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# The Popular Magazine

MAY 7,  
1925

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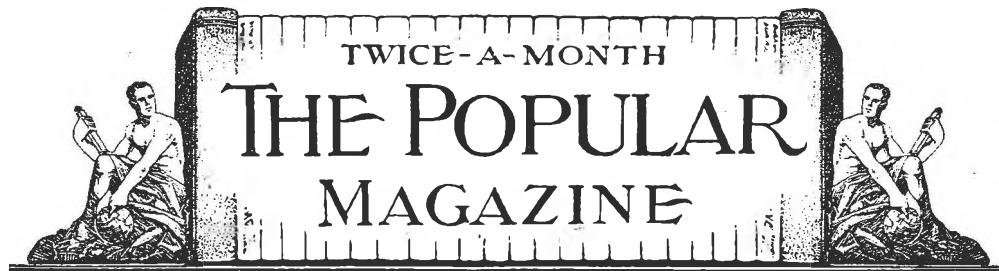
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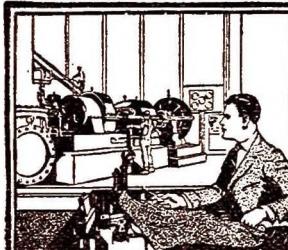
It happened on the stage during a dark scene. Six shots echoed, followed by a seventh.

The first six were part of the play. The seventh was not. It proved a messenger of death for Alan Mortimer. Who fired it?

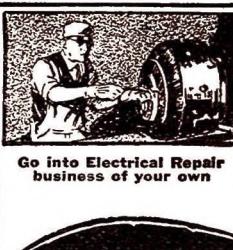
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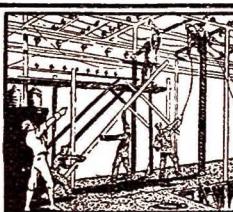
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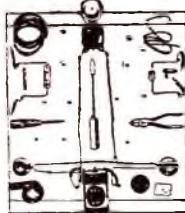
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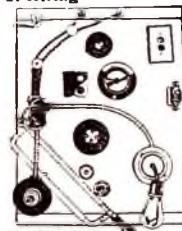
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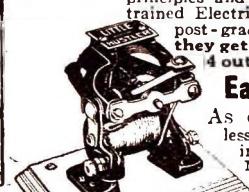
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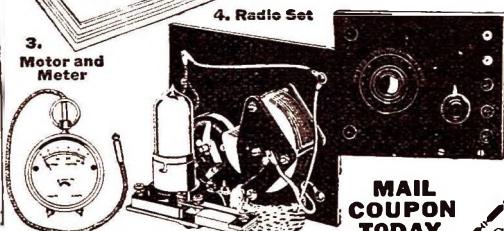
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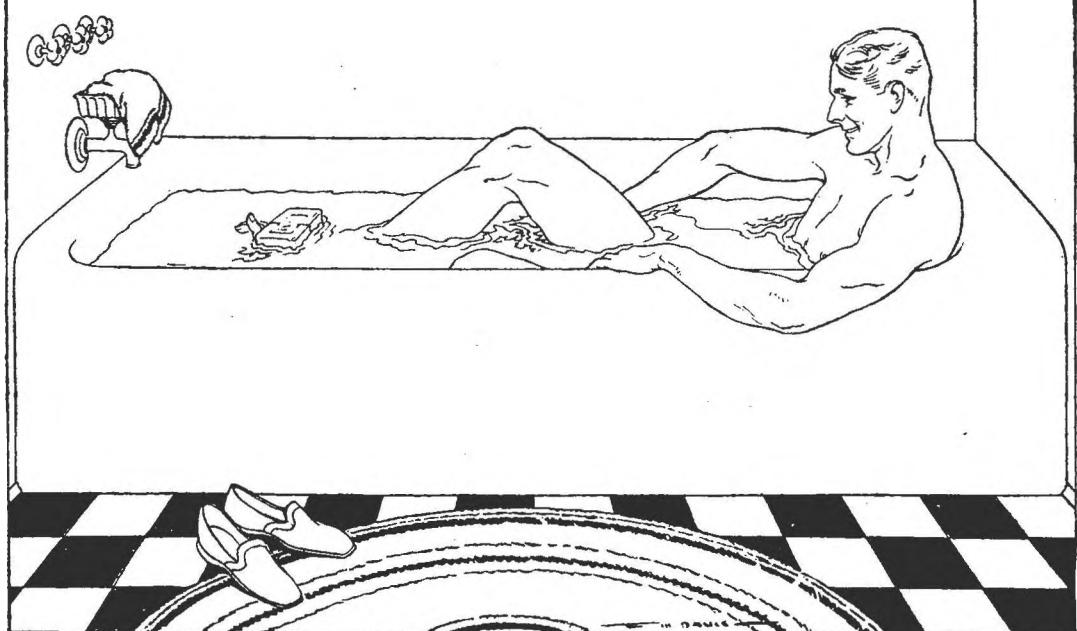
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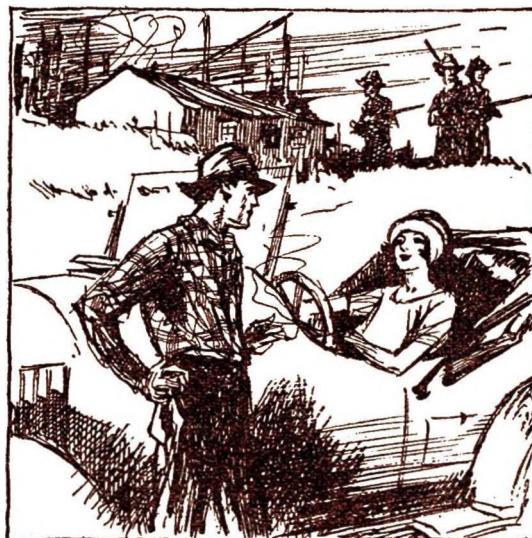
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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVI.

MAY 7, 1925.

No. 2



7:00-12:00  
Plenty of time

## The Shoestring Company, Limited

By Francis Lynde

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Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars sounds more like a fortune than a shoe string to the average man. It sounds even more imposing if you call it a quarter of a million. But in the case of Archer Stanwood and Betty Lancaster, it was really only a pittance. For they were young people who saw largely. What they saw in this story of Western enterprise was a hydroelectric plant whose cost would be measured in millions, not fractions of millions, whose profits would be proportional to the cost, and whose benefits to a great section of country would be incalculable. Opposed to them were powerful and unscrupulous interests. The struggle between the Shoestring Company and its opponents makes one of the best novels of outdoor adventure and inside business that we have read. This is a full-length book. It would easily make a five-part serial in generous installments, but we are printing it for you complete and unabridged in this issue.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

### CHAPTER I.

#### FINANCE FRAPPE.

THOUGH he had been in the great city less than three weeks, Stanwood was beginning to surmise that New York was no place at all for a Western man; particularly for a man

whose experience, like his own, had been gained chiefly in engineering-construction camps in what the subtitle writers for the movies moon over as "the great open spaces." As a matter of fact, as he sat in the lobby of the Admiral Hotel, smoking an after-luncheon cigar—a cigar in deference to his surroundings when his

seasoned brier pipe would have been much more to his taste and mood—he was cherishing a frame of mind which, in his native Wyoming, was best known as a grouch a mile long and ten feet thick.

For this cause, and for some others as well, the sudden appearance before his lounging chair of a big-bodied man whose hawk nose, straight-lined mouth and fighting jaw were handsomely ameliorated by a pair of twinkling gray eyes, made him leap to his feet with a little yelp of delight.

"Great cats, major, you are an answer to prayer!" he burbled. "I was just this minute thinking that I'd give all my old shoes if I could meet somebody from my own neck of woods—somebody who speaks the same language that I do! You sure do look good to me. When did you leave God's country? And what brings you to this tight-fisted metropolis of the money gods?"

The burly chief engineer of the G. V. & P., who had formerly been Stanwood's major in France, drew up a chair, his good-natured grin showing a perfect set of strong white teeth.

"Unload your grief," he encouraged. "At last accounts, you were about to marry the nervy little beauty who helped you explode the Bull Basin oil plot, and with her millions to back you, you were going to build a hydroelectric plant at the head of Little Horse, peddle energy to the G. V. & P. and other power-hungry sources and live happily ever after. What's hit you?"

"I wish you'd tell me what hasn't hit us! You know Betty—a little—and how straight she goes after the thing she wants to do. She had it all planned out to the final decimal place. We were to be married in Green Butte, make a wedding journey of the trip to New York, and then sail in together on the capitalization of the big scheme, with the influence of Betty's bankers to give us a running start.

"Of course I said, 'Yes, yes,' to everything; but just at the last I came down out of the clouds far enough to hear what common sense was trying to say—warning me to go a bit slow; telling me that I might

be doing the dear girl all sorts of an injustice by taking her too swiftly at her generous word. Major, I shall never know how to be thankful enough for having listened to that hunch."

"Go on," said the big man. "Let's have the rest of it."

"I talked her out of the Green Butte wedding; told her that, modern and emancipated as she is, she owed it to her friends and people, here and in Washington, not to make her marriage look as if it were a snap for some greedy fortune hunter who had, so to speak, slipped up on her when she wasn't looking. We nearly had a falling out over it, but I made her see the point at last; and, as I say, I'm mighty glad I did.

"If we had married right off the bat—good Lord! It makes me sweat, even now, to think how near we came to it! She didn't know any of the details about the fortune her father had left her, except that there was plenty of it; she'd always had money to burn, and hadn't known there were any special restrictions."

"And there were some?"

**Y**OU'VE said it. The entire Lancaster fortune was left in trust; she knew that much, of course. What she didn't know, any more than in a general way, was that there was a string tied to the trust. It seems that Father Lancaster had mighty little sympathy with the 'younger-generation' breakaway from the old-fashioned conventions and traditions, so he arranged to put the brakes on for his only daughter."

"Ah," the major put in, "I see—the dead hand."

"Until she married, or, unmarried, reached the age of twenty-one, Betty was to be under the guardianship of her mother's brother, Jackson Underhill, though apart from a liberal allowance, Underhill wasn't given the control of her money. That was placed in the hands of three trustees; New York bankers, all of them; and, by the terms of the will, she must have the approval of all three of the trus-

tees if she marries before she is twenty-five.

"Failing to have the man of her choice approved by the fateful three, the fortune is to remain in trust for her children and grandchildren; she is to have the income only, and nobody can touch a dollar of the principal this side of the third generation."

"Good gad!" exclaimed the ex-major of engineers, "I thought all that old stuff had gone out with our great-grandfathers. You say she didn't know of this?"

"Oh, yes; she knew of it. But she had always supposed it was a mere matter of form, good form, the proper thing from her father's point of view—all that. She'd been taking it for granted all along that when the time came all she'd have to do would be to take her picked man by the hand, lead him up to the judges' bench and say, 'Here he is; get out your rubber stamp, please,' and that would settle it."

"Um," grunted the major. "I think I can guess the rest of it. The syndicate of three refuses to give you a clean bill of health?"

"You've said it again—the entire mouthful. I haven't been able to see any one of them personally; they are not 'at home' to me. As you would imagine, Betty has done her best, and I'll bet she has given those three elderly gentlemen the time of their lives. But it's no good. They are adamant."

"What reason do they give for turning you down?"

"They say they have looked up my record and it isn't satisfactory; that I have never had the handling of large sums of money, either for myself or any one else—which is true enough; and that I have never shown any indications of an ability to administer a great fortune—which is also true. In some way they have found out about the Little Horse project, and they say if there weren't anything else against me, that would be enough; that I would merely sink the Lancaster fortune in a perfectly hopeless enterprise and that would be the end of it."

"One of them went so far as to inti-

mate that my motives weren't entirely above suspicion; that I needed money with which to fly a kite for credulous investors, and had hit upon an easy way of getting it. Betty wouldn't tell me what she said to this man, but you know it was a-plenty."

"I see. And, of course, your marriage is held up?"

"That is the real tragedy, major. We've pretty nearly come to blows over that—Betty and I. She'd give up the principal and marry me in the hollow half of a minute if I'd let her; but, naturally, I won't listen to any such sacrifice as that. It would be plain highway robbery. She says if I loved her as much as I say I do, I'd take her without the money; and I say it's because I do love her that I won't let her rob herself for me. So there you are."

MAJOR BRISCOE smoked in thought-ful silence for a minute or so before he said: "Archer, hasn't it occurred to you that there might be wheels within wheels in this business of yours?"

"Something that doesn't appear on the surface, you mean?"

"Exactly. I fancy you made a pretty bitter enemy of Mr. Jackson Underhill in the Bull Basin oil mix-up—or didn't you?"

"I don't know about the degree of bitterness, but I doubtless got myself handsomely disliked. Though there was no direct evidence that he was the political tool in that piece of hijacking, Betty knows what he did, and so do I. And he knows that we know—which may account for any amount of dislike."

"But Betty has passed her twenty-first birthday, and his guardianship has expired by limitation. Besides, he wasn't given any say-so about her marriage."

"All the same, he'd block it—seeing that you're the man she wants to marry—if he could, wouldn't he? Just to even up the score a bit?"

"We've talked of that possibility, and Betty doesn't think he would. She gives him credit for all sorts of shady schemes in the political field, but she says he wouldn't go deliberately about to smash her chance of happiness."

"That is a very natural thing for her to believe. Underhill is her mother's brother, and she has a very touching fondness for him in spite of the fact that she fights his rogueries, tooth and nail—as she did in the Bull Basin flurry."

"Still, Underhill is hand and glove with a lot of money people here in the East; it is his business to stand in with them. You said a few minutes ago that you couldn't have had less luck if somebody had been blacklisting the Little Horse project in advance. Where do you stand, at present—in money figures, I mean?"

"Practically nowhere," Stanwood confessed. "I have a few thousands of my own that dad left me, and Betty says perhaps she can place a hundred thousand of the bonds among the people she knows and can cajole, bully or browbeat into buying.

"I can do a little of the same in the West; possibly I could swing half as much more out there. But, all put together, it's hardly a drop in the bucket."

"What will your dam, power plant, transmission lines and right of way cost?"

"In round numbers, pretty well up to a couple of millions."

"No more than that? Then Miss Lancaster, if she had the control of her own funds, could probably finance it herself?"

"She could; and still have enough left to keep the wolf from the door. But of course we weren't planning to do anything like that—or at least, I wasn't, though she was willing to back the thing alone. My plan was to let her take up a little more than half of the stock—to give her control—and to peddle the remainder among her friends and mine.

"With a cash initial investment of something over half the building costs, we would have had no trouble in placing the balance of the stock. But that's a dead lamb in the shambles, now.

"Frankly, major, I'm stuck—down and out. Betty has her income; there are no strings tied to that; and she wants to fling it into the breach and start the wheels turning. It would keep us going for a while, but good Lord, I can't let her do that! Besides, we'd soon come to the end

of that shoe string and be left like Mahomet's coffin—hanging up in the air."

"And you say the sentimental part of things will have to be sidetracked for four long years?"

"That is the way it stacks up—unless I weaken and let Betty commit financial suicide. We've had a dismal time over that part of it. I tell Betty it's all off, or it ought to be; that no man on top of earth is worth the sacrifice she proposes, or the long wait. And when I say things like that—well, as I've said before, you know Betty—a little."

Again there fell a thoughtful silence on the part of the ex-major of engineers; a pause which he was the first to break:

JUST after you and Miss Lancaster pulled out for the East, President Brownlow was down from Green Butte, and I had some talk with him about the electrification of the Mountain Division. He is safely sold on the proposal and has recommended it to the executive committee here in New York.

Cavanaugh—not old Dan, but his son, Kerry—is chairman of that committee: you remember Kerry; he is the man who jumped in years ago and snatched the original G. V. & P. jerkwater out of the clutches of the T. C. and made a real railroad out of it?"

"I've heard about that," said Stanwood. "It happened while I was in Denver in a prep school."

"Well, I saw Cavanaugh this morning and had quite a long talk with him. He admits that it would be a paying proposition to electrify the Mountain Division; says he has had it in mind for a good while, and has finally pulled the other members of the committee over to his point of view. He gave me to understand that it is now only a question of the company's ability to buy current at the right price. If you could contract with the railroad, you'd have a market for at least half of the Little Horse output."

"That is what I have been figuring on; and I feel sure we could sell the remainder in Copah and Grass Valley. The two Pan-

nikin plants are already contracted up to the limit, as I happen to know."

"Um," said the major. "I suppose you know, too, that the Pannikins are in the big electrical combine?"

"I've heard they were; yes."

"Have you also heard that they have a third project planned, lower down the river?"

"No; have they?"

"That is what I'm told. How far the plans have gone, I can't say; but Cavanaugh tells me that there have been tentative offers made to supply the railroad if we decide to electrify."

**S**TANWOOD shook his head gloomily.

"Then that is another nail in our coffin," he asserted. "The combine could afford to cut the price on us and put us out of business."

"That is a business chance you would have to take, of course," said the major. "But, all things being equal, our people would prefer to buy power from you; Cavanaugh told me so. The seasonal water flow in the Little Horse is less variable than that in the Pannikin—which means a steadier source of supply; and the transmission lines would be much shorter—less loss. I think I am safe in saying that you would get your fighting chance for a contract with us; but, on the other hand, it is only fair to warn you that the combine isn't likely to leave any stone unturned to keep you out of the field."

"We'd expect that, naturally. If it would be a fair fight, I shouldn't mind. But there isn't going to be any fight, major. We are licked before we have had a chance to begin."

"I'm waiting here now to get word from Betty. She is going to pick up her father's old lawyer, Mr. Prendergast, and tackle her banker one more time for a fare-you-well, and then phone me. It's the last hope, and a mighty slim one, if you should ask me."

The major made no comment on this, and if he were sorry for the defeated Westerner, he did not say so. Instead, he asked a purely routine question.

"Have you taken any preliminary steps at all in the valley of the Little Horse?—as to securing rights and titles and so on?"

Stanwood shrugged. "I am sorry to say that I let Betty push me over the edge into that ditch, too. As you know, I was locating engineer for an Omaha company that was prospecting the valley as a possible field for an irrigation scheme. The Omaha people got cold feet; concluded to quit and take their loss—which wasn't very much apart from the money they had spent in acquiring rights and titles—and Betty insisted upon our stopping over in Omaha on our way East and buying what the irrigation company had to sell.

"I tried to persuade her that an option was all we needed, but she outtalked me and the purchase outright was made. Betty drew on her New York bankers, and we own in fee simple everything that the irrigation company owned."

"Humph!" the major grunted. "Then, if you can't go on, Miss Lancaster stands to lose a goodish bit of money right there, doesn't she?"

"She does, indeed, and it makes me as sore as a boil. If her trustees know about the Omaha deal—and I suppose they do—I can't blame them much for giving me the chilly shoulder. To a man up a tree, I suppose it would look very much as if I had framed the dear girl—driving the nail clear in up to the head and clinching it, when, Heaven knows, I didn't!"

It was at this conjuncture that a bell boy came through the rotunda, droning out a call: "Tel-e-phone for Mr. Stanwood—tel-e-phone for Mr. Stanwood!" and Stanwood got out of his chair.

"That will be Betty, phoning me to come and crawl into the coffin," he said, with a wry smile. Then: "How long are you going to be here, major?"

The big man rose and shook hands. "I'm leaving at three o'clock, heading back to my job on the edge of the Red Desert. Let me hear from you. I shall be curious to know how you come out."

"You've been talking as though you had lost your sand, Archer, and I'd hate to believe that of you, after what I saw of

you when you wore a tin hat in France. Write and tell me what happens to you—to you and to Miss Betty."

"I'll do it," Stanwood promised, "if I don't report to you in person. I shall be chasing you West pretty soon. I've good and plenty had enough of New York."

And with that he hastened away to answer his telephone call.

## CHAPTER II.

### A TWO-HUNDRED-AND-FIFTY-THOUSAND-DOLLAR KISS.

THE private conference room of the Wouter van Twiller Bank & Trust Company was in perfect keeping with the marble wainscoting, rich mahogany fittings and ornamental brass grilles of the main banking room; a stately cabinet with an air of aristocratic refinement in the soft-piled rugs, ivory-tinted walls and carved furnishings.

In the largest of the chairs sat the conditional heiress of the Lancaster millions, violet eyes snapping, cheeks flushed with a rich color that owed nothing to the beauty shop.

"You've got it all, now, Archer," she was saying to the good-looking young Westerner leaning against the massive writing table, "and I'm savage enough to bite a nail in two! I never knew before what a lot of absolutely pig-headed, obstinate, narrow-minded people there are in this world! To hear them talk, you'd think they believed we were out to steal the last dollar they had in their pockets!"

"You can't tell me anything about it," Stanwood put in. "They've shot me full of holes. I shall be bank shy all the rest of my life. Of course, you couldn't do anything with Mr. Attleberry—not even with Mr. Prendergast to back you?"

"I couldn't make a dent in him that you could stick your finger nail into, and neither could Mr. Prendergast. He made me perfectly furious after Mr. Prendergast went away: took the fatherly attitude and treated me as if I were a little girl in pinafores who ought to be spanked and sent to bed! I'm frightfully angry, but

I'm feeling awfully righteous, at that. I didn't swear at him."

Stanwood smiled. Betty in a rage was even more alluringly captivating than a Betty calm.

"I'm sure you felt like it," he conceded. "But now that every string has been pulled—and pulled out by the roots—you'll give it up, won't you, Betty, dear? Dynamite wouldn't blast anything out of this New York money mountain, and you are simply wearing yourself to frazzles to no purpose. We had a fine dream while it lasted, but—"

"Archer!" she cried; "are you trying to tell me *you've* given up? Don't do that! Can't you see what it will mean to both of us to be beaten now? You'll never be the same man again—never in this world!" And she got up to go and perch on the table beside him.

In the better depths of him Stanwood knew that what she said was the sobering truth; that it is only the victory against odds that saves a man, any man, from slipping back into the rear ranks and thence into the mob of stragglers and camp followers. In his own field, which was emphatically not that of frozen finance, he had won such victories more than once: given half a chance, he believed he could do it again. But in the chilling presence of the money kings he felt as helpless as a swimmer in mid-ocean.

"What you say is strictly true, dear," he said gravely, with an arm about her. "I know it perfectly well; but the knowledge doesn't help out any in the present instance. We've butted our heads against a stone wall, and the wall won't give—it laughs at us."

She slipped a firmly muscled little arm around his neck and laid a hot cheek against his. "I love you, Archer, dear," she whispered: "can't I love a little faith into you?"

"Faith—in what?"

"In yourself, and me, and the future. Can't you just shut your eyes and put your head down and—and buck the line? I—I'll be right behind you all the time, and if they get you down and trample on

you, I'll love you back to life again. I can do that; you know I can, Archer!"

"I know you can. But faith won't buy machinery or meet pay rolls. You mustn't forget that."

FOR answer she drew a slip of blue-printed paper out of her bosom and thrust it into his hand. He blinked once or twice before he made out that it was a cashier's check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, drawn payable to his order.

"For Pete's sake, Betty—what's this?" he gasped.

"Can't you see? It's money—simoleons—kale—the wherewithal."

"But where did you get it?"

"I didn't get it; I just had it. I haven't been as extravagant as usual this summer, and my income has been piling up a bit, don't you see?"

"But look here; I thought we'd fought that ground all over. Didn't I positively refuse to let you rob your checking account?"

"Yes; but I have a pretty good refuser, too. And I refused to be refused."

"But you must listen to reason, dear! This check, big as it is, wouldn't much more than start the Little Horse project. We need millions, not thousands."

"I know; and that is why I'm trying my hardest to love a little faith into you."

"But it takes more than faith. I haven't lost my nerve—though Major Briscoe did say that I talked as though I had. But this taking your—your pocket money passes the limit. If it would build the dam and power house and put them into commission so that there would be a Chinaman's chance of getting your capital out again, it would be different. But with no prospect of raising the other seven-eighths of what we'll need, it would be a crime to spend this."

"All right," she shot back, "let's commit the crime! I've never been a criminal yet, and I've often wondered how it would feel to be one. And you needn't refuse, this time, because, you see, my refuser is bigger than yours."

"If you won't take that check and use it to start our shoe-string company, I'll lock it up in my safety-deposit box and never touch a penny of it. What do you say to that?"

"You don't mean any such foolish thing as that, do you, Betty?"

"I do; cross my heart and hope to die if I don't. If you don't take the money and use it, this old tight-fisted bank is going to have the use of it forever!"

For a good quarter hour Stanwood argued and pleaded and expostulated; talked himself hoarse in the effort to show what a rashly desperate thing it was to start a two-million-dollar enterprise with exactly one-eighth of that sum in hand. And in the end he lost out, as any man loses when he tries to argue with a woman who loves him and who has made up her mind to go the limit for him.

WHEN she had finally extorted his reluctant consent—consent given purely in compliance with her insistent urgings and wholly against his better judgment—she snapped her fingers at the sobering luxuries of the stately conference room and skipped to the top of the big library table to do a little posture dance of joy on its plate-glass-covered surface.

"We'll put money in our purse and hurry back to the good old hills, Archer, boy!" she gurgled, when she finally let him swing her down from her dancing dais. "I've written the Barker dude-ranch people that I'd be back for the remainder of the summer, and that is the way I'll keep my promise to stay right behind you when you buck the line. Now you may give me a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar kiss, if you like."

"It would take a lifetime to give you the worth of your money in kisses," he laughed, "but I'll do my best."

As they were leaving the conference room, he said: "Now that we've taken the plunge, what are we going to name our lame-dog project in the Junipers?"

"Oh, I've had that thought out for a long time," she returned airily. "We'll call it Shoestring Power & Light, Lim-

ited. That will make people laugh, and if they will only laugh hard enough and long enough, perhaps we can borrow some money of them when our own is gone.

"Let's go out past Mr. Attleberry's desk. I want you to see his face when I tell him that maybe we'll give him a chance to buy a few Shoestring bonds when we have some to sell."

### CHAPTER III.

#### TOO SHORT AT BOTH ENDS.

**A** SHORT time after Betty Lancaster had cut her little pigeon wing of triumph on the glass-topped table in the conference room of the Wouter van Twiller Bank, the upper valley of the Little Horse, erstwhile a sylvan, mountain-girt wilderness, silent save for the susurrant thunder of the river in its boulder-studded bed and the sighing of the wind in the pines and spruces, was beginning to present a fair example of a busy but rather scantily manned working camp.

On the level bench below the cañon portal carpenters were knocking together a row of bunk shanties, a cook shack and a company storehouse, and a gang of pick-and-shovel laborers was at work in a shallow excavation which was to grow eventually into the wheel pit for a power house. On pole-supported stagings in the cañon half a dozen squads of three men each were driving test holes in the rock to determine its fitness as end anchorages for the dam; a small gang was opening a quarry on the southern hillside; and on the newly graded wagon road paralleling the river a straggling procession of mule teams, gray with the dust of Bull Basin, were freighting in heavy loads of knocked-down machinery and more building material.

Once definitely committed, Stanwood had flung himself vigorously into the Little Horse undertaking. Before leaving New York he had enlisted his staff by wire, had recruited a small working force, and had closed the initial contracts for material. With the "shoe-string" capital limitations shrieking for economy and still

more economy, he had allowed himself only three assistant engineers and a draftsman, but they were all men whom he knew well and upon whose loyalty and efficiency he could depend.

Anson Frenchley, a big, black-bearded railroad builder, figured as first assistant and labor chief; John Brigham, who had built dams and driven tunnels all over the West, was in charge of the rock and concrete work; and young Price Hartwell, a Georgia Tech man who had got his experience in the installing of a hydroelectric project in the Appalachians, was electrical chief. These, with George Pickett, who had been Stanwood's office man and map maker on the abandoned irrigation project, filled out the staff.

Though the launching of the project with only a fraction of the needed capital in hand was giving the launcher a good many sleepless hours, a modest start had been made and the work was going forward on a morning in the third week when Pickett, returning from his mid-week horseback trip to Orrville for the mail, brought a letter from Betty and one from the headquarters of the railroad company.

**S**TANWOOD, at his desk in the log-built camp office and mapping room, read the railroad letter first, and the fine lines of harassment which were already beginning to make creases between his good gray eyes had slipped into place when he sent Pickett to call Brigham, Frenchley and Hartwell in for a conference. To his three lieutenants, when they were assembled, he broke the news contained in the railroad letter.

"This letter is from Major Briscoe, chief engineer of the G. V. & P., and it changes the whole face of nature for us," he began soberly. "He tells me it has been decided to begin preparing the Mountain Division for electrification not later than the first of next month, and that orders have already been placed for the electric locomotives.

"This means that the railroad people have advanced their program fully a half year, and, incidentally, it puts it up to us

to be ready to offer current just that much sooner than we expected to be required to."

Frenchley, cramming a rubbed-up charge of plug tobacco into his black brier, spoke for the staff.

"Well, what's to hinder? We bosses are not earning our salt with gangs the size we're working now. Why don't we string lights for night work, put on continuous shifts and try to get somewhere?"

"The 'why' is just what I've got you fellows together to tell you," said the young chief. "You know, in a general way, that this project isn't capitalized for a finish—or anything like it; I've told you that. We have a working fund to go on with, but it is only a patch on what we shall need before we can turn the water into the turbines.

"In my talks with Major Briscoe, I was told that the G. V. & P. would hardly attempt the electrification this year, so I took measures accordingly; thought it was good business to get action on what money we had in hand and make a start on the job."

Brigham nodded. "You had it doped out right. Nothing like having a going proposition to show up when you're trying to sell stock."

"Exactly. I'll admit I took a long shot. Eastern bankers and capitalists would hardly give me a chance to explain the project, and they wouldn't even talk about underwriting it. But I thought, and still think, that enough of the stock to see us through can be sold here in the West, and I've been only waiting until we got the job under way to get out and do some quick hustling. But now this hurry order from the railroad rips us wide open. We have begun on a shoe string, and the string is too short at both ends."

Frenchley spoke up loyally. "You know you can bank on us to the limit, Archer. Whatever you say goes as it lies."

After a thoughtful minute or two Stanwood made his decision.

"It's one sure thing that we can't back down now. With the exception of a few thousand dollars of my own, our present

working capital has been put up by a single investor—my—er—that is, a person who is betting on me to make a success of Shoestring Power & Light. I'm in honor bound to protect that investor. Say your say; this is an open meeting and I'm listening."

"If we should cut loose with all the men and machinery we could use, how long would the money in hand last?" Brigham asked.

Stanwood took a notebook from his pocket and ran the leaves. "If we should go out for blood, as you suggested, Frenchley: three full shifts night and day on all parts of the work, with an adequate equipment of modern machinery; we might last for a month, or possibly a little longer."

"One more question," Brigham went on. "You've been leaning pretty heavily upon this railroad contract, haven't you?"

"It is the key to the entire situation. If we get the contract it will provide a market for at least half of all the power we can develop."

"And if you don't get it?"

"Failure," was the crisp reply. "We'd have to carry all of our output—instead of half of it—to the distant towns and mining camps and buck Pannikin Electric and the plants north of Green Butte. Besides, we can't hope to sell stock unless we can hold out a pretty sure probability of furnishing power to the railroad."

"All right," said Brigham, "here's my shy at it. You get busy and place your orders for more men and what machinery we'll need, and then jump out and hustle for the cash. We'll stay with you and crowd the mourners to the ultimate inch."

"That's my vote," Frenchley chimed in. "If we've got to go up in a burst of fireworks, let's do it right. We're with you."

"How about you, Hartwell?" Stanwood asked.

"Always yours truly and to command," said the young Georgian, with his cherubic smile. "You know I'd rather fight than eat, any old time."

"That is all I wanted to know," said the chief briefly. "From what I have

told you, you'll see that we have about one chance in a hundred of winning out, but we'll make a desperate fight for that chance.

"Hop to it and make your plans for a race against time. I'll wire for more men and machinery—all of both that you can use—then I'll quit you and go on the money hunt."

**I**T was not until he was once more left alone that he opened the envelope bearing the Washington postmark. The letter it contained was so like Betty that he could almost feel her presence as he read.

DEAR ARCHER: No daylight yet. Uncle Jackson is making an awfully slow recovery from his operation, and I simply can't run away and leave him while he needs me; you know I can't, don't you? It wouldn't be sporting. It has been, and still is, an anxious time, and he clings to me as if I were all he had in the world. Of course, while he is in the hospital I can't do much but go and sit with him and read to him, but even that little is something.

Your dear, good letters help out a lot, and I am eager to know all you can tell me about the dream coming true. It is coming true, isn't it? Don't let anybody make you believe it isn't, please!

And that reminds me. Uncle Jackson has been holding telephone confabs over long distance with my hard-eyed old banker in New York—Mr. Attleberry. The night nurse told me. She wanted to know if I knew Mr. Attleberry, and said if I did, wouldn't I call him up and tell him he mustn't talk to her patient; that he wasn't fit to transact business. (Of course, I didn't do any such thing; but it set me to thinking. Don't you let them put anything over on you out there, boy. They're equal to it.)

That is all for this time: I can talk so much better than I can write. And I'll be out there to talk to you the minute I can break away from Uncle Jackson and not be too frightfully conscience-stricken for leaving him. I'll let you know when I'm coming.

Love and long-distance kisses from

BETTY.

Stanwood read this letter twice; then, putting it in an inside pocket to keep company with three or four others of like tenor, he squared himself at his desk with a pad of telegraph blanks under his hand.

"God bless her optimistic little soul!" he muttered, "I'll make a go of this thing now or sink myself so deep that there'll

be no hope of ever coming to the surface again!"

And with that, he proceeded to dash off a sheaf of telegrams which, when their demands should be met, would leave little more than skeletons of the various bank accounts he had opened with Betty's quarter million in Denver, Green Butte and Copah.

With Pickett pressed into messenger service again and sent to make a quick gallop to Orrville with the telegrams, Stanwood spent the remainder of the day going over plans and blue prints with his three assistants, outlining the details of the rush attack that was to be made upon the job as soon as the working gangs should be filled and the newly ordered machinery installed.

"I've merely given you my own idea as to the 'systemizing,'" he said, at the close of the protracted session, which ran deep into the night. "Summing it all up, there is only one thing to keep in view—or rather two: time saving to the fraction of a minute, and economy spelled out in letters a foot high. It's up to you fellows.

"I'm leaving in the morning to catch the early train from Orrville, and I'll keep in touch by wire so you can reach me. That's all, I believe, except to warn you to keep an eye open for squalls. I have a sharp hunch that Pannikin Electric isn't going to let us cut into its field if it can help it, and if any strangling process develops, you're to wire me, quick."

"How long do you expect to be away?" It was Frenchley who wanted to know.

"I can't say. I'll let you know when to look for me. Let's turn in. I've got to be up early to make that train."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MAN FROM NEW YORK.

**I**T was three weeks to a day from the time when he had taken the morning train at Orrville to begin the money-raising campaign that Stanwood, coming in over the Transcontinental, dropped from the train at Green Butte, thus completing a circling round which had taken him as far

east as Denver and to Salt Lake City in the west.

As he tramped, leaden footed and travel tired, up to the hotel, he was telling himself dismally that as a stock salesman he was a conspicuous failure. After three weeks, during which every discoverable money bush he could come at had been shaken, he was returning with less than fifty thousand dollars of additional capital, and most of this had been gathered by littles from people who knew him, or had known his sturdily honest ranchman father.

Since there was no connecting train south of the G. V. & P., he registered for a room and asked for his mail. To his disappointment there was nothing awaiting him, and it was small comfort to reflect that Betty's letters were probably following him around over the circuit he had been making. As he turned to go to the dining room he saw Calloway, a young lawyer who had been his boyhood schoolmate in Laramie, but who was now the junior member of a Green Butte firm.

"I got your wire a couple of hours ago and I've come to eat with you," was Calloway's greeting. "What's the good word?"

Stanwood shook his head. "Let's get our feet under a table and I'll tell you," he replied; and after they had taken a table in the dining room he told the discouraging tale of failure. "I'm miles out of my line trying to raise money," he wound up. "Stock selling is a trade by itself, and I've never learned it. I don't blame people for not falling for my ballyhoo. I'm just a working engineer and I talk like an engineer, and that tells the whole story."

The young attorney sympathized as a loyal friend should. But his advice was merely a repetition of what he had said at the beginning of the campaign.

"It's just as I told you, Archer; you can't finance that thing here in the West. You've got to find lazy money, and there isn't much of that sort kicking around west of the Missouri River."

"That is what everybody says; but I've

told you what luck I had in the East. There is plenty of 'lazy money,' as you call it, in New York, but I couldn't touch any of it with a ten-foot pole.

"I'm up against it for fair, Bob. I've spent most of Betty's quarter million in rushing things down on the Little Horse; and when I get back it will be only a matter of a few weeks before we'll have to shut down and quit, with an empty treasury. And when that's done, I shall never be able to look Betty in the face again."

"She is down there at the dude ranch now?"

"I don't know. Her letters haven't been able to keep up with my dodgings."

"How about the progress of work on the dam?"

"Going at top speed. Frenchley, Brigham and Hartwell have worked miracles in the past three weeks, judging from the reports they've been wiring me. They've an army of men on the job and are rushing it night and day. If we could only keep the pace they've set we'd stand a fair chance of winning out within the time limit."

"What will you do when you get back on the ground?"

"There is really only one honest thing to do, Bob; sit down and mail these stock-buying checks I've been gathering back to the people who drew them. I've robbed Betty like a buccaneer, but that is no reason why I should rob these other people. It would be nothing short of a crime to dump these few thousands I have been able to raise into the bottomless pit along with Betty's money which has already been sunk."

THE young attorney ate in silence for a few minutes before he said: "There is a chance for an alternative, Archer, and though it is a breach of professional ethics to do it, I'm going to tell you about it. Do you know Thatcher, the senior member of our law firm?"

"Only by sight."

"Well, he is a man of means; owns stock in all three of our local banks, and also a block of G. V. & P. preferred.

Also, again, he is quite a heavy stockholder in Pannikin Electric."

Stanwood looked up with a sour grin. "Are you going to tell me to strike him for an investment of a million or so in Shoe-string Power & Light?"

"Not exactly. What I'm going to tell you is something that, ethically speaking, I should keep under my own hat. A week ago Mr. Thatcher was in conference with an attorney from Copah, a man named Bartlett. Do you know him?"

"By reputation, yes. He is corporation counsel for Pannikin Electric."

"Right. When he called on Mr. Thatcher the door into my office was open, and I could scarcely help hearing what was said. They were talking about your project and it became evident at once that the Pannikin people are keeping cases on you. They know what you're doing, and how much capital you haven't got. Is this news to you?"

"Call it a confirmation. The Pannikin people are in the combine, and the big fellows are not going to let a competitor cut in on them if they can help it."

"You bet they are not. There is a good bit of the combine stock held here in Green Butte, and Bartlett's errand was to feel the Green Butte bunch out on a proposal to take your project over when you go smash."

"Buy us out, you mean?"

"Um—well—maybe; but at a nominal figure, of course. Perhaps they would agree to pay your debts and let you go free—with the clothes you happened to be wearing at the moment."

Stanwood's eyes grew hard. "I'd drill holes in whatever part of the dam we had built and blow it to high heaven before I'd let them rob us that way!"

"Mr. Thatcher was a little more humane about it," Calloway went on. "He said you were well known here—that you grew up in Green Butte and the people here were proud of the record you'd made in the war. Then there was something said about somebody in New York—I didn't catch that; and the upshot of the whole thing was that if you proved amenable to

reason you'd be let down easy. By which I understand that an offer might be made that would leave you a little something more than the clothes you stand in, and that perhaps it would be made before you struck bottom."

"They needn't make me any offer that leaves Betty out. I don't care a damn about the few thousands I've put in; it's her money that's got to be salvaged, and not some of it but all of it. There is a dollar's worth of work for every dollar that has been spent on the job, so far, and if the combine wants it, it'll have to pay par."

"But, man! Suppose you can't salvage any of it by playing a lone hand? Isn't half a loaf better than no bread?"

"Don't push me too hard to-night, Bob," Stanwood begged. "I'm sick and sore and discouraged. Let me get a good night's sleep and maybe I can tell better what I ought to do with my sick project."

The waiter had come with the coffee and cigars, and as Stanwood was striking a match a telegraph boy came in with a message. It was from Frenchley, and its single line read: "Man from New York waiting here to see you. Important. When do you show up?"

Stanwood passed the slip of paper across to Calloway.

"What would you make of that?" he asked.

Calloway read the typewritten line and handed the telegram back.

"One guess is as good as another. I'd say your hour has struck. The headquarters of the combine are said to be in New York."

"You mean that I'm to be given twenty-four hours, or such a matter, in which to say whether I'll fish or cut bait?"

"It looks a little that way to a man up a tall tree."

"I'm much afraid you're right, Bob. That being the case, the good night's rest I was yammering about is knocked in the head. I'll take the midnight freight to Orrville. If I should wait till morning I shouldn't sleep a wink—not with this new threat hanging over me. Come with

me across to the railroad building and help me bully somebody into giving me a permit to ride the freight."

**A** FREIGHT-CABOOSE bunk lacking much of being a restful bed, Stanwood turned out the next morning in the graying dawn at Orrville feeling considerably the worse for wear; and the feeling was not sensibly lessened by an unappetizing early breakfast eaten in the town's one and only restaurant.

On the horseback ride across Bull Basin he was trying to nerve himself for the interview with the stranger from New York. That the stranger's object was to obliterate the Shoestring as an independent enterprise was a conclusion he had jumped to at once upon the receipt of Frenchley's telegram, and he was fully conscious of the fact that the depressive experiences of the practically fruitless money search had left him in poor shape to fight for Betty's hand and his own.

He was still trying to pull himself together for the prefigured struggle when he topped the divide and rode down into the valley of the Little Horse, and it was not until he came in sight of the prodigious transformation which had been wrought in his absence that the feeling of paralyzing depression was pushed aside, temporarily, at least.

Where the scattering camp had stood there was now a populous village of shelter shacks and work buildings. On the quarry hill above the village a huge gash had been blasted out of the limestone ledge, and the roar of the rock crushers was like the continuous growling of thunder.

At the cañon mouth a battery of concrete mixers, each machine with its hustling squad of wheelbarrow men and tenders, was pouring out the prepared material. In the wheel pit for the power house a big steam shovel had supplanted the handful of pick-and-shovel laborers; and at the site of the dam a cableway strung from cliff to cliff was placing concrete in the foundation forms.

Stanwood turned his horse over to a

water boy at the door of his log-cabin office and entered. At the trestle-board table in the mapping room Frenchley, smoking his black pipe, was poring over a file of blue prints.

"Hello, Archer!" rumbled the labor boss; "it's mighty good to see you back again. We figured that if my wire caught you at Green Butte, you couldn't get here much before this evening."

"I rode the night freight," Stanwood explained. Then: "Anson, you fellows have broken all records! I could hardly believe my eyes when I rode up just now. How you could accomplish so much in three short weeks is past me!"

"Six weeks," Frenchley corrected, with a grin. "You forget that we have added the nights to the days. Besides, we've had a whaling lot of good luck. Your hunch about getting the discharged men from the government irrigation project in the Timanyonis was a winner and they poured in here by the truck load."

"Power and lights?" Stanwood queried.

"Your plan of dropping a wing dam into the river upcañon and bringing the water down in a flume and penstock to a small turbine. We've power to burn."

Stanwood dropped into his desk chair and began to fill his pipe.

"You've proved that I'm merely a fifth wheel on this job, Anson," he said praisefully. "So far as the push is concerned, I might as well take a Rip van Winkle lay-off." Then, at the striking of the match for his pipe he took the plunge he was dreading. "Where is this man you wired me about?"

"The last I saw of him, a half hour or so ago, he was up in the cañon with Brigham, watching the boys shoot concrete into the forms."

"Who is he; and what is he like?"

Frenchley shook his head. "You can search me for the 'who' part. He is one of the most interesting gentlemen I ever talked to, but he doesn't talk about himself or his business—not any! All he has said along that line is that he dropped in to have a talk with you, and would wait until you showed up—well, a little more

than that, maybe, for he has mentioned that his name is Morton, and that he hails from New York."

"What does he look like?"

"Like a nice, well-groomed gentleman of leisure—or like some millionaire's well-trained butler. You can pay your money and take your choice."

"You've no idea what he wants?"

"Brigham, Hartwell and I have held guessing contests every night. He has a smile and a good word for everybody, and the camp hardships of eating and sleeping don't seem to faze him in the least, though you can see that he isn't used to them. Your guess is as good as any of ours."

Stanwood began to finger the pile of bills and invoices on the desk.

"If you see him when you go out, you may tell him I'm here," he said, adding: "From something I heard last night in Green Butte, I'm afraid you have this gentleman sized up all wrong. I have reason to believe that he represents the electric trust, and that his particular job is to wring our necks. However, we'll soon find out what his game is if you will send him in."

**T**O steady himself for what was coming, Stanwood began to go through the pile of waiting correspondence. Fifteen minutes later he heard footsteps and looked up to see the man of Frenchley's describing entering the office.

"Mr. Stanwood?" said the visitor, crossing to the desk and extending a hand of cordiality. "This is a pleasant surprise. From what your men told me I hardly expected to see you before the end of the week. You are just in from your—er—trip?"

Stanwood took a long look at the genial face, clean shaven except for the closely cropped little bunches of butlerish side whiskers in front of the ears, at the carefully manicured hands, at the modish business suit proclaiming itself authoritatively as the product of a high-priced city tailor, and the nerving-up process paused.

Then, remembering who this pleasant-

faced gentleman probably was, he steeled himself afresh.

"Frenchley tells me your name is Morton, and that you come from New York," he said, and tried not to say it too inhospitably. "Is this a business call?"

"Why, yes; it is—in a way," was the affable reply. "But I have been spending my waiting time most pleasantly and—er—profitably here in your camp, Mr. Stanwood. Of course, we all know in a general way what tremendous advances have been made in late years on engineering lines, but I have been perfectly astounded at the progress you are making here. It is miraculous!"

Stanwood nodded. "We have a good organization," he asserted; "a very efficient one, considering the haste with which it was assembled."

"Quite so. Everything moves like clockwork. You are to be congratulated."

Stanwood thought of the cat and the mouse and wished the genial gentleman would come to the point. To smash the barrier at a blow he said abruptly: "You are a representative of the electric trust, aren't you, Mr. Morton?"

The visitor's soundless laugh was almost reassuring.

"Now where did you get that idea, Mr. Stanwood? Do you really believe that there is any such thing as an electric trust?"

"You ought to know more about that than I do," Stanwood shot back, with a grim little smile; adding: "Why don't you come to the point? What do you want to do—kill us off or buy us out?"

"My dear sir—how savagely direct you technical gentlemen can be! May I ask you to look at my credentials?" and he handed Stanwood a letter and an engraved business card. The letter was loosely addressed, "To All Whom it May Concern," and its few typewritten lines went on to say that the bearer, Mr. Donald Morton, was the accredited representative of the Wouter van Twiller Bank & Trust, and as such, any business arrangements he might make would be confirmed and approved by the bank. And in addition to

the signature of the president, the letter sheet bore the impress of the bank's seal.

"Satisfactory?" was the mild-voiced query.

"Why—perfectly, so far as it goes," Stanwood returned, trying to flog himself around to whatever new point of view was required. "Am I to understand that you are here in Miss Lancaster's interests?"

"Naturally," smiled the visitor. "May I speak to you quite frankly, Mr. Stanwood?"

"The franker the better."

**V**ERY good; I will begin back a bit. Some time ago Miss Lancaster insisted upon drawing out nearly all of her considerable balance with us, saying that she proposed to invest it in this enterprise of yours out here. To be entirely honest with you, I may say that we advised strongly against such a proceeding on her part, but our advice was not taken."

Stanwood met frankness with frankness. "I wish to the Lord it had been!"

"Ah? You are already finding yourself in difficulties? That was to be expected. Capitalization, my dear sir, is an art by itself.

"But I don't wish to criticize. We have Miss Betty's welfare very much at heart. Her father was one of our stockholders, and since his death we have felt that we stood somewhat in the parental relation to her. You can understand that attitude?"

"Easily."

"At first, we were inclined to regard you as an example of one of two types, Mr. Stanwood, the earnest, but perhaps a trifle oversanguine, enthusiast, or—you will pardon my bluntness—the adventurer, pure and simple. Anxious to save Miss Lancaster from loss, if it could be done, Mr. Attleberry sent me out here to investigate you and your enterprise."

"Well, what have you learned?"

"Nothing at all detrimental to your honesty of purpose, my dear Mr. Stanwood—nothing at all," was the smooth assurance. "You have a project here which may be made to yield excellent returns; of that I am quite well convinced. But to complete

it you will need more capital—a great deal more."

"I realize that," Stanwood admitted, wondering what was coming next.

"And if you don't get the capital to go on with, what you have already spent will be a dead loss to—er—to Miss Lancaster."

"You don't have to rub that into me. I know it well enough."

"Very good. Now we can come down to business. We are most unwilling to see our young client suffer loss, and the loss seems to be inevitable unless something is done to forestall it.

"Before I left New York we conferred with Miss Betty's trustees, and we have secured their consent to invest a reasonable additional amount of her funds in this enterprise, provided it should prove that we were not sending good money after bad, and—"

"Wait a minute," Stanwood broke in. "You say 'we,' meaning your bank and Miss Betty's trustees. Has Miss Betty herself been consulted?"

"She is with her invalid uncle in Washington, as you probably know. I am well assured the trustees have her consent, though, strictly speaking, it isn't necessary. Under the terms of her father's will, the trustees control the investment of her principal, as you are doubtless aware."

"Let me get this straight. Do I understand that you are proposing to let Miss Lancaster finance this project entirely alone?"

"My dear sir! Wasn't she eager to do so only a few weeks ago?"

"Yes; but I never agreed to that. I am no financier, as you doubtless have discovered, but there is no reason why she should carry all the risk. All I ever conceded was that she might take fifty-one per cent of the stock, to give her the control in the management."

"But, my dear Mr. Stanwood! If you have a profitable enterprise here, why deprive her of the privilege of reaping the profits—all of them? You may be well assured that her interests will be carefully safeguarded."

"Just what is your proposal, Mr. Morton? Lay it out so that I can see it."

**I**T is very simple and straightforward. All we ask is that you turn over the bookkeeping and financing to us, devoting yourself to the actual work of construction. We assume that you have Miss Betty's best interests at heart and that you will conserve them in the way of cutting costs and practicing economy.

"As the work progresses and more capital is needed, we will undertake to supply it in such amounts as may be required. As security for such advances, we should expect you to issue first-mortgage bonds of the company, turning them over to us; and, as an evidence of good faith, we should ask you to accompany these bond turnovers with equal amounts of your common stock."

It was coming pretty thick and fast, and Stanwood said so.

"You are rather taking me off my feet, Mr. Morton," he said. "When Frenchley's wire was handed me last night I took it for granted that you were here as a representative of the electric trust."

"Ah," was the smiling comment; "the Wall Street bogey again, eh?"

"I am not so sure that it is only a bogey; but let that go. Even if there be no such thing as a trust, we are likely to have opposition from the local electric companies—from Pannikin Electric, particularly."

"I think you needn't have any anxiety on that score, but if trouble should arise, we shall doubtless be able to meet it successfully." Then, with a revival of the genial smile: "Among other things, I have looked up your record, Mr. Stanwood, and I find that while you have had no experience in finance, you have an excellent reputation as a fighting man."

"Thanks," said Stanwood dryly. Then he went back to the details of the life-saving proposal. "You say the trustees would require me to turn over the bookkeeping and financing as a whole. Would that mean that we would have to maintain a New York office?"

"Oh, dear, no; nothing so elaborate as that! A modest office here on the ground, with a manager, a bookkeeper and a clerk or two."

The young promoter was pulling hard at his pipe. The proposal seemed too good to be true and he was searching desperately for the joker in it, if there were one. It was chiefly to gain time that he said:

"I'm in no condition to make terms, as you well know, Mr. Morton, but I'd like to ask for a little time for consideration. Have you any idea whom the trustees would send out here to keep tab on me?"

The man from New York got up with the affable smile quite firmly in place. "If you agree to our proposal you are looking at your future financial manager at this moment. As Mr. Attleberry says in his letter, I am here with authority to act. And you shall have all the time you desire for consideration. When you want me you can probably locate me with Mr. Brigham up at the dam.

"I find these strenuous industrial activities of yours extremely and captivatingly interesting. And—er—as to our proposal; I trust you will see that you have everything to gain and nothing to lose by accepting it—but there; I don't wish to influence you unduly, one way or the other. We'll talk it over again, after you've looked at all sides of it."

And with a bow that would have done credit to the butler, deferential and well trained, of Frenchley's comment, he took his departure.

## CHAPTER V. PLAIN SAILING.

**L**EFT to himself, Stanwood tried to realize the astounding thing that had happened. It seemed incredible that, at the climaxing moment of discouragement, a way should so miraculously have been opened, not only to save Betty's all-too-small cast for fortune, but also to make his own dream of industrial triumph come true. But there was the New York bank's letter, signed and sealed, to make the incredible thing a fact.

Normally unsuspicious, he was yet cautious enough to subject the Morton proposal to every test he could apply to reveal an ulterior motive, if any such there were; but the only result was to make him a little ashamed of the precautionary prompting. Doubtless, from the point of view of Betty's trustees, the course they were taking was the simplest practicable solution of a difficulty. They had investigated the paying possibilities of the Little Horse project, and were convinced that the only way to save their client's quarter million was to see the enterprise through to a productive finish.

Looked at from a different angle, there were other phases of the proposal to be reckoned at their full value. While, to be sure, it was Betty's money that would be invested, the New York bankers were behind the investment, and, that being the case, Pannikin Electric, or the electric combine, would probably think twice before attacking the new project on the Little Horse.

Again, this same powerful backing would give the G. V. & P. railroad officials the assurance that the enterprise would be carried through to completion; an assurance which would certainly have a favorable influence as against any prophecy of failure that might be made by Pannikin Electric or others.

Lastly, there would be a lifting of a crushing responsibility from his own shoulders, enabling him to throw himself unhandicapped into his proper job as an engineering chief; the capacity in which he could best serve Betty's interests. If the plant was to be built wholly with her money, it would be up to him to see that no dollar was wasted.

It was after the noon meal in the engineers' mess shack, a rough-and-ready camp dinner at which the man from New York genially corroborated Frenchley's assertion that he had a smile and a good word for everybody, that Stanwood led the way to the mapping-room office and took the decisive step.

"I guess I was only trying to save my face in asking for consideration time, Mr.

2A-POP.

Morton," he began, accepting a gold-banded cigar from the New Yorker's well-filled pocket case and lighting it. "All I can say is that you and Miss Lancaster's trustees will have a construction boss who will sweat the ultimate nickel out of this undertaking in the matter of costs. I'll promise you that when the project is completed, there won't be a hydroelectric plant in this region that can compete with it on a basis of construction costs."

"That, my dear sir, was an assumption on our part which went far toward influencing a decision to see your project through," was the suave reply. "We felt that, if you were the honest man we hoped to find you, you would feel doubly obligated to make a money-saving record in the cost account."

"I shall. The only thing that doesn't seem quite right to me is the fact that Miss Lancaster isn't here to approve the arrangement in person."

"That is a very natural feeling on your part, and one that does you credit. But you must remember that in the matter of the investment of her principal her trustees have full authority. Of course, if for any reason Miss Lancaster were opposed to this investment—but we all know that she isn't; that, on the contrary, she is enthusiastically in favor of it."

The decisive step thus taken, the details fell into place almost automatically. With the hustle and rush of construction-camp methods, one of the smaller warehouses across the camp street from Stanwood's office was transformed into a clerical headquarters with mess room and bedrooms in an adjacent building, and in a few days the financial office, with a manager, a bookkeeper, a stenographer and a filing clerk, were installed and functioning. At once, Stanwood found himself relieved of all clerical work—and more, since Morton took over the buying and contracting, as well as the disbursements.

"With our Eastern connections and affiliations we are most naturally in a better position to get low figures on material and machinery than you are," was the argument advanced. "Just make out your

requisitions as the needs arise, and we will do the rest," and the argument was so conclusive that there was no gainsaying it, though both Brigham and Frenchley protested cannily when this final transfer of authority was made.

"You know your own business, of course," said the labor boss, "but though you are president of Shoestring Power & Light, this leaves you with nothing much to do but to sign on the dotted line."

"Still, Morton's argument is perfectly sound, Anson. He can get better prices and quicker deliveries than I can."

"Yes; but the question is, will he?" Brigham put in. "Doesn't this turnover leave an opening for a whale of a graft in the buying?"

Stanwood spread his hands. "It's all or nothing, John. If these men who are handling Miss Betty's fortune are crooked, there is small hope for any of us."

"But with the 'business' office doing the buying, you'll never know anything more than Morton chooses to tell you about costs," said Frenchley.

"Oh, he can hardly refuse to let me see the books," Stanwood returned easily. And there the matter rested.

IT was during these few days of reorganization and change that Betty's delayed letters began coming, and the final one of the series brought the news for which Stanwood had been anxiously looking:

DEAR ARCHER: At last the weary waiting is over. Uncle Jackson was discharged from the hospital to-day, and though he still wants me to stay with him, I'm leaving for the West as soon as I can get my packing done, and I'm coming with bells on. And because of my many sins, I'm going to do a really righteous act! Have I ever happened to mention Allie Arkwright, my chum in college? No? Then I'll mention her now. She is a dear; she belongs in the century back of this one, and is all the things that I'm not, but still she is a dear. Hold that in mind while I tell you that her old-fashioned father and mother are trying their blessedest to marry her off to Paul Stockton, Uncle Jackson's tea hound—the man who goes to all the afternoon teas and gathers up the gossip that Uncle Jackson uses in his political jugglings.

Well, Paul isn't half good enough for Alicia, and I've plotted; got the Arkwright family doctor to say that Allie's health demands an outdoor vacation in the altitudes. So she's coming out to be at the dude ranch with me, and I'm warning you in advance that you're not to fall in love with her. You'll be tempted, I know, because she is the kind that men fall for at the crack of the gun. You haven't told me much about the men on your staff, but if you happen to have a nice young engineer who is heart free at present, why, all the better.

Don't try to meet us at Orrville. Barker will do that; and a little while after he does, you'll be seeing

YOUR BETTY.

Stanwood read this letter in Wiggins' post-office store in Orrville, whither he had gone to arrange for the haul across the Basin of another battery of concrete mixers. He had put the eight barren miles of the Basin behind him on the return ride, and was about to head his horse into the newly made road over the divide, when he saw a buckboard team coming up the trail leading from Barker's ranch with the horses at a keen gallop.

Wondering if something had happened at the dude ranch, he drew rein and waited. Presently he could see that there were two persons in the buckboard seat, apparently a man and a woman—and the driver was waving to him. The next minute the galloping team was pulled to a stand in the road, and he was off his horse, and Betty, with a foot on the reins, was leaning out of her seat to fling her arms around his neck and kiss him.

"You blessed angel!" he exclaimed. "Your coat and hat fooled me. I thought you were a man. When did you come?"

"Yesterday, on the evening train—too late to come over. Climb up here on the wheel and shake hands with Alicia—you can't kiss her—she isn't that modern. Besides, you don't know how to kiss people innocuously. Allie, this is my side kick—Mr. Archer Bolingbroke Stanwood; and you're not to forget the Bolingbroke, please."

Stanwood took his introduction to Miss Arkwright with a proper show of cordiality, recalling that sentence in Betty's letter in which she had said that her college chum was everything that she—the writer

—was not. So far as outward appearances went, the description, though terse, was strictly accurate. Stanwood found himself shaking hands with an attractively beautiful young woman, though he decided with loverlike loyalty, that her beauty was not to be mentioned in the same day with Betty's piquant charm.

MISS ARKWRIGHT was a golden blonde, with features that were almost classical in their modeling, and with soft, blue-gray eyes that had a trick of veiling themselves half shyly under the gaze of a stranger. And as to clothes—Stanwood contrasted the correct outing frock, jacket and hat with Betty's riding boots, breeches, sports coat and the cowboy Stetson pulled down over her bobbed hair; noted the contrast and smiled, thinking that Betty, if she had consciously planned to do so, could scarcely have chosen a better foil.

"You are all kinds of welcome to 'the great open spaces,' Miss Arkwright," he was saying. "We haven't much to offer besides the spaces, but they, at least, are all yours."

The young woman's reply was rather breathless.

"I think Betty has been trying to scare me with her driving," she said. "Is it much farther to your camp?"

"Don't worry, dear," Betty cut in. "My car will be here in a few days, and then you'll feel safer." Then to Stanwood: "You weren't looking for me, Archer?"

"Not so soon. I got your letter less than an hour ago, and—"

She interrupted with a little shriek of derision. "Isn't that just like a man! I'll bet you never looked at the date of the letter. It must have been delayed somewhere. It was written nearly a week ago."

"Check!" he admitted, grinning; "I didn't look at the date." Then with a glance at his wrist watch: "Of course you are going over to the camp? We'd better move along. Moriarity will be blowing the whistle for dinner presently, and it's first come, first served, in a construction camp."

Betty smiled maliciously. "I told Allie

she'd have to eat with the gang. What do you have—cabbage and corned willie?"

"Come and see," laughed the engineer, mounting his horse. "And don't kill Barker's stock on this new road. The heavy hauling has cut it badly."

Betty had her hands full with the wild bronchos on the rough road over the divide, but in the western valley she let them have their heads. Stanwood, glancing aside as he rode, saw that the young woman to whom the West was new was holding her breath again.

The camp was reached just as the steam-shovel engineer blew the whistle for the noon halt, and the Barker bronchos promptly stood on their hind legs and pawed the air. Miss Arkwright screamed, but Betty only laughed and pulled the startled horses to their feet. Stanwood called one of the corral boys to take the team and led the way to the staff mess shack.

"You might eat with the 'quality' up the street a bit," he said, indicating the newly established business headquarters, "but I'm not going to let you. Your company is too precious to be wasted upon a business manager and a bunch of clerks."

The entrance of the three into the engineers' mess exploded a small bomb of astonishment, as it was bound to, no notice having been given. At the rough and uncovered plank table with two long benches for seats four men sprang up as one, and Betty gave them her best smile. Stanwood made the introductions fit the occasion.

"Miss Lancaster and Miss Arkwright—the gang. We'll take them as they come: Price Hartwell, E. E., chief lightning boss; John Brigham, C. E., with hard rock and concrete as his specialties; Anson Frenchley, also C. E., bully of labor; and George Pickett, B. S. in M. E., draftsman and all-around office drudge." Then to the cook's helper: "Two more tin plates, Mickey, and see that the coffee is hot."

"Confound your picture, Archer, you ought to be shot!" said Frenchley. "Didn't you know it was to be only corned beef and cabbage to-day? Sit here beside me, Miss Lancaster, and I'll see to it that you

get your share of what little there is. If Archer had only given us half a hint——”

It wasn't a stilted meal; couldn't well be in the circumstances. Betty rose to her opportunity and didn't let Frenchley monopolize her, as he quite shamelessly tried to. Miss Arkwright, gasping a little at the informalities, and perhaps also a little at the clothless board and tin dishes, soon found that the handsome young Georgian seated at her right was only a trifle less embarrassed than she was, but that he could talk if she made him.

“Your first visit to a construction camp?” Hartwell ventured, after the ice was broken.

“My very first. I didn't want to come; I thought maybe I might be in the way. But Betty insisted, and——”

“No, I reckon you wouldn't be in the way anywhere,” Hartwell broke in, in his soft Southern drawl. “I only wish we'd known. This dinner isn't——”

“If the dinner is good enough for you, it ought to be good enough for us, I'm sure. It's—it's rather delightful. I never knew before how men—the men who really do things—lived, though Betty has been trying to tell me ever since we started West. She knows all about everything.”

“You are staying with Miss Lancaster at the Barker ranch?”

“Roughing it,” she smiled; “though there doesn't seem to be anything very strenuous about it, so far. Betty is the only strenuous person in the crowd. If you had seen the way she drove those horses coming up here! It fairly took my breath. What did Mr. Stanwood mean when he put those letters E. E. after your name?”

Hartwell decided that her innocence, or ignorance, was adorable. “My degree,” he said. “I took the electrical course in college, and I'm known as the lightning boss on this job. This is to be a hydroelectric plant, you know.”

“What I don't know about such things would make you laugh at me. Do you suppose you could tell me, just a little?”

“I'll do better than that,” he acceded eagerly. “After dinner I'll show you over

the works—that is, if you care to see the rough beginnings.”

“I'd love to. I've always wanted to see how they planted the power.”

Brigham, who sat at her left, choked over his coffee; and Betty, who had overheard the last remark, giggled.

