stick to the heroes and heroines of such adventures. He wished that he could think of some incident in his past to match these tales of valor, but as he looked back, the only thing that occurred to him was the occasion upon which the laundress had stolen the cooking sherry and gone to sleep on the front veranda.

She had fought like a tiger when the patrol wagon came for her, and he had been the one to hold her feet as she was carried to it. At the time he had been congratulated upon the able and fearless manner in which he had met the emergency, but a bout with an intoxicated laundress, though it had its dangers, seemed a piffling affair as compared to a hand-to-hand combat with a grizzly.

Gazing absently through the doorway and comforting himself by thinking that, perhaps, he, too, had latent courage which would rise

to heights of heroism in propitious circumstances, he did not see Miss Eyester, who had come in the side entrance, until she stood before him.

He had not expected Miss Eyester, because she was usually employed during the winter and it was only when a well-to-do relative opened his heart and let out a draft that she could afford a few weeks in Florida. But Miss Eyester was one of his favorites and he immediately expressed the hope that she was to stay the entire season, while he noted that she was wearing a mounted bear claw for a hatpin.

"No," she replied, blushing.

Not until then had Mr. Cone observed the Montana diamond flashing on her finger.

"Ah-hi—" He raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

Miss Eyester nodded.

"In January."

"A Western millionaire, I venture?" he suggested playfully.

"A stockman."

"Indeed?" A new respect was in Mr. Cone's manner. "Cattle?"

"Sheep," replied Miss Eyester proudly. "Mr. Fripp is herding at present."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### TWO MORE GUESTS.

In a week Mr. Cone was as familiar with the glorious summer which the Happy Family had spent in the West as if he had been there. Although he knew the story by heart, he still thrilled when Mr. Penrose backed the bear up against a tree and separated its jaws until it "moaned like a human."

He continued to listen with flattering attention to the recital of the intrepid spinster who would have given battle to a hungry coyote if it had attacked her, as he did to the account of Mr. Stott's reckless courage in putting to flight a notorious outlaw who had hired out as a cook for some sinister purpose.

But, gradually, Mr. Cone began to detect discrepancies, and he noted also that the descriptions not only varied but grew more hair-raising with repetition. Also, he guessed shrewdly that the reason the Happy Family never contradicted each other was because they dared not.

The day came, finally, when Mr. Cone found it not only expedient but necessary to

arrange a signal with the operator at the switchboard for certain contingencies. A close observer might have noticed that a preliminary "That reminds me" was invariably followed by an imperative announcement from the operator that Mr. Cone was wanted on the telephone.

A haste which resembled flight frequently marked the departure of other guests when a reminiscence seemed threatening, until, forsooth, the time arrived when they had only themselves for audience and their "That reminds me" became "Do you remember?" The only wonder, to those less traveled, was that the Happy Family ever had brought themselves to leave that earthly paradise in Wyoming, even for the winter.

The only person whom their enthusiasm did not weary was Miss Mary MacPherson, because directly and indirectly it all redounded to the credit of her nephew, whom she now carefully called Wallace, as more befitting the dignity of a successful "Dude Wrangler" than the diminutive. Wallie's refusal to accept her offer had brought tears of disappointment to the eyes of the lonely woman, yet secretly she respected his pride and slyly boasted to strangers of his independence.

"My nephew, Wallace MacPherson—you may have heard of him? He has large interests in Wyoming. Went West without a penny, practically; too proud to accept help from any one—that's the MacPherson of it—and now, they tell me, he is one of the important men of the country."

She was sometimes tempted to mention the extent of his holdings, and put the acreage well up into the thousands. But, since Miss MacPherson was a truthful woman with a sensitive conscience, she contented herself with merely declaring:

"My nephew, Wallace MacPherson, has a large ranch, oh, a very large place—several days' ride around it."

He was all she had, and blood is far thicker than water. She was hungry for a sight of him, and every day increased her yearning. While letters from him now arrived regularly, he said nothing in any of them of coming to Florida. His extensive interests, she presumed, detained him, and he was too good a business man to neglect affairs that needed him.

She had promised to go to him next summer, but next summer was a long way off and there were times when she was strongly

tempted to make the journey in winter in spite of the northern blizzards, of which, while fanning themselves, they read with gusto.

A blizzard was raging at present; according to the paper from which Mr. Appel was reading the headlines aloud to the group on the veranda. All trains were stalled west of the Mississippi, and there was three feet of snow on the level in Denver.

"That reminds me——"

Only too well Mr. Cone knew what Mr. Budlong's remark portended. The hotel proprietor was having an interesting conversation with Mrs. Appel upon the relative merits of moth-preventatives, but he arose abruptly.

Mr. Budlong squared away again.

"That reminds me that I was wondering this morning how deep the snow would be at that point where Mr. Stott slid down the glacier in the gold pan. By the way, Mr. Cone, have you heard that story? It's a good one."

Edging toward the doorway, Mr. Cone fairly chattered in his vehemence:

"Oh, yes—yes—yes!"

Mr. Penrose interrupted eagerly:

"The drifts must be about forty feet high on that stretch south of the Lolabama. There's a gap in the mountain where the wind comes through a-whoopin'. I mean the place where the steer chased Aunt Lizzie—did any one ever tell you that yarn, Cone?"

Mr. Cone, with one foot over the doorsill and clinging to the jamb, as if he half expected they would wrench him loose and make him go back and listen, answered with unmistakable irony:

"I think I recall having heard some one mention it."

It required more than irony to discourage Mr. Penrose, however, and he insisted petulantly:

"Come on back here, Cone! I'll explain just how Wallie jumped that steer and went to the ground with him. It's worth listening to twice."

Twice! Mr. Cone had heard it more times than he had fingers and toes and ears and noses.

"The telephone's ringing," he pleaded.

"Go answer it, then; looks like you'd want to learn something!"

Miss MacPherson had heard the story an even greater number of times than Mr. Cone,

but now she urged Mr. Penrose to repeat it, and he did with such spirit and so vividly that she shuddered almost continuously through the telling. He concluded by asserting emphatically that, if it had not been for his foresight in providing himself with field glasses, the steer would have been running over the flat with Aunt Lizzie empaled on its horns like a naturalist's butterfly, before any one could have prevented it.

Mr. Appel opined, when Mr. Penrose had finished, that "Canby made a poor showing."

"I could have done as well myself if I had been able to get there." He added speculatively: "I suppose Canby and Miss Spenceley are engaged by now—or married. Wallie hasn't mentioned it in his letters, has he?"

Miss MacPherson replied in the negative.

"He might not, anyway," remarked Mrs. Appel. "Helene was a nice girl, and attractive, but I could see that she did not interest him."

Mrs. Budlong, who had one eye closed trying to thread a needle without her glasses, observed succinctly:

"Men are funny."

She intended to qualify her statement by saying that some are funnier than others, only, before she had time to do so, an exclamation from Miss MacPherson attracted her attention. Following Miss MacPherson's unbelieving stare she saw Helene and Wallie getting out of the motor bus with a certain air which her experienced eye recognized as "married."

Mrs. Budlong specialized in detecting newly wedded people and she was seldom mistaken. Her cleverness along this line sometimes amounted to clairvoyancy, but, in this instance, no one needed to be supernaturally gifted to recognize the earmarks, for no man could look so radiantly happy as Wallie unless he had inherited a million dollars—or married the girl he wanted.

Miss Mary MacPherson threw her arms about his neck and kissed him with an impetuosity seemingly incompatible with a lady who wore a high, starched collar in summer. And the others welcomed him with a sincerity and warmth which made his eyes grow misty.

It was hard to believe, as he looked at them beaming upon him in genuine fondness, that only a few short months before they had been barely speaking to him, or that he had

wished the Happy Family had, as the saying is, a single neck that he might wring it.

Above the volley of questions and chatter he heard old Mr. Penrose's querulous voice reproaching him:

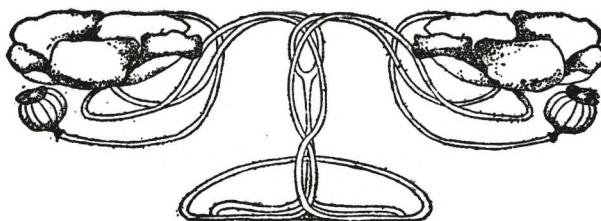
"I hope you have the grace to be ashamed of yourself for not telling us, Wallace!"

"If I look sheepish," Wallie replied, smiling, "it may be due to the nature of my new

occupation. You see," in reply to their looks of inquiry, "Canby bought me out, to get rid of me, and for a far more munificent sum than I ever expected. I reinvested, and, am now," with mock dignity, "a wool grower —with one, Mr. Fripp, engaged as foreman." Wallie's eyes twinkled as he added:

"I trust that the percentage of loss will not be so great as in the dude business."

THE END.



### THE GREAT DELUSION

WITH the incoming of a new administration in Washington, thousands of young men and women throughout the country are besieging their congressmen for assistance in landing government clerkships in Washington. They are convinced that, once on the Federal pay roll with short working hours, they will live in ease and comfort. Some of them look upon the government job as the beginning of a climb to prominence and power.

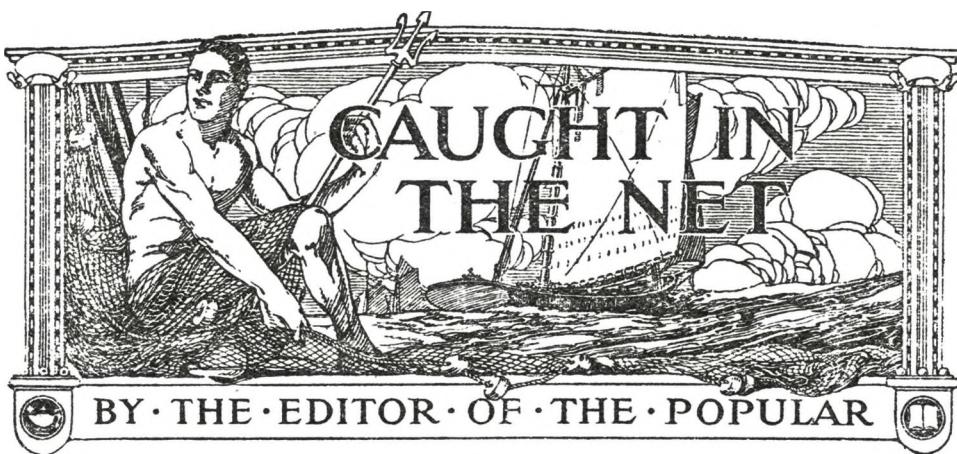
They are grievously mistaken. Out of all the multitude of men who have started out as department clerks in Washington, only two have risen to high place in government service. They are George B. Cortelyou and Frank H. Hitchcock, and Cortelyou became a cabinet officer because as a stenographer he had come under the appreciative eye of a president, and Hitchcock rose because he was specially befriended by Cortelyou.

Living prices are set in the capital by the foreign diplomats and wealthy Americans who have winter homes there, and, as the average annual income from government service is about eleven hundred dollars, the government employee is hard put to it to make both ends meet. In fact, the whole clerical population was so burdened by debt and high interest payments on borrowed money a few years ago that Congress passed a law forbidding the "loan sharks" to do business in the District of Columbia.

Worse than this, however, is the effect that government clerical work has on the average man. Its monotony, lack of opportunity, and discouragement of individual initiative soon cultivate in him a fearful inertia, a drying up of his ambition, a laziness impossible to combat.

Many young men take such jobs with the determination to hold them only as a means of support while they study a profession in the universities of the city. But the vast majority, having won their diplomas, hold on to their government jobs—they have a small, safe income, and, softened by the routine of official life, they cannot summon up the courage necessary for the plunge into the fierce competition encountered in every profession.

If you are thinking of landing a government clerkship, take Champ Clark's advice. "Madam," he once said to a woman who asked him to help her son into such a position, "I won't do it. I refuse because I'm his friend. If he can't get a good job, let him go back home and maul rails. At least, he'll keep his manhood and his spirit that way. Here men lose ambition, courage, and quickness of mind."



## OUR WEALTH

**A**NOMALOUS as it appears, the richer we grow, the poorer we are. At least, something like that is our condition when we, as a whole people, are tabulated as being worth about four thousand seven hundred dollars each, yet have little to show for it except large foreign loans, unemployment, and widespread domestic financial depression.

Where is all our money—the actual cash?

Ask the farmer, and he will refer you to the industrial worker. Ask the industrial worker, and he will refer you to the employer. Ask the employer, and he will refer you to the banker. Ask the banker, and he will refer you to business or government for your answer. Ask the government, and you will be told that it hasn't enough money to run its affairs without demanding a larger share of the national wealth.

How poor we all are!

But so far as the most impressive statistics go, we ought to be beyond want and worry, financially speaking. Data lately compiled from a census taken by *Commerce and Finance* assure us that in the last twenty years, or from 1900 to 1920, the per capita wealth of the United States has increased from one thousand one hundred and sixty-five dollars to four thousand seven hundred dollars. Yes, we have multiplied our riches more than four times, and the multiplication has almost wholly taken place during the last ten years. Let us quote the stark figures:

	1900	1910	1920
Continental area....	3,026,780 miles	3,026,780 miles	3,026,780 miles
Population .....	76,303,387	91,972,266	106,650,000
Wealth .....	\$88,517,306,775	\$125,000,000,000	\$500,000,000,000
Wealth per capita...	1,165	1,360	4,700

Some other reflections that may perhaps comfort us, in this winter of our discontent, are that before the World War we owed \$5,000,000,000 to other nations, and now we have not only paid off that debt but have loaned European nations \$10,000,000,000; furthermore, we are the happy holders of the largest gold reserves of any nation in the world; while our bank deposits exceed by billions the combined bank deposits of the whole world outside our own country.

With such wealth at our command it is, indeed, hard for the average man to understand why any one of us should lack shelter or clothes, or suffer hunger. But all our gold and all our goods and all our credit won't hide or counterbalance the greatest of all outstanding financial facts of the present day—that the world owes itself \$300,000,000,000.

How to meet that debt, the most stupendous in history, is the problem that faces all of our fine statistics and per capita calculations of wealth and well-being.

## COAL COMPETITION

THAT the exorbitant demands of the coal miners in Wales have brought into the market a possible formidable competitor is evidenced by the fact that the Chinese government has sold one hundred thousand tons of coal to France, as reported in the *London Post*.

The coal supply of the Celestial Empire is practically virgin, and is stated to be almost inexhaustible. The present consumption of coal by the entire human race is computed to be about a billion tons a year, and at this rate it is estimated that China alone could supply the world for probably a thousand years.

The coal-bearing areas of that country cover a territory of more than two hundred thousand square miles, which is considerably greater than twenty-five times the size of Wales. Furthermore, whereas in the little Welsh principality coal is obtained only in certain parts, it is found in every province of the Chinese Empire.

Hitherto, the annual output of Chinese coal mines has been only twenty million tons, as compared with about six hundred million tons in this country, three hundred and twenty-five million tons in Great Britain, and three hundred million tons in old Germany. The other coal-producing countries, though to a much less extent, were, in order: old Austria-Hungary, old France, old Russia, Belgium, Japan. India has produced as much as China's output, and Canada, New South Wales, the Union of South Africa, and a few other countries have added more or less smaller amounts to the total production.

Canada's unmined coal is estimated to be greatly in excess of that of China, but her output has been even less than China's, being only fifteen million tons. Very little of our neighbor's coal is anthracite, whereas China's supply of that grade is the largest in the world.

There are no figures at hand to show at what cost Chinese coal can be disposed of to France, but it may be supposed that the cheaper Celestial labor makes the purchase a desirable one.

A further competitor looms to the front from the Union of South Africa, where the shipping lines are urging the use of coal from the Transvaal mines in which there is a considerable supply available for use.

Coal miners the world over have in this something worthy of consideration. The old law of supply and demand has not been abrogated.

The hundred thousand tons of coal sold by China to France is only a trifle; but it is a straw showing how the wind blows. There is a limit to the price that countries as well as people can, or will, pay, and this reaching out into a new and undeveloped market in the Far East may be the first step in an entirely novel arrangement of the world's coal supply.

## OUR CHANGING MANNERS

DURING the last four or five years changes have taken place in our social customs, some of which may have been brought about through the excitement caused by the abnormal events which have taken place and the new conditions following on them. The changes in most of such cases are not likely to last after conditions become normal again.

There is one change in our social customs, however, which is more likely to continue in some form. In the Far Eastern countries of the Old World when one individual praises another, adjective is hurled on adjective in describing the merits of the individual praised, who rarely takes the compliments at their face value. For many years back, both here and in Europe, in eulogies of prominent people there has been a growing tendency among public speakers to pile on the adjectives in Far Eastern fashion. Extravagant praise is not so often heard in the United States now. A change, intangible but none the less apparent, has been going on.

One example of this change was given here in a eulogy in New York State by John W. Weeks of the Republican national executive committee's steering committee—of

President-elect Harding during the latter's campaign for the U. S. presidency when the campaign was nearing its height. Mr. Harding's name, he said, was not connected with any great measure of legislation.

"Harding," he said among other things, "has never really attracted the attention of the public, but that does not mean that he would not make a good president. There are hundreds of men in New York who would make good presidents if they had given the same attention to matters of government that Senator Harding has given."

This faint praise, however, should be looked on as rather an extreme instance of this present tendency among public speakers to avoid hyperbole in eulogizing others.

The frequency at the present time also of the word "liar" during debates in assemblies supposed to be dignified has begun to attract attention in some of our cities. Recently in one large city a lawyer during a court trial called his opponent a liar more than once, without, apparently causing any surprise at such a breach of decorum, though his opponent's reply was more dignified. In crowded meetings in different places, during excited debates, the short and ugly word figures more than it used to do. Most people, though, who have given thought to the matter believe that the tendency to use the word liar is only a temporary habit, due to the high-strung conditions of many people caused by the unlooked-for events of the last five years or so.

## THE HIGH-PRICE TIDE

**W**HILE the most sanguine do not look forward to a drop from the soaring prices following on the late war to those of prewar days, many merchants and manufacturers throughout the United States now say that the prices of most commodities have passed their peak and that the high-price tide is receding. In Cleveland, Ohio, price reductions of from fifteen to twenty per cent in wools were announced a short time ago by officials of the Cleveland Worsted Mills Company, the effect of which is to reach the public in the spring and early summer of 1921 when the goods manufactured will be placed on the retail market. About the time this announcement was made an unusual appeal was decided on, at a meeting of the New York Clothing Manufacturers' Association, to the employees, who are members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, with which the association has an agreement as to wages and working conditions. This appeal was for the workers to speed production, in order to reduce cost—the wages not to be lowered, though, their trade being largely a seasonable one, a large number of the employees were then idle.

At the last convention of the National Association of Retail Clothiers in Chicago, a reduction in prices of from ten to twenty per cent was predicted by its officials. In Toledo, Ohio, a coöperative ready-cut house company has announced a reduction of twenty per cent in lumber prices. Manufacturers in Utica, New York, report that cotton yarn prices have been steadily receding for some time, though the reductions are not radical.

One of the latest instances of the tendency toward a return to prewar conditions of industry is the belief of manufacturers all over the country that a general wage cut is necessary. A readjustment of the wage situation has been already started in a few places, aided indirectly by the growing number of unemployed.

An experiment in this direction is now in progress in one of the largest iron foundries of North Carolina. The workers there had been told previously that, owing to the decreasing prices for products, the employing firm was losing money and it would be necessary to reduce wages ten per cent or shut down the plant. The men went on strike, but returned in a day or two and accepted the reduction. The firm was still losing money and decided on a further ten per cent wage reduction. The employees agreed to remain at work on a profit-sharing basis by which more output means more pay. Since then reports have come from other cities that wage reductions, because of reduced prices, have been agreed to in preference to idleness by the employees of some manufacturing firms—the reductions in wages being agreed upon in a spirit of coöperation.

Prices of some articles of clothing have declined of late and housewives report reduc-

tions in the prices of certain household commodities. A number of restaurants, too, have begun to lower their prices.

## TRADE WITH RUSSIA

THE question of our trading with Russia continues to be a vexed one. Concerning the desirability of such trade there can, on general grounds, be no serious difference of opinion—provided, of course, that it can be carried on with safety to ourselves and to the mutual advantage of both countries. But it is precisely in this latter respect that the question does remain troubled.

As to the actual existent state of affairs in regard to commerce between the two countries there seems to be considerable misunderstanding. Many appear to believe that our government is discouraging trade with the Russian people. Further than in refusing to recognize the Soviet government it is doing nothing of the sort, unless its letting it be understood that all doing trading with Russia must do so at their own risk, can be regarded as discouragement. As a matter of fact, it is the present Soviet government itself which is refusing to let the people of Russia trade with us, for the Soviet has suppressed the right of Russian citizens, whether individuals or commercial corporations, to engage in foreign trade, whether import or export. No trade with Russia is allowed except through the Soviet government itself. Any American merchant who wishes to trade with the Soviet authorities, however, is perfectly free to do so—as long as he does not violate the United States government's restriction as to the exporting of goods for military purposes.

The question of whether it would at present benefit us to restore trade with Russia is one which is largely bound up with that of how we would be paid. Three ways seem to be possible. First, through transference of sums to us from the Soviet government's reserves of gold, silver, and platinum. This has been estimated to amount to about two hundred and fifty millions. As the Soviet's requirements in transportation material alone would mount up to a value of something like one billion dollars, there would not appear to be much hope here. Secondly, we could extend credit to the Soviet authorities. But the Soviet's willingness to repudiate debts at their own convenience, as in the case of the French-built railways, does not make this expedient appear very attractive, even if we were not already overencumbered with debts of our own. There remains the alternative of accepting Russian products and commodities in exchange for our own. Here, however, we run up against two objections. The greater part of commodities held by the Soviet government are confiscated goods—a fact also largely true, incidentally, of their gold reserves. If such goods are rendered in payment to us what guaranty have we that these goods will not be claimed by original owners, leaving our importer to whistle for his compensation? A dispute in such a case has already been decided in favor of an original owner in England. It is likewise pointed out, in this connection, that a large part of Russian exports to us would be agricultural products, with which our markets are already glutted. The fact that our own farm products have dropped thirty per cent in value in the past year would scarcely be ameliorated by added importations in this field, even though Russia has comparatively little existing material to export, anyway.

There are, nevertheless, many who do claim to see immense profit in restoration of dealings with Soviet Russia. And among them are those, not wholly selfish, who sincerely think that such a renewal of trade will, in the long run, be the surest and quickest way to restore the economic life of Europe to something like its normal health. Some even believe that trade intercourse with the bolsheviki would, in the end, through the exigencies of commerce, tend to destroy bolshevism itself. Inasmuch as Lenine himself desires such trade, because he believes that it will bolster up his régime, one is rather puzzled to arrive at a judgment as to what is advisable in this regard, from our point of view.

One thing seems certain. Short of recognizing the Soviet government our own government can, apparently, do no more than it already has done to encourage commerce with Russia at present. Trade if you must, is the way the situation seems to stand, but remember that you will have to paddle your own canoe and take your own chances for the time being.

## POPULAR TOPICS

LAST year our railroads spent \$349,500,000 for new rolling stock. The largest item was \$135,000,000 for forty-five thousand freight cars. This year the roads plan to spend \$67,500,000 for 15,000 refrigerator cars, and \$105,000,000 for 1,500 locomotives. Contracts have been placed for 1,200 passenger coaches, to cost \$42,000,000, and the Pullman Company is building 500 new Pullman cars. The roads also are trying to make financial arrangements for the purchase of an additional sixty thousand freight cars.



JAPAN now has a total population of 77,005,000. Of these sons and daughters of Nippon 55,960,000 live in Japan, and 17,284,000 in Korea.



THE department of commerce estimates that at the close of 1920 the balance of trade was in favor of the United States to the extent of \$2,722,955,008. The year's exports were estimated at \$8,191,008,468, and imports at \$5,468,053,460.



GERMANY'S new army of 100,000 men is to have an officers' corps of four thousand, or one officer for every twenty-five rank and file. Under the army reorganization act the United States army will have one officer for every sixteen enlisted men.



CANADA'S merchant marine now numbers more than eight thousand vessels, aggregating 1,619,000 gross tons. The Maple Leaf fleet is composed of 4,375 steamers, totaling 1,105,000 tons, and 3,720 sailing ships, totaling 514,000 tons.



VITAL statistics of France for 1919 show encouraging signs of recovery from war-time conditions. Seventy-seven uninhabited districts show a gain over 1918 of one hundred and fifty-seven per cent in marriages and of three per cent in births, and a decrease of nineteen per cent in deaths. Divorces, however, jumped forty-seven per cent, almost twelve thousand being granted in 1919.



ENGLAND'S vital statistics show that the middle-aged bachelor has become a rare bird. In both 1918 and 1919 twice as many bachelors over forty-five married as in 1911. War widows, too, are finding mates, for in 1919 ten times as many widows under twenty-five, and six times as many between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, remarried as in 1911.



BOSTON, it is claimed, is now the greatest fishing port in the world. Last year, it is estimated, over a hundred and twenty-five million pounds of fish were brought into the port, breaking all records for the last thirty-two years.



THE capital of France has a large foreign population. According to figures made public by the prefecture of police there are now living in Paris 41,350 Italians, 36,000 Belgians, 29,000 Swiss, 27,000 English, 23,630 Americans, 23,000 Russians, 14,000 Poles, and 7,892 nationals of Central and South American countries. There are also 1,969 Germans, 889 Austrians, and 254 Bulgarians living in the capital of their recent foes.



CHICAGO'S policemen are going to "treat 'em rough." Two types of bombs are being prepared for use against dangerous criminals. One is modeled after the Mills hand grenade used extensively in the war. The other is a glass container designed to break upon striking a hard surface, releasing "tear gas" calculated to make a "bad man" who has barricaded himself in a room change his mind and submit to arrest.

# C o c k t a i l , S a r ?

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

*Author of "It Is Paris!" "A Man of Iron," Etc.*

Cassidy meant well by that little doubles-or-quits play, down Java way, but it was a cure that proved rather worse than the evil

**T**HREE are situations that may be best described as mixed. Patrick Michael O'Sheanus Cassidy was a professional gambler, a man of mark in two hemispheres and a man absolutely to be trusted. Like the great Sheedy, his word was as good as his bond; like the late lamented Mr. John Oakhurst, he had a heart as well as a purse; but he had no soft spots in his character. He knew men and he knew women, and he knew little good of them. He had absolutely no mercy for fools and knaves, and the weak of knee, but for an honest fellow mortal in distress, Cassidy was a sure stand-by, and truth was, for him, religion.

Cassidy's knowledge of art was almost equal to his knowledge of men. He was always traveling and picking up treasures, storing them to be used some day when the spirit moved him to drop the cards and dice and settle down. He was fond of music. He was fond of so many simple things that his character, coupled with his wealth, formed a problem. Why did he continue in a profession ranking in pious eyes only a little above the profession of a burglar?

Perhaps he knew that in private life his past would follow him. Had he been a gambler in wheat, in stocks, in land, or the lives of his fellow mortals, all would have been well, but he had chosen to be a gambler, pure and simple, and, though he had chosen a cleaner game than that which they often play in the Wheat Pit or Wall Street, convention was against him. Perhaps the game dominated him. Perhaps the study of men and of character conducted across the green board held him in its grip. Who knows?

He was forty-two at the date of this story, a fine-looking, fresh-faced man, clean shaven, well dressed, and with a voice that told the tale of his Irish descent, but this morning he looked scarcely thirty as he stood on the deck of the *Saigon* coming to

her berth across the blue harbor under the blaze of the Javanese sky.