“They plant it in rows, just like corn, Allie, dear,” she murmured softly. Then: “I'm sure Mr. Hartwell will be glad to show you.”

**A** LITTLE later, after the raucous whistle of the steam shovel had signaled a resumption of work, Stanwood led Betty up the quarry hill, whence an overlooking view of the activities could be had, and sat beside her on a flat rock.

“There it is, as far as we've gone,” he said, with an inclusive arm wave. But her response had nothing to do with dam building and power plants.

“It is working beautifully,” is what she said, letting him see the impish grin that was not the least of her charms. “There they go up the cañon together—Allie and that Georgia boy who is handsome enough to pose for one of the collar ads. He is going to show her how you plant power and make it grow.

“Don't you know, Archer, it came to me all at once when I saw them sitting 'side by each' at the dinner table. I thought maybe your 'E. E.' might be—or prove to be—the exactly right antidote to the tea hound. Is he a nice boy?”

“As fine as they make them! But tell me more about this tea-hound fellow.”

“I told you in my last letter. He is Uncle Jackson's right-hand man—a sort of understudy, you know. Women talk a lot more than men, and Uncle Jackson gets a good many of his political tips from the tea-table gossip. Paul Stockton gathers the crop for him. It is just about his size.”

“And he wants to marry Miss Arkwright?”

“He does; and her people want her to take him. He comes of a good, old family, has money, and has the entrée to all the best houses. That is enough for Al-

lie's match-making mamma. It makes me sick! But tell me: you've done a lot here. How is the dream-coming-true getting along?"

"It came mighty near going out blink, Betty, girl. Up to a few days ago it was giving me night sweats. As I wrote you, after we got fairly started I chased out on a money hunt. I hate to admit it, but the hunt was the flattest of failures. I was no good as a stock salesman and came back in a blue funk.

"It seemed to be a demonstrated fact that your quarter million of pocket money had simply been thrown away; sunk in the bare beginning of a job that could never be completed. When I rode into camp on my return, wishing that somebody would take a crack at me with a Winchester, I found Morton here, waiting for me."

**M**ORTON? Who is he?"

Stanwood gasped. "Don't tell me you don't know him!" he exclaimed.

"Ought I to know him? The name does seem familiar, but I can't place him at all."

"Why, you must know him! He is one of your New York bankers."

"Which bank?"

"The Wouter van Twiller."

"Oh; a large pleasant-speaking man with cunning little side whiskers?"

"That is the man."

"I remember him—slightly. What did he want?"

Stanwood was conscious of a small inward shock. Though Morton had not said in so many words that Betty had been told of the contemplated action of her trustees, he had certainly given the impression that she had.

"Don't you know what he was here for, Betty?"

"No. Something rotten, I suppose—if he came from Mr. Attleberry."

Bluntly, because he was too much moved to pick and choose his words, he told her what had been done, winding up with: "This is all news to you, Betty?"

"Why, yes; but it's good news—the

best of news! Isn't it exactly what I wanted to do in the beginning?"

"But the trustees ought to have told you—consulted you."

"Why should they? I've never had anything to do with investments. But I'd like to know what gave them such a sudden change of heart."

Stanwood explained. "You had put in a lot of money, and the only way to save it was to put in more; finish the plant and put it on an earning basis."

"Of course," she said calmly. "I had just a wee shaky hope that it might turn out that way; that if I jumped in over my head, they might jump in after me to pull me out. But why the long face? Aren't you satisfied?"

"Not wholly. There is always a risk in any industrial project, and I didn't want you to carry it alone. But when I began to argue with Morton, he said that if there were to be profits, why shouldn't you have all the benefits instead of part of them?"

She laughed joyously and snuggled up to him. "You and I, both, Archer, dear. What's mine is yours—or it's going to be. I'm glad enough to shout, and you ought to be. Why aren't you?"

"I don't know; perhaps it is because things are coming too easily. I'm not used to that. Maybe I'll get hardened to it in a little while."

"You mean that you don't trust this Mr. Morton?"

"There isn't any reason in the world why I shouldn't trust him, is there?"

She got off the flat rock and ran her fingers through her bobbed hair in a characteristic gesture that carried him swiftly back to the days of their adventures together earlier in the summer when they were fighting the oil robbers.

"Suppose we go and see if you have. Take me down and show me this new business manager of yours." Then, with the shrewd little grimace that made her look like a mischievous boy: "I'm an expert on men. Didn't I size you up the very first time I ever laid eyes on you? Let's go."

## CHAPTER VI.

## LITTLE MYSTERIES.

BETTY'S noonday visit to the construction camp was the first of a continuing series, and in a short time the men on the job, no less than the members of the engineering staff, came to regard her as the inspiration of the work, the camp mascot, the presence that kept things going auspiciously and at top speed. Companionable as an interested boy might have been, she mixed and mingled with the working gangs, making friends with everybody, and earning, as soon as it became known that she was the financial "angel" of the enterprise, the affectionate title of "The Little Big Boss."

Until her motor car came, she usually rode over from Barker's on horseback, coming alone because Alicia Arkwright's accomplishments did not as yet include the riding of cow ponies, however gentle. On such occasions Price Hartwell never failed to show his keen disappointment, and Betty comforted him mockingly by saying that the delayed auto would arrive some time, and that she was quite sure Alicia had no fear of motor cars.

From the first, Stanwood had been curious to learn what Morton's attitude would be toward Betty; whether he would welcome the presence of the young woman whose money, as agent for her trustees, he was spending, or would resent it. It was Betty herself who defined the Morton attitude.

"He poses as a dear old fatherly back number," she told her lover. "I think he was a bit shocked at first to see me going about in knickers and coat and a boy's hat; and I am sure he was more than horrified the day he caught me in the cab of the steam shovel, with Moriarty trying to teach me how to make the shovel dig and dump. But that's nothing. He is always nice and polite, and has never even hinted that he wished I wouldn't stick around so much."

"Why should he wish it? Isn't it your money he is spending?"

"Um—y-e-s; but, just the same, I have

a sort of sneaking notion that he wishes I *wouldn't* stick around."

"But you have just said that he doesn't hint at such a thing."

"His kind wouldn't. And, by the way, Archer, there is one thing in your 'business office' that I don't quite savvy—as 'Curly' Biggs would say."

"What is that?"

"It's a stenographer, and its name is Badger."

"What is the matter with Charlie Badger—apart from the wet-seal wave in which he plasters his hair?"

"There is nothing the matter with him except that last year he was Uncle Jackson's stenographer and handy man."

"Well, there is nothing criminal about that, is there?"

This bit of talk was staging itself in Stanwood's office, and Betty got out of her chair to walk to the window. When she came back it was to say:

"You know how Uncle Jackson feels toward you, Archer. He has never forgiven you for making him sign that paper with Mr. Dugannon confessing that they were both in the plot to steal the government oil in Bull Basin.

"I hate to say it, but I'm afraid Uncle Jackson has an awfully long memory for such things. If I were you, I'd keep a sort of wary eye trained on Charlie Badger."

"All right; but there wouldn't seem to be anything he could do to tangle us up," Stanwood said; and so the small incident was closed.

IT was a day or so later when Frenchley, smoking a bedtime pipe with his chief in the otherwise deserted office, spoke of the stimulating effect of Betty's frequent visits.

"That little lady carries a punch that's worth a million dollars, Archer," was his enthusiastic comment. "The men all swear by her, and when she is around they throw themselves to show her how much they can do." Then, with the license of a tried friend: "You're going to marry her some day, aren't you, Arch?"

"I'd marry her to-morrow, Anson, if I could do it without robbing her."

"How is that?" asked the tried friend; and Stanwood explained briefly.

"Lord!" said Frenchley; "so *that's* the meat in the coconut, is it? We've all been wondering. No way to get around it?"

"No way excepting to wait until she is twenty-five—four long years."

"Gosh! That's tough. What have these trustees got against you?"

"Nothing that I know of, aside from the fact that I'm not in the multimillionaire class. But that is enough, I guess. I'm only a working engineer—one step above a shop mechanic—is the way they look at it, I suppose."

"Holy smoke! And you're doing a job here that will put you well up toward the top of the profession when it's done! Can't those old Stoughton bottles see anything but money in big chunks?"

"The job isn't going to get me anywhere. As matters stand, I'm only a capable hired man. In every way that counts, Morton is the Big Ike; and when the job is done, he is the one who will get the credit for it."

"Huh! In other words, these old scalawags are using Miss Betty's money to do you up in the matrimonial field; keeping you from showing that you are good and able to handle the undertaking, solus, if you had the chance."

"Something like that," Stanwood agreed moodily.

**F**RENCHLEY'S eyes narrowed reflectively. Then he began on another tack.

"This genial gentleman who is going to hog the credit: has it ever occurred to you that he may not be altogether what he seems to be, Archer?"

"In what way do you mean?"

"I don't know that I can put it into words; but from a lot of little things that have come up I've rather gathered the impression that he is something more than the bank's paymaster—a lot more."

"Pin it down," Stanwood invited.

"As I say, I don't know that I can, in so many words. You know he doesn't

spend much of his time in his office; he's out strolling about on the job. When he is around my part of it he always gives me the feeling that he is keeping cases on things more like a chief of construction than a mere looker-on.

"The other day, when Moriarty and his gang were moving the steam shovel to a new position, I caught him standing on the edge of the pit telling them how to make the shift. He didn't see me, so I stood back and listened. You may call him a bank man, if you like, but he knows the engineering game, as well."

"I wonder," said Stanwood thoughtfully.

"Brigham has noticed it, too, and so has Hartwell. He doesn't meddle in any offensive way, you understand, but he does give the impression that he knows the technical as well as the bookkeeping end of the job."

"Well, what is the deduction?—or *is* there any?"

"I don't know, any more than a rabbit. Does Miss Betty know him well?"

"No; she merely remembers having met him in the New York bank."

"What does she think of him?"

"Nothing to hang any mystery upon. She calls him a dear old back number."

Frenchley put his pipe in his pocket and prepared to turn in.

"You can take it from me—and tell Miss Betty, if you want to—that Morton is no back number, whatever else he *may* be. That's half of it; and the other half is that I've wished a thousand times that you hadn't turned the buying over to him, Arch. We're all up in the air as to the cost account, and that comes nearer to making us a bunch of irresponsible mechanics than anything else that could be done. At the same time, I don't see how you could have helped it. Good night."

**I**T was ten o'clock when Frenchley left the office, the hour of shift changing, and Stanwood went out to make a final round of inspection before going to bed. Fed by the dynamo of the temporary power installation the arc lights were turn-

ing night into day in the camp and at the cañon portal, and there was no pause in the roar and rattle of machinery as the off-shift men came in and the night men took their places.

From the doorstep of the headquarters cabin Stanwood surveyed the busy scene; the air drills chattering in the quarry; the tiny gravity cars dumping stone into the crushers; the steam shovel opening the great foundation gash in the gravelly soil, its deafening, rapid-fire exhaust dominating all other clamor; the white concrete sections of the dam rising like gigantic teeth in the river bed, with the big steel bucket of the cableway dumping fresh material into the forms.

As many times before, the young chief of construction was thankful for the phenomenal good fortune that had attended the undertaking from the very beginning. There had been no backsets, no hitches, no accidents—not a man hurt, thus far. And, though he had not the actual figures to show for it, he was confident that the force was making a construction record by which all future jobs of like nature would be measured.

There was need for a continuance of the good fortune, as he well knew. In accordance with its changed plans, the railroad was going rapidly ahead with its preparations for the electrification of the grades on the mountain division, and with everything favorable, there was a scant margin of time if the Little Horse plant were to be in readiness to furnish current when it should be required.

Still, with full shifts, good management and no unlooked-for delays in deliveries of material and machinery, Stanwood told himself the race would be won within the time limit—which would also set another record for future construction engineers to surpass, if they could.

If only the luck would continue: but he saw no reason why it shouldn't. The securing and holding of a supply of labor had been his earliest and chief anxiety; the remoteness of the valley from any city of considerable size presenting the major difficulty in this field.

But, happily, the finishing of the government irrigation works in the Timanyonis, and the consequent release of an army of laborers, had come in the nick of time; and with the camp complement full, the isolation was an added factor of safety, since there was no temptation for the men to drift into a town to spend their money in dissipation after the fortnightly pay day.

**I**T was just as he was starting to walk up to the dam that he heard a step behind him and turned to find Morton at his elbow.

"Ah, Mr. Stanwood—just going on duty, or just coming off?" inquired the business manager in his most genial accents.

"Neither," said Stanwood. "Merely looking around a bit before turning in."

"Er—might I ask you to give me a few minutes in your office?"

"Sure; as many of them as you like," and Stanwood led the way into the cabin and turned on the lights.

"I've come to ask a bit of help," Morton began, after he had drawn up a chair and lighted a cigar, "and I hope you will take what I am about to say in the spirit in which it is meant. I think I may have mentioned the fact that we of the Wouter van Twiller Company have always held ourselves in a measure *in loco parentis* to Miss Lancaster since her good father passed away. I have, haven't I?"

Stanwood nodded, the while some inner voice was warning him—quite unreasonably, as it seemed—to be on his guard.

"Very good. That being the case, as the sole representative of the company on the ground, I feel a certain responsibility for Miss Betty—she's a dear girl!—in a—er—protective way. I confess frankly to being an old-fashioned man, Mr. Stanwood, and I may also say that I don't pretend to understand the—er—attitude of the younger generation; of young women, particularly."

"No?" said the younger man with an amused smile. "Perhaps you are not altogether alone in that galley."

"Thank you; then I may go on without giving offense. It has—er—distressed me somewhat to see Miss Betty spending so much of her time in this camp of rough men; you know what I mean—going about among the men and making free with them—if I may say so—much as a young boy might. I cannot believe it is precisely what her best friends would wish for her."

Stanwood's amused smile broadened into a grin. "I grant you that she doesn't seem to distinguish very clearly between the masses and the classes."

"It is more than that. I—er—cannot think the association is altogether good for her."

Knowing the attitude of the men toward their "mascot"—that they would quickly mob the man who would take advantage of her free camaraderie—Stanwood had his own opinion about the proprieties. But he did not express it.

"Just what are you going to do about it, Mr. Morton?—in your parental capacity, I mean?" he inquired quizzically.

"I hardly know what to do. As you may have observed, Miss Betty is—er—inclined to be a law unto herself in many ways, and I greatly fear she would resent it if I should speak to her about this matter."

"Well?"

"I am appealing to you, Mr. Stanwood. It is apparent to the most casual observer that you have a great deal of influence over her. A word from you, now—"

"I see. You want me to tell Miss Betty that though she owns this project in fee simple, she is to keep hands off—stay away from it."

"Oh, I wouldn't put it quite so baldly as that! Just a word from you, as to the proprieties, you know. We mustn't forget that the dear girl has grown up without a mother's care and teachings, and she doesn't realize what is required of her as the heiress to a great fortune; that is, not always."

"All right," said Stanwood shortly, and with what might have appeared to be suspicious readiness; "I'll tell her."

"Thank you. I am sure you will earn the gratitude of all concerned. She will take it without offense—coming from you. I am quite sure she will."

MAKING his inspection round after Morton had gone back to his own domain, Stanwood was soberly questioning the suave gentleman's motive in wishing to eliminate Betty. That the motive wasn't entirely altruistic he was pretty well assured. He thought it must be evident to anybody that in her frequent visits to the camp Betty was neither doing any harm nor taking any.

What then? Was Morton merely trying to throw a monkey wrench into the sentimental machinery; trying to keep Betty from seeing too much of the man she had told her trustees she wanted to marry?

He was still trying to fathom Morton's real motive when he climbed to the elevation in the cañon from which John Brigham was watching the placing of the concrete in the forms. After a bit of talk that concerned itself wholly with the race against time, Brigham said, "Are you getting along all right with the pay boss, Archer?"

"Fine," said Stanwood. "Why do you ask that?"

"Just wondering. How well do you know Gardner, the old bookkeeper?"

"He is a queer old adding machine. I hardly know him at all. Whenever I happen in his office he always has his nose buried in a ledger."

"I've seen even less of him than you have; don't suppose I had exchanged a dozen words with him until last night when he came wandering up here, blinking through his spectacles and staring at the job as though he were seeing it for the first time. Said he couldn't sleep, so he'd go outdoors for a bit."

"I fixed him a seat here on the rock, and he fished out an old pipe and filled it, saying something about Morton not allowing him to smoke it in the office; said it with a curse for Morton that gave me the same feeling you'd have if you heard a

little child swearing. Just then something happened to the cableway hoist and I went across to see to it. When I came back he patted the rock I had perched him on and I sat down beside him. Then he began talking about you."

"About me?"

"Yes; wanted to know what experience you'd had, and if you stood well in your profession, and all that. After a while I said, 'See here, old scout—what are you driving at?' He didn't say anything for a spell, and then he let me have it.

"'You tell Stanwood to look out for himself—that's all,' he mumbled; and for a while I couldn't get another word out of him. But at last he loosened up—a little. It seems that he is supposed to be hard of hearing, but I guess that is only a bit of sly craft on his part.

"Anyhow, he overheard Morton dictating a letter to somebody in New York in which he was giving you down the country for your extravagance in buying—or ordering; backcapping you properly."

"What?" exclaimed Stanwood, blankly incredulous.

"That is what Gardner said, and you can take it for what it is worth. The old man evidently has a grouch against Morton, and he may have been exaggerating; but I thought I'd better pass it along to you."

"Um: there is a screw loose, somewhere, John. Morton has never questioned my requisitions. But, on the other hand, I have never been able to find out what he is paying for things. There is always some excuse: the invoices haven't come in, or if they have, they haven't been checked up, or the question of discounts hasn't been settled—always something so that I don't get the figures.

"For my own satisfaction I have been keeping tab on the buying as well as I could; using market prices for a base. On those figures we are well within our lowest estimates."

"Would Morton have any reason for juggling figures on you?"

"Ask yourself, John. He is acting as

agent for Miss Betty's trustees, and if I am overbuying—as I know I am not—he ought to come to me."

"Well, I thought you ought to know what Gardner said. Let it go for what it's worth. Heard anything more from the Mex who wanted a soft-drink concession?"

"No."

"You turned him down cold, didn't you?"

"Sure thing. The soft-drink business was only camouflage. Bootleg whisky is what he wants to sell. Major Briscoe tipped him off to me. The major had a lot of trouble with him on the Kennesaw coal branch when it was building. He is a mighty hard and dangerous citizen, so they all say."

"Exactly. Just the same, he has bought a piece of land across the river from the camp, and is going to set up his dive over there. Tim Moriarty was telling me. I don't know where he got his information."

**S**TANWOOD swore softly. "Off the reservation, eh?—where I can't get at him. Cards and whisky! John, that will be simply hell!"

"You've said it. It will demoralize us, right and proper. Can't you think of some way to nip it in the bud?"

"If I don't, it won't be for the lack of trying." Then, as he got up to go: "Think of a rotten thing like that right in the edge of the camp, as you might say—with Miss Betty and her friend driving over here nearly every day! Manuel Lopez needn't think he's going to be allowed to light a stink pot like that under our noses—not if I have to run him out with a gun!"

Brigham grunted. "If you do anything like that, you want to be sure you beat him to the draw, Arch. They say he's chain lightning with the hand artillery. I'd hate to see you messed up with a Mex bullet at this stage of the game."

"Going to bed? All right; sleep a few winks for me, while you're at it. I'm needing 'em."

## CHAPTER VII.

SEÑOR MANUEL LOPEZ.

ON the morning following Stanwood's talk with John Brigham, Betty drove up in her car, with Alicia Arkwright for a seatmate. Stanwood heard the car in the camp street, but before he could reach the door, Betty—a Betty with lips parted and eyes mirroring mischief—stood on the threshold.

"I want to borrow your handsome Georgia boy, if he isn't too busy," she announced briskly. "I'm supposed to be driving to Orrville for the ranch mail, and I want him to take the car and go in my place. May he?"

"Is Miss Arkwright in the car?" Stanwood asked, with a grin.

She laughed joyously. "How did you ever guess?"

"If you can find Price and persuade him—" he was beginning; but she was gone before he could finish, and a moment later he heard the roar of the motor as the car sped away, and in another moment Betty was back in the office cabin, snapping her fingers and doing a little double shuffle with a neat pigeon-wing to finish before she dropped into a chair.

"It always makes me feel so ripping when I can trump the other person's ace," she gurgled. Then: "Paul Stockton will want to murder me when we go back."

"The tea hound? Is he at the ranch?"

She nodded violently. "It reminds one of the Book of Job: 'And Satan came also.' He materialized last evening and I overheard him arranging with Barker for the use of one of the ranch cars for to-day; said he wanted to take Miss Arkwright out and have her show him some of this won-der-ful country. I plotted with Allie, and we got up early and vanished before he was out of bed."

"What is Stockton doing out here?"

"Two birds with one stone, if you'll take it from me; doing 'the-villain-still-pursued-her' act with Allie, for one of them, and keeping a malignant eye on you in Uncle Jackson's behalf for the other.

I've been wondering if Uncle Jackson wouldn't try to get a finger in our pie out here, sooner or later."

"He'll have to hurry some to overtake us now," Stanwood remarked easily. "In a few weeks more we'll be installing the generators and getting ready to string the transmission wires. When we get that far along, you won't be able to borrow Price any more whatever; I can tell you that."

She made a mocking little face at him. "I'm counting something on Price's warm Southern temperament. I don't believe he is going to hang fire too long."

"Tell me, Betty—are you really trying to marry those two people?"

"Why not? If it wasn't love at first sight it was something very handsomely like it. I only hope Price will make the most of his spare time and not let Paul Stockton cut in too often."

Stanwood shook his head. "There's a bigger obstacle than Stockton."

"What is it? Don't tell me there's another girl!"

"No girl; it's Alicia's money. Price has a pedigree. His grandfather owned an army of slaves and something like half a county of plantations. The Civil War smashed them, and Price is only a working engineer—as I am."

"Bah!" was Betty's comment. "You didn't penalize me for my money, and I'll see to it that Price doesn't penalize Allie for hers. Don't raise your eyebrows at me that way: I can do it if I put my mind to it. If Allie had to stick at the ranch and have Paul underfoot every time she stepped outdoors, it might be a bit difficult. But so long as we have my car, and your camp to run away to—"

"Wait a minute," Stanwood interposed, "that reminds me. Your self-appointed guardian across the street wants me to tell you that you are wrecking all the nice little proprieties by coming here so often. Don't you realize that a rude construction camp is just no place at all for a properly reared young woman to visit?"

"Oho!" she said; "so Friend Morton has made a move at last, has he? Don't

you know, I've been expecting something of that sort for a long time."

"You have?"

She nodded knowingly. Then: "Tell me."

He recounted the interview of the previous evening for her and she nodded again.

"Tried to persuade you to bell the cat for him, did he? Well, the bell's on. Are you going to order me off the premises?"

"You know I'm not; not yet, at least, though I may have to, later on."

"Didn't Mr. Morton give you any other reason for wanting to get rid of me—besides the smashing of the proprieties, I mean?"

"No."

"Still, you know that wasn't the real reason, don't you?"

"I'm suspecting it wasn't. But the suspicion doesn't get me anywhere."

She laughed mockingly. "Man logic has gone as far as it can, has it?—bless its little old heart! Tell me, Archer, dear; haven't you had a kind of sneaky feeling all along that things were coming too easily?—that they were too sugary good to be true?"

Stanwood took time to consider. When he spoke it was to say, "Yes, Betty, I have. There hasn't been any reasonable peg to hang it on, but I've had the feeling ever since the day when Morton told me what your trustees proposed to do.

"Yet, as I say, there wasn't, and isn't, a peg to hang it on. The proposal was as simple as twice two. You had money invested, and you stood to lose it if some more of your money wasn't sent after it. Therefore the trustees proposed to send it."

"Yes," she nodded; "and to send Mr. Morton along with it."

"Oh, naturally and properly," he put in. "They'd be mighty reckless trustees if they hadn't arranged to keep the money spending in their own hands."

"Just the same, I'm not satisfied. Mr. Morton doesn't want us to be together so much; that is what he meant by asking you to shoo me away. And he thought

you'd do it because, being in love with me, you'd be sort of touchy about the respectabilities, don't you see? You say there are no pegs: are you sure you haven't overlooked something?"

IT was just here that Stanwood recalled the talk with Brigham the night before; the talk and the old bookkeeper's warning.

"Yes, there is something," he admitted, "though it didn't develop until last night." Then he repeated what the bookkeeper had said to Brigham.

"I knew it!" exclaimed the eager listener. "Archer, all this good luck we've been having isn't real! There is something behind it all. What is it?"

He shook his head. "You can search me. Everything in our relations—Morton's and mine—has been perfectly open and aboveboard—and pleasant. He has never questioned any of my requisitions, and he has kept his part of the undertaking right up to the mark; we have not yet been delayed a day by slow deliveries, or anything of that sort; not a single day."

"Still, he writes a letter to somebody in New York abusing you. How do you account for that?"

"I can't account for it."

Betty's cherry-ripe lips came together in as straight a line as their Cupid's-bow curves would sanction.

"I'm going to account for it," she asserted darkly. "You leave it to your honey bunch. I've just been playing around and wasting time and putting my nagging little hunch aside and saying, 'Oh, there's nothing to it!'"

"But now I know there is something: this that you've just told me, and Charlie Badger's being here, and now Paul Stockton. Archer, dear, I—I'm almost scared!"

"Oh, I think you needn't be. We're going through with the job, all right."

"But they are just using you; getting the best you've got to give—and then swearing at you behind your back. There is something wrong—I'm sure of it! And I'm going to find out what it is."

"There is at least one thing that is very wrong," he agreed musingly. "You remember what I told you about that Mexican, Lopez, who wanted permission to set up a soft-drink shop and dance hall in the camp?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I turned him down, of course. I knew that what he wanted to bring in was a dive, a grab bag for the men's money after pay days. But he has put one over on me."

"On the other side of Burnt Mountain, across the river, there is a big tract of waste land that was once a part of an old Spanish grant. One narrow tongue of that tract reaches over the mountain and down into this valley, cornering in a triangle on the bank of the river. Lopez has bought or leased this triangle and is going to build his dive on that little hill you can see from the window; some teams came in with lumber and the carpenters this morning. The Mexican has probably squared himself with the county authorities, and I shan't be able to get at him legally."

"You are afraid it may demoralize your working force?"

"It is sure to. Lopez will make all the bids; bootleg booze, a gambling shop and probably a dance hall. That is why I said, a few minutes ago, that I might have to warn you and Alicia off, later on."

"I went over to talk to Morton about it early this morning; asked him if he'd back me up if I should take the law into my own hands and run the Mexican out of the valley. He crawfished too quick; said neither he nor his principals could sanction anything like mob law; that if I should take any such step, it would have to be entirely upon my own responsibility. You might have thought, from the way he talked, that Lopez had squared him, as well as the county officials."

"How do you know that he hasn't?" she asked, looking up quickly.

"That would be too raw," he objected. "Can you see a respectable and dignified bank outfit taking a bribe from a tinhorn gambler and bootlegger?"

"Not the bank, maybe; but Mr. Morton isn't the bank. What will you do?"

"I suppose I'll have to wait until Lopez starts something that can fairly be set down as a nuisance."

Betty got up, a trim little figure in her jaunty Stetson, sports coat and knickers, with her bobbed hair a touch up to her boyish costume.

"You know you can count on me to the limit, Archer, dear, don't you? I'll be there, with the punch, when you need me. Now I'm going over to make a social call upon Mr. Morton, and if he isn't in, perhaps I'll vamp the old bookkeeper. We'll just keep a stiff upper lip and see where we come out."

FOR the next few days Stanwood was kept so busy that he had little time for anything but working, eating and sleeping. It was during this interval that the question of the disposal of the huge mound of earth taken out of the power-house wheel pit came up, and Frenchley suggested a means of removal which would save the expense of a truck haul.

"You know where that branch comes into the river over the northern cliff about a quarter of a mile up the cañon. There's a fall there of three or four hundred feet, and the branch is the outlet for a good-sized pond.

"We have plenty of pipe in the stock pile: how would it do to lay a line up to that pond, rig a 'giant' such as they use in hydraulic mining, and wash that dump into the river? The current is strong enough to carry it away."

"Capital!" said the chief; "go to it." And a few days later, just as he was about to start on a horseback trip to Grass Valley to adjust a claim of one Josiah Galpin, who held a shadowy title to a worthless bit of mining property which would be submerged when the dam was completed, he paused long enough to see Frenchley turn the enormous pressure into the makeshift 'giant,' and to nod his approval when the solid two-inch jet, hard and rigid as a bar of iron, began to cut away the mound of spoil and wash it into the river.

RETURNING from Grass Valley the following day, Stanwood took another lay off to run up to Green Butte for a talk with Calloway, anxious to learn if anything further had developed in the matter of Pannikin Electric's presumable opposition to the Little Horse project.

The young lawyer was deeply interested in the turn of fortune that Stanwood had found awaiting him on his return from the fruitless money-raising excursion; but, like Betty, he was inclined to look a little askance at the sudden change in the attitude of the Lancaster trustees.

"It always pays to look long and hard at any proposition put forward by Big Money, Arch," he said. "As you've laid it out for me, it looks as if you are holding the little end of the stick. I suppose you are turning over your stock and bonds to this man, Morton, right along?"

"Yes; I'm signing on the dotted line, if that is what you mean."

"Exactly. You are president of a company which is spending money by the hundreds of thousands, and you don't know, any more than a baby, where the company stands financially. Isn't that about the size of it?"

"It is—when you boil it down."

"Well, if you're asking me, I should say it's a mighty unsatisfactory state of affairs. You are entirely at the mercy of this Morton person. For all you know to the contrary, he may be robbing Shoestring Power & Light right and left; cooking it up for a grand smash that will leave you holding the bag and possibly under an indictment for malfeasance in office. As president, you are the responsible head of the enterprise; but in reality you are only a hired man doing a hurry job of plant building."

This talk was taking place in Calloway's private office in the Shoshone Building, and Stanwood moved uneasily in his chair.

"You've put it in cold-blooded words, Bob; but what can I do? It's Betty's money, and Morton is the accredited representative of her trustees. I'm just a rubber stamp, and I know it; but that doesn't help out any."

"That's what you are; and the thing doesn't smell good to me. Have you drawn any money for yourself—salary allowance, or anything of that sort?"

"No."

"But you say you don't see the books: how do you know that Morton isn't charging you up with a personal account every week?"

"Oh, that would be too rank!—when I don't draw any money at all."

"You can't tell. As I say, it doesn't smell good to me. There are too many dropped stitches—a darned sight too many."

"Why does Morton continually stand you off when you want to find out how the business office is handling things? Why has Pannikin Electric folded its hands and let you go on without a breath of interference?"

"Then there is this saloon-and-dance-hall invasion: Morton ought to be backing you to the last ditch in keeping a demoralizing thing like that out of the reach of your working force."

"I've got to catch my train," Stanwood said, looking at his watch; adding: "It is all just as you say, Bob; yet I'm tied hand and foot. All I can do is to push hard on the engineering end of the job, and I'm doing that."

"As to López, I suppose I shall have to take him by the neck if things get too bad. And they'll get bad; there is no question about that. We have a pretty good lot of men, but they're human."

"All right," said Calloway. "They call me the fighting member of this law outfit, and when you need me, just raise a yell. And it runs in my mind that you're going to need a fighting attorney or two before you're through."

Stanwood's train reached Orrville late in the evening, and on the horseback ride across Bull Basin he was thoughtfully considering Calloway's prediction. Was there some hidden meaning behind the events of the past few weeks and months? Could it be possible that Morton's perfectly plain and straightforward proposal to go on and build the plant with Betty's money

had been only a mask for some ulterior design too deep to be fathomed?

It was more than incredible; it was blankly preposterous. Even the most dishonest Big Business would hesitate to use a trusteeship under a will to further a hidden purpose of its own, whatever that purpose might be.

It was after ten o'clock, the hour for the night-shift change, when he topped the divide and followed the winding road up the valley. At the turn that opened the first view of the camp he saw on the opposite side of the river a new building garishly lighted—with electricity. And above the grumbling of the river and the clatter and grind of industrial machinery he could hear the clanging of a piano and the discordant blare of saxophones.

In his absence, Lopez had dug himself in and the camp plague spot was running full blast.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MEETING AND A WARNING.

AS had happened once before on the occasion of his return to camp, Stanwood found Frenchley in the office, smoking a bedtime pipe.

"Back again, are you?" said the first assistant. "I was just wondering if you'd get in to-night. What's the news from the outside world?"

"Nothing alarming. I met Galpin in Grass Valley and settled with him, and then ran up to the Butte for a talk with Calloway. So far as he knows, Pannikin Electric isn't making any hostile move."

"That doesn't look good to me," was Frenchley's brief comment.

"You think they ought to be trying to obstruct us? So do I. But there are wheels within wheels in big business, Anson. Morton assured me in advance that we'd have no trouble with the Pannikin people."

"How did he know?" Frenchley asked bluntly.

"That is beyond me." Then, after a pause: "I see Lopez has blown in."

"Yes; in full feather. And to-morrow is pay day."

"What has he got over there?"

"A three-ring circus; bar, game room and dance hall; soft drinks in evidence, but red liquor if you have the countersign. We're in for trouble."

"Where does he get his electric lights?"

"Buys juice from us. Hartwell's gang strung the wires for him."

"Who made any such deal as that?" Stanwood demanded angrily.

"Morton. I objected—kicked like a bay steer. But Morton said it was a small source of revenue that we might just as well take in; that if we refused to sell him current, Lopez would put in a self-contained gasoline plant."

"I told him that selling current to that outfit made us, in a way, *particeps criminis* in the damnable thing. Morton's reply was that we couldn't afford to look too closely into the character of our customers."

"Any of our men over there to-night?"

"Yes; a bunch of the off shift; which means that they won't be worth the powder it would take to blow them to Hades to-morrow."

Stanwood sat back, scowling. From former experiences he knew only too well what the proximity of a place like Lopez's would mean to the efficiency of a working camp. There would be drunkenness, time lost, bickerings, violence; and, even worse than these, the inevitable consequence of unstrung workman nerves—accidents.

"Among other things, I asked Calloway if there were any way of getting at Lopez through the law. If he sells hard liquor—as of course he does and will—we can get him; but that will be a slow process subject to all the law's delays. It's a bad mess."

"You're shouting," Frenchley agreed, and thereupon went on to tell how on a difficult railroad job in Arizona this same Mexican had made himself a nuisance and menace as a camp follower, the attempts to drive him off finally culminating in a shooting affray in which two members of the railroad-engineering staff were killed.

"He is bad medicine all around," the labor chief said in conclusion. "He is not

only a 'killer' himself; he keeps a bunch of gunmen on his pay roll."

After Frenchley had gone to bed in the other half of the headquarters cabin, Stanwood squared himself to wrestle with this newest of the problems; trying to devise some practicable means of getting rid of the Lopez handicap. While he was still grilling over the problem, Hartwell came in.

"Hoped I'd catch you before you went to bed," said the electrical assistant, dropping into a chair and lighting a cigarette. "I reckon you've seen what-all the cat's brought in, over on the other side of the river?"

Stanwood nodded.

"Miss Betty drove over here to-day, with Miss Alicia," Hartwell went on. "I didn't let 'em stay."

"What happened?" queried Stanwood, instantly alert.

"Lopez was over here with a couple of his dance-hall girls, showing 'em around. After I'd shooed Miss Betty and Al—Miss Arkwright, away, I told the Mex where he got off and ran him out. Was that right?"

"Exactly right. Did he try to get back at you?"

A slow smile wrinkled at the corners of the young Southerner's eyes.

"He had a gun slung in a shoulder holster under his coat. Just at that particular minute I was wearing mine on my laig. Reckon he allowed maybe I might beat him to it on the draw, so he didn't do anything but cuss me out."

"You were wise to heel yourself before you tried to talk to him. He's a bad egg. We're going to have a barrel of trouble with him and his outfit. Any of your men over there to-night?"

"Sure thing. There's a right-good bunch of the off-shift gangs missing. I sent Franconelli, my Italian lineman, over there an hour or so ago, and he says the place is full up; bar, gamblin' shop and dance hall."

"It will have to come to a show-down!" Stanwood snapped angrily. "We can't stand for a holdup like this. It's going to

push us to the limit to keep our date with the railroad, and if we can't hold the men in line, we're done."

"You said it all in a single mouthful," nodded the young Georgian, as he moved to the door. "Any time you're ready to go over yonder and clean that outfit, I'm with you."

**I**N strict accordance with all predictions, the demoralizing effect of the Lopez invasion began to manifest itself with little loss of time. Neither better nor worse than other working aggregations, the Shoestring construction force was still purely human; and the remoteness of the project from a town had bred an appetite for recreation in quantity, with small regard for quality.

Very shortly, working gangs that had been functioning as well-balanced units began to falter; "sick" lay-offs multiplied; and a round of the bunk shanties unearthed a good many bottles of bad liquor. As a natural consequence, the admirable record that had been made on the score of industrial accidents was soon broken, and three times within as many days one of the camp trucks had to be pressed into service as an ambulance to rush an injured man to the railroad at Orrville.

It was on a day when a half-befuddled quarryman cut his fuses too short, and narrowly escaped killing the entire mucker squad, car loading in the pit, that Stanwood sought Morton.

"About this joint on the other side of the river, Mr. Morton," he began abruptly. "If we let it go on, it will ruin us! We have had three serious accidents, so far, to say nothing of the delays caused by men laying off; and just a few minutes ago a quarry boss, with his nerves all shot to pieces by bad whisky, came within an ace of killing half a dozen car loaders in the pit. We can't go on like this!"

The business manager smiled as one only casually interested.

"You are excited, Mr. Stanwood, and I don't wonder at it. Such things must be very upsetting. Are you asking me for some helpful suggestion?"

"I'll be mighty glad if you have one to offer."

"The cure seems quite obvious. Why don't you forbid your men going across the river—with a prompt discharge as the penalty for disobedience?"

"For the simple reason that within a week's time we'd lose half the force. And in the present condition of the Western labor market it couldn't be recruited in a month of Sundays."

The man from the East spread his hands as one willing but helpless.

"What do you expect me to do about it, Mr. Stanwood? Isn't this—er—difficulty somewhat out of my line?"

"Since we are spending Miss Lancaster's money, I should say it is very pointedly in your line," Stanwood retorted crisply. "If you will back me up the nuisance can be wiped out inside of twenty-four hours."

"In just what way?" was the mild-voiced query.

"Ride with me to Grass Valley and join me in demanding relief of the authorities. Lopez and his people are open lawbreakers, and—"

"One moment," interrupted the suave voice. "Why should my presence have any influence at the county seat, Mr. Stanwood?"

"Because it is very well known in Grass Valley that you are the real head of this enterprise, and that you have behind you all the power and resources of Eastern capital."

"My dear sir!"—with a deprecatory hand wave—"don't tell me that you accept the popular fallacy that capital has only to nod to perform miracles! Nothing in the world is farther from the truth. Quite the contrary, capital has no friends; every man's hand is against it and its emissaries are viewed with suspicion."

"If an appeal to the authorities is to be made, you are the one to make it. You are the president of the company, as well as its chief engineer."

"Then you won't go with me?"

"I'd go, cheerfully, if I thought I could do any good. But I know very well that

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my presence with you would be a detriment rather than a help."

"Very well; I'll go alone. And if the sheriff refuses to act I shall take the law into my own hands. I don't propose to sit still and see my working force crumple up and go to pieces at this stage of the game!"

HAVING thus declared himself, the young engineer drove the camp run-about to the county seat in no pleasant state of mind. It was evident that Morton was either utterly indifferent, or that he had some hidden reason for not wishing to appear as the Mexican's prosecutor.

Arrived in Grass Valley, the unpleasant state of mind was still holding its own when he approached the sheriff and demanded relief. The interview was brief and brittle, and the upshot of it was that the county peace officer refused point-blank to act until the alleged lawbreaking had been definitely shown to exist.

"In other words," Stanwood retorted hotly, "you are not willing to take my word for it that it does exist!" Whereupon he flung out of the office of recalcitrancy and climbed into his car to drive back to his valley, firmly convinced that Lopez had forestalled him with Sheriff Blatchford by buying protection.

Losing time on the mountain road by reason of a broken ignition wire which was difficult to locate and repair, it was starlight dark by the time he reached the fork in the Grass Valley road where the Bull Basin trail came in. Since the day of untoward events was not yet ended, his head lamps refused to light, and when he got out to tinker them he saw the lights of an auto approaching from the direction of Orrville.

While he was still trying to find out what was the matter with his headlights, the approaching car came up and stopped, and a voice he knew and loved said, "Is that you, Archer?" And when he turned and answered, she leaned out and kissed him.

"As the governor of North Carolina said to the governor of South Carolina,

it's been a long time between drinks!" she bubbled. "I've been perishing for a talk with you, Archer, dear. What-all's been happening since Allie and I were ordered to stay off location?"

Stanwood briefed the developments in the fewest possible words.

"And you say Mr. Morton won't help?" she queried.

"Not a hand's turn. From the way he shies off you might think he was in cahoots with Lopez."

To his astonishment she said, "Well, who knows? Maybe he is."

"But, good heavens——" he began; but she did not let him finish.

"Listen; I've been doing some telegraphing—I've just come from the telegraph office in Orrville. I have at least one good friend left in New York, and I've been falling on his neck and weeping—if you get what I mean."

"What have you learned?"

"Nothing very definite yet; but there's more to follow—I'm sure of it. This Mr. Morton isn't altogether what he seems to be; of that much I am quite certain. He is an expert of some sort, so my good angel in New York whispers me; a man that the big corporations send out when they want a lot of brains on the fighting line; a 'fixer' is what the answer to my wire calls him."

"Then he isn't an official of the Wouter van Twiller bank?"

"He may be that, too; but if he is, he doesn't work at it all the time."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; Paul Stockton has been doing some telegraphing, too. This morning he sent a wire to Uncle Jackson. Wait a minute and I'll read you what he said," and she calmly took a slip of paper from her hand bag, opened it and held it down to the light of the tiny lamp on the instrument board of the car and began to read:

"Your suggestion adopted and working well. Camp now untenable for parties named. I have daily reports from B. Work approaching completion but costs mounting heavily. More developments shortly.

"You see, he didn't even take the trouble to send it in code."

"See here, Betty; how did you get a copy of that?" Stanwood asked accusingly.

"I persuaded the nice little operator boy at the railroad office to show me the original and then turn his back while I made this copy."

"Great Moses! Don't you know that's immoral? If anybody finds out, it will cost that kid his job, and maybe something a good deal worse!"

She laughed lightly. "If we are going to fight Uncle Jackson on strictly moral grounds, we'll be left at the post. I *had* to find out what Paul was doing, didn't I? And the nice operator boy shan't suffer; I won't let him. Never mind my immorality. Don't you see what this message means?"

"Not wholly."

"It means that this invasion of your camp wasn't just a happen-so; it was planned and I'll bet Uncle Jackson was the planner. He wanted to fix things so that you wouldn't let Allie and me stick around any more. We are Paul's 'parties named.'

"If you should ask me, I'd say Mr. Morton is in it, too. Tell me; is there any reason why Uncle Jackson or Mr. Morton should *want* your building costs to mount heavily?"

"None that I can think of. Since it is your money we're spending, it ought to be exactly the other way around."

"But they are mounting?"

"In the last week or so, shamefully, I'm sorry to say. Our force is all shot to pieces. Since that dive opened up it's been costing us two dollars to get a dollar's worth of work done."

Over a low hill a mile away on the ranch trail a sheen of light appeared suddenly and they both saw it. Betty was the first to grasp the significance of the apparition.

"A car coming from Barker's," she said. "Maybe it's Paul. Run your car in under the trees and I'll do the same. We mustn't let him find us here together!"

THE shift was quickly made, with both cars off the road. Betty slid down from her seat. "If it is Paul, we must find out where he is going—just at supper-time," she declared; but all they could determine as the oncoming car passed them was that it contained a single occupant.

"Nothing doing," Stanwood offered; but even as he spoke a tiny flash light winked twice on the trail ahead and the racing car stopped with a shrill squeal of suddenly applied brakes.

"It is Paul!" Betty whispered; "and he is going to get his daily report from B—otherwise Charles Badger! Let's run!"

Making a short detour through the wood, they approached the road at the point where the halted car was standing; and the noise of the idling motor and the thick carpeting of pine needles underfoot enabled them to do it unheard.

Betty's guess proved to be right. The driver of the car was Paul Stockton, and the man standing beside the machine was Badger, Morton's stenographer.

"No; nothing much new," Badger was saying, as they came, tree-shadow hidden, within earshot. "Stanwood's gone over to Grass Valley, and he hasn't got back yet. He was talking with the boss just before he left, and it looks as if he was beginning to lose his grip. He tried to get Mr. Morton to go over to the county seat with him to complain to the sheriff."

"Well, what is the next move?"

"That's up to Stanwood, and I guess he doesn't know how to make it. We're just sitting tight; saying nothing and sawing wood."

"Are those your instructions? From headquarters, I mean."

"Guess so. I don't know for sure, because the boss has his own wire code. I've offered two or three times to decode his wires for him, but he always does it himself—and is mighty careful to lock up the cipher afterward."

"That doesn't matter; we are not interested in that part of it," said the man in the auto. "How soon do you think the other thing will break?"

"Nobody knows. To a man up a tree

it looks as if things'd have to come to a head pretty soon. I don't know much about construction camps, but this one's sure going to hell at a gallop, right now."

Stockton opened the door on the other side of the car. "Climb in," he invited, "and I'll run you part way back," and as Badger obeyed, the clutch took hold and the car shot away toward the divide.

On the short walk back to the place where Betty's car and Stanwood's were concealed, neither spoke. But at last Betty flamed out.

"A precious pair, I'll say—if anybody should inquire of me! And something is telling me that Mr. Morton isn't any better than the rest of them. They are trying to break you, Archer! What are you going to do about it?"

Stanwood didn't tell her what he was going to do; didn't intend to tell her. The wrath he had been nursing ever since his interview with Morton was turning to cold rage. Jackson Underhill's motive was sufficiently clear: what he wanted was to bury the man Betty had promised to marry so deeply in failure that there would be no hope of a resurrection. Morton's motive was not so clearly defined, but his object was the same.

"I can't tell yet what I shall do," he panted. "Shan't I take the wheel and back your car out of this tangle for you?"

"No, indeed; I can make it all right."

HE got his own car out and waited until she was in the roadway and headed for Barker's. As he was about to climb into his own machine she called to him.

"You are perfectly furious, now, Archer, dear, and I don't wonder at it," she said. "But you mustn't do anything rash. If anything should happen to you just now—"

"Don't worry," he returned, and he tried to say it lightly. "I've no notion of making an unmarried widow of you, just yet. The happenings are going to be on the other side of the fence."

She leaned over the car door and held out her arms. When he kissed her, she said, "Your lips are cold: please, please

don't do anything desperate, Archer. You mustn't break my heart!"

He freed himself gently from the clasp of the clinging arms. This was a new Betty; a Betty that he hadn't heretofore discovered. The discovery thrilled him, but the cold rage remained.

"You mustn't lose any sleep on my account; I can take care of myself," he told her. "You'd better spin along or you'll be late for your supper."

She let the clutch in, and he stood in the road until the red tail light of her car disappeared over the low hill which had thrown the upcast beam from the head lamps of Stockton's machine. Then he climbed into the runabout and drove away in the opposite direction with a heart strangely softened on its emotional side, but hardening itself otherwise in preparation for the thing that had to be done.

## CHAPTER IX. •

### THE CLASH.

**S**TANWOOD expected to meet Stockton driving back to Barker's as he crossed the divide into the valley of the Little Horse; since he did not do so, he was not greatly surprised to see the tea hound's car parked in front of Morton's headquarters when he drove into the camp street.

Putting his car in the camp garage, he went over to his own headquarters. As yet he had formed no plan; there was only the cold rage telling him that the limit was finally reached. First, the Mexican and his demoralizing nuisance must be summarily gotten rid of; then there must be an accounting of some sort with Morton.

He was late for supper, and, in consequence, he ate alone in the mess shack. On the still air of the autumn night the rattling jangle of the piano in the dance hall across the river sounded like a distant beating of tin pans, but the hoarser squawking of the saxophones was lost in the grind of machinery and the thunderous murmur of the Little Horse growling among the boulders in its bed.

Finishing his meal at the otherwise de-

serted mess table, he went up the street to the log-cabin headquarters. As he was seating himself at his desk the telephone buzzed. When he took the receiver from its hook, Betty's voice came over the wire.

"You, Archer?"

"Sure." Then: "Hold the wire a second." Reaching under the desk he found and turned a switch. When Morton had set up his business office, Hartwell had made the necessary telephone extension to it, and in doing so had put in a cut-out switch under Stanwood's desk. "Some time you might want to talk without having other people listen in," he had explained; and now Stanwood decided instantly that this was one of the times.

"Now you may go ahead," he said to Betty. "We're isolated."

"I've been trying for the longest time to get you, but I couldn't get any answer," said the guarded voice at the distant dude ranch.

"Nobody at home," he explained. "I was eating my supper."

"I—I was afraid something might have happened to you. Listen: two minutes after I left you one of my tires went flat. I stopped to change to the spare, and while I was working at it two strange men came along in a car: they had come down the road that goes to Grass Valley. Can you hear me?"

"Perfectly."

"They stopped and got out to help me, so I let them change the tire while I held the spotlight for them. They are officers of some kind; I got a glimpse of their stars under their coats."

"After they had put the tire on, one of them asked me if they were on the right road to your camp. I told them how to find the road over the divide. Have they come yet?"

"Not yet; at least, I haven't seen anything of them."

"If there is going to be any—any trouble, you'll let them make it, won't you? That's what they're paid for, isn't it?"

He made reassuring sounds in the mouthpiece. "Again I'm telling you not to worry your anxious little head about

me," he said. "And I am much obliged for the tip. Evidently Sheriff Blatchford changed his mind after I left him this afternoon. I'll see if I can find the deputies. Good-by."

**H**E went to the door and looked up and down the camp street. There was no auto in sight save the one in which Stockton had come. Something like an hour must have elapsed since Betty had directed the sheriff's men: had they missed their way, after all? He hoped not.

It was a comforting thought that he was to have the law on his side when the clash came, but he wondered what had made Blatchford change his mind. The sheriff had certainly given no indication of an intention to do his duty in the brief and brittle interview of the afternoon.

After looking and listening for a few minutes he went in again to sit at his desk. There was nothing to do now but to wait for the sheriff's men to put in an appearance. To fill in the time, he took out the maps he had drawn of the valley when he was making the survey for the Omaha irrigation company in the early summer.

The map covering the present camp site showed the intruding triangle of the old Spanish land grant with its apex impinging upon the river. After scaling the distances and angles carefully to verify his original figures, he sat looking out of the window at his elbow at the lighted windows of the Lopez building on the opposite knoll.

Presently the sight gave him a suggestion. Taking a surveying instrument from its case he mounted it upon its tripod and went to the door to set it up in the opening. Lining the telescope by the compass data given on the map, he took a sight across the river and made a discovery. The lighted windows of the Lopez building were at least fifty feet to the left of the line indicated by the cross hairs in the telescope.

He was smiling with grim satisfaction as he dismounted the instrument and returned it to its case. "Curious I didn't

think of doing that before," he muttered. Then: "Lopez might have gained a point if he'd had a real surveyor run his lines before he built his hell dive."

Back at his desk and waiting again he tried to find answers to the queries born of the day's developments. Stockton's car was still parked in front of the building across the camp street.

What was the tea hound's errand; the errand that was keeping him closeted so long with Morton? Were Morton and Jackson Underhill working together? and if so, to what definite end? Surely there must be something more important in view than the mere crushing of a moneyless engineer who had had the temerity to ask an heiress of millions to marry him. But if so, what was the stake for which these two were playing?

Becoming restless after a time he got up and went to the door again. There was still no sign of the Grass Valley auto that Betty had telephoned about and evening was coming on.

A few hundred yards away the industrious arcs sizzled and burned blue, throwing a ghastly light upon the activities at the dam; on the motors of the concrete mixers spinning to turn the drums; on the massive rock crusher, grinding like some prehistoric monster cracking the bones of its victims; on the slow swing of the cableway bucket dripping its viscous contents as it traveled out to the forms; on the figures of the men dotting the scaffolding. The job was moving, but one did not need the trained eye of an engineer to mark the palpable slowing of the pace.

In the camp itself there was nothing stirring. The roisterers in the off shift were crowding the three rooms of the garishly lighted dive on the opposite bank of the river; the sober ones had gone to bed in the bunk shanties.

Stanwood wondered again what could be keeping the two deputy sheriffs. The fact that they had asked directions of Betty proved that they were unfamiliar with Bull Basin roads. Could it be possible that they had lost their way?

ONCE again Stanwood turned back to sit at his desk. When one is keyed up to take a decisive step, nothing is so unnerving as delay. In the supper-eating interval he had sketched out a plan of action; to go in search of Lopez and give him a shortly limited time in which to close his dive and move out of the valley, with the alternative of being driven out forcibly if he refused the ultimatum to go peaceably.

Lopez might call his bluff, of course, but Stanwood thought he could make it good. Counting in Frenchley, Hartwell, John Brigham, a picked bunch from Moriarty's steam-shovel squad and a few loyal foremen, he believed he could muster a posse numerous enough to convince the Mexican.

Most naturally, Betty's telephone message had changed this plan, and he was relieved. If Sheriff Blatchford's deputies had the proper instructions—and the nerve to carry them out—there need be no doubt about the outcome. The selling of liquor made Lopez and his employees open lawbreakers, and a wholesale arrest would settle the matter.

For perhaps the twentieth time since Betty had telephoned, Stanwood consulted his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock, the hour for shift changing. Over two hours had elapsed since he had driven into camp, and still the men who had inquired their way of Betty were delaying their expected advent.

The suspense was eating into his bones, and he thought that another hour of it would wreck him. Holding himself in hand by main strength he listened for the shrill blast of the steam whistle which would signal the shifting hour. Though he was expecting it, listening for it, the ear-cracking shriek, when it came, made him start, as if the strident blast had been an electric shock to snap every nerve in his body.

"Damn!" he muttered, under his breath, "I must be pretty far gone if it gets me that way! Why the devil don't those deputies show up? I'll give them another fifteen minutes, and then—"

THE interruption was the bursting in through the open door of one of the quarrymen, white faced and gasping from exertion.

"That damned Mex outfit—over the river! They've half killed my bunkie—Tom Riley—robbed him in th' stud game, and jumped him when he made a kick! Th' boys're carryin' him over. Gawd, boss—can't ye get a doctor on the telephone?"

Stanwood got out of his chair. The twitching of nerves was gone, and in its place there were steadiness and cool deliberation.

"There is no doctor nearer than Grass Valley, Higgins—you know that as well as I do," he said, quite evenly. "Have the men carry Riley into the mess shanty and put him on the table; then go after Frenchley: he's better than half the doctors."

The bearer of evil tidings darted away, and Stanwood crossed the room to the coat cupboard in the corner, taking therefrom a belt and holstered gun which he quickly strapped on. Though he had carried an officer's automatic through the war, he had never liked the weapon and had promptly reverted to the standard Colt .45 with the doffing of the uniform. Twirling the cylinder to make sure that the chambers were all filled, he dropped the big gun into its sagging holster and went out.

In the camp street there was a milling crowd gathered about a couple of huskies who were carrying a bruised, beaten and unconscious burden to the mess shack. At the door of the business office Stanwood saw Morton, and a dandified young man whom he took to be Stockton, looking on, half incuriously, he thought. Morton spoke to him in passing.

"You are going across the river, Mr. Stanwood? Aren't you bidding for more trouble by carrying arms?"

"I mean to make trouble if that joint doesn't go out of business at the drop of the hat! I've had all I can stand!"

"Very well. But, remember, you are on your own responsibility. You must

stand or fall by your own acts. My principals—”

Stanwood whirled upon the speaker. “Is that a threat, Mr. Morton?”

“No, indeed; nothing of the kind. I was merely trying to tell you that our—er—friends in the East will hardly approve of violence, or any unlawful proceedings.”

Stanwood pointed to the men who were carrying Riley. “There is the violence,” he said curtly, “and we’ve had enough of it. I’ll give Lopez his chance to leave peaceably. If he doesn’t take it, he’ll be made to go!”

There was no reply to this, and the young chief cut across to the rude log footbridge that had been thrown across the river for the convenience of the workmen—this before the Mexican had come to make it a handy thoroughfare to his den. On the opposite bank the building that housed the camp menace was ablaze with lights, and the place seemed to be running as if nothing had happened. In front of the building there was a bunched knot of the Shoestring workmen, with big Tim Moriarty, the steam-shovel captain, haranguing it. Moriarty broke his talk in the midst as Stanwood approached.

“Glory be—’tis yerself, Misther Stanwood!” he exclaimed. “Th’ dommed crooks ve done f’r poor Tom Riley, and I’m tellin’ th’ b’ys ’tis up to us to mob that hell hole—clean ut and burn ut down!”

“No,” said Stanwood sharply, “this is my funeral, Tim. Take your men and get over to the other side of the river.”

“But, f’r Gawd’s sake, Misther Stanwood, ye’ll not be going into that dump by your lone!” protested the big Irishman.

“I can take care of myself. Round up your bunch and get out.”

The men were straggling toward the bridge path when Stanwood entered the game room where Riley had been mishandled. As he stepped inside, a man, low browed and with a scowl on his evil face, barred the way and pointed to the holstered gun.

“You sashay ‘round to t’other door and leave yer artillery with the barkeep’ if you want in here,” was the snappy command, and it applied the firing spark to the Stanwood temper.

“When that gun comes out, it will come shooting!” he rasped, fixing the shifty eyes of the door guard with a wrathful glare. “Where’s your boss?”

“He’s back yonder”—with the jerk of a thumb toward a room in the rear.

“You go and tell him I want to see him.”

“Want to see Manuel? Huh! you’d better lay off o’ him and chase yerself out o’ here while ye can do it on yer own feet.”

Stanwood’s right hand hovered over the butt of the big Colt.

“Are you going to do as I tell you? Say it quick!”

THE door guard shuffled off, muttering to himself, and Stanwood got his first appraisive view of the smoke-dimmed interior. The assault upon Riley had cleared the place of most of the Shoestring workmen, though there were still a number of the unsopher ones playing at the card tables or ringing the roulette wheel and the faro lay-out. Through a doorless opening into the next room he could see the bar, which was fairly crowded, and beyond that the tinny piano clanged to mark time for the feet of the dancers.

He had not long to wait. Almost at once the door of the back room was opened and a dark-faced man with curling mustaches and beady black eyes came forward, followed by the door guard and two others. Confronting Stanwood, the Mexican said: “Ha, Señor Stanwood—I am mooth honor’. You want see me?”

“I sent for you, yes. You are through here, Lopez. I came over to tell you that you’ve got twenty-four hours in which to pack your dunnage and pull your freight out of this valley.”

“Ha!” said the dark-faced dive keeper, with a smile that showed a mouthful of handsome teeth, “you talk ver’ beeg. P’raps you t’ink you make me go, yes?”

"I shall do just that, if you don't go peaceably. There isn't enough room in the Little Horse for your outfit and mine."

Stanwood did not let his gaze go aside from the man he was threatening, but a sixth sense was telling him that the roulette and faro games had paused, and that men were getting up from the card tables in various parts of the room.

The Mexican's white teeth flashed again. "You make your men to come and ron me out, yess? Somebody will get keel, quick, w'en you do dat."

"We'll chance the killing," Stanwood snapped back. "If you are here by this time to-morrow night—"

**H**E could never be quite sure afterward as to what happened then, or rather as to the sequence of the happenings.

He saw the Mexican's right hand flick to the shoulder holster hidden under his coat, saw the gleam of the electric lights on blued steel. Instantly there was a deafening fusillade of pistol shots, and a wild stampede from the adjoining bar-room.

Then somebody jerked the Colt out of his hand and he found himself in the grasp of two men who were cursing him and roughly handcuffing him. And at his feet, with his heels drumming the floor in the death agony, lay the evil-faced door guard.

Lopez, unhurt, was pointing to the dying man.

"You come over here and shoot us up and keel somebody, hay, Meester Stanwood? I t'ink maybe you will be hang' for dat: si, señor!"

Stanwood was still in a daze when his two captors hustled him out of the place and marched him hurriedly down the path toward the footbridge.

"Little too quick on the trigger finger, that time, wasn't you?" said one of the two.

"Who are you?" Stanwood demanded.

"Deputies, from Grass Valley. Jim Blatchford allowed maybe there'd be some sort of a rookus over here, so he sent us

over. You told him you was goin' to shoot up the place if Lopez didn't do a fade-out, didn't you?"

Stanwood didn't remember exactly what he had said. He had been too angry at Blatchford's apparent supineness to measure his words.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"Put you in the car and run you over to jail—sure; what'd you expect? Haven't you just killed a man before a whole roomful o' witnesses?"

**S**TANWOOD tried to gather his scattered senses; to sort out the happenings of the tragic half minute. He knew he had drawn at the same instant that Lopez had, being well assured that his own life depended upon his quickness. Then the deafening fusillade in the close room had dazed him.

Though he tried until the effort became a keen agony, he could not recall whether or not his own gun had joined in the ear-deadening crashes. If he had fired, why had he killed the door guard and not Lopez?

At the camp end of the footbridge his captors ran him down the river bank past the construction camp to an auto parked among the river-fringing aspens, and then he knew why he hadn't seen the deputies come in. They had purposely avoided showing themselves in the camp.

"Get in," commanded the bigger of the two; then to his mate: "Reckon I'd better hike back and get the names o' the witnesses—and the gun."

"Hell," said the other, "didn't you take the gun?"

"No; one o' the other guys took it while we was ironin' him."

By this time the young chief was beginning to realize pretty clearly what his arrest and trial for murder was going to mean to the Little Horse project. Frenchley, as first assistant, could probably carry on; but the tragedy in the game room would leave Lopez firmly anchored, and the demoralization of the working force would go on as before—which would cer-

tainly mean failure to win in the race against time; failure and a frightful loss to Betty if the railroad contract should be lost. He spoke to the man who was guarding him.

"Suppose you run me up to the camp while we are waiting and let me have a word with my assistants," he suggested hopefully.

"Nothin' doin', nothin' at all!" was the curt refusal.

"Why not?"

"Ain't takin' no chances on a rescue, I ain't. They're your own men up yonder, and I reckon they'd do whatever you told 'em to. There's a lot o' them, and there ain't only one o' me."

"Nonsense!" said Stanwood. "We're not the lawbreakers. Didn't you see them selling whisky openly over the bar in that dive?"

"Didn't see nothin'. And you needn't to jaw. We ain't goin' to move none till Bill gets back."

THE wait proved a short one. When the other deputy returned, the car was backed out of the aspen fringe and headed for the divide and the Grass Valley road with the throttle wide and the cut-out open.

Stanwood sat in his corner a prey to mingled emotions; decent horror at the thought that he had killed the wrong man; gloomy forebodings as to what the effect of the tragedy would be upon the faltering plant-building project; keen sorrow when he permitted himself to think of Betty, and how the act of a bedazzled instant was going to change the very stars in their courses for her.

Lost in the labyrinth of distressing reflections, he made no account of the passage of time, or of the long flight over the mountain road and down to the county seat on the farther side of the range; took no thought for his surroundings until the car, whirling through dimly lighted and deserted streets, stopped in front of the jail and his two silent captors led him through a steel-plated corridor and locked him in a cell.

## CHAPTER X.

### WITHOUT BAIL.

IT was one of John Brigham's men, losing his money drunkenly in the Lopez place, but sobered suddenly by the out-flare of violence, who carried the news to the camp; news that the chief had killed a man and had been arrested in the very act by a couple of deputies from Grass Valley.

Frenchley had just finished dressing Riley's wounds, and Hartwell was in bed and asleep, when Brigham relayed the news to the headquarters cabin, and at once the three assistants held a council of war in the work room.

"Why on top of earth did the chief want to go and play a lone hand?" Hartwell complained in his soft drawl. "Nobody to back him up—nobody to see that he got an even break. From what your man says, John, it seems that nobody knows just what did happen; but we can be mighty sure Stanwood didn't use his gun until he had to."

"Sure he didn't," Brigham agreed. "What gets me is how those two deputies happened to be right there to play Johnnies-on-the-spot. Did Stanwood bring 'em over from Grass Valley with him?"

Nobody could say whether he had or hadn't, though the fact that he had driven the single-seated car leaned to the negative.

"We needn't bother with that part of it," said Frenchley. "They were here, and we've lost Archer, temporarily, at least, and I suppose that leaves me in command."

"It does," said Hartwell briefly; and Brigham nodded his assent.