Colored houses, rocketing palms, far blue mountains, the harbor where Western freighters and junks lay at anchor, he took it all in as he stood on the spar deck talking to Van Zyall, the Dutch trader, and two or three other passengers of the *Saigon*. The tepid wind blowing from the shore brought perfumes of vanilla and earth, ooze and a tang of tar from the nearing wharves—sights, sounds and smells absolutely unnoticed by the others, who were talking of the Borneo tobacco crop, the customs, the price of sugar.

"You stay at the Amsterdam Hotel," said Van Zyall for the twentieth time that morning. "Tell them Van Zyall sent you. Hoffman will put you straight."

"I'll remember," said Cassidy. During the run from Malacca, he had lost money to Van Zyall. The play had been trifling for him, and it amused him to think that the Dutchman was trying to make amends for his winnings by offers of good advice.

Then came along Connart. He had lost money to Connart, too. Connart was a man of dubious nationality, about as old as Cassidy, a fragile man, worn by the climate, pale, and with a brown Vandyke beard. He was well to do, owning a big place near the town, and he interested Cassidy a lot.

Connart hated to lose and loved to win. Most men do, but in the exhibition of his hatred and love, in his general manner of play and in something recondite and illusive in the man's character and appealing only to some sixth sense, Cassidy had formed the opinion that here was a gambler of the first water.

Very few men are that.

Cassidy had also formed the opinion that Connart was an uncut jewel, that his passion for play had never been fully developed,

either from want of opportunity or self-restraint. Last night, in a conversation with Connart, he had discovered that lack of opportunity was the probable cause, the ingenuous Connart declaring that it was quite impossible to play high outside of Monte Carlo without being swindled.

"Of course it is different with you," said he, meaning to say that Cassidy's probity was beyond reproach.

## II .

"Where are you putting up?" asked Connart.

"The Amsterdam Hotel," replied Cassidy. "Van Zyall says it's the best."

"He's right," replied the other. "How long did you say you were staying here?"

"A week. I'm going on by this boat and she'll be here a week."

"Well, you must come and see me," replied the other; "come to dinner or something. My place is not far out, and I'll run in and fetch you to-morrow, if you'll come. I'll run in about five and you can dine with me—will you?"

"Yes," said Cassidy. "I'll come."

The *Saigon* was close in to the wharf now, moving almost imperceptibly with the engines rung off and the fellows waiting with the hawsers. Cassidy, collecting his luggage, did not see Connart again and, when he reached the Amsterdam Hotel, had almost forgotten him.

Here in Batavia in the hot season, one does a lot of forgetting. Seated in the veranda with a whisky and soda at his elbow, he fell in conversation with a trader who spoke English like an Englishman and who gave him the news of the place. Van Amberg was the trader's name, and his news was mostly about crop prospects, the rate of exchange on London and the pictures showing that week at the chief cinema palace. Then Cassidy gave his news, the bad cooking on board the *Saigon*, a storm they had run into after leaving Malacca and other trifles including the names of some of the passengers.

Van Amberg knew some of them personally, including Connart.

"I'm going to dinner with him to-morrow night," said Cassidy.

"Oh, are you," said Van Amberg. "Then you'll see Daia."

"Who's Daia?"

"She's his wife—well, call her his wife—Dyak girl."

"Dyak?"

"Just so. Not from Borneo. Dutch Guinea coast. Some sea Dyaks have settled there up a river, and that's where Connart fell in with her. He was up there prospecting for gold and nearly lost his head, for those chaps go in for head collecting still on the sly. I had the whole story from Ollsen, a man who was with him in those parts on the gold hunt. There were six of them, with a few Javanese chaps to help working the schooner they hired, and they pushed her up the river as far as she would go and then took to the bank, leaving the ship in charge of the Javanese."

"Ollsen was the man who had the location, and a three days' tramp took them to it, and they found gold but not in paying quantity. They found rubies, too, but small and not of much account. Then they fell in with the Dyaks, who were friendly at first, or seemed so, till one night there was a row. I don't know what about, but the Dyaks broke up the camp and killed every one but Connart and Ollsen."

"They tied these two chaps up and put them in a hut—meaning to kill them later on most likely, but Daia had taken a fancy to Connart, and she cut them loose in the night and showed them the way down the river back to their ship. Connart couldn't send the girl back to her tribe; they'd have killed her. So he took her with him and brought her here. Sounds like a story out of the pictures."

"What sort of fellow is Connart?" asked Cassidy.

"Oh, good enough," said the other, "a bit close and keeps to himself. It isn't often that he invites people to his place, must have taken a fancy to you."

"Does he gamble?"

"Not that I know of."

Then Van Amberg, remembering business, went off downtown, leaving Cassidy to his thoughts undisturbed except by the rustle of the tepid wind in the palm trees by the veranda.

Connart knew Cassidy by repute as well as personally. Pat Cassidy, the gambler, was even a bigger figure in the East than in the West, not only because of his reputation for straight dealing and high play, but by the fact that he had won the Calcutta sweep two

years ago. It was the gambler, not the man, that Connart had taken a fancy to.

Sure of his money if he won, with all his latent gambling instinct magnetically aroused, Connart was anxious for play, and play on a big scale. So Cassidy fancied, as he sat in the great cane armchair, smoking and listening to the wind in the palms. The more he thought of the matter, the more sure he was that Connart was no "sucker" anxious to win a few pounds, but a gambler worth engaging in battle.

Cassidy, in his long experience, had only met two dangerous men. Men who had fought him to the death and threatened to destroy him. Cedorquist of the Amazon Plantation Company, and Bowater, the wheat speculator. Men, in these little days, play as a rule for amusement or to win a few pounds; the great gamblers of the past belong to the past. But occasionally one finds a throwback.

Some instinct told Cassidy that Connart was the third dangerous man he had met, but he was not yet sure. To-morrow would tell.

### III.

A little before five o'clock, next day, Connart's car, driven by a Chinese chauffeur, drew up at the hotel.

Cassidy was waiting in the veranda and they started, taking a road that led by banks of tree fern, palms, and gray-green cactus under a sky losing its glare and against a wind warm and scented with the fragrance of trees and flowers.

Then fields of cane took the place of palms and ferns, and beyond the cane fields, groves of orange led them to the home of Connart, a wide, spaciously built, verandaed dwelling amid gardens haunted by tropical butterflies and birds gorgeous as the flowers.

"Well," said Cassidy, as he looked around him, "you ought to be happy here."

"Oh, it's well enough," said Connart unenthusiastically, "the only thing against it is it's not Europe."

"Faith, that's true," said the other. He was thinking more of the Dyak girl Van Amberg had spoken of, than his host, but there was no sign of her. They took their seats in the veranda, and the Chinese servants brought drinks and cigars and they talked of a hundred things, but never once did Connart hint of a wife.

At dinner it was the same. The iced

champagne did not loosen Connart's tongue as to himself and his affairs, and, after dinner, they had no need for conversation. The thing had happened. They had drifted into play, and, seated opposite one another, were barred out from all things mundane, but the chances of the game.

The great moon rose and cast its light on the palms and flowers of the garden and laid a square of white on the matting of the room where a blue haze of cigar smoke hung above the lamps; white moths entered and cast birdlike shadows on the table and walls, unheeded by the players. Past midnight the grass curtains dividing the room from the next were pushed aside and the figure of a girl appeared. It was Daia.

Van Amberg had forgotten to mention that she was beautiful. The bangles on her bare arms glittered in the lamplight, her feet were bare, and the robe of gauzy, ghostly white material, half veiling the lines of her figure, added to the strangeness of the picture.

Cassidy looked up; then Connart turned.

"Daia," said Connart. Then turning to Cassidy, "This is Daia." He picked up his cards again, the girl glided up and stood behind his chair, and the game went on without another word.

The beauty of the girl and the strangeness had no effect upon Cassidy. He had wished to see her as a curiosity, nothing more. Women had no part in his life. Without being a misogynist, he was absolutely cold as far as the other sex was concerned, rather antagonistic, if anything. Women were a nuisance. Yet he was attractive to women.

Daia, standing behind Connart's chair, seemed to find him attractive now. Her eyes were fixed upon him, eyes deep and mysterious as the sea, dark as night in the forests of Borneo. Cassidy continued his play. A stone figure standing behind Connart's chair would have moved him as little as the figure of the girl. The game held him entirely.

Then, chancing to look up, he saw the curtains swaying. She was gone.

The play continued till the clock, standing on a little table close by, struck two. Then he broke off play. He had lost seven hundred pounds. He took a fountain pen from his pocket and wrote out his check on Mathesons' bank which has a branch at Batavia, and handed it to Connart.

"They'll tell you my check is good for any amount," said Cassidy.

"That's all right," said Connart. "Have a game to-morrow night?"

"Just as you like."

"Right! I'll send the car for you. You'll dine here? Right!" He called a servant and ordered the car to be brought round.

"It's pretty late," said Cassidy.

"Oh, the hotel keeps open all night," replied the other. "We're used to late hours in this place."

#### IV.

On the way back to the hotel Cassidy felt elated. He had six days before the *Saigon* started, and he reckoned on a big fight with a worthy antagonist. The stakes of to-night would be nothing to what was coming, and Connart had the money to back his elbow. He had made inquiries about him.

Games where skill entered into the business did not appeal to Cassidy; pure chance was his favorite field and the bones his favorite weapon. He played bridge, just as a golfer plays clock golf on a lawn, but he looked down on the game, and the highly respectable men and women who make an income by their sharpness as bridge players, were for him pedicular.

Just before closing his eyes that night, the figure of the girl, Daia, framed itself, for a moment, before him. Was Connart married to her? The question came with the picture. He could not tell and he did not care.

Next day at five o'clock the car arrived and Cassidy took his departure for the plantation. Connart received him in the veranda; dinner was dispatched, and the business of the evening began.

Midnight struck unheeded by the players and again, as on the preceding night, the curtains parted, the figure of Daia appeared, stood for a moment, and then glided behind the chair of Connart. Cassidy looked up and bowed. The girl inclined her head slightly, then she stood, motionless as a statue, seeming to watch the play, but, in reality, watching Cassidy. He seemed to fascinate her.

Perhaps he was for her a new type of man, perhaps his absolute indifference toward her was the charm. Her eyes followed every movement of his hands and every expression on his face. Instead of withdrawing as on the preceding night, she sat on the arm of a great basket chair near by, still

watching and absolutely unheeded by the object of her gaze.

Cassidy was winning to-night. He had wiped off the seven hundred. Fortune had deserted Connart, and was standing behind the chair of his opponent. When the little clock on the table near by struck two, Cassidy laid down his cards. He had won two thousand five hundred pounds.

Daia had vanished.

"Let's go on," said Connart.

"Well, then, till half past," replied Cassidy.

They went on, but the luck still held, and at half past two the play stopped, Connart three thousand pounds to the bad.

"You've struck a bad vein," said Cassidy. "It would have been better to have stopped. Oh, don't bother about a check. We can settle up before I go. You'll want your revenge."

"To-morrow night?" said the other.

"Right," said Cassidy. "But I'm straining your hospitality; why not come and dine with me at the hotel and play there?"

"I'd just as soon play here," replied Connart, "if it's all the same to you. It's more comfortable here, and quieter. Besides, hotel people talk."

"That's true," said Cassidy; "but what do you mind about the hotel people?" Connart, helping himself to a whisky and soda with a steady hand, despite his losses, did not reply for a moment. Then he said:

"Oh, I don't know—one has to keep up a name in a place like this. I know the best people, and you'd be surprised how old-fashioned and stodgy they are. There are only two circles here, the best and the worst, and I've strained the best with Daia. I don't want to add late gambling at the Amsterdam to my sins. I never gamble—that's my reputation here."

Cassidy took a whisky and soda; then, while the car was being brought round, and to make conversation, he asked about Daia.

"A man at the hotel was talking about you," said Cassidy, "and he mentioned that you were married."

"I'm not."

"I see."

"No, you don't. Daia is no more to me than a daughter."

"You mean——"

"I mean exactly what I say. Did that man tell you how she came to me?"

"Yes."

"She got me free of those Dyak people, risked her life for me, and she lives with me, and, of course, not being married to me, people look on her as my mistress. She's not, she's my dog. She became violently attached to me up in that camping place just as a child or a dog might; she led me as a dog might, and she lives with me as a dog might live with me."

"There is nothing at all between us but that. People don't know that. It's no use in telling them, they couldn't understand. I've never even tried to tell them. I did tell one man, a Dutchman, that there was nothing between us, that Daia was only living here as a child might live with me, and he winked at me and grinned."

"I can understand it easy enough," said Cassidy; "but it's queer. D'you care for her?"

"Very much, but only as I might care for a dog. She's undeveloped, or, rather, not quite human. Still, I care for her very much. You see she cares for me in quite an extraordinary way—as a dog. Can anything care for a man as much as a dog does?"

"Faith, I don't know," said Cassidy. "I've never had a dog and I've never cared for a woman."

Then the car came round and he drove off for the hotel with, somehow, a better opinion of Connart than he had before.

Connart was weak. Cassidy, like a physician, had diagnosed the great weak spot in his character. He was an A1 gambler without the special genius of a Cassidy, and without the moral or immoral courage to gamble openly. Fortune hates a man like that who hangs on to her skirts in the dark and ignores her in the daylight. And Cassidy, the spoiled child of Fortune, could not but despise him. But he was at least leading a clean life and he had not wronged the woman who had loved him.

Next night the proceedings took place as usual, and the next. It might have been a play that was being acted over and over again, with a slight difference each time; the dinner, the game, Daia gliding in and out again, the settling up and the departure of Cassidy.

Fortune played with the players; huge sums were lost and won; but it was not till the fifth and tragic night that the real struggle came. Cassidy was due to depart in the morning. The *Saigon* left at eight

10A P

o'clock. His luggage, all but a few light things, was on board.

They had flung the cards away. The dice had taken their place, and the players sat opposite one another flushed, bright-eyed and heedless of everything but chance. They had drunk more than enough, and long glasses of iced brandy and soda stood on the table at their elbows.

Daia was not present. She had looked in and vanished. The clock pointed to seven minutes to two. Cassidy rattled the box and cast. Then Connart pushed his chair back.

"That does me," said he. He had lost fifteen thousand pounds.

Cassidy picked up the cubes, dropped them again, and leaned back in his chair.

"Are you cleared out?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

"Damn!" said Cassidy.

The tension removed, the drink was getting at him. He suddenly hated the business. He had never played quite like this before, calling night after night and accepting his opponent's hospitality. The victory had drawn all his teeth. He would have handed back his winnings straight across the table, but he could not do that. They had played; if he had lost, he would have paid. The fifteen thousand was his and Connart was not the man to accept charity.

"The plantation is tied up," said Connart, "and there's no more cash, and that's an end of it."

Cassidy, leaning back in his chair, hands in pockets, seemed thinking profoundly. Then he sat up. The whisky had given him an idea.

"I'll play you double or quits," said he with a hiccup.

"I told you I had nothing more," replied Connart.

"Put up Daia," said the other with a laugh. "I'll play you for Daia or quits. Go on, you d—— fool, you're going to win."

"Daia!" said Connart.

On the crest of disaster, a life line seemed flung to him by Satan, though Cassidy was Satan by no means. Cassidy was just a man who wanted to get out. He had fancied Connart a very wealthy man; he wasn't. He was broken at fifteen thousand, and all those dinners and all the hospitality he had received rose up, backed and flushed with whisky in Cassidy's mind, crying, if you will

permit the stretch, "Give the chap another chance."

He did not want Daia. If he won her, she would be of no use to him. It was like saying, "I will play you for that big euphorbia tree in your garden." He could no more take Daia off with him, than the tree.

But to Connart, whose mind was in a whirl, the life line seemed cast to him by the devil. Still there was the chance! Had he stopped to think, he might have refused. Cassidy gave him no time. He cast, handed the box to Connart, who cast.

"You've won," said Cassidy. "We're quits."

"God!" said Connart, with his elbows on the table and his head between his hands.

Gambling teaches one a lot of things. He had gambled with her as a counter and might have lost her to this man—this devil! and the thing he might have lost disclosed itself to him. He loved the woman who had saved him. She had saved him twice—saved his life, and saved his future.

Cassidy, well pleased, poured himself out another whisky, lit another cigar, and sat down again. Connart neither moved nor spoke, then he rose up, went to a desk in the corner of the room, opened a drawer, and took something from it. Then he wrote for a moment.

He came to Cassidy with a slip of paper in his hand. Cassidy took it. It was a check for fifteen thousand. Cassidy tore the paper in two, then in four, and cast the pieces on the ground, the whisky turning to vinegar in him.

"I'd give you to understand that I'm a gentleman," said Cassidy. "Good night. I don't want the car. I can walk."

## V.

Nothing is more unreasonable than whisky stopped in its convivial and warming work, especially when its workshop is the mind of an Irishman.

For a mile down the road Cassidy walked absurdly raging. Then the night wind and the moonlight and the palms and the exercise began to tell on him, and he reached the outskirts of the town, calm, and almost regretful. At the hotel the Chinese night porter saluted him, and he went up to his room, turned on the electrics, and began to pack the few things he carried in his light luggage.

He could not sleep, so he did not undress. It was after four in the morning, and he would have to join the *Saigon* at seven, so he lit a pipe and sat down at the open window to smoke and think. The whole of this business was a new experience and gave him plenty of food for thought. It came to him now that Connart had actually gambled with the girl, while he, Cassidy, had only used her as a door of escape, a last chance to let Connart save himself. Did Connart actually imagine that he, Cassidy, cared for the girl and wanted her. Undoubtedly. That was why he tried to hand back the money and efface as much as possible the disgraceful deal into which he had been trapped.

Cassidy, considering this matter, laughed to himself.

He would never see Connart again, but Connart would always have that opinion of him, would look on him as a man who had taken advantage of another man's money losses to do a deal in flesh and blood.

He heard voices down below, then the voices ceased. He tapped the ashes from his pipe and was just about to refill it when the door of his room opened. He turned and found himself face to face with Daia.

## VI.

She had evidently followed him on foot. The reason why she had followed him, any man could see, even Cassidy. It surrounded her like an aura as she stood gazing at him with those dark, unfathomable eyes.

He neither rose from his chair nor spoke. Behind her, the yellow, clawlike hand of the Chinese night porter closed the door on them.

She came gliding toward him, sank beside him, and took his hands in hers; then, with head raised and her eyes still fixed on his, she began to speak. She spoke in the language of her people. He did not understand a word, but he understood everything. Understood that she had followed him, that she loved him, that she was his slave, that she would follow him to the ends of the earth, and even beyond, to the ghostly country of the Atu Jalan.

With her hands clasped in his, he was no longer thinking, or trying to think, she enveloped him. Then, suddenly, the spell was broken. The sound of a car drawing up outside came through the open window. Cassidy disengaged himself, swiftly but

gently, from the arms that had encircled him, placed his finger on his lips to say "hush," stole to the door, opened it, and glanced back. She was gazing after him, crouched still beside the chair with one arm resting on it. She nodded to him as though to say, "I wait." He left the room, and next moment he was in the hall.

The night lamp showed Connart, and through the open door beyond he could see the car standing in the dawn.

"Ah," said Connart.

"Come outside," said Cassidy.

He got the other into the street. Connart, in the gray-blue light that was breaking over the houses, looked old and shaken. Cassidy, hatless and dazed, stood for a moment, then, pointing with his thumb to the upper story of the hotel, he said, "She's up there. In my room."

"You tore up my check, for money was not your game, and you pretended to be angry and refused the car, and spoke of yourself as a gentleman!" said Connart. He took off his hat and held it in his hand for a moment as though to let the land wind which was beginning to blow, reach his head. Then he dropped the hat on the ground, and folded his arms and inclined his head slightly as if in thought.

"You are absolutely wrong," said Cassidy. "She has only come this minute."

"I know that," said Connart, "an honest man told me—the hall porter."

Cassidy swallowed the insult.

"She followed me without my knowing. I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I do not care for her."

Connart laughed.

"How could she follow you. She has been scarcely ever in this town, and she did not know where you were staying."

Cassidy seemed to consider the proposition for a moment. The unfortunate man could not tell whether she had followed him by some Dyak tracking instinct or how. He only knew the facts of the case, and the hopelessness of trying to explain the posi-

tion; also the absolute necessity of getting away at once lest Daia should suddenly appear.

Then he remembered that he had no hat, that he would have to go back for it. That was the last straw.

"You can think what you like of me," said he; "she's innocent. Go up and take her away. I'm off. Curse this place. I'm going aboard. I have no hat."

He picked up Connart's hat, turned and walked off with it.

At eight o'clock, the *Saigon* put out, and Cassidy, on the deck with Connart's Panama on his head, stood watching the receding wharves. Not a word had come from Connart to the ship, not a whisper through the clear air of all that fantastic business. The town with its palm trees and houses flooded by the blaze of morning light, had about it an extraordinary air of peace and contentment, silence and detachment.

What had happened at the Amsterdam Hotel? Had she gone back? What did she think of him? What was Connart thinking of him? Was Connart wearing his hat? What would the hotel people do with the few inconsiderable articles he had left behind? What would they think of his leaving like that?

Suddenly, a great and forgotten fact wrote itself in letters of fire from the blue hills to the sea:

"You have not paid your hotel bill!"

A week's board and lodging, champagne, cigars, drinks to all and sundry, tips—

He left the deck and sought the bar of the *Saigon* where a dusky gentleman was setting out bottles. Above the bottles, across the Venesta paneling, the words regrouped themselves:

"You have not paid your hotel bill."

He could liken the whole situation to nothing earthly, till—

"Cocktail, sar?" asked the dusky bartender.

Cassidy nodded.

*"The Hunter and the Hunted," by Mr. Stacpoole, will appear in an early issue.*



# In Bonanza

By William MacLeod Raine

*Author of "Tangled Trails," "Troubled Waters," Etc.*

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## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the early 1860's, when what is now Nevada was called "Washoe," Hugh McClintock, a Pony Express rider, was wounded by Indians and taken by his brother, Scot, a "square gambler," to Virginia City to recover. Among the gold seekers were Robert Dodson, a worthless drunkard; Mollie, his wife; their baby daughter, and Victoria, Mollie's young sister. Through Scot's efforts the baby was adopted by the miners and generous provision made for her education. Furious because he couldn't dissipate this fund, Dodson abused his wife, and was beaten by Scot. Further trouble loomed up for Scot when Sam Dutch, a gunman, tried to cow him at his faro game, but with Hugh's help Scot drove him from town. Dodson, while drunk, accidentally killed his child, and the educational fund was transferred to Victoria. Later Mollie divorced him. After Hugh again had mastered Dutch in Aurora, a new camp, the McClintock brothers joined the Union army, and after the war Scot and Mollie were married. Meanwhile, Dodson had become rich and had been joined by his brother, Ralph. The McClintocks went into the freighting business, and when Hugh visited Piode, a new camp controlled by the Dodsons, he was attacked in the dark by Dutch, who left no trace of his identity but a bowie knife. Hugh again made the gunman take water, and, after staking out some mining claims, returned to Virginia City, where he was surprised to find that Victoria had grown into a young lady. Scot had become a father, and was entering politics as a candidate for secretary of state of Nevada. Victoria obtained a position as school-teacher in Piode, and Ralph Dodson paid court to her. Hugh warned her against him, but couldn't shake her faith in Dodson.

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*(A Five-Part Story—Part IV.)*

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE KILLER STRIKES.

IT was generally recognized that the Republicans would carry the State that year. The war was still so near that it would have a determining influence on thousands of voters. The chief local interest centered in the race for the nomination of the dominant party for secretary of state.

This was due to several factors. Chief of these was the fight between two candidates of outstanding personality, a fight which rapidly developed into a bitter one. Scot McClintock was still the most picturesque figure in Nevada, though he had left behind him his wild escapades and his gay irresponsibility. The mining camps were yet full of the rumor of his adventures. In any assembly his good looks, charm, and qualities of leadership made him a marked figure. His audacity and courage fitted the time and the place. Men tremendously admired him because they saw in him what they would like to be themselves.

The character of Ralph Dodson made no appeal to men's affections. He was too cold

and calculating, his ambition too ruthless. But they recognized his strength. He would travel a long way in the world. The big mining interests supported Dodson. Scot was too much a tribune of the people to suit them. At any time he might embarrass the mine owners by some quixotic gesture inspired by his sense of justice.

Scot went out into the camps and the agricultural valleys to make a personal campaign. If he had been dealing with the voters individually he could have made a runaway race of it. But delegates to conventions, then as now, were under the influence of leaders, who in turn took orders from the men who financed the campaign. He was under a tremendous handicap because he had only an individual following to oppose a party machine.

Yet he made headway, and so fast that his opponent became alarmed. Dodson came out in the *Enterprise* with a savage attack on his rival in which he accused him of being an ex-gambler and a bawdy house brawler. Scot kept his temper and made no countercharges. From the stump he replied that at least he had always been a

square gambler. His fighting record, he said carelessly, must take care of itself.

Vicky met Ralph Dodson on the Avenue at Piodie while the campaign was at its height. She fired point-blank a charge at him.

"I read what you said in the *Enterprise* about Scot."

He laughed a little, but his eyes watched her warily. "You'd think once in a while some newspaper reporter would get a story right," he said easily.

"Oh! Wasn't it true that you said it?" Her level gaze met his steadily.

"I was annoyed, and I said something. Don't remember just what. Certainly I didn't intend to insult any of your family."

"Then you'll deny it in the paper?"

"Is that quite worth while? Everybody knows what newspapers are—how they're keen to make everything one says sensational."

"If you don't deny it people will think you said it."

"We—ell, in a political campaign men get excited. It doesn't greatly matter what folks say—just part of the game, you know."

"Is it part of the game to tell lies about a good man?" she asked flatly.

He threw up his hands gayly. "I surrender at discretion. Will a note to the *Enterprise* correcting the error suit your majesty?"

"You're not doing it for me," she told him, her dark eyes shining. "You're doing it because it's the fair thing."

"Hang the fair thing," he answered, laughing. "I'm doing it for Miss Victoria Lowell."

"I'd rather you didn't." She dimpled to a smile. "Because I'm against you and for Scot in this fight."

"Then I'll give up the race," he mocked. "I think you ought at least to be neutral."

Dodson played his hand under cover after that. He saw that McClintock was kept under a steady fire of newspaper attack and that none of it could be traced to him. No paper dared make any reference to the origin of the trouble between Colonel McClintock and the Dodsons, but hired assassins of reputation whispered evil stories in which the name of Mollie and Scot appeared. These became so numerous that at last Scot, in a speech full of eloquence and fierce indignation, referred to the traducers of his wife as snakes in the grass who dared not come

into the open for fear of having the life trampled out of them.

The bitterness grew, became acute. Robert Dodson, still full of venom and hatred, whispered in the ears of killers. The word was passed around quietly that McClintock might be shot down any time. Friends came to warn him. They carried the word to Hugh, who dropped his business at once and joined Scot at Austin. From this time the younger man, in spite of the colonel's good-humored protest, traveled over the State with his brother as a lookout.

At Carson the killers struck.

Scot had addressed an enthusiastic meeting, at which he had been heckled by supporters of Dodson and had turned upon them with such witty scorn that they had slipped out of the hall discomfited. With Hugh beside him the speaker had returned to the Orpsby House. The younger brother was putting up at the house of a friend. He left Scot in his room ready to undress.