"All right," snapped the big man, "I'll wear the brass hat if you say so. We all know why Stanwood jumped in. He told me two or three days ago that when it came to a show-down he was going to push Lopez and his gang out of the valley—in case he couldn't get the authorities to do it. Did your man hear anything that was said before the shooting began, John?"

"Says he heard Archer snap out some-

thing about giving the Mex twenty-four hours' notice to quit, or thought he did."

"Good!" barked Frenchley. "If you're both agreed, I'll trot over the river and tell Lopez the notice is still in effect—that he goes, or we'll make him go. They've half murdered Tim Riley, and that is what set Archer afire."

"I'll go with you," said Brigham. "We can—" He was the only one of the three who sat facing the door and he broke off abruptly to say, "Come in, Mr. Morton. We're holding an emergency confab. I suppose you've heard the news?"

Morton, looking, as he always did, as if he had just stepped out of his bath and dressing room, came in and seated himself in the only remaining chair.

"You are quite right, Mr. Brigham," he said smoothly. "I have just heard that Mr. Stanwood has been rash enough to—er—kill a man. It is most distressing. I warned him before he went across the river; urged him not to go armed. But he seemed—er—almost insane with anger, if I may say so."

"He had good reason," Frenchley cut in curtly. "A few minutes earlier, one of our workmen had been half killed in Lopez's place."

"That, too, was distressing—most distressing," was the deprecatory rejoinder, "but it does not at all excuse Mr. Stanwood's—er—frightful act of retaliation. And that brings me to a matter which is even more serious."

"I chanced to overhear your remark made as I came in, Mr. Frenchley—about driving these people away. Much as I may disapprove of the presence of this—er—road house in our immediate vicinity, the fact remains that the man Lopez is occupying his own building on his own land, and is, therefore, well within his rights. I cannot permit the carrying out of any plan of reprisal."

"'Permit?'" Frenchley growled wrathfully. "We haven't asked your permission, Mr. Morton!"

"Ah; I am aware of that. But without it, I fancy you won't emulate Mr. Stan-

wood's rashness. In fact, I am quite certain you won't."

By this time the suavity with which the "business manager" customarily buttered his words had wholly disappeared.

"We are just plain workingmen, Mr. Morton," said Brigham slowly. "Perhaps you will make it a little clearer for us?"

"With pleasure," was the terse acquiescence. "As you all know, I represent the capital—all the capital—that is behind this enterprise. More than this, my authority in that field is unquestioned. If you three gentlemen do not agree with me, here and now, to abandon your lawless intention of reprisal, I shall have only one recourse: that is to stop operations here at once—to close the books and discharge the camp."

The New Yorker had risen as he was speaking, and with a brusque "Good night!" as he finished, he left the mapping room.

**H**ARTWELL was the first to break the silence that Morton had left behind him.

"Um; that is one time when our friend forgot to lubricate his talk motor, for sure!" he remarked. "Have we found the place where we get off?"

Frenchley swore with hearty bitterness.

"I told Archer, long ago, that that damned tailor's block was standing in with the Mexican, and this proves it!" he rasped. "He's got us. We can't turn a wheel on the job without money, and he holds the purse. What's next?"

Brigham, who was sitting in Stanwood's chair, reached for the telephone.

"I guess the next thing on the docket is to get Archer back on the job, pronto," he offered, adding, half humorously: "We don't seem to be anywhere near big enough to handle it. I'll get Calloway on long distance and rush him down to Grass Valley to pry Archer out of jail."

"There is a midnight train from Green Butte, and if I can raise Calloway in time, he can catch it. After that, I think I'll take the liberty of calling up the Little

Big Boss at Barker's ranch. I have a hunch that she'll be able to run rings around all of us when it comes to getting at the true inwardness of this business."

THAT Brigham's efforts to get at least one of the long-distance connections were entirely successful was proved by the appearance, at the serving of the early jail breakfast in Stanwood's cell, of the breezy young attorney from Green Butte.

"Well, well!—this is a pretty howdido!" he exclaimed. "Brigham phoned me last night that you'd killed a man. Did he get it straight?"

Stanwood put his breakfast tray aside. "Sit down, Bob, and I'll tell you what happened, as nearly as I can recall it, and then you must judge for yourself." And thereupon he told the story of the tragic moment as well as he could.

At its conclusion Calloway said, "And you don't know whether or not you fired the shot that killed the man?"

"I don't; but I suppose I must have. You see, it all happened in a split half second. Lopez was reaching for his gun. I thought I could beat him to the draw—knew I'd got to if I didn't want to be murdered. The Mex's gangsters were closing in from the card tables, and a number of shots were fired all at once. I suppose my gun went off with the rest of 'em."

"You suppose? Don't you *know*?"

"No, I don't; I couldn't swear that I pulled trigger, or didn't."

"But you would have fired at Lopez. wouldn't you?"

"Sure thing. But if I fired at all, it must have been from the hip. I used to be decently good at that, years ago, but I wouldn't bet on it now—on the accuracy. I mean."

"This man who was killed: where was he standing when the trouble broke?"

"I don't know. He was the fellow who was acting as door guard when I went in, and we had some words. He objected to my gun and tried to make me go to the next door and leave it with the barkeeper."

"What did you say to him?"

"Told him that when the gun came out, it would come shooting, and ordered him to go and fetch his boss."

"Did anybody hear you say that—about the gun?"

"Good Lord, Bob, I don't know! I was pretty hot under the collar—having just seen what they had done to Riley—and I suppose I didn't take pains to whisper."

"Well, go on: what became of the man afterward?"

"He went to a room at the back and got Lopez; then he and two others followed the Mexican out to where I was standing. I don't know what he did after that; I was too busy keeping cases on Lopez's eyes and hands to notice much of anything else. You know the Mex's reputation as a swift 'killer.' "

"Was the man who was killed standing in line with Lopez when you fired?"

"I can't say; I wasn't paying any attention to him."

Calloway tore a leaf from his notebook and gave it and a pencil to Stanwood.

"Make a sketch of just how things stood when the racket ended," he said, and after Stanwood had complied: "That settles one point; the man who was killed wasn't standing behind Lopez when he was hit. If he had been, he couldn't have fallen out there where you've drawn him. What became of your gun?"

"Somebody—I don't know who—took it away from me when the deputies grabbed me. After I was taken to the auto on the river bank, one of the deputies went back after the gun, and to get the names of witnesses."

"Were any of your men present when the shooting took place?"

"Yes; enough of them to keep the games running. How much or how little any of them saw or heard, I don't know."

Galloway leaned forward and put his finger on a rip in Stanwood's coat just across the top of the left shoulder near the collar.

"What is it?" asked the wearer of the coat.

"A bullet hole. And here is another through the pocket."

"So?" said the prisoner. "I didn't know that any of 'em came that near."

"You want to be careful of that coat; it's good evidence; proves that you fired in self-defense—maybe." Then, getting up to shake the cell door as a signal for the jailer to come and let him out: "I'll be back after a bit. Just keep your chin up and we'll have you out of this in about three jerks of a dead lamb's tail."

**S**TANWOOD ate his prison fare with an appetite considerably improved by Calloway's confident promise, though he was still depressed by the remorseful thought that he had shot—and killed—the wrong man. Before he had burned out his third after-breakfast pipe, Calloway was back.

"The mill is grinding," he announced. "You are to have your preliminary before old Justice Snyder at ten o'clock. That will be a mere formality, of course. On the testimony of the two deputies, he'll be obliged to bind you over to the grand jury, but that's all right; your bail is arranged."

"It is? I didn't know I had any pocket-book friends in Grass Valley."

Calloway grinned and fished a copy of a telegram out of his brief case. "The original of this was sent to me at Green Butte, and relayed here," he said. "Read it."

The message was addressed to Robert Calloway, Attorney, Green Butte, and it had been phoned to Orrville at midnight, wired to Green Butte, and forwarded from Green Butte to Grass Valley. It said:

Don't let them keep Archer in jail. Show this telegram to Langford, president First National Bank, Grass Valley, and tell him to draw on my account for bail. **ELIZABETH LANCASTER.**

"Some loyal little pal you've got, Archer," Calloway commented, still grinning. "She didn't lose any time getting busy, and she knew exactly what to do first."

Stanwood was swallowing hard. "Betty doesn't lose time over anything. I suppose some one of the staff phoned her

last night from the camp. Have you seen the bank president?"

"Just a few minutes ago. It's all right. He'll be in court to make your bond. After you are footloose, we'll hire a car and drive over to your camp and do a bit of investigating on the ground. There are a number of things about this business that I don't quite sabe yet."

**A**T the appointed hour Stanwood was taken before the examining magistrate. The proceedings in the dingy little justice court were purely formal. The two deputies testified briefly: the sheriff had told them that they might look for trouble at the Lopez place, and they had reached there in time to witness the killing and to arrest the prisoner.

While the two men were testifying, Stanwood was studying the face of the doddering old man who sat in the seat of justice. It was a senile face and a crafty, half masked by a bushy white beard unkempt and ragged.

At the conclusion of the deputies' testimony he announced his decision in a cracked voice. The prisoner was bound over to await the action of the grand jury, and the question of bail, or commitment without bail, would be decided later.

Calloway made instant protest, producing his surety in the person of the bank president; but the magistrate was obdurate. His duty was to bind the prisoner over, and he wasn't sure that the circumstances didn't warrant him in a commitment without bail. This business of shooting people offhand had to be stopped. So the matter ended in Stanwood's being taken back to jail.

Calloway went no farther than to the jail entrance with his client, but on the way thereto he freed his mind fully touching the criminal folly of electing doddering old imbeciles like Josiah Snyder to office.

"He'll bail you; he's got to bail you," he insisted; "and we're not going to stand for any time-killing delay. That was only a bluff about committing you without bail. He knows perfectly well that I'd spring

a *habeas corpus* on him too quick if he should do that. By the way, did you happen to notice a little black-haired, black-eyed man with big horn-rimmed spectacles among the bystanders?"

"Yes," said Stanwood.

"That was Bartlett, of Copah—chief counsel for Pannikin Electric. I wonder what he was doing there?—just 'rubbering,' I suppose."

"Glad to see me in trouble," Stanwood offered. "The P. E. people don't love me any too well—any of them."

"He's a mean little cur, but he has sharp teeth. I'll keep an eye on him," Calloway promised. And then, as the court officer was waiting to lock Stanwood up, the lawyer went his way.

Stanwood was not a little depressed when the cell bolts were shot upon him. He knew that the situation at the camp had been made vastly more critical by the events of the night. There would be hot wrath over his arrest and the secret manner of it—of that he was well assured. There was pretty sure to be an explosion, and he could only hope that it wouldn't come until he could be on the ground to control it.

Besides this there were the mysteries, developing one after another. Blatchford had sent the two deputies over, apparently to keep the peace. If so, why hadn't they come to him and stated their business? Why had they hidden their car outside of the camp? And how was the long gap of time between their parting from Betty and their appearance at Lopez's to be accounted for? It was all very perplexing; rather ominously so.

Just before noon Calloway came again.

"I've been having another round-up with Snyder, but he's as obstinate as a mule," he declared. "I threatened him with a writ of *habeas corpus*, but he merely sniffed and told me to go ahead if I wanted to.

"There is something that I can't understand behind all this, Archer. It's too darned vindictive for the proceedings in an ordinary shooting scrape."

"I'm anxious about the conditions at

camp," Stanwood said. "Frenchley is a mighty good man, but he has his own notions about getting even with an enemy. Then there is Morton: I haven't any idea as to how he is taking all this."

"Never mind the camp; it will take care of itself. I'll get Frenchley on the wire this afternoon and give him any message you want to send. Now for a bit of cold comfort. I stopped in at Blatchford's office as I came through and got him to let me look at your gun. Was it clean when you put it on last night?"

Stanwood nodded. "Clean and oiled."

"Well, it has been fired—once. There is one empty cartridge shell in it, and the barrel is fouled. The which is just that much against you."

"Of course I fired it," Stanwood assented. "I couldn't swear of my own knowledge that I did or didn't; but the gun speaks for itself."

"All right: we'll thrash those things out when it comes to the trial. Just now the main thing is to get you out of 'stir,' as the yeggs say. We'll do it, if I have to go to the supreme court for my 'produce-the-body' writ. What shall I say to Frenchley for you?"

"Just tell him to hold steady and wait until I come—and to keep the job going. That is the principal thing."

Calloway hung on his heel at the door after he had signaled for the corridor guard to come and let him out.

"Shall I call up the good little pal at the dude ranch?"

"Oh, I wouldn't, Bob. She has a heartful, as it is."

"Any message for your money boss, Morton, when I have Frenchley on the wire?"

Stanwood hesitated. Down at the bottom of things unexplained, and unexplainable, thus far, there was a feeling that Morton wouldn't be shedding any tears over the fact that he—Stanwood—was in jail and likely to be indicted for murder; that Morton would still be coldly unmoved if, at the trial, the verdict should be "Guilty, as charged." The feeling was unreasonable, he told himself, yet it was

this that prompted him to say, in reply to Calloway's offer:

"No; I don't believe I have anything to say to Morton."

"Right-o. I'll get busy again and see if I can't bring some pressure to bear upon our ancient friend with the whiskers. As I said before, keep your chin up. There's another day coming, or, if there isn't, it won't make any difference to any of us."

And, since the turnkey was waiting, he took his leave.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE KISS CASUAL.

BARKER'S dude ranch in the valley below Bull Basin was equipped with a circling of comfortably fitted log cabins to serve as sleeping apartments for the guests who believed they were sampling the pioneer West in true primitive fashion. It was out of her warmly blanketed bed in the cabin she shared with Alicia Arkwright that Betty had crept, without wakening her roommate, when the mestiza woman cook came to summon her to answer John Brigham's telephone call in the middle of the night; to answer Brigham, and to send, by way of Orrville, the message which had reached Calloway at Grass Valley, and another to a certain New York address.

Having thus done what the emergency demanded, she went back to bed—also without disturbing the sleeping Alicia; crept in between the blankets to lie awake into the small hours a prey to distracting emotions in the turmoil of which her active brain was trying to strike out some plan of action. That her lover had been made the victim of some deeply laid plot was a conclusion to which the active brain had jumped while she was still listening to Brigham's meager report of the tragedy. Too many unexplainable things had preceded the tragic culmination to admit of any other conclusion. Therefore and wherefore—

She went to sleep at last, with only a sort of inchoate plan taking shape in her thoughts; but the next morning, when she

and Alicia were getting ready to go to breakfast in the main ranch house, the plan, or at least an approach to one, was beginning to develop.

"You didn't hear me get up last night, did you, Allie?" she asked while she was vigorously brushing her bobbed hair.

"No," replied the one whose hair was not bobbed.

"It was away late in the night. Mr. Brigham was calling from the camp in the Little Horse to tell me that Archer had shot a man."

"*What—shot a man?*"—with the accent horrified.

"That is what Mr. Brigham said. It was at that wretched place across the river. There were no details; all that he could tell me was that Archer had gone over there alone, that there had been trouble of some kind, and Archer had killed somebody and had been arrested and taken to Grass Valley."

"But, *Betty!*—"

"I know. You think I ought to be all up in the air, and so I am; not because Archer has killed somebody who probably needed killing—I'm sure he wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been obliged to—but because I believe there is a lot more in last night's trouble than appears on the surface of things—if you know what I mean."

"But I don't in the least know what you mean, Betty, dear!"

"You wouldn't, naturally. And I don't suppose I could tell you, so you would understand. But I have thought maybe you could help."

"I?"

"Yes; even your own sweet, innocent, mid-Victorian self. Tell me honestly, Allie; do you care anything at all about Paul Stockton?—in a marrying way, I mean."

The innocent one blushed. "You know very well I don't. But momma—"

"I know; momma dear wants you to marry him; she thinks he is the pure quill—the one altogether lovely. You don't, and I don't blame you. He isn't to be spoken of in the same day with a real man

like—well, like Price Hartwell, for example."

**A**LICIA blushed again, but her looking-glass was the only witness.

"I do like Mr. Hartwell," she admitted. "There is something about him—"

"Of course there is," Betty cut in; "anybody can see that. You wouldn't like to see Price lose his job in disgrace, would you?"

"Mercy, no! How could that happen?"

"Listen, Allie: I believe there is a plot to smash Archer; and if he gets knocked out, the members of his staff will go down with him. I've got to find out who is who, and what is doing, and you are the one to help me."

"But, goodness me, Betty, dear! what can I do?"

"A lot, maybe—if you're not too squeamish. Is Paul Stockton going to take you out driving this morning?"

"He said so; and I haven't thought up any excuse for refusing to go."

"So far, so good. Now then, tell me; have you ever kissed him?"

"Of course not! Why, we've never been engaged!"

Betty's laugh was mocking. "You came on the stage too late, Allie, dear; much too late. You ought to have been born in the middle of the other century. Don't you suppose you could make yourself kiss him if he wanted you to?—just a little casual kiss, you know?"

"Why, Betty—I think you are perfectly horrid!"

The temptress laughed again. "Other people have said that, lots of times—but I still survive. If I cared for a man like Price Hartwell, and he was in trouble, I'd kiss any number of other men to get him out."

"I truly believe you would. But there is Juanita beating her tin pan to call us to breakfast: tell me quick what you want me to do."

"I want you to honey up to Paul Stockton when you go driving with him and be nice and cuddly so he will bubble over and tell you what he knows about the trouble

at Archer's camp. I'm sure he is just aching to tell the right person, and if you can make him believe that you are the right person—"

"But, Betty—what you are asking is perfectly awful! I couldn't—"

"Not even for Price's sake?"

"W-e-l-l," with a little shudder, "if I must. But Paul will find out as sure as can be that I'm just a little hypocrite and spy; I know he will!"

"Not if you kiss him first," Betty put in quite coolly. "Men are just that way. Let's go and eat before the coffee has time to get cold."

It was at breakfast that Stockton remarked that he and Miss Arkwright were going to drive to Orrville for the ranch mail, and Alicia blushed and gave a frightened glance in Betty's direction. But Betty was seemingly intent upon her ham and eggs.

Since the news of the trouble at the camp had not yet been published at Barker's, there were no embarrassing comments to be endured; and after Stockton and Alicia had driven away, Betty shut herself into the small, boxed-off telephone booth and had a long siege with a most exasperating and leisurely long-distance "central," first getting Green Butte, and, after much wearisome effort, learning that Calloway had gone to Grass Valley on the midnight train; and next trying—and failing—to get the young lawyer on the wire at the Grass Valley hotel.

Just before Stockton and Alicia returned from their drive, Betty tried to get a telephone connection with the camp in the Little Horse, but after waiting for what seemed an interminable interval she was told that the Shoestring Power & Light line was "out of order." As the word came she heard the purring of an automobile, and, whipping out of the telephone closet, darted to a window.

**S**TOCKTON was helping Alicia out of the car and there was a fatuous look on his face that spoke volumes to the window watcher. Waiting only until Alicia had gone across to their sleeping cabin to wash

after the dusty Basin drive, Betty stole out of the back door of the ranch house and went to join her.

"Well, Allie, dear?" she queried, after she had shut the door and put her back to it.

"It was perfectly awful—just as I told you it would be!" exclaimed the amateur spy, with a catch in her voice. "But—but I'm glad I did it. I don't care, now, what momma or any of them say: I'll never, *never* marry Paul Stockton the longest day I live!"

Betty smiled. "Did you kiss him?" she asked quizzically.

"Betty Lancaster, if you ever mention that again I—I don't know what I'll do to you! It was such a beastly thing for me to do!"

"Wasn't it?" said Betty mockingly. "But I'll bet it brought home the bacon. Loosen up, dear, and tell me all the things you've found out."

For a matter of fifteen minutes or so Betty sat on a soap box camouflaged as a hassock, elbows on knees and her chin propped in cupped hands, listening to the amateur Delilah's report of the drive to Orrville and its betrayings. When the story was told she got up, nodding soberly.

"So that is the way of it, is it?" she said, half to herself; and again, this time wholly to herself: "I've more than half suspected it, all along."

"Suspected what?" asked Alicia, going to the door to shake her dust coat.

"That you were deserving of a lot more than Paul Stockton could ever give you, my dear," was the evasive reply. "After this, you may ask for the half of my kingdom, Allie, love, and you shall have it."

After the midday meal, which she ate with apparently as good an appetite as she had had for the breakfast ham and eggs, Miss Lancaster asked Curly Biggs to get her car ready; and when the cowboy chauffeur brought it around, she got in and settled herself behind the wheel.

"Want me to drive you?" asked Biggs, with his good-natured grin.

"Not to-day, Curly, thank you. No offense, you know, but I don't believe you

would step on it hard enough for me this afternoon. So long."

## CHAPTER XII.

### NO THOROUGHFARE.

BEFORE Betty had reached the fork where the Barker ranch trail dove-tailed with the Orrville-Grass Valley road she saw some one coming from the direction of the Little Horse on a motor bike. Coming at once to the not unreasonable conclusion that the bike rider was a messenger from the camp, she pulled up at the trail fork and waited.

The conclusion justified itself almost immediately. The cyclist proved to be Stanwood's map maker and draftsman, George Pickett, a shy young fellow, boyish in everything but size, whom Betty had loved from the first for his doglike loyalty to his boss.

"Hello, George; were you looking for me?" she said, as he coasted up.

"I sure was, Miss Betty," he acknowledged breathlessly, steadying the motor cycle with a foot on the running board of her car. "Our telephone's on the blink, and Frenchley thought you ought to know what's happening."

"And what *is* happening?"

"Everything that oughtn't to. Mr. Morton has laid us all off. He says we can't go on without a chief engineer, and the work will have to stop until he can find somebody to take the boss' place."

Betty nodded. "He didn't wait very long, did he? What next?"

"The camp's all torn up, of course, with the men laid off and nothing to do. Frenchley, Brigham and Price are trying to hold 'em down, but a good half of 'em are over the river, raising Cain at the Lopez place. It's something fierce, Miss Betty!"

"And Mr. Morton? Where is he?"

"He left camp just a little while ago in his car, with Badger driving. We're all guessing he's gone to look for a new chief."

"You've had no word from Archer—Mr. Stanwood?"

"No telephone. Price says our wire's down somewhere. He's out now, looking for the break."

Betty's resolve was taken on the instant.

"You can't do anything if you go back to camp now, can you, George?" she asked.

"Not a thing. Frenchley told me to find out and put you wise, and that lets me out."

"All right. Hide your bike in the woods somewhere and then come with me. I'm driving over to Grass Valley, and I want you to go along and tell Mr. Stanwood every little thing that has happened since he was arrested."

Pickett disappeared, trundling the motor bike, and was back and climbing into the car by the time Betty had restarted her engine. "We're off," she said, and forthwith the fast car began its roaring climb through the gorges and up the grades on the fine driving road leading over the mountain to the county seat.

FOR mile after mile the racing ascent continued, and though Pickett was no alarmist, he was telling himself that he had never before ridden with such an apparently reckless driver as the young woman beside him. Again and again in negotiating the curves the car seemed to be running upon two wheels. After half an hour or more of the storming climb they began to overtake faint little dust clouds hanging in the warm still air of the September afternoon.

"There's a car ahead of us," Pickett announced, shouting to make himself heard above the roar of the open cut-out.

"Yes," Betty returned quite calmly; "and if we don't break something, I'm going to find out who's in it. Watch for it on the loops."

As they were turning to head the next gulch, Pickett looked across to the grade beyond and above on the opposite mountain shoulder.

"There it is!" he exclaimed, pointing to a gray dust cloud moving along the slope. Then, as the car came in sight on the fill:

4A—POP.

"Say! It's Mr. Morton's car, or one just like it!"

Betty's lips came together and she slid forward to jam the foot throttle to its widest opening. The fast car tore around the gorge loop at airplane speed, but on the opposite grade, and straightaway where they had had their glimpse of the car ahead, a shirt-sleeved man came running down the road to meet them, waving his stripped coat in the stop signal. Pickett thought he heard his pretty seatmate say something under her breath that wasn't exactly a prayer and the car was brought to a stand as it came up to the man.

"What are you stopping us for?" snapped the impatient driver.

"They're workin' the road in the cut up ahead," was the answer. "Gittin' ready to shoot off a blast."

"Haven't we time to get past before they fire?"

"No, ma'am, I reckon not. Catch ye, shore."

"But there is a car just ahead of us. Did it get past?"

"Yes'm; I didn't get out in time to stop it."

"Who was in that car?"

"You kin search me," grinned the road watcher, and before he could say any more there was a grunting explosion followed by a slowly accelerating crash.

"Is that all?" Betty demanded with impatience.

"Yas'm, that's all," said the man, with another grin. "Reckon ye kin go on now, if ye want to."

BETTY shifted gears, released the brake and let the clutch take hold. Around the next bend in the road they came to the point of peril, and to their consternation found a good-sized tree lying fairly across the roadway, blocking it effectually.

The tree had evidently just fallen from the embankment of the upper slope, which accounted for the slow crash which had followed the hoarse grunt of the dynamite. And there was no road-mending gang in sight; nobody in sight in either direction. Even the man who had warned them had

vanished as mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Betty brought her car to an abrupt halt with its bumper nuzzling the branches of the fallen tree.

"They've given us the air," she said crisply. "This tree was blasted down on purpose to stop us!" Then: "You are an engineer of a sort, aren't you, George? Can't we hitch the car to this thing and drag it out of the way?"

"Not a chance, I'm afraid," said the draftsman. "It's a lot too heavy."

"Um," she frowned; "Mr. Morton doesn't want us to go to Grass Valley. He is in that car ahead; I'm sure of it now. Do you know the other road?—the roundabout one that follows the railroad from Orrville?"

Pickett did not know it, and he said so, adding: "It's about twice as far as it is this way, isn't it?"

"I don't know much about it, but I do know that we're going to Grass Valley, if we have to drive a hundred miles around to get there," said Betty the determined, and a minute later the fast car was retracing its course down the grades, with its reckless driver crouching over the wheel and Pickett holding his breath as the big machine tore around the curves and fled down the occasional tangents.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### LEGAL PROCEEDINGS.

**I**N midafternoon of the day following the shooting affray in the Lopez game room, at about the same time that Betty Lancaster was whipping her car around the curves in the descent to the Bull Basin level, a dusty auto came to a stand in front of the courthouse in Grass Valley and a big man enveloped in a tan dust coat descended from it to climb to County Attorney Holsey's office on the second floor.

As he entered, Holsey, a well-preserved man in his late forties who looked—as he had a right to—like a hard-bitted politician of the pioneer period, got up from his desk.

"Come in, Mr. Morton; we've been

expecting you," he said, greeting his visitor with a touch of subservient cordiality. Then, as Morton was slipping out of his dust coat: "Your wire came through all right, and things are shaped up in the way you indicated."

"Stanwood is still in jail?" Morton asked, seating himself at the desk end.

Holsey nodded. "The question of bail was left in abeyance, as you suggested, though Snyder would have been fully justified in remanding Stanwood without bail. Stanwood's lawyer, young Calloway, is here—came on the early train; but he hasn't been able to do anything—naturally."

"Was bail offered in Snyder's court?"

"It was; by Langford, president of the First National."

"If it becomes necessary to bail Stanwood, we shall not call in outside parties," Morton put in stiffly. Then, with a solemn shake of his head: "It is a bad business, all around, Mr. Holsey. Stanwood, I regret to say, armed himself deliberately and told me, in so many words, just before he went to this place, that he was going to make trouble; said this in the presence of a gentleman who was standing beside me at the moment."

"Ah! premeditated, eh? That is excellent evidence, if we should need anything more than the testimony of the eyewitnesses."

"Sad, very sad," said Morton. "I felt sure a clash would come, sooner or later. As you know, the financial affairs of the company are in a bad way, and Stanwood has been more or less desperate for some time. As we talked a few days ago, it will now be necessary to take the final step, and I have come over to file a petition on behalf of the bondholders praying that a receiver be appointed. Is Judge Bradley in chambers?"

"He is; and the papers are ready for signature, as you directed when you were here last week. Shall I call in an attorney and have the petition presented at once?"

"Not just yet; but I would be obliged if you would ask the judge to remain

sitting for an hour or so. Is Bartlett here?"

"Yes; he is stopping at the Valley Inn."

"And Stanwood's lawyer, Calloway: where is he stopping?"

"At the Interocean."

"Very good. I'll see Bartlett before any further steps are taken. I can depend upon you to hold matters in suspense until you hear from me?"

"Oh, certainly," was the deferential assent; but as Morton rose to go, the county attorney detained him.

"Just a moment, Mr. Morton: about this receivership, which will, of course, extinguish the common stock. My understanding has been that certain small—ah—local holdings would be—ah—protected. Am I right?"

The suave gentleman who had been so affable up to this moment seemed to have suffered a complete sea change as he turned and scowled down upon the county attorney sitting at his desk.

"You'll get yours, if that is what you want to know," he grated bluntly, "but 'here mustn't be any hitches or 'ifs' or 'ands.' You see to it that the judge doesn't leave his chambers until I get back." And with that, he departed.

A FEW minutes later, Robert Calloway, smoking a bad cigar in the lobby of the Interocean Hotel, and not especially noticing the badness of the cigar because he was trying to devise some means of getting his client out of jail without having to resort to the time-killing expedient of the *habeas corpus* route, saw himself pointed out by the clerk to a portly gentleman with small, closely clipped side whiskers and a benevolent cast of countenance.

Calloway got out of his chair as the stranger approached. He had never met Morton, but Stanwood's description of his "business manager" fitted so well that the portly gentleman offered his hand, saying, "I'm Morton, of the power-plant project in the Little Horse, Mr. Calloway, and I am delighted to meet you. Stan-

wood has spoken of you so often that I feel we don't need any formal introduction."

"We don't," Calloway agreed, trying to hold his better judgment firmly in the saddle.

"I take it you are here to try to help Stanwood, and that is my object, too," Morton went on genially. "Suppose we go up to my rooms and have a little friendly talk? Perhaps we can get together in this helping business."

Still trying to set his former impressions of Morton, gained from what Stanwood had told him, over against the portly gentleman's present attitude of sympathy and concern, Calloway accepted the invitation. In the first-floor suite to which the invitation led, Morton began at once, in his smoothest tones.

"This is a sad business; very sad, indeed, Mr. Calloway. I did my best to avert trouble, but Stanwood wouldn't listen. If the case comes to trial—well, as his counsel, I'm sure you would do your best, but I doubt very much if you can clear him, don't you?"

Something in Morton's manner helped the young attorney to discount the smooth tone and apparent concern for Stanwood, and he answered guardedly.

"Naturally, I can't tell much about it at this stage of the game, Mr. Morton. I have had no chance to investigate the circumstances."

"But Stanwood admits the killing, doesn't he?"

Fully alert now, Calloway evaded. "The plea will be 'not guilty.'"

"But, my dear sir—there were a dozen witnesses!"

Calloway evaded again. "I can hardly discuss the line of defense with you at this time," he deprecated, "knowing so little of the actual circumstances. Have you any suggestions to offer?"

"I have. I have given the matter a great deal of serious thought, and, as I see it, there is little reason to hope that Stanwood can escape a life sentence, or at least, a long term of imprisonment, if the case comes to trial."

Calloway marked the emphasis on the "if," and answered accordingly.

"The grand jury will be quite certain to find a true bill, so I don't quite see how the case can be prevented from coming to trial."

"Don't you? It seems to me it will be very simple if your client will listen to a bit of calm reason. We can afford to be quite frank with each other, Mr. Calloway. I suppose you know how the company has been financed, thus far?"

"I understand that Miss Lancaster is a heavy investor in it."

"She is. While Stanwood is its nominal head, as president, his holdings in the company are comparatively small. As you have doubtless been told, I represent Miss Lancaster's interests.

"I need make no secret of the fact that she has conceived a sort of romantic interest in our unfortunate young friend, and while I am sure that his rash act of last night has done much to weaken that interest, she still wishes to have him escape the consequences, perhaps as much for her own sake as for his."

"I see," said Calloway.

"Here, then, is my suggestion," Morton went on suavely. "I understand the committing magistrate has refused to admit Stanwood to bail, but if you—and Stanwood—will accept my good offices in the matter, I am sure I can get this decision reversed; in which case, acting for Miss Lancaster, I will go on Stanwood's bond.

"Naturally, in the circumstances, he will feel it incumbent upon him to resign from the presidency of the company, and this will free him from his responsibilities in that quarter. You agree with me, thus far?"

"I am listening," Calloway admitted guarded.

"Very well. I am sure we can both find good and sufficient excuses for helping Stanwood out of his difficulty. I should be sorry, indeed, to see such a fine, capable young man end his career in prison, and I know you would."

"Perhaps I am a trifle dense, but I don't quite get your drift. Are you intimating

that Stanwood might jump his bail and disappear?"

"Um—the world is very wide, Mr. Calloway, and a vast majority of the people in it have short memories. If, when the grand jury meets, Sheriff Blatchford is unable to find the defendant—but I need not go into particulars.

"Of course, as matters stand, Stanwood will wish to resign from the presidency of the company, as I have said; but, speaking for my principals, I may say that we have no intention of taking undue advantage of his unfortunate situation. We are entirely willing to purchase his holdings in the company at their face value, thus providing him funds for—well, for whatever he wishes to do."

Calloway looked the proposer of expedients squarely in the eye.

"I suppose you are aware that you are suggesting the compounding of a felony, Mr. Morton," he said crisply.

"My dear young man!—why drag in such mechanical objections? We shall be strictly law-abiding, as a matter of course. There is no law to forbid our buying Stanwood's interest, or to prevent our going on his bond. If, after his release, he chooses to stay where he can be found, that is his own affair.

"But I had hoped, and still hope, that he will spare Miss Lancaster the—er—publicity and embarrassment in which she must be involved if he decides to stand his trial. I have taken it for granted that he would be willing to make any reasonable sacrifice of his own feelings to spare her this."

C ALLOWAY looked up quickly. "Did Miss Lancaster authorize you to come here and make this proposal to us, Mr. Morton?" he asked.

"My dear sir, haven't I just said that I am representing Miss Lancaster?"

Since the young lawyer was not himself in love with Betty—had, in fact, never met her—Morton's final shot had gone home with a rather dismaying impact. True, Betty had wired him promptly to arrange for Stanwood's bail, but this might mean

either of two things: that she was still loyal; or that she wished to give him the chance to disappear which Morton was now offering. That she would wish to send her lover adrift as a self-confessed murderer didn't at all accord with Stanwood's description of her; but he reflected that his praises of the girl might perhaps be discounted.

"I take it you want me to make this proposal to Stanwood," he said abruptly. "I'll do it, but I shall advise him to refuse. If he permits you to bail him, and then runs away, he will be finished just as effectually as he would be if he were convicted of bloody murder and sent to prison."

"That, my dear Mr. Calloway, is your opinion as an attorney, and it does you credit. But I can assure you that the world at large will take a much more lenient and sympathetic point of view."

"All right," Calloway yielded. "I am in duty bound to lay your proposal before my client, and I'll do it—with the condition I have stated."

This ended the interview, but as Calloway left the hotel it was with the feeling that Stanwood had rashly flung himself into a pool that was much deeper than appearances had indicated; that under Morton's specious reasoning there was, or there might be, a veiled threat that the mighty power of money would be thrown into the scale to secure the prisoner's conviction if he should not accept the offered chance of freedom—a feeling that would have grown to a conviction if he could have known that, five minutes after his outsetting for the jail, Morton had gone around the corner to the other hotel to closet himself with Bartlett, the local attorney for Pannikin Electric.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SPRINGING OF THE TRAP.

**N**OT on your life—never in this world!" was Stanwood's instant and wrathful reaction to the Morton proposal when Calloway, sitting on the cell cot bed, set it forth, bluntly and without comment.

"But if Morton is right about Miss Betty's attitude?" Calloway put in.

"Right? You're crazy, Bob!" the prisoner declared hotly. "Leaving sentiment entirely out of it, Betty is the last person in the world to care an owl's hoot about publicity or scandal or anything of the sort. Why, good Lord, man, if you knew her you'd have laughed in his face! Don't make any mistake; she didn't send him here with any such dirty proposal as this he has made to you!"

Calloway was frowning thoughtfully. "There is something more to this business than appears on the surface, Archer; I'm pretty well convinced of that," he said. "It is plainly evident that for some reason Morton wants to eliminate you, chase you off the lot, get rid of you, once for all. What's the idea?"

"If he represents Betty's New York trustees, as he claims to, the object is as plain as a pikestaff. They wouldn't ask anything better than to see me leaving the country about two jumps ahead of the sheriff. Betty has declared her intention of marrying me; she would forfeit her fortune and marry me to-morrow, if I'd let her. That's enough."

"No," said the young lawyer, "it isn't enough, Archer. I can't help feeling that your marriage, or rather the spoiling of it, is only a side issue in this mix-up. There is something much bigger at the bottom of it."

"Tell me more about the details of your transactions with Morton. You said you'd been turning over your bonds to him, together with a bonus of common stock, to cover the cash advances made as the money was needed to pay construction costs. You haven't been giving him these bonds in blank, have you?"

"No, indeed; the bonds have been issued to James Page and John A. Blackstone, trustees of the Adam Lancaster estate."

"And Morton didn't object to this method of issuance?"

"No, not a word. Why should he?"

"I guess there is no reason why he should. The bonds, as you have issued them, are the property of the estate, but

they are subject, of course, to whatever disposition Betty's trustees, acting in their fiduciary capacity, see fit to make of them."

Stanwood whirled to face the attorney. "You mean that they may sell the bonds if they want to?" he demanded.

"Certainly. They would have very limited authority as trustees if they couldn't sell them—or any other securities belonging to the estate."

Stanwood began to pace the narrow limits of his cell. When he spoke it was to say, in a voice that Calloway scarcely recognized: "Bob, I'm smashed—completely and painstakingly smashed! Don't you see what has been done?"

"No, not yet."

"Think back a bit. When our company was launched, we all expected Pannikin Electric, as a subsidiary of the trust, to make a stiff fight to keep us out of the field. There has been no opposition; not a sign of any. More than that, the Pannikin project of building another plant farther down the Pannikin River has been dropped—which puts the Copah company out of the running as a bidder to furnish power for the railroad electrification. Don't you see where we have arrived now?"

"I am beginning to see."

"Of course you are. All the trust people had to do was to make a crooked deal with Betty's trustees and send Morton out here to rope me in. We are building the plant with Betty's money, but when it is done, a simple transfer of the bonds will turn it over to the trust, lock, stock, and barrel. And I was too blind to see it!"

"It's hell, Bob! That plant is going to prove a gold mine for its owner or owners: I've been chortling to myself and saying that when it should be finished and the railroad contract signed, I'd go to those old moneybags in New York and say, 'Here's what I've done for your ward in chancery. Haven't I proved up on my claim?'

"And here's where I land—in jail, with my hands tied! Morton—and the trustees—can do whatever they want to; and

Betty will be lucky if her bonds are not sold at a discount—to the trust!"

"But, see here," Calloway interposed; "this is all guesswork on your part, Archer. I'll admit it looks a little like a good guess, but until we have something more to go on—"

"You'll see," Stanwood broke in. "Now that I'm down, Morton can make any kind of a case that he wants to against me. He has managed things so that I don't even know how much money we've been spending. If I'm guessing right, the sky will be the limit in his game, and he'll win, hands down. Bob"—brokenly—"I'll never be able to look Betty in the face again!"

Calloway got up to go.

"I'm hoping you are making it a lot worse than it is in reality, Arch, though I'll admit that all the possibilities you've dug up are on the cards. Just the same, I'm glad I can go back to Morton with your refusal to listen to him. I'm sure Langford's offer to furnish bail still holds good, and if Snyder doesn't come to time by to-morrow morning, I'll begin habeas corpus proceedings immediately."

"You don't know how deep this damnable ulcer burrows, Bob. More than likely, Big Money has 'fixed' everybody, from the judge on the bench down to this petty magistrate who committed me."

"It may be so," Calloway conceded. "I believe Judge Bradley is entirely beyond suspicion, but Holsey, the district attorney, isn't; and neither is the sheriff nor old Josiah Snyder. Nevertheless, we'll make 'em sit up."

Stanwood looked up with a sorry smile. "I'll prophesy again, Bob. If my guess is right, you'll merely run your head against a stone wall. I have a hunch that I'll never be allowed to leave this steel box until it is too late to do any good. If I had anything left to put up, I'd bet on it."

Calloway shook his head. "That isn't keeping your chin up. You've built up a stack of suppositions which may or may not be true. Until they are proved, it's up to you to grit your teeth and wait. Can

I get you anything—tobacco, or something to read?"

"No," said the poor prisoner, again with his head in his hands; and he did not reply to Calloway's "Good-by" when the turnkey came to open the cell door.

**F**OR what remained of the afternoon Stanwood paced his cell a prey to the emotions that dagger a man of action when he finds himself tangled in a spider's web to the spinning of which his own lack of foresight has contributed. It was little comfort now to remember that he had all along told himself that things were coming too easily. Any man with a grain of business sense should have seen the potentialities wrapped up in Morton's offer to finance the project as Betty's representative; but he had seen nothing, suspected nothing.

As he passed the events of the strenuous summer of building activities in review he saw how his enthusiasm as an engineer had blinded him. As president of the company he should have insisted upon his right to know exactly what was being done in the financing; how nearly the cost of the undertaking was falling within his estimates. But of this he knew nothing. His part in the financing had been merely that of a rubber stamp.

**H**E was walking the floor in a state as nearly approaching complete dejection as a life of cheerful optimism and sane activity would admit when the dusk fell, and the high, barred window in the end of the cell began to frame itself in the light of the outdoor street lamps. Through the window, open for ventilation, the street noises were plainly audible; the drumming of motor cars, the clacking of horse hoofs on the pavement, the foot-steps of the pedestrians.

Suddenly he was halted by the shrill cry of a passing newsboy hawking the evening paper. At first he could scarcely credit the evidence of his own ears, and he listened again. Clear and piercing the cry was repeated: "Here's yer *Evenin' Tribune!* All about the Shoestring Com-

p'ny goin' into the hands of a recei-ver! Evenin' pa-a-per!"

The blow had fallen and Stanwood staggered across to the iron-framed cot and flung himself upon it, face down. And, a half hour later, when the turnkey unlocked the cell door and came in to place the supper tray on the three-legged stool, the man lying prone upon the cot with his face buried in the blanket made no reply to the gruff, "Sit up an' git it" other than a muffled malediction and a demand to be let alone.

## CHAPTER XV.

AT BANKER LANGFORD'S.

**R**EACHING the Bull Basin level in the swift flight from the tree-blockaded mountain road, Betty sent her car over the eight-mile stretch to Orrville at a pace that made Pickett's legs ache in the effort to put on imaginary brakes. At the one filling station in the town she stopped to get gas, and while the garage man was filling the tank she sent Pickett over to the railroad office to see if there were any telegrams for her.

Waiting impatiently for Pickett's return, she pressed the gas merchant for the road directions; was still trying to get some mental picture of "right turns" and "left turns" when the draftsman came up with a yellow envelope; whereupon she immediately became deaf to the road itinerary. The telegram bore a New York date line, and as she read it her eyes danced.

"It's a fool for luck, every time, Georgie, boy!" she exclaimed, calmly ignoring the garage man, who was still spilling his road directions. "If the Juniper road hadn't been blocked, we wouldn't be here and I shouldn't have had this wire."

"Good news?" he asked.

"The best of news, if we don't fall down on our share of things in the next few hours. And I have a feeling that we're not going to come a cropper. Climb in and we'll fly. You don't know the road, and neither do I, but we're going to find it or break a leg trying."

"Here's your money"—thrusting a bill at the gas seller. "No, don't bother about the change—we're gone!" and the powerful car leaped away, with Pickett once more grabbing for handholds and staring in fascination at the climbing figures of the speed indicator.

What with the "right turns" and "left turns," many crossings of the railroad track, uncounted perilous fordings of the Little Horse, and a road rough enough to be called a mere trail, night had fallen before the lights of Grass Valley came in sight, and Betty, drawing a long breath, said, "That's that, Georgie; and I think we deserve a Carnegie medal for—well, for something or other, don't you? You needn't talk if your mouth's too dry."

Pickett laughed. He was young, and having had to work his way through school and college his contacts with modern young women in Betty's class had been conspicuous by their absence. Her comings and goings at the camp during the strenuous summer as Stanwood's financial "angel"—and probably something more—had awed him a little until he came to realize that she was quite the reverse of awesome; and after that he had tried to put his shyness in the background and meet her, as he phrased it to himself, as man to man.

"You are some little driver, Miss Betty," he ventured. "I don't believe there is a man in the outfit who could have made it in the time you have."

"Time is the essence of things just now," she declared. "Everything depends upon what we—you and I and perhaps a few others—can do in the next few hours. Do you know Grass Valley—the town, I mean—pretty well?"

"I ought to. I was raised on an apple ranch a few miles south of it."

"Fine! You are a whole series of delightful surprises, George. Do you know Mr. Langford, the banker, and where he lives? You do? That's more good luck.

"I'm going to drop you when we reach the suburbs, and you must go somewhere and get your supper. After you have

eaten, come around to Mr. Langford's house and I'll meet you there."

"Anything for me to do before I come?"

"No; I'm just guessing at a lot of things yet. When I've proved up on some of the guesses, we'll get busy. You are going to be game for anything that turns up, aren't you?"

"You can bet on me, if it's to help Mr. Stanwood."

"I'm betting," she said; and a few minutes later she stopped the car in the outskirts of the town to let him get out. "Perhaps it will be better for you not to show yourself too publicly just yet, George," she remarked, as a final caution. "I don't know that it would make any difference, but it might."

**S**HE drove through the residence part of the town, following the directions Pickett had given her, and her next stop was at the banker's house in the northern suburb. It was Langford himself who admitted her and rang for his chauffeur to come and take care of her car.

"After seeing your telegram to Mr. Calloway, I've been rather expecting you," he told her. "You have driven over from Barker's?"

"You may call it over," she replied, making a wry face, "but I'd call it all around Robin-hood's barn and back again. The road was blocked on Red Mountain and I had to drive back to Orrville and come in over the rabbit track."

"But, my dear young lady!—that is no road at all! It must have been something terrible! You haven't been to dinner?"

"No; and I'm as hungry as the wolf in 'Little Red Riding-hood.' Will you be nice and feed me while you are telling me what has been going on to-day?"

"You are just in time to save me from dining alone. Mrs. Langford is away in Green Butte on a visit."

She stripped off her gauntlets and held out her hands. "Washee-washee, first, please!" she pleaded, laughing; and he called a maid to show her to the conveniences.

She was down again in less than ten minutes, and at table the banker told her what she needed to know. "There was no reason why Snyder shouldn't have admitted Stanwood to bail," he said, in conclusion. "I was present, and was ready to secure his bond, as you directed."

Betty's teeth snapped on the biscuit she was eating with her bouillon.

"There was the very best of reasons," she contradicted. "There is a lot more to this than is visible to the naked eye, Mr. Langford. I've been suspecting it for some time, but I couldn't make my—Mr. Stanwood—see it. Tell me about this receivership. Is it final?"

"Oh, no; it is only temporary, of course. The hearing is set for a week from Friday. But from what I can learn it is altogether probable that Mr. Morton's appointment as receiver will be made permanent. From the few facts that have been made public it would seem that the Shoestring Company is hopelessly bankrupt."

"*Bankrupt!* How could it be?"

"That is more than I can tell you—not knowing any of the details. But the talk is that it was much undercapitalized, and the creditors are pressing for settlement."

"Creditors? What creditors?"

"The firms from which material and machinery have been bought, I suppose."

Again she let him see the wry little smile. "My business education has been fiercely neglected, Mr. Langford. What I don't know about such things would fill a large library. But I do know that our company needn't be in debt to anybody. Mr. Calloway is still here, isn't he?"

"Yes; he is stopping at the Inter-ocean."

"Do you suppose you could get him by telephone and tell him I want to see him, right away?"

The banker left the table to go and do it, coming back shortly to say: "He'll be here by the time we have finished dinner."

"Is Mr. Morton at the Inter-ocean?"

"I suppose so. He always stops there when he comes over."

Silence while the meat course was being

served, and then Betty, with her eyes on her plate: "Is—is the jail very strong, Mr. Langford?"

The banker smiled. "I hope you are not thinking of wrecking it to get Mr. Stanwood out," he said.

"N-no; not just that." Then: "Do you suppose I could get permission to see Mr. Stanwood?"

"I don't know; I'm afraid it would be rather irregular. A prisoner remanded without bail isn't supposed to see anybody but his counsel. But I'll try to get the permission, if you wish me to."

"We'll wait; perhaps it won't be necessary. I can tell better after I've seen Mr. Calloway and talked with him."

KEEPING his promise most willingly, Calloway rang the Langford doorbell just as the banker and his pretty guest were leaving the table. Begging leave of her host, Betty took the young attorney into the library, where they remained for some little time. Langford, smoking his after-dinner cigar in his den across the hall, heard only the concluding sentences of the conference as the two came out of the library together.

"It will take some doing," Calloway was saying. "If we had time to work it up properly—but I'm not going to make difficulties. Only I do wish your New York friend had been a little more explicit in his telegram. He lays all the stress upon the importance of this seizure he refers to, and we do not know what reason he had for advising us to put ourselves entirely outside of the law, as we shall be obliged to if we follow out his directions."

"He has good reasons, you may be sure," said Betty confidently. "As I have told you, he is a lawyer himself, and one of the best in New York, though he may not look the part. I've known him ever since I was a baby."

"All right," Calloway agreed. "We're going to fly straight in the face of all constituted authority, and if we fail, we are all likely to go to jail. The plan as you have outlined it is an expedient that only complete success can justify; and if we

can't justify it, we need expect no mercy. You are sure you have the courage to go through with it?"

**T**HE banker, smoking in his easy-chair, heard a silvery little laugh and then a musical voice speaking.

"If you only knew me a bit better, Mr. Calloway. Major Briscoe said, one time, that I was the most courageous person he had ever met. I think he said 'courageous,' though perhaps it was 'outrageous.' You needn't fear for my part in the play. I'll be in the spotlight every minute."

"There is one other thing," Calloway interposed, with his hand on the door latch. "We are reckoning without Archer in all this. I don't know how he is going to take it."

"Never mind Archer; you leave him to me. When you are ready, bring or send my car back here and I'll be with you. Good-by and good luck!"

Robert Calloway, cool-headed lawyer though he was, left the house in the northern suburb with his brain in a whirl. Like Pickett, he knew the modern young woman more by the printed page than from actual contact.

"Jove!" he muttered, as he went around to the Langford garage to get Betty's car. "She had it all doped out as if she'd been planning it for months! And she has certainly given me one whale of a job to pull off with a little less than no time at all to pull it off in."

"If we don't all go to jail as a tail-piece to this thing, it'll be the biggest miracle of the century. But I couldn't let her bluff me out!"

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### THE CAR AT THE CORNER.

**G**RASS VALLEY, in its beginnings, had been purely an agricultural center; a shipping point for the potato ranches and apple orchards of the fertile, irrigated upland valley, and, in due course, a settled town to which the successful ranchers could gravitate to take their ease

and educate their children in urban schools.

Later, after the discovery of gold in the adjacent Lariat Hills, a new element, and a very different one, had been added. The outlying western suburb across the railroad tracks had become an uproarious gold camp with all the dissipative appurtenances thereto; much to the scandal of the well-behaved older town eastward of the dividing line.

Though the gold excitement had long since become little more than a settled industry, some few of the scandalous dregs remained; a dance hall or two, a diminished quota of gambling dens and "speak-easies," and a population which gave a bullying, but at heart rather cowardly, sheriff no little uneasiness at times.

**I**T was to this outlying suburb that Calloway drove upon leaving the Langford house; and, having penetrated it, risked his reputation, and that of Betty's car, by pulling up in front of one of the most notorious of the dives. Passed by a suspicious door guard to an upper room, he found himself in the presence of a round-faced, round-bodied man tilting behind a desk in a pivot chair, with a half-burned cigar between his teeth and his feet on the drawn-out slide of the desk. The man grinned a mocking welcome as Calloway entered.

"Well, well, now—look who's here!" Then with a broader grin: "This isn't afther being Green Butte, Misther Calloway, and ye'll not be running me out av this th' way ye did out av th' big town up beyant, if that's what ye've come for."

Calloway smiled and drew a chair up to the desk end.

"The shoe is on the other foot, to-night, Mike," he said. "I hope you're not holding a grudge against me for that Green Butte housecleaning?"

"Hell, no. Did ye ever know Mike Grattan to hold a grudge ag'inst anny man? 'Twas a fair enough game ye played that time in th' Butte. You was on the wan side av the fence and I was on t'other—and I lose. What brings ye?"

C ALLOWAY moved closer and said what he had come to say, rapidly but clearly, while the fat-faced man listened, shifting the half-burned cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. When the lawyer had made an end he was grinning again.

"Ye're telling me less than wan half av it, Misther Calloway, and that I know full well. What's the rest av it?"

"That doesn't concern you, Mike."

"Maybe so; maybe not. But why should I be t'rowin' a scare into me good friend Jim, who'd never 've been elected if I hadn't pulled f'r him?"

"There is a reason; a very good one, as you'd admit if I were at liberty to tell you what it is. I'll say this much: if you'll do this thing it will go some little way toward evening up some of your scores on the other side of the fence. It may look a bit queer on the surface, but I can assure you it is all to the good."

The man with his feet on the desk was chuckling softly. "'Twould be a gr-rand joke on Jim, I'm thinking. 'Tis not much red blood he has in him, or I'd not be here this night runnin' th' games wid the doors wide open. Ye'll not be wanting anny rough stuff pulled off?"

"Nothing like it; nothing but what I've told you."

The round-bodied man who, so to speak, carried a majority of the votes of West Grass Valley in his waistcoat pocket, swung his feet down from the desk.

"'Tis a go, Misther Calloway," he agreed, with another chuckle. "We'll take a shot at your game this wance, f'r the fun av it, and the next time I'm pulled 'tis yerself as'll have to defend me in the coorts. How much time do ye give me?"

"Will' an hour be enough?"

"Plenty—and then some."

"All right; in an hour, then, and at the southeastern corner of the railroad plaza. And handle it yourself, Mike. It will be safer that way."

Calloway took his leave and drove back to the respectable half of the town feeling more like a criminal than he had ever

felt before. As he was putting the car into a public garage he saw Pickett and signaled to him. The draftsman was waiting for him when he came out.

"You've come from Miss Betty?" the lawyer asked.

Pickett nodded. "She said I was to find you if I could and lag for you."

Calloway gave his orders promptly.

"Stick around here in the street, and when you see people getting together in knots and talking, listen in. After you've heard enough to make a good newspaper story, come to the Interocean. You'll find me waiting in the lobby."

His return to the hotel led him past the other hostelry, and a glance through the street-facing windows into the lighted lobby showed him Morton sitting in conference with a small, black-haired man who wore huge horn-rimmed spectacles, and the sight moved him to swear softly.

"Morton and Bartlett hobnobbing together—that cinches it!" he told himself wrathfully, as he passed on. "I'll never doubt a woman's guess again! Now, by Judas, I'm willing to admit that the whole blamed shooting match is crooked! That's a good enough warrant for anything we may do from this time on."

AFTER he had planted himself in a big lounging chair in an otherwise unoccupied corner of the Interocean lobby, the young attorney had a rather anxious wait, punctuated from time to time by furtive glances at his watch. Grass Valley was the meeting and passing point for two trains, the night express to Green Butte on the north, and the Fast Mail to Copah on the south, and it was the arrival and departure of these two trains in opposite directions that would place a fixed limit upon the time still available.

While matters were still in suspense he saw Morton come in, get his key at the desk, and disappear in the direction of the elevators, and this was a relief, as far as it went. It was an assurance that Morton was not intending to return to the Little Horse on the night train by way of Orrville.

The time limit had shrunk to the final half hour, and Calloway was growing pricklingly nervous, when Pickett came in to report.

"Good gosh! you called the turn—some kind of a turn, Mr. Calloway!" he began excitedly. "There's a story on the streets that a mob is forming to take Mr. Stanwood out of jail and lynch him! They say it's the tough element from the west town out for revenge because the man that was killed in the Lopez dive was one of their bunch. I couldn't believe it at first, but—"

Calloway sprang up.

"Never mind the details. Go around to the garage where you met me and get Miss Betty's car and drive like the devil out to Mr. Langford's! Tell Miss Betty the time is now, and the place is the southeast corner of the railroad plaza. That's all you'll need to say. Then stay with her and take your orders from her. Jump for it!"

He gave the muscular young draftsman time to disappear, and then hastened out to walk rapidly in the direction opposite to that taken by Pickett. There was an air of suppressed excitement in the streets; little groups and knots of pedestrians at the corners talking in low tones, with apprehensive glances toward the street leading up from the railroad crossing. Calloway quickened his pace until he was almost running when he came to the jail.

In the entrance corridor of the building he found the sheriff just unlocking the door of his office. The big-bodied, bearded man's greeting was tremulously bickering.

"You, Calloway? What the hell do you want?"

"I think you know well enough what I want," Calloway snapped, taking it for granted that the sheriff had been summoned, and probably gotten out of bed, to deal with the emergency. "I want to know if you are going to lie down and let a murdering mob take Stanwood out and hang him?"

Blatchford opened his office door,

switched on the lights, and sank heavily into a chair.

"What do you know about this thing?" he demanded.

"I know what you know, and that's enough. I'm here to demand protection for my client. What are you going to do about it?"

The sheriff fumbled in his pocket, found a cigar, and clipped it with his pocketknife. But his big hands were trembling.

"I tried to get Mike Grattan on the phone from my house, but the wire was dead. He's the only man that can handle them thugs from t'other side o' the railroad. I ain't got no riot guns, and my deputies are scattered to hell an' gone chasin' cattle rustlers."

"Well?" Calloway rapped out. "Do we stay here and wait for them to come and hold you up for your keys? You know what will happen to you if you let a mob hang a man who hasn't even been indicted! Stanwood has friends in this country who would hunt you down and shoot you on sight, as you'd deserve!"

The big man slumped in his chair and was so badly shaken that he forgot to light his cigar.

"I—I'll go after Judge Bradley and get him to talk to 'em when they come," he mumbled.

Calloway sprang up in a rage, real or so closely simulated as to appear real.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Blatchford! The night express is due here in ten minutes. You get Stanwood on that train and take him to Green Butte for safe-keeping, if you don't want to have a man's life to answer for! Get a move! Don't you hear them gathering in the street?"

Stirred into action at last, Blatchford grabbed for his keys, summoned the night deputy who had telephoned him, and led the way to the cell corridor.

"Mob comin'!" he barked at the sleepy turnkey on guard. "Don't fight 'em; let 'em in and show 'em that the man they're lookin' for ain't here." Then he opened Stanwood's cell and growled at the pris-

oner: "Snap out o' that, quick, if you don't want to stretch a rope!"

Stanwood came out, blinking in the lighted corridor. He had just fallen into a troubled sleep when the shooting of the bolts aroused him.

"What is it?" he asked, as he faced the four men who were waiting for him. Then he recognized Calloway as one of the four. "You, Bob? What's the matter?"

The lawyer explained crisply.

"Mob of gunmen—Lopez's friends—out to storm the jail and hang you; at least, that's the talk in the streets. Blatchford's aiming to put you on the train and take you to Green Butte. No time to talk. Hurry!"

Stanwood submitted as one in a daze; made no protest when Blatchford produced a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on, ignoring Calloway's remonstrance to the effect that a man in danger of his life from a mob ought at least to have his hands free.

"I ain't takin' no chances," was the surly answer. Then to the night deputy: "You'll go along, Heflin, and you don't take your eyes off'n him till you see him locked up at the Butte. Come a-runnin'!"

THE way out of the jail was through the basement into the alley, as Calloway had confidently assumed that it would be, and from that into a back street leading to the railroad station three short squares distant. The night was dark, and that part of the town was not too well lighted.

Blatchford walked on one side of his prisoner and Heflin on the other, with Calloway following on behind, nerves taut and tingling and senses keenly alert. A number of things had to synchronize very accurately if Betty's desperate expedient were to succeed; and as yet he had had no chance to give Stanwood a hint of what was coming.

As the walking party of four approached the railroad square the whistle of the incoming northbound train was heard. On the corner an automobile was standing with its side curtains up and its lights

switched off. As the party turned the corner it found itself suddenly in the midst of what seemed to be a street brawl; two men clutching at each other, and others trying to part them. Mindful only of his prisoner, Blatchford tried to steer a course around the mêlée.

At that instant a man dropped from the running board of the near-by auto, and, darting in from behind, locked an arm around Stanwood's neck and jerked him out of his place between the sheriff and the deputy. Blatchford swore madly and tried to pull his pistol, but the milling crowd got in his way and it was perhaps half a minute or so before he and the deputy could fight themselves free.

When they succeeded, their prisoner had disappeared, and Calloway, giving a faultless imitation of a man beside himself with frenzied wrath, was pointing to the retreating mob, three or four members of which appeared to be dragging an unwilling and struggling captive in the flight.

"After them!" Calloway yelped. "Are you going to stand here all night and let them murder him? Come on!"

It was not until after the mob and its three pursuers had vanished in the direction of the railroad crossing that the auto standing at the corner began to pur and move quietly away, still with its lights switched off.

"Presently, Archer, dear," the young woman behind the steering wheel was saying calmly to the manacled man sitting beside her. "It's all right, as far as it's gone, but we've got to beat it out of this town before we can talk."

Then, as she twisted the wheel and headed the car into the crosstown street, she flung a word back at the stalwart young man settling himself in the tonneau. "Did you remember to steal Mr. Langford's ax out of his garage, Georgie?"

"Got it right here," was the chuckling rejoinder; and then the fast car, with a good road for its speedway, shot through the eastern suburb and began its race among the apple orchards toward the foot-hills of the Junipers.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE DYNAMITERS.

THOUGH Betty's answer to Stanwood's query as to what it all meant seemed to imply that an explanation would shortly be forthcoming, there was little chance for connected speech as the car of escape shot away through the night. Forbearing to question her while she was giving her whole attention to the road and the racing machine, Stanwood sat back with his manacled hands in his lap, watching the rows of apple trees as they flashed into the beam of the head lamps and flicked backward into the darkness.

That Betty and Calloway and Pickett had somehow accomplished a jail break for him was evident enough; but what good could come of it—since in all probability he would promptly be recaptured and jailed again—he could not imagine.

In a very few minutes of the speeding flight the apple orchards were left behind and the car was careening around the curves and loopings of the road through the foothills on the approach to Red Mountain. When they entered upon the series of grades leading to the pass, Betty flung another word over her shoulder to Pickett.

"Keep an eye on the back stretch as we swing the curves, Georgie!" she directed. "If you see the lights of a following car, tip me off."

Pickett obeyed, straining his eyes in the effort to locate the windings of the road over which they had lately passed, but nothing came of it. As they were doubling the final hairpin curve on the up grades he leaned forward to report.

"Nothing in sight, so far; I guess we foolished 'em, all right. Don't believe they got on to our get-away at all."

Then to Stanwood: "Hope I didn't hurt you when I gave you the neck lock. I had to make a sure thing of it, you know."

"No bones broken," said Stanwood; "but it was lucky for you that I had these bracelets on. I took you for one of the lynchers."

With the summit gained and passed, Betty slowed down, mindful of the blockading tree which had forced her to turn back in the early afternoon. But upon reaching the place there was nothing but a litter of chips to show where the obstacle had lain, so there was no use for the ax Pickett had brought along.

"What was it?" Stanwood asked, as the car was once more speeding smoothly on its way.

"Mr. Morton had a tree put across the road to stop me this afternoon. We had to back up and go the long way around by way of Orrville."

"Morton did that?—but of course he would do anything that was needed. 'Can't you spill a little more of this newest news to me now, Betty?'"

"Not quite yet. I've only one brain, and if I try to talk and drive at the same time, there'll be a messy wreck on some one of these curves."

Stanwood held his peace, was still holding it when the flying descent of the mountain was safely accomplished and the car was braked to a stand at the Bull Basin fork. Pickett unlatched the tonneau door and climbed out.

"Think you can find your bike in the dark?" Betty asked.

"Sure," said the draftsman; I'll find it all right. No need to wait."

"Are you taking me back to the job?" Stanwood asked, as she let the clutch in.

"Just that, Archer. Aren't you glad to be going back?"

"It's no matter of use, Betty, dear," he objected gloomily. "We're wiped off the slate—both of us. I take it you saw and talked with Calloway. How much did he tell you?"

"He told me every little thing he knew—which wasn't so awfully much more than I'd been suspecting. You've had your work to keep you busy, but, you see, I haven't had anything to do but to pry around and think."

"But this jail break: it can't get us anywhere. They'll be over here after me in a few hours."

"Wait until I've finished doing my part;

then you can do yours," she answered cryptically.

Silence until the car began to labor on the sandy road over the divide. Then Stanwood spoke again.

"Was the mob alarm part of the play, too?"

The small plotter laughed joyously. "It was only a stage mob. We had to get you outside of the jail, somehow, and that seemed the easiest way. Mr. Calloway said he thought he could manage it, and he did—beautifully."

"It was very well managed, so far as that goes. Still, I don't see where we land."

"Wait," she said; and at that the laboring car topped the divide and the descent into the valley of the Little Horse was begun.

**W**HEN the camp lights came in sight Stanwood was conscious of a startling change of some sort and had to pull himself together sharply before he could realize what it was. For weeks the rattle and roar of machinery had not paused, day or night, but now there was a dead silence broken only by the softened thunder of the river.

"Good heavens!" he gasped; "the job's stopped!"

Betty was nosing her car gently into a grove of aspens beside the road.

"Don't you think it's about time you were getting back?" she asked quizzically. "The work couldn't very well go on without a chief engineer, could it?"

"Morton stopped it?"

She nodded. Then: "We'll get out and walk from here. There is something to be done, right away, and it must be done quietly."

When they reached the sleeping camp it seemed deserted. Over on the knoll across the Little Horse the Lopez dive was running full blast, as the clanging of the piano and the squawk of the saxophones testified. As they were walking up the camp street Pickett overtook them and sprang from his bike.

"Let's get those bracelets off, first thing,

chief," he offered; and in the camp-repair shop he got a hack saw and set to work. Finding that the handcuffs were tempered steel and too hard to be cut by the saw, he started a small motor-driven emery wheel, and on this the locks were ground away, Betty standing by to dribble water on the heating metal to keep it from burning the captive's wrists.

"All right; that's that. What next?" Stanwood asked when he was freed.

Betty spoke first to the draftsman.

"George, you go and find out if everybody is asleep over in Mr. Morton's house and come and tell us," she said; and after Pickett had gone to do her bidding, she turned to the liberated prisoner. "As Curly Biggs would say, don't you think I'm some little Ranahan, Archer, dear? If you really want to, you may kiss me, just once; and then we'll go around to your office. I've a terrible lot to tell you."

**I**T was in the log-cabin headquarters, with the shaded desk light turned on, that Betty's story was told to the single listener.

"I was suspicious from the very first," she began. "As I told you ever so many times, if you'll remember, things were coming too easily for us. And at last, when this dreadful place on the other side of the river started up, and Mr. Morton refused to help you get rid of it, I was sure there was something behind it all and made up my mind I'd find out what it was. You remember that day in New York when I took you to see our old family lawyer, Mr. Prendergast, don't you?"

Stanwood remembered the visit. It had been made at Betty's insistence for the purpose of enlisting the old lawyer on their side in the attempt to persuade Betty's trustees to invest a portion of her fortune in the Little Horse project. He made the sign of assent and she went on.

"Mr. Prendergast is a snuffy old dear, but he is as wily as an Indian, and he has always had a soft spot in his heart for me. I telegraphed him, and then wrote him a letter, telling him everything that was happening out here. He prom-

ised to look into things for me, and then I sent him a power of attorney, or whatever you call it, to act for me.

"Last night, as soon as Mr. Brigham telephoned me about the shooting, I sent a hurry message to Mr. Prendergast, telling him what had occurred, and asking him what I should do about it. Here is his reply."

Stanwood took the telegram she gave him—it was the one that had been picked up at Orrville on the long drive to Grass Valley—and read it:

Your suspicions well founded, but we must have more proof. Shooting affray and arrest probably part of plot. Get your young man out of jail at any cost and have him seize and hold all records at camp. Also have him hold possession, which is nine points of the law. Have locked the door here and am leaving for the West to-night. Courage. PRENDERGAST.

Stanwood folded the message and handed it back.

"I guess I've been pretty blind," he confessed. "I suppose Calloway told you of the proposal Morton made; to bail me out on condition that I'd jump my bond and vanish?"

"I understood then that Morton had been simply stringing me all the way along; that he or his New York backers had cooked up some sort of a deal with your trustees to push us both off the map and turn the completed plant over to the trust. Then, a few hours ago, when I heard through my cell window a newsboy calling the evening paper, with an account of the granting of a receivership—"

"I know," she cooed. "You poor dear! It must have been horrible. But now tell me, Archer: do you know positively that you killed the man over there on the other side of the river last night?"

"I don't; but, as matters stand, I can never prove that I didn't."

"But I believe you can."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Allie—Allie Arkwright. I told her this morning that it was up to her to kiss a man, and I guess she did it—though she wouldn't admit it."

The listener shook his head. "I'm

afraid you'll have to make it a little plainer than that."

"It's this way: Paul Stockton is in the plot, as Uncle Jackson's understudy, and he thinks he is going to get all set and marry Allie—though he is going to miss that mark by a mile. I thought he might be persuaded to talk a bit—by the right person, you know, so I encouraged Allie to go driving with him, and—er—well, sort of lead him on to be confidential."

Stanwood grinned. "You haven't any scruples whatever when you are reaching out for the thing you want, have you?"

"Er—maybe not; not enough to hurt, anyway. But it was all right. Allie balked at first; she's awfully old-fashioned, you know. But she is dead in love with your handsome young Georgian, and when I told her that Price might be ruined and lose his professional reputation in the smash, she—well, she brought home the bacon."

"Paul gave the whole thing away; admitted that it was Uncle Jackson's idea to cripple you with this horrid dance-hall thing, in the confident expectation that some day you'd lose your temper and do something that would get you safely put out of the game."

"Still, that doesn't clear me on the murder charge."

"Wait. He went on to say that he was over here when the shooting occurred. He said there were half a dozen people who would probably swear that you killed the man who was shot, and only one who knew that you didn't—and that one wouldn't be called upon to testify."

"Who was the odd man?"

"That was where Allie fell down. I suppose by that time she was too horrified to think straight. But just there I had a guess coming, and the name of it is Charlie Badger.

"It was his job to shadow you; not last night particularly, but all the time. Paul admitted that much to Allie. When the time comes, you must make Badger tell what he knows—get the truth out of him. That can wait, but just now—"

"Just now there is something more im-

portant to be done," Stanwood broke in, as Pickett came to say that Gardner and the file clerk were sound asleep in their detached bunk shack. "I guess you and I can do the burglar act, George, without calling out the others." Then to Betty: "You will stay here until we come back?"

"Right in this chair," she sighed. "But don't be too long or you may find me lost to the world. I've lived a lot since this morning—or yesterday morning, whichever it is."

Knowing what was to be done, Stanwood made adequate preparations. The door to Morton's office was easily forced, but that was only a beginning. There was a rank of filing cases along one wall of the ample room, but he knew that if there were anything of a secret nature in the "business" records it would be in the vaultlike safe.

Therefore he proceeded deftly and scientifically to dynamite the safe, which was rather a fire than a burglar-proof structure; and when the muffled explosion had taken place and the room was cleared of gas, the account books and private files were to be had for the taking.

Together he and Pickett crammed the contents of the safe into a couple of wastebaskets and carried the loot over to the mapping room. It was now deep in the night, and there was little time to go thoroughly into the books and papers.

**B**UT a very cursory examination showed that there was no lack of proof of the sort to which the New York lawyer's telegram pointed. Though many of Morton's telegrams to New York were in cipher, there were enough that were not. In his private correspondence Morton had dealt directly with the officials of an unnamed syndicate.

There were copies of letters showing the transfer of stock and bonds to Betty's trustees, reports of the progress of the work on the dam and power plant, and, finally, a letter outlining the receivership plan by which the stock was to be extinguished and the way opened for the purchase of the bonds at a discount. And in

5A—POP.

the account books there had apparently been no effort made to conceal the false entries by which the Shoestring Company figured as a bankrupt concern.

To Stanwood, well versed as he was in the chicaneries to which Big Business sometimes descends to gain its ends, the boldness of the thing was amazing. That the unnamed trust should plant its emissary right at the heart of things in the construction camp of the enterprise to be raided was simply an incredible piece of buccaneering.

Yet, when he came to consider the circumstances, he saw that Morton had had nothing to fear. Not even the craftiest of manipulators could have foreseen the collapse of the plot to be brought about by the keen wit and reckless determination of a young woman lawless enough to turn jail breaker. Lacking Betty's timely interference, the piratical scheme would have gone through without a hitch, with the one man who might have opposed it convicted of a crime, or, if not convicted, at least a fugitive from the law.

Betty—and by good rights—was patting her lips to hide a sleepy yawn.

"Well, where do we go from here?" she asked, after the cursory examination of the loot was made.

Stanwood reread the message from the New York lawyer.

"Mr. Prendergast says he is starting west: if he comes direct and makes good connections, he ought to be here Thursday night or Friday morning—three days. This thing is too far away for Bob Calloway to handle; and, besides, he hasn't the gun or the ammunition to reach these big fellows.

"It's a case of some more, and more desperate, lawbreaking, I guess. Morton and Sheriff Blatchford will know, before many hours have passed, that I am here and going on with the job. That will mean a posse and a fight, if I don't walk out and surrender. We'll make it a siege and try to hold out until Prendergast comes. I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, while I'm about it. By the way, in your correspondence with

Prendergast did you tell him that we had a good lawyer out here?"

**B**ETTY got up out of her chair with another stifled yawn and a little stagger of weariness.

"Yes, I told him, and gave him Mr. Calloway's address." Then, kissing him right in the face and eyes of George Pickett looking on and blushing: "You are a man after my own heart, Archer. When the real fight comes, I'll be with you, doing my little prettiest to help out.

"What are you going to do with the burglarized stuff? Hadn't you better put it in the car and let me take it to Barker's and hide it till it's needed?"

"Never in this world!" said Stanwood. "When the burglary becomes known, it is safe to say that these buccaneers wouldn't stop at anything, perhaps not even murder, to get this stuff back and cover their tracks. Don't you want George to tie his bike on your running board and drive you to Barker's? You must be frightfully tired."

"Nothing like that. But you may come and see me off if you want to."

The office had been emptied of them only a few minutes when Pickett, standing guard over the stolen records, heard the diminuendo purring of a motor, and Stanwood came back.

"Business, now, George, and a lot of it, quick!" he snapped. "Go and rout out Frenchley, Brigham and Price and we'll hold a council of war."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### OUTLAWS.

**Q**UIET naturally, Stanwood's three assistants were properly astonished when Pickett awoke them with the news that the chief had broken jail and was back on the job. When they gathered around him in the mapping room, Stanwood explained tersely, confining himself to the bare facts.

"You see what we are up against," he said at the finish. "Morton has been appointed receiver, and he has all the au-

thority of the law and the courts behind him. More than that, on the face of the returns I'm a fugitive from justice and Blatchford has a legal right to come and get me, dead or alive, I suppose. He'll be here in the morning with a posse, and Morton will most likely be with him. What do you say?"

"What do you say?" queried Frenchley.

"Just this. There is a bare chance that this crooked deal can be sidetracked if we can hold out, and hold on to these incriminating records, until this New York lawyer of Miss Betty's gets here. You see what Prendergast says in this telegram; 'Possession is nine points of the law.'

"But I don't want to drag you fellows into it against your better judgment. If we elect to make a fight, everything we do will be illegal; resisting officers in pursuit of their duty, contempt of court for disregarding the judge's order granting a receivership. If we lose the fight, they can send every man of us over the road to the pen."

"Put that all aside," growled Brigham. "Of course we're with you, until the last dog's hung. But how are we going to put up a fight without arms?"

"That is the weak point," Stanwood agreed. "Copah is the nearest place. If we had time to send there——"

"Wait a minute," Hartwell put in, in his leisurely drawl. "You say Blatchford and his gang will be over here in the morning. Isn't it only a guess that he'll head straight for the camp? Of course he'll find out that the mob was only a frame-up, but even at that, he isn't likely to look for you here unless somebody tips him off, is he?"

"You're right," Stanwood conceded. "Bob Calloway will no doubt do his best to steer him wrong and gain time for us. If we can have a clear day we can get the fighting tools. The next thing is the army. How about that, Anson?"

"No trouble there," was the labor boss' reply. "Moriarty's shovel gang will stand by us to a man, and so will a lot of the others. We nearly had a riot on our

hands last night when the men found out what had happened to you."

"All right, then, here's the program. To-morrow morning at six o'clock the job will start up again with the day shift, and some of the night men can get busy putting the camp in a state of defense. Pickett, it will be your job to run the blockade in one of the camp autos and catch the five-o'clock train at Orrville for Copah. I'll give you a note to Major Briscoe and he'll help you in the gun running.

"It will be up to you to get back as swiftly as you can—to beat Blatchford to it. Maybe you can make the noon train up; if you can, so much the better. Any of you think of anything else?"

"This 'evidence,'" said Brigham, pointing to the stolen records. "We have to hang on to this like a dog to a root, haven't we?"

Stanwood's smile was grim. "You said it, John. It's the end that justifies the means—if anything can. I hardly know what to do with the stuff."

It was Frenchley who offered the suggestion that was acted upon. There was a space under the floor of the log-built headquarters cabin. While Hartwell and Brigham pried up a couple of the floor planks, Stanwood went to his sleeping quarters, emptied his trunk and dragged it to the mapping room where it was used as a receptacle for the books and files and lowered into its hiding place.

That done, Frenchley said: "You've done your bit, Archer, and so has George; you'd both better turn in and get what sleep you can. We three will divide time between now and daylight and start the job with the day shift. Needn't sleep with one eye open, George. We'll see to it that you're called in time to catch that early train."

**H**AVING been under a severe strain for upward of twenty-four hours, Stanwood slept like a log after he turned in; knew nothing until Frenchley called him at eight o'clock in the morning. But at the sound of the big man's voice he sat up

with a jerk to stare at the little tin alarm clock on the shelf at the bunk head.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, flinging the blankets aside, "what made you let me sleep so long?"

"You looked as if you needed it; and there was no reason why you shouldn't. Everything's jake, so far; the job's in motion again, Pickett's gone on his gun-running trip, and we've got a bunch of the night men out fortifying. John and I have laid out a line of defense. Unless the enemy cuts in behind us, we can hold this camp till the cows come home—always provided we get some artillery before Blatchford shows up."

"By the way, what sort of an animal is this sheriff person? I've never met him."

"A bully—when things are coming his way; otherwise, I think he loses his nerve pretty easily. He was badly rattled last night over that mob scare when he took me out of the jail."

"Which means that he'll probably pick good, stout fighting men for his posse," Frenchley put in with a laugh. "Here's hoping he doesn't sick 'em on us till we're ready for 'em. Your breakfast's waiting, when you want to chew."

While he was eating breakfast Stanwood tried to catch up with the procession of events which had acquired such frantic speed since the fateful moment when he had entered the Lopez game room on the night of the clash. In the light of a new day the successive steps in Morton's campaign of aggrandizement were easily followed. Still, the boldness of the thing was almost unbelievable.

When he thought of that phase of it he flushed hotly, blaming himself for having offered such an easy mark to the buccaneers of high finance. "Heavens!" he muttered over the bacon and beans, "anybody could sell me a gold brick at sight, if I'm that simple! If it hadn't been for Betty's keen little brain——"

**T**HE hot flush became a glow of adoration. How straightly she had gone to the heart of the thing, and how surely and geniously she had struck in at the crisis,

when everything was all but lost! He was a dub, he told himself, a poor miserable dub; but he couldn't go far wrong if she had her hand on the steering wheel.

Nevertheless, there was still a man's job ahead; a desperate game to play. Both Morton and the sheriff would be within their legal rights in demanding his surrender and a turnover of the property and the law would sanction whatever steps they might take.

Nothing but the possession of Morton's incriminating records could justify him in resisting their demands. If these could be held and produced in court—he was sweating a little when he came to this "if." Even that saving contingency must turn upon what Prendergast, the New York lawyer, had been able to do with the master plotters at the Eastern end of things.

Breakfast eaten, he went out to make an inspection round of the work and the camp. Once more the big job, now nearing completion, was in full swing. In the cañon portal the great white wall of the dam lacked nothing but its cap course, for which the carpenters on the stagings were now placing the forms. The power house, concrete built, had risen over its wheel pit, the turbines were in place, and Hartwell's gang, augmented now to a small army, was installing the dynamos.

In another fortnight, barring unforeseen industrial difficulties, a test run of the machinery could be made; and then, as soon as the railroad people were ready, the current could be turned into the mountain-grade power wires.

Stanwood's eyes narrowed when he thought of what the buccaneers of business had planned to do to him and Betty. The piratical scheme succeeding, they would acquire a plant built in record time and at a minimum outlay, with a complete extinguishment of all rights and titles save their own, and with the services of its originator, promoter and chief of construction donated free of cost!

"Not this time!" he gritted between set teeth; "not if we have to stand off the whole United States army! If they were

robbing me alone, I might take it lying down as a penalty for my thick-headedness. But they are not going to be allowed to rob Betty and get away with it—not while I'm on earth!"

Circling the camp he took note of the defenses. Along the river, and around the collection of buildings to the hill on the south a low breastwork of cement sacks filled with sand had been built. Behind this Frenchley's volunteers from the night shift were digging a shallow trench. A break had been left where the road came through, but there were sandbags in reserve to close this gap when the need should arise.

On the south, the hill which was an extension of the quarry hogback was itself as good as a fortress, since a few armed men on its summit could hold it against double their numbers.

The one weak point in the defenses was on the north. The Lopez building, perched on its knoll within a short pistol shot of the camp, was a menace that could not be ignored. Stanwood took it for granted that Blatchford, finding himself opposed by armed resistance, would not hesitate to swear Lopez and his gunmen in as additional members of the posse.

The desperadoes in the dive-keeper's pay would shoot straight and shoot to kill—and, for once in a way, they would have the law's sanction. And from the building on the knoll they could command the camp.

**H**ARTWELL, coming down from the power house for a roll of blue prints, overtook his chief at the door of the headquarters cabin and they entered together.

"Nothing stirring yet, is there?" inquired the Georgian.

"No; and I'm hoping there won't be until after Pickett gets back. Have you fellows picked your men to help us put up the bluff?"

"Frenchley has. He made a little talk to the day shift when it turned out to go to work, and the only trouble we'll have will be to keep 'em from mobbing the sheriff's outfit when it shows up."

"There mustn't be anything of that sort!" Stanwood protested. "We shall be far enough on the wrong side of the law if we merely try to hold what we've got. What are you looking for, Price?"

"The prints for the layout of the switchboards."

"They are over there in the rack; I had them day before yesterday," said Stanwood, and he went to help Hartwell find the missing drawings.

It was just as they had found the drawings that an automobile rolled into the camp street and stopped beside the "business" office. Hartwell, with the misplaced roll of blue prints in hand, had got as far as the open door when he stopped and beckoned to Stanwood.

"And the cat came back," he announced, with a grinning laugh, as he pointed across to the other office out of the wrecked interior of which Morton and young Badger were just emerging. Then he added: "I reckon this is where we hear something drop."

Stanwood did not dodge. With a word to Hartwell to keep an eye on Badger, he stepped out and met the pair in the middle of the camp street. As was to be expected, the chief conspirator was apoplectic with rage.

"So!" he yelled, his former suavity flung to the four winds. "So this is what your jail break meant, you damned bandit! What have you done with my records?"

"You won't make anything by abusing me," Stanwood replied coolly. "Your records, as you call them, are the records of the Shoestring Power & Light Company, and as president of the company, I have taken charge of them."

"Hell and damnation!—you're out of it, I tell you! You are nothing but an outlaw—an escaped criminal! This company is in the hands of a receiver appointed by the court, and I am the receiver!"

"Well," returned the young engineer, still unruffled, "why don't you go ahead and receive?"

Morton whirled upon Badger. "Arrest that man!" he shouted, pointing a shaking

finger at Stanwood. But inasmuch as the young man who wore his hair in a wet-seal wave lacked something of the courage of his convictions, he was prudent enough to hang back.

"I—I'll go and fetch the sheriff," he stammered; but as he started to retreat to the car, Hartwell stopped him.

"Nothing like that, son," drawled the Georgian. "I reckon neither one of you will leave this camp till Mr. Stanwood says you may."

The little interlude gave Stanwood time to consider. If Morton and Badger were suffered to leave, it would mean that a quick alarm would be sent to the sheriff from the first telephone they could reach; in which event an attack on the camp might be made before Pickett could return with the means of defense.

"Hartwell is right," he said shortly. "Now that you are here, you will stay, Mr. Morton—both of you."

The quiet pronouncement brought matters to a head. Morton sprang back and made a dash for his car, and Badger tried to follow him. Hartwell took care of the stenographer, and Stanwood promptly closed with Morton.

There was a brief wrestling match, but before it could culminate, big Tim Moriarty ran in with a couple of his men and the struggle was over. Stanwood snapped out his orders.

"Put Mr. Morton in his office and nail up the doors and windows," he directed. Then to Hartwell: "You may lock Badger up in the tool house for the present, Price. I'll have something further to say to him, later on."

Morton's profane explosion was like the eruption of an overdue volcano. Becoming coherent, it took the form of threatenings dire and calamitous.

"I suppose you know what you're doing!" he bellowed. "You'll end your days behind the bars for this! I am a duly appointed officer of the courts, here in the performance of my duty. If you think you can set the laws of the country at defiance—"

"Lock him up, Tim," said Stanwood

curtly, and, turning away, he was shortly joined in his office by Hartwell and a little later by Frenchley, who had witnessed the brief struggle in front of the business office from the quarry.

"Nabbed the king-pin, did you?" laughed the labor boss, seating himself on Pickett's high stool. "What are you aiming to do with him?"

"Hold him until the trouble is over, one way or the other. I didn't want him, Heaven knows; but I couldn't let him go out and telephone Blatchford from the first ranch house he came to."

"Sure you couldn't. And it doesn't matter. We're in so deep now that nothing matters very much. I only hope Pickett doesn't fall down."

"He won't," said Stanwood confidently. Then, after Hartwell had gone back to his job with the roll of blue prints under his arm: "Pull up a chair, Anson, and let's go over these final estimates while we can. What office work we do after the lightning strikes won't amount to much, I imagine."

Noon and the call to dinner found the young chief, and his first assistant still working over the estimates, but they stopped and joined the other two members of the staff in the mess room. Brigham, busy all the forenoon at the dam, had not heard of Morton's coming, and he shook his head dubiously when he was told that the some-time business manager was held a prisoner in his own office.

"That's a pretty broad step, Archer," he commented. "As a court-appointed receiver he represents just about all the law there is, doesn't he?"

"I know," nodded the chief; "but, as I have said before, everything we do or may do is illegal, and a little more or less won't make much difference."

RETURNING to his desk after dinner, and after giving the cook orders to feed the two prisoners, Stanwood again immersed himself in the estimates; and he was still covering a scratch pad with figures when he heard the expiring detonations of an auto motor and, looking out

of the window, saw Betty and Alicia Arkwright in the halted car. Before he could rise, Hartwell was helping them out, and a moment later Betty stood in the doorway of the mapping room.

"I simply *had* to come," she burst out, forestalling his protest. "Paul Stockton has the news—by telephone, I suppose—of part of what happened last night in Grass Valley, and he's been telegraphing Uncle Jackson. I was obliged to find out what he was doing; it was *needed*."

"So Allie and I drove the roundabout way to Orrville, and I did find out. He was congratulating Uncle Jackson; told him you'd got out of jail and run away, or had been lynched—he didn't know which, and would most likely never be heard of again. The joke was too good to keep, and I had to come and tell you."

Stanwood tried to frown his disapproval of her recklessness, and made a failure of it.

"As it happens, you are safe enough to come and go, but you mustn't stay. I'm looking for Blatchford any time, and when he comes there'll be hot trouble. Where is Miss Arkwright?"

"Price has taken her off somewhere; up to his power house, I guess. Did you ever see anything work out any more beautifully than that has? I just hoped you'd have somebody out here that she could fall in love with! And Price is *such a* dear! If I hadn't already gone off the deep end with you—"

SHE had come around to sit on the arm of his desk chair facing the one street-fronting window. It was the sight of an odd thing that made her break off in mid-sentence. A big-bodied man was sliding awkwardly, feet foremost, out of a barred window on the opposite side of the camp street, a window from which one of the wooden bars had been removed.

Before she could speak, the man, minus coat and hat, had wriggled out and was climbing agilely into an auto that stood beside the building.

"What do you see?" Stanwood asked; but when he, too, saw he did not wait for

her answer. Diving into a desk drawer, he snatched up the mate to the revolver he had carried on the night of the shooting affray and leaped to the door.

But swift as he was, Morton was swifter. With two jerks of the steering wheel he had backed and turned his auto, and was speeding away.

Stanwood raced out, meaning to give chase in Betty's car. Then he saw Pickett's motor bike standing under its shelter beside the tool house and ran for it. And a moment later two dust clouds rising to float over the river-fringing trees were all that was visible of pursued and pursuer.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE "DEFI."

**A**BETTER rider of horses than of motor cycles, Stanwood made rather hard work of racing the two-wheeled machine over the soft and rutted road in the valley, and at the crossing of the divide he was still several hundred yards behind the dust cloud Morton's auto was raising. But on the descent to the Bull Basin level he gained something, and on the hard-surface Basin straightaway to the fork of the Grass Valley road he saw that he was at last overhauling the flying auto.

Coming within long pistol range, he began firing at the auto wheels, and at the third shot had the satisfaction of seeing one of the rear tires go flat. Morton's only answer to the disablement of his car was to clap on more speed, and the pursuer had a vanishing glimpse of his quarry as it turned into the mountain-climbing road and was lost to sight in the foothill forest.

Getting the last possible wheel turn out of the pursuit machine, the young engineer shortly came upon the disabled car, stopped, canted into the ditch at the roadside and empty. Morton had left it and taken to the woods.

Realizing that a single-handed search for his man in the thick forest was useless, Stanwood put the car permanently out of commission by taking off the top of the timer and carrying it away with

him, remounted his motor cycle and raced back to the camp.

"You weren't gone very long; what price success?" Betty asked, as he re-entered his office and found her sitting in his desk chair.

"You saw who it was?" he said.

"Yes; and Mr. Frenchley has just been telling me what you've been doing to him."

"I stopped his car by shooting a tire, but he jumped out and ran into the woods. One more charge against me, and he'll probably make this one 'assault with intent to kill.' Every day and in every way I'm getting in deeper and deeper."

"But you are not letting it wangle your nerve?"

"No, not yet; but it may if you and Miss Alicia stay here any longer. This camp is no place for noncombatants."

"I'm not a noncombatant."

"I'll say you're not," he grinned. "Just the same, my dear, you're cramping my style fearfully. Won't you please go while there is time for a safe get-away?"

She looked out of the window and saw Hartwell returning from the power house with Alicia.

"I suppose we shall have to go, if you insist upon it; but, really, Archer, dear, I'd love to stay and mix in if you'd let me."

When he was leading her to the car into which Hartwell had already put her companion she asked if the camp telephone was working. He told her that it wasn't; that Hartwell had put it out of commission, for safety's sake.

"Then I shan't be able to find out how things are going after—after—"

"After we are surrounded? I'm afraid not. But you mustn't worry."

"You might as well tell me I mustn't breathe! Oh, I do hope 'Daddy' Pendergast will hurry, hurry!"

Stanwood stood in the camp street with Hartwell looking after the departing car as long as it remained in sight. Then Hartwell said, "I'm sure glad you made 'em go. I've had cold chills running up and down my back ever since they came."

Stanwood smiled. "I wonder if it

means as much to you as it does to me, Price?"

"I reckon it does. I got my courage up a few minutes ago, and—well, she said she didn't care what her people would say. I feel like a dog robber, Arch, but I couldn't help it. Her money has made me hold off all summer, but I hit the limit to-day."

THE afternoon of suspense dragged slowly. The arriving time of the noon train from Copah at Orrville was two twenty, and by three o'clock Stanwood was beginning to look anxiously for the return of the auto in which Pickett had driven to the railroad town in the early morning. But at half past three the road to the divide was still empty; and at four it seemed to be plainly evident that the draftsman had not been able to make the northbound noon passenger. The only other train would be a slow freight leaving Copah late in the afternoon and arriving at Orrville long after dark.

While he waited Stanwood began to pencil figures on his desk pad. If Pickett were coming on the freight he couldn't possibly reach the camp before half past nine or later; and as against these figures he set down the Morton-Blatchford possibilities. It was one o'clock or a little later when Morton made his escape. Allowing him an hour for the finding of a telephone and getting into communication with Grass Valley and the sheriff's office, Blatchford would have had ample time to assemble a posse and be even now on his way in autos or motor trucks to the Little Horse.

Stanwood was frowning over the time problem when Frenchley came in.

"Anson, it begins to look as if we were in for it barehanded," he announced, calling Frenchley's attention to the figures on the desk pad. "It's pretty certain now that Pickett missed the passenger train and is coming on the freight—which means nine or ten o'clock to-night. If my time guesses work out as I've set them down here, we can expect Blatchford any time after half past four."

"It looks that way," the first assistant

returned soberly. "Our best hope is that Morton didn't find the needed phone within the hour you've allowed him. What's your notion, if the worst happens?"

"I'm ashamed to say I haven't got any, Anson. We have numbers enough to eat up any force that Blatchford is likely to bring in, but I'm not going to put a lot of unarmed men up against an armed posse."

"Brigham and Price both have Winchesters, and so have you and I. And there'll be a scattering of pocket guns among the men."

"Wait," said the chief; "I've just thought of something else. That outfit across the river—every man of it is a walking arsenal. What do you say if we—"

"I get you," Frenchley cut in. "The four of us can go over there and stick 'em up for their weapons. That's the proper caper. We'll do it now. There goes the split-shift whistle, and Price and John will be coming in with the men. I'll go and round 'em up while you're assembling the munitions."

"Good!" Stanwood approved; but as he got out of his chair a sound like the murmur of distant gunfire was heard and he went to the door. "A car coming!" he exclaimed, and they both ran out.

UP the river road an auto was racing at a forty-mile clip. The camp street was filling with the incoming day shift, and the men scattered to right and left to clear the way. In a twinkling the hard-driven machine tore into the street and was braked to a stand, with Pickett tumbling from it to pass out his collection of arms; a few repeating rifles, an armful of shot-guns of various calibers, a dozen or so army Springfields reaved from the Copah pawnshops and a weird gathering of side arms.

"Get busy, quick!" he panted. "They're right behind me—saw their cars chasing out of the Grass Valley road as I came over the divide. They'll be here in about two jumps of a jack rabbit!"

Brigham and Hartwell came up on a run, and Stanwood snapped out his orders. With many willing hands to take hold, a barrier of the sand-filled cement sacks was swiftly built across the road, the breastwork defenses were manned, and Hartwell with three of his electricians climbed the quarry hill to cover the flank and rear from the vantage of the higher ground.

THE hurried dispositions were barely made before three touring cars, packed with armed men, came in sight in the road. Stanwood stood up behind the barrier and fired a shot in the air. The cars were halted suddenly, so suddenly that the two in the rear collided clashingly.

The men swarmed out of them, and there was a little pause, as if for conference. Then the burly sheriff walked up toward the breastwork, waving his handkerchief as a flag of truce. Stanwood showed himself behind the sandbags.

"Not too close, Blatchford," he warned, as the sheriff came nearer. "Some of the boys may get nervous and shoot before I tell them to."

Blatchford saw the gun barrels leveled over the sandbags and stopped.

"You're in dead wrong, Stanwood!" he barked. "You know it as well as anybody. You might as well come along peaceably, because we're goin' to get you, anyway. You ain't got a leg to stand on. This plant's in the hands o' the court and you can't buck the whole United States!"

Stanwood, with the safety of his loyal supporters in mind, was only too willing to avoid an armed encounter if it could be done.

"See here, Blatchford," he argued; "I know where I stand, and what is at stake in this game, even better than you do. I am willing to go to trial on the charge upon which I was arrested night before last if, within three days' time, that charge is not withdrawn. But you can't take me now; and you can't take possession of this camp and plant—not with that handful of men you've got back there in the road."

Blatchford shifted his weight from one foot to the other, still with his eyes on the threatening gun barrels.

"I ain't here to make no terms with you," he rasped. "I got the judge's order to put Mr. Morton in possession o' this dump and to fetch you back to jail. That's enough for me."

"Three days' grace is all I ask," Stanwood temporized. "If you still want me at the end of that time, I'll come in and surrender."

"I say it ain't up to you to make terms!" was the irate rejoinder. "You're a criminal before the law on three-four counts, and I'm summonin' you to come along peaceable. If you don't, why, it'll be the worse for you and every man you've got behind them sandbags a-helpin' you defy the law! We're comin' in, and I warn you if there's a shot fired at us, there'll be blood on the moon!"

And with this ultimatum he turned and went back to his posse.

"We'll know now in a minute or so," Stanwood predicted, crouching with Frenchley behind the road barrier. "Blatchford would back down if he could, but Morton won't let him—can't afford to let him, if the big steal is to go through."

Notwithstanding Stanwood's prediction, the attack did not materialize at once. There was quite a long delay and apparently a lot of talk before the men of the posse began to scatter and take cover in the aspens on the river bank and the scrub pines on the opposite side of the road.

The sun had gone down behind the western range and the blue haze of twilight was beginning to fill the lower levels of the valley. Still meaning to avoid bloodshed if it were at all possible, Stanwood passed a word to the defenders:

"Keep down and hold your fire. If they come too close, shoot over their heads. We don't want to kill anybody if we can help it," and the order went from man to man along the line.

In a few minutes there was a brisk exchange of shots near the river bank; then

a desultory spattering on the hillside to the right of the road. The men behind the barrier could hear the sheriff urging his deputies to close in and cursing them because they hung back.

Just then the masthead lights came on in the camp and at the dam, where the split shift had gone to work quite as if nothing were happening, and the starting-up rattling of the concrete mixers broke in on the evening silence.

"We've got 'em guessing," Frenchley asserted. "There can't be more than a couple of dozen of 'em, all told, and they know we outnumber 'em, ten to one. They're bluffed."

"For the present, yes." Stanwood agreed, as dark figures began to regather about the three autos in the road. "I'm wondering now if they've brought any provender along."

"Not likely. But it isn't far to Orrville."

In a few minutes camp fires began to blaze near the three cars, and by their light the watchers behind the barricade saw one of the machines backed and turned and driven away down the valley. "Going after the eats," Frenchley prophesied; "eats, and probably more help."

"Provisions in Orrville, but not more men," Stanwood qualified. "The town is not in this county."

"Sure! I forgot that. But Barker's ranch is. Think they can swing in any reinforcements from the dude ranch?"

"No; Barker's no scrapper; and Betty will see to it that the ranch hands are kept out of it. We can trust her for that."

It was at this conjuncture that the camp cook's dishwasher came crawling on hands and knees to the breastwork to say that the men's mess was waiting, and Frenchley laughed.

"Get up on your feet and walk like a man, Tony," he chuckled. "Your time to be shot hasn't come yet." And then the supper dispositions were made, with half of the men to stand guard while the other half ate.

Leaving Moriarty in command at the outpost, Stanwood and the first assistant

went back to the headquarters cabin. At the door Frenchley pointed to the dive on the opposite side of the river.

"I don't see any reason why we should go on furnishing that outfit with lights," he said. "That was Morton's deal, and Morton isn't boss any more."

"Tell Brinker to cut 'em off," Stanwood directed; and a little later the building on the opposite knoll went dark.

"Maybe the Mexican will take that as a notice to quit," Frenchley offered; adding: "We ought to have wrecked that place the night you were carried off. John and I wanted to head a bunch to go and do it, but Morton held us down."

**A**T the supper table, where only Hartley was missing, Pickett told of his day's adventures. There had been a dearth of weapons in the Copah hardware shops, and he had had to resort to the pawn places. He had caught the noon train by a hair's breadth, with Major Briscoe holding it for him, but his auto had broken an ignition wire a mile or so out of Orrville, and he had lost much time hunting for the trouble.

"Did the major want to know what we were going to do with the guns?" Stanwood asked.

"The major is a good scout. He merely winked an eye at me and asked no questions about the gun running. But he did say something that will interest you; he asked me when we'd be ready to shoot the juice into the wires. Then he said, 'You tell Archer we'll be ready when he is.'"

"Does he know of the trouble we've been having?" Stanwood inquired.

Pickett grinned. "He never said a word to me. But this morning's Copah *Tribune* had the whole business; front-page headlines an inch high—the shooting scrape, jail delivery and the receivership."

"And still the major asked you when we'd be ready to deliver current to his railroad?"

"He did—just that."

Stanwood had a shrewd suspicion that Betty had been plotting with Major Briscoe and the railroad people, as well as with

the New York lawyer, but he said nothing.

After supper he and Brigham made a round of the defenses. The second relay of defenders was straggling out from the mess tent to the breastwork, the men lighting their pipes and joking over the sheriff's inadequate "bluff." Stanwood called Moriarty and gave the orders for the night. The men were to sleep in detachments, with only enough of them on guard to give the alarm in case of a night attack.

"Blatchford won't try it in the dark," Brigham predicted, as they moved on. "In fact, I think he is already stumped. Reckon he'll call on the governor for the militia?"

"I don't know," Stanwood demurred. "All we do know is that Morton will play the limit, and he has all the money in the world behind him. He knows his game is up if he can't clap an extinguisher upon us and get hold of those records that he's lost. His backers will hardly forgive him for leaving the books and files where they could be looted."

"Still, he hadn't the slightest reason for suspecting that he was taking a chance, with you locked up in jail and two of his own men here on guard. And that reminds me; have you seen anything of the old bookkeeper and the filing clerk?"

"No. I think they must have run away early this morning when they saw what had been done to their office; afraid of Morton, perhaps, or afraid we might hold them as accomplices or witnesses."

When they came to the road they saw that the third auto had returned, and the camp fires were blazing again at the roadside. Over on the knoll across the river candlelights were appearing; and some member of Blatchford's posse, with a pine knot for a torch, was moving along the river bank, apparently searching for a place where the stream could be forded. While they looked, the torchbearer found his crossing, and presently they saw the flaring beacon ascending the knoll to the Lopez building.

"I thought Blatchford would do that,"

Stanwood remarked. "He is going to deputize Lopez and his gunmen. That will mean war to the knife, John. Those thugs won't care how many of us they kill."

"If they do that, maybe we can do a little killing, as well," Brigham put in quietly. Then: "I'll take the first watch and you'd better turn in. There won't be anything doing until morning, but if you're needed, we'll call you."

## CHAPTER XX.

### MORTON'S MESSENGER.

AS John Brigham had prefigured, the night passed without alarms. At the shift-changing hour in the morning Stanwood made new dispositions of the working force.

Since the breastwork had been lightly manned during the night, most of the men off duty were available for the industrial drive on the dam and power house, and a second call for defense volunteers met with such a hearty response that there were not weapons enough with which to arm them all.

"You have made sure the men all understand what they may be letting themselves in for—putting up an armed resistance to officers of the law?" Stanwood said to Frenchley as the new men were taking their places on the firing line.

"What they understand is that somebody is trying to do us dirt, and that's enough for them. They are perfectly human. They may go on the loose over there at the Lopez joint and make you think they don't care a hoot about you or the job, but when it comes to a show-down they'll fight for you at the drop of the hat.

"What is the Blatchford bunch doing this morning? It has moved back out of sight and range, I see."

"I don't know what's doing. I'm going up on the hill and try to get a line on things."

"Better take your Winchester along," Frenchley advised. But the young chief laughed and said there was no need, and

presently went to climb the hill behind the headquarters cabin.

From the summit of the hill, which was a continuation of the quarry hogback, he was able to see well down the valley. The sheriff's party had withdrawn around the first bend in the road. The autos were parked in a small clearing, and the men were cooking breakfast over a number of camp fires. Focusing his field glass accurately, he identified Blatchford and Morton in one of the groups.

Readjusting the glass he turned it upon the tar-paper-covered building across the river, but the only sign of life there was a thin column of smoke ascending from the kitchen stovepipe. "Nobody but the chink cook up yet, I guess," he muttered to himself; but a moment later, when a man came out to crank up the Mexican's ramshackle auto, he changed his mind.

**L**EANING against a tree to steady his hand, Stanwood looked again. With the auto in action, the man who had climbed into it backed it to the door of the dance hall, and a number of women—Stanwood couldn't determine how many—came out and got into the car, which was immediately driven away toward the lower ford of the Little Horse.

"Um," said the watcher on the hilltop, "that means business. They're taking their women away. All right: that gives us a free hand, too."

When he focused the glass on the building again he saw, or thought he saw, the middle door of the three in the river-facing front open slightly. Before he could make sure that the dark line between the door and the jamb was not merely an optical illusion, a faint puff of gray obscured it, and a bullet from a high-powered rifle tore up the ground at his feet coincident with the sharp crack of the gun.

Though he was taken completely by surprise, Stanwood reacted almost automatically. There was a little clump of the dwarf pines a few yards below him on the camp-facing side of the hill, and before the sniper could fire again, he had

made a base-runner's slide into the cover from which he could make his way unseen to the camp street. As he came down, Frenchley ran up with a squad of the armed workmen.

"Lord!" he gasped, as Stanwood came around the corner of the headquarters cabin, "I saw you fall, and I thought he got you! Are you hit?"

"No; I was merely ducking to get out of range. It was a good line, but his sights were set too low."

"That was a deliberate attempt to kill you—you, individually, Arch!" said the labor boss wrathfully. "You were in plain sight up there, and they recognized you. That shows the length to which these highbinders will go!"

"Morton has a good bit at stake, if you stop to think of it, Anson," was the quiet rejoinder. "There will be more of it before there is less. They are taking it easy down the road, and I imagine they are waiting for reinforcements. No doubt the auto that went to Orrville last night for provisions carried a wire call for a bigger posse."

Frenchley nodded and said: "Meanwhile, we ought to clean out this nest across the river, don't you think?"

"Yes. I told the Mexican three days ago that if he didn't clear out I'd push him out. Now, by George, I'm going to do it!"

"Shall I take a bunch of Moriarty's men and rush the place?"

"No. They'd get some of us before we could reach them. I've a better notion than that. Come on up to the power house."

**O**N the riverside north of the power house stood the makeshift "giant," the hydraulic contrivance by means of which the spoil from the big wheel pit had been cut down and washed into the river. Stanwood looked it over and swung it upon its ball-and-socket-joint swivel. "If you'll go around and open the valve?" he said to Frenchley, and the big man slapped his thigh.

"Gad! Why didn't we think of that be-

fore? Can you handle it alone? It kicks like a mule."

"I can handle it. When you get to the valve, open it quickly, so the pressure will come on with a slam."

Frenchley disappeared around the corner of the power house, and Stanwood swung the big nozzle and sighted it. There was a gurgling in the pipe; the section of stout hose stiffened and squirmed like a huge snake, and a two-inch stream as solid as a steel bar shot from the nozzle toward the flimsy structure across the river.

The first impact tore off a section of the corrugated-metal roof, and as the nozzle was depressed, a window in the game room disappeared as if it had been a cobweb film. Instantly there was an exodus from the doomed building; men falling over each other as they rushed out only to be caught by the powerful jet and hurled headlong.

By this time the men on the stagings at the dam and those behind the breastwork saw what was going on and a shout was raised. Riding the directing lever of the movable water gun with all his weight, Stanwood played the stream remorselessly. First the tar paper and then the planking was ripped from the skeleton framing, and with the intervening side wall gone the furnishings of the game room, roulette wheel, tables and chairs became missiles to bombard what was left of the building, and the internal walls went down in creakings and crashings.

IN a very few minutes the destruction was complete and there was nothing but a splintered and twisted timber wreck to mark the site of the dive. Not content with this, Stanwood deflected the roaring jet still lower. Piece by piece the wreck was dismembered and blown into space until finally the besom of destruction was tearing up the soil of the little hilltop and sending a cataract of mud to follow the wreckage.

Brigham came down from the dam stagings as Stanwood was shouting to Frenchley to shut the water off.

"Bill for damages there, if the Mexican wants to go to law about it, what?" said the concrete specialist, grinning.

"Hardly, John. Just before I went over there on the night Riley was beaten up I took a compass sight on that place from the door of the headquarters. Lopez wasn't careful enough about his boundary lines when he built that shack. It didn't stand on the old Spanish grant; it was fifty feet or so over on our land.

"He was duly warned off, and I had a perfect right to wreck the trespassing building if I wanted to. I told Manuel I'd push him if he didn't go off his own accord, and I think he can consider himself pushed, don't you?"

At this, Frenchley came around to view the results of his valve opening.

"Well," he said, "whatever else may happen, there won't be any more sniping from that gun nest." Then: "But there's another side to it, Arch. If that Mexican lives long enough he'll kill you for this."

"Not if I see him first," said the young chief, with a bleak look in the good gray eyes; whereupon he climbed to the top of the outlook hill again with his glass and was in time to see the evicted gunmen straggle into the sheriff's camp. There was some little excitement to follow, but no move was made.

Convinced, now, that Blatchford was waiting for reinforcements, he focused the glass on the distant divide. Shortly after he did so, three motor-driven vehicles topped the rise. They were trucks and were filled with men. Stanwood waited until the halt was made at the camp by the roadside before going down the hill to give the alarm.

"We'll get it now," he told the members of his staff. "Frenchley, you and John walk the lines and tell the men what to expect. We must bluff again and not let it come to killing. Every man in that crowd wears the brand of the law, and the courts will call it first-degree murder if a single one of them gets bumped off.

"Tell our fellows to shoot high, and for Heaven's sake not to get rattled. Pickett, take my glass and skip to the top of

the hill. Signal to us when you see them coming!"

Followed a prolonged interval of suspense that was worse than a battle actual. From his post in the camp street Stanwood could see Pickett on the hilltop; but the draftsman with the glass at his eyes made no sign.

Slowly the minutes dragged on—ten, twenty, thirty of them, and still Pickett stood motionless. Unable to contain himself longer, Stanwood went up to join the watcher on the hill.

"What's doing, George?" he demanded.

"Queer, but there isn't anything doing. Just after I came up here, two men climbed into one of the autos and drove away over the divide. Since then the big bunch has been taking it easy, smoking and doing nothing, so far as I can see."

Stanwood took the glass and looked for himself. Blatchford's posse had been a good deal more than doubled in numbers; but, as Pickett had said, the men were lounging about and doing nothing. Once more the sheriff was waiting; but for what, this time?

It was a full hour later when Stanwood left Pickett to maintain the lookout, and went down to report to Brigham, Frenchley and Hartwell.

"They are holding off again, and I can't imagine what for," he said. "Blatchford must have fully sixty men, now that this new crowd has come in. Still, they are just sitting around, smoking and playing cards. Pickett says two of them drove away in an auto just after he went up, and they haven't come back yet."

There was nothing to do but to await the event, whatever it might be; and it proved to be a long-drawn-out interval of suspense, with Pickett patiently keeping watch on the hilltop, from whence he came down every hour or so to report that still nothing was happening.

ALONG late in the afternoon Stanwood called Frenchley, saying: "Betty told me yesterday that Badger could throw some light on the murder that I'm supposed to have committed, if he could be

induced to talk and tell the truth. I'm going to put him on the rack, and I want you for a witness." Together they went to the tool house where the stenographer was locked up.

They found the young man with the wet-seal hair wave a comparatively easy subject. Some thirty-odd hours of close confinement, with no knowledge of what was going on or what fate was awaiting him, had broken what little nerve he possessed, and a few terrifying threats finished him.

Frenchley whipped out his engineer's notebook and took down the facts as Badger blurted them out in answer to Stanwood's questions. Yes, he had been ordered to shadow Stanwood, and he had had to do it or lose his job. Yes—again—he had followed his questioner across the footbridge and into the game room on the night of the shooting; Mr. Morton had ordered him to.

"Go on," said Stanwood, "tell us the rest of it."

"I—I was trying to get out of the way when the shooting began. I was too scared to see straight. I don't know who killed the fellow that was shot, but I know you didn't."

"How do you know that?"

"They took your pistol away from you when the two deputies jumped in."

"All right; so they did. Go on."

"After you were taken away they looked at the pistol and found it hadn't been fired. Then one of them said, 'They'll be back after this gat in a minute,' and with that he shot it off, just once; I suppose so there'd be an empty shell in it when the deputy came back for it—as he did in a few minutes."

"Ah!" said Stanwood, and the exclamation was a huge sigh of relief. Then: "You told your boss, Morton, about this?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He told me to keep my mouth shut; that if I didn't, he'd ditch me and I'd never get another job as long as I lived."

"One more question: who got you this job with Morton?"

"Mr. Jackson Underhill."

"All right. That's all."

Frenchley thrust the notebook and pen at the captive. "Sign your name, right there," he commanded, and Badger obeyed.

"That's that," said Stanwood, with another deep sigh of relief, as they went out and locked Badger in again. "Now if Blatchford will only hold off until Betty's lawyer can get here——"

THE interruption was thrust in by one of Moriarty's men who came running up from the road barrier. "Th' little leddie!" he panted; "she's down beyant in th' road and wants to see ye. Misther Stanwood!"

"Miss Lancaster?" Stanwood gasped and set off at a run. It was Betty herself, alone in her gray car which she had driven up to within a few yards of the sandbags. He sprang over the barrier and went to her.

"What on top of earth!" he demanded; but she patted the seat beside her and said, "Come up here; I want to talk to you."

He climbed in quickly, asking how Blatchford had let her get past him.

"He had his orders," she replied coolly: then: "Listen: Mr. Morton has been hunting for me ever so long. They couldn't tell him at Barker's where I had gone, and he has been driving all over the place looking for me. He found me at last in Orrville, where I've been all day worrying the telegraph people to try and find Mr. Prendergast for me. I've lost him."

"What did Morton want with you?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you—or at least I hope you will. He told me all the frightful, horrible things that are going to happen to you if you don't surrender yourself and the camp and the plant, and he seemed to think I was the one person who could persuade you to be reasonable if I should try. Of course I told him I'd try. I wanted to come, anyway."

"Have you come to tell me to surrender?"

"Do I look like it?" she retorted, with the adorable little grimace. "The truth of the matter is that this Blatchford person

is afraid to fight. Mr. Morton is going to drive him to it, sooner or later, but the sheriff man is putting it off just as long as he can. He has telegraphed the governor, asking for soldiers."

"He won't get them; not if I know anything about Governor Thompson."

"Let us hope not. But now let me tell you my troubles. I can't find Daddy Prendergast. He wired me yesterday morning from Pittsburgh, and that's the last I've heard from him."

Stanwood passed the westbound train schedules in mental review. "He ought to be somewhere this side of Omaha, by this time," he offered.

"I know. But I've wired to every train, and he isn't on any of them."

For a time they talked over the situation as it had developed; this and the mysterious disappearance of the old lawyer. Then Stanwood told her of Badger's confession.

"I'm so glad I made a spy out of Allie!" she gurgled. "And you didn't have to tie Charlie Badger up by the thumbs?"

"Oh, no; I didn't do anything but gnash my teeth at him. But see here; it's coming on to dark and you must get back to Barker's. What are you going to tell Morton?"

SHE laughed hardily. "I'll fool him if I can; tell him you must have a little more time to think about it. It's just anything for delay, isn't it?"

"You won't fool him for a minute," he predicted. "Our best hope is in Blatchford's lack of nerve. He has men enough now to come and get us if he only had the sand to order them in. He is just a plain coward. If he had any sense at all, he'd know that it's got to be a bloodless battle on our side."

"Why has it?" she asked, with a woman's complete and lofty disregard of consequences.

"Because every man in that posse represents the law of the land, and if we should kill one of them we'd pay the penalty, no matter how just our cause is. We bluffed them last evening with a show of force,

and we may be able to do it again—or we may not."

"It is Mr. Prendergast's disappearance that is worrying me," she put in. "I can't imagine what has become of him."

"I'm afraid we are due to lose out if he doesn't show up pretty soon," he asserted soberly. "As I have said, we can only put up a fight Chinese fashion—make a lot of noise and try to scare 'em off; it's got to be that way on account of my men."

"I won't put a man of my force in jeopardy of his life on the gallows if I can help it. And if Morton gets in, that will settle it. He'll find those records of his, if he has to take every building in the camp apart to do it."

"What have you done with the records?"

"They are in my trunk under the mapping-room floor."

"Hadn't you better bring them here and hide them in the boot of my car? There's lots of room to stow them under the tonneau seat."

"Not that! I'd about as soon give you a dynamite bomb with the fuse lighted. It would—" he broke off abruptly and leaned forward to listen: "What's that noise? They're coming!"

"Wait!" she interposed, with a hand on his arm; then: "It isn't the autos—it's—it's an airplane!"

By this time the nature of the vibratory drumming in the air was unmistakable; it was the steady beat of an airplane motor. They both got out of the car to look upward, but in the dusk that was now filling the valley they could see nothing.

Though the echoes from the surrounding heights were baffling, Stanwood thought he could trace the course of the passing plane from east to west. The machine evidently was flying high to clear the summits of the Junipers; the humming sound rose to a buzzing crescendo, then faded out and was lost.

"It is probably one of the mail planes off its course," Stanwood guessed. Then, speaking again to the need of the moment: "You must go, Betty. If Blatchford

should take advantage of your being here and rush us—"

She nodded and slipped into her place, leaning out to give him a final encouraging word.

"Buck up hard, Archer, dear. We'll never say die till we're dead. And I'll do my best to buy you a little more delay from Mr. Morton."

She cut the car to turn it in the road, and neither she nor Stanwood saw a dark figure that sprang aside in the shadow of the trees to avoid being run down by the backing car. When she drove away, and Stanwood climbed back over the sandbag barrier, the figure of the eavesdropper melted into the shadows and disappeared in the direction of the sheriff's camp.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FULFILLMENT.

**D**BACK in his office, Stanwood told Frenchley and Hartwell why Betty had come, and Frenchley nodded, saying: "You can see how the thing shapes up. Morton is hamstrung by Blatchford's lack of nerve."

"Morton will push him to it eventually," was Stanwood's prediction. "He's got to recover his records, or destroy them. And I haven't any idea that Betty will be able to persuade him to hold off."

"Well, here's hoping that Miss Betty's lawyer will turn up before it's everlasting too late, and that he's bringing the big stick along with him," Frenchley put in. "It's running in the back part of my head that our time is short."

"I have a notion that Blatchford will try to sneak us to-night. It wouldn't be hard to do. Our men are not soldiers. We must keep a sharp lookout. Price and I will divide up on the line between the road and the river if you and Pickett will keep cases on this side."

Following Frenchley's prudent suggestion the four members of the staff separated to begin a watchful vigil, patrolling the defense line and keeping in touch with the men lying behind the sandbags. Stanwood's beat was between the road and the

hill, and Pickett's was around the base of the hill to the right.

Hour after hour passed and there was no alarm. At half past nine the men of the night shift turned out of the bunk shanties to crowd the mess tent, and at ten the camp street filled with the men of the off shift coming in and those of the night shift going to work.

At the sound of the whistle Stanwood left his sentry beat to call for volunteers to relieve the guard line. In a short time the confusion of shift changing had subsided, the guard line was reestablished and the camp street was cleared. As the young engineer went to resume his patrolling he met Pickett coming in with a prisoner.

"A couple of the men caught this fellow trying to make a get-away through the lines," the athletic draftsman reported tersely. "I don't know who he is."

Stanwood turned the captive to face the light. "Come clean!" he snapped. "Who are you, and what are you doing in this camp?"

The man made no reply. Instead, with the quick twist of a trained wrestler he tripped Pickett, leaped the sandbag barricade and ran, zigzagging, down the road.

"Don't shoot!" Stanwood called out, as two or three of his men leveled their guns over the barrier, and the words were scarcely spoken before Pickett, scrambling to his feet, let out a yell: "Fire!—the camp's afire! It's the headquarters cabin!"

**F**ORTUNATELY, the men of the off shift were still eating their quitting-time meal, and at the shouted alarm they turned out tumultuously, a bucket line to the near-by river was quickly formed, and the blaze which had started at the back of the office cabin was soon quenched.

The fire was plainly incendiary. A pile of gasoline-saturated pine brush had been heaped against the cabin, doubtless by the man who had just made his escape. To Frenchley, who had organized the bucket brigade, Stanwood said:

"No question about what that was meant to do, Anson. Burned records are

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like dead men—they tell no tales. As Betty was leaving, she asked me what we had done with the evidence and I told her. Somebody was listening and carried the word to Morton."

"Shall we move the stuff to some safer place?"

"No; it is as safe here as it is anywhere. If you'll look after the patrolling, I'll take time off and camp in the office. I'd like to get a shot at the next bird who tries the fire-bug act."

Suiting the action to the word he went around to the door and let himself into the smoke-staled atmosphere of the interior, turning the lights off and seating himself with his rifle between his knees. Notwithstanding Betty's cheerful optimism he had a depressing conviction that he was fighting a losing battle. But for Blatchford's cowardice the reprieve, which had now extended over a day and a night, would never have been gained.

Only too clearly the young chief saw the final catastrophe closing in. The sheriff must make a move shortly; Morton would drive him to it. And with Morton in secure legal possession of the Little Horse project, the rest would be merely routine. Once intrenched in the receivership, and with the damning evidence against him and his principals recaptured or destroyed, the emissary of the all-powerful trust could snap his fingers at the world.

It was in this dark hour that Stanwood realized how little there was to be hoped for in the New York lawyer's coming—if he should come after the fact. With the loss of the incriminating records there would be nothing upon which to base a suit at law for recovery; nothing with which to convince Judge Bradley that it was his duty to rescind the receivership order. "Seize and hold," Prendergast had said in his telegram to Betty: the seizing had been done, but the holding was about to fail.

**W**EARILY the hours dragged along.

From time to time Frenchley or Hartwell or Pickett came in to report all quiet on the defense line, but there were

no other interruptions to the silent vigil. It was along toward morning, and the hot-eyed watcher in the darkened mapping-room office was still wallowing in the ditch of dejection, when the sense that is nameless warned him that some one had noiselessly entered the door at his left and behind him.

**B**EFORE he could turn his head a grating voice said, "Don't yuh move, damn yuh! I've got yuh covered!"

"Well?" said Stanwood, resisting by a mighty effort the impulse to commit swift suicide by springing up to face the intruder.

"I'm the pal o' th' man yuh killed over in Manuel's joint t'other night," the grating voice went on. "By rights I'd ort to plug yuh right where you're a-settin', but that'll keep f'r another day. I've brung yuh a letter from yer gal. Set still an' right where you're at till yuh count ten, and then yuh can read what-all she's writ."

It was again only by the supremest effort that he forced himself to obey. When he spun around at last and snapped the lights on, the intruder had vanished as noiselessly as he had come, and the letter, written in pencil on a piece of wrapping paper, lay on the desk beside him. He caught it up and read it with the blood pounding in his veins:

DEAR ARCHER: I'm writing this because a man is standing over me with a pistol and threatening to—well, no matter what he is threatening to do if I keep on refusing. The sheriff wouldn't let me go back to Barker's after I left you. He said he'd hold me as an accomplice of yours, and would send me under guard to Grass Valley. He put a man with me in my car to drive, but after we got into the Basin we were stopped and three men held up the guard and took me out of the car. I'm somewhere off in the woods now, and it is the horrible Mexican's men who have brought me here. They are furious because you drove them out and made them lose everything. They say I'm to tell you that you know what they'll do to me if you don't do what Mr. Morton wants you to. They've been trying and threatening for hours to make me write this, and I'm only doing it now to tell you that you musin't mind me. I'll stay game to the last. You know I will. BETTY.

For a staggering moment Stanwood thought he was going mad. When some measure of self-control returned he read the letter again, hoping against hope to find it a cruelly clever forgery concocted, perhaps, by Morton himself.

But there was no mistaking Betty's handwriting, and he sank back with a groan. He was utterly helpless and he knew it. Even if he should turn the entire camp force out to search there was not one chance in a million that Betty could be found and rescued.

In a blinding series of mental pictures he saw what had been done. Manuel Lopez, furious for revenge, had whispered to Morton that if he were paid for it he could bring him—Stanwood—to terms, doubtless without explaining the method. There had been a word to a trio of his gangsters and the thing was done.

For an agonizing minute or so he sat staring at the opposite wall with unseeing eyes. Then he roused himself with an effort that seemed to snap something in his brain.

**T**HREE was only one thing to be done, and even that might be too late: he must tell his loyal confederates that the fight was lost, and hasten out to the sheriff's camp to surrender himself, showing Morton Betty's pitiful letter and begging him to intervene quickly.

The decision reached, he got out of his chair stiffly, as if the experience of the past few minutes had made him an old man. As he turned toward the door he heard a little choking gasp, and the next instant Betty, herself, stood framed in the doorway, hatless, pale as a ghost, her short hair flying, her eyes staring as if they had looked upon things unutterable, her lips twisted like those of a hurt child trying to choke back the tears. The next moment she was in his arms, her face buried in his working coat, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"You mum-mustn't mind," she stammered, when speech came; "thu-this is just the woman of it, Archer, dear. I'll be all right in a minute."

He comforted her as he could, though his blood was boiling.

"Tell me when you can," he urged. "I've had your letter only a few minutes. How did you get away?"

"The two men who were left with me were drinking. I saw a light in the sky and I was sure it must be from the electrics here. I had seen which way the man who was carrying my letter had gone, and I thought it couldn't be very far.

"So I watched for my chance, and when it came I jumped up and ran. They chased me, yelling like fiends, but—but I guess they'd been drinking too much, for pretty soon they lost me in the dark. Then I just ran and ran!"

Stanwood's eyes were hot. "Somebody is going to pay mighty bitterly for this!" he promised.

Then the thought of her superb courage swept away all other thoughts. "You are just about the bravest thing that ever lived, Betty, but your letter nearly killed me. Wait—" He ran across the passage and came back with a lounging chair made out of a cut-down flour barrel and padded with wolf skins. "Curl up in this and get a little rest, if you can, sweetheart. You must be nearly dead after what you've been through to-night.

"I'll have to leave you and make ready for what's coming to us. The news of your escape has probably reached Lopez by this time, and when he tells Morton that his plan to bring me to book has failed there'll—"

Before he could finish the sentence a spiteful gunfire crackled upon the early-morning stillness and Hartwell came in on the run.

"They're coming!" he shouted; then, as he saw the little figure curled up in the barrel chair: "Good heavens. Miss Betty—how did you get here?"

"That part of the story will keep," Stanwood snapped. "Come on!"

WHEN they reached the outlying breast-work there seemed to be a battle royal in progress. The sharp crack of rifles was mingling with the roar of shot-

guns; but, so far as they could learn, it seemed to be all noise, as yet.

Stanwood sheltered himself behind the barrier and tried to penetrate the darkness beyond the radius of light thrown by the nearest masthead electric. He could see no sign of the attackers; not even the flashes from their guns.

"Whereabout are they?" he asked of Hartwell, crouching beside him.

"Search me," returned the Georgian. "From the racket you'd think they were right at us. But I haven't seen a man of them yet."

"It's a feint—a sham to cover up something else!" Stanwood barked out. "Take a bunch of Moriarty's men and flank the hill. That may be the place where the real thing will break! Hurry!"

Hartwell gathered a squad, ran with it to the camp, deployed it and began the ascent of the quarry hill. But, swiftly as the covering was made, it was too late. Halfway up the slope the climbing squad heard the quick spattering of revolver shots, and, facing about, saw a bunch of men running down the camp street, firing right and left as they came; saw the men of the off shift, who had turned out of their bunk shanties at the noise of the firing, scattering like sheep in all directions; saw incendiary fires springing up here and there among the buildings nearest the power house.

Instantly Hartwell remembered the young woman left alone in the headquarters cabin, shouted to his men and led a frantic race down the hill to the rescue.

It was Frenchley who gave the new alarm at the breastwork, where Stanwood was still trying to locate the enemy in front.

"They're in behind us!" yelled the labor boss, and Stanwood waited to hear no more. But by the time he reached the scene of the surprise attack, Hartwell and his men, taking cover as they could, had driven the attackers to shelter in Morton's deserted office building, and the scattered workmen were putting out the fires. Stanwood's first care was for Betty as he dashed into the mapping room.

"It's the Lopez gang," she told him quite calmly. "I saw them, you know. See the window? They shot through it."

"At you?" he raged.

"I guess maybe they thought it was you. I was chilly, and I put your coat on over mine."

"You are sure you recognized Lopez?"

"I did. I saw him and the three men who took me out of my car. They were under the electric light out there. And there were three more besides."

The reason for the sham battle at the barricade was sufficiently clear. The fusillade was merely a diversion to enable Lopez and his gunmen to steal in from the rear and stampede the defenders. By this means the Mexican had hoped to make his bargain with Morton hold good.

Stanwood moved the barrel chair out of range of the window. "You are safe here behind these log walls if you don't show yourself at the window," he said. "Hartwell tells me they have only their six-guns."