But when the colonel felt in his waistcoat pocket for a cigar he found none. He stepped down to the barroom to get one. Baldy Green, the old stage driver, was sitting by the office stove. The two fell into talk and Scot sat down to smoke his cigar with the old-timer.

A man whom Scot did not know lounged into the office and out again. In the darkness outside he whispered to two men. One of them was the ex-mule Skinner Hopkins, a dyed-in-the-wool bad man; the other was Sam Dutch. The hotel office had three doors. One opened from the street, a rear one led to the rooms, the third was a double-swing door separating the office from the bar. Scot's chair was so placed that he faced the entrance from the street and the bar. His back was half turned to the rear one.

The stage driver was talking. "You betcha, colonel. If us old-timers had the say-so we'd elect you by a mile. Sure would. That slick scalawag Dodson, why he—he is—"

Scot's first warning came from Baldy's consternation. His eyes popped out. They were staring at some apparition in the back of the room. The words of his sentence stuck in the roof of his mouth. Almost simultaneously came the click McClintock knew from old.

He whirled in the chair, dragging at his revolver. It caught on his coat. Two bolts of lightning flamed. The crash of heavy

thunder filled the room. Scot sagged in his seat, the curly head falling forward heavily on the chest. From his slack fingers the revolver dropped. Again the guns boomed. Another jagged knife thrust of pain went through and through Scot's body.

"Got him. Got him good, Sam," an exultant voice announced through the smoke.

A hulking figure slouched forward cautiously. The victim lay huddled in the chair motionless, both hands empty of weapons. No sign of life showed in the lax body.

"Always said I'd git him." Dutch broke into a storm of oaths. He reversed his revolver and struck the fallen head savagely with the butt.

"We'd better make a get-away," the other man said hurriedly. "This ain't no healthy place for us."

The gorilla man struck again and broke the hammer of his revolver.

"Out this way," he said, and pushed through the swinging doors to the bar.

The heavy blows had beaten McClintock down so that he slid from the chair. The doctor who attended him afterward said that the effect of them was temporarily to act as a counter shock to the bullet wounds. His senses cleared and his hand found the revolver. He was cocking it as the second assassin vanished through the swing doors.

Scot concentrated his strength and energy, focusing every ounce of power left in him to do the thing in his mind. With his left hand as a support he raised the six-shooter and fired through the swing door. Then, inch by inch, he crawled forward to the barroom entrance, shoved the door open with his shoulder, and tried again to lift the .45. It was not in his ebbing forces to raise the heavy weapon from the floor.

But there was no need to use it again. The mule Skinner Hopkins lay face down on the floor, arms flung wide. Scot's shot through the swing door had killed him instantly.

Baldy knelt beside his friend. "Did they get you, old-timer," he asked, his voice shaking.

"I'm still kicking. Send for Hugh," the wounded man gasped.

Half an hour later Hugh stood beside the bedside of his brother. Scot's face was bloodless to the lips. He was suffering a good deal and was very weak. The doctor had told Hugh that he would not live till morning.

"I'm going—to—make it," Scot said faintly. "Wire—for—Mollie. Tell her—not to—worry."

Mollie came down from Virginia. She reached Carson by daybreak. Scot was still living, still holding his own, though the doctors held out no hope of recovery. At the end of forty-eight hours he was in a high fever, but his strength was unabated. The fever broke. He came out of it weak but with the faint, indomitable smile of the unconquered on his face.

His hand pressed Mollie's softly. "It's all right, sweetheart. I'll make it sure," he promised.

The tears welled into her eyes. His courage took her by the throat and choked her, for the doctors still gave her no encouragement.

"Yes," she whispered, and tried to keep the sob out of her voice.

"What's a li'l' thing like three bullets among one perfectly good man?" he asked whimsically.

"You're not to talk, the doctor says," she reproved.

"All right. Where's Hugh?"

"He left yesterday to 'tend to some business."

"What business?" A frown of anxiety wrinkled his pale forehead.

"He didn't say."

"Where did he go?"

"I didn't ask him. He said he'd be back to-day or to-morrow."

Scot thought this over, still with a troubled face. He guessed what this important business was that had called Hugh from his bedside at such a critical time. But he did not hint to Mollie his suspicion.

"When he comes back will you let me know right away, honey? Or if he wires?"

"Yes. Now, you must stop talking and take this powder."

The smile that was a messenger to carry her all his love rested in his eyes. "I'll be good, Mollie."

He took the medicine and presently fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HUGH HITS THE TRAIL.

While Hugh was still at the bedside of his brother he began to make arrangements for the thing he meant to do. Already he knew that Sam Dutch had left town. Word had come to him that two horsemen in a des-

perate hurry had clattered down the street from Doc Benton's stable. They had disappeared in the darkness. But the man who had seen them go had not recognized the companion of Dutch. Nor could he tell whether the riders had turned off Carson Street into King's Cañon road, had swung to the right along the foothills road, or had held to a straight course toward Reno.

The news of the outrage spread fast. Friends of the McClintocks poured into the Ormsby House by scores to see if there was anything they could do. Among them were the governor, a justice of the supreme court, half a dozen State senators and representatives, and the sheriff of the county.

It was characteristic of Hugh that even in the anguish he felt at seeing his brother stricken from lusty health by the bullets of assassins his mind worked with orderly precision. When he thought of the murderers, a cold, deadly anger possessed him, but, if possible, he meant his vengeance to come within the law.

"There's one thing you can do, Phil," he said to the sheriff. "Swear me in as a special deputy. I'm goin' out to get Dutch."

"To bring him back here, you mean?" asked the officer.

McClintock's eyes were inscrutable. "Of course."

"Now, looky here, son, that's our job," the sheriff remonstrated. "I'm gonna git that fellow. He's run on the rope too long. You stay right here with Scot."

"No. I want Dutch. He's mine. Hands off till I can leave Scot, Phil."

The sheriff argued, but he could not move the grim-faced man from his purpose. At last he gave way with a shrug of his shoulders. A willful man must have his way.

"All right, son, I'll swear you in, if you'll promise to bring Dutch back to Carson providin' you git him."

"I promise that."

"Alive," the sheriff added.

"Alive," agreed Hugh, meeting him eye to eye.

Baldy Green showed his teeth in a mirthless grin. "A few of us here in town'll guarantee that if you bring him alive he won't go away alive."

The officer turned on him angrily. "That's a fine way to talk, Baldy. You hold yore lines tighter. Monkey with my prisoner an' I'll show you a scatter gun that throws buckshot all over Carson."

Meanwhile Hugh kept the wires hot with messages. He telegraphed friends at Virginia, Reno, Piodie, and Genoa, asking for news of the fugitives. His suspicion fastened on Robert Dodson as the man who was riding with Dutch. He knew the man had been in town earlier in the day and he could not, through his friends, locate him here now. The night travelers might make for Virginia, where Dutch could lie hidden in one of the Dodson mines till the excitement was past. Or they might be making for Genoa with the intention of crossing the Sierras to California. More likely still they were headed for Piodie, where the sheriff, the law machinery, and the town bad men were all friendly to the Dodson interests. So Hugh reasoned it out.

The sheriff shook his head. "Don't look to me like Dodson would mix himself up with Dutch now. Maybe he hired him to do this killing. I don't say he did. I don't know. But it ain't reasonable that he'd give himself away by ridin' hellamile outa town with him."

"Ralph Dodson wouldn't, but you can't tell what his brother might do. My notion is he didn't intend to go, but afterward lost his nerve and wouldn't stick it out here alone."

"That'd be like Bob Dodson," Baldy confirmed. "He's got a sure-enough rabbit heart."

None of the answers to his telegrams brought Hugh the message he hoped for. The fugitives had not been seen at Virginia, Genoa, or Reno, though it was quite possible they might have reached or passed through any of these places unnoticed. The natural place for them to go was Piodie, anyway. It was there he meant to look for them.

The doctors gave him no hope for Scot, but they now believed that his remarkable vitality would keep him alive several days. Hugh arranged to keep in touch with Baldy Green by wire. Now that the railroad was in operation he could get back to town within a few hours if an emergency call came for him.

He rode down to Reno and there boarded the Overland. A couple of hours later he left it at a small way station and engaged a saddle horse. He guessed that if the fugitives had gone to Piodie they would leave watchers to report on any strangers who might come to town. Therefore, four

miles out of Piodie he left the road, took a cow trail that swung round Bald Knob, and dropped down a little gulch that led to the back of the Pony Express Corral, and under cover of dusk slipped into the stable.

Byers was there alone. "How's Scot?" he asked.

"Bad," said Hugh, and his haggard face twitched. "Doctor don't think he'll make it. What about Dutch?"

"Got in last night."

"Dodson with him?"

The small man nodded. He was always parsimonious of words.

"Know where he is now?"

"At the Katie Brackett. Rode right out there."

Hugh knew that this meant his enemies were playing it safe. The Katie Brackett was owned and controlled by the Dodsons. Here they were on home territory, surrounded by adherents. If a sheriff's posse appeared on the road leading to the mine Dutch would be safely underground in one of the levels long before it reached the shaft house. There he would be as secure as a needle in a haystack. Even if the sheriff elected to search the mine the bad man could play hide and seek with the posse in a hundred stopes, drifts, and crosscuts.

"Ralph Dodson in town?"

"No. Virginia."

This was one piece of good news. With the younger mine owner absent he would have one less enemy to contend with, and the most dangerous of the three. For Ralph was game, audacious, and brainy. It would hardly have been possible to get the killer out of Piodie with young Dodson running the campaign for him.

"I'm goin' up after him," Hugh said quietly.

"With that gang round him?"

"Maybe I'll catch him alone."

"And maybe not." Byers stepped to the wall and took down from a peg a belt to which was attached a revolver. He strapped on the belt.

"No, Dan," Hugh told him. "I'm playin' a lone hand. My only chance is to lie low and surprise Dutch before he knows I'm within a hundred miles."

"Hmp! What if he surprises you?"

"I'll be Number Sixteen. But he won't. I'm goin' to take him back to Carson."

There was a sound of feet moving at a shuffling run. A man burst through the

doorway and stopped at sight of them. The runner was Jim Budd. For a few moments he stood panting, unable to find his breath for speech.

"What's up, Jim?" asked Hugh.

The fat man wheezed out an answer. "H-hell to pay! The Katie Brackett's afire, an' the day shift's down in her caught in a drift."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### TRAPPED.

As the three friends hurried up Pine Nut Gulch toward the Katie Brackett the youngest of them reflected that the method of approach had been made smooth for him. It was not now necessary for him to skulk up through the sage. The whole town was on its way to the scene of the disaster. A stream of people was headed for the mine. Nimble boys passed them on the run. Less active citizens they overtook and left behind. The sounds of voices, of movements of many people, came to them through the darkness.

Hugh carried his old sawed-off shotgun. He might need it. He might not. He realized that for the moment his vengeance must take second place. The common thought and effort of Piodie must center on the business of saving the poor fellows trapped in that fiery furnace six hundred feet below ground.

The superintendent of the mine was calling for volunteer rescuers just as Hugh and Dan reached the shaft house. McClintock hid his shotgun under a pile of lumber and stepped forward. The cage was a double-decker. There was a rush of men to get on the lower floor. They knew well enough the danger that faced them, but it is a risk a brave miner is always willing to take for the lives of doomed companions.

"Hold on! Get back there. Don't crowd!" ordered the superintendent. "No married man can go. You, Finlay—and Trellawney—and Big Bill. That makes six. All right."

The lower compartment dropped and the second level was even with the ground. The superintendent stepped into the cage. Byers crowded in next. Budd, puffing hard, pushed close. With an elbow driven hard into his midriff Hugh thrust him back.

"Don't you hear? No married men wanted, Jim."

McClintock vaulted over the edge of the cage and dropped into it.

A big Ayrshire mucker shouted at the superintendent. "An' when did ye divorce your wife an' twa weans, boss?"

"I've got to go, Sandy. It's my job," the mine boss called back. "That's all. No room for more. Jam that gate shut."

The engineer moved a lever and the bucket dropped into the darkness. Every few seconds there was a flash of light as the cage passed a station. Except for that the darkness was dense.

Hugh heard some one beside him say, "I hear Dodson's caught in a drift."

Carstairs, the superintendent, answered. "Yes. Dutch is with him. They went to look at that new vein we struck yesterday."

No accident contains more terrible possibilities than a fire in a mine. Flame and gas pursue the trapped victims as they fly. Cut off from the shaft, buried hundreds of feet in the ground, the miners run the risk of being asphyxiated, burned, or blown up in an explosion of released gases.

The shaft, the drifts, the crosscuts, and the tunnels all act as flues to suck the flames into them. At Piodie, as at Virginia City, the danger was intensified by the great quantity of fuel with which these natural chimneys were lined. In the Katie Brackett whole forests were buried. Every drift and tunnel was braced with timbers. Scores of chutes, with vertical winzes, all made of wood, led from one level to another. The ore chambers were honeycombed with square sets of timber mortised together and wedged against the rock walls and roof. Upon each set floors of heavy planking were laid. In these were trapdoors, through which steps ran leading from the lower level to the one above.

The fire was in the north drift. Carstairs led the men forward cautiously. Already their eyes were inflamed from the smoke that rolled out at them. As they moved forward heat waves struck them. The rock walls were so hot that the rescuers could with difficulty keep going.

Hugh was at the nozzle of the hose they were dragging. He kept a stream playing on the rock and the charred timber. Presently he fell back, overcome by the intense heat, and Carstairs took his place. Byers succeeded the superintendent at the apex of the attack. Steam, sulphur fumes, and gas released from the minerals swept the

rescuers back. The air was so foul that the workers could not breathe it without collapsing. An air pipe was led in from the main blower above and the volunteers renewed their efforts.

At times the swirling smoke was too much for them. It either drove them to the shaft or it forced them to lie with their faces close to the ground where the air was purer. Farther down the tunnel they could see red tongues of flame licking at them. The roar of the fire as it leaped forward was far more appalling than that of any wild beast.

The faces of the firemen were smoke-blackened and grimy. Already several had collapsed from the intense heat. These were helped back to the shaft and sent up. Others came down to take their place. Hugh's eyebrows crisped from the heat. The men were all naked from the waist up. Below this they wore only cotton overalls and boots. These were licked to a char, thin and fragile as paper. The skin peeled from Hugh's body in flakes where anything touched it.

From above came an ominous sound.

"Back," ordered Carstairs.

The roof came down, an avalanche of dirt and rock and timber. So close was McClintock to it that the air shock almost knocked him down. Before the dust had settled Carstairs sent his sappers at the job of clearing out and timbering the tunnel.

Steadily the rescuers gained ground. Every few minutes they relayed each other. Each man knew that his position was one of great danger. The fire might reach the shaft and cut them off from above. A cave of rock might release gases which might kill either by explosion or asphyxiation. A change of draft might fling a great tongue of fire at them and wipe the whole party out in a few seconds. Yet the work went on, hour after hour, steadily and without ceasing. For somewhere in one of the crosscuts which they were approaching a group of haggard, anxious men were awaiting rescue, unless the fire had already snuffed out their lives.

"The crosscut's just ahead," Carstairs announced.

Byers was at the nozzle. The little man had stuck it out gamely. Only four of the original party were still working. The others had been relieved and sent to the surface.

McClintock had just returned from the shaft where he had been with a man overcome by the heat. He was for the moment the freshest man in the group.

"Two volunteers to search the crosscut while the rest hold back the fire," called Carstairs.

"I'll go," said a Maine lumberjack.

"Same here," added Hugh.

They waited, watching for a chance to plunge into the side tunnel when the fire was momentarily low.

"Now," said McClintock, and he dived at the opening in the wall.

The lumberjack followed him. So intense was the heat at the entrance to the crosscut that a little pool of water on the rock floor was boiling angrily. As they pushed deeper into it the heat decreased.

Hugh shouted. A voice answered his call. He moved forward and presently stumbled over a body.

"How many in here?" he asked.

"Eleven."

"Where are the others?"

"Dead," came the answer. "Cut off by fire damp before we reached the crosscut."

"All of you able to travel?"

"Yes."

Hugh heard the sound of footsteps stumbling toward him. Men came abreast of him and went past. He counted them—eleven. Then he stooped and picked up the body at his feet. In another minute he was staggering into the drift with his burden. The fire fighters fell back past the charred timbers and the hot rocks of the wall.

"You're through, boys," Carstairs said. "I'll send a fresh crew in to blast down the mouth of the drift and build a bulkhead against the fire. Then we'll close the shaft and let 'er die down for lack of air."

The first thing Hugh did when he reached the foot of the shaft was to find the revolver he had hidden beneath a car; the next was to look over the rescued men for the one he wanted. He found him, standing beside Robert Dodson close to the cage. The mine owner was sobbing with the strain he had undergone. His nerve had gone. The big, hulking figure at his back was Sam Dutch.

Hugh kept in the background. He did not want to be recognized just yet. Meanwhile he slipped into his trousers, shirt, and coat. In the pocket of his coat was something that jingled when he accidentally touched the wall.

The rescued men were in much better condition than the ones who had fought the fire to save them. They had reached the precarious safety of the crosscut in time to

avail themselves of its comparatively fresh air. The volunteers were worn out, fagged, and burned to a toast. Some of them had inhaled gases and smoke that would enfeeble their lungs for months. They moved like automatons, their energy gone, their strength exhausted.

The cage came down and the men began to pile in. Hugh was standing close behind a huge man whom his eyes never left. He pushed into the lower level of the cage after him.

The car shot upward. Hugh drew something from his pocket. In the darkness his hand moved gently to and fro. It found what it was seeking. There was a click, a second click, a furious raucous oath of rage like the bellow of an enraged bull elephant. Hugh had slipped handcuffs on the thick wrists of Dutch and locked them.

His thumb jammed hard into the spine of the desperado. "Don't take chances, Mr. Dutch," he whispered. "This gun's liable to go off sudden."

The car rose into the fresh daylight of the young morning.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### "AS GOOD AS THE WHEAT."

Through the crowd at the mouth of the mine word flashed that the cage was coming up. All night they had waited there, the wives and children of the imprisoned miners, the residents of Piodie who knew one or another of the men caught in the raging inferno below. The women and the little ones had wept themselves dry of tears long since. They stood now with taut nerves, eyes glued to the cage as it swept into sight.

Some one started a cheer as the first of the rescued men stepped out to the platform. A wail of anguish rose above it and killed the cheer. It came from a young wife with a shawl over her head. She had asked a question of one of the men and learned that her husband was dead. A woman gave a sob of joy and fell into the arms of a grimy "Cousin Jack." Another caught a glimpse of her husband's face and fainted. In the excitement two men pushed through the crowd toward a pile of lumber. The one in front moved with sullen reluctance. Only the pressure against his back kept him going. Nobody noticed that he was handcuffed.

From underneath the lumber pile the second man drew a sawed-off shotgun.

"We'll be movin' down to town," he told his captive.

Dutch shouted one word, "Dodson."

The mine owner swung round, and at the first glance understood the situation. He turned pale and stepped behind Carstairs. Not for a moment did he doubt that McClintock had come to kill Dutch. Would he make a clean sweep of it and shoot him, too? Convicted of guilt, he crouched behind his superintendent shaking like an aspen.

"Don't let him kill me," he begged.

Hugh spoke, his voice cold and hard. "I'm not or the shoot to-day, Dodson—unless you force my hand, you black-hearted murderer. I'm here to take Dutch back to Carson with me. The yellow wolf shot my brother in the back."

"No such thing. I got him in a fair fight," blustered Dutch. "An' I ain't goin' to Carson with you, either."

"You're going, *dead or alive*." McClintock's face and voice were as inexorable as the day of judgment.

"He's aimin' to take me there to be killed," Dutch cried out. "You boys won't stand for that." He named two or three of the men with whom he consorted, picking them out of the crowd.

"Sure we won't." A gunman stepped forward briskly. "You can't put that over here, McClintock. You don't own this camp, an' you can't play chief here."

Two men lined up with Hugh, one on each side of him. The man on his right was a whale of a fat man. Deftly he slid McClintock's revolver from its holster. The second ally was a small, wiry fellow. From a grimy, blackened face keen eyes peered intently.

The fat man spoke. "Don't run on the rope, Sloan. We're with the kid on this. He's a deputy sheriff, an' it'll sure be 'Let's gather at the river' for some of you anxious gents if you overplay yore hand."

Sloan hesitated. He could not very well look round to see whether the gang of which he was one were present in numbers and, if so, whether they would support him. He knew these three men of old. They belonged to the Pony Express outfit, as hard riding and fast shooting a group of men as the West has known. It was certain that Dutch could not be rescued without a fight, and

Sloan was hardly in a position to call for a show-down. He was game enough. With McClintock alone he would have taken a chance. But the three of them were too many for him.

The sheriff of the county saved his face. He hustled forward.

"Tut, tut! What's all this?" he asked fussily. "There's good law in this town, lots of it. No need of gun plays. If Mr. Dutch is wanted, there's a right an' proper way to get him, but that way ain't at the point of a gun."

"McClintock's a deputy sheriff," put in Budd.

There was rivalry between him and the sheriff. Budd was a candidate against the incumbent for the party nomination at the coming primaries. The wise politicians admitted that, even with the Dodsons against him, the fat man had a chance.

"You'd oughta know better'n that, Budd, an' you a candidate for sheriff," the officer reproved. "Say he is a deputy. He can't go covortin' round all over Nevada, California, and Utah arrestin' any one he's a mind to. Where's his warrant? Why'n he come to me with it like a reasonable man would—that is, if he's got one."

With his left hand Hugh felt in his pocket and produced a warrant. He handed it to the sheriff. That gentleman ran his eye over it. He returned it.

"Good only in Ormsby County," he snapped. "What arrestin' is done here I do—leastways at present," he added with a sarcastic grin at Budd.

The fat man was caught. He knew nothing about the technicalities of arrests. What the sheriff said might or might not be true. He tried a bluff.

"This here's an extra-territorial warrant that runs ex-judicio," he explained largely.

"That so?" asked the sheriff ironically. "Well, it sure don't hold water here. Bad men can't get on the prod with me. No, sirree!"

The cage had descended to bring up a second load of miners. Meanwhile, the interest of the crowd centered on the dispute that had arisen. Those on the outskirts pressed forward, eager to hear what was being said. Sloan had fallen back and was whispering in the ears of a few choice spirits.

Hugh spoke out straight and strong. His words were not for the sheriff, but for the judgment of the unbiased public.

"I came here as an officer with a warrant to get this man. Three days ago he shot down from behind the best man in Nevada, Scot McClintock. Most of you know my brother, a first-class citizen and soldier. He ran this scalawag out of Virginia, and he made the mistake of not killin' him right then. I've made that same mistake myself three times. Yet yore sheriff says I'm a bad man, because I come here to arrest a fifteen-times murderer. How about that, boys?"

The crowd was with Hugh at once. The Dodsons controlled the camp. A good many of these men were dependent upon them financially. But even Ralph Dodson was hardly popular. As for Dutch, their camp bully, everybody feared him and nobody trusted him. He was so confirmed a gunman that at any moment while in drink he might slay any of them.

The sheriff had not volunteered to go down into the mine with one of the rescue parties; nor had Sloan or any of his cronies. But this young fellow with the fire-blackened face and hands, whose haggard eyes looked out with such quiet, grim resolution, had gone into that hell below to save their friends. Byers, the man on his left, had been another of the rescuers. The fat man had volunteered three times and been rejected.

"His warrant goes in Piodie," some one shouted.

"Sure does," echoed another voice.

"Not on yore tintype," retorted the sheriff. "Ormsby County don't run our affairs. Not none."

The Maine lumberjack lined up beside Hugh, an ax haft in his hand. He had observed that Dodson and Sloan were gathering the camp toughs for a rescue.

"His warrant's good with me—good as the wheat," the big woodsman said. "He made it good, boys, when he stood up to that hose nozzle down below and stuck there while he baked. He made it good again when he went in to the crosscut where our friends were trapped."

Sloan and his friends moved forward. One of them spoke to the sheriff. "If you want to swear in some deputies to enforce the law, Dick, why we're right here handy."

From out of the crowd a girl darted, light as a deer. She stood directly in front of Hugh, face to face with the gunmen of the camp. A warm color breathed in her cheeks. Her dark eyes flashed with indignation.

"Don't you touch him. Don't you dare touch him," she cried. "It was my brother this—this villain killed. He *did* shoot him from behind. I've had a letter. It was murder."

A murmur of resentment passed like a wave through the crowd. They knew the slim, young school-teacher told the truth.

"Don't I know?" she went on ardently, beautiful as a flaming flower in her young unconsciousness of self. "Wasn't I there when he tried to kill Hugh here—and Hugh frozen from the blizzard so that he couldn't lift a hand to help himself? Oh, he's—he's a terrible man."

"He is that," an Irishwoman's voice lifted. "But glory be there's wan man not afraid to comb his whiskers for him. An' it's a brave colleen y're are to spake up for your young man like that."

A roar of approval went up into the air. Men surged forward, and women, too, to express their gratitude by standing between this young man and the Dodson faction. Vicky, rosy with embarrassment, vanished in the crowd.

"I reckon you don't get a chance to use yore scatter gun this trip," Budd said with a grin. "Prospects look bilious for this killer you got rounded up. Sure do. I never did see such a son of a gun as you, kid. Me, I'd 'a' bet an ounce of gold against a dollar Mex you never would 'a' walked into Piodie an' took Sam Dutch out. But that there miracle is what you're gonna pull off, looks like."

"Went right down into the Katie Brackett after him," chuckled Byers. "Brought him from that hell hole with the cuffs on him."

"Sho! It's you boys that helped me out," said Hugh. "And I haven't got him to Carson yet, anyhow. Sloan won't give up without makin' a try to get Dutch from me."

Evidently the gunmen knew better than to challenge public opinion at present. They drew off to the mine boarding house and left Hugh free to return to Piodie with his prisoner.

McClintock thanked the lumberjack and others who had come to his aid and started down the gulch, accompanied by a straggling guard of townspeople returning to their homes for breakfast after a long and anxious night.

Dutch shambled in front of him through the sage. After a period of violent cursing

he had fallen into a savage and vindictive silence. He, too, believed that his allies would not desert him without a fight.

Beneath the superficial needs of the moment Hugh's thoughts were all of Vicky. He had all the average healthy man's reluctance at being defended by a woman, but deeper than this was his admiration for the spirit of the girl. He had never seen anything lovelier, more challenging, than the slender girl glowing with passionate indignation on his behalf. She had looked like Joan of Arc in shining armor.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### VICKY FINDS A WAY.

Vicky, in her bedroom at Mrs. Budd's, flogged herself with a whip of scorn. She had acted on imperative impulse, just as she used to do when she was a little girl. Her cheeks flamed again when she recalled what the Irishwoman had said. Of course! Everybody would think she had done it because she was in love with Hugh McClintock.

Savagely she mocked her own heroics. She had behaved ridiculously. There was no excuse for her at all. Probably Hugh, too, was laughing at her or else flattering himself that he had made a conquest. Her pride rebelled. And yet—when she saw again in imagination the group of gunmen under Sloan moving forward to attack, she knew that she would probably do the same thing a second time, given the same circumstances.

Mrs. Budd knocked on the door. "Breakfast ready, deary."

Miss Lowell became aware suddenly that she was very hungry. But she did not want to meet Jim Budd. He would probably start teasing her, and if he did she would certainly lose her temper. She fibbed.

"I'm not hungry yet. If you don't mind, I'll come down and get a bite out of the pantry later."

"Mr. McClintock is here. He wants to thank you," the landlady said gently.

Hugh McClintock was the last man in the world that Vicky wanted to see just now, but she would not for a month's salary have let him know it.

"He needn't trouble, I'm sure," she said carelessly. "But I'll be down presently."

She came to breakfast stormy-eyed. Hugh rose to meet her from his seat next the door. He offered his hand. For a fraction of a

second she looked at it, apparently surprised. It was as though she said, a little disdainfully, "What's the use of all this fuss about nothing?" Then her hand met his.

He said, in a low voice, "Old dog Tray's mighty grateful, Vicky."

But he spoke with a smile, words unstressed. She drew a breath of relief. Hugh understood, anyhow. He was not imagining any foolishness.

"Oh, I didn't want them to take that villain from you," she explained. "I'll not be satisfied till he's hanged. What have you heard about Scot?"

"A telegram last night and one this morning. He's still holding his own, the doctors say. But they're not hopeful. One of the bullets went into his intestines."

Tears brimmed her eyes. "Isn't it dreadful—when people are happy, like Scot and Mollie, that—"

He nodded, his throat tightening.

"Don't let these buckwheats get cold," Mrs. Budd said cheerfully, bustling in with a hot plateful.

Jim Budd was sitting in the kitchen guarding the prisoner, but Byers, Hugh, and Vicky, with an occasional word from Mrs. Budd, discussed plans for getting Dutch to Carson.

Both Hugh and Byers were exhausted. The night through which they had just come had been a terrible one. Their bodies, from which the skin peeled in flakes at several points of contact with their clothes, were a torment to them. Eyebrows, eyelashes, and some of the front hair had crisped away. The faces of both of them were fire-red, and from sunken sockets blear-eyed old age gazed listlessly. They needed sleep certainly, medical attention possibly.

The girl's dark eyes softened as she looked at them. They had fought a good fight, just as a matter of course and all in the day's work. She had been down a mine. Her imagination filled in the horrors of the fearful hours in that hell's caldron from which they had at last dragged the imprisoned miners.

"Let me send for Doctor Rogers," she said gently.

"You feelin' sick, Vicky?" Hugh asked with a flare of humor.

"I mean, to look at you and Mr. Byers"

"We ain't much to look at right now. I expect he'd rather see us some time when

we're not so dog tired. Find us more entertainin'?"

"Then you'd better go upstairs and sleep. Mr. Budd says he'll watch your prisoner till night."

"And what then?" asked Hugh. "We can't just saddle up and hit the trail for Carson. Never in the world get there. By this time they've wired to Ralph Dodson. He's on the job at the other end of the line."

"What makes you think so?" Vicky asked.

"Because Bob Dodson hired Dutch to shoot Scot. He showed it when he lit out with him in the middle of the night. Dodson has got to stand by Dutch to keep him from telling all he knows. He's sure sent a hurry-up call for help to brother Ralph. Their play is to prevent me from reaching Carson with Dutch a prisoner. Once there, with feeling in the town high against him, the killer would be liable to tell who was back of the shooting. He'd do it out of revenge because he had not been rescued."

"I can telegraph to Carson for help and have friends come and meet you."

"That would mean a pitched battle. Can't have that."

"Oh, well, you go to bed and sleep," Vicky said imperatively. "We can decide later about how you're going to reach Carson."

Hugh nodded. "You'll have me wakened if any word comes about Scot?"

"Of course."

Within a few minutes both men, and Dutch, too, were sound asleep. It was late in the afternoon when Mrs. Budd knocked on Hugh's door to awaken him.

He found Vicky waiting for him in the sitting room.

"You look better," she said.

"I feel a hundred years younger," he answered. "Any news about Scot?"

"No."

"I'll leave to-night. Can't stay away any longer."

"Yes. That would be best."

"Is the house watched?"

"Yes."

"Can't help it. I'll go soon as I've eaten."

"I'm going, too," she told him. "I ought to be with Mollie."

"You come to-morrow—not to-day. There may be trouble."

"No, there won't be any trouble—and I'm going with you," she answered. There

was a queer little smile on her face, a smile of friendly mockery.

"I'm not going alone, you know," he explained. "Dutch travels with me."

"Then there'll be three of us." She stepped to the kitchen door, but before she opened it mirth bubbled in her face and broke to laughter. "Come in, Mr. Dutch. We start on a long journey about dusk."

Dutch shuffled into the room—at least the man was Dutch in walk, in manner, dress, and beard. Hugh looked at him again, and still a third time, before he discovered that this was Jim Budd made up for the part of the desperado.

The young man's puzzled eyes asked a question of Vicky.

"We three are going after supper," she explained. "Their lookout is over at Schmidt's blacksmith shop. Mr. Budd will seem to have his hands tied. Of course he'll think it's your prisoner."

"If Jim doesn't begin to tell him all about old Grimes," McClintock said dryly.

"Yes, you mustn't sing, Mr. Budd. You know there aren't many voices like yours," the girl replied, laughing. "The lookout'll notify his friends, and they'll follow us. Probably they'll telegraph ahead that we're coming. Very likely a welcome party will come to meet us. By that time Mr. Budd will be Mr. Budd, and somebody will be sold."

"Good enough," agreed Hugh. "But haven't you forgot one small detail? The real Dutch has got to go to Carson. That's what I came here for—to get him."

"He'll go. As soon as the sheriff's posse has clattered past after us Mr. Byers and your prisoner will take a very quiet walk up the gulch and round Bald Knob. Horses are waiting there somewhere; I don't know just where. Your friend the lumberjack with the ax handle took them. He and Mr. Byers will ride across the hills with the prisoner to Carson."

Hugh looked at the eager vital girl with frank admiration. "You're a wonder, Vicky, one sure-enough whirlwind when you get going. Sounds reasonable—if Dodson's crowd let us get goin' as you figure they will. But you can't tell. They may stop us right when we start up the cañon. Then they'll know Jim here isn't Dutch—and the fat will certainly be in the fire."

"No, Hugh, we've had a message from a friend in the enemy's camp."

"Yes?"

"From Irish Tom."

"Carberry?"

"Yes. At least we think it's from him. One of my little boys brought me a note. Here it is."

Hugh read the words scribbled on a sheet of torn note paper:

Tell McClintock to look out for trouble near Bell's Camp. He'll be caught between two fires if he tries to take Dutch with him.

A FRIEND.

"What makes you think Carberry wrote this?" asked Hugh.

"Ned described the man who gave it to him," Budd explained. "He's sure a ringer for Carberry—even to that red shirt he wears."

"Might be Tom," agreed Hugh. "My vote saved his life from the vigilantes at Aurora. Tom's not such a bad sort."

"You see we're safe till we reach Bell's Camp," interpreted Vicky. "The sheriff and the gunmen he appoints as deputies will follow behind us and we'll be driven into the arms of those who come to meet us. That's the plan."

"Yes—if Irish Tom wrote this, and it's not a trap."

"Oh, well, beggars can't be choosers," she cried impatiently. "I don't suppose you have a better way to suggest."

"Only in one particular, Vicky. No need of you going. There might be shooting."

"Fiddlesticks! There won't be, not if I'm there. Think I don't know Ralph Dodson?"

Budd came unexpectedly to her aid. "Miss Lowell's sure right, Hugh. You *know* if she's with us there won't be no gun play."

Hugh hesitated. What his friends said was true enough. The West, even at its worst, was very careful of its good women. No weapons would be used in the presence of Victoria Lowell. But there was in him an extreme reluctance to use her skirts as a protection behind which to hide. He wanted to play his own hand and take Dutch out openly in the face of opposition.

Yet he knew this was not possible. Vicky had worked out a feasible plan of operations. It was only fair to give it a try-out.

"All right," he conceded rather ungraciously. "Have it yore own way, good people. Vicky, you're road boss of this outfit. Go to it. When do we start, did you say?"

Vicky dimpled with delight. "Right after supper."

## CHAPTER XXX.

AT BELL'S CAMP.

A boy rode up the street leading two saddled horses. He stopped in front of the Budd house, from which three persons emerged in answer to his shrill whistle. The lookout in the shadow of Schmidt's blacksmith shop leaned forward to peer into the failing light. First came a huge shambling man, hairy and bearded, his hands tied together in front of him. At his heels walked a straight, lithe figure recognized instantly by the watcher as McClintock. The deputy carried a revolver. A young woman in riding dress brought up the rear.

McClintock handed his revolver to the lady after he had helped her mount. He adjusted the stirrups of all the saddles. To the watcher up the street it seemed that all his movements were hurried and furtive. Plainly the travelers wanted to be gone. No sooner had they started into the cañon than the lookout was off to make his report. Inside of five minutes a party of four horsemen swung round the bend of the road into the gorge.

Half a mile up the cañon Hugh stopped to free Budd's hands. This done, he waited a moment to listen. On the night breeze came faintly the ring of a horse's hoof on granite.

"Our anxious friends aren't losin' any time," he said, grinning.

"You're damn right!" agreed Budd. "Beg pardon, ma'am. I done forgot you was here. I meant to say he was dog-goned right."

From the cañon they emerged into a rough country of basaltic rocks twisted and misshapen. Once a rabbit scurried from almost under the feet of Vicky's horse. The scent of the sage was strong in her nostrils and the taste of alkali in her throat.

But the girl was happy. This night ride, with her face against the wind and the eternal stars above, made the blood in her body sing. She vibrated with excitement. The rapid motion, the knowledge of the armed pursuit, the touch of peril in the situation, appealed to all the adventure zest in her heart. As they rode knee to knee through the darkness the movements of the horses occasionally pushed her and Hugh into contact. A new delightful thrill flamed through her. Shyly she looked at him and was glad of the night. Her eyes were too bright and her cheeks too hot to be seen even by old dog Tray.

Old dog Tray! She knew the metaphor was inept. Jim Budd, now, was a good old dog Tray. But not this light-stepping young Apolio who somehow contrived to be the partner of all the dramatic moments in her life. She would never forget him as he had faced Sloan and his gang at the mouth of the pit from which he had come with all the anguish of the night written on his face. There had been something indomitable in his gesture, a spark in the sunken eye struck from the soul of a man quite sure of himself. Vicky knew—and knew it with a strange reluctant dread—that her feelings would insist on a retrial of the case of Hugh McClintock at the bar of her judgment. Vaguely she divined that the true romance is not of outward trappings but straight from the heart of life.

The miles of their journey stole the hours. It was far past midnight when Hugh turned to Vicky with a smile not free from anxiety.

"Bell's Camp just ahead," he said. "Don't make any mistake. When we're ordered to halt, all our hands go straight up in the air."

He wished now that he had not let the girl come with them. It had been easy enough to reason in the light of day that she would be quite safe. But Dodson did not know she was in the party. Suppose some one got excited and fired in the darkness. Hugh's imagination began to conjure disaster. But the affair worked out quite simply. From behind rocks on both sides of the road men rose suddenly and covered the party with rifles.

"Stick 'em up. Reach for the sky," a voice ordered curtly.

Six hands went up instantly, almost as though they had been waiting for the cue.

"You may pull yours down, Dutch," the voice went on.

Hugh spoke suavely. "Must be some mistake, gentlemen. Mr. Dutch isn't with us."

"Not with you. What's the use of lying? Speak up, Dutch."

"If you're meanin' me, my name's Budd—Jim Budd, from Piodie," spoke up the fat man.

The challenger stepped close and stared up at his face. "Where's Dutch? What have you done with him?" he demanded.

"Why, we left him at Piodie. The sheriff didn't want us to bring him," Budd said with bland innocence, grinning down at his

questioner. "Is this here a holdup, or what?"

"One of 'em's a girl," cried another of the armed men in sharp surprise.

"A girl!"

Vicky spoke now. "Isn't that Mr. Dodson—Mr. Ralph Dodson?" she asked quietly.

"Miss Lowell! What are you doing here?"

"I might ask that about you, Mr. Dodson," she retorted. "I'm going with Mr. McClintock and Mr. Budd to Carson. Haven't you heard that two ruffians tried to murder Colonel McClintock?" Her voice rang out like a bell. It accused him, if not of conspiracy to murder, at least of aiding and abetting the escape of the murderer.

After just an instant's hesitation Dodson spoke gravely. "Yes, I've heard, Miss Lowell. Believe me, I have been greatly distressed. If there's anything I can do—"

"You can help us bring to justice the desperado who escaped," she cried hotly.

Dodson chose his words with care. He knew they were likely to be reported by some of his men to the gang at Piodie. "If some one got into a quarrel with Colonel McClintock and—"

"They didn't get into a quarrel with him," Vicky flung out indignantly. "They crept up behind him and shot him down while he wasn't looking. Even rattlesnakes give warning. These reptiles didn't."

"I really don't know the facts, Miss Lowell. But if you're correctly informed—"

"Oh, if—if—if," exploded the girl. "Just words. The attack on Scot was the most dastardly, cowardly, cruel thing I ever heard of. The men who did it and those who had it done are as bad as red Indians." Her eyes stabbed into him. They were filled with the passionate intolerance of youth.

"Well, I can't talk about that, because I don't know anything about it," Dodson said, his surface smile working. "We're here under orders from the sheriff at Piodie. He sent us word that some one was attempting illegally to abduct Sam Dutch. There seems to be some mistake."

"So that it remains for you to apologize for having drawn guns on us," Vicky said tartly. "Then we'll move on."

Dodson flushed. "I'm certainly sorry if we alarmed you, Miss Lowell. Under the circumstances it couldn't be helped. If we had known you were out riding with friends —" He stopped, leaving his sarcastic sentence suspended in air.

"Much obliged, Mr. Dodson," she answered angrily. "I suppose you felt you had to say that pleasant farewell remark. I wouldn't be out riding with friends at this time of night, as you would have put it, if your friends hadn't laid in wait to kill my brother Thursday evening."

Hugh spoke, quietly and evenly. "We'll say good night, Mr. Dodson, that is if you're quite satisfied we're not concealing Mr. Dutch about our persons."

Dodson fell back with a wave of his hand. The rifles were lowered. In a moment the travelers were on their way. The mine owner looked after them with a frown on his brow. He was not satisfied. He believed he had been tricked, but for the life of him he could not tell how.

Budd was the first of the three to speak. "You got us out of that fine, Miss Lowell. Had him busy explainin' whyfor the whole time."

But Vicky was not willing to leave the case as it stood. She was annoyed at herself. Yet her judgment defended her course.

"I acted like a vixen," she said. "But I wanted to put him on the defense. The easiest way to meet an attack is to attack first, Scot once told me. So I tried to ride roughshod over him so that he wouldn't dare take us back to Piodie with him."

"He couldn't fight Miss Victoria Lowell," Hugh told her, smiling. "If it hadn't been for you, he ce'tainly would have taken us to Piodie. But you had him right. He couldn't do a thing but let us go. We're much obliged to you."

Presently, out of the darkness, while Budd was riding a few yards ahead of them, Vicky's voice came with unwonted humility.

"You were right, Hugh, and I was wrong. I heard something about him the other day. Mrs. Budd told me, and it came direct. No matter what it was, but—I don't want to be friends with him any more."

Hugh's heart lifted, but all he said was, "I'm glad, Vicky."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### HUGH TAKES THE STUMP.

They found Scot still defying the predictions of the doctors by hanging on to the thread of life that tied him to this world. He was asleep when the travelers arrived. Within a few minutes Hugh was in the saddle

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again and on the way to meet Byers and his prisoner. Before morning they had Dutch behind bars in the Carson jail.

When Hugh tiptoed in to see Scot a second time, the wounded man smiled at him reproachfully. The colonel's hand slid weakly along the bedspread to meet his brother's brown palm.

"Glad you're back safe," he said in a low voice.

"We brought Dutch along," Hugh said by way of explaining his absence.

A faint flash of amusement lit the drawn face. "Buck much, did he?"

"Oh, he reckoned he wouldn't come along. Then he reckoned he would."

Scot asked a question. "What have you been parboiling your face for?"

"Got caught in a mine fire. How are you feelin', Scot?"

"Fine and dandy," murmured the older brother indomitably. "Mollie's spoiling me. Everybody's mighty good. When I don't feel so trifling I'll say thank you proper."

Mollie kissed him and said gently, "Now you've talked enough."

Business, much neglected of late, called Hugh to Virginia City. But every two or three days he ran back to Carson for a few hours. The doctors became more hopeful. The great vitality of their patient was beginning to triumph over the shock his system had endured.

Meanwhile Scot's political campaign had died down. If the Dodsons had been willing to let it alone, Ralph would probably have been nominated without opposition. But this was just what they could not do. They knew themselves that they had played a poor part in the contest with the McClintocks, and they were afraid that Nevada's private judgment would be the same.

Sinister whispers passed from mouth to mouth. They found a discreet echo in the newspapers friendly to the Dodson candidacy. Scot McClintock had broken up the home of Robert Dodson. He belonged to Nevada's past and not her present. The disgraceful affair at Carson showed him to be a desperate man, in the same class as the men Hopkins and Dutch. This was hinted in veiled language and not openly charged by the press.

It was at the *Maison Borget*, as good a French restaurant as could be found between New York and San Francisco, that

Hugh first learned of these rumors. He had been too busy to read any newspaper except a local one.

Senator Stewart, seated alone at a small side table, called to him. The young man took the place opposite him.

"How's the colonel?" asked the senator.

"He's not out of danger, but we think he's gaining."

"Fine. Glad to hear it. What about his campaign?"

"It seems to have dropped by the wayside, senator."

The big man stroked his long, yellow beard. "Pity. I'd like to see him win. With these stories going around—"

"What stories?"

The senator told him. He ended with a startling question.

"Why don't you take the stump and answer the lies, Hugh?"

"Me. I'm no orator."

"None needed. You can talk straight, can't you? Call a lie a lie?"

"I reckon. But it's a game I don't savvy, senator."

"Just hit out hard from the shoulder. Talk right out for Scot as though you were with two or three friends. Carry the war into the enemy's camp. Show how they've stacked the cards against your brother."

McClintock's eyes blazed. "I'll do it, senator. I'll give Scot a run for his white alley yet."

He did. To every camp and town in the State he fared forth and told the story. He told it at mine shafts, in saloons, around hotel stoves, and in public meetings called for that purpose. Much to his surprise he developed a capacity for public speaking. His strength lay in the direct, forceful simplicity of what he said. He was so manifestly a sincere and honest champion that men accepted at face value what he said.

At one town Captain Palmer, who had organized the Aurora vigilance committee, introduced him in characteristic fashion.

"You see the big head on his broad shoulders. It's up to you to decide whether there's anything in it," he said bluntly.

Hugh plunged straight at his subject.

"I'm here to speak for a man who lies at Carson wounded by three bullets from the revolvers of two murderers. I'm here to answer the whispers set going by the men who profit most by that attempted assas-

sination, men who would never have the courage to say any of these things face to face with Colonel McClintock."

He reviewed his brother's life and tried to interpret it.

"They say he was a gambler. So he was, at a time when nine-tenths of the men in this State gambled hard and often. But they can't say he wasn't a straight gambler. There never was a crooked hair in the head of Scot McClintock. Everybody knows that."

Without gloves he took up the charge that Scot had broken up Robert Dodson's home. He showed that Dodson was a drunken ne'er-do-well who had smothered his own baby and had afterward been rescued from a mob of lynchers by McClintock; that he was a wife beater and a loafer who by chance had later stumbled into a fortune, a man always without honor or principle.

"It was this same man who rode out of Carson at breakneck speed fifteen minutes after my brother had been shot down from behind—rode with the red-handed murderer, Sam Dutch. It was this man and his brother Ralph Dodson who tried to keep me and my friends from bringing Dutch back to Carson as a prisoner.

"From the beginning of this campaign they have smeared mud on the reputation of Scot. Even now, when he lies at the point of death at the hands of their hired killers, they go about hissing poisonous lies. The record of Scot McClintock is an open book. You know all his faults. They are exposed frankly to all men's eyes. If he was wild, at least his wildness was never secret. It was a part of his gay and open-hearted youth."

Hugh passed to his later years, to his brilliant career as a soldier and to his public services as a citizen since the close of the war. He named Scot's qualifications for the office he sought and concluded with an appeal for justice in the form of a vindication.

Nevada was young. It understood men like the McClintocks and it liked them. Ralph Dodson was of a type it neither knew nor wanted to know. The verdict was unmistakable. The political bosses gave way to the public demand and Scot McClintock was nominated on the first ballot by a large majority.

Hugh took the Carson stage to carry his brother the news.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## FATHER MARSTON PROPHESIES.

Sulky, morose, sluggish as a saurian, Dutch lay in his cell and waited for deliverance. The weeks passed. The Dodsons sent him word to say nothing, that when the time came they would set him free. He suspected them, as he suspected everybody. If they failed him he meant to betray them. But the time had not come for that yet.

As he grew weary of confinement, his restlessness found vent in a plan of escape. From his boot he worked the tin piece used as a stiffener for the leg. With this as a tool and a piece of a broken bed slat as material he began to shape a wooden pistol. He worked only when he knew he would be alone. The shavings that came in thin slivers from the pine he hid in the mattress upon which he slept. When the weapon was finished he rubbed it with lampblack till it took, in a measure, the color of steel.

It was in the man's temperament to be patient as an Apache when he found it to his advantage. He waited for his chance and found it when the jailer made his round one evening to see that all was secure. The moonlight was shining through the barred window on the bed in checkered squares of light. Dutch was pacing up and down his cell when the guard appeared. He moved forward to the door.

"Gimme a chew, Hank," he said ingratiatingly.

The killer was a sullen and vindictive prisoner. The jailer had tried to placate him, for, now that Scot McClintock was getting better, it would be only a question of time till Dutch would again be loose on the world.

"Sure, Sam."

The jailer dived into his right hip pocket, found a plug of tobacco, and handed it through the grating to his prisoner.

Dutch caught the man's wrist and twisted it down against the iron bar of the lattice. Simultaneously a pistol barrel gleamed through the opening.

"Gimme yore six-shooter! Now, unlock the door. Let out a squawk an' I'll pump lead into you."

The jailer obeyed orders. Dutch hustled him into the cell, then tied and gagged him. He took the keys, went downstairs, unlocked the outer door, and walked into the night a free man. He stood for a moment at the door hesitating. Which way should he go?

The first thing was to get a horse at some stable. That would be easy enough. All he had to do was to go in and ask for it. But should he go back to Piodie, try Virginia City, or cut across the Sierras to California and say good-by to Nevada?

Before he had made up his mind which road to take his thoughts were deflected into another channel. A young woman passed on the other side of the street. He recognized her immediately. The light, resilient step, the gallant poise of the slender body, identified their owner as Victoria Lowell. He was sure of it, even before the moonlight fell full upon her profile.

His eyes lit with a cunning tigerish malice. Softly he padded down the street after her. There was in his mind no clear idea of what he meant to do. But he was a born bully. She was alone. He could torment her to his heart's content. He moved faster, came abreast of her after she had turned into a dark side street. His step kept pace with hers. She looked up to see who her companion was. A gasp of surprise broke from her throat.

His grin was a leer, hideous and menacing. "How are you, m' dear? Didn't expect to meet up with old Sam, did you? But tickled—plumb tickled to death to see him!"

Involuntarily she quickened her step. His arm shot out and his great hand closed on her wrist. A shriek welled up inside her, but she smothered it unvoiced. The shudder that ran through her body she could not control.

He purred on. "Came to meet old Sam soon as he got out. Had to see him right away, didn't you? Couldn't wait a minute."

With a twist of her forearm she tried to break away. His rough fingers crushed deeper into her soft flesh.

"You in a hurry, sweetheart?" he went on, and his heavy body shook with unholy mirth. "Afraid of old Sam's winnin' ways? Don't like to trust yore feelin's with them, I reckon."

"Let me go," she ordered, and her voice shook.

Instantly his mood changed. He thrust his hairy gorillalike head close to hers. "When I get good an' ready, missie. Think you can boss Sam Dutch, do you? Think I've forgot how you shot me onct, when I took you in outa the storm? Think I care for yore crybaby ways? You'll do jest like I say."

"I'm going home. Don't you dare stop me." She could not make her quavering voice quite as confident as she would have liked.

"Home. So you're going home?" His slow thoughts struck another tangent. "Good enough. I'll trail along an' see you get there safe, missie. Like to say 'How-d'yedo?' to Colonel McClintock while I'm there." His teeth uncovered in a snarl of rage.

Vicky's fears for herself fled, swallowed up in the horror of a picture struck to life by her imagination. She saw Scot lying helpless on his bed with this ruffian gloating over him. A flash of memory carried her back to another scene. This time it was Hugh who lay at the ruffian's mercy—Hugh spent and all but senseless, his muscles paralyzed by the cold of the blizzard that raged outside.

A week before this Scot had been moved from the hotel to a small private house put at the family's disposal by friends who were temporarily in California. He and Mollie would be alone. She dared not lead the killer to the house. What ought she to do?

The killer now knew what was the first thing he meant to do. He would go and finish the job he had left undone some weeks earlier.

"Home it is, m' dear. Hotfoot it. I got no time to waste. Where do you live?"

Her thoughts flew. Since he did not know where the house was she could mark time at least. They were close to a corner. She turned to the right.

"This way," she said, and led him away from the house where Scot was lying in bed.

He shuffled beside her, still holding fast to her wrist. His presence was repugnant to her. The touch of his flesh made hers creep.

"You're hurting me. Why don't you let me go? I'll not run away," she promised.

"I know you'll not—if you don't git a chance, sweetie." His fangs showed again in an evil grin. "If I hurt you some, it ain't a circumstance to the way you hurt me onct. I ain't aimin' to let you play me no tricks like you done then."

They came to a house, set a little back from the road in a young orchard. Victoria opened the gate and they walked in. Her brain had registered an inspiration. Straight to the porch she went.

Dutch warned her. "Remember. No tricks, missie. You lead me right into the

room where he is an' don't say a word. Un'erstand?"

"Yes. You'll promise not to hurt him."

"My business. I got an account to settle with both them McClintocks."

"At any rate you won't hurt anybody else in the house," she said faintly. "You've got to promise that."

"Suits me. I ain't intendin' to run wild."

"Swear it," she insisted.

He swore it.

Vicky, still with his hateful fingers about her wrist, opened the door and walked into the house. At her touch a second door swung. Before Dutch could recover from the surprise of what he saw he had moved forward with the girl into a room. A man was sitting at a desk writing. He looked up astonished at this interruption. The man was Father Marston.

"He wants me to take him to Scot," Vicky said simply.

Her explanation sufficed. Dutch, a many-times killer, stood before him with a drawn revolver in his hand.

The minister rose. "So you brought him here instead. Well done, Vicky."

The desperado ripped out a violent oath. "Make a fool of Sam Dutch, will you?"

His fingers moved up to the fleshy part of the girl's forearm and tightened. She could not keep back a cry of pain. Marston stepped forward. He had served through the war as a chaplain and the spirit of a soldier was in him.

"Hands off, Dutch!"

The teeth of the bad man ground together audibly. "You sittin' in, parson?" he asked in a thick, furious voice.

"Yes. Take your hands off her."

The gaunt, gray-eyed preacher faced the killer's rage and overmatched it. He had both moral courage and the physical to back it.

"Where's Scot McClintock?" demanded Dutch.

"We'll take that up when you've turned Miss Lowell loose."

"By God, you're not runnin' this."

"Get your hand away."

The bully felt that he either had to kill this man or do as he said. He dare not shoot him down. Father Marston was too well beloved in Nevada. His was one of those stanch souls which commanded an immense respect. Back of him now the gunman felt the whole weight of civilized opin-

ion in the State. It was a spiritual power too potent to be ignored.