"What will you do to them, Archer?" she asked.

"I'm going to give them a chance to come out with their hands up. If they don't take it—well, they'd better."

HE had taken his handkerchief from his pocket to wave for a truce signal and was on his way to the door. But before he could step out her arms were around him.

"No, no!" she pleaded. "They'll kill you! Look!—Oh, God!"

The gunmen were still firing through the barred windows of the building opposite, and as Stanwood wheeled he saw one of his foremen who was trying to reach the headquarters cabin, spin around and drop in his tracks. Stanwood broke away, dashed out, and in a rain of bullets from the barred windows dragged the wounded man to safety. Not quite scatheless, however, for one of the flying bullets had found him and the blood was running down his face from a scalp wound. Betty shrieked when she saw his bloodstained face.

"Never mind me!" he panted. "Do what you can for Kendall." He whipped out again and found Hartwell. "You saw what they did to Kendall!" he rasped, wiping the blood out of his eyes. "Open fire on that building and keep it up until they stop their damned murdering! It'll be a good riddance if you kill every man in that shack!"

THAT, indeed, came near being the grim outcome. With the desperate recklessness of their kind, the besieged gunmen prolonged the fight into the graying dawn, and the spat of the revolvers and the answering cracks of the rifles of Hartwell's men kept up after the gunfire clamor at the breastwork had dwindled and ceased.

Stanwood left the siege to Hartwell, and, after washing and dressing his own wound, with Brigham and Betty to help, strove to save the life of the foreman who had been shot down in the camp street; but it could not be done. Just as the sun was reddening the crests of the western mountains the poor fellow died, with Betty, white lipped and pale, holding his head on her knee as he lay on the floor of the mapping room.

"What a night!—heavens, what a night!" she gasped, as Stanwood lifted her to her feet. Then Hartwell came in to say that his men had at last broken into the building across the street; and, in answer to Stanwood's urgent unspoken question:

"Yes, they were game to the finish; we'll have to say that much for them. Manuel and three of his sure shots have passed out, and the other three are not much better off. Frenchley's looking after the wounded ones."

Stanwood drew Betty to the door. It was the shift-changing hour again, and the gang foremen were trying to bring some sort of order out of the confusion into which the working force had been thrown by the night of battle. While they stood on the step the drumming murmur of an airplane motor came faintly from the upper air.

THAT plane again!" said Betty; and by searching the sky they found it, an insect dot against the blue momently growing larger as it swept down from the west toward the valley.

In another minute the plane was circling over the camp, still at a considerable altitude. "It's spiraling down!" Betty declared. "What does that mean?

Stanwood shook his head. "We'll know in a few seconds. You'd say the pilot is looking for a safe landing field."

Evidently that was precisely what the pilot of the plane was doing, for in its final sweep over the valley head the ship disappeared behind the wooded knolls in the valley to the eastward and the drumming of the motor ceased. Just then Frenchley came up from the breastwork where he had been posting a new shift of defenders.

"See that plane?" he asked; and when Stanwood made the sign of assent: "I suppose that means more trouble." Then to Betty: "This has been a pretty horrible experience for you, I guess, Miss Betty."

"No worse for me than for everybody else."

Frenchley looked across to where some of the men were carrying the dead raiders out of Morton's bullet-riddled office and quickly stepped aside to come between Betty and the gruesome sight.

"Cookee's got the mess breakfast ready in the eating shack, Archer," he said hastily. "Better take Miss Betty down and give her a cup of hot coffee," and Stanwood took the hint, walking his companion quickly away from the scene of the late tragedies. It was the big labor boss who kept the other members of the staff away from the mess shack while the chief and his charge ate their silent meal. At its close Betty looked up with her lip quivering.

"Is the worst over now, Archer?" she asked tremulously.

"I don't know, dear," he said gently. "But whether it is or isn't, we must contrive some way to get you out of this and back to Barker's. I'd have given ten

years of my life, Betty, to have saved you what you've been through in the past few hours."

"It is like a bad dream, but it is over and done with, now."

Hoping that Hartwell, Frenchley and Brigham had had time to remove the dead and wounded, Stanwood got up to take her back to the headquarters cabin. At the door of the mess shanty he paused to look up and down the camp street. Walking up the road from the barricade, with Tim Moriarty, gun in hand, trailing him suspiciously, came a tall, spare man in a flapping frock coat and with a silk hat of a long-obsolete vintage set well back on his head. Betty took one look; then, with a gasped out, "It's Daddy Pendergast!" she flew down the road to meet the stalking figure.

IT was two hours later, and the old lawyer had breakfasted and had finished going through the Morton records exhumed for his benefit, with Stanwood explaining as the investigation proceeded, and Betty, sitting chin in hand, listening avidly.

"Well," said the shrewd-faced old man stroking his chin reflectively, "in the language of the streets, Lady Luck is with us. We needed some pretty stout backing to justify the—ah—extra-legal things we have been obliged to do, and I think we have it all here—all we shall need and maybe more."

"Now I suppose you two younglings would like to know the ins and outs and whys and wherefores, and—but first, Mr. Stanwood, do you happen to have an extra tobacco pipe anywhere about your diggings?"

Stanwood quickly found a pipe, tobacco and matches; and after he had first, with old-fashioned courtesy, asked Betty's leave, the old attorney lighted up and began.

"Your telegram and letter, Betty, child, were what started the conflagration. A very little prying and spying on my part developed the fact that the power trust, or syndicate, or whatever it calls itself,

was working through your trustees, and, to some extent, with their connivance.

"With the power of attorney you sent me I was able to make the trustees believe that there would be a hereafter for them if they should dispose of the stocks and bonds of the Shoestring Company standing in your name; so that door was closed and locked, temporarily, at least.

"Next, there was the situation out here; a situation that had to be handled, as you might say, without gloves. I took it for granted that Morton was keeping a record of his transactions; hence my telegram advising the seizure. In the Chicago papers picked up as I passed through, I saw a news item stating that Shoestring Limited had gone into the hands of a receiver, and that the receiver's name was Morton.

"This meant that there was need for haste, so I chartered an airplane at Omaha—and had an experience that I wouldn't have missed for a fortune, and wouldn't go through again for another fortune.

"Knowing that my first business was with the court, I told my pilot to fly to this Grass Valley place, which we reached last evening, and where I had the extremely good fortune to meet your corporation counsel, Mr. Robert Calloway. Together we bearded the majesty of the law in the person of Judge Bradley, and after a good bit of argument, succeeded in convincing him that a gross miscarriage of justice had taken place.

"In your name, Betty, child, and with Mr. Langford's assistance, we made a heavy bond to be forfeited in case we should fail to produce our evidence; and that done, the judge issued a court order suspending the receivership, with a notice to the sheriff to that effect—which order and notice he intrusted to me to deliver.

"I had no trouble with the sheriff. He seemed glad enough to wash his hands of the whole affair upon my assurance that you would go to Grass Valley and surrender yourself in the matter of the shooting affray in the dance-hall place. You will do that, of course?"

"Very willingly: now that I have a

witness under lock and key who will testify that I didn't shoot anybody."

"You have? That is excellent—most excellent. I was afraid we might have more or less trouble about that: How did you find your witness?"

"Ask Betty," said Stanwood, with a short laugh. "She has been the goddess in the machine from the beginning. You say you had no trouble with Sheriff Blatchford; how about Morton?"

"Um—ah," said the shrewd one, "Mr. Morton's position was a trifle difficult, don't you see? *If* there had been a miscarriage of justice, as we claimed, he was, of course, the guilty miscarrier.

"I must admit that I—how is it you say?—took a long shot and swore out a warrant for Mr. Morton, charging him with all the crimes I could think of on the spur of the moment; and just now I trust he is on his way to Grass Valley with the sheriff's party, under arrest."

Betty clapped her hands.

"Daddy Prendergast, you are our good angel—nothing less!" she exclaimed. "But tell us: just where do we stand, now that it is all over?"

"Since the stock and bonds have been issued to your trustees in your name, and the trustees have been restrained from disposing of them without your consent, you are the owner, in fee simple, of Shoestring Limited, subject, of course, to the claims of what few other stockholders there may be. It is your money that has built the industry, and you own it." Then, with a shrewd look aside at Stanwood: "I hope you haven't made a bad bargain, my dear."

"Which bargain do you mean?" she shot back.

"Suppose we say both."

She pointed at Stanwood. "Does he look like a bad bargain, daddy?—even with his head bandaged up the way it is now? It is Archer who has made the bad bargain; he has to wait four years for his pay, and by that time I'll be old and all wrinkled—maybe."

The shrewd smile crinkled at the corners of the old lawyer's eyes.

"I've been keeping—ah—one bit of news for the last," he said, with a little chuckling laugh. "As I have said, there was more than a suspicion that your trustees were consenting, at least by their silence, to the plans of these people who would have robbed you of your property out here, and I—well, I must confess that I played a little upon their fears.

"Publicity is the one thing they can least afford; and before I left New York I had their promise that, for the *quid pro quo* of silence which I offered in return, they would withdraw their objection to your marriage to this young man, here, provided you were—ah—still minded to accept him."

"Oh, Daddy Prendergast—you dear!" she cried, flinging her arms around his neck and kissing him. "I said you were our good angel, but—but the angels aren't in it with you! I know you are blushing, but—hold up your head and let me kiss you again!"

IT was a flawless autumn day when the penstock gates were first opened in the Shoestring power house for a trial run of the turbines and dynamos. This was Hartwell's show; and besides the throng of workmen, there was quite a little gathering of spectators who had motored over from Grass Valley, not to mention Barker's cowboys, the few summerers who lingered at the dude ranch, and a party of railroad officials brought in by Major Briscoe.

Betty's car was among those parked in the camp street, but she had lost her pretty driving mate as soon as Hartwell learned of their arrival. When the prearranged flash had come over the wires signaling the starting of the first electric locomotive over the distant Mountain Division of the G. V. & P., Betty drew her lover out of the crowd at the power house, and together they climbed to a little elevation on the quarry hillside from whence they could

look down upon the scene below and up to the white wall of the dam bridging the cañon portal.

"Do you remember this place—this very spot, Archer, dear?" she asked softly.

IT was the spot where, early in the summer of the oil fight—and after the fight was fought and won—they had sat together on a flat rock and he had told her of his dream of the power plant, and she had told him of her love.

"I shall remember it as long as I live—and after," he returned soberly. Then: "You have made the dream come true, Betty. Without you, it would have remained a dream."

"Oh, no; I've only helped. And I was obliged to do that, you know."

"Obliged?—how?"

"Why, you see, when those old men in New York—my trustees—rose up in their might and sat on you, I said I'd show them what you were and what you could do on a—shoe string. I thought if I waded in and took hold with you, we might pull through, some way. It didn't come about just as I planned it; but no matter—it's here, and we've made good."

He slipped an arm around her and was silent, perhaps because in this moment of triumph his heart was too full for speech.

"Then there is Allie," she went on; "she has made good, too. She had a letter from her mother this morning. It seems that the home folks have been looking up Price's ancestral tree, and they've withdrawn their objections and are ready to say, 'Bless you, my children.' And Paul Stockton has gone back to Washington to condole with Uncle Jackson; and—"

"Well?" he encouraged, when she paused; "what other blessings are there to be thankful for?"

"I was just thinking," she murmured. "Nobody seems to be looking up this way just now. You may kiss me, Archer, dear—if you really want to."

*The complete book-length novel in the next issue will be "The Sungazers," by Henry Herbert Knibbs.*



# The Black Stone from Heaven

By Ernest Douglas

*Author of "The Pursuit of the Wooden Leg," "The Wooden Leg of Destiny," Etc.*

**A meteor falls from heaven and it proves to be  
the lucky star of two adventurers in Mexico.**

**M**AJOR ARTURO PECINA was no friend of ours. We had bumped into him several times in Mexico and immediately thereafter had bumped into trouble. So when we heard that he had been appointed comandante of the meager garrison at Magdalena I wanted to go right away from there. Joe Bonner, though, pooh-poohed my cautious suggestion.

"Run away from that pompous *cholo*!" he scouted. "If any running's to be done, let him do it."

"Not exactly run away," I argued. "But you ought to know by this time that his mere presence in the community means grief for us. We got the best of him in that Lagarto fracas and you can bank on it that he won't pass up a chance to get even."

"He'll manage some way to get us tangled up with the authorities and thrown into jail on a trumped-up charge, just as

sure as your hair's red. Now we haven't any particular business in Magdalena, so what's—"

"Haven't any particular business here? Pete, that's where you're dead wrong. The most particular business of my misspent life is right in this torpid old burg, or mighty close to it."

I sighed. From this I knew that Joe had not given up his idea of marrying Señorita Francisca de la Rosa, sole heir to the vast and valuable but badly rundown De la Rosa hacienda. We had come down from Nogales a week before with some notion of buying a slice of the estate, and as soon as he met the fair proprietress Joe's plans began to take on a decidedly matrimonial tinge.

Then his wooden leg had been stolen and we had chased clear over the Arizona border before he got it back. Now we were on the ground again; but I harbored a secret determination to head off my im-

petuous partner's romantic aspirations. Not that I had anything against the lady in question, but I just couldn't see Joe Bonner settling down to the humdrum life of a ranch owner.

After we had removed the grime of the railroad journey we left the hotel and sallied forth to see what could be done about rustling a meal. From the band stand in the plaza around the corner of the Calle Madero floated the dulcet strains of "La Paloma," and our steps turned in that direction.

On the broad earthen sidewalk across from the plaza were a number of little tables where the élite of Magdalena sipped lemonade or more potent beverages, gossiped of their own small affairs, listened languidly to the music, gazed at the kaleidoscopic throngs of shy señoritas and bold caballeros parading by.

AT one of these tables sat Francisca de la Rosa, lovely in a black-lace gown that glistened with jet beads. Beside her crouched a withered, mantillaed dueña; opposite her was Pecina, gaudily uniformed and medaled, chattering volubly.

I caught Joe's arm and we would have passed to the other side of the street, but she had already seen us. With a glad light in her black eyes, and a gleaming smile of welcome, she arose and extended both hands.

"My Americano friends!" she exclaimed. "I thought that you would never come back. Señor Bonnair and Señor Wayland, allow me to present an old family friend, Major Pecina."

Pecina bowed frigidly, endeavoring to efface the scowl that had set itself upon his swarthy features. He did not offer his hand, nor did Joe, who replied:

"We have met Major Pecina before."

"Indeed!" The señorita was nonplussed by the unmistakable air of hostility on both sides.

"It was at Lagarto," Joe went on. "Lagarto, where Major Pecina was held a prisoner of war by the revolutionist, Salazar."

This was pure sarcasm, for Pecina had

been one of Salazar's lieutenants and it was only by representing himself to have been a prisoner that he had escaped the punishment meted out to other leaders of the ill-fated Lagarto rebellion.

"And how is your wooden leg, Señor Bonnair?" the major inquired with exaggerated politeness. "Still giving good service, I hope. It was the talk of Lagarto, I remember."

"A wooden leg!" ejaculated Señorita Francisca in palpable amazement and disbelief. "Why—"

There she hesitated, blushed furiously, coughed into her handkerchief.

Joe went white under his ruddy skin. I could feel his powerful body quivering with anger. With an effort he controlled himself, ignored Pecina's venomous thrust and addressed himself to the señorita:

"We trust that we may have the pleasure of calling and resuming our interrupted negotiations."

"Certainly. Come soon. Come tomorrow."

"Negotiations!" snarled Pecina. "Señorita, it is my duty as a friend to warn you to have nothing whatever to do with these gringos. They are undesirable aliens who stir up trouble wherever they go, and as comandante it will probably be my duty to take steps to deport them."

"Deport us?" Joe glared savagely at the glowering officer. "Just you go and try it."

"Come on!" I hissed in Joe's ear. "We'll have the whole Mexican army on us in a minute. Besides, you can't start a fight before her."

"I'll fix that tin soldier," Joe vowed between clenched teeth after I had dragged him away. "I'll beat his ugly head off. I'll—"

"There you go. I told you that we'd better beat it before getting into a mix-up with him. Now you'll climb his frame the next time you meet and there'll be the devil to pay. He was bluffing about deporting us."

"There wasn't any call for him to refer to my wooden leg."

This seemed to worry Joe a lot more

than Pecina's accusation that we were "undesirable aliens."

"But she was bound to find it out sooner or later, anyway," I rejoined.

"Of course she'd have found it out, but not until I was ready to have her know. Pete, that's a woman in a million and before she ties herself up to any half man she's got to think a lot of him. I meant to have her thinking a whole lot of me before I let her know that the Germans shot away a piece of me at St. Mihiel."

We milled around and around the plaza, forgetting our hunger, while he clamored for war and I pleaded for peace.

JOE was still threatening to waylay Pecina and have it out with him that very night, when, all at once, the moonless dark, only faintly relieved by the feeble street lamps, became lighter than day.

Across the northwestern horizon flashed a streak of fire, more brilliant and dazzling than a dozen suns. It curved to earth, throwing off a myriad sparks, and disappeared. For a minute, perhaps two minutes—it may have been five—long tongues of quivering orange flame leaped into the sky.

I looked about at the crowd. Some were standing with mouths agape; others were lifting clasped hands or making the sign of the cross; more had fallen upon their knees and were muttering or shouting prayers for mercy. A plump Chinese pitched into the gravel at our feet, gibbering about devils. A bell tolled solemnly in the battered mission above the town.

"What do you suppose it was?" I breathed.

"Must have been a meteorite," Joe replied. "Big enough, though, to be called a comet. I've seen several, but not one as big and bright as that."

My red-haired buddy was sobered. He said nothing more about Pecina. We found a restaurant conducted by a Yankee not too excited to serve patrons. After a silent meal we went back to the hotel and to bed.

The next morning Magdalena was in

the grip of a violent hysteria. Rumors of the wildest and most improbable nature were flying thick and fast. The bartender in the cantina where we got our eye-openers assured us gravely that a company of angels had come down from heaven on a bolt of lightning and carried away all the babies in the village of Tubutama.

Scores of peons had already started out afoot, on horseback, on mules, in burro cars, to search for what they superstitiously believed must be some message from on high. They supposed that it lay right out of Magdalena, but we estimated that the meteorite had come to rest at least a hundred and perhaps a hundred and fifty miles away.

Along toward noon one of the weekly papers issued an extra edition assuring the populace that the display of the night before had been caused by an unusually large meteorite. Statements from the mayor, from Major Pecina, a bishop and a local priest backed up the editor's assertion that there was nothing supernatural in the occurrence.

The excitement rapidly subsided. The searchers straggled back, reporting that they had found nothing. By evening Magdalena was again just a somnolent Mexican town.

"All the same I'd like to see that rock, or whatever it is," Joe remarked. "It ought to be interesting. If I didn't have this business on hand here I'd say that we hunt it up and take a look at it."

"How do you intend to proceed, now that Pecina has upset your plan of campaign?"

"I don't know, Pete," he acknowledged miserably. "Except to get even with him I have nothing definite in mind; and I don't even know how that's to be done. But I'll tell you I'm not going to lie down and say I'm licked, even if I do have a wooden leg and that double-crossing pup lies about me till his saddle-colored hide turns blue."

"Guess I'll just let things take their course for a day or two and see what turns up. I'd like to see him start his deportation proceedings. That would give me a

chance to get to headquarters with the real story of the part he played at Lagarto."

"Why not go hunting that meteorite while you think it over?" I proposed quickly, seeing a chance to get Joe away from Magdalena and the keg of dynamite on which we were figuratively sitting.

"Might be a good idea," he admitted.

**B**UT there he balked. I wanted to start the next morning, but he hemmed and hawed and put me off. Quite evidently his mind was not on meteoric phenomena nor scientific investigation.

I don't know whether I would ever have succeeded in moving Joe had it not been for General War.

We were sitting in the plaza late in the afternoon of the third day after the descent of the meteorite. I noted, without being very much interested at the time, that we were under close observation by an odd-looking character on a near-by bench.

He was somewhere between fifty and sixty years old, with a short, graying beard that was carefully parted in the middle—a rather unusual style of facial adornment for a Mexican. He was shod like a peon in rawhide sandals and hatted like a movie brigand in a sombrero two feet across the brim.

The remainder of his attire had evidently been purchased, many months before, in some American army-goods store. It included a tattered khaki jacket and trousers, a pair of mangled leggings, and a Sam Browne belt, all sprinkled with alkaline dust as though their wearer had just concluded a long journey.

He saw that I was watching him and flashed us a smile. Then he arose and approached. As he came near I perceived that the luxuriant whiskers failed to conceal several livid scars. Later he told us that he had been wounded seven times.

"Have I the honor of addressing the American señores from Nogales?" he inquired in excellent English.

"We've been making that place our headquarters lately." Joe answered guardedly.

"I am General Juan Guerra, whom your newspapers call General Johnny War. *Guerra*, as you probably know, is the Spanish word for war."

I pricked up my ears and tried to recall what I had heard and read of General War, who was said to have been involved in every revolution between Panama and the Rio Grande in the last thirty years.

"You were at Lagarto," he continued. "Unfortunately I missed that engagement, as I was occupied elsewhere. It was a very nice fight, I understand."

"Very nice," I agreed laconically, remembering how narrowly we had escaped being numbered with the casualties.

"Times have changed," he grieved. "Peace, peace everywhere. It is hard on a soldier who knows no other trade from which to gain a living."

Sadly he regarded his sandaled feet, accustomed to being incased in campaign boots.

"I am what you Americans call broke flat," he added mournfully. "Even my weapons have been sold that I might eat. I was thinking of making my way to Nicaragua, where there is to be a revolution soon, but—"

**G**ENERAL WAR was fumbling in his pockets. "Do either of you know anything about minerals?" he asked.

"I was assayer at a gold mine once," Joe replied.

"Excellent! Perhaps you will tell me what you think of this."

He passed over a dull black object perhaps half the size of a man's fist.

"Looks like a piece of meteoric iron," Joe commented.

"Ah, señor, you do indeed know something of minerals. That is a piece of the meteorite that fell three nights ago."

"You have seen it?"

"I have not seen it, because some Indians would not allow me near it. They think that it was sent direct from heaven and regard it with religious veneration. This is merely a fragment that I picked up a mile or two from the main stone,

which an Indian told me is as large as a small house.

"Now I have heard that such stones sometimes contain precious metals. I have not the means to pay for a test of this piece, therefore I have come to you. If it turns out to have value I shall be glad to guide an expedition to take the meteorite away from the Indians. Of course I shall want a share of the winnings for myself."

"Unph, humph! If the redskins think the boulder came from heaven, getting it away from them may be some little chore. But I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have an assay made and in the meantime stake you to board and lodging. And you say nothing to anybody else about that meteorite or its location."

Delightedly the professional revolutionist shook hands with us. Joe gave him five pesos and told him to drop in at the Hotel de Sonora in the morning.

The only assay office in Magdalena was conducted by a snaky-eyed little Mexican named Pacheco. We left the sample with him and called for his report early the next day: I thought he seemed curiously agitated when Joe paid the bill and received from his hand a sealed blue envelope.

Joe did not open the envelope until we were a square or two away. When he read the assay sheet his face went pale and he sagged against an adobe wall with a heartfelt "Gosh!"

I SEIZED the slip. Gold, a trace, was what it said. Seventy-three ounces silver to the ton. A little nickel. More copper.

And six per cent platinum!

"What's platinum worth?" I gasped.

"Something like a hundred and ten dollars an ounce."

"And General War says that the meteorite is as big as a house. Rather indefinite, but it must weigh several tons. Say five tons, ten thousand pounds. Six per cent would be six hundred pounds, ninety-six hundred ounces avoirdupois. At a hundred and ten dollars an ounce that

would be—let's see—a little over a million dollars. Whew!"

"Pete, before anybody else finds out about this we've got to go out there and locate that rock as a mining claim. We'll all three be rich men. This business here will have to wait a little while. And maybe if I come back worth a third of a million dollars that will go a long way toward offsetting my wooden leg, even with her. There's some difference between a lame plutocrat and a peg-legged adventurer."

"Mining claim, you say. Think that's the right way to go about it?"

"I can't think of any other way. The rock is ore even if it is all on top of the ground and came from above instead of below."

"All right, let's go."

We hurried toward the hotel. On the way we passed the office of *La Voz del Pueblo* and a boy was just emerging with an armful of papers damp from the press. I bought one and glanced through it for news or comments on the meteorite, fearful that our secret might already have become public knowledge.

"Look here!" I howled. "Major Pecina is going to take a detachment of cavalry and go out looking for our meteorite. He thinks it may be worth sending to the National Museum. It is now known that the stone fell two miles east of the Indian village of Cieneguita, in the Altar Mountains, over a hundred miles from here."

"Hum-m-m! Well, we'll have to beat him to it."

"And that isn't all. The meteorite is on land belonging to the De la Rosa estate. An outlying rancho that has been practically abandoned for several years and is partially farmed by the Opata Indians."

"What? Let me see that paper."

Joe snatched the sheet from my hands and read the article for himself.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "Why, the platinum belongs to her."

"Pecina doesn't know about the metal, though."

"Not yet; but what if he finds out about it? How much do you suppose she'll get then?"

"Pete, that crook is going to rob the little girl just as sure as you're a foot high. And right when she's so hard up she can't even pay her taxes and has to sell off part of her inheritance or lose it all.

"By gosh, Pete, I'm not going to stand by and see her done. We've got to blast that meteorite to pieces and smuggle it out of the country before Pecina ever sees it. It can't be very far from the border."

"Yeah, it ought to be easy," I interposed sarcastically. "Nobody to stop us except the army and a tribe of wild and hostile Indians."

"It's a hard proposition; of course; but we've got to try, haven't we? I know she'll be more than glad to give you and General War your fair shares."

"Oh, well, we may as well get killed fighting over a meteorite as any other way. I suppose. If we keep on knocking around this country we're bound to get bumped off sooner or later, anyhow."

Though my words were pessimistic I was really as eager as Joe. The desperate nature of the adventure, the tremendous odds against us, the vast reward to be won in case of success, appealed to me as had none of the other foolhardy enterprises that we had undertaken south of the border.

General War was in the hotel lobby and, somewhat to our surprise, he was sober. We had rather expected that he would spend the five pesos for tequila, as he looked to be that kind of a citizen. We took him up to our room, showed him the assayer's report and acquainted him with the latest developments.

"Fine! Fine!" he enthused. "This ought to be as much fun as a revolution. If we can be first on the ground we can make friends with the Opatas and help them drive away the soldados who would steal from them the sacred stone that dropped from heaven.

"They are very fierce and brave fighters, those Cieneguita Opatas. Ah, but it will feel good to be in a real battle once more!

"The hard part will come later, when we want to remove the stone. The first

thing to do, though, is to see that the soldiers do not get it."

IT would be necessary to make the journey with saddle horses and pack mules, Guerra said, as much rough country lay between Magdalena and Cieneguita. He advised slipping out of town after dark that night in order to avoid arousing any one's suspicions.

We supposed that Pecina, Mexican fashion, would take his time about starting and perhaps not leave for three or four days. But while scouting around town, buying the animals, guns, ammunition and other supplies necessary for our fantastic expedition, we accidentally learned that he had pulled out, with some fifteen mounted men, shortly before noon.

"That means we've got to step some, General War," Joe remarked crisply. "Wonder what's his hurry."

"We can beat them," our guide declared confidently. "I know side trails that we can take so they will not see us. But our time to organize the Opatas will be short."

"Say, Joe, I wonder if we shouldn't tell Miss de la Rosa about her meteorite and what we intend to do," I speculated.

"No time," he vetoed positively. "We'll do it first and tell her about it afterward. Then, if we don't succeed, she won't ever have to know that I failed her."

That was Joe Bonner all over. It was no use to argue with him, so I saved my breath.

Joe and I had a revolver apiece and for our Cieneguita expedition we provided ourselves with good saddle guns. General War we armed similarly.

At a corral on the north edge of town we bought three wiry ponies and four mules. Two of those mules were to pack blankets and food, the others dynamite for the reduction of the meteorite to portable fractions. All our purchases we had delivered at the corral and we also carried thence everything from our suit cases that we thought we might need, for it was from there that we planned to make our start before moonrise that evening.

Finally even our guide was satisfied

that we had everything necessary. It was late afternoon when we returned to the hotel with the idea of resting an hour or two before undertaking the arduous night journey toward the Altar country.

In front of the hotel a squad of soldiers was lounging, very much at ease. We paid little attention to them, but as we stepped inside the lobby a sergeant barred our way and importantly presented an ornately sealed legal document. General War unostentatiously slid into the background.

THE document was an order directing that Joe and I be escorted across the border at Nogales and that we remain out of Mexico pending an investigation of our status by the immigration authorities. It was signed with many a flourish by Major Arturo Pecina, comandante of the garrison at Magdalena.

"Well, he has made his move," I murmured. "Now to get to headquarters with that story of yours."

Joe laughed but with a palpable effort. "This thing isn't worth the gold in its seal," he declared contemptuously. "All absolutely irregular and illegal. A mere comandante has no authority to deport American citizens from Mexico. Besides, we have passports."

"I know nothing of all that, señores," the sergeant replied with an indifferent shrug. "I know only that it is my duty to take you to the border. Your case will doubtless have the fullest investigation. You will kindly pack your grips at once for the train leaves in an hour."

"I want to see the American consul. Right now!"

"Unfortunately the consul is away on leave of absence. The consulate is closed. But at Nogales——"

"The mayor, then. I'll take this up with the mayor and see if any two-bit major can kick me out of Mexico."

"You are at liberty to try, señor. I doubt, however, if the mayor will see fit to interfere. There is the telephone."

Joe went inside a booth and, standing outside, I could hear his voice booming

into the instrument. When he came out his complexion was several shades more rubescent than usual. It was quite plain that the mayor would not interfere.

"Says it's entirely a matter for the military and the immigration authorities," he fumed. "Won't do a thing. Wasn't even half civil. That's another jasper I'll have to have an accounting with before I'm through around here."

"Looks like we're through already," I commented.

AT that instant a cigarette paper was crushed into my hand from behind. I glanced at it and tossed it carelessly aside after I had read these words scrawled by General War:

"I'll take the outfit to Nogales if I can't do any better. We'll start from there."

Joe was glaring at the sergeant, for once at a loss for words. I soothingly advised him to submit, argued that there was no other course open to us. The sergeant began to fidget.

At length Joe turned to the desk and sullenly asked that our bill be made out at once. The clerk reached into our pigeonhole and handed him a square white note.

As we stumbled up the stairs the sergeant was at our heels, apparently half in the notion of seizing the missive. Joe unlocked the door of our room, pushed me ahead of him and slammed it in the Mexican's face.

"No sense in making him sore," I remonstrated. "There's no chance of escaping out of here without dropping out of that window forty feet into a hedge of prickly pears."

"I know that."

Joe was ripping open the envelope that the clerk had given him. He perused the note with puckered brows, then passed it to me. I read:

MY DEAR AMERICAN FRIEND: Pacheco, the assayer at Magdalena, has just come to me with a very strange story. He says that two Americans who, from the descriptions he gave, must be you and Señor Wayland, brought him a piece of rock which he is convinced must be part of the meteorite that fell a few nights ago. The

rock was rich in platinum. Early this morning Pacheco reported the fact to Major Pecina, believing that it was his duty to do so. Pecina laughed at him, assured him he must be mistaken, but himself left shortly after for Cieneguita.

Later the assayer read that the meteorite is on land belonging to me, which is the reason he came to me with his story.

For many reasons I do not trust Major Pecina, although he is a son of an old friend of my father.

Won't you please come at once and tell me what you know of this mysterious affair?

Yours anxiously,  
FRANCISCA DE LA ROSA.

"See that, Pete?" Joe stormed. "She's depending on me—on us. Ain't this hell with the lid off?"

He touched a match to the letter and watched it burn.

"That's the reason Pecina arranged for our deportation," he continued glumly. "He didn't want us trailing out there and interfering with his little game.

"Up at Nogales the immigration officials will laugh at his silly little order and throw it in the wastebasket, but in the meantime it will have served his purpose. That's what will happen unless we can break away from this bunch somehow."

"Better not try it. I've a notion they'd like nothing better. Ley de fuega, you know."

We packed in gloomy silence. The moment we stepped into the hall the disgruntled sergeant pounced upon us and searched the suit cases, as well as our pockets, for arms. He found only the revolvers and those he promptly confiscated. Our passports he disdained even to glance at.

AS we trudged through the streets, guarded by the squad of barefoot soldiers, the derisive cry of "Gringos!" arose on every hand. Joe scowled furiously at the jeering peons, so merry at the sight of two Americanos being ignominiously escorted out of their city.

We were shoved into a vile-smelling little passenger coach and motioned to a straight-backed seat that was particularly hard and uncomfortable, even for Mexico. The sergeant and one of his men took the

seat behind us and two privates the one in front. Then they proceeded calmly and contentedly to fill the already reeking atmosphere with the pungent, irritating smoke of their cigarettes. We were relieved that they did not deem it necessary to handcuff us.

The train was due to leave at half past seven, but we knew that that meant any time before midnight. Bells clanged; engines banged into our car first from one end and then the other; we were transferred to every track in the yard and then started over the route again.

"Did you think of trying to send her a note?" I whispered.

"No use," he said. "It would be intercepted and likely do her a lot of harm. We'll try to communicate with her from Nogales—if we're taken that far.

"Pete, this is the first time in my life that I was ever absolutely stumped. There just isn't a thing we can do to head off that jackass of a major."

It was well after nine before the locomotive finally clanged its way northward up the narrow valley of the Magdalena River. Joe and I disposed ourselves as comfortably as we could for a long and painful ride.

The city was not more than two miles behind when the train was jerked so suddenly to a standstill that we were all thrown out of our seats. Simultaneously from the thick brush along the river bottom to the left of the track came a fusillade of rifle and revolver shots that smashed the glass in the windows and pinged through the air above the cars. We slid to the floor among the cigarette butts.

"Bandits!" was the cry that arose along the length of the train, mingled with shrieks of terror from women and children in the coaches forward.

"Soldiers!" screamed the conductor, dashing into our car and dropping upon his stomach in the aisle. "Pigs! Dogs! Cowards! Why do you not protect us?"

Thus berated, the sergeant and his three privates crawled warily to the west windows, peered out cautiously and began firing at random into the brush. Imme-

diately all the fire of the bandits became centered on our car. The shooting of the soldiers grew more rapid, frantic.

"Our chance!" Joe hissed. "Leave the suit cases. Come on."

**B**EFORE I realized what he meant he had dived awkwardly through the east window. I followed. Our guards paid not the slightest attention.

We charged up a steep embankment and into a thorny ocotillo cactus. Cursing fervently, Joe bore to the right toward the lights of Magdalena. By virtue of my two good legs I soon took the lead. Whenever he undertook to run with that wooden leg of his, Joe's gait became a lumbering roll.

The firing slackened, then ceased altogether. Still we could hear the excited yells of soldiers, passengers and train crew.

"Let's get down into the thick cover," Joe panted.

Again we turned to the right; we crossed the railroad and entered a dense thicket of batamotes. A cow path led us to the edge of the river, a mere brook at that season. Still keeping in the high brush, we sank down to catch our breath and consider what we should do next.

"Don't see where we've bettered ourselves," I complained. "Guerra is already on his way to Nogales with our outfit. We ought to have gone on and met him there and then sneaked back into Sonora."

"Maybe you're right," Joe admitted. "But that would have thrown us too late. Maybe we can get another outfit together here. Señorita—"

He broke off as the thud of a horse's hoofs on sand came to our ears. Some one was riding down the bed of the river.

"One of the bandits, I'll bet," I murmured. "Let's take a look at him. Or it may be somebody looking for us."

**W**E peered out between the batamote stalks. In the faint rays of the rising moon we perceived a lone horseman with a glowing cigarette between his lips. He pulled his mount to a walk and looked

about as though in search of some one or something. Then he turned his face so that the moonlight fell full upon it.

The horseman was General War!

Joe caught at my arm and whistled. Guerra stopped and then rode toward us, whistling the same note. We stood up.

"Hello, Johnny," Joe greeted. "How much did you have to do with that holdup?"

"Ah-h-h! I was afraid that I would have to hunt all night for you. When I saw you run up that bank I knew that my little trick had been successful, and I hoped that you would come to the river."

"Say, did you stage all that ruckus just to give us a chance to escape?"

"Of course! What do you think? One man can shoot fast enough to sound like a whole platoon if he has plenty of cartridges and does not stop to take aim."

"But how did you stop the train in the first place?"

"A few boulders on the track did that very nicely, my friends. The train was pulling up the grade very slowly so the engineer had plenty of time to stop after he saw them. Ah, but if I had only had a man or two with me we might have made it a real robbery instead of a trick."

Guerra sighed regretfully for the vanished opportunity.

"Where is the rest of the outfit?" I broke in.

"At the corral, still. We can be on our way in an hour. Here, Señor Bonnair, take my horse."

Joe scrambled into the saddle and we moved downstream with as little noise as possible. Soon we left the water. Guerra opened a gate in a pole fence and we waded knee-deep in lush alfalfa.

Five minutes of this and we were at the corral, feverishly at the business of saddling and packing. As our account had already been settled we did not trouble to awaken the hostler who snored in the adobe stable.

Guerra led us down a narrow lane between fragrant blossoming orange groves. We splashed through the river and climbed to a rocky mesa where the fluted columns

of orange-pipe cacti loomed ghostly in the moonlight's silvery glow. Out of the darkness ahead materialized the Altar Mountains, jagged and forbidding, which we entered before daylight.

I RECALL the following day and night with a shudder. Not for years had I spent any time to speak of in the saddle, so I was soon chafed, sore, aching.

Joe was in no better case; in fact, he must have suffered far more than I did for one of his legs was wood, rubber and metal from the knee down. Obstinate he insisted that his wooden leg made no difference in his horsemanship, but I knew better.

Our first stop was at a cluster of shacks called Conejo. There was only one tiny store, that conducted by a half-blind Chinese, but he had a small stock of American firearms and we bought a pair of revolvers to replace those the soldiers had taken. Then onward we pushed, over an obscure and tortuous mountain trail.

About all that Joe and I were able to do was to hang on in speechless misery and wonder how long it would be ere one of the dynamite-laden mules lost his footing and sent us all to kingdom come.

General War, however, was haunted by no such fears. He gayly caroled his way between the towering Altar peaks while we simply gave our steeds their heads and followed him. Guerra was as merry as though bound for a wedding, a song ever on his lips.

"Of course we will beat Pecina," he told us over and over. "This way is shorter than the one he has taken, and we can travel faster. Remember, the soldiers also have a train of mules.

"But we have no time to lose. An hour or so at each water hole to rest the animals and take a little food. The rest of the time we must hurry, hurry."

Guerra carried through his program so well that early in the morning of the second day we toiled to the crest of a black lava ridge and below us stretched Cieneguita Valley. A waste of sagebrush, greasewood and cactus for the most part,

but at that distance a sea of amethyst and mauve. Through the center meandered a green-fringed ribbon of silver that was Cieneguita Creek.

All this vast domain, said General War, had been held for generations by the De la Rosa family and had been its most productive cattle range. In the course of one of Mexico's revolutions all the cattle had been driven off and the De la Rosa retainers harried out of the country.

The present head of the family had not the means to restock the ranch and it remained in undisputed possession of the Opatas, who tilled the fields and orchards by their own peculiarly primitive and ineffective methods.

We took turns looking down into the valley through our only glass. Guerra pointed out the decaying adobe ranch buildings. A little farther up the creek was the Indian village, a collection of box-shaped brush shacks and round tepees that looked like huge beehives.

A few squaws, children and dogs moved languidly among the dwellings. One lone horseman was driving a bunch of ponies into a corral. Nowhere was there any evidence of Mexican soldiers.

"But I knew we would beat them," said our guide. "The army travels slowly and Major Pecina will not be here until tomorrow or the day after. Ah, my friends, we are going to have a very nice fight. I dreamed of a gray mule night before last, and that always means that I will soon be engaged in battle."

"Does it mean victory?" Joe wanted to know.

"Oh, no, not always. But what of that? There will be other battles to win if we lose this one."

We slipped and slid down the mountain-side, crashed through a tangle of cottonwoods and willows and came to the stream, where the weary beasts drank deeply. Cautiously we proceeded toward the village. It was no certainty that some zealous Opata would not pot us from ambush before we had a chance to explain the friendly nature of our mission, our desire to assist in protecting the sacred stone.

**N**OTHING of the kind happened, however. Eventually we caught sight of a dozen or fifteen Indians, mounted on lean and scrawny mustangs, observing us from the summit of a sandy hummock.

I drew rein hurriedly, but Guerra motioned us forward. My heart was beating wildly but outwardly I remained as calm as my companions.

"Keep your hands in plain sight," Guerra cautioned. "Don't make a motion toward your guns. If you do, we will all die very quickly."

I needed no second admonition to avoid even the appearance of hostility. Slowly we plodded up the hummock. The Indians regarded us with unmistakable suspicion registered on their faces of scorched leather.

Most of them were undersized and stringy, though there were three or four large and powerfully built men among them. I had rather expected to see Indians in breechclouts and war bonnets of eagle feathers, for these Opatas had little contact with whites, but they were clad in the blue overalls and coarse shirts that have robbed the red men in our own country of so much of their picturesqueness.

All were armed, their weapons ranging from bows and arrows to ancient muzzle-loading shotguns and modern repeating rifles. They looked as though they were perfectly able and willing to use them, too.

"Friends!" shouted Guerra in Spanish, sweeping off his sombrero. "We come as friends and with important news."

This elicited only skeptical grunts. A wrinkled but stiffly erect old savage detached himself from the rest and rode forward to meet us.

"Ah, it is Juan Guerra," he said, also in Spanish, which most of the Opatas understood. "And you have brought two gringos to help you steal the black stone from heaven."

General War laughed loudly at this blunt accusation. "I care nothing for your black stone," he denied airily. "But I am a friend of the Opatas and come to warn you that a score of soldiers are on their

way from Magdalena to take it away from you."

The Indian wheeled and rejoined his tribesmen. An animated powwow ensued in their own guttural tongue, punctuated by much waving of hands. Finally the chief came back to us.

"You are indeed a friend if what you say is true," he declared.

"Have I not ever been a friend of your people? What I say is true, as you will learn not later than to-morrow."

"We shall fight, of course. They shall not take the black stone from us. It was sent to the Opatas direct from heaven and brings a message from the God of whom the priests preached to our fathers before the Mexican government banished the missionaries. Our medicine man, Diego, is now fasting and praying that light be granted him and he be able to read that message."

"I am glad that you have decided to fight, Emilio. And we shall help you, I and my comrades, José and Pedro."

The chief acknowledged the introduction with a prolonged inquisitorial gaze. At length he seemed satisfied and briefly invited us to accompany them to the village.

Upon our arrival there, a few minutes later, women, papooses, dogs, even chickens, stood in the low doorways to stare at us with frank curiosity. A brush jacal, or open shed, and an adjoining hut were turned over to us.

We unsaddled; our horses and mules were led away to pasture. Emilio disappeared somewhere. Soon several young squaws came lugging watermelons and muskmelons, a bag of dried jerked beef and an earthen olla full of a mysterious stew. The melons were excellent but we managed surreptitiously to feed the stew to the dogs.

Ourselves we fed on the provisions that we had brought along. Like polite hosts, the Opatas discreetly withdrew when we began to eat. Such courtesy was the usual thing among them, Guerra said.

"With this whole tribe of fighting men at our backs, we will ambush and defeat

the Pecina party easily," Joe prophesied. "But the Opatas sure do think a heap of their black stone."

"We will never get it away from them," I predicted gloomily.

"But at least we won't let Pecina have it."

**A** TOM-TOM sounded from a larger jacal down the way. Emilio reappeared to escort us to the council that had been called to consider ways to repel the invader. Over fifty warriors lounged about on the ground or sat on cottonwood logs.

Most of the discussion was in the Opata language, of which even Guerra knew not a word, but at intervals Emilio gave us its general drift. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that the defenders should surround the sacred stone and give battle to the death.

General War, as a military man, was asked for his advice and he urged an ambuscade in a certain narrow pass several miles back along the main route to Magdalena. In this he had the warm support of a tall, fiercely handsome fellow named Lorenzo, who was apparently a leader among the younger Opatas.

"No, that would not do," Emilio dis-  
sented. "Until we know for a certainty  
that they have come for the black stone  
we must not make war on the Mexicans."

"It is a certainty," Guerra countered hotly. "For what else would they come?"

"They mean no good to us, no matter what they come for," Lorenzo put in.

But the counsel of Emilio and other older heads prevailed. The conference adjourned. We all got horses and followed the chief up a sandy arroyo.

"We're going to see it, Pete," Joe exulted. "The meteorite that's worth a million dollars. Oh, boy! And when I take it to her she's going to forget all about my wooden leg."

All that we saw, however, was a black point glistening above a high circular wall of rock that the medicine man and his assistants had erected to protect the sacred object from profane eyes and hands.

The heavy, sultry air vibrated to a monotonous singsong and the rasping of holy prayer sticks. Diego was still praying for light that he might interpret the tidings from heaven.

Emilio said that we must go no farther, so we sat in our saddles and surveyed the scene. All about were strewn great boulders of granite among which grew prickly yuccas and sotols.

"Not so bad, after all," commented General War. "Plenty of cover here. A good place for a surprise attack. I am sure now, my friends, that we are going to have a very nice fight."

The chief posted half a dozen sentries around the inclosure and the rest of us returned to Cieneguita. From there he sent several scouts out on the Magdalena trail with instructions to lose no time in getting back with their report as soon as they located Pecina's command.

**A**S we lay on our blankets under the stars that night Joe and I discussed the situation from every angle. We had little doubt that the Opatas, with the advantages of superior numbers and surprise on their side, would rout the Mexicans, but I could perceive no chance whatever for the ultimate success of our venture.

"Everything that you say is dead right," Joe conceded. "Just the same, we'll find some way to accomplish what we're after. Now there's that medicine man, Diego. We'll have to meet him. A lot depends on the revelation that he gets."

Some time in the night the scouts returned with word that the soldiers were camped two leagues up in the hills. At dawn the village was seething with unaccustomed activity. Guns were oiled and polished, knives sharpened with meticulous care.

The Opatas were grim of countenance but light of heart. After long years of peace they were going again on the war-path, supremely confident of victory.

Half an hour after sunrise the start was made for the field of battle. Every able-bodied male who had a firearm was in the tatterdemalion company; those who

had only bows were left behind with the women and children.

"And to think that we're going out with a tribe of Indians to fight the whites!" I exclaimed. "When we came back from France we thought that we'd had enough war to last us the rest of our lives, but we've had nothing much else since. This is the third Mexican rebellion that we've been more or less mixed up in. It's becoming a dangerous habit."

The horses were left with a couple of boys half a mile down the arroyo from the meteorite and the remainder of the journey was made on foot. Emilio, Lorenzo and Guerra disposed the Opatas among the boulders on the south side of the black stone, the direction from which the enemy was expected. Beyond lay a flat mesa that stretched away to the base of the blue-and-purple Altar range.

"I shall wait out there and warn the soldiers that they must not approach nearer the sacred stone," the old chief told us, indicating a palo-verde tree perhaps a hundred yards distant.

"You are crazy," spat General War. "Wait until they are right on us and then kill them all. Why throw away all our advantage?"

"They will not know that we are here in force," Emilio contended stubbornly. "We want no war with the Mexicans if it can be avoided, for they are many and we are few. After these more will come, and then more and more."

He trotted out into the open and took his place beneath the tree. Joe and I crouched behind a granite slab and Guerra lay a few feet away, roundly cursing what he termed the idiocy of the chief.

Behind the wall the medicine men intoned a solemn invocation to Iitoi, Creator and Elder Brother of the tribe. The religion of the Opatas, we had learned by this time, was a strange combination of Christianity and the primitive worship of their forefathers.

We had not long to wait. Across the mesa floated a cloud of dust. With our glass we could make out the troopers, slouching along carelessly. We counted

twenty-two of them. At their head rode Pecina.

**E**MILIO arose and stood in their path, a pathetic little figure in a dirty white shirt that was unconfined at the waist and flapped in the morning breeze. He raised his hand. Pecina halted and looked down at him.

A brief colloquy ensued, Emilio motioning earnestly in our direction and then toward the hills. Joe, who had the binoculars at the moment, says that Pecina laughed contemptuously. Then he drew his revolver and casually shot the chief in the mouth.

With an oath Joe dropped the glass, seized his rifle, drew a bead, fired. Pecina pitched off his frightened horse and sprawled over a white brittle bush beside his victim.

Guerra leaped to his feet and poured lead into the prostrate form of the major.

With demoniac yells the Opatas swarmed out of concealment, shooting wildly as they ran. Forgotten were their instructions to remain silent and hidden until the invaders were within fifty yards. Their chief had been wantonly slain and there was no room in their minds for any thought save vengeance.

The surprised Mexicans turned and fled in wild disorder, without firing a shot. One horse stepped into a badger hole and went down; his rider was immediately collared by the swift-footed Indians. No other prisoner was taken.

The Opata mustangs were so far away and so inferior to the cavalry mounts that pursuit was useless. At any rate the murderer had paid the penalty and the sacred stone was safe.

Silent and sorrowful, the warriors gathered about their fallen leader. Both he and Pecina were quite dead. The blood that had gushed from their wounds had already sucked down into the thirsty earth.

"I killed him," boasted Johnny War. "The moment that he shot Emilio I shot him."

Joe gasped with astonishment. "Let

him claim the credit if he wants it," he muttered. "Anyway, I guess I'm even with that slimy coward. Just out with his gun and murdered that poor, inoffensive old savage as calmly as you'd swat a fly. I can't feel a bit sorry for what I did."

Three medicine men, wearing coyote tails and other barbaric trappings, came and carried Emilio's corpse inside their inclosure. Pecina was stripped of his arms, his pockets rifled, his remains unceremoniously dumped into a recess between two boulders and covered deep with rocks. If scalping was ever one of the practices of the Opatas it had been abandoned, as had the war dance.

Joe and I crossed to the prisoner, a lank private who trembled violently between two wrathful Opatas. He was amazed to see us and asked in broken English when and how he was to be killed.

"That we cannot tell you," Joe replied. "Perhaps they will let you go, as you were not the one who shot their chief. Your comandante used very bad judgment."

"He was a fool. If he had not killed the old man we would have whipped these miserable Indians and carried the meteor across the border, where we would all have been reech, reech, reech."

"Oho! So he thought that the stone was valuable?"

At that the Mexican shut up tighter than a clam. He had said more than he meant to divulge.

"Didn't I tell you!" Joe chortled, clapping his hand on my shoulder. "He meant to steal the meteorite and desert with the whole detachment. Probably picked his men with that very end in view. And the little girl—she knew."

We slipped away, got our horses and jogged back to Cieneguita. The events of the morning had in no way improved the prospects for us. The soldiers had been repelled and probably would not attempt a counterattack, but as soon as they got back to Magdalena a punitive expedition would be sent against the Opatas. And when that expedition arrived, we wanted to be elsewhere.

From every hut arose a mournful wail, for the news of Emilio's passing had traveled ahead of us. Shortly before noon a procession, led by the medicine men, brought the body down to the village.

It was laid out in the dead chief's own lodge and the protracted funeral rites began at once. Guerra went off with Lorenzo.

"And now to get hold of those medicine men some way," said Joe. "They're pretty busy, of course, preparing Emilio's soul for its journey into the next world."

"What in the world do you want of the medicine men?"

"You'll see," was his enigmatic reply.

SEVERAL children, including two or three boys of fifteen or sixteen, found our jacal more interesting than the funeral. They stood about, watching us with wide, wondering eyes.

Joe walked over to one of the youths and plucked a half dollar from his mat of coarse black hair. Quickly he turned and extracted a quarter from another tangled poll. Then he presented the coins to the amazed youngsters from whose heads they apparently came.

The Opata lads bit the silver and showed it to their fellows. Then all of them began to run eager fingers through their hair in search of buried treasure, chattering shrilly the while. One of them slipped away and soon several of their fathers joined the group, grinning indulgently and unbelievingly.

Joe approached one of the men and pulled a peso from the pocket of his shirt. The others plainly expected him to do the same for them but he turned away indifferently.

"The white medicine man is tired of such childishness," I said gravely. "Some other time he may show you some real magic. He will talk no more to-day except with your medicine men."

"Well done," Joe approved as he withdrew inside our hut. "You've got the idea, Pete."

"Yes, but I was sure puzzled when you began to pull those parlor tricks. Haven't

seen you do any of your Hermann the Great stuff since we were in hospital at St. Nazaire."

"I didn't expect ever to do it again, but it's sure coming in handy now."

**H**ALF an hour later the three medicine men, very melancholy and dignified of countenance, called at the jacal. We shook hands and invited them into the hut, where they subsided upon our bed rolls. Joe gave them a cigar apiece.

After the smokes had been lighted, he absently reached out and drew a dollar from the ear of Diego, oldest and ugliest of the hideously tattooed trio. Two more dollars he found somewhere under the chins of Diego's assistants. Then he coaxed a few nickels and dimes out of the air.

The medicine men sat with the coins in their hands and surveyed them with ill-concealed astonishment. Joe launched into a eulogy of the dead chief and a denunciation of his slayer.

From one subject to another the conversation rambled, Joe doing most of the talking and casually performing a few simple tricks with a handkerchief and pieces of string. He subtly let it be known that he was the most powerful medicine man that his country had ever seen, and added that he must soon return to his own people.

This seemed to cheer the Opata priests a lot. They were evidently glad to know that they were not long to suffer competition from the red-haired stranger.

"And what of the black stone?" Joe asked finally. "Do you know yet what message it brings from heaven?"

Diego regarded him between narrowed eyelids. "Not yet," he grunted.

"Are you sure that it was from heaven?"

"Sure!"

"But it was afire and very hot, was it not? Could it not have been sent by the devil to bring bad luck to the Opatas? Their chief is already dead."

Diego seemed startled and impressed by this notion.

"My magic tells me that the stone came from the devil and that the whole tribe will die unless it is removed at once," Joe went on. "I would not advise any Opata to go near it. Its removal will be very dangerous, for the evil one is terrible in his anger.

"I believe, though, that I can weave a powerful spell and defy him. But it must be to-morrow, for not later than to-morrow night I start for my own land."

Silent and thoughtful, our visitors departed into the gathering darkness. They did not forget to take our silver with them.

"Joe Bonner, I've got to take off my hat to you again," I applauded. "Most of the time you're a brainless wonder, but now and again you demonstrate that you're an utter genius. It must be the genius of insanity."

"It's going to work," was Joe's pleased reply.

**W**E sat and smoked, listened to the funereal wailing, wondered what was going to happen next. General War came in late, joyously warbling an ancient Castilian battle song.

"The revolution is about to begin," he proclaimed jubilantly. "Soon Mexico will have another president, a really strong man to rule her and make her the greatest nation on earth."

"What do you mean?" Joe snapped.

"These Opatas—the young men, at least—demand further satisfaction for the murder of Emilio. They are already talking of marching on Magdalena. Tomorrow they start to make the sacramental saguaro wine and when it is ready to drink they will take the warpath."

"What do they think they can do, a mere handful?"

"Ah, but there are other Opatas in Sonora; this is only one small branch of the tribe; and all of them are very angry at the way the government has been taking away their farm lands and cattle ranges. They are determined to throw off the yoke of the tyrant at Mexico City. All the other Indians, as well as the peons, will

fall in with them when the uprising starts."

"Stuff! Don't you encourage any such madness, Johnny."

Guerra was astir early the next morning and did not stay for breakfast with us. Soon he came racing back, boiling with excitement.

"The medicine men!" he sputtered. "They say now that the black stone did not come from heaven but that it is a curse sent by the devil and must be destroyed at once or the whole tribe will die of a plague."

"Yeah: and did they tell you anything else?"

"Yes, they said that you are a great medicine man yourself and that you have offered to defy the devil and undertake the removal of the stone."

"That's correct. I figure on doing that little thing, with your help."

"Let us start at once. The sentries have already been withdrawn and no Opata will go near the meteorite. A stone that is worth a million dollars ought to be some sight, no?"

We saddled our horses and galloped up the arroyo, General War in the lead. Joe was humming some meaningless bit of A. E. F. doggerel and his face was flushed, his eyes feverishly bright. My own pulse was pounding away at a rate far above normal.

No one was about when we threw ourselves off the horses and crowded through the narrow gate in the rock wall. There we stopped stock-still to gaze at the sky-born wealth that lay before us.

**W**E had expected to behold something majestic and imposing, but the meteorite scarcely fitted that description. It was merely an irregular cone that looked more like smelter slag than anything else. Its sooty surface was studded with wart-like protuberances. Through the base it was perhaps twelve feet in diameter.

"Yes, it's all of five tons." Joe estimated judicially. "If it all runs like the sample Johnny found, it's worth over a million dollars."

"A million dollars!" Guerra whooped. "Viva la revolucion! It is financed."

"Hey? What the devil are you raving about?"

"It is true, my friends. We already have the men, the Opatas, and here is the money needed to equip our army. Make your bow to the next president of Mexico, Juan Guerra. You shall be members of my cabinet."

"Johnny, you're as crazy as a bat in a brewery. This meteorite belongs to Señorita Francisca de la Rosa, for it is on her land. We have come to get it for her, and by gum, we're going to get it! You'll be given your fair share and I don't care if you start forty revolutions then, but you'd better forget it now."

"Forget it! It is you who are crazy. This is our opportunity to make ourselves masters of Mexico. We are men of destiny. This stone was indeed sent by God, but it was sent to Juan Guerra, liberator of his oppressed country."

"You'll have to forget it. To-day we'll plant a box of dynamite under this thing, sack as much of the fragments as we can transport, and duck across the border. Then we'll come back for other loads until we have it all."

"But have I not treated you fairly? Did I not save you from being thrown out of Mexico? Was it not through me that you first learned of this fortune?"

"We'll grant all that, Johnny. But we can't follow you in this lunacy you propose. There are only three of us on this expedition and you are overruled, two to one."

"So I am overruled?" Guerra screamed. "What of this?"

In the wink of a cat's eye he had us covered with his revolver. We clawed desperately at our belts. An utter nausea of fear swept over me, for in our haste we had left our side arms behind. The rifles were slung from the saddles on the horses outside.

Tremblingly we elevated our hands.

"God forgive me for getting you into this, Pete," Joe blubbered. "And that girl at Magdalena will never know that I

did the best I could to help her. "Good-by, buddy. See you over yonder."

**G**UERRA waved the automatic in our faces, ripping out a stream of Spanish invective so rapid that I caught only a word here and there. We pressed back against the black stone.

It tilted partly over.

"What the—"

Joe turned, inserted a toe under one edge and actually rocked the meteorite.

"All right, Johnny," he said with a queer little catch in his voice. "Take your stone from heaven. It's all yours. We don't want it."

"You don't want it?" Guerra obviously suspected a trick. "You don't want a million dollars?"

"If you can get one dollar out of it, you're welcome. It's nothing but a cinder. If there ever was any metal in it, it's burned out. Lift it yourself if you don't believe that it's lighter'n a feather pillow."

General War approached gingerly and gave the meteorite a shove that moved it a foot out of position. Then he flew into a frenzy beside which his rage against us had been merely a mild pique. Bullet after bullet he discharged into the worthless clinker.

Deeply disappointed and at the same time vastly relieved, Joe and I went away and left him there, cursing and foaming.

The reaction was so intense that I could not at once climb upon my horse, but collapsed under a cat's-claw bush, totally unnerved. Never, not even with exploding German shells covering me with French mud, have I felt so close to death as I felt that day beside the Cieneguita meteorite.

In another instant, I am convinced, that deluded visionary would have shot us both. Now his dreams of power were blasted. And we had risked our lives for something of no more value than the ashes from a kitchen stove. What an inglorious anticlimax to a treasure hunt!

"Joe," I stammered weakly, "was there ever such a pair of absolute imbeciles as we are?"

"Never!" he agreed gloomily. "Still we—"

**H**E did not finish the remark. We went down to the village, caught our mules and packed everything that we had except the dynamite. General War was welcome to that, as well as to the pony that he rode.

Now that there was no longer any reason for us to stick around Cieneguita, we could be well over the Arizona line before the expected punitive column came up from Magdalena or Hermosillo. That was one fight that we would dodge, at any rate.

Without waiting to bid good-by to Johnny and without explaining to the Opatas that we had decided not to remove their diabolic black stone, we drove the mules northward. Luckily most of the population was then participating in one of the endless series of funeral obsequies and few observed our departure. If questioned we would probably have made some promise to return later.

We knew that the desert lying between us and Quitovaquita, on the border, was almost wholly uninhabited; also that water holes were far apart. It would be a dangerous journey but we did not care to travel east or south and chance having to explain ourselves to the military or wandering rurales.

To the west lay the Gulf of California, with no settlement along its shores for hundreds of miles. Yes, north was the way for us. In the course of our stay at Cieneguita we had asked careful questions about the route and felt sure that we would not go wrong.

A mile or so above the village we passed through a shaky barbed-wire fence that marked the boundary of the De la Rosa acres. The trail led us along the base of a gray dolomite butte and into a veritable forest of tree chollas among which cactus wrens twittered merrily.

Both of us were silent and preoccupied. Joe's eyes were on the ground as though in search of something.

Suddenly he halted, dismounted and picked up a little black pebble by a young

saguaro. He squinted at it, hefted it, passed it up to me.

IT was a piece of meteoric iron exactly the same in appearance as that which Johnny War had given us at Magdalena.

"What do you make of it?" I asked, mystified.

"Pete, of course you remember that Johnny said his chunk was only a fragment that he picked up some distance from the main meteorite. We know that the meteorite must have come over about here. Well, this is another fragment."

"But it's heavy. How do you account for that?"

"My astronomy, meteorology, or whatever you want to call it is mighty sketchy. I know less about it than I do about keeping out of trouble. But my theory is that the little pieces cooled off quickly before all the metal was burned up. The big one was so hot by the time it struck the earth, due to friction with the atmosphere, that there was nothing left but a lump of carbon."

"Those sparks that we saw when the meteorite fell—"

"More fragments, likely. At least, a good many of them probably were."

"Joe, there must be thousands! Wow! Maybe we aren't such hopeless imbeciles after all."

We grabbed each other and did a clumsy war dance there among the cactus while the ponies and mules looked on in brute wonderment.

"But — but — gathering—'em—up's—going—to—be—a job and a half," I wheezed as we jigged hilariously.

"Never mind. We'll find 'em if it takes all summer. Remember, each one of 'em's six per cent platinum."

I began coursing around like a bird dog and not fifty yards away came upon another black chunk almost as big as my head. After a second spasm of mutual felicitations we sobered and got down to making definite plans.

For various reasons we did not want Johnny War or the Opatas to know what we had found, or even that we were still

in the neighborhood. Finally we decided to angle back to the creek and go on north until we found a suitable stopping place, then trust to luck that we would not be discovered.

We found the very spot we were seeking in a dense mesquite thicket just back from the water. Here were plenty of mesquite beans and grass for our animals, so we made camp. After the heat of the day had passed we went scouting.

Our search that afternoon netted only half a dozen particles not much larger than marbles. When we went to bed we were feeling pretty blue.

The next morning, however, we found where a meteoric shower had fallen and set fire to a number of the chollas. Some of these pieces, though, were as completely burned out as the big stone.

Nevertheless, by night we had collected over seven hundred pounds, as near as we could guess, and that was all we cared to pack on four small mules across the blistering Altar desert. As there were no more burned cacti outside that small area, it is unlikely that we left behind any considerable number of fragments.

EARLY dawn saw us again on our way. We climbed to a pass through a chain of red hills and looked back upon Cieneguita, half a dozen miles away and queerly distorted by the heat waves that ascended from the floor of the valley. The village was calm and peaceful.

"All clear," I shouted encouragingly. "Nobody following us."

"All clear," Joe called back from the head of our little procession. Then he burst into song that made the slim, white lizards at the trailside cease their bowing and blinking and scuttle for their holes.

"Joe, to whom does this stuff belong, anyway?" I asked that night. "It wasn't on the De la Rosa land, but on the public domain. Maybe we ought to have staked out some mining claims after all."

"Don't be too technical, Pete. If we filed mine locations we'd have to declare what we found and it would be taken away from us by some hook or crook. Finders,

keepers, is the only rule that will apply in this case."

It looked that way to me so I said no more on the subject. Besides, I had my own private doubts as to our cargo being worth anything. That one fragment contained platinum was no proof that they all did.

Neither of us mentioned Johnny War. We tacitly agreed that we were under no obligation to share our discovery with him.

The following day we crossed into the United States between Quitovaquita and Sonoita. There was no one to stop us, to ask our business, to inquire what we were bringing over the international line. We wouldn't have known that the border was there had not the trail chanced to pass near an iron pillar marked "Repubica Mexicana" on one side and "U. S. A." on the other. Adequately to patrol his frontier between Nogales and the Colorado River, Uncle Sam would require an army as large as the one he sent across the Atlantic.

THREE days later we were in Tucson, where we attracted no more attention than any two other prospectors out of the desert. We hunted up an assayer that I knew, took him into our confidence and asked him to make a few tests.

With the assayer's consent we stayed right in his dusty little workshop while he crushed and ran the first sample. It was a tense moment when he lifted a shiny white button out of his furnace, applied to it certain acids, weighed it on a tiny scale, then fell to figuring on a scratch pad.

"Yes, it's platinum," he told us laconically. "Little less than five per cent."

"Whoops!" Joe grabbed me in a bear hug and we essayed another war dance that shook a row of expensive glass retorts off a shelf.

"Never mind," my jubilant partner reassured the alarmed assayer. "We'll pay for your glassware. Where's the telegraph office?"

"Turn the next corner and go two squares to your left."

"Say, whom are you going to wire to?" I demanded suspiciously.

"To that girl at Magdalena, and tell her not to worry any more. My half goes to buy an interest in her hacienda and relieve her of her financial troubles. And then I'm going to relieve her of all her other troubles by making her Mrs. Joe Bonner. Better come in on the deal, you old sidewinder."

"Come in on the deal? What—"

"The land deal, I mean; not the girl."

We persuaded the assayer to smelt our aerial ore right in his own plant. With his limited equipment the process was a slow one, yet it was anything but tiresome to Joe and me. We stayed right there all the time, weighing each gleaming metallic button as it came from the furnace.

When the smelting was all done we had seven hundred and sixty ounces of platinum, worth a trifle less than eighty thousand dollars. We arranged for the sale of the metal through a banker who thought that we treated him very badly when we declined to sell him an interest in our mine.

"Joe, are you really serious about that Magdalena matter?" I asked sadly as we left the bank.

"Serious? You bet I'm serious! The way I look at it, we're morally obligated to help her. It wasn't her fault that her meteorite was burned out and all the platinum was somewhere else."

"It wasn't our fault, either. I don't see where we're under any obligation, moral or otherwise."

"Say, that reminds me that I haven't had an answer to my telegram. Hope her creditors haven't foreclosed on her yet. Let's get the Magdalena and Nogales papers and see if we can find out anything."

WE stopped at a news stand, bought all the recent publications from Magdalena and Nogales, and carried them up to our room at the Santa Rita Hotel. They were full of news of the deepest interest to us.

*La Voz del Pueblo* had a badly dis-

torted account of the "murder" of Major Pecina. A later edition announced that a troop of cavalry had been dispatched to punish the "cruel and bloodthirsty Opatas."

According to the Nogales *Herald* of the day before, the troop had already returned to Magdalena. Its commander seemed to have been a man of some intelligence and judgment, for he had sent an emissary forward under a white flag and asked for a parley with the Indians.

From them he learned the circumstances of Pecina's death, also that he had not been killed by a member of the tribe but by a renegade Mexican named Juan Guerra. Upon being arrested, Guerra had attempted to shift the blame to some mysterious red-haired American supposed to have fled across the border with a confederate. But the Opatas assured Colonel Carrillo that Guerra had indeed shot the major and then boasted proudly of his feat. Furthermore, he had exhorted them to make war upon the Mexicans.

For that crime, more serious than the killing of Pecina, Guerra would probably be executed. A private of Pecina's command, held a prisoner, was willingly released. The much-discussed meteorite had turned out to be merely a cinder, shunned by the Indians, since the death of their chief, as a curse from the devil.

That was all.

"Well, there doesn't seem to be any reason why we can't go back to Magdalena," Joe mused. "Pecina's deportation order is as dead now as he is."

A hopeless, helpless feeling came over me. Would my buddy never get over that Magdalena madness? I had hoped that he would forget the dark, languorous eyes of Francisca even as he had forgotten so many other eyes that at various times had enthralled his unstable affections.

"We have the money to buy her whole estate now if we want to," he went on. "It may be just the investment we're looking for. Besides, I've got to go back and somehow prove to her that I'm all man even though one of my legs is wood. Come on, Pete."

Well, if Joe Bonner insisted on marrying Francisca de la Rosa and settling down on a Sonora rancho, I'd settle down with him.

This resolve cost me a severe wrench, for I realized that marriage would destroy to a large extent the more than brotherly intimacy that had existed between us since that far-away night when we first bunked under the same pup tent. It would bring to an end the roving partnership that had led us into so many strange places and so many bizarre adventures since Uncle Sam told us that he didn't need us any more. Of course I ought to have been glad of that, for I had always opposed Joe's ambition to embroil us in every fuss south of the border; but somehow I wasn't any too cheerful.

ON our way down we stopped between trains at Nogales and called on the banker who administered the financial affairs of the De la Rosa estate. All that Joe wanted, I knew, was news of Francisca, for all of his elaborate pretense that he wanted to talk business.

"We'd like to go into that De la Rosa matter a little deeper," he began.

"You're too late, gentlemen," the banker stated. "A deal for the sale of the entire property to an American syndicate has just been closed. She held off for some time, expecting to get money from a source that she did not disclose to me, but yesterday she came up and signed the deeds."

"That's too bad. Is she still in town?"

"No, she left last night for Hermosillo, where she is to be married in a few days to a childhood sweetheart. Very fine young fellow, I understand. He has just returned from Madrid, where he was connected with the Mexican embassy."

Neither of us said anything until we were a square down the street. Then Joe started to whistle softly.

"Glad to see that you take it philosophically, old chap," I approved consolingly.

"Philosophically? Pete, I'm tickled pink."

"Why, I supposed you'd be all broken up about losing that girl."

"You've been letting that imagination of yours get out of hand again. Can't I indulge in a little harmless flirtation without you getting all flustered over my impending doom? Don't you realize that I consented to go back to Magdalena only because you were so dead set on buying her hacienda? You talked me into it.

"But you wouldn't like it, Pete, tied down like that. In two months your feet would be itching again. You are an in-

curably restless spirit, born to ramble over the world hunting for meteorites and things like that."

He was spoofing, of course. I didn't care, though. A great load was lifted from my mind and a song of joy lilted in my heart. Joe was still my buddy, unhampered by feminine encumbrances. Alluring roads of adventure, not too smooth, stretched before us.

"Say, I'm feeling a little restless myself," Joe fretted. "Let's go find a revolution or something."

*Another adventure story by Mr. Douglas in the next issue.*

### A LOGICAL EXPLANATION

**W**HEN Harry Maynard was a member of Congress from Virginia he was discussing oratory on one occasion with the late Cardinal Gibbons.

"Preachers," said Maynard, "have the advantage over political speakers.

It is a dreary and disheartening business to get up on the floor of the House to make a speech and see the other members reading newspapers, whispering to each other, taking a nap or drifting away to the cloakrooms. But preachers are not annoyed that way. When they go into the pulpit, their audiences listen attentively to every word they say."

"Perhaps," the cardinal said gently, "a reason for that is that the preachers are supposed to be telling the truth."

### CONVINCED AT LAST

**C**LYDE DAWSON, a prominent attorney of the national capital, formerly lived in Denver and was at one time president of the Colorado Bar Association. In those days he had a good friend who was a Scotchman and whom he good-naturedly kidded on the subject of the Scotch people's extreme thrift, not to say "tightness." The friend could not see the point and invariably argued at great length that the accusation of parsimony against his people would not stand.

One summer, after many years' absence from the Highlands, he went back there for a vacation. Upon his return to Denver, he looked up Dawson and confided:

"Speaking of your charge that my fellow countrymen, the Scotch, are tight, Clyde: while I was in Edinburgh a few weeks ago, and while strolling through the streets, I took out a cigar to smoke but found that I had no matches. I stepped into a cigar store and asked for a light. The clerk told me that they did not furnish lights and did not give away matches but that they would be glad to sell me a box of matches. I left the shop; but, still wanting to smoke, I went into another and asked for a light. The clerk told me the same thing I had heard in the other store. I walked on and in the course of an hour tried four more shops, but they all answered alike: they didn't give away a light but would be glad to sell me a box of matches. And, don't you know, Clyde, I finally had to walk nearly two miles back to my hotel before I could get a light!"

"And that has just about convinced me. I really believe at last the Scotch are tight!"



# Red Maria

By Robert McBlair  
*Author of "Luck," "Settin' Pretty," Etc.*

**Fish Kelly wins a horse, a race, a bet, and the last laugh. A human and humorous story of Negro life.**

**M**R. WASHINGTON JONES possessed the grand manner. He bowed deeply from the waist as he entered the red-plush "settin' room" of Mr. and Mrs. Fish Kelly's two-room quarters at No. 11 Queen Street. The sweep of his grass-green fedora was directed toward Mrs. Fish Kelly in a gesture of obvious admiration. Mr. Fish Kelly—the husband in the case—did not seem to be pleased.

Mr. Jones was persona grata to the colored ladies of the town. He had arrived in the splendor of a maroon suit, green hat, yellow cane and white spats only a month before. His beautiful brown eyes, his high-yellow complexion, smooth straight-black hair and wisp of mustache had made an impression at once.

His comely manners and Bermuda accent, coupled with a judicious impartiality in distributing his attentions, had kept his star in the ascendant. There was a cer-

tain mysterious glamour, too, in the fact that he seemed never to work and yet could keep always most radiantly attired.

Thus it was perhaps not surprising that the thin, tar-black Mr. Fish Kelly—observing signs of interest and pleasure on the part of his wife—should promptly have begun to pout his long dark lips and to bat his protruding eyes. Mrs. Fish Kelly and Mr. Washington Jones sensed the significance of these phenomena, and the atmosphere in the sitting room became somewhat overcharged with emotion.

Mr. Fish Kelly was heard to swallow: his pointed Adam's apple reappeared above his high blue celluloid collar with something of a click. Mr. Washington Jones—habitually tactful—created a diversion by drawing a blue envelope from some recess in his form-fitting suit.

"De 'surance money!" ejaculated Mr. Fish Kelly, his prominent teeth appearing as he reached forward. The teeth re-

turned to obscurity as the envelope evaded his grasp.

"Reckon 'at's my two thousan' dollar, ain't it?" Fish demanded, belligerently blowing out his cheeks.

"Dat question," replied the high-yellow Mr. Jones, "is a matter of which I have no concerns. I were requested by de Virginia Insurance Company to deliver dis check to de lady who stands so becomingly befo' us."

"She my wife, ain't she?"

"Dat is as is," returned Mr. Jones non-committally. "I was requested to deliver de money to her, 'cause she is de one what took out de insurance. If I recollects," he continued—brushing a beringed hand over his glossy straight-black hair—"de restaurant was set on fire by de carelessness of persons whom I won't mention being as how it is possible dat even though one of dem is present dey may have been extinguishing circumstances."

MR. JONES stopped for breath, but he could have continued without being interrupted. Fish Kelly was silenced by the memories that Mr. Jones' eloquence had evoked. His thin, gangling, black-garbed frame relaxed; his lips pouted sullenly; only the regular appearance and disappearance of prominent white eyeballs relieved the stillness of his black face and clothes.

It was true that his negligence had occasioned the burning up of the Fish Kelly Eat Palace, which had been his and Macedonia's source of income. It was true, also, that Macedonia had been the one—at the solicitation of Mr. Jones—to place the insurance.

"De automobile what was burned was bein' driv by de same pusson what I have mentioned of," continued Mr. Jones, pursuing his advantage. "For dese reasons," the high-yellow gentleman concluded, "I was requested to give dis here check to de lady."

"Was you requested to make a speech while you done it?" inquired Fish Kelly bitterly.

"I can symtomize wid yo' desire for si-

lence," responded the slick-haired, slick-talking Mr. Jones. As he bowed himself from the room he continued to face its occupants—partly so as not to expose himself to Fish Kelly's large impulsive foot, and partly that he might bestow upon Mrs. Kelly a final languishing glance.

He left behind him the elements of an explosion. Macedonia sat down in the red-plush chair near the window and examined the check with soft-brown eyes, her oval light-brown face aglow with something more vital than the love of money. Then she raised her head and looked out of the open window upon the cobbled street that on the left ran for three blocks toward the white-folks' section of this Southern seaport, and toward the right, after half a mile or so, changed to an oyster-shell road passing between prosperous truck farms.

Fish Kelly had been her first beau, and she had married him. Fish—tall, thin, black and lugubrious—had appealed to her maternal instinct, and she had loved him rather for his humanity and faithfulness than for his brilliance.

But since the restaurant had burned, and two thousand dollars was on its way to her, Mr. Washington Jones had lavished upon her every evidence of regard. Her honest soul had seen no connection between his love and her money.

So elegant was his demeanor, so gifted his language, and so luminous were his beautiful brown eyes—no wonder her vanity, if no more, was stirred. He carried about him an aura of worldly polish and unlimited affluence. She looked up at Fish, pressed against the wall—a thin tall black figure with white-blinking eyes. The comparison was not favorable to present company.

"Fish," she said, "how come you always wear such dark clothes? 'Cep'n for dat red tie an' blue shiny collar, you looks like de inside of a lump of coal. 'Nough to give somebody de creeps."

Fish's throat began to ache, and he swallowed with difficulty. Macedonia had never said anything like that to him before. She had always thought black

clothes went well with his black complexion. Her comely oval light-brown face became dim to him; he shifted from one foot to the other and blinked rapidly.

"I aims to change," he answered in a strained voice.

"What you talkin' 'bout?"

"I aims to git me a checked suit, an' a green hat, an' some shoes wid de hair on," said Fish, warming to his subject. "If other married folks can be projectin' roun', reckon I can too."

"Who projectin'?" demanded Macedonia sharply. She felt the faint stirrings of jealousy. Somehow, it had never occurred to her that Fish could look at another woman.

"I ain't sayin' nothin' 'bout no names," responded her husband. "I'm jes' sayin'—*watch* me. Dat's all—*watch* me!"

"S'pose you're figgerin' on spendin' our good money on clothes?" snapped Macedonia, somewhat illogically. "Left to you, me an' yo' baby would starve."

"*Watch* me," repeated Fish Kelly. "Dat's all I say. *Watch* me!"

"You means you'd spend our good money on—you ain't talkin' 'bout no woman in particular; I know dat." Macedonia felt that control of the situation was somehow slipping away from her. No one was more obstinate than the gentle Fish Kelly, once he was aroused. Her heart came a little in her throat as Fish maintained his silence. She strove for a diversion.

"Dat lease on de new restaurant place got to be paid for to-day," she said. "Dis money come jes' in time."

Fish merely pouted his lips sullenly and blinked his prominent eyes.

"Dis is yo' restaurant," she continued, catering to his sense of importance. "An' can't nobody else tend to it. Us puts dis money in de bank an' draws out a hundred to pay de landlord. An' don't you forget to git a receipt."

**F**I SH covered the undulations of his kinky cranium with a felt hat a shade blacker than his skin and followed Macedonia out into the morning sunshine.

Across the street was the charred remnant of their restaurant. Fat sparrows hopped and chattered over the intervening gray cobbles; grass sprang greenly in the gutters. Happy good-natured colored people shuffled leisurely over the uneven red-brick sidewalk, or leaned on their elbows from upper windows and exchanged laughter with neighbors and passers-by.

The colored man without legs—drawn in a wheeled soap box by a white-bearded goat—hailed them cheerily as he rolled downtown after his newspapers. They passed Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen, and, on the corner, Hammer John's fragrant saloon.

On the opposite corner they entered the imitation-mahogany portals of the bank. Macedonia deposited the two thousand dollars to her account—Fish not having had the advantage of a reading and writing education—and drew out one hundred dollars, which she gave to her husband. "Give 'at to Mr. Moses, an' git a receipt."

"Where de money for my clothes?" Fish inquired as they went toward the door.

"What clothes?"

"Dem clothes I gwine git. Dat's what clothes."

"You think I gwine give you money to go projectin' wid?"

"It half my money, ain't it?"

"You go on an' git dat receipt."

Fish had a wild thought of going up to the cashier's window and demanding some of his money, but the cold and intricate appearance of the metal gratings repelled him. Pouting his long lips, blinking his prominent eyes, he shuffled resentfully up the street, while Macedonia looked after him with the thought that perhaps it had been unwise to let him go off with a hundred dollars in cash while in that humor.

Fish turned at the next corner into Nicholson Street and shuffled up that dilapidated thoroughfare in search of Mr. Moses, who resided above the space that was to be refurbished into Fish Kelly's New Eat Palace. His thoughts were not cheerful.

"We gits our money in, an' starts settin' pretty. Den what happens? Den she got to start makin' eyes at dat high-yaller talky-talk. Married man sho' have a hard time nowadays. Ne' mind. Watch me when I gits me a new green suit, an' a pair of dem natural hair shoes! 'At's what I mean—*watch me!*"

"Hey, Fish!"

Fish Kelly jumped. The voice had been unnecessarily loud, considering that it was right at his elbow. He looked down into the monkeylike features of Jockey Johnson, whose diminutive figure was half concealed by an enormous white-felt hat. A diamond horseshoe pin was thrust into the bosom of his collarless green-silk shirt, and his pipestem legs, in plaid trousers, were curved like the wishbone of a chicken. He seemed out of breath.

"Is you deaf?" he demanded. "Like to run my laigs off. Next time I starts after you I gits me a horse."

"How come all de runnin'?" Fish inquired. He felt that some new responsibility was casting its shadow over him. "Thought you was down to Louisville?"

Jockey Johnson looked cautiously about, unpleasantly confirming Fish's suspicions.

"Ain't dey somewhar we can go an' talk?"

"I can talk right here," said Fish defiantly. He pouted his long prehensile lips and blinked. "How come you can't?"

Jockey lowered his voice. "Fish, dis here proposition got money in it. Mo' money dan you ever heerd of. Not hundreds. Thousands. Tens o' thousands. Hundreds o' thousands."

"Nigger," said Fish, "shoot it in de leg, yo' arm's all full."

Jockey's monkeylike face screwed up until his eyes were little pin points of light. "Dis ain't no pipe, Fish. You come wid me. I gwine show it to you wid yo' own eyes."

This was rather more than Fish's curiosity could stand. He tried unsuccessfully to adjust his hanky shuffle to Jockey's foot patter as they crossed the street, went up a lane to the more-or-less-uninhabited oyster-shell road beyond it, and then cut

across lots toward a ramshackle wooden barn that leaned as if from fatigue against a sycamore tree in the corner of a weedy field.

When they reached the barn, Jockey Johnson took a key out of his pocket and unlocked the new nickeled padlock that glinted conspicuously against the rusted hasp and weather-stained dark pine boards of the barn's decrepit door. He pulled the door outward and stepped inside. Fish peered after him.

THE floor of the inside of the barn, or shack, had been strewn with straw. Jagged edges showed where a board had been broken in the wall beneath the cobwebby eaves of the roof, obviously to let in light and air. Silhouetted against the spear of sunshine that fell through the oblong opening, Fish saw the curve of a graceful neck and two small pointed ears. At the same time he heard a whinny, and the affectionate snuffle of the horse's nostrils against Jockey's extended hand.

"Ain't she a beauty?" asked Jockey in a voice full of awe.

Fish stepped inside. He was no connoisseur of horses, but he could see that there was as much difference between this horse and the average horse you see on the street as there is between a violet and a cauliflower.

Her legs were slim and straight, tapering off to the daintiest feet imaginable; her whole high-strung shining russet body, with its lean, rippling muscles, spoke of birth and breeding. But it was the eyes that told the story. Separated by a star-shaped patch of white, they looked upon you with a sort of luminous intelligence that called forth the best in your nature.

They were the eyes of a princess of royal blood. No wonder Jockey Johnson's voice had trembled with awe. Fish swallowed with emotion.

"Jockey," he said, "a man in Richmon' got a year for only stealin' a bass drum. Come dey ketch you, you goes to jail from now on."

"Law, Fish," Jockey was holding the soft muzzle against his green-silk shirt.

"I thinks too much of dis horse to steal it." Fish somehow knew that he was telling the truth.

"How you git her?"

"De owner give her to me."

"No white man ever give a colored boy no horse." Fish reversed his opinion of Jockey's veracity. "De mos' a boy ever got from a white man would be twenty years in jail."

"Believe it or no," replied Jockey. "You don't know my white-man boss. Dis here horse was formed to win de Futurity. De boss bet his shirt on her, an' at de start of de race she jes' toss her haid up an' down an' wouldn't start. Time she was whipped to a canter de race was over.

"De boss man face got so red it nigh burned his mustache. He say to me, 'Jockey, you want a horse?'

"I say, 'Yassuh.'

"He say: 'Dat horse is yourn, take her away.'

"Take her where?" I asts him.

"Out of my sight," he say; "let me see dat horse or you again, an' dere goin' be two daid animals," he say.

"Dat's my boss man all over. Oncet he was ridin' a ottermobile an' she broke down on him. A little colored boy was settin' on de fence. De boss man say: 'Boy, you want a car?'"

"What you want wid me over here?" Fish interrupted Jockey's apparently unending flow of conversation. "You want to give dis horse to me?"

Jockey Johnson cackled loudly.

"Boy," he said. "Dis here horse cos' fi' thousand dollars. I ain't no white man."

"I'll say you ain't," Fish agreed, teeth gleaming white against black skin as he appreciated his own humor. "Den where all dis million dollars you was talkin' 'bout?"

Jockey's monkeylike face screwed into a knot under the complications of his thought.

"Lissen," he began. "I owes freight, an' I owes feed bills; an' I got to have a hundred dollars to enter dis here horse in de race what comes off Sad'dy, at de

8A—POP.

County Fair. All told, I needs two hundred dollars. De purse at de race is fifteen hundred. You puts up de two hundred, an' we splits de purse."

"Dis here horse was given you cause he won't git up an' run. Den I pays you money for half intrus' in de purse!"

"Laugh an' show yo' eegrance," replied Jockey resentfully. "How come dat horse throw her haid an' won't run? 'Cause she love me, an' dat white man don't know no better dan make another nigger ride her.

"Dat's how come. Dey's good horses in dis here Sad'dy race, but dey ain't a horse can nose her saddle if I got de laig up on her."

Fish Kelly sank with disinterested languor upon the straw of the floor.

"Horses what is boun' to win is what makes de bookies rich."

"Fish," said Jockey earnestly, coming nearer, "I gwine give you a chancet to git rich. Dis horse cost fi' thousan' dollars! She worth dat for breedin', let alone racin'."

**H**E took a worn copy of a racing sheet out of his hip pocket and pointed with a twisted brown forefinger at a paragraph circled by pencil marks. "Read dat! Come straight down from Man-o'-War."

"Dat so?"

"Sho' it so. Now listen. I's busted. I done borry'd all de money I can. Dat nigger, V'ashington Jones, done promise to help me, but now he say he ain't got no money.

"Now listen. You puts up de two hundred what will git us in dis race, an' I gives you half of de horse an' half of de purse."

"You say dat high-yaller Jones want to come in?"

"He was want to take half intres' for fi' hundred, but I can't wait for him to git de money."

Fish's prominent eyes gleamed whitely against the blackness of his thin features as he looked over the beautiful slim lines of the russet mare. He liked the idea of preempting Mr. Jones' place.

"Which half does I git?" he demanded.

"We ain't goin' to cut her up," snapped Jockey. "You gits half of all she earns, an' half if we sells her. Ain't dat enough? Horse like dis is liable to win fifty thousand' jes' as easy as one."

Fish slid his hand in his pocket. The feel of the crisp green paper money reminded him that it had been intrusted to him by Macedonia for the purpose of leasing the space for their new restaurant. He didn't relish the thought of going back to her and explaining that he had bought half interest in a race horse, instead. It would be better to have her consent in advance. He explained as much to Jockey.

"Come I don't talk to her first, she make trouble. You ain't married—but dat's de way a woman is."

"I waits here for you," said Jockey. "Maybe I takes Maria for a workout. Don't be long."

**F**I SH rose to his skinny length, brushed the straw from his form-fitting black suit, put on his felt hat—a shade blacker than himself—and, with a straw hanging down over his retreating chin, shambled eagerly across the field and down the lane to Nicholson Street. As he turned to the right and shuffled toward Queen Street, however, his eagerness became somewhat dimmed by the pale cast of thought.

Macedonia was not the one to become immediately enthusiastic over race horses. She seemed to have, besides, a congenital distrust of Fish's most roseate ideas. The fact that this distrust was based largely upon experience did not serve to make Fish's present mission the easier. "S'pose dat white man come an' take dat horse back," she would probably remark at once.

Although Fish could hardly have put his thought into words, he sometimes felt that Macedonia did not possess a sufficiently sanguine temperament. He knew, however, that she had a shrewd eye for business, and felt that it was possible that the idea of buying half of a five-thousand-dollar horse for two hundred dollars would appeal to her.

As Fish turned into Queen Street his thoughts changed from the abstract to the

particular. About two hundred feet ahead of him strolled a green hat, a maroon-colored suit, white spats and yellow shoes. A twirling yellow cane confirmed the fact that he was gazing upon the rear of Mr. Washington Jones.

As if this sight were not sufficiently unpleasant, he was treated next to seeing Macedonia come out of Isham Walters' wood and ice shop across the street, and cross the cobbles as if to intercept the radiant Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones' green hat came off in a de-testably graceful bow. Macedonia's prim smile was heart-sickeningly happy. She stopped. Mr. Jones stopped. They chatted gayly. They wheeled, as with one accord, and strolled across the street to the Ice Cream Mansion.

Mr. Jones opened the rusted screen door of the mansion with a supple bow. Macedonia simpered and entered the cool and fragrant portals. Mr. Jones followed. The screen door banged shut behind them, disturbing a covey of flies.

Fish had a sick sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Macedonia's smile reminded him of the way she used to look when he would meet her during their courting days. In just such a manner, too, would they once together have entered the Ice Cream Mansion.

Fish's long lips trembled. His eyelids stung, and he drew in a tremulous breath.

"I comin' home to talk wid her, an' she eatin' sody pop wid another man!" Fish's throat hurt him. "I'll show her! I'll go my way—she can go hern."

He shuffled back over the course that he had come. At the corner he turned for a last hopeful look, but the screen door of the Ice Cream Mansion did not open.

**I**NSIDE the Ice Cream Mansion, Mr. Washington Jones led the way past the marble soda counter, laden with sliced watermelon and pies covered with mosquito netting, and chose a small circular table in the rear, adapted to a tête-à-tête. Macedonia's tête-à-têtes had in the course of a rather prim life been very few. Her light-brown face became darkened some-

what with color, her soft-brown eyes grew luminous and were almost maidenly demure. Even her glossy black hair, dressed in a style reminiscent of the pompadour, seemed to hint that a tête-à-tête was an adventure.

"Sometimes," began Mr. Jones softly after the proprietor had served them with two bubble-crowned beakers of frosted chocolate, "a man admires wid his eyes an' don't say nothin'."

He took a deep swallow, wiped the foam from his pinch of black mustache, and sighed. Macedonia covered her confusion by diving after a floating island of ice cream with a long-handled spoon.

"Maybe he don't speak," spoke the light-complexioned Mr. Jones. "Maybe he jes' plans to benefact."

There fell a silence. "Has you ever 'mired from far off?" inquired Macedonia demurely.

"I has, an' does," returned Mr. Jones with a voice full of emotion. He smoothed back his glistening straight hair with a jeweled hand and rested his beautiful dark eyes upon his companion. "An' when I admires, I aims to benefact. I ask you," he added, "who suaded you to take out dat insurance?"

"You did," admitted Macedonia, with lowered eyes.

"Dat's who did," he agreed, moistening his full lips as he remembered the commissions he had received from the insurance company. "Now I got somethin' else nice for you. When I admires, I benefacts."

"What 'tis?" Her heart beat fast as she wondered quickly whether her position as a married woman would permit her to accept the diamond ring or pearl necklace that seemed implicit in Mr. Jones' glow of beneficence.

"Oil stock!" said Mr. Jones in a dramatic whisper.

Macedonia started. Her light-brown hand paused in its spooned pursuit of an ultimate fragment of ice cream. Could it be that Mr. Jones was talking business, and not love?

"Dis ain't like other oil stocks," Mr.

Jones insisted. "Dis turns quick. I got a friend what is president of it. You buys two thousand dollars' worth to-day; in two weeks you sells it for four thousand. Two thousand profit in two weeks.

"Dat's de way I does my friends. An', bein' as how it's you, I goin' to 'range it so you git your profits in *one* week. How's dat? Next Monday. Dat's me."

A gleam of cupidity came into Macedonia's brown eyes.

"Me an' Fish was goin' to put dat money in a rest'r'ant," she replied indecisively.

"Dat what he tell *you*," replied Mr. Washington Jones, using an argument that he had often found profitable. "When I 'mires a woman, I plays straight wid her. But all husbands ain't like dat."

"You mean to tell me Fish Kelly got him a gal?" A flash of primitive woman shone through Macedonia's soft-brown eyes.

"All I say is, if you craves money to spen' on yo'se'f, you better make it yo'se'f. Dat li'l' brown I seen him wid is goin' to ruin dat skinny black man's money."

Macedonia got up so suddenly that her wire-backed chair fell over backwards.

"Can you wait till to-morrow mornin'?" she asked. "I plans to know mo' by den."

"I'll try an' hold dis opportunity open for you," graciously consented Mr. Jones as he paid for the ice-cream sodas out of his last half dollar. "But I 'vises you to ack quick."

**M**ACEDONIA'S heart was pumping hard as she told Mr. Jones good-by and went across the street to her home. To make two thousand dollars was one thing, but to lose her Fish Kelly was to have the foundations of life crumble beneath her.

Mr. Jones, with all his admirings from afar, did not appear to her as a satisfactory substitute. Her heart sank as the hour for supper passed and Fish Kelly did not arrive. She was sick with jealousy when he finally came in, about eleven o'clock at night.

His manner seemed strange. He was

sullen and resentful; his lips were pouted, and he continually blinked his prominent eyes; but he was also excited. Worst symptom of all, he refused to eat.

Hardly speaking a word, he undressed and climbed into bed. Macedonia presently went to bed too, but not to sleep. Her heart was beating so fast and hard that she thought it must burst. Her face was hot, her throat ached, and tears wetted her pillow.

Fish Felly, next to her, although asleep was not sleeping soundly. He tossed and muttered. Macedonia listened, with the keen hearing of love. All through the night she listened as he muttered excitedly.

Gradually the one word, "Maria," became more and more distinct. And, just before dawn, she heard quite plainly: "Ain't she a stepper! Ain't she cute! Maria an' Fish Kelly. Clear de track. Bam! Dey're off!"

Her name was Maria! Macedonia buried her face in the pillow. The next morning at breakfast—drawn and hollow-eyed—she opened the attack.

"You got de receipt for dat rent?"

Fish Kelly thrust half a cornpone into his mouth in order to give himself time to think. He had paid Jockey Johnson one hundred on account, and he now needed another.

"I'll git it for you dis mornin'," he replied. Macedonia's troubled heart was eased by hope. Maybe after all he had not been spending his money on Maria. She decided to delay judgment.

"You have it back here befo' lunch," she warned as Fish went out the front door.

Fish, like a moving segment of night, shuffled moodily over the uneven brick sidewalk of Queen Street, trailed by a thin shadow not as black as his skin. Life had become no less complicated since the afternoon before. Unless he could rustle up the other hundred, Washington Jones was apt to come and buy the half of that horse for himself.

As Fish shuffled up the garbage-cluttered lane and crossed the oyster-shell

road, he could think up no reason for requesting a hundred dollars that Macedonia would find convincing. His lips suddenly pouted as he looked ahead, across the weedy field, and saw none other than the radiant Mr. Washington Jones leaning against the corner of the tired-looking barn, talking to Jockey Johnson, who lay on the grass.

"I jes' tellin' how you done outbought him," said Jockey as Fish shuffled near.

"Dat skinny black nigger ain't outbought nobody," retorted Mr. Jones. Fish was now a double obstacle in his path, and he regarded him with venom. "I don't buy 'less a horse gwine win."

"Who say dis horse ain't gwine win?" Fish demanded.

"Why, it's a fi'-to-one shot! I'd bet fifteen hundred to th'ee hundred," Mr. Jones added with contemptuous grandeur, "ef I thunk you had de money."

"Ouch!" Fish ejaculated. "How come you kick me, Jockey?"

"Bet him, fool! Bet him!"

"Sho' I bets him," said Fish, looking defiantly at Mr. Jones out of the corner of his eye. His heart sank at the thought of how—in a woman's sight—Mr. Jones' radiance must throw his own somber blackness into eclipse. "Could I jes' git holt of de money an' bet him," Fish was thinking, "an' be lucky—an' win!"

Against the optimistic glamour of all these ifs loomed the imminent fact that Mr. Jones was about to call his bluff.

"I don't happen to have fifteen hundred wid me," answered Mr. Jones, and Fish drew a breath of relief. "De race ain't twill to-morrow. I meets you here in de mornin'."

**H**ALF an hour later, Fish Kelly drifted into the Queen Street sitting room and sat down in a dark corner, where he became almost invisible, except for the white of his eyes. Macedonia was seated by the window, sewing.

"You got dat lease?"

Jockey Johnson's agile mind, and Fish Kelly's prehensile lips, collaborated in the following answer.

"He want fo' hundred mo' dollars. He got to be paid for de whole year."

"I'll go wid you an' pay it," Macedonia announced, getting up.

They proceeded together along the sunny dilapidated street, and at the bank Macedonia gave Fish four hundred dollars. As they traversed Nicholson Street she noticed that Fish had become strangely *distract*, and had taken to rolling his eyes up each inviting alley.

She took his arm. But her attention was unexpectedly diverted. The elegant Mr. Washington Jones was strolling toward them. Macedonia released Fish, patted her glossy pompadour and glanced down at her blue-serge suit.

"Miss Kelly, might I be so kind as to have a word wid you in private?"

This publicly displayed interest on the part of the radiant Mr. Jones—and while her husband was present—confused Macedonia. She tittered—turned to ask Fish if he would excuse her.

But the distract Mr. Kelly had vanished.

Near by was a grocery store that had a rear exit into a devious alley, which again possessed fences capable of being expeditiously skinned. Tears of mortification burned Macedonia's eyelids.

"Come wid me down de street a minute," she requested, and led the way to Mr. Moses' office. That eagle-featured gentleman confirmed her worst suspicions. Fish had not been near him.

"Like you say," Macedonia admitted huskily to Mr. Jones when they were again on the street. "'At nigger runnin' wild. You know dat gal, Maria, I hear him talkin' 'bout when he sleep?'

Mr. Jones batted his eyes in thought for a moment, then stifled a comprehending grin. "Sho' I knows her," he answered, "an' soon as you buys dis oil stock I gwine tell you how to handle dat nigger."

"Will you, sho' nuff?" Macedonia quickened her step toward the bank. Five minutes later she counted fifteen hundred dollars, in nice clean bills, into Mr. Jones' yellow palm. "Now how I gwine handle him?" she demanded eagerly.

"Don't be in sich a hurry," protested Mr. Jones, putting the money in his pocket. "Can't you wait twill I benefacts you first?"

Bowing gracefully, he presented her with two thousand dollars' worth of bright green certificates. "Dat's fi' hundred dollars you done already got for nothin'," he explained.

"Is I benefacted now?"

"I'll say you is benefacted."

"Den tell me how I—"

"De onliest way you gwine handle dat nigger is to bus' him. When dey ain't no money but a woman's money," spoke Mr. Jones out of his experience, "a man come home for his meals."

"Dat's right too. But how I gwine bus' him?"

"Don't push me. What I was gwine say, 'at man riskin' his money on a horse. Him an' Jockey Johnson. You fix it so dat horse lose in de race, an' Fish Kelly go bus' sho'."

"I don't know nothin' 'bout—"

"You git de key to de horse's barn. Fish Kelly got it in his pocket, I reckon. You snitch it out to-night while he sleep. I waits for you in front of de Ice Cream Mansion, an' den I'll show you how we does de res'."

**F**ISH did not come home until ten o'clock that night. Hopeful dreams, however, dammed the jealous torrent at Macedonia's lips. Within a week she would be in a position of commanding affluence; and Fish Kelly, to-morrow, would be broke.

She did not even mention the four hundred dollars that Fish had vanished with; and actually smiled at his puzzled look when he climbed frowning into bed. He slept soundly, however, and in the middle of the night Macedonia slid from bed, found a new key in his vest pocket, dressed hurriedly and stole silently out into the dark, deserted street.

Mr. Jones emerged from the shadow of a tree. They proceeded in silence down the street and across the weedy field to where they unlocked the door to Maria's stable. It hurt Macedonia to hold the gen-

tle horse's head while Mr. Jones thrust a small sponge far up its nostril.

"Now," Mr. Jones explained as they returned, "I gwine bet against dat nigger to-morrow. Gwine bet him fifteen hundred to th'ee hundred, jes' to teach him he ain't —jes' to teach him to leave dat Maria gal alone. Major Braxton, at de track, gwine stakehold it for us. An' I gwine come by an' take you to de race, so you can see him lose."

**F**Ish was gone the next morning when Macedonia awoke. She donned a red dress reserved for gala occasions, and after breakfast sat down to await Mr. Jones.

Life smiled upon her. Fish would go broke, and she would be rich. Good-by, Maria, good-by. Noon came; one o'clock, two o'clock came—but Mr. Jones did not. At last, however, there came a knock on the door.

She opened it with a smile of relief, and was taken aback to see a burly red-faced white man in a blue suit and derby hat.

"I am looking for a colored boy named Washington Jones. Do you know where he is?"

"No, suh, mister. He was comin' by to carry me to de races, but he ain't shown up."

"How much oil stock did he sell *you*?" the man inquired.

"Oil stock? Two thousan' dollars' worth for fifteen hundred. Why, mister? Dey ain't nothin' wrong?"

"Nothing except that yellow scoundrel's been selling bum oil stock to all the colored women in town."

"Mister, you don't mean my money is gone! Come you ketch him, couldn't you make him give it back? Couldn't you, mister?"

"There'd be so many claims against him, I don't imagine anybody would get anything back."

"Don't look, mister. Here he come across de street now!"

"Keep right on talking," said the white man. "Where are you going?"

Macedonia was flying like a red comet down the street, not waiting for the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Jones arrested. Fish Kelly had bet Mr. Jones three hundred to fifteen hundred on the race. If she could only get there in time!

"Mister, what time do de races begin?" she pleaded breathlessly of the street-car conductor when she scrambled aboard at Monticello Avenue.

"Be 'bout over by the time we get there."

Macedonia was almost ill with nervousness and remorse as the open trolley car bumped its leisurely way to the race track. She had criticized Fish, and extolled Mr. Jones. She had hurt Fish Kelly's feelings.

This, and this alone, she was sure, had driven Fish to a romantic dalliance. More, she had intrusted their money to Washington Jones—and now it was gone forever. Not satisfied with all that, she had crept forth into the night to trick the simple, trusting Fish Kelly.

"De Lawd he do right to punish me," she murmured, biting her trembling lip. "But do Fish lose his bet, de punishment gwine drap on him an' my baby, too. Oh, Lawd, does you he'p me jes' a little bit dis time, I ain't never gwine be a bad wife no mo'. Oh, Lawd, can't you make dis here cyar go quicker?"

Even a Monticello Avenue trolley car must at length get somewhere.

**L**ITTLE boy! Hey, peanut boy! Does you know has dey raced de race what Mister Fish Kelly was a-bettin' on?"

"Can't tell you dat. What was de name of de horse?"

"I don't know de name of de horse!" Macedonia looked wildly about. Her prim career had never included race tracks. Hurrying pedestrians jostled her as they pressed through the crowd about the track.

Above, on her right, rows of white folks ascended in tier on tier of colorful scarfs and clothing, the sunlight now and then glittering on the glass of leveled binoculars. Into the bewilderment of her mind floated a tenor scream.

"Maria! Dere you is! Show 'em de palms of yo' feet!"

On her left, standing on the back of a seat in a section massed with colored folks, Fish Kelly—a wild look on his thin black face—was waving his black felt hat at the track below.

Plunging through the crowd, Macedonia scrambled over the seated customers who blocked the ascending aisle and threw herself hysterically upon her precariously balanced husband. She and Fish landed in a complicated and bruised condition beneath the feet of four customers two tiers below.

"Fish!" she cried at the surprised and injured black countenance staring at her, "whar at is dat horse?"

Apparently Fish did not feel like being drawn into what might become a protracted conversation. With a few brief but convulsive efforts he managed to climb upward through the clothing and limbs of the ladies and gentlemen who covered them and to emerge into the upper air and sunlight. Macedonia emerged at his side.

Belligerent murmurs began to arise from dislocated ladies and gentlemen, but Fish Kelly heeded them not. And Macedonia realized the cause. Curveting rhythmically toward the barrier—bandaged ankles leaping, hooded heads tossing, nine horses were tense for the start. From the crowd swelled suddenly a full-throated roar.

"They're off!"

All but one. Its back obstinately curved, one horse was prancing sidewise, snorting temperamentally and throwing its head in the air. Left at the post.

"Fish, baby, will you ever forgib me?" Macedonia threw her arms about Fish's neck. "I helped Mr. Jones put a sponge in yo' horse's nose! Fish, honey, I wouldn't 'a' done it 'less I thought you never loved me.

"I thought—honey, I didn't know Maria was a horse! Fish, honey, we's ruined now." The tears streamed down Macedonia's face. "Fish, it's all my fault!"

Macedonia was aroused from her re-

morseful supplications by a tenor wail in her ear.

"Maria! Dat's my baby wid de green shirt on! Show 'em, baby, show 'em! Show 'em de palms of yo' feet!"

Macedonia rubbed the tears from her eyes. On the last far turn, five horses were bunched in the lead. Three others followed them closely. Four lengths behind, a hopeless horse straggled alone. But the jersey of the straggling rider was red—and Fish was cheering for green.

Now as the horses headed homeward, those behind were obscured by the dust. But the dark sweat-shiny bodies of the leaders were clear in the sunshine against the dun clay track. Macedonia recognized a monkey face on one of those leading jockeys. His cap and shirt were green.

A woman's scream pierced the roar of sound.

"Dar he, Fish! See Jockey? She gainin', Fish! She gainin'!"

Macedonia abandoned her husband. She maintained her balance by a grip on the necktie of the man beside her, expressed the tension of the moment by pounding on the feathered hat of a colored lady below.

**B**UT no one seemed to mind. Red Maria—the long shot, the russet mare with the bad record—had been with the leaders from the start, and now in the stretch had her nose at the favorite's bridle. She gained an inch. Another. Her dilated nostrils crept forward—level now with the fleck of foam on the favorite's bit.

Stride for stride, heartbeat for heartbeat, the two thoroughbreds matched their bodies and their souls as they swept by toward the wire.

For a long time the judges consulted. And then, opposite first place, was inserted the number twelve.

"Maria done won!" Fish screamed.

"Fish, our money done come back! Does you forgib me, honey?"

The gleam of thirty-two white teeth became slowly eclipsed by the shadow that fell over Fish's perspiring ebony face.

"Forgib you for what?"

"Didn't you hear what I tol' you endurin' de race?"

"What you tol' me?"

"Didn't you hear nothin' at all what I said?"

"Us foun' a sponge up Maria's nose dis mornin'. Too busy watchin' how dat horse would run to be listenin'. What you done done now?"

Feminine intuition warned Macedonia that sometimes a married couple's most important secrets are those known to only one of the pair. She kept the whole truth in reserve.

"I los' our money, Fish. Put it in oil

stock wid dat good-for-nothin' yaller nigger, Jones. I done had him arrested—but dat ain't gwine do us no good."

"You done had him arrested?" Fish's face again was alight with the sunshine of white teeth and sparkling eyes. "Jes' so you shet of dat yaller nigger, I ain't carin' what you lose. Does you love me?"

"Fish!" Macedonia's voice was tremulous. "I ain't never loved nobody else!"

"An' you gwine love me mo' dan ever, too," Fish predicted as he led the way toward the stakeholder and the purse. "'Cause now I can buy me a spinach-green suit, an' a pair of dem natural hair shoes!"



### GOSSIP OF THE GREAT

#### PEAKING of Washington:

General Nelson A. Miles, who is now eighty-four years old and used to be a valiant Indian fighter, is a mighty golf player. On a pleasant day he goes nine or eighteen holes on the public links in East Potomac Park.

Senator Medill McCormick and Mrs. McCormick are authorities on Holstein cattle. On their Illinois farm they concentrate on Holstein breeding and study the business together.

When Chief Justice Taft was a candidate for the presidency, he had a millionaire brother who helped along a lot with contributions to the campaign fund. Senator Underwood, prominent candidate for the Democratic nomination for president, last year, has a brother of the same kind who, they say, is willing to do the same thing.

The richest men in the United States Senate now are Couzens of Michigan, who got rich on Ford automobile stock, and Phipps of Colorado, who got his in Steel. Other very wealthy senators are McKinley of Illinois, Warren of Wyoming, Elkins of West Virginia, Stanfield of Oregon and Gerry of Rhode Island.

By way of variety in life work Senator Shipstead was a dentist, and Representative Schafer of Wisconsin a locomotive engineer.

Senator Ashurst of Arizona was born in a tent while his parents were on a trek from California to the section he was later to represent in "the most deliberative body in the world."

Representative Mae E. Nolan, the only woman in this Congress, plays golf, and frankly says she does it for the purpose of keeping down her waistline.

In one year the garbage of the national capital brought \$350,000 into the treasury, showing that the housekeepers of the millionaire and official worlds in Washington live high and throw away regally.

There is a White House tradition that Thomas Jefferson introduced the use of finger bowls to this country.



# One Ring Too Many

By H. R. Marshall

"Slicker" Miller hits on something new in the way of disguises.

**S**LICKER" MILLER seemed quite at ease in the marble, mahogany and gold lobby of the Corn Market Bank.

He might easily be taken for a successful business man, one of that type of big, breezy individuals who radiate confidence. His manner suggested Big Business; his obvious bodily vigor and health indicated an easy life, free from money worries.

Even his clothes were in keeping with his latest pose. A soft Italian felt hat; shirt, collar and tie, all of the same stylish shade of blue; an English tweed suit half covered by a sport topcoat, yellow pigskin gloves and quiet cordovan shoes made up his outer clothing.

He was an impressive, confidence-inspiring figure, was Slicker Miller, and he knew it. Nature had endowed him with a splendid physique which was just beginning to protrude at the abdomen. His face was large, florid and handsome, except for his blue eyes.

They were unusual eyes, small and close set with pin-point pupils against the

palest of blue irises. He smiled easily, showing strong white teeth marred by too much gold.

A casual observer would judge Slicker Miller to be a self-made man of considerable wealth, an energetic, capable individual, a little loud perhaps, but probably honest. This was just the appraisal the Slicker wished.

For a moment he glanced around the elaborate bank lobby, then sat negligently on the marble bench near the cashier's desk to wait.

Behind the brass railing which fenced off his desk, Cashier McLeod was talking to a bank customer. As he talked, Slicker Miller studied him. Yes, he was the right man to whom to go—a nervous, over-worked little fellow who would make his decision rapidly.

As he studied the cashier, Slicker Miller peeled the pigskin gloves back, revealing soft, white hands. On the second finger of his left hand was an extremely odd ring.

A modest diamond, one and one-half

carats, perhaps, was set between two delicate palm leaves, artistically fashioned in platinum.

The width of the ring was extraordinary. There was purpose in that, too. Under the broad platinum leaves was irregular red-and-white scar tissue; there the finger had the appearance of having been chewed.

THAT scar was a memento of the early days of the Slicker's life—the days when he was beginning in the art of living by his wits. When liquor and gambling went hand in hand in San Bernardino County, California, the Slicker had made an easy if thoroughly dishonest livelihood in the barrooms and cowboy camps.

Once during his desert life a rattlesnake had sunk its fangs into the second finger of Slicker's right hand. His treatment had been prompt and efficacious—a slashing of his finger with his pocketknife, a sucking of the poison and the immediate application of chewed tobacco. But the little experience left a scar which Slicker Miller had had cause to regret more than once.

Now, as he fidgeted with the ring, the scarred finger showed prominently.

The cashier was through with his customer at last and the Slicker, hat in hand, stepped forward.

"Mr. McLeod?"

"Yes."

Slicker extended his hand. "Name's Dutton," he said. "R. A. Dutton."

"Yes, Mr. Dutton"—with rising inflection. The cashier was fascinated by those unusual eyes; he stared into them, wondering at the tiny black dots of pupils.

"I want just a moment with you. May I sit down?" The self-y-cleped R. A. Dutton lowered himself into the chair by the desk. "Mr. McLeod, I'm just back from abroad. Been away two years. Before I went I put my money in bonds. You know how it is—feel safer that way."

"Yes," agreed McLeod fatuously. "Good bonds are good."

"Got back last week," continued the Slicker. "Now I've a chance to go back

in business and, believe me, it seems good. Just in a small way, understand, manufacturing a spotlight for automobiles. I need thirty thousand dollars but maybe I could get along on twenty-five. I brought my bonds to you, Mr. McLeod, hoping you would accommodate me."

The Slicker pulled an envelope from his pocket and handed it to the cashier. "There they are, forty thousand in A-1 bonds—Pacific Gas and Electric, Province of Ontario, Big Four—well, look them over yourself. A nice, carefully selected list.

"That's my collateral. I don't want to sell; good bonds are going up every day. Will you advance me thirty thousand on them?"

Cashier McLeod ran through the bonds rapidly. "They're all right," he agreed. "Will you leave them here until I check them up? You see, Mr. Dutton"—ingratiatingly—"you're a stranger to us yet, though we hope to get better acquainted."

The Slicker arose immediately. "Sure, sure," he agreed with heartiness. "Take your time, Mr. McLeod. I don't want to push you. I'll drop in again this afternoon. Should I have a receipt?"

The cashier walked to the nearest collateral cage and poked the bonds through the grating. "Issue a receipt to R. A. Dutton, please," he ordered. "All right, Mr. Dutton, we'll see you this afternoon."

Slicker Miller-Dutton waited for his receipt, then walked nonchalantly from the bank. He was back at two o'clock that afternoon and Cashier McLeod signaled to him to come to his desk immediately.

"Mr. Dutton, I've talked this matter over with our Mr. Gorham. He suggests that you try to get along for a time on twenty thousand dollars. You understand, Mr. Dutton, the bonds are very good and all that, but money is tight right now."

"Besides, we think we are protecting our customers when we urge them to get along on as little as possible. If you need more later—"

Slicker Miller looked disappointed. But: "That's all right, Mr. McLeod," he

said. "I understand that if I do need more later maybe you'll raise the ante five or ten thousand dollars, eh?"

"Yes, probably," agreed the cashier. "If you will just step to the collateral window, I'll have the note made out. Do you want the money in a certificate of deposit or a certified check?"

"I'd rather have a certified check," stated the Slicker. "I want to apply it on the purchase price of the business immediately."

Three minutes later Slicker Miller left the bank with a certified check for twenty thousand dollars in his pocket. He waited until the next morning to cash the check at a near-by bank. Then he returned to the collateral cage of the Corn Market Bank.

"May I see my collateral?" he asked the red-haired young man in charge, pushing his receipt into the cage. "I've got a couple more bonds to add to it, just for safe-keeping. No sense in renting a safety-deposit box, not when the bank will keep the bonds for me for nothing, is there?" he added, winking good-naturally.

The teller went to the collateral file and immediately brought back the Slicker's envelope of bonds. "Shall I give you a receipt for the new ones and put them into the envelope?"

"Please."

Slicker Miller waited until the teller had completed the receipt and added the new bonds to the others. "What were the numbers of those Ontario bonds? For my records. May I see them, please?"

Thoughtlessly the teller pushed the envelope forward. Suddenly the Slicker was seized with a paroxysm of coughing, a violent uncontrollable spasm which purpled his face and wracked and twisted his body.

The teller, startled and fearful, watched Miller's face turn blue and his eyes bulge. In a moment the paroxysm was over and the Slicker, tears running down his face, grinned weakly.

"That was a bad one," he gasped. "I can remember those numbers now." He

pushed the overstuffed envelope back to the teller and turned away.

But now up the sleeve of Slicker's top-coat were all of the bonds, and in the teller's cage was an envelope stuffed with neatly folded varicolored paper.

ONCE on the street, Slicker Miller didn't hesitate. He hailed the first passing taxicab and raced to the Pennsylvania Station. Two hours later he was in Philadelphia. In a loft on Chestnut Street which he had used before, Slicker Miller changed his clothes to those of an ordinary laborer.

Within another two hours he was in Atlantic City. In the pockets of his ill-fitting clothes were twenty thousand dollars in cash and his original investment in bonds. Those bonds had stood Slicker Miller in good stead before and would again. Now he must lie low for a while.

Easy! It had been all so easy! Slicker Miller grinned to himself as he scorned the taxicabs and walked carelessly toward the sea.

Of course, the trick wasn't over yet. To-day, to-morrow or next week, the bank would find that it had been duped. Then there would be a furore, an investigation, a search for one Slicker Miller, alias R. A. Dutton.

Already the Slicker was wondering who would be assigned to the case. Maybe Detective Lieutenant Alvarado. The thought brought Slicker up short, made him wince.

Detective Alvarado! He had caught Slicker once before, had been responsible for that two years abroad—"abroad" being Sing Sing. Yes, Ramon Alvarado was a clever man and a dogged one. But this time—Slicker Miller shrugged his shoulders, then walked on rapidly as if already he were pursued.

## II.

IT'S Slicker Miller," declared Detective Ramon Alvarado to Cashier McLeod. "Your description fits him to a 'T.' Particularly those queer eyes with the small pupils. He was let out last week; I guess I should have been watching him.

"Yes, I've known him for years," the detective continued. "Knew him in Mecca, California, first. Gambler and frisker. Then I came East on the *Times* dynamiting case, and stayed here."

"About a year later he showed up. Either he had been run out of California or was looking for bigger game."

"Remember the fraudulent Imperial Seating bonds about two years ago? He passed those. Cleaned 'up' about sixty thousand dollars. I caught him finally and he got a two years' stretch for it. But I never could find where he put his money. Hid it, and then bought those bonds which he snitched back from your teller."

Cashier McLeod was drumming on his desk top nervously. "Can't understand how—"

"No, it's hard to understand how the Slicker gets by. But he does. By the way, did you notice a prominent scar on the second finger of his right hand?"

Cashier McLeod considered for a moment. "No," he confessed, "I can't say that I did. Seems to me he wore a peculiar ring or something. Just a hazy impression. No, I didn't see any scar."

"The teller didn't notice it, either. Still, I know it's the Slicker. Anyway, I'll look for him first."

"But where will you start?" asked McLeod curiously. "You haven't any clews as to his whereabouts or—"

"It's an odd thing about criminals of Slicker's class," explained Detective Alvarado. "They're like animals in a way. Seem to have their lairs, some place to run as soon as they make a killing."

"The Slicker's hiding place is Atlantic City. I don't know why exactly. Guess he likes to be where there is glitter and wealth and show. Then he knows the place thoroughly. He's been a con man there so long that he's familiar with every street and building, to say nothing of half of the people. Then it's handy to New York and new skin games. Yes, if it's the Slicker he's run for Atlantic City."

Detective Alvarado arose. He was a tall man, as little like a detective as one could imagine; slender, with a long thin

face, big, dreamy black eyes and the carriage of a Spanish grandee. He might have been an artist, a poet or a wealthy globe-trotter—but a detective, never!

"I'll run down to Atlantic City, Mr. McLeod, and see if I can locate him. That's where I got him before. Meanwhile if you hear anything, communicate with Chief Riley. He'll be handling the local end of the case. Good-by, Mr. McLeod."

Ramon Alvarado extended a thin white hand, then turned away, leaving Cashier McLeod wondering if he had been talking with one of the most famous detectives of the country or with an artist.

### III.

**S**LICKER MILLER took his exercise at dawn. It was safer that way: fewer people to recognize him.

Not that he didn't feel safe! His disguise, he flattered himself, was complete. No longer he looked the successful newly rich business man; rather, an ordinary laborer on his way to work. He had grimed his hands, allowed a stubble to grow on his face. His clothes were out of shape and soiled without being too-exaggerated evidence of poverty.

Yes, a hotel cleaner, a street workman or a common laborer, but a common laborer with forty thousand dollars' worth of bonds in his inside coat pocket and twenty thousand dollars in his wallet. And on the second finger of his right hand was a ring such as a laborer never wore—a peculiar ring—two platinum palm leaves flanking a modest diamond.

Slicker Miller was considering the disposal of his wealth as he walked down Kentucky Avenue toward the Boardwalk. He must hide it somewhere, that was certain; it wasn't safe to have it with him as proof of the New York transaction. When he started to Atlantic City he was sure that he knew the place so well he could easily find a cache. But so far he'd discovered no place safe from both robbery and detection.

Now he was on the Boardwalk. He turned southward, pondering his problem.

Suddenly he stopped, then dodged quickly into a doorway. Ahead of him was another man, also evidently a laborer, a tall man with coal-black hair and the erect figure of a major-domo.

"Alvarado!" The name pounded in the Slicker's mind. He was suddenly panic-stricken; the thumping of his heart seemed to shake his whole body; he could scarcely breathe.

By force of will he concentrated his thoughts on the Japanese ware in the show window in front of him. Gradually he regained his composure.

It probably wasn't Alvarado after all. He hadn't seen the man's face. Even if it were the detective, he hadn't caught sight of the Slicker. Nervous, that's what Slicker was; nervous, and with a tremendous fear of the New York detective who was responsible for the two years at Sing Sing.

He had had a warning. That was all. Probably it was fortunate. Now he would be more circumspect.

A moment later Slicker Miller stepped from the doorway and retraced his steps. He walked rapidly now, as if he were late for work. His intention was to return to his room in the second-rate hotel above a downtown bakery.

Yet the hotel was just such a place as Alvarado would watch. The Slicker hesitated, then plunged ahead rapidly. At least he was safe as long as he progressed away from the detective. As he walked he must plan some ingenious scheme of concealment. That Alvarado was not a man to be taken lightly.

True to form, the Slicker never thought of fleeing from Atlantic City. Perhaps experience had taught him that trains were dangerous places for criminals; more likely he felt safer in his own lair than in strange surroundings. No, he decided he'd find some way to hide right where he was.

**A**HEAD of him on the beach, silhouetted against the gray Atlantic, Slicker Miller saw a beach comber. Momentarily the Slicker envied the man his freedom

from worries, then suddenly his little blue eyes narrowed.

He turned off the Boardwalk and made directly for the shore. The beach comber, a gray, bent old man, glanced up as the Slicker approached.

"Lo," said the Slicker. "Find anything this morning?"

The beach comber appraised Slicker Miller cunningly. "Not much," he stated. "'Spensive ring lost here yesterday. Looking for it?"

"Do you find things often?" insisted the Slicker.

"Sometimes." The man stepped into the low rollers, his back to Miller. Suddenly he uttered a little cry of pleasure and plunged his arm into the water, then hurried to the beach. "See," he crowed, "see what I found!" He offered a ring for Slicker's inspection.

Slicker Miller grinned broadly. "Yes," he agreed. "Pretty good game, isn't it? What will you sell it for?"

"Let you have it for ten dollars," the beach comber said. "It's probably worth two or three hundred. Looks like a real diamond to me."

Slicker Miller made a noise as near a laugh as he ever allowed himself. "Yes, sir, great game," he repeated. "Of course, I happened to see you drop that ring into the water before you grabbed it. The Five and Ten Cent Store's best, eh?"

"You drop it in the water; then when a sucker like me comes along, you find it and make a profit of nine dollars and ninety cents. Not bad."

The beach comber began to protest feebly, but Slicker waved him into silence. "It's all right, grandpa. Pretty good business. Easy profits."

"Not so damned easy," grunted the old man. "Not at my age. The water's cold, gives me the rheumatism; my boots always leak and I can't tell when a big wave will soak me. Not very often any guy will take a chance and buy any of this recovered jewelry."

"Once, though," he added proudly, "I found a real ring, worth a thousand dollars it was, and another time I got a wrist

watch. Sold it for eighteen dollars. Take in the crowded season now, in the summer time, the bathers are always losing things. Of course, mostly they ain't never found, but sometimes——"

"In reality, though, you make your living finding and selling this ten-cent jewelry which you plant," asserted the Slicker. "Gosh, that's a great game. Clever."

Slicker Miller could appreciate the occupation. In a very small way it was similar to his own method of making a living. But now he must get to business.

"I'd like to get into the game myself," he suggested. "Will you sell out to me?"

"Sell out?" echoed the old man, amazed. "What've I got to sell?"

"Well, your boots and your stock of ten-cent rings and that rake. What do you want for the outfit?"

"Guess I won't sell. Go buy your own."

"I'll give you twenty dollars for the boots, the rake and half a dozen phony rings."

"Twenty dollars," echoed the old man. "Well——"

"It's done," asserted Slicker Miller, "and I'll give you my shoes in addition. Let's go up under the Boardwalk and change."

THE old beach comber wasn't sure that he wanted to change, but he had met a personality stronger than his own. Obediently he followed the Slicker under the Boardwalk where it extended over the sand.

"Where do you sleep at night?" asked the Slicker as he was changing his shoes for the beach-comber's boots.

"Anywhere. Generally along here under the walk. 'Tain't bad, now. The sand keeps quite warm at night. Next month, though, in October, it gets cold. Then most generally I go downtown. If I have money enough I get a two-bit flop, and if I haven't——"

"Guess I'll sleep under the walk for a while, like you do," declared the Slicker. "How'd it be if we kind of stick together? That's the idea. You go get you some new

boots and some more rings and we'll work along together."

"All right," agreed the old man doubtfully. "Only there's too many beach combers now."

"Run along and get some boots," ordered the Slicker. "I'll wait for you here."

The old man departed, leaving Slicker Miller distinctly pleased with himself. But he didn't allow himself much time for exultation. As soon as the old man was out of sight, he crawled far back in the darkness under the walk and began to dig in the sand beside one of the supporting posts.

After he had hollowed an eighteen-inch hole, he took out his pocketknife. Rapidly he slashed at the side of the post until he had flattened one curve of it for a space of a foot high and six or eight inches broad. From his inside pocket he brought the bonds he had used in the Corn Market Bank deal. Carefully he wrapped them and the twenty thousand dollars from his wallet in his handkerchief. Then he placed them against the hollowed portion of the post and held them there while he refilled the hole with dry sand.

The incriminating bonds and money were hidden at last, hidden in a safe dry place, a place that wouldn't be found until the Boardwalk rotted to pieces.

He was proud of himself, was Slicker Miller. Carefully he gathered the chips he had cut from the post and carried them fifty feet away where he buried them, too, in the sand.

When the old beach comber returned, Slicker Miller was lounging negligently on the sand under the walk.

"All fixed up, eh?" hailed the Slicker. "Say I'm nice and comfortable here. I wish you'd do something more for me. My eyes aren't strong enough to stand this ocean glare; they need some medicine. Here's a dollar: you go to the nearest drug store and get me some atropine."

"Atropine?"

"A-t-r-o-p-i-n-e. Can you remember that? Tell the druggist you want it for your eyes. Tell him a doctor ordered it.

Atropine. Can you remember it? A two-per-cent solution. There's a dime in it for you if you do it. I want a little snooze. Two-per-cent solution of atropine. Remember!"

Mumbling to himself, not understanding exactly what he was doing, the old beach comber departed again. While he was gone, Slicker Miller inspected his handiwork. Yes, the bonds were safely hidden. Now if the worst happened and he were caught he'd still have his stake.

When the old beach comber returned a few minutes later, Slicker Miller was apparently almost asleep. He aroused himself, however, long enough to take the little vial the old man offered him. With great care he released a single drop of the atropine solution into each eye. Then he rolled over to doze.

An hour later he stirred, and again he dropped a minute amount of the atropine into his tearful eyes.

Already his orbs were changing. Gone were the tiny pupils in the pale-blue irises. Slicker Miller's facial appearance was changed completely.

With the enlargement of the pupils, the eyes seemed totally different—coal black now and apparently of unusual size. They had the effect of softening his entire face.

Yet a third time, an hour later, he used the medicine. "Now," he thought, "I'll look quite different—for a few days at least. Alvarado—poof!"

That was his challenge.

BEFORE noon a new beach comber joined the others on the seashore—a big fellow whose eyes seemed all pupils and whose right hand bore a peculiar ring.

As he splashed through the water, Slicker Miller was communing happily with himself. "One place Alvarado will never look for me," he crowed. "Me, Slicker Miller, a con man getting his tens of thousands every deal, down here working a snide game with phony jewelry for a few odd cents. Here, by gad, right in front of his nose, Alvarado will never see me—or if he does see me he'll never know me."