The fingers loosened from Vicky's arm and fell away.

"Where's McClintock at?" the man with the revolver asked again hoarsely.

"First tell me this. What are you doing here? Why aren't you in prison where you belong?"

"Because I broke out. Tha's why."

"Then I'll give you a piece of advice. Get out of town. Now. Quick as you can hit the road."

"I'm askin' you where McClintock's at, parson."

Again the eyes of the two battled.

"Sam Dutch, your name stands in this country for murder, treachery, drunkenness, and all other evils known to man. You're as black-hearted a villain as ever I knew. If you've got one redeeming trait, I don't know what it is. Now, listen. You're going to get out of town now. Right away. You're not going to murder Scot McClintock. You'll walk with me straight to Doc Benton's stable. You'll arrange with him for a horse. And you'll drop into the saddle and light a shuck out of Carson." The voice of the preacher rang harsh. It carried conviction, but Dutch wanted to know what was back of this edict.

"Who says I'll do all that?" he sneered.

"I say it. If you don't I'll rouse the town and hang you in front of the jail. That's a promise made before God, Dutch. I'll keep it, so help me."

The killer's mind dodged in and out, cunningly, and could find no way of escape. He dared not kill Marston. He dared not let him go out and rouse the town against him. Though he was armed and Marston was without a weapon, it was he who was defenseless and the preacher who held him covered.

The bad man threw up his hands. "All right. You got me, parson. I'll light a shuck, but God help you if I ever get you right. I'll sure fix you so you'll never do me another meanness."

The preacher stood before him straight as a sycamore.

"My life is in God's hand, Sam Dutch. You strut across the stage, poor braggart, and think yourself mighty powerful. You're no more than a straw in the wind. His eye is on you, man. You can't lift a finger without His permission. And in His scrip-

ture He has said a word about you. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' And again, 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' That's His plain promise, Dutch. I tell you that your hour is close. It's at hand. Repent and flee from the wrath to come."

Marston had the orator's gift of impressive speech. As he faced the killer, hand lifted in a gesture of prophecy, eyes flashing the fire of his conviction, Vicky felt a shiver run over her. The preacher was, so she felt for the moment, a messenger of destiny pronouncing doom upon a lost soul. In the light of what so swiftly followed she was to recall many times his burning and passionate prediction.

Dutch sneered, to cover the chill that passed through him. "The bullet ain't molded yet that can kill Sam Dutch," he bragged.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### THE BOOMING OF THE FORTY-FIVES.

At the gate Father Marston stopped. "You run along home, Vicky," he said. "I'll drop in after a while and see how the colonel is."

The girl hesitated. "Hadn't I better go with you?" she said. It was not necessary for her to say in words that she was afraid to leave the chaplain alone with Dutch. All three of them understood it.

Marston laughed, rather grimly. "No child. Mr. Dutch and I understand each other first-rate. We'll get along fine. See you later."

She left them, reluctantly. The men took a side street that led toward Benton's stable. Dutch was anxious to be gone from Carson. The preacher's words had filled him with foreboding. He would not feel easy until the dust of the capital had long been shaken from his horse's hoofs.

His surly voice took on a whine. It was his way of attempting to propitiate fate. "I got a bad name, parson, an' so folks don't feel right to me. Lemme say that there's a heap of worse men than Sam Dutch. I've shot men sure enough, but I ain't ever shot one that wasn't better dead. Most folks don't know that. They think I go round killin' to see 'em kick. Well, I don't. Live an' let live would be my motto, if gunmen would only lemme alone. But you know yorese'f how it is, parson. They git to thinkin' if they can bump off Sam Dutch

they'll be chief. So they come lookin' for trouble, an' I got to accommodate 'em."

A man came down the street walking as though he loved it. His stride rang out sharp in the still night. He was singing softly the words of a trail song:

"Last night as I lay on the prairie,  
And looked at the stars in the sky,  
I wondered if ever a cowboy  
Would drift to that sweet by and by.  
Roll on, roll on,  
Roll on, little dogies, roll—"

Marston's heart lost a beat. He felt rather than saw the figure of the man at his side grow tense as it crouched. Steel flashed in the moonlight. The preacher struck at a hair-matted wrist as the gun roared.

The singer stopped in his tracks. With incredible quickness he dragged out a revolver and fired. The chaplain thrust Dutch from him and stepped back into the road out of the direct line of fire. The boom of the forty-fives seemed continuous while the short, sharp flashes stabbed the darkness.

A man groaned and clutched at his breast. He sank down, still firing. On his knees, supporting the weight of his body with the palm of his hand thrust against the ground, Dutch emptied his revolver, ferocious as a wounded grizzly. From his throat there issued a sound that was half a sob and half a snarl of rage.

The thunder of the guns died. The singer moved forward, warily, his gaze fastened on the huge huddled figure slowly sinking lower. One glance had been enough to tell him that Marston was not an enemy. Therefore, he concentrated his attention on the center of danger.

Marston ran to the fallen man and knelt down beside him. He tore open the coat and vest. A single look was sufficient. Three bullets had torn into the great barrellike trunk of his body. One had pierced the right lung. A second had struck just below the heart. The third had raked from right to left through the stomach.

"Take my boots off," gasped the desperado.

The chaplain knew that Dutch was aware

he had been mortally wounded. This request showed it. The Western gunman wanted always to be without his boots on when he died. Father Marston eased his head while Hugh McClinton removed the boots.

A gargoyle grin was on the face of the bad man. He meant to "die game," after the manner of his kind.

"You sure rang a bull's-eye, parson, when you pulled them Bible texts on me. At that, maybe I'd 'a' fooled you, if you hadn't spoiled my aim that first shot."

"You realize—"

"That I got more'n I can carry? Sure do."

Marston forgot that this man was the worst desperado Nevada had ever known. He remembered only that the soul of Sam Dutch, a poor, erring human being, was about to meet its Maker.

"His mercy endureth forever. Repent. Repent and be saved," he exhorted earnestly.

"Too late, parson," Dutch answered feebly. "I'm a—dyed-in-the-wool sinner—an' I'm—hittin' the trail—for hell."

"It's never too late. While the light holds out to burn the vilest sinner may return. That's you, Sam."

"That's sure me, but—I don't reckon—I'll—"

His body stiffened suddenly, then relaxed limply. He was dead.

The two men rose and looked at each other. Hugh spoke first.

"I had to do it, father. It was Dutch or me."

"Yes, you had to do it."

"He didn't give me any choice. Come a-shootin' before I knew even who he was."

"I saw what he was doing just in time to hit his arm."

"I reckon that saved me. You were that quick. I can't thank you."

"Don't thank me, Hugh. Thank God." He looked soberly down at the dead man. "There, but for His grace, lies Hugh McClinton."

"Yes," agreed Hugh solemnly.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



# Stop Thief!

By Roy W. Hinds

*Author of "Out of a Clear Sky," "A Tale of Two Towns," Etc.*

*The rounding up of Pete Stem's gang had in it elements of surprise for the citizens of Pine City—also it was a godsend to the editor of the Sun*

**C**HAINS clanked on Main Street—and Pine City was thrown into an uproar. Things didn't occur often in Pine City. A newspaper, the *Weekly Sun*, occurred there once a week, but this had been happening for five years now, and long ago the *Sun* had dropped from the realm of sensationalism. Other newspapers, from Saginaw and Detroit, came to the little logging and lumber town in summer on the river packet *Belle Seymour*, which made the run on the Tittabaw River between Saginaw and Pine City, and in winter on "Buck" Hooker's sleighs. Buck Hooker was a grub driver for the Larkey string of lumber camps, and also carried mail in winter, when neither he nor his sleighs had too heavy a load.

Particularly in mid-summer, when industry consisted alone of droning sawmills, Pine City was devoid of excitement. The *Weekly Sun* had a hard time filling up its columns. "Shorty" Price once described the *Weekly Sun* as a triweekly, because, he said, it came out one week and tried to come out the next. However that may be, it came out each week; but the overwritten personal items, the elaborate stories of dog fights, and the lengthy recipes reprinted from a trusty cookbook testified to the troubles of its editor and printer, Jim Savage.

The preceding summer a real sensation had ripped Pine City from one end to the other and across the middle. The Peter Stem gang of robbers rode into town one day, and presently rode out accompanied by the visible resources of the Pine City bank, for which they left nothing but a pound or so of bullets. These bullets were mostly fired into the air, as a warning that the exhibition was not a public spectacle, but one of them happened to lodge in the forearm of Sheriff Joe Blackmore.

The wound soon healed and the Pine City bank eventually recovered its equilibrium,

but the town for months proceeded under a certain strained tenseness; a vague expectancy—almost hope—that something of the kind would happen again. Joe Blackmore, despite the scar on his arm, hoped so, too. Joe had a grudge to settle with Peter Stem and his gang. But it isn't likely that the officers of the bank prayed for a recurrence.

However, a year had elapsed. The raid on the bank was an old, worn-out story; told and retold, hacked to pieces and patched up, until the desperate Peter Stem himself hardly would recognize it did he see it in print. Meanwhile the town had gone through a winter and spring of logging activities. The Tittabaw and Chickanee Rivers had been clogged with logs. Uproarious days and nights had followed the appearance in the town of lumberjacks and rivermen, fresh from a winter in the sober woods.

But all this turmoil had been carried away on spring breezes. The rivers were placid and at low water; the saloons were quiet, boasting only an occasional spree and long days of casual drinks and listless dice games; the jail was empty, and Main Street was hot and forlorn. The dull days of lazy summer hung heavily.

And then chains clanked on Main Street!

An open wagon hauled by an indifferent team of horses entered Pine City by way of the Edenville road. Two men sat on the seat of the wagon. One man faced ahead, occupied with driving the team. Occasionally he turned a wary glance over his shoulder. The other man faced to the rear, his long, powerful legs dangling over the seat back.

Across the lap of the driver lay a Winchester. Now and then he caressed its trigger, especially when he turned his face backward.

The other man held a Winchester somewhat carelessly across one forearm, while his

other hand toyed lightly with the stock and trappings in the vicinity of the trigger. This man's attitude, again, was a trifle careless; yet a watchful eye and the lithe movements of his body as the wagon jogged over the restless road might be taken as a warning that the man and gun were on edge for quick action.

Seated in the wagon box were seven other men. They were huddled closely together. For the most part they kept their scowling eyes lowered, but now and then one lifted a malevolent face up to the man facing them from the wagon seat.

He returned their gazes coolly, indifferently; and all the time kept his hand close to the trigger.

All the men, including the two on the seat, were roughly clad, with their faces in various stages of beard. Stains of the woods were distributed freely among them.

Seated tailor fashion in the extreme rear of the wagon box and facing the others was another man with a Winchester. There was evidently a kindred interest between him and the men on the seat, for with them he exchanged smiles, while upon the others he gazed sternly.

Upon closer scrutiny one could detect under the dust and dirt on the two forward men and the man in the rear a garb bespeaking more scrupulous habits of dress. These men's faces were not so blunt and coarse. In fact, they appeared to be men of the city dressed for a toilsome journey in the woods. Their shirts were of a finer fabric, and each of the three wore a necktie.

The other men were plainly denizens of the woods, brown and weatherbeaten. Their clothing was bramble torn and stained with the mud and dust of weeks and weeks. Their hats were slouched and battered.

The heat was oppressive. The seven men stirred restlessly and cursed under their breath.

Chains clanked when these seven men stirred. A small boy, soon after the wagon passed within the town, braved the scowls of the seven and peered over the edge of the wagon box.

He saw that the seven men were hand-cuffed and ankle-chained together. He fled, and came to the center of Pine City before the wagon.

When the strange equipage drew up in front of the Orchard House an audience of some dimensions had assembled. Sheriff

Joe Blackmore came upon Main Street about that time and hastened to the spot.

His gaze traveled swiftly over the occupants of the wagon. He pointed to one of the men in the wagon box, a large fellow with hulking shoulders who returned a fierce gaze.

"That's Pete Stem, the robber," said Sheriff Blackmore.

The crowd instinctively drew backward, but recovered its poise in an instant when it was realized that Pete Stem and his gang were securely chained and in the custody of three very efficient-looking men armed with Winchesters.

By this time one of the men had alighted from the front seat.

"Where can I find the sheriff?" he inquired of a bystander.

Joe Blackmore stepped forward. "I'm Sheriff Blackmore," said he.

They shook hands. "We're officers from Bay City," the newcomer informed the sheriff. "My name's Blake, and the men with me are Turner and Gowing. Maybe you've heard Sheriff Thornton in Bay City speak of us, eh? He told us to look you up if we came through Pine City."

"I'm glad to meet you," the sheriff rejoined. "I know Thornton well, and I guess I've heard him speak of you." The sheriff, perhaps, stretched the truth a little there, but that was of no consequence. He turned his eyes upon the wagon, and went on: "I see you've got Pete Stem and his gang."

"Yes—cornered 'em in the woods up near Edenville last night. Been chasing that gang for a week, and—but let's get away from this crowd. Come on in the hotel."

The sheriff and Blake stepped into the Orchard House.

"I want to arrange to feed these prisoners," Blake told the sheriff. "Guess it can be done at the hotel here, eh?"

"I expect it can. We'll see Charley Orchard."

Sheriff Blackmore, in a way, was sorry that Peter Stem and his gang had been captured. It had been a fond dream of his that some day he would run that gang to earth. However, he had no ill feelings toward Officers Blake, Turner, and Gowing from Bay County; who, in fact, he admired very much for the quiet efficiency and bravery that was apparent in their conduct.

Presently arrangements were made to feed the prisoners. They were herded into the

dining room, where the handcuffs were removed. They were still chained together at the ankles. They were seated side by side at a long table. Over them Officers Turner and Gowing stood guard. Night Marshal Jim Lamay, to whose bedroom the excitement had penetrated, soon appeared and volunteered his assistance. The marshal was the only outsider, except those who served food, who was admitted to the dining room.

The crowd in the hotel office and outside swelled until it included almost all Pine City. Women came with babies in their arms. Men quit their tasks in the sawmills and came running. The Pine City bank closed its doors about that time and the entire force, from the president to the janitor, appeared on the scene—to get a look at the desperadoes who a year ago had robbed the bank.

Sheriff Blackmore and Officer Blake stood guard outside the closed door of the dining room. By frequent admonitions the crowd was kept at a safe distance.

"We started after the Stem gang about a week ago," Officer Blake explained. "They raided a bank up at Beaverton, and we heard they were headed down this way, so we cut in between them and Pine City. Got 'em into an old shack in the woods and burned 'em out. Killed one man."

"One of Stem's men, eh? Did you hear his name?"

"Rufe Higgs, I think they said he was."

"Rufe Higgs—is that so? Well, Rufe was a bad man."

"They're all bad men," Officer Blake suggested. "They've been raiding towns and camps in these woods for three years now—and had everything pretty much their own way. Thornton said that if they ever come over into Bay County we'd give 'em a chase, and for a year now us three, Turner, Gowing, and me, have been looking over the woods—in Gladwin County, Midland County, and Saginaw County. We got so we know every road in the woods—and about everything else."

Sheriff Blackmore meditated. Presently he admitted: "It was a clever piece of work all right. Every officer from Clare to Saginaw has been hunting them fellows—or looking for a chance to take 'em in; but they had the run of the woods. Trouble is, I guess, we never went after 'em in full force. We scattered our play, first one crowd and then

the other trying. We ought to went stronger."

"It only took three of us to get 'em," Officer Blake suggested dryly. "Three of us took 'em all."

The sheriff winced. "Yes," he said, "but did you get 'em all?"

"We got eight of 'em," Blake rejoined. "We brought seven in and buried another in the woods."

"You're going to drive into Bay City to-day, eh?"

"Yes, I think that's best," Blake replied. "We're tired, but I won't feel exactly safe till that gang's inside a good strong jail. I'm a little afraid of your jail here."

"Well," the sheriff said reluctantly, "it ain't the strongest jail in the world—and it ain't the weakest. If you want to put that gang up for the night and take a rest, I'll guarantee they'll be under lock and key in the morning. We've got plenty of men to guard the jail while you boys are sleeping."

"No," Blake said, "we'll go on through. It's only twenty miles, and we can drive it in four or five hours."

"The road ain't none too good—it's an old corduroy road."

"I know it—but we'll drive on through."

"And some of Stem's gang may be hanging on your flanks."

"I think we got about all of 'em."

"There was more than eight men in his gang, according to reports."

"Two or three more maybe—but I think they're scattered. We'll drive on through, I guess."

"Do you think you need anybody else to go along with you?"

"No; much obliged just the same. We can handle 'em all right."

"All right," said Joe Blackmore, much as though he had done his duty and now washed his hands of the whole affair.

Jim Savage, editor of the *Weekly Sun*, obtained a glowing description of the man hunt and capture from Officer Blake, and hastened back to the office. He didn't have to write the story; he grasped a composing stick and set it up from his notes. He had to make haste, for the *Sun* was due to shine late that afternoon.

The officers took turnabout at eating, assisted in all their work with the prisoners by the Pine City officers.

Pine City had its revenge on Peter Stem and his gang when the desperadoes, hand-

cuffed and ankle-chained, were led out of the hotel and loaded into the wagon. The first shock of the sensational capture had worn off and the instinctive timidity of the citizens in the presence of such a redoubtable gang was dissipated.

Despite the protests of the officers, the crowd hooted and jeered the glowering prisoners. The captives snarled and hurled oaths at the throng, and gnashed their teeth in impotent rage. One of the most bitter in his taunts was Emery Bergol, cashier of the bank, who, on the day of the robbery, had been compelled to stand for a half hour face against the wall and hands raised high. He stood thus for five minutes after the robbers had departed, and hadn't heard the last of it yet. His arms were still weak, so some folks said, from the experience.

Face by face the robbers were picked out, or most of them at least. The man who first rode into town was recognized; as were the man who stood guard at the front door, the man who guarded the rear door, and the men who stood at each corner and kept a clear street.

Of course it was no trouble to recognize the desperate Peter Stem. The crowd "rubbed it into" Peter, and several small boys shook their fists at him and dared him to climb out of the wagon.

Thus the officers started out with their captives. It was getting late into the afternoon, and not so hot. The driver whipped the team into a lively trot along the street leading to the Bay City road, and soon left the shouting crowd behind.

The wagonful of captives and officers melted away in a cloud of dust. The townspeople reluctantly turned back toward the Orchard House, for no particular reason except that that had been the stopping place of the desperadoes. It was utterly out of the question that they should disperse to their homes.

But the crowd hadn't proceeded very far nor had the wagon got far into the woods when there came the sound of a distant fusillade of shots.

The faint crackling came from the direction which the wagon had taken. The crowd stood rooted to the spot. Some one sped into town and notified Joe Blackmore and Jim Lamay.

Headed by the sheriff and marshal, the crowd walked briskly toward the woods through which ran the Bay City road.

The exact location of the wagon was hidden by a turn in the road, but the crowd knew it couldn't be far from that bend. They heard no more shots, and some had an idea that the officers perhaps had slain some of their prisoners and captured the others. It was accepted as a fact that there had been an attempted get-away in the woods.

"I thought so," Joe Blackmore muttered. "He didn't want help! and no telling what's happened now."

It occurred to the sheriff that the bandits, chained though they were, may have wrenched a gun away from one of the officers. It might be that the officers had been slain and the bandits, in possession of the keys to their irons, and of the Winchesters, were roaming the woods.

The sheriff communicated this probability to the men nearest him. In a moment it had sped throughout the crowd. Several men and most of the women and children dropped behind.

But the sheriff, the marshal, and a goodly following of rugged townsmen kept straight on. Just before they reached the turn in the road, at a point which was well within the woods, a man dashed around the bend toward them.

The sheriff and marshal had their revolvers out in a twinkling. A dangerous light kindled in the black eye of Joe Blackmore. But the man approaching them was not one of the desperadoes. He was recognized at once as Officer Blake. It was observed that he was hatless and carried no Winchester. A revolver hung in its holster at his hip, however.

"They got away! They got away!" he cried. "Spread out into the woods—and we can catch 'em! Spread out, boys!"

"Spread out nothing," said Joe Blackmore calmly.

Officer Blake stood in front of the sheriff now, breathing heavily and perspiring freely.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Ain't you going to help us?"

"We're going to help you," Blackmore assured him quietly, "but we ain't going to be ordered everywhere and nowhere unless we know just what's coming. The officers of this county and the people stand ready to help you, Mr. Blake, but they're going to operate under command of their sheriff."

"All right, all right!" Blake exclaimed. "But let's get busy!"

"Did they all get away?" the sheriff inquired.

"All seven of 'em."

"Did they get hold of any guns?"

"No—they ain't got a weapon among 'em."

"I'm glad to know that, because most of these men with me are without weapons; and it wouldn't be fair to send 'em into the woods against armed men. Did they get the chains and handcuffs off?"

"Yes; they dragged Gowing into the woods, and he had the keys in his pocket. They all got loose and scattered, holding us off with threats to choke Gowing to death. They dragged him into the woods a piece and then turned him loose. That's when we shot, but we couldn't hit 'em through the trees. Gowing and Turner are trailing two of 'em."

Joe Blackmore turned to the crowd.

"Three or four men run back to town and get a load of guns. Fetch 'em back in a buggy," he commanded. "The rest of you spread out fan shape, and comb the woods. Which side of the road did they take, Blake?"

"They went south," replied the Bay County officer, "but they can double back. Best way is to spread out on both sides."

And that was what happened. Joe Blackmore and Officer Blake walked slowly down the road. Rounding the bend the sheriff perceived the empty wagon and the horses in the middle of the road. The other two officers, Turner and Gowing, were not in sight.

"It was the nerviest thing I ever seen," Blake explained. He talked hurriedly, apologetically perhaps. No doubt he felt intensely ashamed. "There wasn't a flicker in their eyes that told they'd hatched a thing. They must have got it from one to the other some way when they was eating. All of a sudden they jumped out the back of the wagon, taking Gowing with 'em. His rifle dropped in the wagon—and they didn't get that. Lucky he wasn't carrying a revolver and cartridges, or one of 'em could have peppered me and Turner and took all our guns and ammunition. They held Gowing so we couldn't shoot without hitting him, and backed off into the woods."

"They knew he had the keys to them irons. They had the keys out and the chains and cuffs unlocked in no time, working on 'em while going deeper and deeper into the

woods. They held us off by hollering that they'd choke Gowing to death if we moved away from the road—and that's what they'd have done in no time.

"They all disappeared, but it wasn't long before Gowing come racing back to get his gun, saying they'd scattered. It'll be funny if most of 'em don't get away now," the officer finished ruefully.

"'Specially Pete Stem," suggested the sheriff.

"Yes, Pete Stem." Blake spoke like a man dazed. Perhaps this was the most important thing of his career as an officer. He had had that gang of desperadoes in custody once, had them manacled and chained, stood over them with two other men armed to the teeth—and yet his captives were gone now. It was a severe blow and the man hadn't recovered.

"Yes, Pete Stem," he repeated. "He'll get away, and organize another gang. I wouldn't care much about the rest of 'em if we could only get Pete Stem."

The men stood beside the wagon. Blackmore was considerate enough not to remind the other that he had offered his help and that it had been refused. No use to "rub it in" now.

"Well," said the sheriff, "there's a whole town full of men that you can call on."

"Yes," Blake rejoined, "but it'll take a million men to cover this big stretch of woods close enough to drag in seven scattered men. Some of 'em will go south, and some north, and the rest east and west."

"Sure," admitted Blackmore, "and we got to figure some way to cut 'em off—on all sides."

Blake started, like a man suddenly awakened from sleep.

"What am I thinking of," he burst out fiercely. "Standing in this road like a dead tree! How many roads are there leading out of Pine City, sheriff?"

Blackmore briefly sketched the highway system of the country.

"Then," said Blake positively, "the only way to get Pete Stem and his gang is to take as many rigs as we can, load 'em with men and send 'em out on all the roads. When they get to places where they know no man could get on foot in so much time, these men can break into the woods."

His plan was soon revealed in detail to Sheriff Blackmore. It would have the effect

of forming a vast circle, open in many places to be sure, yet providing the best net available. These posses would work in toward Pine City from points beyond which it was physically impossible for the robbers to reach on foot. As the posses drew in toward the center, perhaps a bandit or two would be picked up. Perhaps Pete Stem would be picked up.

That scheme was put into effect. The men who entered the forest immediately after the robbers escaped soon came straggling back to the road at various points. They were ordered back to Pine City, and, their ranks swelled by every able-bodied man in town, organized into posses. Soon rigs were speeding away from the little town on all roads.

Joe Blackmore started out at the head of one posse, Officer Blake at the head of another, Jim Lamay another, and other efficient fighters commanded the remainder.

Thus did Pine City send all its man power into the great chase. The women and children and the aged and infirm huddled together through the sleepless night, feeling sure that the bandits would strive to get farther and farther away, yet beset by all the terrors of a raid.

Of course the robbers wouldn't venture back to Pine City! Those in town were far safer than the men in the woods, even if the robbers were not armed. Wasn't it possible that the hunters would fire upon each other? Countless dangers lurked in the dark forest.

The women worried, as women will. The aged and infirm strove to comfort them with tales of earlier days in the forest. The small children clung closely to their mothers. Older boys crept away and, forming into gangs, made the night hideous with their howls and war whoops. They roamed the streets for a time, but late night coming on, vague fears and terrors began to haunt their breasts. The boys sought the shelter of their homes—and silence and darkness hovered over the little town. Scarcely a soul slept.

No one stirred throughout the scanty busi-

ness district of Pine City. Scores of houses were unpeopled, various families having grouped together under a single roof. Now and then vague noises came to the ears of the watchers, but these perhaps were night noises of the woods unheeded in ordinary times.

Bonfires built early in the night by the boys smoldered in the streets. Not a step was heard throughout the dismal town.

At dawn next morning the hunters began to dribble into town. They came empty-handed. Group after group appeared, but not one of the Stem gang did they bring.

The women and children hastened out to meet them and soon the streets were bustling.

Joe Blackmore and Jim Lamay came in. So did the leaders of the other posses—except Officer Blake.

"Well," some one remarked, "Pine City is in the same fix it was yesterday morning, ain't it? No bandits in town, and no strange officers, either."

This circumstance set Joe Blackmore to thinking. Others soon began to think, too. The result of all this mental exercise was a hasty survey of Pine City's business district.

Whereupon it was found that the town had been systematically looted. Almost all the stores had been robbed. Safes had been ripped open. And the vault in the Pine City bank was bare of money, too.

It didn't take more than a day to verify what in reality needed no verification. Joe Blackmore and Pine City soon knew for a fact that there were no such officers in Bay County as Blake, Gowing, and Turner.

"Just three other members of Pete Stem's gang," said the sheriff. He gazed with resolution off into the woods. "And I'll get Pete Stem yet!" he promised.

It happened then that Editor Jim Savage, who had given up the printing of the *Sun* in order to join in the man hunt, revised his story before going to press. And that story was big enough to provide his luminous sheet with copy for several weeks thereafter.

*More of Mr. Hinds' stories will follow soon.*



### ANOTHER MECHANICAL PROBLEM

THE cat sprang into little Edith's lap and lay there purring contentedly. "Oh, father!" exclaimed Edith after a short pause. "Kitty's motor's running and she ain't moving a bit!"