Slicker Miller took great gulps of the salt air into his lungs; he cocked his head and splashed happily ahead, trailing his rake. A great load had been lifted from the Slicker's mind: he had a feeling of utter security.

#### IV.

DETECTIVE RAMON ALVARADO stared out over the Atlantic. He was brooding his problem. He had not located Slicker Miller. For three days he had quietly searched Atlantic City, watched the many hotels, scrutinized the loungers on the Boardwalk. He had thought that eventually Slicker must pass before his eyes.

Now he was beginning to doubt his success. Surely if Slicker Miller were in Atlantic City he would have shown himself by now. The Slicker was not a man to hide himself in a back bedroom for many hours. And if he had been such a man, there were not many back rooms which Detective Alvarado had not watched.

"Maybe he didn't come here at all," thought Alvarado. "Still, I'd swear that this is his lair. What's my next move? Guess it's a matter of watchful waiting. Some time, somewhere the Slicker will show up."

Still leaning against the popcorn stand just inside one of the open-front stores, Alvarado continued to ponder his problem. At the water's edge in front of him, almost a quarter of a mile away, two figures were trailing rakes.

"That's the life," thought Alvarado. "Beach combing. Happy-go-lucky. Sometimes I envy—"

Suddenly Alvarado stepped forward. The physique of the foremost beach comber kindled a spark in the detective's brain. Foolish, of course, it was to investigate. But one of Alvarado's characteristics was thoroughness. He'd stroll along the beach to get a closer view of that big man in front.

He crossed the Boardwalk and dropped down to the sand. The beach combers were working northward now, and Alvarado followed.

Slicker Miller saw the detective approaching. For just a moment he stood motionless in the knee-deep water. Slicker was paralyzed as a bird is paralyzed before a constrictor.

Then he forced his faculties into action. Gradually he worked his way out into the ocean until the water was almost hip high. There he stooped over and reached to the ocean bed, then straightened.

Northward he worked his way slowly through the water. Detective Alvarado was on the shore opposite him now, studying him keenly. But the Slicker paid no attention. For a quarter of a mile the two men walked. Slicker Miller in the water almost waist-deep and Alvarado on the beach.

"He'll have to come ashore some time," Alvarado decided. "The way he stays out there is suspicious."

Still Slicker Miller worked ahead, studying the ocean bottom. Once more he stopped; his arm plunged into the water, withdrew again, his hand holding a small object.

"Either the fellow is a good 'actor,'" thought Alvarado, "or he is actually finding something out there." Suddenly he grinned. "I believe he is playing me for a sucker. He'll probably come ashore in a few minutes and offer me some phony jewelry."

That was just what happened. A hundred yards down the shore the Slicker, determined to brazen out the encounter, angled to the beach. Detective Alvarado was awaiting him.

"Find anything?" asked Alvarado easily. His eyes were studying the figure in front of him. He was immensely disappointed, was Alvarado. Not that he had really expected to find Slicker Miller, but that he had held a strong hope.

Now he found that this man in front of him bore no resemblance to the notorious confidence man, except in build. His clothes were soaked and in tatters; a long stubble covered his face; his hands were cracked and seamed from the salt water; and his eyes, the eyes which Detective Al-

varado had hoped to find the palest of blue with pin-point pupils, were black and seemingly all pupil.

"Want to buy these?" the beach comber asked huskily. He offered the two rings in his left hand. "Look like real diamonds. Let you have them for ten dollars."

He was acting, was Slicker Miller, and doing it well. Every faculty was strained to meet the situation. Here he was face to face with his Nemesis, a man who had caught him before and who was now on his trail.

A false move meant captivity. But Slicker Miller was determined to make no false moves. His eyes, he knew, that most distinguishing characteristic, were totally changed by the action of the atropine. Now it was a matter of brazening out the encounter, of throwing Alvarado off the trail. Once that was done he was safe.

"You'd better gamble on these rings, governor," he suggested to the detective. His voice was barely a whisper; it sounded as if the constant wetting by sea water had given him a perpetual cold.

One moment more Detective Alvarado studied the beach comber, particularly the eyes with the great black pupils. Then he turned away. "No thanks," he said over his shoulder. "I'm wise to that game with the ten-cent rings."

As the detective walked away, Slicker Miller drew a great sigh of relief. The sigh was checked midway. Detective Ramon Alvarado had turned around and was coming back.

IT was a forlorn hope which caused the detective to return. Belatedly, there had registered in his keen mind the fact that the beach comber had offered the rings with his left hand. It might be worth while to see the fellow's right hand.

"Let's see the rings again," requested the detective.

"Sure, let you have 'em for eight dollars apiece"—pleadingly.

Again Slicker Miller was acting and doing it well; again he offered the rings

with his left hand, but Detective Alvarado was studying the Slicker's right hand. "That's an odd ring you're wearing," he declared, pointing.

Slicker Miller rose to the occasion. Here was the real test. "Sure," he said hoarsely. "Let you have it for ten dollars. Looks like a real diamond, too."

He was offering a ring which cost him three hundred dollars for ten dollars; taking the chance that his readiness to sell it would throw the detective off the track, keep him from studying that incriminating second finger on his right hand,

"Let's see it," the detective said, extending his hand toward the Slicker's.

"Sure. I'll take it off." Again the Slicker was playing the game. He tugged at the ring but it seemed to resist his efforts. Finally he put his finger in his mouth to jerk the ring off with his teeth.

"The salt water's swollen my finger," he mumbled. "Ouch! The damned thing cut me."

He pulled his finger from his mouth and after it the ring. The second finger of his right hand, the incriminating finger with its scar tissue, was bleeding. Slicker's teeth had scraped the top of it raw.

"Look at that," the Slicker cried, extending the finger to Alvarado for inspection. "It was soft from the soaking in this damned water and the skin broke."

"Well, here's the ring. Do you want it for ten dollars? Maybe it's worth two or three hundred."

Detective Alvarado needed only one glance to assure himself that the beach comber's finger was not the finger of Slicker Miller. There was no red scar tissue on it, apparently. Blood oozed over its water-shriveled, whitened skin, but the red scar had been bleached. Carelessly the detective took the ring that was offered and just as carelessly returned it.

"No, guess not," he said and walked away.

Behind him on the beach, Slicker Miller gazed ruefully at his lacerated finger, but there was a grin on his face, a smirk of satisfaction.

"Whew! That was a close one! But I

9A—POP.

fooled him and I'm as safe now as if Alvarado had never seen me. Gosh, my eyes ache! I'll be glad when I can stop using this atropine."

Slicker Miller turned up under the Boardwalk to rest, confident that he had won the game whose stakes were arrest and imprisonment.

## V.

ACKADAIASICALLY, Slicker Miller continued to play at being a beach comber. He fancied he saw the tall, dignified figure of Detective Alvarado occasionally on the Boardwalk. But he was safe, was Slicker Miller; safe as long as he continued on the beach and under the Boardwalk. Any suspicion that Alvarado had ever had was allayed.

Still, it was safer to continue as he was. So he continued to plant phony rings and to find them, to offer ten-cent jewelry for sale for ten dollars. Periodically he made a sale; one ring even brought twenty-five dollars and he boasted of his accomplishment to the other beach combers. That twenty-five-dollar sale had far-reaching consequences.

The Slicker was wading along the beach four days later when he saw three men approaching. Some instinct warned him that two of the men, at least, were police officers. Yet he had never seen them before nor they him, so he felt little fear. Detective Alvarado was the one man of whom he was afraid.

"That's the man," one of the approaching party said, pointing to the Slicker. Instantly the Slicker recognized the informant. He was the "sucker" who had paid twenty-five dollars for the ring two days earlier.

So that was it! The fellow realized he had been duped in buying the ring and had brought a couple of police officers to help him regain his money. Well, the Slicker would repay him readily enough. He felt a great relief at the smallness of the charge against him.

"Come in here!" shouted one of the police officers, a short, burly man with flapping ears and a button nose.

"Sure," responded Slicker, wading ashore.

"Come along to the station with us," ordered the officer. "And come peacefully, too."

"What's the idea?" demanded the Slicker.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"This bird objected because he paid too much for a ring?" asked Slicker. "I'll give him his money back if he gives me the ring. That's fair enough, ain't it?"

"Not quite," said the police officer. "Come on!"

Scenting some mystery, but as yet barely apprehensive, Slicker Miller went unresistingly to the police station. Once inside headquarters he went straight to the desk sergeant.

"What's the charge?" he demanded. "I offered to buy back the ring for what that bird paid for it. Isn't that fair enough?"

"The man paid twenty-five dollars for it?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes."

"And you will pay him back his twenty-five dollars?"

"Yes."

"I should think you would," said the sergeant sarcastically. "Any one would pay twenty-five dollars for a two-thousand-dollar diamond ring."

"Two-thousand-dollar diamond ring?" echoed the Slicker.

"That's what I said. And any time a man sells a two-thousand-dollar ring for twenty-five dollars, that man needs some investigating."

"But I found it in the water," declared the Slicker. "I didn't know it was worth anything. I thought it was one of the phony rings I had dropped in."

"Our records show that that particular ring was taken from a room in the Traymore two weeks ago," declared the sergeant. "The charge against you is grand larceny."

"But—but—" sputtered the Slicker.

"Search him," interrupted the sergeant. "Then run him back to a cell."

Slicker Miller was too astounded to protest more. Arrested he was, on a

charge of which he was totally innocent, but arrested nevertheless. Mentally he cursed the man who had lost the diamond ring in the ocean and then mistakenly declared it was taken from his room.

Eventually, of course, the Slicker would be freed. But meanwhile he disliked spending his time in jail and feared an investigation of his actions.

Humbly he allowed himself to be searched; a few silver coins and a handful of cheap rings were brought to light. Then from a vest pocket came the bottle of atropine.

"What's this?" demanded the searching officer. "Nitoglycerin?"

"No," the Slicker protested. "It's atropine for my eyes. See the label? You can ask the druggist."

"Atropine!" repeated the desk sergeant. "That's a funny thing for a man like you to be carrying. Anything else?"

Nothing more was brought to light, and Slicker was marched back to a cell. The irony of it all galled him deeply. To escape cleverly with thousands of dollars in bonds and then be arrested for finding a ring in the ocean!

Then, optimistically, his mind seized the brighter side of the dilemma. At least he was safe from Detective Alvarado.

## VI.

**T**WO weeks and no success! Detective Alvarado was losing hope. Evidently Slicker Miller had not come to Atlantic City after all. The detective might as well return to New York. He hated to confess his failure, but there it was, staring him in the face.

In the cheap rooming house he had chosen for his headquarters, the detective started to pack his suit case. Halfway through the operation he stopped. There was one further source of information he would investigate.

Yes, he would violate his usual procedure and appeal to the local police officers. Generally he was able to get along better without local assistance than with it. But this time he had failed. So before he left he would talk with the local

officers and tell them to be on the look-out for the Slicker.

At the station ten minutes later, Detective Alvarado introduced himself to the desk sergeant. Quickly he explained his mission.

"Just want you to keep your eyes open," he said. "The Slicker's not here now or I would have found him. But he may drop in any time."

The detective proceeded to describe Slicker Miller, emphasizing the peculiar eyes and the scar on the second finger of his right hand.

Alvarado made his farewell and started out, then, as an afterthought, "You haven't picked up any unusual characters lately, have you?" he asked. "I'm still looking for 'Pete the Wop,' 'Sleepy Joe' Benham, the Saari brothers, and a half dozen others. You haven't any one on your register who would interest me?"

"No," responded the desk sergeant. "It has been very dull; the usual number of drunks and some petty thievery. We have one man booked on a grand-larceny charge, but we've decided he's innocent. Actually found a two-thousand-dollar diamond ring in the ocean and sold it for twenty-five dollars.

"Rather a funny character at that. When we searched him we found a bottle of atropine on him. That was four days ago. Say, Alvarado, you'd think that man was an atropine fiend. Back there in his cell, he cries for his atropine. Atropine—atropine—all day long!"

"I'd give it to him, only I can't figure why he needs it. He says the ocean glare hurts his eyes, but the jail physician can't find anything the matter with him except pupil dilation due to the drug. That's about worn off now, and the fellow still cries for his atropine."

"Atropine?" repeated Detective Alvarado. "Say, let me see this prisoner. He sounds like an odd bird." He turned toward the cell block.

Slicker Miller grinned weakly as Detective Alvarado stepped into the cell. "Lo, governor. Want to buy some rings to-day?" he asked.

**D**ETECTIVE ALVARADO couldn't resist one little crow of satisfaction. There in front of him was Slicker Miller; a Slicker with the old small, blue eyes and pin-point pupils; a Slicker dressed in the clothes of a beach comber and with a fresh gash on his right hand where the old scar had been, but undoubtedly Slicker Miller just the same.

"Hello, Slicker," said Detective Alvarado. "That atropine game is a new one to me. Pretty clever, Slicker. Rather hard luck, though," he confessed, "to get away with forty thousand dollars in bonds, to act as perfectly as you acted down there on the beach that day, and then be arrested for finding a diamond ring. Let's see your hand. No, the right one."

He was caught, was Slicker Miller, and he knew it. Obediently he held out his right hand. There, around the edges of the fresh gash on his second finger, the old scar tissue, whitened by soaking in the sea, was beginning to color vividly again in the dry atmosphere of the jail.

Detective Alvarado studied the hand a moment and then dropped it. "Yes, Slicker, hard luck in a way. But that's how it goes with a life like yours. Will you demand extradition?"

"No," said Slicker Miller wearily. "Might just as well face it and get it over with. You arrange the transportation and I'll come."

Suddenly he smiled feebly. At least he had added twenty thousand dollars to his stake. Hidden under the Boardwalk was sixty thousand dollars in cash and securities.

That, at least, Alvarado would never find. That would be awaiting the Slicker after he had served his second term in Sing Sing.





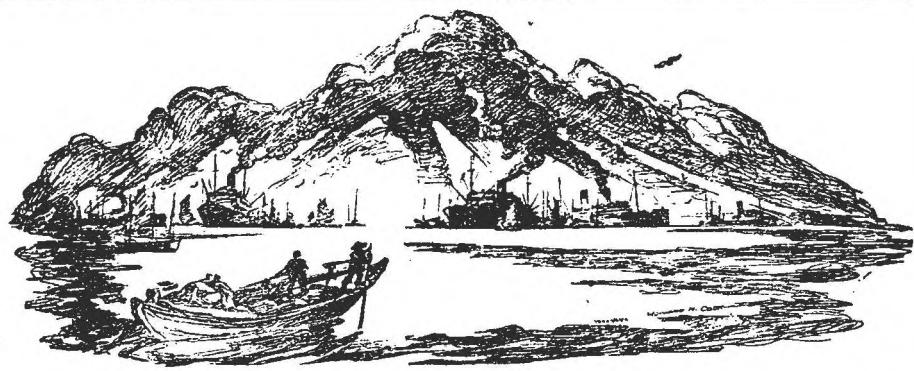
*(Martin is the head porter of the Grand Hotel, Yokohama.)*

WHEN first your ship is docking  
 In Yokohama town,  
 And customs men are blocking  
 The gangway you go down,  
 There is a subtle art in  
 Arriving on this strand,  
 Just give the word to "Martin,"  
 To Martin of the Grand.

Throughout the East he's famous,  
 This canny little chap,  
 To travelers his name is  
 Known all about the map,  
 So when you make your start in  
 This cherry-blossom land,  
 Just slip your keys to Martin,  
 To Martin of the Grand.

Yes, on your trip initial  
And later journeys too,  
Fret not with ways official  
Let Martin see you through.  
The Oriental's smart in  
Things you can't understand,  
You'd better trust to Martin,  
To Martin of the Grand.

His cheery face will greet you  
Long ere you reach the slip,  
And Martin's sure to meet you  
Before you leave the ship:  
So do not fret your heart in  
Vain worries, but command  
The services of Martin,  
Hand all your stuff to Martin  
Trust everything to Martin,  
Efficient, smiling, bland;  
And—slip some yen to Martin,  
To Martin of the Grand.





# You Can't Keep a Good Man Down

By Douglas Newton

*Author of "The Daring Adventurer," "The Water Rats," Etc.*

**In which "Grimy Doug," chief engineer of the *Olive Branch*, demonstrates an instinct and ability to rise to the highest honors in any sphere.**

THE undoubted and redoubtable oiliness of the clothes and person of Chief Engineer Douglas Dickson, known up and down the world and broadways as "Grimy Doug," had its disadvantages and led to mistakes.

"Shanghai" Ralph, of Pusskeepie, U. S. A., made one of the latter. Deep in the problem of how to get a full consignment of hands onto a hard-case packet with a reputation for man breaking, his squint eye lighted on Grimy Doug.

There is no reason to ask what Doug was doing in Shanghai Ralph's bar. Doug often did roll, in his comfortable, thick-set way, into such places. Under his engine-room grease smudges and his placid calm his blue eyes had a passion for locking upon life when it was raw.

It was very raw in Shanghai Ralph's. He had heard as much on many a voyage before, so that when the *Olive Branch*

docked at Pusskeepie, on her way, coast-wise, to Charleston, South Carolina, he strolled along to look at the place where all the bad boiler-room hands came from.

It never occurred to him that he might look like one of his own black gang. It never occurred to Shanghai Ralph that he was of full-certificate rank. He simply saw Grimy Doug as a substantial sum subtracted in advance from pay. He winked at a big man, who immediately engaged Doug in conversation, leaned indolently across his counter, and poured knock-out drops into Doug's drink; then stood yawning, waiting for the inevitable effect.

FOR this reason the skipper of the *Olive Branch* hurried round to lay information of a disappearance before the British consul a few hours later.

For this reason Grimy Doug awoke un-

der the combined effects of a slush bucket and a boot toe about much the same time, and, with a head fit to split, gazed round upon quarters that were emphatically *not* his own quarters on the *Olive Branch*. A large, red, bony half Swede of unknown quality was applying more boot, and bidding Doug show a leg and get down to the boiler room on time.

Grimy Doug blinked bitterly, took a cuff on the head that made its ache treble, stood up slowly, and hit the half Swede so hard that he fetched up spread-eagle on a bulkhead. The half Swede began to shout. Grimy Doug said: "Don't! I don't want to hit ye again, and I *do* want information."

"You scum!" roared the half Swede. "Do you want to be broken up? Do you want me to put you in irons?"

"Ah!" breathed Grimy Doug. "So you c'n put me in irons. Y'll be officer rat-  
ing?"

"You'll learn it," snarled the half Swede. "I'm second engineer on this ship."

"Then this is not ma ship," said Grimy Doug. "I'm careful to select human beings for me subordinates. But then I know it's not ma ship—it smells ill found."

"You'll be smelling something stiffer in a minute," said the second engineer. "Don't let's have any more lip. This is the *Angel of Peace*. I suppose you were too drunk when you signed on yesterday to remember the name."

Grimy Doug abruptly assessed the vile taste in his mouth. He remembered Shanghai Ralph's joint. "Ah, knock-out drops did it," he thought, and aloud: "So I signed on this packet yesterday. What rating?"

"Fireman," snapped the second. "Any other questions you'd like to ask?"

"Ay. Who's your chief?"

"Well, of all the--his name's Bolsen."

"Na, I don't know him."

"Ye will soon," stormed the second, "an' it'll be painful. He's the worst man breaker on the Atlantic, an' his pet form of exercise is knocking the stuffing

out of fat stokers who are work shy—an' here he is."

A GIGANTIC man with a lowering face appeared. He looked his reputation. If ever there was a brute who enjoyed the simple pleasures of knocking the heads off big and recalcitrant firemen Mr. Bansen was the man.

Grimy Doug's blue eyes sized him up at once. A man of low intelligence, but of no mean capacity with his fists. Bansen glared at the second engineer. He glared at Grimy Doug.

"What's this, Largsen?" he bellowed. "A skulker? Why don't you beat the life out of the scum?"

"He has, sir," said Grimy Doug softly, "an' I'm recovering. I was utilizing the moment of recovery to learn something of my whereabouts."

"I suppose it's no good mentioning the fact that I'm a pressed man; that my own ship is lying way back in Pusskeepie harbor waiting for me?"

"No use at all," snarled Bansen. "Fact, it's highly enraging to me—that means painful for you."

"I guessed it," sighed Grimy Doug. "No good saying that my rating isn't exactly fireman, either?"

"Not much," snapped Bansen, regarding this thickset, dirty, and apparently simple fellow as a good butt for his jokes. "And what may be your rating—admiral of the fleet, or Washington senator?"

"Just chief engineer."

"That's unfortunate," said Bansen, pretending to be taken aback.

"I'd already gathered that," smiled Grimy Doug.

"Ruddy unfortunate," said Bansen, with a wolfish grin. "You see, all our chief-engineer jobs are filled by me—a sort of life job, an' I'm so healthy. And the second-engineer billet—why, Mr. Largsen has that, and he's so healthy, too."

"He might suffer a decline," mused Grimy Doug, looking at Largsen dreamily.

"He might—and then you would get your chance. I might, too, between here and the Gulf of Mexico—and then that'd

be another chance. But meanwhile"—the big engineer stepped nearer, and his aspect was truly slaughterous—"but meanwhile we are most powerfully healthy, most powerfully so, and don't you forget it, you little greaser.

"An' what we say in our rude an' powerful health goes, or else our rude and powerful health wants to know the reason why. Understand? We want no lip, sea-lawyering, or skulking from you. We want just work, an' work, an' again work!"

"I'm a reasonable man," murmured Grimy Doug, with his intense blue eyes on the other. "Work's good enough for me—with, of course, a chance of promotion to that grade where my training will prove most useful."

"Aye, you'll get promotion," grinned the chief, "if you show you have the capacity to take, and hold down, the job, an' by way of test we'll put you under 'Bull-neck' Edgar, who's ganger of the watch just going on.

"If you can persuade Bull-neck that you are more fitted for his job than he is—it's yours. Nothing could be fairer, could it?"

"Nothing," said Grimy Doug with mild gratitude, blinking at their uproarious laughter. "I find that, on the whole, I have a natural inclination to rise in whatever sphere I find myself."

THE two engineers were still laughing when Grimy Doug strolled forward to the boiler-room fiddley. His steady brain cleared with the brisk sea air, but his sense of the difficulties in the situation did not decrease.

He knew that he had been pressed, Shanghaied aboard a tough packet accustomed to get its crews in this fashion. That is, those in command would not pay the slightest attention to any protests nor trouble to consider what rank their forced hands held outside the ship.

He'd be held on this ship for the full voyage. It was no satisfaction to him to know that they were going down the coast, and that presently the faster *Olive Branch*

would pass them on her way to Charleston. He knew that he could not communicate, and he felt certain that the *Angel of Peace*—what a sweet name for a packet like this!—would not call at any port between here and the Gulf. He'd have to stay aboard and endure what there was to endure.

And being a man of common sense, as well as grimy exterior, he recognized that to kick against the pricks was no way to make life endurable on a ship like this. The two engineers would only too willingly seize upon any excuse to break him up.

"Violence," he thought, "except in season, is of no avail. I must depend upon ma natural instinct for using ma not-inconseederable abilities. Ah've an idea from the muscular manner o' the officers what that may mean.

"Heigh-o, I must now undertake the first test o' my gifts wi' this Bull-neck Edgar. Bull-neck has an ominous sound!"

Bull-neck was, in fact, more ominous than his sound. He was one of those solid, massive men who seem just as deep through as they are across. He was, also, an undoubted man-eater. He had a stoker-mauling manner. He glared at Grimy Doug the moment that easy-going fellow turned from the ladder and faced him almost diffidently.

"Who an' what the hell are you?" said Bull-neck in a voice like vocal murder. "You the skulker who's hanging up my fires? Get busy, you tub of lard, before I take the hide off you. You've come down here to work, an' work you do."

"Oh, no, Bull-neck," said Grimy Doug, with his friendliest smile. "I haven't come down here to work. Not I. I've come down here to take your job away from you."

Even as he said that the two engineers were laughing as they walked the deck.

"Bull-neck!" bellowed the second. "He'll knock the chump's block off."

"That's why I mentioned him," said Bolsen, with his wolf snarl. "Bull-neck will deal with his natural inclination to rise. Bull-neck's a mighty pulverizing

proposition to any man looking for promotion."

"He'll batter that poor loon to pulp," said the second.

"He'll shove his fist right through him," agreed Bansen.

"It'll be a massacre, sir. The only thing is, short-handed as we are—"

"Mmm, maybe you're right. Better slide down to the boiler room, Largsen. Don't stop Bull-neck too early, mark you—that feller has to learn who's who. But directly the mauling approaches permanent incapacity, call it off."

"My idea exactly, sir," and, chuckling, the second engineer made for the fiddley.

He returned twenty minutes later, a quieter and slightly bewildered man. Bansen looked at him, snapped:

"Well, what about the man? Not out of action?"

"Oh, no, sir; he's all right. Quite all right. Working. Working well, in fact."

"You mean to say that Bull-neck—"

"The queer thing about it is Bull-neck, sir," said the puzzled second. "Bull-neck was sitting on a heap of coal when I got down there, and a trimmer was heaving a bucket of water over him."

"An' Bull-neck was feeling a face that looked as though it had met an active, combatant typhoon, and murmuring to himself: 'What hit me? Have the engines broken loose and hit me? What happened to me?'

"I was beginning to ask myself what had, for Bull-neck is a very sad human sight, when a voice called out: 'Bull-neck, my lamb. Bull-neck, you great, bone-idle, skulking mountain, get to No. 3 fire and get their quick—or I shall come and reason with you again.' An' Bull-neck suddenly seemed to remember—an' got there *quick*."

"You mean," gasped Bansen, "that that little, round, oily swab we just sent along—"

"I mean just him," said Largsen. "He's there, bossin' the shift. How he did I don't know, but the knuckles of his left hand are slightly split."

"He's there all right, anyhow; he came

up to me and smiled in that blue-eyed way of his, an' said: 'You see I followed out your wise suggestion, sir. I put the matter of my promotion to Bull-neck and he saw at once—well, almost at once—where a man of my talent should stand. You were entirely right, sir—or was it the chief?—when you said that natural ability would tell."

The engineers stared at each other for a few seconds. Then Bansen said, in an angry roar: "By gum, I guess this is the sort of man that needs a little particular attention from me."

"Well, I don't know that I'd interfere now, sir," said the second. "He may or may not be the engineer he says he is, but I will say I never saw firing handled better. He's got that squad working like a clock already, sir, and it's clean furnace work, too, none of the bar-clinkering stuff that Bull-neck used to give us."

LARGSEN, conscious that Grimy Doug was in his watch, and that good firing meant less trouble with steam, was now all for making the most of his find. The chief engineer knew it. He leered at his second with a touch of anger—*his* watch would not be free of steam trouble—and growled: "Better be careful, Largsen. A feller so earnest after promotion as that will be taking your job next. You ain't the best engineer I've suffered, by a long chalk."

Grimy Doug indeed was earnest after promotion. He had, as he said, the instinct for rising in whatever sphere he was, as many a good man who had judged him merely by his oily clothes and smudged face had found to his cost. He firmly intended to go up—for reasons of his own—and he intended to use the considerable cleverness that lurked under his gritty exterior to that end.

He worked as only he could at his job for two days as the *Angel of Peace* floundered her clumsy way along the American coast toward Charleston and the Gulf of Mexico. So excellent was his handling of his watch that the second engineer was beside himself with joy at his ability to

steam to bell, while the first was hot with rage against his subordinate for it, and also for the fact that during his watch the stoking was so inefficient that his own steaming went to blazes.

Grimy Doug, a chief engineer himself, was not unaware of these emotions, and of the desire to get even with his second that must be raging in the chief's breast. It was undoubtedly because of this knowledge that he went into the engine room during one of his watches off—that is, in the chief's watch—and was found there by the chief, talking sadly to a large but furious oiler.

"What the hell are you doing here?" asked Bolsen, eying him with calculation.

"Sorry, sir," Grimy Doug murmured humbly. "Couldn't help coming in here—professional interest, don't you know. Thought there was something wrong, from the sound, with that spindle."

The chief cocked his head, his eyes narrowed. "Well, what's wrong?" he snapped.

"This fool," said Grimy Doug crisply. "Look at him, swilling all the caps with oil like a mutton-handed chauffeur."

"Ha!" breathed the chief, and suddenly he saw his way to get even with his cocky second by removing Grimy Doug to his own watch. "Think you could do better? Think you could take and hold this bucko's job?"

"I don't think there would be any trouble about that," grinned Grimy Doug, eying the bucko. And the bucko immediately swelled his mighty chest. He had got his soft job in the way soft jobs were got on that packet, that is, by bashing the man who held it. He put down his oiling can and backed to a clear space. "You ding well try to lift it," he snarled.

Grimy Doug walked straight inside under the right lead that the bucko loosed. Something happened violently in the midship region of the bucko. He grunted, lashed out with left and right, grunted again as a boom end seemed to kick into his ribs, dropped chin forward and took the sauciest uppercut that Bolsen had ever seen.

THEN Grimy Doug was smiling pleasantly up into the chief's face. "That's the procedure for taking over on this ship, isn't it, sir?" he grinned.

"That's it," snapped Bolsen, thinking with glee of his outwitted second. "Carry on as oiler, and kick that dirt back to the boiler room when he comes to. He takes your place—if Bull-neck lets him."

Largsen was none too well pleased with Grimy Doug's uncanny knack of promotion. He spoke his mind so violently on the subject of the chief's dirty and underhand work that the seeds of a very satisfactory hate of each other were duly sowed, and only the intervention of the captain saved the pair from battering each other's faces.

The captain, having threatened to put them in irons and thus quieted them, demanded in the name of the infernal regions what it was all about.

"As a matter of fact," said the chief, when Largsen had told his bitter story, "this man Largsen talks of is a fully qualified engineer who is best employed in his natural capacity—as an engineer. Largsen is scared about the feller—thinks he'll take his place."

"That be darned for a story," snarled Largsen. "I'm signed on as second engineer. Nobody c'n take my place."

"You might become incapacitated," said Bolsen, grinning. "From what I see of things it'd be quite easy for you to become incapacitated."

"Are you threatening me?" cried Largsen.

"No—warning you," grinned the wolfish chief. "If anything happened to you I'd take him on in your place."

"Is he qualified, though?" asked the skipper.

"Yes," snarled Largsen, with a venomous look at his superior. "He's a fully qualified chief engineer, sent us by mistake by Shanghai Ralph. Don't forget his full qualifications, captain, in case the chief ever becomes incapacitated."

The chief grinned at that. He was perfectly confident of his ability to look after himself.

THE second engineer became incapacitated no later than the next day. Perhaps the chief dropped a word which a wise man like Grimy Doug was not slow to understand, but the real cause of the second's considerable ill health was a little misunderstanding about the tail rods.

The second engineer held different opinions from the oiler. Also the second engineer had decided that Grimy Doug's unwarrantable capacity for rising in whatever sphere he found himself had better be checked here and now.

Having experienced something of Grimy Doug's punch, he proceeded to enforce his opinions with a ratchet spanner. Doug, thick, bulky, and indolent though he appeared to the naked eye, somehow was not there when the spanner arrived. Instead, he was within jolting distance of Largsen's midrib section—and he jolted.

He jolted hard with the right and harder with the left, and Largsen, who rather fancied himself as a scrapper, was astounded that one so plump and circular should punch so hard. He danced back to clear, and took a ripping following left to the mouth as he went, and then a stubby smash over the breastbone that told him that Grimy Doug must weigh every ounce of thirteen stone and knew how to pack it into his punch.

The second stopped retreating at once, and for sweet safety's sake fell into a clinch. Grimy Doug did not seem to mind. Two steel-faced fists kicking in with the regular and powerful beat of the ship's piston rods pounded and crashed on Largsen's ribs.

In thirty seconds the second was painfully aware that his ribs were so bruised that he would be in his bunk for weeks. In thirty-two seconds he was groggy and reeling clear, and Grimy Doug was following him, and very carefully and very accurately applying both fists to those places that meant rest and contemplation for long periods for the victim.

When he had deposited the groaning second in his bunk, Grimy Doug walked meditatively toward the chief engineer's quarters. He had, that day, had a squint

at the chart, and he knew that Charleston—where the *Olive Branch* must now be docked—was not more than a day and a night's steaming away. The whole object of his rapid promotion by intellect and fists lay in that fact.

He thought of this when he met the chief in the alleyway and solemnly reported that the second engineer had been overcome by some sort of illness, or seizure, and would not be fit for duty for at least a fortnight.

Bolsen's eyes, gloating at the downfall of the man he had come to hate, twinkled at him.

"Well, I sort of saw it coming on, Dickson," he grinned evilly. "Oh, yes, I kinda expected it, an' I'd already arranged with the skipper that you'd take charge if anything happened to poor Largsen."

"Lucky we had you aboard, ain't it?" The grin was sly and significant. "For man is prone to indispositions, ain't he?"

"Exactly what ah'm thinking at the moment, sir," smiled Grimy Doug, gazing at the chief sympathetically.

"What's that?" bellowed the chief.

"Ah'm thinking that you don't look too well, yerself, sir."

"That's it, is it?" snarled the chief. "Well, I'll show you how healthy I am." And, man of action, he dived straight at Grimy Doug.

GRIMY DOUG rather suspected he would be a man of action. That was why he had tackled him in the close quarters of the alleyway outside the chief's cabin.

Men of action such as the chief demanded large, rangey spaces. Grimy Doug, on the other hand, from his build and compactness, was quite content with close quarters.

As the chief dived, Grimy Doug slipped his left drive, and his own left smashed home on the passing ear and hammered the passing head very hard and very cruelly against the steel bulkhead of the alleyway. Having dazed a man rather more than two stone above his own fighting weight, and so evened things up,

Grimy Doug got in under a bunch of two hard fists that craved for long-range fighting, and did all he knew in the jolt and jab line.

He had no time for finesse or for pretty ring work. Bolsen was a killer with the distance and weight on his side, and given the chance, would fight wickedly to prevent Doug's natural ambition for promotion from fructifying.

So Doug's fists played a rivetter tune on the big man's ribs, blocked anything that came slamming along, and occasionally corrected Bolsen's tendency to fight back with fine, up-snapping blows to face and chin.

Bolsen fought like a bear, but unfortunately he had met just then a tiger. A tiger whose heart was set upon promotion, and whose natural instinct took him powerfully and inevitably to his own old level as cock engineer of any ship he sailed on.

"What's the good"—left jolt—"of having"—right uppercut—"a full chief's"—a bunging smash to the right eye—"ticket"—ditto to left—"if one can't"—right eye again—"make the most of it"—left eye once more. "And, chief, I intend to use it here and now"—a seven-inch shift punch hard and true to solar plexus.

Grimy Doug thereupon gazed down upon the lumpy mass that had just now been a chief engineer.

"From the look of you," he mused, "you have the air of a week in bed, and quite a lot of arnica and embrocation. Well, well, ambition caused the fall of angels—pity you should be the angels and me the ambition."

**H**E picked up the chief, deposited him in his bunk, and went to the skipper to report the unqualified, if unexpected, illness, indisposition, and otherwise confined-to-bedness of the two ship's engineers.

"You scoundrel, you dog!" bellowed the captain. "This is your doing!"

"Mine?" echoed Grimy Doug in innocent surprise. "How could that be? Apart from the fact that I illustrate the weel-known axiom or proverb, 'You can't

keep a good man under,' I don't see how you can blame me for anything."

"I'm a good mind to put you in irons," snarled the captain. "By gum, that's the thing I gotter do."

"Of course, that's as you like," murmured Grimy Doug, eying him meditatively. "Unless, of course, my natural instinct for promotion would lead me to fancy myself fit to command a ship."

"What!" shouted the skipper, backing away.

"But I think not. Engines are my forte," murmured Grimy Doug, "and talking of them reminds me that at the present moment the good ship *Angel of Peace* is wandering along yon sunny ocean without an engineer to attend to her engines."

"By gum, that's it," moaned the captain. "There'll be nobody to look after the engines, for days."

"Weeks," murmured Grimy Doug pleasantly. "Let me assure you from the state of the patients, it'll be weeks. And they are very racket engines—as you undoubtedly know. Of course, being fully qualified meself, I might let bygones be bygones and consent to give ye a helping hand."

The skipper glared at him furiously for a full minute. "You'd better do it, by gum," he snarled at last, "and do it well. And somebody's going to pay for this."

"Just what I said, skipper, when I learned I'd been shanghaied. We're two minds wi' but a single thought—but maybe with different intentions," he ended, as with a twinkling smile he walked to the engine room, took over, and then paid certain careful attention to the crosshead gibs, which, he had already noticed, had a tendency to knock.

By the afternoon, twenty hours' steaming from Charleston, the crosshead gibs knocked themselves once too often. There were certain drastic and unpleasant noises in the *Angel of Peace*'s engine room, and a few minutes later the ship was lying dead and helpless on a lazy sea.

**A** COUPLE of hours later Grimy Doug, his round face more solemn than natural, his blue eyes twinkling through engine-room grease, was ignoring all the skipper's ragings, threats, profanity, and promises of sudden death, and was saying calmly:

"Na, we canna carry on indeefinitely. I ha' patched yon collection of old petrol tins and bike-tubing misnamed engines so's they'll carry ye a run of, say, twenty-five hoours—but beyond that it's a deadly bust and danger in your engine room. It's a machine-shop repair, mon, an' you'd better hit it out to the nearest port. What will that be?"

"Charleston," snarled the captain.

"I guessed it would be," grinned Doug. "For a man prone to slovenliness and dirrt my workings are remarkably accurate."

They tied up a couple of cables away from the *Olive Branch*, next day. Grimy Doug, without the slightest by-your-leave or word of farewell, calmly climbed the

engine-room ladder, crossed the deck, walked onto the quay, and rolled to the *Olive Branch*.

He did not trouble to discover if anybody saw him go, and he did not care. He guessed that if the skipper of the *Angel of Peace* went to law he had quite a lot of good law on his side, which said skipper would find painful.

He was welcomed with open arms by his messmates of the *Olive Branch*.

"Where in Heaven's name have you been, Doug, and what in Heaven's name have ye been doing?" cried his skipper.

"Been? Doing?" grinned Doug, eyes twinkling over smudges of oil. "Ah've been engaged on an interestin', if unwilling, experiment. I've been provin' to meself an' others that I'm the original good man ye carrn't keep under, an' that it is a dangerous, not to say painful, thing to try an' prevent a man of my parts and intelligence following out his natural instinct to rise to the highest honors in whatever sphere he finds himself in."

*Another "Grimy Doug" adventure in an early issue.*



### THE HEART-BREAKING PLAY

**H**E is seventy-four years old, he has been in Congress thirty years, his days are full of politics, oratory and legislation, but nothing thrills him more than the memory of the moment when he broke a man's heart with a quick throw to first base. He is Henry Allen Cooper, representative of the first Wisconsin congressional district, and the story came out when he received a book entitled "History of the World Tour of the Chicago White Sox and the New York Giants." On the flyleaf of the volume was written: "Compliments of Ted Sullivan to Congressman Cooper, who broke the author's heart by catching him off first base by a lightning throw in a game at Burlington, Wisconsin, between the Stars of Milwaukee and the Alerts of Burlington for the championship of Wisconsin."

Sullivan, later manager of the St. Louis Browns, was captain and pitcher of the Milwaukee Stars, and Cooper was catcher for the Burlington Alerts. Sullivan, the first hitter up, got to first base by cracking out the first ball thrown for a single. Cooper, catching the next ball pitched, snapped it to first and nipped Sullivan several feet off the base. He says he got the signal for the throw from his third baseman, proving that there was "inside baseball" in even those distant days.

That play discouraged the Stars. The Alerts won that game and the next, and the State championship, rode home in triumph in a four-horse wagon and were received by a brass band and a battery of orators.

By  
**CHARLES NEVILLE  
BUCK**

Author of "The Rogue's Badge,"  
"Off Side in Scrimmage," Etc.



# All the

## THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

**KENNETH APPLEFIELD.**—Descendant of an aristocratic Kentucky family whose male members have been distinguished as soldiers, statesmen, and breeders of blooded horses. Kenneth inherits the prideful bearing, but neither the martial nor sporting instincts of his forbears. He is ambitious but sober; courageous but never foolhardy. In the course of his journalistic apprenticeship as a reporter on the Louisville *Leader* he has distinguished himself by his handling of a delicate and hazardous diplomatic mission between the hostile McDonough and Spencer clans in the highland region about Hemlock Town.

**MARY LEE LORD.**—A popular Louisville girl of aristocratic lineage. Dazzled by the eminence of Kenneth Applefield's social position, his reputed wealth and his distinguished bearing, she falls in love with him. As the engagement advances, however, she is disillusioned. His sobriety, his aversion to spectacular rashness of any sort, repell her.

**OTHER CHARACTERS.**—Craig Smiley, whom Mary Lee Lord has rejected as a suitor, but retains as a courtier. Major Jerry Shane, a theatrical figure on the Kentucky tracks, a blue-blood prompt to admit his pride of race. Dorothy Shane, a serious-minded girl, the spiritual antithesis of her spectacular father. Captain Willis Blake, a Louisville lawyer with a fatal penchant for track gambling and a sincere love of good sportsmanship. Tom Bristoll, a newspaper telegraph operator by profession and a gambler by birth. Joe Applefield, Kenneth's uncle; owner of a racing stable.

**THE STORY.**—Kenneth Applefield, having stormed the heart of Mary Lee Lord easily, finds the fortress harder to keep than to take. Mary Lee makes it pretty plain that she wants a lover and husband with a high heroic polish—a man who will take the center of the limelight and walk there without blinking. Courage is not enough for Mary Lee. She demands courage that scintillates, courage that calls down the cheers of the gallery. She has been bred among sportsmen and sportswomen. It does not please her that Kenneth is apathetic toward the spectacular sport of kings and prefers to bend his energy to the sober career of molding public opinion. Little by little she stimulates Kenneth's interest in track affairs.



A story of Kentucky  
feud and sport, in five  
parts—Part IV.

# King's Horses

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE DISAPPOINTING KNIGHT.

**T**OM BRISTOLL did not invest his first week's salary in a railroad ticket to another town and another job. According to his capricious philosophy that would be as well done a bit later, and the horses were still running at Churchill Downs. In his judgment, he could use his small earnings to better advantage here than elsewhere, and if fortune smiled on him with such favor as he had known before, he need not go elsewhere for work or, for that matter, trouble himself about work at all.

His winnings had always started from small beginnings, and at first he would play cautiously—very cautiously indeed. But he must hold himself more austere in check. He must never chance his whole capital recklessly on one event, however confident he might feel that this time he had outguessed the "iron men." Acquaintances who met him on the street saw him wearing good clothes, and need not know that his wardrobe was reduced to a single suit, and that his more valu-

able possessions all reposited, for the time being, in pawnshops. He was eating at cafeterias and begrudging each half dollar spent for food, and more than once he borrowed small sums from Kenneth Applefield.

But when the spring meeting closed and Tom Bristoll's pockets were still unchafed by the milled edges of many coins; when the lure of large possibilities out there to the south of the city gave way to emptiness and void, Tom's feet smarted to be away—and the old wanderlust possessed his soul. Once more Kenneth contributed a small loan, and saw the picturesque character flitting into the limbo of his accustomed absences.

Kenneth, sitting before his typewriter, or hurrying about on his news assignments, alternated between peaks of exaltation when Mary Lee smiled, and depths of despair when her mercurial nature drew the blinds of ephemeral displeasure across her violet eyes. She had seemed to forget entirely the episode of his failure to measure up to her spirited requirements when he had declined to ride *The Cherub*. Indeed, it is doubtful whether a

night's sleep had not obliterated from her mind the whole circumstance that had momentarily estranged them. So much for the kaleidoscopic quickness of a temperament that is constantly shifting and altering its pattern of present thought!

Now, nearer concerns made that incident seem already remote to both of them. Mary Lee, with her mother, was sailing late in June for four or five months of European travel, and her lover was moving heaven and earth to have his two weeks of vacation fixed within such dates that he might be with her in New York, and wave his farewell from the pier as her steamer stood out to sea.

It was a catastrophe to have her go, but his youth sought to turn the clouds inside out and make them present their silver linings to the eye. There would be a fortnight together in the East, and the bleak future, after that, could be faced when it arrived.

The dates so fell that during that time, at "The Newmarket of America," the handiest of the three-year-old division would meet to do battle in the Belmont Stakes. Kenneth remembered with a sense of wonderment that he had ever been indifferent to the things that come to pass on the race course. Mary Lee, with her electric enthusiasm, had galvanized his tepid interest into an eager keenness. She talked sagely of weights and track conditions and the relative abilities of jockeys, and just now—though there was always the depressing realization that the colt Kenneth was relegated to inactivity—she was seeking to convince her lover that St. Francis in the Shane colors would lead the way home in the notable fixture of the Belmont Park program.

"Cousin Jerry has explained it all to me, Ken dear," she argued valiantly. "The boy who was up on St. Francis in the Derby threw away the race. He took too much out of his mount in the early stages and then let him get bumped about until he sulked and chucked the whole thing."

She paused and added disdainfully: "Everybody knows that The Bolt had no

right to win. It was a pure fluke. He happened to drop into a lucky spot there on the rail where there wasn't any interference. He had been rated back while the rest were burning themselves up, so he got through and lasted just long enough. It wasn't a true-run race—that Derby."

Kenneth smiled.

"I expect you're right in thinking that The Bolt ran a better race than he knows how, that time," he acceded. "He hasn't quite the class to repeat the performance—but he has more than St. Francis at that. Comet Light will be at the post in the Belmont, and Comet Light figures to roll home at a gallop."

**K**ENNETH had registered at a cheaper hotel than that in which Mary Lee and her mother had their habitation in Manhattan. Though his colleagues spoke of him as "the millionaire cub," his purse was slenderer than he could have wished. His father had supplied him with vacation funds, but less lavishly than the son had hoped. It was his need that violets and orchids should appear at Mary Lee's door each morning, and that the character of her entertainment should be such that she should remember it during several months abroad.

Because of this nicely calculated regimen of economy, Kenneth felt a stab of foreboding when his telephone rang one midnight as he sat, still in evening dress, and he recognized the voice of Tom Bristol. The lover had been contentedly digesting in his mind the glories of the evening just ended; an evening of dinner over shaded lights with an orchestra just far enough away, of several hours in a theater, and finally—in the taxi—of his lips pressed on the lips of Mary Lee, and of her arms impulsively clasped about his neck. He yearned for no interruption.

How did Tom Bristol get here? How had he discovered that Kenneth was at this hotel? What did he want?

But as he stammered into the phone, Tom himself was answering at least one of these unexpressed inquiries.

"I saw you on the Avenue this after-

noon, riding on top of a bus with Miss Lord," came the information. "And later I met Major Shane and he told me where you were stopping. What are you doing now?"

"I was just going to bed," came the prompt reply.

"You can do that any time," laughed Bristoll. "I want to see you. Will it be all right if I jump down there right away?"

"Why," stammered Kenneth inhospitably, "it's pretty late, isn't it?"

"Getting early again now," retorted the other. "I've got to see you for a moment. I won't keep you up long."

"Oh, all right," came the grudging assent.

**K**EENNETH hung up the phone. Tom Bristoll had had his taste of riches and had soon gotten down to the dregs of poverty again. He was a gambling monomaniac with a greed for big money, and for months he had been on his uppers. Kenneth had been willing enough to make small loans there in Louisville, but here he needed to guard and stretch his funds. Only a fool could fail to guess that this urgency of Tom Bristoll's had, as its driving power, his desperate need of making a touch. Tom would willingly give any friend his shirt—but he rarely had a shirt to give, and meanwhile he was equally willing to borrow one.

Kenneth was debating how he could decently refuse such opportunities when the phone rang again, and in answer to the announcement from the desk he said shortly, "Send him up."

The frown was still on his face when he opened the door on the smiling face of Tom Bristoll, telegraph operator, plunger, and adventurer at large.

The visitor did not look seedy, but then he never looked seedy. He wore the one good suit in which he had sat at the wire's end in the *Leader* office, and his engaging face was wreathed in its boyish and naïve smile.

"All dolled up in the soup and fish, eh?" observed Tom. "Here you are swanning

10A—POP.

around New York with the prettiest girl in captivity—and dispensing largess to florists, confectioners, and—"

"I'm not," interrupted Kenneth ungraciously seizing his cue. "At least I can't last long at it. The pace is too strong for me, and my dimes are getting lonesome."

Tom, who still stood by the door, ran a hand into his trousers pocket and brought it carelessly out with a roll of bills as thick as a policeman's nightstick. The one that showed had a yellow back.

"My clairvoyant soul whispered something of the sort," he announced with a grin. "It struck me that cavaliering such a lovely lady about this man's town might make inroads on the good old hoard. That's why I insisted on seeing you tonight. I came to settle what I owe—and if you want to borrow a few hundred, just name your sum."

Kenneth's eyes widened in astonishment, and his visitor laughed.

"Oh, I got you from the moment I heard your voice," he declared amiably. "You were wondering how you could turn down the insistent touch—and you couldn't spare it."

"Things seem to have taken a good turn—for you," volunteered Kenneth lamely, and Bristoll nodded.

"I got to St. Louis and located a pool room," he said. "The place was pinched, but I folded my tent like the Arab while they were loading up the patrol wagons. I'd gotten a start and I've gathered in a few pickings here and there."

"I'm living at the Waldorf, and a very decent Fifth Avenue tailor is working for me overtime. I want you and Miss Lord to have a party with me. How about lunch at the Plaza and motoring out to the track for the Belmont Stakes? That's day after to-morrow."

"But, man," expostulated Kenneth, "what are you? A maharajah? That party would cost nothing short of a young fortune."

Tom waved his hand in a gesture of negligent grandeur. "Let it be inscribed on my monolith," he murmured, "that I was a good fellow when I had it."

THE papers on the morning of the great race carried one note of doleful regret. The weather was perfect, the field was one that promised a royal struggle—but a damper was cast on the finality of the result because of an absentee.

In the Kentucky Derby, the East had sent its champion to join issue with a native champion. Joe Applefield's Kenneth had been accounted worthy to match strides with the heralded Comet Light—and Kenneth had not been able to start. Now, the West came to the East, but again its outstanding representative was unable to face the flag. Without Kenneth, asserted the turf analysts, Comet Light would not be truly facing his most formidable peer.

It was true that Comet Light had been defeated in the Derby by an outsider, and that outsider would again be under colors to-day—but hardly twice in succession could such a break in racing luck occur as would make The Bolt victor over the pride of the East. The first victory had been by inches, after the favorite had set a killing pace for all the rest. The jockey had been overconfident and careless. To-day, added the form critics, Jimmy Earle would use better judgment in piloting his mount and the story would have a different ending.

In the Derby, too, the rivalry of East and West had promised a duel of riders as well as colts. Now, again, the fresh-water pilot from Kentucky would wear silks, but to-day he would be up on The Bolt—and it was agreed that The Bolt was a youngster who had had his lucky fling and who must now drop back into the more mediocre setting to which he belonged.

Mary Lee and Kenneth devoured these discussions, and mourned a little over the misadventure which robbed them of a proprietary interest in the race. What a white-hot fever of excitement would have gone with them had Applefield silks paraded to the post with such high regard for their starter as these newspaper items indicated would have been his right.

"As it is, we can only root for an out-

sider again," lamented the girl as they left their luncheon for Tom Bristoll's hired car. "We haven't really any personal interest."

"We might have had," suggested the boy shyly. "They run the Syosset Steeplechase to-day, too—two and a half miles for gentlemen riders—and Major Shane offered to get me a mount."

"Why didn't you accept?" demanded Mary Lee eagerly. "I've never seen you in silks. I'd give a year of my life if I could ride a steeplechase."

Kenneth smiled deprecatingly. "I'm a stranger here," he said, "and it looked like a grand-stand play to me. Besides, I can't ride well enough for that company."

Mary Lee looked off along the sunny cañon of the Avenue and said nothing. For a moment Kenneth read in her eyes that same old disappointment for a knight who showed no eagerness to enter the lists.

TO Major Jerry Shane, of Kentucky, such an occasion as the running of the Belmont was a day set in gold upon the calendar. In his own State, though accounted a picturesque figure, he was taken more for granted. Here, heralded by reporters, who had fallen into the habit of treating him as a personage, he found himself pointed out and heard his views flatteringly quoted. The ceremonious manner of the elderly gallant, smiled at as an overstressed affectation by his fellow Kentuckians, passed among strangers at its face value for a survival of the chivalric attitude.

As the major moved about the lawns, with a gardenia in his lapel, he wore his years with a jaunty ease that achieved the debonair, and those to whom he was pointed out seldom failed to turn for a second look.

"The Bolt? Yes, madam, I quite agree with you," Major Shane was saying impressively to a richly caparisoned dowager as Kenneth, Mary Lee, and Tom Bristoll passed by on the lawn. "His victory in the Derby was a sheer bit of

luck, scarcely to be looked for a second time. I owned him as a two year old, but I disposed of him as lacking in real class when I weeded out my string."

Watching the great race course fill with its sparkling throngs, fill yet remain spaciously free from crowding; looking out across the green plush of the field and the embroidery of the flower beds to the blue Westchester skies, Mary Lee stood with her breath coming fast and the violets on her bosom rising and falling to a palpitant excitement.

The first race she hardly saw. The second, which was the steeplechase for amateur riders, calling out a field of four, made her almost forget the great feature which was to follow later. She stood with such rapt attention as might have been seen in the Coliseum of gladiatorial days as the timber toppers plunged at the stiff barriers of the infield course, launched themselves over, and came pelting on again.

She wondered how Kenneth could have persuaded himself to watch that race from the ground when he might have been in the saddle, flying at those fences. But as horses and riders approached the wings of each jump, she held her breath and her hands clenched themselves, and when two starters went down, hurtling their riders over their heads, she gasped and did not breathe again at all until she saw the amateur jockeys roll clear and come up to their feet, shaking the dirt from their silks.

Then again in the Keene Memorial her interest lapsed, because excitement could not maintain such concert pitch without relaxation, even though splendid babies were doing two-year-old battle over what was, for them, the trying route of five and a half furlongs.

After that the crowds set out to the paddock, and under its patriarchal trees she saw the aspirants for the greater crowning being led around, blanketed and keenly pitched, their high-strung sinews twitching under sleekly polished coats. She stroked St. Francis' muzzle and wished for the colt Kenneth, and she looked at Comet Light, the much vaunted,

and passed by The Bolt with a cursory disdain.

The saddling bugle had blown its admonitory fanfare and the post call had been sounded.

Onto the lightning-fast track, shining like a toy shop with fresh paint on fence and stand and announcement boards, its green background and its flawless overhead blue, paraded seven of the finest three-year-old colts that the breeding plants of the continent could send out to battle.

St. Francis had been lucky, for the drawing of numbers had given him the rail position. Comet Light trod just after him, Jimmy Earle confidently perched over his withers with knees high and body swaying to each movement as if it were part of the horse under him. Then followed the others, The Bolt plodding along at the tail of the queue with as business-like a stride as if he were being sent out to fetch the milk or the mail. Astride him was the Kentucky boy, Johnny Forrest, new to these parts but much heralded by men who had seen racing distant from the metropolitan circuit.

As that field paraded, there was a sort of sigh in the multitude that looked on—a sigh for the absentee, because without him in that company, whatever the result of the race, there would be dubious voices raised to assert, "Yes, but if Kenneth had been there it might have been another story."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE HARD BLOW.

AT the post there was some delay when the field had lined up under command of the starter. Something wheeled and kicked, and those jockeys within range of its heels maneuvered their mounts out of the danger zone.

The multitude waited nervously till the webbing snapped skyward and the red flags swooped down. The classic journey of a mile and three furlongs was under way. At the outset, it was a repetition of the Derby. It was Comet Light that showed at the front of the eruption, and

it was St. Francis that ran on his flank with the rest following.

But to-day Jimmy Earle was remembering a bitter lesson. He had been criticized for tossing away that earlier race by burning the great heart out of his mount in the setting of too early and too furious a pace. Now, he appraised the situation and eased up the favorite until Major Shane's black youngster had shot into the lead—and though the star jockey lay close, he held the public's choice under double wraps and even dropped for a while into third position. The boy on St. Francis saw what he was being asked to do—to cut the speed pattern and hold his own in the dizzy pace of the finish as well, and he, too, eased back and let his mount run second.

The field was divided into two sections now; those three in front, and, two lengths back, a close-bunched quartet, trailing. Around the far turn and into the stretch they swept in that same order, and then two of the first division began to waver and shorten stride.

The consumed pacemaker, charred to a cinder of exhaustion, was first to toss up his tail in distress, and the Shane starter, St. Francis, dizzy now and reeling on his feet, abandoned the torture of the ordeal. From the rear section something moved up with relentless, businesslike determination. He passed the tiring pair and set sail for Comet Light, who now winged on alone.

The stands came to their feet howling in wild incredulity, yet with that willingness of exhortation that pays tribute to an amazing performance. Could it be that the Kentucky Derby was to be reenacted here at Belmont Park? Could it be that the despised fluke horse that had been victorious there was here to be recrowned?

Jimmy Earle went furiously to the bat with the favorite, and the favorite responded with gallant and great-hearted courage—but the open gap of daylight at his rump was shortening, and Johnny Forrest, in a whipping finish, was overhauling the leader and biting out a visible piece of the margin at each stride.

Fifty yards from the wire those two

were running nose and nose. The head that was down with the rise and fall of the leap was the head in front. The muzzle that was up was the muzzle behind.

Now they were matching heart for heart and courage for courage in the hot duel of endurance that burns along the last sixteenth.

Jimmy Earle's whip and Johnny Forrest's whip seemed to swing up and down as if one hand wielded both, but in the final twenty yards Comet Light reeled noticeably in his stride and The Bolt drew authoritatively away—this time to cross the wire with a full length of victorious margin.

The howls that went along the rail were a chorus of thunders, and when they had finally dwindled, an elderly colored man, standing against the fence, hurled his hat into the air and wheeled to face the grand stand with a wild light of challenge in his eyes.

"A hoss may do that once by luck," he bellowed at the top of his lungs. "No hoss can't do it twicet without he's all hoss. I'll tell the world he can't!"

Then the negro, who had once been for a short time the owner of this often-sold colt, wheeled and walked away. The fire that blazed in his eyes attested that, for the moment, he had forgotten he was no longer owner and proprietor of The Bolt.

**K**ENNETH left his own hotel the next morning to breakfast with Mary Lee at hers. With the absorption of theatrical people after an opening, they were poring over the papers, ripping them open to the racing news and casting the rest away.

There, in that accuracy of analysis which is always possible in backward looking and rarely achieved in prophecy, they read the verdict of the experts that the Violett stable had in The Bolt the prince royal of the three-year-old division, and that the mighty Comet Light had bowed to a better horse. These experts discussed their theme with more elaboration, but in the end the consensus of turf opinion was precisely what the elderly negro had bellowed out under the judges'

stand yesterday. "A hoss may do that once by luck. No hoss can't do it twicet without he's all hoss!"

Said one scribe:

Comet Light was not disgraced in either race. Each of the great events was run close to record time, and in each he was so close to the front that the time hung out was to all intents and purposes his as well as the winner's. It was less that he was a disappointment than that another colt proved himself greater. Certainly, after ratifying in the Belmont his declaration of greatness in the Derby, it is too late to fling at The Bolt any such untenable charge as that of being a luck horse. He is a great colt—one of the greatest. Indeed, so far as the record shows, he is the greatest that this season has offered in his division.

They laid aside that paper and took up another. Its tenor was the same. The deriders of yesterday were the eulogists of to-day.

Mary Lee bent forward. "Listen," she commanded. "Here is a word for the absent. This man says:

"There was just one regret to be associated with the Violett colt's brilliant victory. Kenneth, which was proclaimed and accepted as a wonder horse before a bad leg threw him out of training, was not on hand to have his say. There will be those a-plenty to declare that his presence would have scrapped yesterday's form sheet and rewritten it. However, it must be remembered that this colt was one whose public acceptance stood not on a record of races won, but on the legend that in training workouts he had played hob with track records and toyed with time. It is to be hoped that the so-called supercolt will be brought back to soundness and come to the races—and that the two will meet. But until that day dawns, Kenneth's superiority is one based on words and unproven claims—while The Bolt's flag is raised to the masthead and nailed there. Now for the Queens County Handicap! If Mr. Violett's youngster captures that, his glory is secure."

The boy sat stirring his coffee and looking across the table at the flushed face of the girl. There was worship in his eyes and a pain in his heart because the vacation days were ending, and after to-morrow, when her steamer sailed, there would be an empty and dismal fog wrack of loneliness lying ahead.

"They haven't a kind word for poor St. Francis," lamented Mary Lee. "If they

speak of him at all it's to say he's running in the wrong races and that he belongs with the selling-platers."

Kenneth nodded. "And the worst of it is," he admitted, "they're quite right."

**I**T was a day of sparkle and zest with flawless skies, but Kenneth rose with a tightness around his heart and a lump in his throat.

With the sailing of the *Mauretania* this morning, it seemed to him that the bottom must drop out of life and leave it void; that over the empty water back of the liner's wake would rise the bleak words, "Ichabod, thy glory is departed."

He was so heavy of spirit that he found it hard to summon an aspect of gayety for the farewell hour, and this he regretted because the girl's eyes were a-sparkle with the gladness of expectancy.

On board the liner they found a little scrap of deck that was almost hidden—though that was hard of achievement because it seemed that more couples were searching for just such refuges than the designers of the big boat had been able to provide. Already the whistle was blowing its "all-ashore" warning, and Mary Lee gave Kenneth both her hands. "Hurry, Ken," she urged nervously. "They'll be pulling in the gangplank in a minute." She paused and her voice melted into impulsive tenderness. "It won't be long, dear, you know."

"Not for you, dearest," he answered huskily, in spite of his resolution. "It's going to be splendid for you, of course. But for me it *will* be long—desperately long."

Their eyes met, and then the girl was clinging to him, with her lips to his. He was almost crushing her, and then, as he felt with mortification that his eyes were unaccountably misting, he bent his head again and buried his face in the violets she wore.

**T**WO weeks after the Belmont had been decided, the Queens County Handicap was run at Aqueduct, and because of a slight ailment, Comet Light had to be

withdrawn. But *The Bolt* faced the flag, and after the mile had been traveled he had stepped into the chalk semicircle from which the winning jockey salutes the judges.

Of that race one of the press writers made a brief summary: "The *Bolt*, under the heavy impost of one hundred and seventeen pounds raced the mile in one thirty-seven flat. He had his field reeling and strung out at the end of seven furlongs, and from that point home he galloped as he pleased and was plainly eased up."

Of the lame *Kenneth*, by *Bombay* out of *Annie Laurie*, hardly a turf critic now spoke. Then when to the *Queens*, the lately despised *Violett* colt added the laurels of the *Latonia Derby*—though this was a race run on Kentucky soil—the *Applefield* claimant for glory was entirely forgotten. His name was no longer evoked even as a memory.

While such great fixtures as the *Derby*, the *Belmont* and the *Queens* are starry classics of the turf, the turf cannot subsist by classics alone. In those more numerous races that drop down the scale to a lesser importance, horses with less-exalted names must play their less-exalted rôles. Often, too, colts that have started their careers with glowing promise gravitate by the sifting process of competition to these humbler grades.

Major *Jerry Shane* had clung to his belief in the picture horse that had carried his silks in the *Derby* when all other trust in that colt had shamefully wilted and died. At length even his confidence shriveled, and though the name of *St. Francis* appeared on the starting card often enough, it no longer appeared in company with great competitors. He had found his level in cheap fields of selling-platers, and even there he was yet, in his three-year-old form, a maiden. No brackets signifying victory stood to his credit in any company, and the handicappers, yielding to a contagion of contempt, were giving him more and more concession in the weights, which are supposed to make democracy safe for race horses.

At *Latonia*, though the season was still

young, *St. Francis* was a discredited beast, beaten by all sorts and conditions of rivals and utterly scorned by the students of racing form.

On the day of the *Latonia Derby*, he started at a mile in cheap company, and for the fifth successive time trailed home disconsolately in the ruck.

**P**ERHAPS Major *Shane's* temper had become whetted to edginess by disappointment. Perhaps chagrin blistered him because his early prophecies returned now to reflect on his judgment as a horseman. Be that as it may, when the colt was being led back from this inglorious finish, and when he saw the erect figure of *Willis Blake* standing near with a quizzical expression in his steely eyes, the major was less than cordial in his greeting.

*Blake* eyed him for a moment, and then the pupils smiled while the lips refrained from bending.

"I still venture to believe, major," commented *Blake* amiably, "that *The Bolt* is a better colt than *St. Francis*."