# Heads and Tails

By H. Mortimer Batten

It was a nasty accident that Lightfoot suffered in one of Wolfer Nodwell's traps—one which almost put him down and out. But blood told in the end—luckily for his mate Takeet

THE day had been sultry, and Jess Nodwell, the wolfer, exploring un-surveyed territory north of Butte Leg Flats, guessed it would pile up and blow some before daybreak. Therefore, he unsaddled his saddle horse and unpacked his pack horse, and made what he called a dry camp—that is, he selected a sandy knoll, covered everything except himself, and prepared for a very wet night of it.

Now there are two ways of guarding against chill—one by preparing for it externally, and the other by preparing for it internally. Jess had abandoned the external expedient years ago, and, moreover, it is impossible to keep dry externally when it really rains on the prairies. Jess was sure it was going to rain, and therefore he prepared for it internally.

He had with him a bottle of hootch of about the same potency as the wolf charms he used, and he decided, before tucking up for the night, to take what he called a chest warmer. The first was followed by a second, then Jess began to sit up and take notice. That was always the way with him. He was what you might call a steady man, in that he would pack a bottle of hootch about with him for at least three days and never so much as sniff the cork. But when he did—then it was all up with the hootch!

An hour later Jess was singing ribald songs in solitary splendor, with fully a hundred miles between himself and any human audience. He wept solitary tears about his dead mother, babbled about his beloved Colorado, and toasted the King of England, Alfred Laurier, and President Wilson. Lastly, he went to sleep, and the fact that in the end it did *not* rain had nothing to do with the case.

Lightfoot and Takeet had listened from afar. They had trotted back and forth, sniffing the air, and listened. They had propped each other up and stared across the great, gray loneliness, their big ears

a-cock, their bright eyes shining, for never before had the coyotes of Butte Leg Flats heard such sounds of human merriment. In the end it became too much for them, and they howled in sympathy. They poured forth their very souls into the starlight, but the wolfer was too drunk to hear. When eventually he fell silent they, too, managed to master their sentiments, but a burning curiosity was upon them.

No coyotes in these days are unsophisticated, but the coyotes of Butte Leg Flats are as unsophisticated as any. They knew man only by hearsay, knew him as the most perilous of all their foes, yet they had not learned by personal experience to fear him as only the coyote that is going to live *must* fear him. Therefore—being coyotes—they regarded the appearance of Jess and his horses on their home range more as a national holiday affair than as a grave misfortune.

When all was silent they trotted to the leeward side of the wolfer's camp, and very slowly, very cautiously, zigzagged up. There the man lay, breathing heavily, his face aspiring toward the stars. They circled rapidly round him at forty paces or so; then they saw the two "mustangs" standing like sentinel figures near in the purple dimness.

Jess had left his horses hobbled. They were tame horses, and he seldom troubled to tie them. Lightfoot and Takeet discussed the point. Nothing would have suited them better than to have found the wolfer's stores easily accessible, so that they could scatter them to the four winds, then roll on the fragments; but that was out of the question as the man had his stores by him. The horses, however, were clearly his, so the two coyotes trotted up to investigate. On seeing them, the horses threw up their heads and snorted, whereupon Lightfoot bounded up with chopping jaws and bristling mane.

Now, any one who has tried to catch a hobbled horse knows that, in spite of its bonds, it can average quite a goodly speed

over quite a sufficient distance. Nodwell's two horses, bounding stiff-legged over the dry sand, exhibited surprising abilities in this direction. Lightfoot and Takeet, running wide, kept them at it till the moon was up—drove them clean across the flats toward the foothills!

Dawn came—creeping up through a haze of fairy buttes tinted with gold and purple, fanning the prairie ridges with that sweet, strong freshness peculiar to the dawns of the land where cities are not. It came like the dawning of a man's twelfth year, full of magic promises, boundlessly sweet, and the wolfer looked at it and groaned.

Then he heard, not far away, a coyote's "yah—yar—yarr!" of mockery. That brought him to his senses. He was prospecting this country in search of wolves and coyotes, and he staggered to his feet. Where were his horses? That he did not know, but all around the story was written in the oldest writing in the world—the imprints of passing feet on the bosom of the old, old earth.

Wolfer Nodwell left his packs where they were, but all round and about them he set wolf traps in the sand, smeared them with magic scent charm, and to each trap was attached by a length of chain a buried three-pronged anchor. Then he set out to catch his horses.

He caught them eight hours later—eight sweating, blasphemous hours of thirst, sun, and mosquitoes.

In the meantime Lightfoot and Takeet had, of course, explored the trapper's camping ground. Takeet had hung back in the offing, trotting back and forth with her nose to the ground, watching her master with quick, sidelong glances, while Lightfoot bellied up, sat down, wagged his tail, bellied up again, then looked round at his mate with shining eyes and licking his chops. No one was near, the man was chasing his horses a couple of leagues away, and, anyway, they could see him if he returned, long before he saw them.

A faint gust stirred the stagnant air, and it brought to Lightfoot's nostrils a scent so enticing, so appealing to his appetite and to his instincts, that he rose up where he stood, and looked with hungry longing toward the wolfer's packs. Then it seemed that his suspicions left him. He trotted on, drawn by that magic scent, sweetest of nectar, most seductive of all aromas—he trotted swiftly

up, while Takeet froze in her tracks and stared.

In the very ace of time Lightfoot's instincts warned him. He stopped within a yard of the nearest pack, intoxicated now by that wondrous scent charm. Something seemed to whisper to him, "Come on! Come on!" but the wild dog in his veins cried out, "Go back!" He hesitated, and was lost. He sat down to ponder the point, moving his tail slowly from side to side, looking round encouragingly at Takeet, when—"Thud!"

Out of the sand the blunt jaws rose, sending up a little hot spume which drifted away like powder. Lightfoot leaped into the air, then fell back—held by those terrible jaws—held ignominiously by that wonderful tail of his! He pulled with all his strength and dragged the trap out of the danger zone. His poor tail cracked and creaked, but still he pulled—he had to pull!

Takeet turned hysterical. She yapped and yarred and ran in foolish circles, as though quarreling with her own tail. After this, she dug a huge hole in the ground—dug with tremendous energy, but when she had dug it her poor, dumb little mind didn't know what to do with it. She seemed to want to carry the hole to where Lightfoot was struggling, but had to abandon the ambition as impossible of fulfillment. And all the time Lightfoot, still perilously near those hateful packs, was tugging and wrestling to an accompaniment of ominous sounds from the rear.

The awful day dragged by. Both coyotes lay in the sand panting with thirst and misery. Then the figure of a horseman appeared on the sky line. It looked at first like a flagstaff, then like a towering stone monument, then like an omnibus. Lightfoot, yelping his suspense, tugged like a mad thing, and for the first time Takeet came bounding up to him. She fell on the trap in a fury of suspense, and her teeth snapped like steel on the jaws of steel.

Accidentally or otherwise she bit Lightfoot's tail—already strained to breaking point. There was a zip, and Lightfoot fell on his neck. In an instant he was up, and he and Takeet were running like the wind, flank to flank through the lengthening shadows.

Thus Wolfer Jess, riding up, found the tail of a coyote fast between the jaws of one of his traps. He spat voluminously and

cursed prolifically. He had experienced an entirely irritable day, and this was the last straw. That night he did not depend upon hobbles for retaining his horses, neither was he disturbed by the yapping mockery of coyotes.

## II.

There was no doubt left in Wolfer Nodwell's mind. He had expected to find pelts in the north of the Butte Flats, and the events described fully convinced him that there *were* pelts.

A month saw him back. The wild geese were honking south and east to the Gulf States; the sun, too, was going south. In the vast gray flats the only sound that broke God's quietude was an occasional twittering of southward-bound chickadees. In all that boundless space the wolfer was the only living thing that journeyed north. His desolation of purpose depressed him a little. For him it marked another year in the drift of time. He envied the wild geese and the sun and the chickadees.

Each year he had promised himself that next fall would see him too journeying south—south to his beloved Colorado, to start that poultry farm of his. It never materialized, for as we have seen, it was not within the constitution of the man to "leave a wee dram in the bottle for the morning." All his life he had drained his cup at the last draft, and so each winter found him heading north again, into the region of half lights.

He built his cabin at the base of the foot-hills, with the rolling spruce slopes and brimming Silvertrail on one side and the open prairie on the other. He brought with him a complete outfit, for he was a successful trapper. It consisted of three horses, piled high with packs and traps. Also there were four dogs—such dogs as nature could not have produced without the interfering originality of man. But man himself could not have unraveled his own mystery with regard to their breed.

One saw in their heavy jowls a suggestion of mastiff, in their limbs a trace of Russian wolfhound, in their staying powers an indication of foxhound, while their ears were a strange mixture of bloodhound, bulldog, and setter. There was also a smattering of spaniel to improve their scent, and one of them was mottled like a sea serpent, betraying Dalmatian ancestry.

Light-limbed, they were heavy-pawed, to skim the drifts—that was where the otter-hound blood came in, and all of them grew long, coarse manes in a cross about their shoulders—wolf blood through the veins of the northern Malemutes. This hardened up their paws and made them more or less impervious to cold, while the water spaniel in their make-up, by which they had no fear of crossing lakes and rivers, was betrayed by a slight curliness of the close hair about their buttocks.

Building a cabin was a tedious business, for the timber was small; but within a fortnight Nodwell was properly installed. He then took a nip to celebrate his advent, and forthwith finished the bottle—carried laboriously northward against winter chill—fully a fortnight before the freeze-up came.

In the meantime, Lightfoot was experiencing much bewilderment. The loss of his tail did not trouble him much, for the stump quickly healed, and instead of carrying astern a sweeping, glorifying ensign, he carried an absurd little hairless stump which wagged at terrifying speed. It is doubtful whether his unobservant wife noticed the loss of the personal adornment, for when one day another gentleman coyote, journeying south, gave her the glad eye and wagged his magnificent rudder, she fell upon him with tooth and claw and drove him out of the range—telling him, as clearly as any feminine mode could tell—"and me a respectable married woman, too!"

Lightfoot and Takeet's business was in the prairie-dog line. They would lie under a scrap of sage, close to a prairie-dog city, and keep perfectly still till one of the unsuspecting citizens wandered away from the prescribed area of burrows. It was then a toss up whether the coyote reached the prairie dog or the prairie dog reached his burrow, and each sprint, whether successful or not, wound up with a series of lightning twists when both pursuer and pursued were hidden within a cloud of smokelike sand.

With the loss of his tail Lightfoot found himself confronted with a problem that perplexed him sorely. Time after time he missed prairie dogs that he should have caught. He found himself unable to follow those lightning twists and turns, for, robbed of his rudder, deprived of his stabilizer, he was no longer able to perform those necessary evolutions. Several times he fell heavily, and rose with his eyes filled with sand, to

stare dejectedly at Takeet, who would regard him with superior contempt; and but for the success of *her* hunting Lightfoot would have gone hungry.

One night, hunting the foothills, they watched a snowshoe rabbit come down from the spruce clump to nibble the prairie grass at the creek edge. Lightfoot, who was the swifter of the two, took the field, and after a most elaborate stalk was almost within springing distance of his quarry. Out he bounded, and away went the hare. The wise little creature knew that it was outmatched for speed, so at once resorted to those dollar-absorbing twists and turns which are chief among the hare's methods of defense.

Now, any but a fool coyote would have caught that hare. There was a clear ninety yards in which to do it, and never an obstacle in the way. Yet Lightfoot missed. The hare gained a yard at every twist, and soared confidently into the bush with twelve feet to spare.

If ever a coyote knew that he had made a fool of himself, Lightfoot did. His stump drooped, he slinked away; he cast a side-long, shameful glance in the direction of his wife, and she, for her part, came up and nipped him. She nipped his neck and his flank till he jumped and squealed, and thereafter she took not the least notice of him, leaving him to sneak meekly at her heels.

With the loss of his skill as a hunter, Lightfoot began to lose other things. The ruffle of long hair about his neck began to lose its luster, his confident uprightness of carriage slowly gave way to a sneaking, furtive indecision, to be seen often in the coyotes of the lower ranges who move hourly in peril of their lives, but not generally among those of the unfettered, unsettled northern flats.

He was like a poor city clerk who, having lost his job, spent his days in fruitless searching for another, while his wife took to sewing to keep the home together. He was like a man who, once proudly master of his own house, had fallen from his place of eminence, to become merely a lodger dependent on his wife's resources—an errand boy, feebly doing her bidding.

The frost came, and Wolfer Nodwell set out his long lines of traps, with shelter cabins every few miles. Often he sat in the burning cold and talked to his dogs about far-off Colorado, where the sun shone and shone

till one wished to God it would freeze. The creeks became solid one by one, but the laughing Silvertrail remained unfrozen, mocking the deathlike silence of the land with its eternal laughter. On every crag and butte, on every cañon ledge and rugged shelf, the long, white teeth of winter began to form, growing in length and girth each day, till some came thundering to earth, and others built up marble palaces, scintillating and wonderful, like ghost cities of the dead. So bearded, gray, and old the land became that it seemed impossible that spring had ever caressed those slopes.

It was now that yet another hardship dawned into little Lightfoot's life. Hitherto his tail had been his traveling cloak, and when he lay curled up it served to protect his naked paws and his moist, black nose from the cold. That is why all the dogs of the north country have bushy tails—nature does not waste valuable material on ornaments. With the coming of the frost Lightfoot began to suffer keenly. Had he been a lone jackal he would doubtless have perished, for now he was dependent upon his wife not only for food but also for warmth. If his paws or his muzzle had become frost-bitten, a terrible end would have befallen him. As it was, he suffered so keenly that ere long he was too weary to remain awake, yet too cold to sleep; and in the midst of it all hunger fell upon the land.

There was no mischief left in the two coyotes now. Furtively they watched the man, and when he and his dogs went one way *they* sneaked off the other. But one day Lightfoot made a discovery which entirely reversed the order of things.

Though a wolfer by calling and temperament, Jess Nodwell was not uninterested in other fur. Indeed, he had not yet begun to hunt wolves, and his trap lines all up and down the creeks were for mink, marten, fisher, and lynx. One day, when Lightfoot knew the man to be at the other end of the range, he stole down to examine the human tracks in the snow as was his wont, and, following them, was led to a strange little triangular pen of twigs, in the center of which was half a partridge. Lightfoot sprung the trap by scratching snow upon it, then he and Takeet ate the partridge.

Following the man's tracks still farther, they found another baited trap, and that also they robbed. The third contained a snarling, devilish lynx, and Lightfoot and

Takeet sat and looked at her. Then they began to circle round, slowly at first, then faster, faster, till the lynx became giddy and bewildered, and they tore her limb from limb.

When some days later Jess went that round, he found that every trap along his line had been purloined of all success. He cursed savagely, and brought his brains to bear on every coyote "set" he knew. He left behind him a string of poisoned bait steeped in magic dopes, he made most obvious marten sets and placed wolf traps where the coyote would step in robbing them, he even resorted to snares. And a fortnight later found them all ignored.

Pursuing his way he found that his second round had been nosed out and robbed like the first—found that the coyotes had even located his rabbit snares, set for bait, had robbed every snare, defiling what they could not eat. Wolfer Nodwell realized that, until he had cleared up those two jackals, he might as well devote himself to fishing.

Lightfoot it was who did the stealing, for his wife was more timid than he, and well fed and confident once more, he was able to combat the cold. The luster came back to his eyes and the gloss to his coat, and one night he sat and mocked at the streak of white smoke rising from Nodwell's chimney pipe.

"You wait, my boy!" muttered the wolfer. "You wait till the tracking snow comes!" But little he thought that it was his own diabolical engines that had plunged him into the present caldron of misadventure.

The tracking snow came a few days later. Jess and his dogs were up before the dawn, and as the first sunlight fell on the glitter of icy buttes, they struck the trail of the jackals.

"Boo-oo! Boo-oo-o!" bellowed the hounds, and Lightfoot and Takeet, on the distant ridge, chased their "tails" a round or two and yelped back a mocking echo. On and up came the hounds, bursting into view across the bluff, and behind them the horseman, riding leisurely. Lightfoot and Takeet turned and skimmed away, separating ere they had run a mile, Lightfoot to make for the timber and Takeet for the open prairie.

Only one dog followed Lightfoot, and him the coyote easily tricked by dodging under windfalls too low for the hound to follow and too dense for him to crash

through. The dog gave it up almost immediately, and turned back in pursuit of his friends.

Those dogs were swift, and they possessed marvelous staying power. Away across the laughing Silvertrail Takeet led them, leaping from bowlder to bowlder, then out across the treeless flats, hard and fast, making a giant detour of her old home range. Then she began to realize that speed alone could not save her. She was faster far than her pursuers, but they were terribly sure, and, strain every muscle though she might, the distance between them and her did not decrease. "Boo-hoo! Boo-oo!" bellowed the hounds, and the sonorous ring, echoing across the deathly stillness, itself bore the very notes of death.

Takeet ran back and leaped aside; she sought the glassy patches where the scent hung thinly; she coupled up her new tracks with her old, she played every trick she knew to baffle pursuers following by scent. But still the hounds came on. Her tongue was lolling now, and, desperate at length, she sought the last resource of the hunted wild dog of the hills.

Oh, laughing Silvertrail, from which I drank in my puppy days, from which my mother drank when I was born, you will not fail me now in the hour of my direst need? Oh, River Silvertrail, living when all the rest are dead, laughing when all the uplands weep—you who lead the wild geese north with the joyous renewing of the spring, I look to you when all that I can do is set at naught! Help me, mighty friend of the wild folk—more faithful far than other friends who change or move to distant hills! Help me now in the hour of my burning need!

Into the icy water Takeet plunged, swimming with the current, drifting, swimming again, to land at length on the other side and scramble out. Wearily dragging one limb after another, Takeet faced up toward the higher country.

The hounds surged up to the water's edge and crossed—no scent! They separated, casting up and down, and within one minute the rally call was bellowed forth and on they bore.

Takeet heard, and knew that her ruse had failed. At the merest walk, now, she toiled up the mountainside, burdened, dragged down, by the clots and ice cakes matted in her tail. The water had frozen instantly, for she was too fatigued to shake the dense

hair free, and now it seemed that her tail was dragging her back at every stride, as though she hauled behind her a convict's shackles. Her tail dropped in the snow, and the snow clung to it in balls and pellets. She turned frenziedly and tried to bite out the chunks, but a fresh outburst from the hounds bade her struggle on.

Takeet crept into the timber edge as the hounds burst hotly into view and then, in the twinkling of an eye, Lightfoot was at her side, rubbing his flank to her, running with her, snarling a savage mockery at the roaring death in their wake.

Takeet leaped on to a windfall and ran along it, to crouch in the upper branches, while Lightfoot bore steadily on, keeping the chain of tracks unbroken.

The hounds surged up and drifted by—on the trail of the new coyote now. Lightfoot led them down to the river—down and across. He led them over the river flats and down to the river again, and again across. The chase was hot and fast, and the dogs were wearying a little. They were coated and caked with ice from tip to tip. Ice blades formed between their toes, till they left bloody imprints. Wolfer Nodwell read the signs, urged his panting horse, and cursed. He was just in time to see the third crossing—to see one of his dogs turn back in midstream, battling with the current, then begin to drift. He saw it beaten against the rim ice and, struggling feebly, go under.

He rushed to intercept the three remaining hounds ere their fugitive led them across again. He read the game of the coyote, who was trying to wear his heavy pursuers down with cold and clotted ice. He saw the coyote coming toward him, and opened fire at about three hundred yards with his revolver. The coyote stopped and regarded him unconcernedly, then loped off to cross the creek lower down—just above the whirlpool. And as it went Wolfer Nodwell saw that it was a tailless coyote. "Just as I thought!" he said. "Just as I danged well thought!"

He arrived at the margin just in time to prevent his dogs from plunging to their inevitable doom.

A few days later Wolfer Nodwell happened to be hunting the south end of the range when he saw two coyotes running side by side and heading in a southerly direction. He watched them through his glasses, and saw that each of them carried something in its jaws—a sure sign that they were migrating to another range. He saw also that one of the two was tailless!

"I've scared them out, anyway!" he pondered, closing his telescope with a click. Then a puzzled look came into his face. "Wonder where they're going?" he added, almost wistfully.

And something in the cold, grim silence seemed to answer, "To far off Colorado to start a poultry farm!"



### AN INTERRUPTED LECTURE

WHEN Doctor J. Jayneway Wilder, the celebrated zoölogist, was a college professor, he sometimes suffered from the very pronounced absent-mindedness about which his intimates of to-day josh him.

On one occasion, when he had a junior lecture to deliver in the morning and a senior in the afternoon, he appeared with two paper parcels, well wrapped and mysterious looking, which he placed on his desk on the platform. When the senior students assembled for their session of instruction, one of the parcels had disappeared. Doctor Wilder picked up the one that remained, and, holding it in his hand, began:

"For the study of the vertebrata I've taken the common frog as a very instructive type. We will now consider the gastrocnemius muscle of this dissected specimen."

Slowly and carefully untying the strings of the package, the professor exposed to the view of the class a bulky ham sandwich and a boiled egg. For a moment his consternation was even greater than the amazement of his students.

"But, young gentlemen," he exclaimed, in tones of absolute bewilderment, "I've eaten my lunch!"

# F i s h   K e l l y ,   J o n a h

By Robert McBlair

*Author of "Read 'Em and Weep," "False Alarms," Etc.*

Even if it were Man-o'-War, Lawyer Little wouldn't bet on a horse that "Fish" Kelly was on

**A**S "Fish" Kelly was flapping his generous feet up Queen Street in the direction of Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen, where he worked, a hiss like the hiss of a rattlesnake seemed to fall out of the clear blue sky. He looked rapidly about, and descried above him, in the second-story window of a rickety frame dwelling, a small, animated black face. He recognized the features of Jockey Johnson, and grinned a greeting. But the little rider put a scrawny finger to his bulging lips and motioned Fish to come upstairs and join him.

Fish entered the narrow hall and mounted the creaking stairs with misgivings. His nature was melancholy rather than adventurous, and since he married Miss Macedonia Clinton, six months before, he had been living a peaceful and uneventful life, a life he liked. He entered Jockey Johnson's room with his tar-colored features set in opposition to any and all possible innovation.

Jockey, a diminutive figure clad in a green suit, with a diamond horseshoe pin in his red necktie, greeted Fish cordially and confirmed the fact that they had not met since the races at the county fair, a year ago. But his next words quenched the answering cordiality that had arisen in Fish's bosom.

"Is you seen Lawyer Little?"

Fish blinked. Macedonia had instructed him to keep away from "that big bacon-colored rascal." So, although he had seen Lawyer Little, he had always seen him first—and had gone round the block.

"I been looking for him," Jockey went on eagerly, "'cause here's a chance to make a pile of money, and I want him to help us."

"What kind of money?"

"Listen. You know dat big race what's coming off dis afternoon at de fair grounds? Well, who's de favorite?"

"Lady Nicotine going to win in a walk. Dat's what dey say."

"Yeah. But dat ain't what I say. Boy, I

gwine ride a horse what can run dat Nicotine lady ragged. And don't nobody know it but me, an' my white man boss."

"How come dey don't?"

Jockey rose and tipped to the door to see that no one was in earshot.

"Boy!" Jockey pulled his chair closer. "My horse run de legs off Lady Nicotine down in Louisville. But dea he was a white horse!"

"Ain't he a white horse now?"

Jockey laughed loud and long.

"I'll say he ain't! Naw, suh! My boss man's wife she changed her hair from gray to brown. My boss man say: 'How you do dat?' She tell him. Den he take dis horse, dis white horse, and he changed him from white to brown. Yas, suh. All but his ears and his forehead. Den he call me, an' he say: 'Jockey, here a new horse. Try him out. His name is Silver Lining.' But, Lawd chile, dey got to do more than change dat horse's color to keep me from knowing him, when I got a leg up."

"I'll say," agreed Fish, admiring the other's technical knowledge. "But I don't see what dat got to do wid money."

"Naw, you don't," Jockey acknowledged contemptuously, "but, Lawyer Little would. Why, boy, dey betting ten to one against Silver Lining."

Fish swallowed his prominent Adam's apple. The thought of putting up one dollar and getting back ten made his mouth water.

"What you want me to do?"

"I want you to tell Lawyer Little to get a lot of money and come to de track at three o'clock and see me. I can't go lookin' for him. White man boss told me to stay in dis room and not speak to nobody till race time. An' if he see me on de streets he sho' would bus' me open."

"What you say is the name of dis horse of your'n?"

"His name, Silver Lining. But he ain't

gwine win dis race 'less Lawyer see me, 'fore he bet. I got to make some money, too."

"An' where does I come in?"

"You an' Lawyer fixes dat."

"I'll tell him," said Fish. He rose and went down the creaking stairs, his easily aroused imagination already spending large sums of gold. But as he flapped in search of Lawyer, and drew nearer his goal, he grew less sanguine. He could not remember, among the numerous projects in which he and Lawyer had joined, any occasion when Lawyer had disclosed even a chemical trace of generosity. Fish's hopefulness entirely departed when he finally sighted the rotund Mr. Little seated in a chair in front of Benny Horton's barber shop.

Lawyer's dusty and greasy opera hat rested bottom up on the brick pavement. The mellow sunlight made shiny headlights on his close-cropped conical skull and gave a sheen of green to the old frock coat which once had been black. Lawyer's original chin was resting on his lower chins in an attitude of sleep, but as Fish came into his line of vision his eyes opened suddenly and his brow corrugated in a frown which to Fish seemed to spell unmitigated ferocity.

"Mornin', Mr. Little," offered Fish weakly.

Lawyer glared at Fish for a moment in silence. Then:

"I jes' been thinkin' about you," he said unpleasantly.

"Me?" This was not good news. Fish, to relieve his melting knees, sank onto the edge of a chair a safe distance away.

"Yes, you! You heard me!" Lawyer snarled. "You Doctor of Jonahrosity!"

"Me—what?" asked Fish, startled.

"You heard me. You's a regular professional Jonah. You's a Doctor of Jonahrosity."

Fish's already prominent eyes seemed about to come entirely from their sockets.

"You—you mean me?"

"Yes, you! You bug-eyed shadow of nothin'! I jes' been thinking. Ever' time I had anything to do wid you, I got in trouble. Ever' time!" Lawyer glared fiercely. "When you interduced me to dat hypnotizer, a lion had to get loose an' come in de theater. Next you got me into dat mess of trying to get big John Henry's life insurance. Said you seen him daid on de river bank. And big John Henry come back to life and nearly kilt me wid a pistol. Den was dat time we brought in liquor in a coffin, and 'cause you

was wid us, de liquor got sent to a funeral and I got sent to jail. Den was de time me an' Ted Harpy took dem alarm clocks, and de things began ringing in our pockets right dar befo' de judge. Once mo' I goes to jail."

There was a disagreeable silence.

"Mr. Little—" began Fish weakly.

"Listen," Lawyer Little interrupted. "I want you to keep 'way from me. Every time I talks to you I git in trouble. If I was to let you touch my rabbit's foot it would turn into a rattler's tooth. Don't never cross my path no more, 'cause if you do"—an expression of pleasure came over Lawyer's face—"I gwine kill you whar you sit."

"Mr. Little," said Fish desperately, "I knows a chance to make a lot of money. All you got to do is raise 'bout a hundred or a thousand dollars, and—"

With a gurgle of rage, Lawyer leaped to his feet and swung his chair over his head. But with the rapidity of lightning Fish had zigzagged across the street and disappeared up a lane in nothing flat.

"Dis earth is twice too small for me an' dat nigger both," Lawyer muttered as he dropped the chair to the sidewalk. With a grunt, he picked up his opera hat, put it on, and waddled down the street toward the Liberty lunch room in search of food. Just as he opened the rusty screen door of that fragrant hostelry he encountered Jockey Johnson, coming out. Jockey looked quickly up and down the street, for any sign of his white boss.

"Lawyer," he said, "I ain't got no time to hesitate. Meet me at de race track at three o'clock an' I'll tell you a sure ten-to-one shot. Bring your money with you."

Lawyer watched Jockey's green suit and white felt hat till they turned the corner. Then he entered the lunch room and gave himself over to appetite and meditation.

He knew Jockey Johnson of old. They had pulled many a trick together, and Jockey's judgment of good things was almost infallible. But Jockey's error this time lay in supposing that Lawyer had any money. And the fact that riches were within his grasp, but that he was unable to grasp them, threw Lawyer's mind into a state of irritable activity. His irritation was not lessened by the sight of Fish and Macedonia as they entered their ground-floor rooms across the street. And, to make his irritation almost unbearable, presently floated across

the street a cheerful song in Fish's quavery tenor, accompanied by syncopated chords from Macedonia at the piano.

"Him singing!" muttered Lawyer with bitterness and disgust as he presently saw Fish and Macedonia leave the house. "Him with a piano!"

But the mention of the piano seemed to bring beauty and light into Mister Little's thoughts. He slapped his knee, chuckled, paid his bill, put on his opera hat, and waddled rapidly out of the restaurant and several blocks down the street, to a wooden stable that housed Charley's day-and-night express.

Followed a brief colloquy with the amiable Charley. A few moments later the day-and-night express, with Lawyer seated beside Charley on the driver's seat, rattled along Queen Street and drew up with a flourish before Fish Kelly's residence.

Lawyer and Charley dismounted, entered the house, and shortly staggered forth, carrying a brightly varnished upright piano. This was loaded into the uncovered express wagon, the dejected clay-colored horse was urged into a convulsive trot, and with Lawyer standing and keeping the instrument in balance, they started on their journey to Mr. Meier's musical store.

Lawyer was in high good spirits until, having turned into Monticello Avenue, he espied the uniformed bulk of police officer Johnson at the next corner. Officer Johnson, he knew, would be unduly inclined to consider his connection with any article of property as a suspicious fact, requiring investigation. So he called to Charley to slow up, clambered down to the street, and waddled along the sidewalk.

When he and the parallel express wagon were passing Officer Johnson, and as he was bestowing upon that cold worthy his deepest and most ingratiating bow, he was struck chill by hearing a stentorian summons from Charley.

"Hey, Lawyer!" Lawyer pretended not to hear, and quickened his step.

"Hey, Lawyer! Come ketch your piano, quick!"

Charley had stopped at the crossing and was blocking traffic. The piano had slipped to the rear of the wagon and was threatening to topple over.

Lawyer had no choice. Perspiring profusely from nervousness, conscious of Officer Johnson's thoughtfully suspicious eye, he

pushed the piano back into the wagon and climbed in after it. From that point till they reached Meier's musical store he maintained, with more vigor than dignity, the unequal contest with a heavy piano determined to escape and aided by the wagon's inclined plane. He mopped his slanting brown forehead, told Charley to wait outside, and entered the store for a conference with Mr. Meier.

That aquiline-featured gentleman admitted that Fish Kelly was buying a piano from him on the installment plan, and, on referring to his books, found that so far the payments, several of which had been made by friends as wedding presents, amounted to four hundred dollars. How much would he allow if the piano was returned?

"Vell, if in perfect condition, two hundred dollar maybe. But who iss you?"

"I's Mister Kelly's lawyer. He is in a little trouble, and he got to have de money quick."

The piano was unloaded and proved to be as good as new. Mr. Meier was used to the irregular ways in which the colored people did business. He imagined that Fish was locked up and needed bail money. So Lawyer got two hundred dollars, signed a receipt, paid Charley two dollars, and caught the first trolley for the race track.

"If dat skinny nigger find out I took his pianny," he chuckled, "I tells him I borrowed it. I cleans up two thousand dollars, at ten to one, and pays him right back his two hundred."

The car soon arrived at the high board fence surrounding the race track. Lawyer dismounted, brushed by the yelling hawkers of programs and dope sheets, bought a general admission ticket and went through the turnstile gate. His nostrils fairly quivered as he inhaled the exciting race-track atmosphere of contest and chance.

Above him the white folks' boxes and grand stand, opposite the starting line, were packed with a colorful, noisy gathering of fine ladies and gentlemen. Crinkly money was in evidence, and passed from hand to hand. Field glasses of all dimensions were leveled at the bandaged racers warming up on the track, or hung in leather cases from tweed shoulders. An irregular procession wormed its way to and from the bookmakers who, like spiders, had attached their booths to pillars in the promenade beneath the stands.

Lawyer concluded that several races had been run, and had started hastily toward the stables when he felt a hand on his arm. It was Jockey Johnson. His diminutive frame was arrayed in a blouse of bright orange and trousers of apple-green laced tight over the calves, and on his small black head was a peaked jockey's cap of orange and green stripes.

"Where's dat money?" asked Jockey.

"What's de name of dat horse?" demanded Lawyer.

"How much does I get?" Jockey first wanted to know.

"I couldn't raise but a hundred. I'll split it wid you. Is it a sho' thing?"

"As sho' as a horse race ever is," grinned Jockey, grabbing the five ten-dollar bills. "Bet all you got on Silver Lining. Dat's what I am gwine do."

He darted off in the direction of the bookmakers.

A closing in of the crowd prevented Lawyer from following so quickly, but he pushed slowly along with the scores of others who were anxious to get their bets placed for the next race on Lady Nicotine, the favorite. As the press converged at one of the booths he became subconsciously aware of a familiar presence. He looked round and had a sudden sinking feeling at finding Fish Kelly at his elbow.

Fish seemed equally uncomfortable at being so near Mr. Little. But a sudden surge of the crowd thrust him forward till his black face was within six inches of Lawyer's.

"Go 'way," said Lawyer.

"I can't go 'way," retorted Fish. "Somebody pushin'."

"Don't talk to me! What you tryin' do, ruin my luck?"

"Mr. Little, I jes' want do you a favor."

"I don't want no favors. I jes' want you go 'way," retorted Lawyer excitedly. The gambler in him was on top. "Every time I do what you say I lose. Go 'way!"

But Fish could not relinquish this opportunity to reinstate himself in the eyes of his old compatriot. To be believed to be a Jonah would be as bad, or worse, on Queen Street, as having leprosy. The crowd had pushed them past the booth and Fish saw a chance to speak and, if necessary, run.

"Mr. Little, I kin tell you what horse gwine win dis race."

Lawyer glared at him.

"Go 'way! I don't want to hear nothing."

"Mr. Little, dat horse called Silver Lining gwine win dis race. Dat's what I was trying tell you dis mornin'."

Lawyer's jaw dropped.

"You mean tell me youbettin' on Silver Lining?"

"Yes, suh."

Lawyer groaned aloud. He remembered suddenly Jockey's words: "As sho' as any horse race ever is." He knew of no reason why Silver Lining should win, except Jockey Johnson's tip. And now he knew that Silver Lining was Jonahed.

Through the crowd he caught a glimpse of Jockey's orange and green cap, and rushed over to him.

"Jockey, whar dat money? Silver Lining Jonahed!"

Jockey's eyes and mouth opened wide; his blackness grayed.

"How come he Jonahed?"

"I seen a perfessional Jonah after him. Bet dat money on another horse."

"I done already bet."

"Den sell de ticket."

From the region of the stable came the clanging of a bell.

"Here," cried Jockey, thrusting a pink slip into Lawyer's hand. "You sell it." And he darted away.

Only a few minutes remained for the placing of bets. The horses already were entering the track. Lawyer found a booth.

"How much you give me for dis pink ticket?"

"Forty dollars."

Lawyer pushed his hundred and fifty dollars across the counter with it.

"Put de whole hundred an' ninety on Lady Nicotine, to win," he instructed. And, having got his ticket, he hurried out to the track.

He found a place on the rail around the track, and calculated his financial situation. The odds on Lady Nicotine were three to two, so aside from what he would have to give Jockey, the bookmaker would return to him only two hundred and thirty-five dollars. Assuming that the worst happened, and he must return two hundred dollars to Mr. Meier, to save trouble, this would leave him a profit of only thirty-five dollars. Thirty-five dollars as compared with the two thousand in prospect before that Jonah appeared!

While the horses, with their bandaged

ankles, made ready for the start, a fat colored gentleman in an opera hat sat on the race-track rail and plotted murder.

Lady Nicotine was a beautiful bay mare with ears and feet Arabian in their smallness. The two next favorites were handsome horses, one a sorrel, the other brown and white. There were two other entries. And then came riding from the paddock Jockey Johnson, on a rangy horse of a strange russet, almost a henna color, but with white ears and forehead.

There were two false starts, and then from a thousand throats came the stirring roar that meant:

"They're off!"

Lady Nicotine, next to the rail, was ahead. Lawyer could see the number four placarded on the jockey's back. The next two favorites were next, and fourth, squatting like a monkey over his horse's shoulders, came Jockey Johnson on Silver Lining. Pressed so close together that it seemed inevitable they must trip and fall, they clattered round the first turn in a cloud of dust. Lawyer let out a terrific yell:

"Go it, Lady!"

And like a distorted echo he heard from near by a quavery tenor:

"Go it, Silver Lining. Bring me back my five dollars, and fifty mo'!"

Lawyer was making a mental note of the point from which the tenor voice had come when he was surprised to feel a heavy clasp on his shoulder. He was still more surprised when he looked up and saw the gray mustache and blue helmet of Officer Johnson.

Lawyer tried to smile a smile of welcome. "Push right up, ossifer, an' see de race."

"You is under arrest."

"Me?" inquired Lawyer in a high voice of astonishment. "How come?"

"For stealin' Miss Fish Kelly's pyanner, which I done had taken back to her."

"Oh," smiled Lawyer wanly, "dat was jes' a joke." He dismissed the subject with a wave of the hand.

"You can tell dat joke to de judge," returned Officer Johnson, "de same time you tell him de joke about gittin' two hundred dollars from Mr. Meier on false pretenses."

Lawyer had paled perceptibly.

"Listen, Mr. Johnsing. I got a bet on dis race, and I kin pay back all dat money. Jes' wait till dis race is over."

"What horse youbettin' on?" inquired

the officer, taking a precautionary grip on Lawyer's sleeve.

"Number fo', dat one what's leadin'?"

The horses were two-thirds round the track, which had to be circled twice. Lady Nicotine was leading by half her length. Next, neck and neck, came the second favorite and Silver Lining. The remainder of the field straggled out hopelessly behind.

"Oh, you Silver Lining!" came a quavery tenor yell as the horses flashed past the post on the first lap. But there seemed to be no change in position. Like toy horses fastened to a base, they neither gained nor lost, till three-quarters round the second lap.

Then something began to happen. Silver Lining drew ahead of the second favorite by an inch, then by six inches, then a foot. Next his wide nostrils were even with Lady Nicotine's shoulder. The second favorite was forgotten. The boxes, the grand stands, rose to their feet with a shriek and a roar.

"Go it, Lady! Come on, Silver!"

The race was almost over. There was barely a hundred yards to go. Silver Lining gained another half an inch, an inch. His russet muzzle was now level with Lady Nicotine's bit. The crowd groaned. He gained an eighth of an inch—a quarter—a half—

They flashed by the post while the crowd went wild.

"Who won? Who won?"

The judges conferred. Then the marker slipped a number opposite first place. The number was six. Number four got second place.

Jockey Johnson on Silver Lining had won.

"Dat judge crazy," said Lawyer faintly. "Dat horse—"

"You lose," interrupted Officer Johnson without sympathy. "Let's git out of here fo' de crowd."

Too dispirited even to converse, Lawyer allowed Officer Johnson to lead him in the general direction of ninety days in jail. The hundred and ninety dollars had gone up in smoke. And he would have been two thousand dollars ahead if it hadn't been for that Fish Kelly—that Jonah!

Just outside the gate he felt a timid touch on his arm. It was Fish Kelly, his ebony face wreathed in smiles.

"What I tell you, Mr. Little? Didn't I tote you dat horse would win? You see now I ain't no Jonah, don't you?"

The annihilating right swing that Lawyer

aimed at Fish's smiling countenance threw the unsuspecting Officer Johnson three feet out of plumb. But its only other effect was to add wings to Fish's feet. In less than three seconds he was at a perfectly safe distance, but it was longer than that before

he could persuade his limbs to slow down to a walk.

Then, between puffs, he could have been heard to mutter:

"Dat Mister Little, he sho' am a curious man. He ain't *never* satisfied wid *nothing*."

*Look for more of Mr. McBlair's work.*



## MOVIE MUSIC

YOU do not have to look back more than ten years to realize how the motion-picture industry has allied itself with music, while in the theaters of the spoken drama music has become a negligible quantity. Is it that the sound of the human voice suffices in the latter case, while the silence of the former calls for something to break the stillness?

But that is not our main subject here. Good music in the movies will exert a great deal of influence toward the musical culture of America, for standards are apt to go higher as familiarity with an art increases. And that very thing is happening with the union of the moving picture and high-class music.

Originally, if you remember, anything would serve in the way of musical entertainment in the average movie house from a tin-pan piano to a violin with the soul of a slate pencil. And the pieces played were stereotyped and dog-eared from abuse. Sad scenes were served to "The Maiden's Prayer," the Mendelssohn "Spring Song" indicated happier moments, and the "Ben Hur Chariot Race" stressed the dramatic climaxes.

But a complete transformation has taken place—is taking place—right under our eyes. The metropolitan temples of the silent drama now lay much emphasis on their symphony orchestras and their operatic selections. Their programs are ambitious, and, what is strange to those who persist in denying that the "masses" can possibly like "good" music, the movie-goers enjoy and demand music of the better sort. Only the other evening we dropped into a couple of these gorgeous temples of screen drama, and in one we heard a movement from Tschaikowsky's Fourth Symphony given to the evident pleasure of the crowd, and in the other house an aria from the Mozart opera of "Don Giovanni," which was applauded with gusto.

Not more than six years ago the writer was asked to make up some programs of music which were intended to match a series of moving pictures with fitting music. At that time he was a pioneer in the field. Most of his suggestions were considered too advanced for the average movie-goer's intelligence or appreciation. To-day, he feels sure that what he then proposed would be considered below the present standard.

Still, in contributing the proper musical accompaniment to screen stories, there are many humorous combinations unconsciously indulged in, especially in some of the smaller houses. Murders are always accompanied by "shivery" music, lovers in the lane are handed "Hearts and Flowers," dying mothers and villains get the Massenet "Elégie." But some of the funnier things of the sort which we have witnessed were Beethoven's "Sonata Pathétique" to a gambling game, Chopin's "Funeral March" to the ravings of a lunatic, and Schubert's "Serenade" to a motherless baby playing near a precipice. Certain traditions continue even in the higher-class movie houses, such as a piano medley being sufficient to a comedy, but a tragedy calling for a violin or flute, as well as piano.

# Jeering Birds

By Arthur Tuckerman

*Author of "The Starfish Tattoo," "The Ship of Hate," Etc.*

**Tremaine had won his wings in the war, but he found things in the tropical jungles that would have shaken the nerve of the bravest man in the flying game**

**I**N telling of this curious affair of young Tremaine, the aviator, we'll dub the republic Maraguay, and its capital, Marillo. For, surely, there's little to be gained in libeling a Central American republic which might some day, by the grace of God, be induced to stir from its accustomed lethargy and do something to gain the world's respect.

Carruthers had been our consul at Marillo for six years, but he had no good word for the place. A white-walled, cobble-streeted pesthole, inhabited by a degenerate populace, who incessantly proclaimed their lofty ambitions in the glare of noon tide, and then proceeded to commit the most immoral duplicities under cover of darkness. Not an immoral people, Carruthers asserted with a hackneyed shade of distinction, but an unmoral one.

It was Carruthers' custom to join me nightly at my table outside the Hotel of the Two Worlds—to drink sirupy coffee with me and expound his theories concerning the Maraguayans. The hotel faced the Plaza of the Ascuncion, a most dreary rectangle of plaster walls and cobblestones, blistering hot by day and mosquito-ridden by night. Directly across the plaza from the fonda stood the American Hospital, a rambling one-story structure that was as unpretentious as it was practical. Carruthers informed me, with his dry humor, that of all the public institutions in the town of Marillo it was by far the busiest—except, perhaps, the Federal prison, which invariably entertained to capacity crowds. Between Maraguay's sporadic revolutions and its occasional fever scourges, the hospital had more than its share of work to do.

One evening, about ten o'clock I think it was, while we were sitting at our usual table outside the fonda, I called Carruthers' attention to a commotion in front of the hospital;

an ancient carriage was waiting before the entrance and we could see three people descending the steps, slowly and cautiously; a nurse and a white-garbed interne were supporting between them a pitifully weak and pale young man.

This young man was clad in a faded khaki shirt, whipcord breeches, and leather puttees; as he limped into the circular glare of an arc light I could see his features clearly—straw-colored hair, a clean-cut, honest, boyish face, pale-blue eyes. They were eyes that seemed oddly fixed in focus, as if they had looked upon something which they could never quite forget—something haunting and terrible which was not to be obliterated from memory except, perhaps, by the passing of many years.

"Carruthers," I began, "who is that young fellow? He looks like an American—and a very sick one, too."

"It's Tremaine," he answered, "Bob Tremaine—out of the hospital for the first time in three months. They're taking him over to the consulate. I'm going to ship him home on next week's boat."

"What happened to him? The usual thing—fever?"

"No," he replied slowly, "it wasn't fever exactly—although that came on later. It was an accident, an unbelievably queer accident. It had to do with an aeroplane and some jeering birds; it sounds absurd, doesn't it?"

I drew my chair closer to the little marble-topped table. When Carruthers had a story to tell it was always worth the listening. He lighted a thin, yellow cigar, a foul product of the Maraguayan swamps which served its purpose in warding off mosquitoes. In Marillo, by the way, the mosquitoes are double the size of their far-famed, Jersey cousins.

"This lad, Tremaine," Carruthers began, puffing up a smoke screen worthy of a de-

stroyer at the Guantanamo maneuvers, "came to Marillo during last October—five months ago. He was then an aviator. I say 'then' because it isn't likely he'll ever fly again. He was a fine young fellow, had fought straight through the war, and downed a dozen boche planes. He didn't tell me that himself; he was far too modest. I just happened to run across his record in an American magazine."

"What was he doing in this God-forsaken place?"

"Making his way back to the U. S. by slow coastwise hops after completing an exhibition tour on the Pacific coast of South America. When the war stopped he had hardly a cent to his name and took up stunt flying for a living. His machine wasn't one of those nifty little flying boats you see skipping about off Long Island on a summer's day—nothing like that.

"He wanted to fly over water, so he bought a secondhand French seaplane discarded by a South American government that found aviation too expensive. It was one of those tractor affairs with the propeller away up in front, and a pair of old-fashioned catamaran floats instead of a hull. It was good enough for its purpose and pleased the natives immensely. He had big posters printed in atrocious Spanish and stuck up all over the walls of this town to announce 'A Sensational Exhibition by the Renowned Devil of the Air.'

"When the Maraguyans saw him do an Immelmann turn or the falling leaf, or the French 'vrie' the womenfolk almost expired from heart failure and the men shouted themselves hoarse—a childish people for all their vices. Tremaine loved to amuse them, and never worried about the gate money which was ridiculously small. A dear boy—it did you good to see his fine Anglo-Saxon face amidst all these rotten surroundings."

I think Carruthers' eyes were just a little moist when he said this, and he gulped down the remainder of his coffee hurriedly.

"I'll have to digress a little at this point to tell you about Sawtrell's; it'll make the story clearer to you. About two hundred and forty miles inland up the Rio Negro, that dirty stream you see down by the docks, there was a big mahogany camp started about eight months ago and operated by a British firm. The place was called Sawtrell's—after the head of the firm—and employed some hundred men, twenty whites

and the rest of them native lumbermen and Yucá Indians. This camp was pretty well isolated from the rest of the world, except for a dinky little stern wheeler that went up the river every six weeks.

"Now the white men at Sawtrell's soon discovered that this lack of communication was a serious inconvenience. They had no way of receiving their business instructions from London, even cables, or their letters from home—except by waiting six weeks for the *Libertad*, which was always late. They're building a railroad through the forest now, but it'll be many months before that's finished, and then it'll be used for bringing the lumber down.

"They tried native runners for the mail, but the Indians took fifteen days to get down here to Marillo, and fifteen back, and generally got drunk on the way—an unreliable lot. After that Dickerson, the camp manager, made a contract with a half-breed here in Marillo to run a motor boat up the river every two weeks, bringing the mail and provisions with him; this scheme worked after a fashion, although they suspected the man of pilfering the mails. But it was better than nothing.

"One week last November Dickerson came down to Marillo on one of his occasional trips; in the hotel here he met Tremaine. As a matter of fact, I introduced them."

Carruthers paused to smile reminiscently.

"Dickerson almost immediately put a business proposition to Tremaine, and Tremaine accepted. The lad needed a rest from stunt flying, and he suspected that the strain was beginning to tell on his 'ship.' Dickerson's terms were generous and it just suited Tremaine. So they sat down here, at this very table, and drew up a contract.

"Tremaine was to make his headquarters here and was to undertake one trip a week—on the arrival of the boat mail—up the Rio Negro to Sawtrell's. The distance, following the river, approximated two hundred and fifty miles—you see Tremaine had to follow the river because he had a seaplane and couln't risk a forced landing in the forest or swamps. His first trip was highly successful. He left here on a Saturday at eight a. m., and reached Sawtrell's a few minutes after noon. Not so bad for a three-year-old plane, was it?"

I agreed that it wasn't so bad, although I secretly decided that Tremaine's 'ship' must have been badly underpowered.

"Tremaine stayed at the camp about three hours and got back here just before sundown that evening. The population of Marillo lined the banks of the Rio for several kilometers in a cheering mob, and they gave him a big reception. Tremaine made a perfect landing at the harbor, put his plane in the hangar that had been built for it down near the Molo, and came straight to the hotel. He had supper with me that night, and I saw that he was enthusiastic over his success.

"'Apart from its being a good business proposition,' he said, 'I like the job because it helps those boys away up there in the forest. My, but they were glad to get their letters! They treated me royally—as if I'd done something wonderful, just flying up there.'

"Toward the end of supper he began laughing quietly to himself.

"'A funny thing happened to me on the way up,' he said. 'My radiator circulation gave me trouble about two hundred miles from here—just where the river leaves the swamps and plunges into the forest. On either side of me I couldn't see anything but trees and trees and trees, and a dark tangle of underbrush. I had to fly considerably lower than I'd calculated on doing, because the river was so narrow that I lost sight of it very easily and I didn't want to risk a crash into the timber—so I kept to about three hundred by my altimeter.'

"'In the middle of the forest my motor began to overheat badly, so I planed down and hit the river at a spot where it curved sharply westward; just before I touched the water I had to dodge a narrow sand bar in the center of the stream. On that sand bar there were—well, what do you think? A swarm of giant birds! They were hideous-looking things; I'd never seen the like of them before, a kind of dull, metallic green in color, and they had long, thin necks and flat little heads like snakes. And their beaks—nasty, conical beaks with daggerlike points. Lord, but they were ugly creatures!'

"I knew from Tremaine's description that the things he had seen on that sand bar were what we call snakebirds. There are lots of them in this country, and especially up Honduras way. But when I came to ask him how big they were he staggered me by saying that most of them stood higher than four feet. Of course, I had to believe him; you see, there are all sorts of queerish stories concerning the Maraguayan forests, because

the region has never been properly explored, even to-day. And there was no reason to doubt the existence of a race of supersnale-birds. Very horrible creatures they must have been, too.

"As soon as the birds saw Tremaine's plane they flapped across the river in a great mass toward him, and in a moment he was surrounded by them. And then, he said, the things began to laugh at him—made a kind of subdued jeering noise, like an audience at a cheap theater when a turn comes on that doesn't suit their fancy! Tremaine said they gave him the feeling that they were jealous of his plane and that they were gloating over his trouble. Queer thought, wasn't it?"

Carruthers paused to light another cigar.

"I'm trying to describe the incident in the boy's own words, as well as I can remember them. It seems that he tinkered over his radiator for about ten minutes and then 'gave her the gun,' ready to take off. As he rose from the water several of these bird brutes got in his way; two were struck by his whirling propeller and instantly killed. The rest of the birds then became enraged; the whole crowd of them began to scream in a perfect fury, dashing their wings frantically against his plane and making sharp little stabs at him with their long, pointed beaks.

"He discovered, too, that they could fly, and fly very well, for they followed him at least a mile up the river before he got up enough speed to leave them behind. I remember Tremaine grew suddenly serious when he finished his account of the incident. 'They seemed terrible vengeful,' he said. 'If I ever landed among them again I think I'd have quite a time. Next time I go up that way I'll take my automatic with me.'

"Well, to make a long story short, Tremaine made his trip to Sawtrell's regularly for six weeks, and nothing untoward happened. He kept to his schedule as if he'd been a municipal ferry in New York harbor. Then, one evening along toward the end of December, he failed to show up here at eight o'clock. I went down to the river, and I confess I was a little anxious about him, because I didn't relish the idea of his spending a night in a wrecked plane on that lonely river; everybody knows that the forest is full of all kinds of weird creatures, some of them man-eaters. At ten o'clock I spotted his plane heading down the Rio and I rowed out to meet him, breathing a sigh of relief.

"When he climbed down from the cockpit I saw at once that something had happened; he had a deep, red gash across his left cheek and his face looked unnaturally white.

"I took him up to the fonda and gave him a stiff drink. He told me that on the return trip from the camp he had been delayed in starting on account of carburation trouble—that old plane of his would have driven another man crazy, but he seemed to take a sheer joy in diagnosing its ailments. It was nearly dusk when he made his take-off, and consequently he was compelled to fly low over the river, which was his only guide. He'd discarded the use of his compass because he didn't have a chart of the district to use in conjunction with it.

"Some fifty miles south of Sawtrell's a dozen of those snakebirds suddenly flew out of the depths of the forest and attacked him viciously. Three of them flew straight into the cockpit and stabbed at his head with their sharp beaks; he had a desperate fight, clutching his control stick in one hand and his automatic in the other. He managed to shoot one of the creatures, and that apparently disheartened the other two, but he very nearly lost control of his plane in doing it."

"Why didn't he rise higher and get out of their reach?" I asked.

"The moment he tried to he lost sight of the river. The reflection of the rising moon on the water was the only thing he had to guide by, and of the two evils he preferred a battle with the birds rather than a crash in the forest. He was in a devil of a position.

"When he retired to his room that night I think he had a slight fever, and the next morning he looked—well—not at all his usual self. Now the dreadful part of the whole business was that the thing must have grown on the lad's mind.

"A subtle change came over him, something that he was fully aware of himself, but neither he nor I could understand it; afterward the cause of it became as clear as daylight to me—but not at the time. His old 'war nerves' came back; he grew nervous, pale, and at times utterly miserable. He explained to me that he wasn't afraid of a few of those damned birds, but that he dreaded a concerted attack of hundreds, 'an inhuman army of them,' as he put it.

"Long after the tragic dénouement of it

all I learned that he had lain awake, night after night, in his room thinking of those birds, with their serpent heads and bright, wicked, little eyes. He knew, somehow, that he'd roused the enmity of a whole kingdom of God's creatures, and no man likes to be up against nature itself like that. It was a very peculiar situation.

"Tremaine left Marillo on his last flight on January 7th, exactly three months ago to-day. I helped him put the mail bags aboard his plane and facetiously suggested accompanying him, but he said that was impossible; his craft was what he dubbed a 'monoplane,' and it wouldn't stand the extra load. He had spent all the previous day painting its wings with a new coat of cellulose and he looked somewhat tired when he started, I thought.

"During that afternoon a thunderstorm came up, a vivid tropical storm of the kind you encounter only down in this part of the world—and then torrents of rain. The fonda's roof leaked like a sieve, and the tramway line down to the harbor was inundated. The plaza out here looked like some obscure part of Venice. I wasn't worried about Tremaine at first, because I felt sure that he would have sense enough to remain at Sawtrell's until it was all over. And then it dawned on me suddenly that as he'd left Marillo considerably earlier than usual that morning he had probably started on the return trip long before the storm began.

"At seven o'clock, as was my custom, I went down to the banks of the river to meet him. The storm was over and the usual crowd of Marillans had gathered to witness Tremaine's arrival. His old seaplane never failed to arouse their enthusiasm—and, you know, it takes a good deal to get these somnolent Maraguayans enthusiastic. I think they looked on Tremaine as a kind of human angel and his straw-colored hair, which was a miracle in itself to them, aided their imagination somewhat.

"Eight o'clock came; then nine, then ten. The crowd gradually dispersed, leaving me alone on the river bank. Oh, those long hours of waiting! At midnight there were no signs of Bob Tremaine.

"You can imagine how much sleep I had that night. Before dawn came I had chartered a motor boat and had started up the Rio Negro with Alvarez, the proprietor of this hotel and the best fellow in Maraguay. It was a day of blazing heat, and it took us

hours and hours to crowd up the sluggish river in that little one-lunger motor boat. We covered about a hundred miles, that day, and camped overnight in an Indian village on the edge of the swamp lands. That was another sleepless night for me. We were off again at sunup the next morning, and late that afternoon we left the swamps and plunged into the forest. The river was deadly silent but for the screams of the macaws and the occasional rustling of the undergrowth by some hidden creeping thing. The place got on my nerves, I confess.

"At dusk we rounded a bend and came upon a sand bar—just as Tremaine had described to me. Of course I instantly thought of the birds, but there were none in sight; the place was devoid of all signs of life. Fifty yards upstream above the sand bar we found a yellow object sticking up above the surface of the muddy water; it was the upper wing of Tremaine's aéroplane.

"Yes. We found him, unconscious, lying across the upper plane. Apparently he'd had the presence of mind to crawl up there from the cockpit as soon as he'd crashed. We gave him what first aid we could and took him back to Marillo."

"But the birds!" I asked. "Didn't you see any of them?"

"Not a single one. The lad hovered between life and death, at that hospital across the street, for nearly a week. Both legs were broken and several ribs fractured, and to make matters worse a delirious fever came on. I was at his bedside much of the time, night and day. He'd wave his arms and shout: 'The birds—thousands of them—my God!'—and things like that. But the doctors pulled him through somehow. When he was on the road to recovery he gave me a very vague account of what had happened to him.

"He remembered starting from Sawtrell's that afternoon before the storm, feeling depressed and a little dizzy; he ascribed this dizziness to the sultry heat that lay over the forest, heralding the storm. A half an hour or so after he had left the camp the storm broke; as he approached the bend in the river everything, he said, seemed to grow dark around him. And out of this canopy of creeping blackness, from every direction, came those gigantic snakebirds—swooping straight upon him.

"They came not in hundreds but thousands, so that the air was a living, flutter-

ing mass of them, and they beat against his plane in a moving greenish wall that closed in gradually upon him. It was like a harrowing nightmare, a phantasmagoria, and those birds seemed ten times bigger than before—he knew they wanted to down him, to crush him to earth where they thought he belonged. They screamed, too, louder than they had ever screamed before, so that he heard them above the bark of his motor, and their eyes were vivid little dabs of fire. After that he fell down, down—into the river.

"How much of his story was true to fact and how much was due to a highly inflamed mind I couldn't tell, but I have studied some medicine in my younger days and, while listening to him, I came to the conclusion that his brain had been subjected to some external influence; in other words, I believed that when he started upon that last flight his mental condition was abnormal. I questioned him carefully and was rewarded with several clews that started me thinking.

"It seems that during all those stops at Sawtrell's he had spent most of his time with the new assistant foreman, one Foya, a half-breed. Foya had a pleasant little canteen up there with a good supply of cigars and cooling drinks of fruit sirup, and altogether it was an agreeable spot in which to pass a few hours—especially as the Englishman Dickerson was usually too busy at his work to spend any time with Tremaine. The lad also mentioned, casually enough, that he had told Foya of the birds' first attack upon him, and Foya had seemed inordinately interested. After that they often discussed the birds together.

"That was enough for me to go on. I started upon a little investigation of my own, and I must tell you that the results of it were very surprising indeed."

I interrupted Carruthers.

"You must have known this man Foya before, because the mere mention of his name seems to have roused your suspicions."

"Of course. He was known through Marillo as a rotten character—a grafted and a crook—but you couldn't get anything on him because he paid the Loyalist party in power for immunity. The real thing that put me on his track was the fact that I knew he was the man who held the contract to deliver the Sawtrell mails and provisions by motor boat before Tremaine showed up. Foya was making an enormous profit in a very easy way,

and I'd heard it said over and over again in this town that he was insanely angry when Tremaine supplanted him with his modern method of mail service. It was queer, then, that he should go out of his way to be decent to Tremaine. The lad, of course, knew nothing about the motor boat contract.

"I went up to Sawtrell's myself, ostensibly on a mahogany deal, and spent three days there with Dickerson, whom I took into my confidence. Luckily Foya was away in the forest, logging, at the time, and didn't return to the camp while I was there. In his cabin we discovered several gallons of a native drink manufactured by the Yuca Indians from a creeper plant that grows in the forest. I instantly recalled Tremaine's mention of the delicious sirup that Foya had served him during his stops at Sawtrell's.

"You can see plainly now what happened. Foya had planned a revenge of some kind, and Tremaine's chance remark about the birds suggested a very grotesque and brutal scheme. He gradually gave Tremaine a taste for this native stuff under the pretext that it was a harmless sirup. I've studied the effects of an overdose of that stuff on the Indians; I've seen them reeling under it.

"The effects—which generally come about half an hour after consumption—are peculiar. The victim's imagination is intensified to an incredible degree, so that whatever he is thinking of at the time seems more real than reality—if you can understand what I mean. Everything that comes into his inflamed mind appears before him, and many times its normal size. Emotions are exaggerated; a slightly humorous thought becomes a cause for screaming hilarity, the vaguest fear is transformed into dread terror—

"You must give Foya credit for a very big imagination and a certain knowledge of psychology. He made a point of talking to the lad week after week about those gigantic birds—and, perhaps, exaggerating the danger of them. He played hell with Tremaine's mind in a very subtle way."

*Other stories by Mr. Tuckerman will appear in early issues.*



#### A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE

**S**OME of these girls," remarked Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "wear their hair over their ears to keep from hearing what folks say about the way they're dressed."

"And so," I said slowly, "that last great attack by the birds was all a matter of imagination."

"Yes. Most of it was imagination. During Tremaine's last visit Foya gave him an overdose of the stuff for the first time; he considered the boy's mind primed for his rotten scheme. Thirty minutes after Tremaine had left Sawtrell's his mind went *crack*, like the snap of a whip. The vision of the birds, distorted and enormous, came vividly before him. He lost control of his plane and crashed into the river. In that thunderstorm, too. It must have been ghastly."

For a long time Carruthers and I sat in silence.

"And Foya?" I asked suddenly. "I suppose you managed to get him in the end?"

A queer little smile flickered about his lips.

"No," he said thoughtfully. "I didn't have time to do that. But there was something rather brutally splendid in the justice that was meted him. He went down the Rio Negro to the spot where Tremaine's plane had fallen, after we had left, and tried to salvage the thing—always on the lookout for the *pesetas*, you see. It seems that while he was standing in his motor boat, shouting instructions to his Indian helpers, several of those damned birds—there was a whole flock of them huddled on the sand bar near by—suddenly took fright and whirled up in the air screaming. The sight of them, at that moment, so completely unnerved him that he somehow lost his balance, and fell into the river. They say he drowned almost immediately.

"Eh—have another cigar, won't you?"

Out in the plaza an old cripple was playing snatches of "Carmen" upon a battered cornet, to the delight of a dozen ragged, filthy children. His mournful notes were suddenly drowned by the deep blast of a steamer entering the harbor—the ship that was to take Tremaine home. I half hoped that he, poor fellow, was still awake to hear that gruff promise.

## A Chat With You

JUST about now, the new president is getting started. Friday was inauguration. Saturday and Sunday he and Mrs. Harding had time to look over their new home. And now Warren Gamaliel is facing the heaviest responsibility the world holds for any one man. We all, of course, wish him luck. Can we do anything to help him in the tremendous task that is his? We think so.

Most people mean well. Nine tenths of the trouble is caused by misconceptions and misunderstandings. If we knew a little more of the inside facts of American history, we would all be better off. One of the most distressing misconceptions is that which goes under the name of "sectionalism." The disciple and propagandist of sectionalism is the New Englander who thinks the Southerner a lazy descendant of slave owners, the Southerner who thinks the New Englander a greedy hypocrite, the farmer who thinks every man who earns his living anywhere within sight of Trinity Church a piratical member of the money trust, the city worker who thinks the farmer gets all the best of it. His name is legion. He is the man who thinks that *his* ancestors really made the country. Local pride is a good thing, but national pride is a great deal better.

• •

ARE you a native-born American? Oh, yes! Your ancestors grew up in New England or in Virginia. Pure Pilgrim or Cavalier stock, as the case may be. How pure? We have before us the genealogy of a distinguished ex-governor of Virginia who bears an hon-

ored English name. Let us see how unmixed his blood is. Of thirty-two ancestors in the fifth degree, only nineteen are of English descent. Eight are Scotch, two Irish, two Swedish, and one Dutch. Of the English ancestors, eight are descended from so-called Cavaliers, and eleven are Puritans. Of the Puritans, two are descended from Puritans who had turned Quakers. If you were to have the pleasure of meeting the gentleman and hearing him talk, you would decide that the mixture was an excellent one. And rest assured that if your people have been in this country any length of time, your ancestry is just as various as his. You are not a Southerner nor a Cavalier nor a Puritan nor a Dutchman—you are just a plain American. So much for ancestry. Some of the sectionalists who have forgotten what the Civil War was for take a lot of stock in it. Here is their answer.

• •

LET us look now at some of the things of which we as a people are proud. We have the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the separation of church and state, our land tenures with their abolishment of entailed estates, our laws, our charitable institutions, our courts, and our system of public education. Let us see where all these safeguards of liberty and happiness came from. The first two settlements in this country were in Virginia and Massachusetts. The Southern sectionalists gives the credit to the South, the Northerner to the North. Both claim that our laws and institutions are a direct heritage from England. Let's forget sentiment and look at the facts.

*A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.*

**J**EFFERSON, the author of the Declaration of Independence, was Welsh by descent and French in his political thinking. The language of the Declaration was not of English origin at all. It was taken almost verbatim from the written constitution of the Dutch Republic of 1579. Why quarrel as to the Puritan or Cavalier origin of this famous document? It was neither.

Take the Constitution. England has no written constitution, so it didn't come from there. Patrick Henry, Scotch-Irish, and Henry Lee, Virginian, had first try at it. Then Jay, French Huguenot, and Livingston, a Puritan, were called in.

Henry, Scotch-Irish, and Jefferson, Welsh, have the credit for the separation of church and state.

Our land tenures are not English, save in the forms of the deeds. Our methods of transfer by registration of deeds came from Holland. The Continental and Roman law gave us most of our customs regarding the transfer of personal property and commercial law. England had very little law and hardly any commerce when the Puritans and Cavaliers landed. The common law of England, of which we hear so much, was not even taught in the English universities for more than two centuries after America was settled. Our system of elections is not English. The only English thing we have in our system of criminal procedure is the jury. Our principle of religious toleration came to us straight from Holland. Neither Cavalier nor Puritan understood that sort of freedom till they learned it from the Dutch.



**A** FAVORITE New England claim is that the Puritan invented our system of public education. The free-school system they learned in Holland.

There were free schools in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam twenty years before they appeared in New England. Among the officers of the Revolution were Germans, French, Scotch-French, Scotch-Irish. Of the twenty-seven men who preceded President Harding in the White House, eight have been of Scotch-Irish stock, three of Scotch, one of Welsh, two of Dutch, three Cavalier English, five Puritan English, one Puritan and Scotch-Irish, one a mixture of English, Welsh, and Huguenot, one a cross between a Scotch Presbyterian and an Irishman, one a cross between a Cavalier and a Puritan. Count them up. We have left one out. His name is Theodore Roosevelt. His ancestry was so varied, the elements in his wonderful personality so mixed, that you might say to all the world: "This is an American."

President Harding is an American. He does not represent the North, the South, the small town, the city, the country, the East, the West, or yet the Middle West. He represents America. That means all of us. No North, no South, nor East nor West, but an American pilot on the ship of state! Good luck to him!



**J**UST a word about the next POPULAR. It opens with a novel by Edison Marshall, complete in the issue, "Folk of the Gray Sage." It has a funny story by McMorrow, a mystery story by Wallace, stories of sport by Brown and Fitz Morris, Western stories by Norton, Knibbs, and Raine, a story of the South Seas by Beatrice Grimshaw, and a tale of the big woods by Chisholm. Every one of them great!



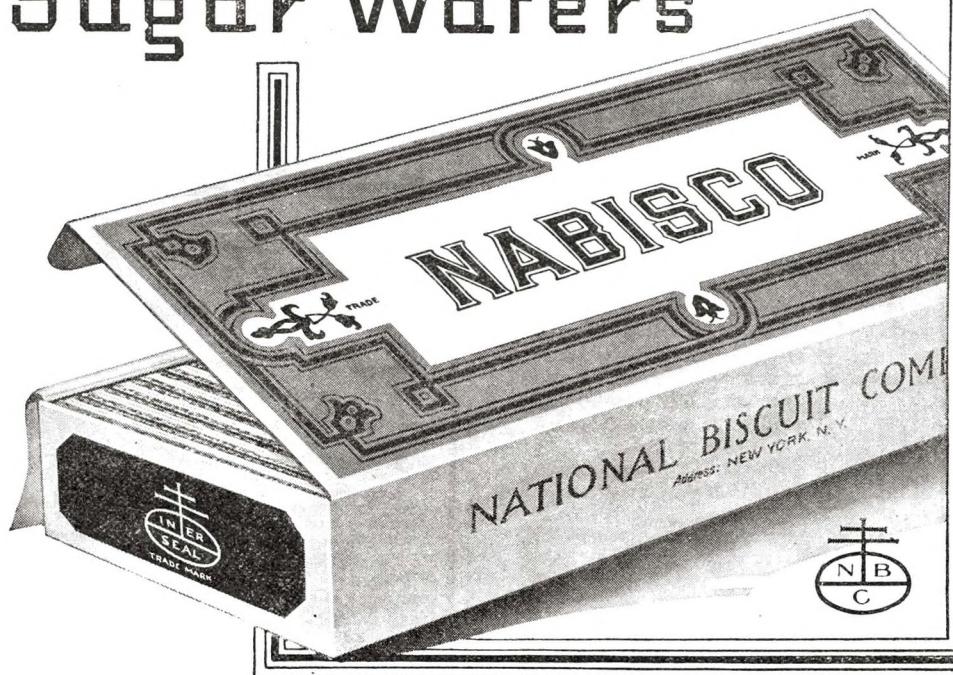
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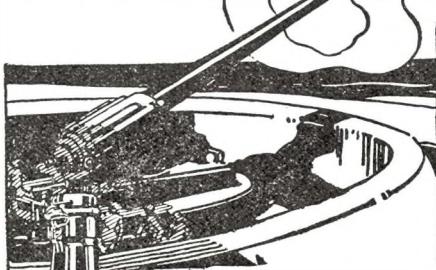


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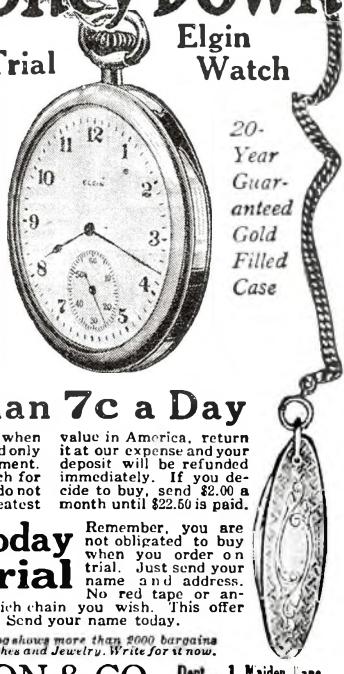
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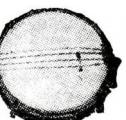
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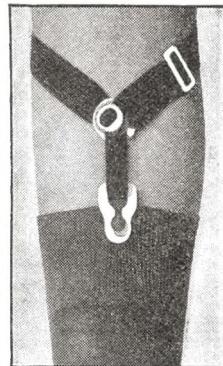
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left William White's leg in a crippled condition, forcing him to walk on his toes. Less than five months treatment at the McLain Sanitarium produced the satisfactory result shown in the lower photograph. Read his mother's letter.

"When William was three years old, he had Infantile Paralysis, which left him crippled in his left leg. He went to your Sanitarium October 24, 1919, at the age of 13—walking on his toes. Came out April 10 with his foot flat on the floor and can walk as good as anyone.

Mrs. S. P. White, Wced, Cal.

### Crippled Children

The McLain Sanitarium is a thoroughly equipped private institution devoted exclusively to the treatment of Club Feet, Infantile Paralysis, Spinal Diseases and Deformities, Hip Disease, Wry Neck, etc., especially as found in children and young adults. Our book, "Deformities and Paralysis"; also "Book of References," free. Write for them.

**McLAIN ORTHOPEDIC SANITARIUM**  
954 Aubert Avenue      St. Louis, Mo.



**\$2 50 —A— MONTH!**  
**19 Jewel Railroad Quality**

This month's Bulletin smashes the terms—boosts the quality, lowers the price. No security—no interest. We trust you.

**SENT ON APPROVAL**

You do not risk a penny. This beautiful watch will be sent you on 30 days Free Trial. A new deal for square people. Write now for this big special offer. A postal will do.

**HARRIS-GOAR COMPANY**  
Dept. 651      KANSAS CITY, MO.

**AFTER** **40?**

A PLEASINGLY written booklet for those near or past middle life. It concerns a simple, drugless treatment that cannot interfere with daily work or doctor's care. It has delighted thousands, is prescribed by hundreds of physicians and indorsed by intelligent laymen all over the world. Not a book about infectious diseases but wholesome truth. Just say: Send me, free of all charge,

### "PROSTATOLOGY"

If depressed in spirit; if backache, sciatica or tender feet annoy you; if nerves are exhausted, if bladder weakness, gland faults and disturbed slumber undermine your health, you will bless this book. Do it now before you forget where you saw this notice. For complete information be sure to mention your health fault.

**THE ELECTRO THERMAL CO., 33-E, Kirk Blde., Steubenville, O.**

0330

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Is Yours

For the  
Asking



No. 3—\$15.50

"Gem of  
the Nation"

**Keep It 10 Days FREE**

Wear a LIZNITE GEM RING and be the envy of your friends. See if you can tell it from a high priced diamond. WE TAKE THE RISK. Just your Name, Address and Number of the Ring you select, brings you by return mail a LIZNITE GEM RING with all the fire and sparkle of the finest diamond.

**Solid Gold Mountings**

All Rings shown here have solid gold mountings, are hand made and hand engraved and set with full carat weight LIZNITE GEMS.

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No. 2—Lady's latest style, white and yellow gold ring. Only \$17.50

No. 3—Man's extra wide, heavy, flat Belcher gold ring. Only \$15.50

Finger Size—Exact

length of strip of

paper drawn tightly

around second joint

of finger.

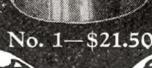
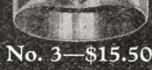
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Your Name, Address, Ring Number, Finger Size—No Money—brings you a LIZNITE on our 10 DAY, FREE INSPECTION PLAN, as told in coupon below. Send today for a LIZNITE—the ring you'll be proud to own.

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## SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE

320 PAGES, ILLUSTRATED, CLOTH  
By Winfield Scott Hall, M.D., Ph.D.

### SEX FACTS MADE PLAIN

What every young man and  
Every young woman should know

What every young husband and  
Every young wife should know

What every parent should know

Table contents and commendations on request.

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## "DON'T SHOUT"

"I can hear you with the MORLEY PHONE." It is invisible, weightless, comfortable, inexpensive. No metal, wires nor rubber. Can be used by anyone, young or old.

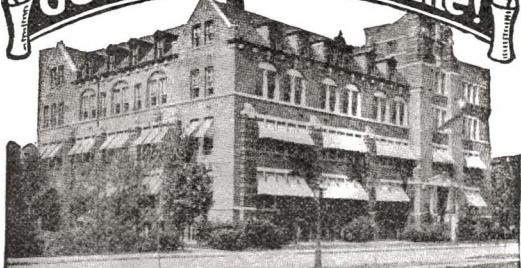
The Morley Phone for the

### DEAF

is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. Write for Free Booklet containing testimonial of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness, tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

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## High School Course in Two Years!

### You Want to Earn Big Money!

And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion. Many business houses hire no men whose general knowledge is not equal to a high school course. Why? Because big business refuses to burden itself with men who are barred from promotion by the lack of elementary education.

### Can You Qualify for a Better Position

We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. YOU CAN DO IT.

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**American School of Correspondence**  
Dept. H-3192 Chicago, U. S. A.

**American School of Correspondence,**

Dept. H-3192 Chicago, Ill.

Explain how I can qualify for positions checked.

Architect.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Lawyer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000
Building Contractor.	\$5,000 to \$10,000	Mechanical Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000
Automobile Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	Shop Superintendent.	\$3,000 to \$7,000
Automobile Repairman.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	Employment Manager.	\$1,000 to \$10,000
Civil Engineer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Steam Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
Structural Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	Foreman's Course.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
Business Manager.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	Photoplay Writer.	\$2,000 to \$10,000
Certified Public Accountant.	\$7,000 to \$15,000	Sanitary Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$5,000
Accountant and Auditor.	\$2,500 to \$7,000	Telephone Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
Draftsman and Designer.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	Telegraph Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
Electrical Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	High School Graduate.	In two years.
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Name .....

Address .....

**Formula No. 130**Accepted  
on these tests**Multiplies itself**

The cream multiplies itself 250 times in lather. Thus a tiny bit serves for a shave. A 35-cent tube serves for 152 shaves.

**Maintains itself**

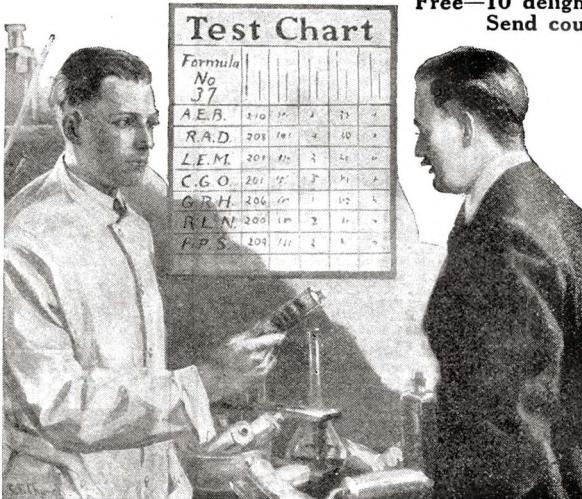
The lather maintains its creamy fullness for 10 minutes on the face. So it does not need replacement.

**Acts quickly**

The average beard is softened in one minute. Within that time it absorbs 15% of water. That is enough to make a horny beard wax-like.

**Soothes the skin**

It leaves the skin in soft and smooth condition. No lotion is needed. The cream itself forms a soothing lotion, due to palm and olive oils.



**Free—10 delightful shaves  
Send coupon**

# We Made 130 Kinds of Shaving Cream

And tested them all—scientifically

By V. K. CASSADY, B. S., M. S., Chief Chemist

Six years ago we started out to make the supreme shaving cream.

Long before, we had attained the finest toilet soap created. The secret lay in a perfect blend of palm and olive oils. Our chief idea was to apply that balmy blend to shaving.

But there were, perhaps, a hundred shaving soaps, and each had its adherents. We tested many of them—found their virtues and their faults. And we started to reach new perfection in each quality desired.

**18 months of experiment**

We knew soap making well—that's evident. But it took 18 months to satisfy us on a shaving cream.

In that time we made up and tested 130 kinds of soap. The tests embodied five shaving soap requirements. And we persisted until, step by step, in each of them we seemed to reach the limit.

**What we finally attained**

At last we attained a shaving cream which showed these unique results:

First, great economy. The cream multiplies itself in lather 250 times. Thus a bit of cream—just one-half gram—suffices for a shave.

Second, quick efficiency. The oil on the beard is removed almost instantly.

Within one minute the beard absorbs 15% of water. And that's enough to soften a most stubborn beard.

Third, lasting lather. It maintains its creamy fullness for ten minutes on the face.

We had the rest. The palm and olive oils form ideal lubrication. Their lather softens and soothes the skin. So lotions are not needed.

**You will be surprised**

Now we offer you a shaving soap which millions have adopted. It is based on oils which for 3,000 years have held supreme place for the face. And those oils are blended in a shaving cream which brings the results we state.

You will be delighted with it. Whatever you seek, Palmolive Shaving Cream will exceed your expectations. Whatever you have used, this cream will surprise you.

Send the coupon for a trial tube. Do us the kindness and yourself the justice, of learning what we have accomplished.

## 10 Shaves FREE

Simply insert your name and address and mail to

Palmolive Company, Dept. 158  
Milwaukee, Wis.

# PALMOLIVE

## Shaving Cream

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements





## "I smiled- and he shot me"

AFTER MONTHS and months.  
MY WIFE persuaded me  
TO HAVE it done.  
SO I went around.  
TO THE photographer.  
AND GOT mugged.  
WHEN THE pictures came.  
I SHOWED them to a gang  
OF AMATEUR art critics.  
AND PROFESSIONAL crabs  
DISGUISED AS friends.  
WHO FAVORED me  
WITH SUCH remarks as:  
"DOESN'T HE look natural?"  
"HAS IT got a tail?"  
"A GREAT resemblance"  
AND THAT last one  
MADE ME sore.  
SO WHEN friend wife.  
ADDED HER howl.  
I TRIED again.  
THIS TIME they were great.

FOR HERE'S what happened.  
THE PHOTOGRAPHER said.  
"LOOK THIS way, please."  
AND HELD up something.  
AS HE pushed the button.  
AND NO one could help  
BUT LOOK pleasant.  
FOR WHAT he held up  
WAS A nice full pack.  
OF THE cigarettes.  
THAT SATISFY.



LIGHT up a Chesterfield and sense the goodness of those fine Turkish and Domestic tobaccos in that wonderful Chesterfield blend. Taste that flavor! Sniff that aroma! You'll register "They Satisfy." You can't help it.

*They Satisfy*

# Chesterfield

## CIGARETTES

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