"There are many judges of horseflesh, sir," came the curt retort with no yielding to any spirit of pleasantry, "whose judgment is unimpeachable when it operates on hind sight."

*Blake* stiffened a little at the frigid tone and the unresponsive spirit. His steely eyes hardened and engaged, for a moment, those of his old, though not his intimate, acquaintance. Between the two men flashed a dawning gleam of enmity, the sort of enmity that may spring to quick life between adversaries who share the quality of unbending egotism.

"My judgment was not expressed after the fact—but before it," observed *Blake* frostily as he turned on his heel.

**I**T was casually enough that *Craig Smiley* told *Kenneth* as they met on the street one afternoon: "I'll be saying 'so long' for a while, old top. I'm off for a few weeks abroad."

*Kenneth* gulped as if he had taken a blow on the point of his jaw.

"I expect you'll see *Mary Lee*," he

found himself saying blankly, and the other favored him with that darting smile of his out of birdlike eyes.

"Now I shouldn't wonder if I did," he exclaimed with the whimsical pretense of greeting a new idea. "They say that if you stand long enough in front of the *Café de la Paix*, you'll see every one you know. I'll try to stand there long enough."

Kenneth went on rather sick at heart. That particular vicissitude was one which it had not occurred to him to forecast, and as he turned it around in his thoughts it acquired fresh menace from every angle of view. Craig Smiley could make himself rarely companionable among the opportunities of European travel, and to the young man who must wait here at home, Europe became a stage so set that any man needed only its environment to play the successful lover.

But why should he wait here at home? After all, why should not a family, which set store by the elegancies of life, give its only son the advantages of a little foreign travel; of a brief opportunity to polish his provincialism with Continental contacts? He had interests over there that needed watching, and this evening he would broach to his father—for he had no mother—the matter of an early sailing. He would explain how urgently the call sounded to his heart, and his father, whose own heart was generous, would doubtless agree with him.

He finished the news assignment upon which he had been engaged when that chance meeting with Craig had spoiled his day, and started back to the *Leader* office.

But when he entered the city room its chief glanced up under his green eye shade, and then rose rather hastily. There was unaccustomed solicitude in the manner of the city editor that made his speech awkward, and that carried to the young reporter a premonition of disaster.

"I've been trying to get you, Applefield," said the local boss, coming away from his desk and taking Kenneth by the elbow. "The Old Man wants to see you."

With an almost funereal soberness Kenneth was conducted to the sanctum door

and pushed gently through it. On his appearance there, the editor in chief also came to his feet.

"You must brace yourself for bad news, my boy," he said with the same clumsy concern that had been apparent in the outer office. "I'm sorry."

"What is it?" demanded Kenneth, and the editor cleared his throat, picked up and laid down again a pair of desk shears.

"Your father has had a violent and sudden attack," began his informant.

"How bad?" The words came huskily.

"About as bad as—"

"You mean—he's—dead?"

The chief nodded his regretful affirmation.

Kenneth stood for a moment staring to the front, then he said blankly: "I must go home."

THE funeral was over, and in the house, which had been occupied by his father and himself alone, a lawyer and his Uncle Joe Applefield sat with him in conference. There had been much talk, and as he had listened to it, first with a numbed sort of disinterest, certain things had begun to develop; amazing and unsuspected things.

Now the attorney made a deprecating gesture.

"That's how things stand, my boy," he summarized. "You are your father's sole heir, but the estate seems so involved that you inherit next to nothing. Perhaps, though, your father had explained his circumstances to you?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"I had always supposed," he said vaguely through the giddiness that seemed to befog his mind, "that we were reasonably rich. We lived that way. Father hated economies."

"There you have it," the attorney enlightened him. "The community thought the same thing. Even I thought so. Your father hated economies—and he had about reached the end of the principal."

He paused, then added: "Your Uncle Joe, here, has the farm and the horses.

It seems, though, that these things have proved rather a liability than an asset and your father came often to his support, indeed——” The lawyer looked at Joe Applefield, and Applefield nodded.

“Practically all I have,” he corroborated bleakly, “could have been foreclosed upon by your father—can be foreclosed upon by you, as his heir, if you see fit.”

“Not at all. Don’t worry.”

Kenneth felt that he was talking in the disjointed idiocy of nightmare. It had come without warning, and he felt very much as a prize fighter might who clings to the ropes and seeks to keep the light from going out and his legs from buckling under him.

“I’ve been hoping from year to year——” began Joe and broke off.

“Yes, Joe was always—hoping,” added the lawyer dryly.

That evening Kenneth sat in the house which except for himself was quite empty. He had been trying to think. What he had supposed to be his circumstances, Mary Lee had also taken for granted. Plainly, instead of going to Europe, he must write her a letter. Clearly decency demanded that he tell her candidly how he had shrunken and shriveled in eligibility as a lover—how threadbare had become his desirability as a husband.

Why in Heaven’s name had he been raised to think of himself as a young aristocrat with an easy future assured? Why had he not been told the naked truth and allowed the opportunity of shaping himself to meet it?

He had said he wanted to stand on his own feet. Well, now he must either do that or fall flat. His family had been too proud to economize; too proud to admit the truth. Now the truth insisted on full recognition and it was not pretty to look at.

He must write his letter to Mary Lee. He went into the library where there were paper and pens. At the edge of the desk a hideous fear of all life in its abrupt alterations assailed him. It had changed between two suns as lunacy changes a human being from dignity to ugliness.

He sought to brace himself. He wondered if praying would help, and he closed his eyes but no words suited to prayer would shape themselves.

Courage, that was what he needed. With a half savage passionateness he found himself exclaiming, half in supplication and half in rebellious despair: “God, give me guts!”

Then he sat down and began his letter.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“DISMISSED FOR COWARDICE.”

THE grand stands at Latonia look across a center field with a bridged lake and a formal garden. For background, there is a line of Ohio River hills whose green caps, in the afternoon light, catch a reflex of blue from overhead skies.

Like all lovely spots where sportsmen follow the lure of chance, one finds, too, those infesting parasites, the sports, to whom the fevered hope of getting something for nothing is the essence of the game.

Two such chronics stood one afternoon at the edge of the shed where the pari-mutuel machines were doing active business with a shouldering crowd of betters. These small-calibered, but deeply devoted, gamblers wore the dismal faces of men who have been outguessed in their racing judgment.

“What do you like in this next, ‘Biscuits?’ ” inquired one in a husky voice, and the other, whose face wore a pallor suggestive of drug addiction, shook his head dubiously.

“It’s at a mile and a sixteenth an’ the track’s dull,” came the deeply preoccupied response, as the speaker thumbed his tattered volume of form sheets loosely bound together and bearing the official “dope” on every horse and every race for weeks and months back. “This here St. Francis of Jerry Shane’s startin’ an’ he’s in mighty light—for a Derby colt runnin’ with a bunch of skates. I wonder if this might be his day.”

The first habitué jerked his head disdainfully.

"That hound won't never have no day," he announced curtly. "He's like the damn four-flusher that owns him. He can't do nothin' but show hisself off. If you was to stick a peacock feather in his tail he'd strut hisself to death."

"Easy! Watch your step," cautioned the pallid one in an excited whisper. "There's Shane standin' right behind you!"

The user of careless similes started and wheeled with perturbed eyes, but the turfman, whose repute was that of a man swift and resolute to punish impertinence, stood with the preoccupation of one who had palpably heard nothing, and after moving a few paces farther away the gambler continued:

"Look back over them dope sheets you've got there, Biscuits. Do you see anything in St. Francis' last five outs that shows where he's got a license to trim any man's horse? He started out as a Derby colt and he's slid downhill till he runs with skates, but he ain't never found no field cheap enough yet to suit him.

"He ain't never been in the money, has he? He ain't even been knockin' at the gate. You call this a bunch of cheese hounds—but Spartan ain't no dog. He's as good as in now. Here, let me show you the classy race he run his last time out."

"Maybe Spartan's a racy tool, but I don't like his agent," came the objection. "That jock couldn't ride a merry-go-round for me."

"All right," the argument was waxing hot, as is likely between men able to back their judgment only in words. "I reckon you *do* like the yegg that's up on Shane's starter. That boy's so crooked he sleeps zigzag. He'd bump off his crippled grandfather for two-bits."

The man who was still industriously thumbing his tattered volume of authority smiled cunningly.

"That's the reason why I like St. Francis," he made confidential admission. "I've got a hunch that Shane's been runnin' him back there at the tail end on purpose. Shane's foolish—like a fox. If he wins to-day, he'll cash in at thirty to one, or

better. Maybe this is the soft spot that bird's been waitin' for."

At this credulous line of reasoning the other laughed raucously. "Simps will be simps," he observed as he took his leave.

**W**HEN the bugle sounded post call and the field of mediocrities paraded, Willis Blake sauntered to the place he had selected on the stairs of the grand stand near the judges' kiosk, and as he watched the starters, identifying with a practiced eye their numbers and colors, he absently shuffled in his pocket a half dozen tickets he had bought on the favorite, Spartan. He told himself accusingly that he was a fool.

Spartan certainly figured on form to lead that field all the way—to win handily and at his pleasure. Still the odds would be small, and Blake felt uneasily that he had risked more money than he could afford to lose. He was an inveterate gambler, but usually a cautious one. This time some quirk had seized him, and he stood to be seriously crippled if a single race went wrong.

But it was not in the nature of Willis Blake to cry before he was hurt—or afterward either, for that matter. Now, he only shrugged his shoulders and waited.

**A**S the barrier was sprung, Spartan was away with boltlike speed forging into the lead, and St. Francis was at his rump. In spite of his forlornly disgraceful record, Shane's colt never failed to get away winging from the post. Rarely did his nose fail to show in the van at the start—but this is not the end of a race that is judged or rewarded. It was after some furlongs of fast going that the superb-looking creature was wont to curl like a shaving and let his spurting courage subside. It was when something looked him challengingly in the eye and measured stride for stride with him that his stamina collapsed. So Blake only smiled dryly when he saw the black thundering along, lapped on the leader, as the field swept for the first time past the stand.

But when they had straightened into the

back stretch, and when the boy on Spartan had shaken him up sharply—when in spite of that, St. Francis passed him as if he were hitched, not only Willis Blake but several thousand others looked on in amazement. When the hitherto undistinguished St. Francis breezed three lengths to the front, and from that point on proceeded to make a show of his field, romping home an easy and unextended winner, that amazement gave way to something like indignation.

"If it was anybody else but Major Shane," muttered one of the men in the press stand, "a reversal of form like that would call for an investigation."

A fellow scribe nodded. "If St. Francis had been improving—if he'd been knocking at the gate, it would be different." He paused, then added: "Shane's above suspicion, of course—but maybe the jockey isn't. Maybe the stewards will have something to say to him."

The confirmation of results did not go up at once on the board, and when the boy, who had worn the Shane silks, unsaddled to weigh out, the crowd noted that he was summoned into the presence of the judges where his face told of an uncomfortable interview. Major Jerry Shane pushed his way toward the kiosk, and the crowd, that had played the favorite, gathered below excitedly bellowing: "Disqualify him! The race was fixed!"

Neither the officials, looking down from their elevation, nor the owner of St. Francis, standing on the ground level, paid the slightest attention to this mob outcry, and after a few moments the discomfited jockey strode down the steps, the bell tapped and the numbers swung up on the board—with that of St. Francis confirmed as the winner. There was nothing tangible upon which to base a disqualification, but it was a fishy-looking race.

Slowly, Willis Blake strolled down from his place on the grand-stand stairs. Thoughtfully, he tore up and scattered to the winds a handful of cardboard scraps—the fragments of unredeemable tickets purchased from the "iron men."

The next morning over his breakfast,

Blake gave the sporting page a casual perusal, and he was not surprised to find a note announcing that Jesse Combs, the jockey who had brought home a winner in St. Francis, had been soundly admonished.

The colt was saddled from the stable of Major Jerry Shane, and this fact was sufficient assurance that he has always gone to the post in good faith. None the less, there was such a startling contrast between yesterday's performance and preceding fiascoes as was hard to reconcile with logic. The officials felt called upon to cross-question the jockey, and to warn him that his future performances will be keenly scrutinized.

It was not for misconduct in the Shane cap and jacket that Jesse Combs was set down and sentenced to watch the races from the ground for the rest of the season. Yet that punishment befell him a few days later when a charge of criminally rough riding was preferred and sustained against him, and the boy had friends who asserted that there was rank injustice in the treatment.

"It was really the St. Francis race that did for Jesse," they argued, "but the stewards didn't have the nerve to bawl Shane out, so they laid for the kid and got him on a pretext"—which was of course an accusation without color of justice.

But a day or two later Willis Blake met the boy on the race-track lawn. Jesse, having no business that kept him a prisoner in the jockey room these afternoons, stalked disconsolately about the paddocks and betting sheds, willing to rehearse the saga of his persecution to whoso would lend ear.

"Give my record the once-over, Captain Blake," appealed Jesse aggrievedly. "You'll see I've brought as many mounts into the money as any other apprentice riding in the West. I've ridden as straight, too. Now, just when I've got a chance to get out of the apprentice class and cop me a good contract, they hand me this raw deal. They don't say a word to the man that owned St. Francis—and whatever I did, I did on his orders."

"If you can show me that you've been

unfairly treated," Blake told him coolly, "I'll undertake to get your case reviewed. If you got what was coming to you—I won't."

The jockey shook his head. "They all quit when it comes to making Major Shane sore," he said. "He's got the whole blame outfit bluffed and buffaloed."

"He hasn't bluffed me yet," was the quiet response. "But as far as that goes neither have you told me anything definite."

The jockey caught excitedly at his sleeve. "Say," he declared in a passionate whisper, "if you mean that—if you ain't afraid of this gentleman bad man, this fine old Southern fire-eater, believe me, captain, I can spill an earful—and I'm game to do it."

**K**ENNETH APPLEFIELD was going through these first days after his personal cataclysm in a groggy sort of daze. He carried himself straight enough and normally enough to escape further comment from those he met than the black band on his sleeve justified. But until an answer came to the letter he had sent overseas, he must endure a purgatory of bleak suspense.

Dorothy Shane had offered him a sympathy which might have helped except that against Dorothy he was harboring a grudge. He told himself that this drawing away from the girl was because she had been unjust in her estimate of Mary Lee; because she had attributed to his ideal a flaw of fickleness which loyalty required him to resent.

**M**EANWHILE, though nothing was being printed on the subject, there were "grapevine" intimations about the sporting desk of brewing antagonism between Major Shane and Willis Blake, and one day on the street, Kenneth met the captain and paused to speak to him.

Blake had begun to express his sympathy, and with a shrinking of shyness from a discussion of his own misfortunes, the boy seized the first decent opportunity to divert talk to a less-embarrassing topic.

"What's this I hear, captain," he inquired, "about your taking up the cudgels for Jesse Combs?"

"It's hard to answer that, because I don't know what you've heard," was the smiling response. But even as he smiled, the lawyer's eyes hardened, and he went on in a tone of chilled sternness. "It's not so much the jockey I'm interested in. As near as I can make out he pulled several races with Shane's colt before winning the one that stirred up the officials. He's crooked, I expect."

"But I hear you're trying to have him reinstated?"

"I'm trying to have the responsibility placed squarely where it belongs. Dishonest jockeys are not as rare as they should be. It's when a dishonest jockey rides for a dishonest owner, and when that dishonest owner can still pose as a pillar of society, that the good repute of the turf is threatened."

"You don't mean that you suspect Major Shane?"

"My boy," the tall man spoke almost softly, "many people suspect Shane. The point is, that the man carries a legendary repute which no one seems anxious to challenge. He is one of those individuals about whom a myth has grown up. If he had been a little figure, his entries would have been refused by this time and he would have been stinging yet under his well-deserved rebuke."

"Why, captain," Kenneth stammered, "you astonish me. Surely Major Shane stands above suspicion both as to his honesty and his courage. No squarer or braver man ever walked in shoe leather."

"Major Shane," came the uncompromising retort, "is a counterfeit and a windbag. He is both a crook and a blustering bully. I myself found that hard to believe, and I did not believe it until I ran this thing down."

"I found that Shane intentionally lost race after race with this horse until the odds were tremendous. Then he sent him out to win, and won a fortune. The boy's conduct, first and last, was in pursuance of orders from his employer."

The accuser paused, then continued: "I don't say these things with the light malice of a scandalmonger. I state them after such investigation as will enable me to prove them."

"This is a shocking story," declared Kenneth Applefield blankly. "And without intending any disrespect to you, sir, you must let me put myself on record as saying I don't believe a word of it. Of course," he made haste to add, "I shall treat it as confidential."

Blake smiled with a wintry gleam of the eyes.

"I dare say you will, my boy," he answered deliberately. "Newspapers are extremely shy of libel suits, and properly so. But I place no obligations of secrecy on you—none whatever. I mean to run Jerry Shane off the turf—because I object to men who abuse their positions in respectable society. I dislike horsemen who manipulate their stables as chattels of greasy dishonesty."

"But, sir," Kenneth laid an impulsive hand on the arm of the taller and heavier man, "if this came to Major Shane's ears, a personal collision would result. It couldn't be avoided."

"It has come to his ears," said Blake dryly. "and he's pretending he hasn't heard it. I mean to make him abandon that pretense."

"You must be mistaken about that. If any rumor had reached him, you'd have heard from him like a shot."

Blake's lips set themselves straighter. "Then perhaps you'll do me the kindness of seeing that he has a report of our conversation?" The speaker paused and the smile in his eyes was bitingly ironic. "Shane is reputed to be a fighting man, isn't he? Isn't it even rumored that he can draw quick and shoot straight, and that he holds his honor very sacred?

"There are Kentuckians who don't relish the swaggering bravado of these professional Southerners. He has postured about the country overlong. Now, let him show some of his highly advertised qualities—or leave the stage. When I'm through with him, I trust no horse of his

will be allowed to start on a respectable race track—and I'll be glad to have you tell him that."

Kenneth shook his head.

"I'll have no hand in it, sir," he declared with emphasis. "I believe you're misinformed, and I know that if you hew to this line there'll be a clash. I'm afraid it will end in bloodshed."

Blake shrugged his shoulders. "It will end in showing up a faker," he asserted. "If I'm wrong, I'm prepared to bear the consequences of my mistake."

"I hear Blake is blackguarding me right and left," the major made casual comment to Kenneth a day or two later, "but I hope my name is secure against slander from such a source." He paused, then added: "I'm going to give him rope enough to hang himself, but I'm not overlooking the matter. I've got to take my stable East now, and I haven't time to stop and quarrel with cheap detractors.

"When I come back, I'll consider an apology—if it's respectfully offered. Unless it's forthcoming and satisfactory, then —" Once more the major paused and smilingly shrugged his broad shoulders. "Well," he concluded smilingly, "he'll have to be taught his lesson."

AS Kenneth waited for an answer to his letter, he swung pendulumwise between extremes of emotion. Sometimes he yielded to the despair of feeling that he was like his namesake colt, who had stood on the threshold of victory only to drop out of all competition. In other moods, he felt sure confidence that the news of his misfortunes would mean nothing more to Mary Lee than deep regret and strengthened loyalty.

Of this condition of spirit, his colleagues in the city room saw little. He did his work with energy and a growing ability, and he carried himself with an outward show of quiet assurance.

At length the envelope came to his office desk bearing a French stamp and a Paris postmark. Kenneth thrust it into his pocket, and it burned there with a hot expectancy of fear and hope until he could

close the door of his own library to read its sealed verdict alone.

Its beginning was affectionate and full of sympathy for his bereavement, and through several sentences the suspense of his heart remained taut and unenlightened. Then came a reference to his offer to release her.

I want you to try to understand me, Kenneth dear. And above all I don't want to hurt you, but if you loved me as I thought you did you couldn't offer to give me back my promise. You'd make me keep it whether or no. Your not doing that makes me realize that after all we haven't honestly and truly known each other. If you had the iron in you I thought you had—for all your self-accusations of timidity—you'd see in this blow only a thing to make you hit the line harder, and if you saw that, the poverty wouldn't matter much. Maybe I'm all wrong. Maybe you're too big and courageous and generous for me to understand, but if that's true, Kenneth dear, then I'm too small for you. The trouble is that we don't see the courage that is the soul of life as the same thing, and that's the one matter people can't agree to disagree about. Please don't think that being poor makes any difference. It doesn't. It was the tone of your letter that opened my eyes. That was a tone of surrender.

There's another thing I haven't spoken of until now, because I wanted you to have the whole of my feelings from first to last—but just as I've come to see that you and I didn't really know each other, so I've come to see, too, that Craig and I didn't really know each other either until lately. We do now and we are in love with each other. I don't think he has your intellect or your lofty ideals, Kenneth dear, but he and I see things alike. We like to think of living as a splendid adventure, and we don't like to test every chance to find out whether or not it's worth taking. We just want to take those chances as they come—together—in our stride.

I hope you won't hate me for this letter or this decision. I was always honest with you, or if I wasn't, it was because I didn't know myself. I'll always love you, Kenneth dear, but I'm not in love with you as I thought I was. If we had to find that out, it's better that we did it in time to avoid shipwreck.

Kenneth let the page drop from his hand and sat staring at the wall.

"A tone of surrender,'" he repeated in a dead voice. "She gave herself to me—and I didn't have the strength to hold her!" He picked up the unfinished sheet but the characters on it seemed to dance

fantastically before his eyes so that he could make nothing of them.

"You're the hell of a hero," he made bitter self-appraisal. "You deceived the clan chiefs, but you couldn't persuade the two persons that matter—a girl and yourself. You're dismissed for cowardice in the face of the enemy."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"THETAWAY" CORNETT.

**T**HERE were yet two more pages in that round hand, which Kenneth knew so well, and which heretofore had been a sign manual of love, but those remaining pages were still too blurred to read. They were not blurred by tears for Kenneth's eyes were as dry and as hot as the cinders of an expiring fire. It was his brain that seemed smudged and stunned, and as he lifted the page again, its lines became a mass of wavering hieroglyphs.

After a time, though, the dizzy chaos of his brain steadied a little and his eyes refocused. He took up the letter and followed it doggedly to its end.

I didn't answer at once, Kenneth dear, because I wanted to take the whole matter into my very inmost thoughts and study it out fully. It meant so much to both of us. Of course, Craig had been making love to me. You know he was in love with me before I met you. He was fine and honest about it. He said this was the paramount issue of his life—those were his own words, and that just as you had been in your rights in trying to win me away from him, so he was within his in fighting to the very steps of the altar—those were his words, too.

And then I saw that I'd made a mistake all this while, and that to go on with it would be as unjust to you as it was to him. I tried not to think too much of myself.

Kenneth laid the letter down again. This reading seemed to be, in a spiritual analogy, much like rolling a wheelbarrow of stone. He had to stop at certain intervals and let the palpitant violence of his heartbeat subside with rest.

Craig isn't rich. Indeed, he isn't as rich as we thought you would be. If we were to be married, he urged, we could never again afford to take a wedding trip like this one. We could

never again see all the wonderful new things together as we can now. I stood out against him for some time because I wanted to talk to you face to face, first—and I wanted a church wedding at home. But he carried me off my feet, and after all it seemed foolish to wait. So we have been very quietly married. He sends you his best regards, and we both hope that when we get back home we will see a great deal of you.

She signed herself Mary Lee Smiley, and what small endurance the loser had been able to maintain through the body of the missive seemed to collapse abjectly at the unrelieved spirit jolt of the signature.

There was nowhere any longer a Mary Lee Lord!

It would have been a relief, perhaps, had the young man, who had been unwittingly bemused by his romanticism, been able to fly into a just and robust rage. But disillusionment did not at once come to his aid. He was not yet ready to call upon so grim and ungracious a support.

He could not so swiftly rearrange his whole fabric of allegiance into a realization of the shallow hypocrisy of those self-justifications. He did not recognize that Mary Lee's one and only controlling reason had been her inability to face life with a man who had dropped from ease to poverty. To this deciding factor, she was now giving other and prettier names.

In his defeat, he was ready to accept the girl's judgment of him, as an estimate no more cruel than the fact, and in his misery, the only hate that survived the ruin of things, was a hate of self. That he had been too fair for her appreciation, he did not even tell himself—though the effort to be fair to her had dictated his letter.

About the walls of the library hung a number of family portraits; portraits in Revolutionary blue and buff, in Civil War gray, in stocks and old-fashioned collars. They all looked down on Kenneth out of eyes that were challengingly bold, quietly overbearing, fully self-sufficient. Silently, all these forefathers said, in the light of their eyes and the twist of their lips: "No doubt but we are the people!"

Their descendant looked back at them as one who had forgotten their language, as

an heir become unaccountably alien to their self-assured traditions.

How long he might have remained there in that fashion, had he been left uninterrupted, there is no way of guessing. The doorbell had rung repeatedly and insistently before he heard it with any sense more informative than his ears.

**T**HREE was no servant in the house to-night, and finally he roused himself and went heavily to the front.

Joe Applefield came in, and the younger man nodded to him in a dazed fashion. For a while Joe talked to ears that heard him yet made nothing of his speech. Then Kenneth realized that he must shake himself into a more responsive mood and give answers. Vaguely, he realized that his uncle was talking business and that he was talking with a heavy spirit.

"So whatever I have is really yours," the older man was saying. "This season promised, at its beginning, to wipe out all the debts and to bring the estate back to solvency and profit. In the colt we named for you, we seemed to have the horse we had been seeking for all these years—a Sysonby or a Man-o'-War. With the Derby and the Belmont, we should have reaped a fortune—and then the colt went wrong."

Kenneth was trying to focus his thoughts.

Suddenly he rose eruptively to his feet, and with clenched fists, began pacing the floor in a transport of blind fury.

"I was ambitious once," he declared with the pathetic absurdity of the young, speaking of a year ago as though it were the Old Stone Age.

"I wanted to go in seriously for journalism. I wanted to try to be another Watterson, writing editorials that shaped opinion. There at the office they made fun of me. They pretended to think that I was going to buy out the paper and run it."

"Did you think you could do that?" inquired the uncle gravely, and the boy answered passionately:

"I hated to hear that sort of talk because it made me absurd. It made me

appear a teacher's pet—but I thought that if I made good, the family would get behind me financially—and give me my chance."

"The family had nothing to get behind you with, my boy, except a fine collection of traditions. The family was run to seed. For some years now, it's been floundering along trying to keep up appearances."

Kenneth paused in his pacing and faced his uncle with a white face and a passionate indignation.

"What appearances?" he demanded. "Why couldn't proud people be honest? Why should every instinct in them make them agonize and strain to show the world a false front?"

"Why," countered Joe Applefield lamely, "does any man try to live up to the standard of his fathers? We had always been prominent. We had been lawyers and turfmen. The name stood for something in Kentucky."

"Turfmen!" Kenneth shot the word out as if he were spitting it out of his life. "Breeders of the one kind of domestic animal in the world that has no value except as the plaything of gamblers! It would be as sensible to boast that for generations our blue blood has been dedicated to the manufacture of roulette wheels—or dice for crap games."

He broke off, and his uncle stood there with the air of a man who finds himself addressed in a language which he does not know, and which he had not supposed any gentleman would employ.

"Now we're bankrupt," went on the younger Applefield, still swept on the freshet of his vehemence. "We're broke and we can't pay out. Why don't we scrap this whole damned outfit that has ruined us? Why don't we sell the stallions for whatever they'll bring and put the mares to foaling mules? Why don't we set out the pastures and paddocks in tobacco? As for me, I'm everlastingly done with race horses and I'm done with flaunting a false pride because we've been a line of glorified gamblers."

Kenneth broke off, and his uncle stood

looking at him with contracted brows. At length, he said slowly:

"Your father and I understood each other. It seems that you and I don't. You stand in your father's place now, and you have the power to foreclose on me. Unless you do that, I certainly shan't sacrifice the plant. I believe that by next season, or even at the end of this, Kenneth will be sound again, and that he'll pay us out. I believe he's the best three year old in the world—when his legs are right. I'd like to carry the experiment to its end, but of course you have the veto power."

The boy dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. His finger ends pressed his temples, and at last he looked up.

"I guess I was carried away, sir," he said penitently. "I guess I don't know what I'm saying. Go ahead and follow your own judgment. As for me, I haven't any."

TO the Empire City track and to Saratoga went the horsemen and the horses, and as the season progressed, two names stood out above all others. The Bolt seemed invincible, whether the track were fast and firm or heavy and holding. Whether the distance were short or long, whether he ran all the way in front or came from behind, he met and ran to dizzy defeat everything of his own age or older that matched its speed and heart against his own. And with a separate schedule of engagements on the Canadian and other tracks, Comet Light was almost paralleling that spectacular record. Except for the drubbings he had received from Violett's champion, Comet Light encountered no rival that succeeded in forcing him to extend himself, or to come home driven out. The clamor for a fresh meeting between these two rose urgently from partisan groups, and though the thing seemed often impending, it had not yet come to pass.

When Kenneth saw the reports of these races run far away, he turned from the columns that chronicled them as a man turns from a subject which is wrapped up

with bitter thoughts. He had been kindled out of indifference for such things and fanned into a flaming enthusiasm for them by Mary Lee, and to him the turf had been a spirited and appropriate background for her own vital gallantry.

Now, the institution with all its correlations was to his mind a house in which a tragedy had happened and he hated it. He could not explain these feelings at the office where he was a part of the sporting staff, or escape the waves of discussion that rose to flood tide out of a remarkable racing season.

Other years had produced mighty horses. Long ago, there had been Hermis and Sysonby and Colin. More lately, there had been a Man-o'-War. These were outstanding names linked with astonishing achievements, but this year had both its Bolt and its Comet Light. Never before had there been a champion so distinguished, which, none the less, a large and partisan group believed must surrender his laurels if only once again he faced the barrier in the company of the runner-up.

"That's easy talk," growled Robinson from the litter of his turf editor's desk in the *Leader* office. "They're yammering for a meeting, but I notice that while they yammer they always see to it that no such meeting takes place. Comet Light's a grand three year old, all right—just so long as he doesn't hook up with The Bolt. Then he's a trailer."

It was a season of match races when, to draw together fields of ultrainteresst, associations vied with each other in hanging out prizes of unprecedented munificence.

Across the sea, Parchment had won the British Derby, most historic of all racing fixtures. Beyond the channel, Gaulois had captured the Grand Prix and swept the French tracks clean, and with the turning of the leaves to autumnal fire, racing ardor girdled the globe like a fever.

Meanwhile the lesser atoms of the organism were functioning in their lesser fashion. Major Jerry Shane, campaigning a string of a dozen fair starters, was showing a balance in the credit column

of his ledgers, but one of his colts, which bore the name of St. Francis, was being spoken of in the press as "that grand and inglorious in-and-outer."

Now an in-and-outer, in the parlance of the track, is a horse whose off days are bewilderingly set over against his on days. The in-and-outer is highly temperamental. He syncopates the scale, and to the normal uncertainties of racing, adds yet other uncertainties. In to-day's race such a horse may pick up his freight and carry it with the speed and stamina of a stake winner. In the day after to-morrow's event, when money rolls in on him on the strength of his last performance, he may disreputably trail a pack of dachshunds. He may be the creature of moods and the despair of an honest owner, or he may be the craftily manipulated tool of a weazel-witted gambler, building by repeated defeats the chance of a killing on the day when he is sent out to win.

Shane openly cursed his erratic possession and candidly told his friends that St. Francis was a good horse to leave un-backed, but back in Louisville, while other devotees of the race course poured over the doings of Parchment, Gaulois, The Bolt and Comet Light, one man meticulously kept a scrap book on the doings and misdoings of St. Francis, and that man was Willis Blake.

There are human in-and-outers in the racing business too.

ONE morning toward the tag end of a hot and dusty August when Kenneth went dully through the door of the city room and hung his hat on its peg, he saw by the telegraph operator's desk a broad back which he knew.

He winced at the sight because he had last seen Tom Bristoll when for both of them there was more zest and triumph to life, and he shrank from the possibility of questions.

Yet he went over and shook hands, and the face that looked up held no trace of the lugubrious. Also, its lips shaped no embarrassing inquiries. On the contrary it smiled with its boyish winsomeness and

seemed to accept the fortunes of war in the order of their coming.

Back at his own desk, Kenneth found his philosophy challenged by this man, so perversely constructed that he seemed to make and abide contentedly by his own code. One now and again met men who had been poor and who had become rich. One more frequently met those who had been rich and had become poor. In both classes an organic change seemed to be worked by the change of circumstance.

In Tom Bristoll alone was there no such change. When he was up he was all up, indulging every whim and scorning every economy: learning no lesson of the husbandry of his resources; treating life as though a gilt-edged security and guarantee stood behind its opulence. When he was down, he went contentedly on, making no complaint, seemingly knowing no discontent—merely waiting with serene confidence for the next wave to lift him and float him again.

When in an interval of mutual leisure the two found themselves chatting with crossed arms, Bristoll volunteered: "There's big news to-day."

"What?" came the listless inquiry, and the plunger's eyes gleamed.

"The International Match Race has been definitely arranged to be run here at the Downs. Such a race has never been undertaken before. The winner takes down a cool hundred thousand—and the championship of the world."

"Is that so?" Applefield answered because an answer was expected. He had no residue of interest in such things.

Bristoll nodded.

"Think of it," he exclaimed. "Here on this track, over the mile-and-a-half route! The starters will be Parchment and Gau-lois and The Bolt and Comet Light—and any others that want to pay an entrance fee of twenty-five hundred for the honor of being walleted and humiliated by royalty."

Kenneth knew that he was receiving great news in advance of a less-favored public. The edition carrying that announcement was not yet on the streets. It

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left him cold, and he glanced at the office clock.

"It's lunch time," he suggested. "Won't you come out with me and have a bite to eat?"

IT'S throwing good money after bad, sir," objected Kenneth disconsolately, and his Uncle Joe looked at him with the eyes of injured pride.

"Perhaps you are right," he acknowledged. "But I still have a few shreds of credit left. I can raise the entry fee on my personal note, and if the thing *should* go through, my problems and yours would be solved."

"Mine?" questioned the younger man miserably. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't do that, sir, I'm afraid."

"I can raise the entry fee," repeated Joe Applefield stubbornly, "and to show you that I'm not venturing into the thing without faith, I'll say that I mean to raise a thousand more—and to bet it on Kenneth for you and me."

"Do as you like, sir," advised Kenneth. "But please leave me out of it. I'm satisfied with our present ruin. You're running a cripple against the four greatest colts in the world, ridden by the four greatest jockeys in the world."

Seeing how the face of his uncle, who had been his father's dependent, fell, the younger man was at once smitten with self-reproach. He felt that he had been ungenerous and churlish, and he forced the smile that had formerly been so engaging—when it flashed impulsively.

"You must forgive me, Uncle Joe," he made apology. "It's not that I want to hamper your judgment or to seem a crape hanger. I'm just out of sympathy with a game that hasn't paid. It seems to me bad business for men who need money desperately to compete with those who are able and willing to spend twice the value of a stake to win its glory. The 'sport of kings' is no game for beggars. They're your horses, of course—but I can't let you borrow to bet for me."

"They are my horses only in a technical

sense," the uncle made candid avowal. "The debt to you would swallow them, and without your consent, I don't feel that I can go deeper into debt—even in an effort to get through and out on the other side."

"Then you have my consent, sir. I'm not a damned mortgage shark, only you must let me argue with you. It eases my mind."

The elder Applefield nodded his head.

"If I fail this time, I'll sell out," he said. "I'm only asking one chance more. But perhaps I'm not quite the fool you think me, Kenneth—and have the right to think me. The colt that's named for you will be a dark horse."

"This spring he was conceded to be one of the two most promising three year olds in training. He went wrong. He's been completely forgotten. But he's sound again and he runs as fast a mile and a half to-day as any of these champions has ever shown. If he doesn't break down before he hits the stretch, he'll give a good account of himself."

"Who can you get to ride him?" inquired Kenneth pointedly. "Forrest will be up on Comet Light. Jimmy Earle will be piloting The Bolt. England sends O'Shaunessy, who's held the pigskin laurels over there for ten years. France sends Riley, who was the best we had until he went abroad. Is there a boy left who can ride with them?"

The turfman smiled.

"There's *one*," he said. "I'm going to have Kenneth ridden by a lawyer, but it's a lawyer who's been riding him and who knows him."

Kenneth looked at his elder kinsman with a commiserating wonderment, but Joe Applefield went tranquilly on.

"'Thetaway' Cornett is going to have the mount on Kenneth," he announced, and added nothing to the climax of that information.

If it had been possible for the nephew to whip his dead interests into rebirth, the announcement would have been enough to stir excitement.

Thetaway Cornett was a boy from the Cumberland hills who had blazed his way

across the turf firmament like a comet, who had ridden to the premiership and studied law while he rode, and who had retired with a name secure in its greatness. It was a name which stood in the same roster with those of Garrison and Archer and Sloan. Jimmy Earle had headed his profession until Cornett came. He had ridden at his rear until Cornett retired, and now again he was America's first jockey.

Kenneth repressed his own lack of faith to some degree, but not entirely.

"So it's a double comeback you're trying to stage," he said. "A horse that looked good once and that went wrong twice, and a jockey who was once the greatest in the world—but who for several years hasn't had his feet thrust home in racing irons. Can he get down to the weight?"

"No, he'll be overweight," admitted the owner of the forgotten Kenneth. "But overweight of Cornett isn't dead weight by a jugful."

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE START OF THE INTERNATIONAL.

HAVE you dropped your advocacy of Jockey Combs, sir?" inquired Kenneth one day when he met Willis Blake on the street. "And did you come to see that you were mistaken after all in your opinion of Major Shane?"

The lawyer shook his head, and though his face retained its composure there was an uncompromising and metallic glint in the eyes.

"The gallant major is absent at present," he made quiet response. "But time will bring him back to us. From all indications, there will be quite a bit doing when the gates open at the Downs this fall. An international flavor will be imparted to our local sport. The whole turf world will be present or accounted for—and to the general interest, I'll endeavor to contribute my widow's mite."

"You mean you'll attack Major Shane—then?"

"Attack isn't quite the word perhaps,"

Blake made amiable correction. "But I mean to unmask the major. I haven't been able to follow the races East, but it's before an Eastern audience that this resplendent gentleman has most vaingloriously strutted.

"Well, that audience should have a quorum here when The Bolt hooks up with the champions of the British Isles, the continent and our native land. That would seem the proper time to turn the spotlight on the major before his admirers, wouldn't it?"

"Good God, sir," pleaded Kenneth. "You're forcing a disastrous issue. A mouse would fight if he were crowded that far—and Major Shane isn't a mouse."

"No, I admit he isn't a mouse, but neither am I." The tone grew serious. "I am not setting out recklessly to blacken an honorable name. I happen to love clean horse racing—and when I fire my opening gun, I'll have the proof ready. It won't be a skirmish. It will be a finish fight."

Kenneth shook an apprehensive head, and the captain smiled gravely.

"There's one thing that troubles me, though," admitted the lawyer. "It's a conflict of dates."

"How is that, sir?"

"Of course, I must see the big race. A man has only one such chance in a lifetime. Also, I must present my charges before the Jockey Club, but just about that time I'm due up in the hills—for a special term of court at Hemlock Town."

"Hemlock Town," repeated Kenneth as a shadow of painful memories crossed his face. "I was there once."

The lawyer nodded. It was almost pathetically evident that this man, whose youth had held a promise of splendid attainment, was going out of his way to refer to a legal employment. It was as if he were anxious to impress the young reporter with the idea that he was not wholly briefless.

"Two men who were feud leaders there and who have made peace," explained Blake with dignity, "have been conducting a sort of clean-up campaign. Having

buried the hatchet, they want to inculcate a sounder respect for the law, and I've been designated as special prosecutor."

NEWS and gossip of the turf in those days of approaching autumn overflowed the confines of sporting columns and spilled their tidings into first-page headlines. Photographs and biographies of the foreign colts and their jockeys were spread voluminously to the eye and eagerly assimilated.

In order to adjust themselves betimes to a new climate and to recover edge after any possible ill effects from a sea voyage, Parchment and Gaulois crossed the Atlantic several weeks ahead of schedule, and their quarters at Belmont Park, policed and guarded as if human royalty were billeted there, became a Mecca for excited sight-seers.

Back on his home track in Kentucky, where he had won his first prestige and waited now to match his undefeated powers against the superchampions of Europe, The Bolt munched his oats and went out for daily gallops nicely calculated to hold his fettle but not to dull or stale its razor-edged keenness.

At Jamaica, where a loyal coterie of adherents continued to believe that he needed only his chance, Comet Light was answering all training questions to the satisfaction of his handlers. To those who had accused this colt of warily side-stepping conclusions with The Bolt, the horse was now ready to give his answer. He would not only meet The Bolt and carry pound for pound with him, but he would also meet those two challengers that Europe said were better than anything American soil and American training could send to the races.

Then while prognostications ran rife, while turf writers and photographers worked overtime, the Westchester Racing Association waxed fretful. The biggest and richest of races was going to the smaller organization in Kentucky. Sentiment had carried it to the home State of the colt that had lured these overseas rivals by his fleetness and greatness of heart.

But compared with the "Newmarket of America," Churchill Downs was a small plant and the greater establishment felt injured.

**S**O Belmont Park hung out a magnificent purse and invited the now acclimated foreigners to meet in a prefatory combat with whatever American colts cared to accept the issue. Wrote the dean of metropolitan turf scribes :

This proposal was at first regarded as taking the wind out of the big feature already arranged. It was argued that either the French or the English horse would, in effect, be eliminated from consideration before facing the flag for the race he had come across the ocean to run. But the management met and overcame these objections with resource and sound logic. The match race at the Downs would be over the full Derby route of the mile and a half. It will call for stout staying qualities as well as fleetness of foot. The event proposed here is at a mile only. For horses trained to the longer journey it might almost be called a sprint. Also, the colt that leads at the end of eight furlongs need not be he who would show at the front when twelve had been covered. For the big issue, each of the starters will require a stiff workout under his girth before he faces the flag, and what better tightening up could be given than this mile at Belmont?

So the extra match race was run, and though a hundred thousand men and women rushed the gates, and though the roads to the course were black all morning with motors and brown with dust, only three horses were led out when the bugle blew.

Comet Light alone of American horse-flesh had faced the issue, but that surprised no one. He was on the ground, and for the stable that sheltered The Bolt, to ship their colt East and ship him back again within the week would have been unexpected folly. The holder of the crown could afford to wait on his own battle ground.

If it had been supposed that the preliminary battle would detract from the later one and deflate it of its interest, that supposition was abundantly and gloriously given the lie.

For when the multitude that breath-

lessly watched that conflict burst into its throat-tearing pandemonium as the trio came down the stretch a sheer mania of excitement thundered in their outcry.

It was Comet Light that showed ahead by a short neck, after all—America's second choice, her runner-up. But a neck is not an undebatable margin of victory, and what capped the amazement of the racegoers was a secondary feature. The British and the French colts crossed the wire so absolutely and evenly linked into a two-horse team that the judges were unable to split them apart and pronounced it a dead heat for the place.

**E**STABLISHED upon that spectacular foundation, the day of the Churchill Downs match dawned with a violet haze of Indian summer along the horizon.

The flags lifted to a languid breath of breeze, warm after a morning that had held a hint of frost. Crushed and trodden upon, yet unharassed, because a festival spirit stirred them, the scores of thousands milled and elbowed in slowly changing patterns of kaleidoscopic color.

Undertones like the buzzing of numberless swarms of bees competed with the overtones of blaring bands. Faces that were strange to the town and faces that were not native to the continent mingled with those that had been seen here, spring and fall, for decades, and that would be seen here while life quickened them.

Any individual must be lost in such a human massing, but now and then, here and there, in the pink of dress and the perfection of debonair manner, one glimpsed the straight shoulders and the erectly borne head of Major Jerry Shane. This was his world, and to-day other worlds had come to it. They were visitors and he was to the manner born.

Perhaps he carried himself a trace the more unbendingly because he knew that out of these thousands there were some hundreds who had heard his honor as a sportsman blatantly assailed. If that were true, his appearance gave the lie to all accusations. It was as if Major Shane felt that to-day his State was host to the

world, and as if he himself was the symbol and representative of his State.

Kenneth Applefield, wandering on the clubhouse lawn, came upon Dorothy standing quietly and alone. There was an almost cryptic light of amused pride in her eyes as they dwelt on her father, who had become the center of a group a few paces away.

"Ken," said the girl with a simple sincerity, "I hope this is your day. I hope the colt that's named for you makes amends for every past disappointment."

Kenneth tried to answer her smile with his own, but it was a forlorn attempt.

"He might as well have been left in his stall, Doctor Dot," he answered. "No horse could be expected to frame a comeback after such long idleness—and in company with the pick of the world!"

The young man's eyes were resting absently on Major Shane, and abruptly their lackluster weariness quickened into apprehension. He glanced quickly at the girl as he wondered if she, too, had seen that Willis Blake, towering a head's height over the crowd, was strolling deliberately in Shane's direction.

Kenneth felt sure that this was the first time the two men had come so nearly into physical contact since Blake had assumed his rôle of implacable accuser. It was the first time the pair had met since the lawyer had begun pursuing the horseman with relentless denunciation.

Only a day or two before had Shane returned to Kentucky, borne on the tide that had set toward to-day's race. Those who knew him, and who knew his enemy, had predicted an explosion.

Shane himself, engrossed in his talk, had not yet seemed to see the other man, but Kenneth realized that Dorothy had. Her eyes were on the figure that moved at an unhurried pace toward her father—and Kenneth, whose own nerves had answered to a startled flurry of foreboding, saw that her color did not change and that her fine, dark eyes betrayed no sign of heightened emotion.

But that must be just the Shane self-containment under stress.

Others were less composed.

With an unostentation that was almost as marked as panic, men in the immediate vicinity began falling back as far as the crowd would permit. If current rumors were to be credited, there was an ugly possibility of gun play in the spot where they stood—and they preferred standing elsewhere.

Willis Blake himself moved imperturbably forward, and when he and Shane were ten feet apart their glances met and engaged.

On the face of neither was there any expression of admitted recognition. A quick blaze of white-hot anger flared in the eyes of the major. A biting chill of irony smiled from those of Blake. For a moment each stood with the air of a man saying, "It's up to you," and then Blake strolled on by and was lost in the crowd.

**K**ENNETH drew a deep breath of relief that seemed to loosen taut nerves, and belatedly he realized what Dorothy had been quicker to perceive. In such a crowd, neither of these men could have behaved otherwise since neither was an irresponsible bully imperilling the safety of bystanders by his abandonment to anger. That would have been the conduct of gang fighters and gunmen. Each of these two had eyed the other and each had silently said, "We can wait."

Finally, the preliminary events had been disposed of. There would be an interval of a half hour before the international starters paraded to the post, and the anxiety to see the young contestants in the paddock made a maelstrom of its gates.

Dorothy and Kenneth had been foresighted enough to go there before the last race, gaining places of vantage in advance of the mob. Now, the first of the thunders began to roll. The British colt was being warmed up, and the identifying number on the arm of his exercise boy as he cantered through the stretch, set the echoes crashing. Before they had fully subsided, they rose again to fresh volume, and this time it was for the pride of France.

There was a breathing space after that, but when, close together, The Bolt and Comet Light went rocking by, it seemed that the solid roar of a few moments ago had been, in the measure of comparisons, a feeble and perfunctory greeting.

Dorothy looked up and smiled her sympathy without words, because the noise had begun to dwindle as a fifth colt came galloping along, and at the sight of him it had no rebirth. Dorothy's companion was staring gloomily at this last unheeded thing as it passed the stands unacclaimed—an afterthought, an extra. It was the Applefield colt, Kenneth, which last spring had been vaunted as a world beater, and the man he had been named for observed grimly:

"He doesn't get much of a hand, does he?"

But Kenneth turned just then—and forgot the colt. He forgot what he had been saying—what he had been thinking.

There, within arm's length—and millions of miles away in all but physical measurement—stood Mary Lee and her husband.

It was the bride who recovered herself the more instantly from the surprise of the encounter, and who thrust out her hand with a beaming cordiality.

What gorgeous eyes she had, thought the discarded lover.

"Kenneth!" she exclaimed joyously. "And Dot! This is wonderful meeting you both here twenty-four hours after getting home."

**C**RAG stood a shade awkwardly in the offing, awaiting greater leisure to make his salutations.

"We hurried back for the big race," ran on Mary Lee buoyantly. "You know, we'd seen Gaulois run at Longchamps, and we wanted to raise our two weak voices against the thousands that would be rooting for The Bolt."

Kenneth nodded blankly. He felt as if his legs were about to collapse and he wanted to get away hurriedly and steady himself.

"Doctor Dot," he suggested weakly,

"I've got to get to the colt's stall now. Would you mind going back to the clubhouse with Mary Lee instead—and Craig?"

**T**HREE by the stall where the Applefield colt stood stamping nervously, the younger Applefield met his uncle. To Kenneth the whole world on this day was a wavering, confusing, uncertain nightmare.

Dizzily, he heard the clean, full-throated summons of a bugle, and out of the jockey house came spilling a bunch of boys in tack and silks.

There were jumbled words of introduction and he found himself clasping the hand of a man—for he was not a boy—who wore the sky-blue jacket with white polka dots that was the livery of his uncle's stable. In the eyes of the jockey, as they steadily met his, was a quality from which his own stunned mind seemed to draw a transitory sense of comforting reassurance.

"I've heard of you, sir," said Thetaway Cornett. "Cal Spencer has yarneed about you. But we're here for a horse race." He laughed confidently, and then added: "Let me tell you something. This is stall four. It's from this stall that I rode to my first victory—and my last. Here's hoping."

"Boys up!" came a shout from outside, following the bugle's blare of post call, and Kenneth saw his uncle taking the booted heel of the jockey in his hand and pitching him lightly to the saddle. He saw Cornett gathering and knotting his lines. Then he saw the starters for the world's most important race being led out and heard the mighty howl of reception from lawns and stands.

Kenneth himself watched that race from the paddock inclosure. The crowd had already ebbed there, and only a few hundred spectators remained in that less congested spot.

With brows studiously contracted but with thoughts that strayed waywardly, he watched the field as it tripped mincingly out

THE Britisher had drawn the rail position, and the great O'Shaunessy bestrode him in the English fashion of a straighter back and less hunched shoulders than our boys use. He rode in a jacket of red and green bars, with a quartered cap. His stirrup leathers, too, looked long and his knees swung low.

Behind him came The Bolt, who had drawn second place from the rail, and who carried the number two on his saddle cloth. His colors were easy to distinguish—unbroken white. Over his withers crouched Jimmy Earle, his kneecaps almost level with his pommel, his hands wrapped on his lines close to their bit rings, and as he turned out through the track gate, the outpouring of sound swelled as if hell were assaulting heaven.

Third was the Frenchman, with silks of midnight blue and white, and on him went a boy who had made his fame on this side of the water and capitalized it on the other.

Then Comet Light danced daintily along with Johnny Forrest in the pilot house, jacketed in green and black. Last and least, forgotten and despised, trudged Kenneth under the guidance of a jockey clad in sky blue and white polka dots—a jockey whose name had lapsed from daily use but not from history, Thetaway Cornett, who had been reinstated for this occasion after having left a conquered turf behind him.

Five starters make an ideal field for a true-run race. There are enough to fill the eye and to afford the varied elements of contest, yet not so many as become unwieldy at the post. These five marched past the kiosk of the judges with as sedate a dignity as though every thoroughbred in the quintet knew that he was offering his head for a crown.

There was no impish fretfulness, no fractious fighting at the bits. It was as if each and every young veteran of the lot was content to make his fight along those twelve heart-trying furlongs, and wary to squander no ounce of treasured strength in advance.

At the half post where the webbing was

stretched, they wheeled circumspectly and lined up. Toward the barrier, they walked heedfully, twitching in each overstrung nerve, yet decorous of manner. Each of those five jockeys, all past masters of their art, sat with feet thrust home to the instep in the irons and with pulses tuned to a hair-triggered alertness.

"Come up quietly, boys," urged the starter, with his finger crooked on the barrier trigger, and with an unaccustomed deference in his voice. "This is too big a race to start wrong."

The five came forward quietly—tip-toeing as if on compressed springs.

Evenly lined, they approached the webbing and the webbing went skyward. The red flags swooped down and a voice howled: "Go on!"

NO captiousness could have complained of that get-away. Five horses started in perfect alignment, but three strides past the starting point this was no longer true.

It was The Bolt that showed ahead now, his white silks flapping like a flag at the front of a charge. Earle was holding him wrapped, mindful of the long trip that lay ahead, and back of him, locked as they had been at the finish of their last race, came the Frenchman and the Briton.

Bringing up the rear, nose and nose, with the knee of Forrest almost rubbing the knee of Cornett, came Comet Light and Kenneth.

The watches showed fast going. This was no race in which any starter could afford to hang back for the purpose of letting another forge the pace. A world's championship was in the making and each competitor must give all he had.

Past the stand, the first time, with a half-mile run, swept the field with positions unaltered. The Bolt still led the way. The English Derby victor and the Grand Prix champion pelted close behind as if a double yoke were set on their steaming necks. Just at their rumps came a second pair, with legs that went forward and back as if moved by a common set of muscles and a single heart—Comet Light and Kenneth.

## CHAPTER XXI.

KENNETH WINS.

**S**TANDING in the paddock, Kenneth Applefield looked on. He would have laughed at any man who had told him that even for the space of two or three minutes on this day his attention could have been so enthralled by a horse race that he would have forgotten himself, forgotten his problems, forgotten even to take out and focus his binoculars.

Yet now he stood as if a trance held him.

"By Heaven," he muttered. "Kenneth's sticking close to the pace for a field like that—but there's a long way to go yet."

As the five thundered by and the stands rose and thundered back, Thetaway Cornett, who was returning for one day to an excitement that had once been his life, leaned low over the neck of the Applefield starter and talked quietly to his horse.

"They say you're an outsider, son," the jockey exhorted. "You're bucking the class of the world. Show me what you can do now, son. Show me!"

Around the turn that entered the back stretch, The Bolt led the way. The foreigners still fought stride for stride behind him, but as the field straightened out they failed to creep up for any gain. It seemed they were keyed to their supreme limit when they clung close behind this colt that had dazzled and conquered the American turf.

With Comet Light it was another story. He had so far been in the rear and now Forrest let out a reef and vigorously shook him up.

With instant and gallant response he went forward, and across the infield came the howl of recognition as it was seen that Parchment, Gaulois and Comet Light were running even, just back of The Bolt, with only the unconsidered Kenneth in the rear.

Then came the confusion of the far turn and the turn into the stretch. There the glasses gave a less-clear picture, jumbling everything into an obscurity of vision. This is the succession of instants

when judgment must pause and wait for the field to straighten out—and it is the time when startling rearrangements sometimes occur.

Thetaway Cornett, riding behind the procession, had not yet fallen into the despair of thinking of himself as a camp follower. Under him he felt the vibration of a power as yet untested, and now as they swept around that last turn the leader and the three followers bunched at his back swung a shade wide, leaving a gap on the rail.

It was a constricted gap through which a horse might barely squeeze, but through it—if anywhere—lay victory. Raising his whip for the first time, driving home his steel-shod heels for the first time, too, Cornett lifted the head of the Applefield colt and seemed to hurl it forward.

"It's through that hole or not at all," he shouted. "Go to it, boy!"

He felt one knee scrape the rail and one scrape a boot, but he knew that he was moving up.

His ears, keenly receptive in spite of the lesser sounds that volleyed about him—sounds of hoofs and leather and wind and straining—caught a new note from the galleries. It was a note of incredulous acclaim for a newcomer, and now four horses were running like a cavalry front, nose and nose, neck and neck, shoulder and shoulder—The Bolt, Parchment, Gaulois and Kenneth, with Comet Light pounding along like a footman just behind his masters.

Jimmy Earle, O'Shaunessy, Riley and Cornett, the four plu-perfect craftsmen of the pigskin, were pumping their whip hands so close that they almost flailed each other, as down the smooth straightaway of the stretch came the three horses that had won the greatest races of the year—and one that had been thought great and been forgotten.

Cornett was lifting his mount with the hand ride that had once been famous. His bat was rising, falling, rising in a perfect rhythm. The other three boys were doing the same, two of them looming up stiffly erect—as judged by American standards—

the other huddled low over knees close to his own chin.

**I**T was up to the horses now. Not one but was having the best that could be given him of jockeyship. Not one but was being held straight and true and driven to his uttermost resource.

It had come down to the final test of heart and courage, of breeding and stamina. The lungs in those great barrels were under such stress as a boiler must withstand when it strains under a full head of steam. Foam flecked their necks and shoulders. Sweat drenched their withers and flanks. The legs pounded on resolutely against the temptation to falter and totter to a reeling stagger and a shortened stride.

There was still a sixteenth more.

On the rail where Kenneth was making his race, the steel and rawhide was falling. Cornett, glancing sidewise out of the tail of his eye, found himself looking into the eye of Jimmy Earle. He almost fancied he could feel Earle's hot breath on his cheek.

There were only twenty yards left, and Cornett and Earle, with set teeth and straining arms, were lifting and throwing their mounts. The Frenchman and the Britisher were already behind—then the Applefield colt seemed to strain an inch forward—another inch.

Was it soon enough? Cornett was not sure. He knew the wire had been passed. He knew he was riding in front, but whether he had been there soon enough he could not tell.

When the horses had been throttled down and ridden back, Thetaway Cornett looked at the chalk circle where the winner stands.

To-day it should have been traced in gold—and it was empty! He raised inquiring eyes and a smiling judge nodded to him and beckoned him into its charmed exclusiveness.

For once Cornett slid from his saddle with a brain smudged by emotion. For once his legs buckled and wabbled under him, and he steadied himself by a head

thrust against steaming ribs as he sought to loosen the stubborn buckles of his cinches.

**K**ENNETH APPLEFIELD slipped through the gates of the race-track inclosure, and walked away from the direction of town. After that finish and that result, it was no longer possible for any man wearing his name to move quietly or keep to himself. About the colt's neck was being hung a gigantic garland of hot-house roses—and there was no longer a Mary Lee Lord to want a flower from it for thrusting into her bridal bouquet.

Kenneth had no wish, just now, to be mobbed by frenzied well-wishers and congratulators. The intoxication of that little time of racing had died out and left him to other and less-spirited memories. It was splendid, of course, that his uncle had seen all his fetterings of debt and anxiety cut away at a clean stroke, and had found himself secure on the elevation toward which he had been vainly clambering through years, but as for himself, the nephew felt it was a tragically tardy triumph.

It didn't matter now—because it was too late for such things to matter—but it would be interesting to know what might have happened had this race been run a few months earlier. Would Mary Lee have awakened with the same fullness of conviction to an appreciation of Craig that had not come to her before, even though she had known him for years and had once dismissed him as a suitor? Would he himself, with no need for making quixotic offers of release, have stood out convicted of a craven spirit? He wondered, but he could come to no conclusion.

He tramped a long way into a country of small market gardens where even the autumnal glory failed to cover up a certain tawdry dejection of existence. To the life of these dingily painted frame houses set among truck patches, all the large, artificial excitements of the racing plant a few miles distant were as foreign as Jugo-Slavia. More so, for some of

these people had ancestral links with Jugoslavia.

Dusty and bone weary, though still fretted by a restlessness which exertion had not burned away, Kenneth returned to his house that evening. His uncle was being toasted, he guessed, at the club. He was sitting with men who were the moguls and potentates of the racing world and accepting from them right well-earned tributes.

THE fall meeting had yet some days to run, but its greatness was over and the rest was anticlimax. Willis Blake could now go to his mountain term of court without regrets. He had seen the race. Also, he had preferred his charges against Shane, and for a little while, though in rude surroundings, he would be clothed in the professional dignity of a State's attorney.

Shane, too, was no longer seen about the track. His string had been shipped to the farm for a let-up of rest while there was yet nourishment in the pasture blue grass, and until he was called before the stewards he preferred letting the track do, as well as it could, without him.

But back at the telegraph operator's desk in the office of the *Leader*, Tom Bristol still transcribed from the wire to the typewriter. This period of adversity was proving stubborn and protracted. He had fancied the French horse, and had said so too emphatically with money. The "iron men" had once more outguessed him and now he was his less splendid self.

One afternoon, just before the last edition went to press, Kenneth stood by Tom's desk. The operator tore from the machine a half sheet of paper and handed it to Applefield.

"That's a rather startling bit of news about a man we both know," he said. "Take a glance at it before I shoot it over to the news desk."

Kenneth took the sheet and his eye was caught by the date line: "Hemlock Town, Kentucky."

But the body of the item was more arresting.

The Honorable Willis Blake, who is acting as temporary prosecuting attorney at the special term of court here, was shot to death at the edge of town this afternoon by an unknown assassin. Though Captain Blake has been vigorously prosecuting a number of minor offenses, he has not, so far as is known, aroused any deep enmities, and the cause of the tragedy remains shrouded in mystery. Investigations are on foot, and Sheriff Cawley has telegraphed to Lexington for bloodhounds.

So Willis Blake was dead—murdered! Kenneth could not forget the little touch of pride with which this impressive man, fitted by nature for preeminence, had announced his temporary appointment to minor office. This had been the fee that came from that short-lived preferment. Some hoodlum, inflamed by "blockade liquor" and smarting under prosecution for a petty offense, had avenged himself from ambush.

THE reporter found his thoughts going back to that locality and that people with all the tarnishing of time rubbed away to brightness. He seemed to see the old courthouse standing back from the twisting street, and to hear the voices of Cal and Don ringing from the steps before its scarred and battered door.

Unpleasantly, too, when his imagination groped instinctively for the type of man who could be chargeable with such a crime as this, the features of Tom Monk rose before his eyes. He saw that scowling face, in memory, as it had glared at him across the room of Don McDonough's house, when Monk had sought to slip out with his rifle, only to be whistled back, doglike, by his master.

Willis Blake, who had walked through life definitely facing every adversary, had fallen before a cheap grudge bearer who presumably would never have ventured to meet him eye to eye—and as the indirect result of this thing, the clash that Kenneth had dreaded between Blake and a man who would face him had been obviated.

That was the one phase of the affair which Kenneth could not regret, but the price of its attainment was too high. Willis

Blake had been a gallant fellow who, when life had faded from brilliancy to drabness and when men smiled behind his back, had still walked with a high chin. Now, he was murdered.

Kenneth went over and sat down before his machine, and as he absent-mindedly stared at its keyboard, the Old Man came up behind him.

The editor held in his hand the same half sheet that the reporter had already

*To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, on the news stands May 20th.*

### GONE ARE THE DAYS

THE Grand Duke Michael, uncle of the late Czar of Russia, lives the melancholy life of a political exile in France. It is melancholy because he has willed it so, for it is his solemn pleasure to mourn for the dead empire of which he was once a glittering ornament. Stately, taciturn, somber, few of those who knew him in the days of imperial prosperity would believe that this is the same debonair aristocrat who once drank twenty-seven bottles of champagne between three and eleven in the morning, to win a bet, and then proceeded, straight as a ramrod and dignified as a deacon, to preside at a review of troops. Nowadays he frowns on all frivolity.

Possibly he has the revolution which drove him from the genial follies of his younger days into voluntary asceticism to thank for the fact that he is still alive. For at one time he was such a consumer of forbidden spirits that his physicians despaired for him.

On one occasion he complained of violent stomach pains.

"Hepatic colic," diagnosed his doctor. "Your highness must give me his word to empty the wine cellar."

"Hum!" grunted the Grand Duke Michael. "That's pretty stiff. How soon must it be done?"

"Twenty-four hours, your highness."

"Twenty-four hours! That's going to be hard—hard. Well, I'll do it. Come back to-morrow and see for yourself."

The doctor returned the next day. The grand duke's cellar—several hundred bottles of rare old vintage, it contained—was not yet empty. But the stock was going fast. As fast as the bottles were carried up to him, Michael was emptying them down his throat.

### A WILD CAT'S GENEALOGY

GENERAL SMEDLEY BUTLER, known as the "Wild Cat of the Marines," the man who, as director of public safety, on leave from his marine-corps duty, cleaned up Philadelphia, is famous for the amount of work he can get out of his men. He works so hard and fights so fearlessly that the men know he never asks of them anything that he won't do himself. This fighting phenomenon, by the way, comes from a long line of peace lovers and war haters, Quakers. His Quaker father is a member of Congress from Pennsylvania and for years has been one of the leading Republicans on the House committee on naval affairs.

seen, and he laid it down by the typewriter.

"Blake's been murdered," he said crisply. "You know the place where it happened. You know Spencer and McDonough. They can put you in the way of getting the facts—and I want the facts. This is the sort of outrage that must be fully avenged by the law. I think there's a train to-night. Get it and run down this story."



# Hunting the Giant Bildik

By Percy Waxman

*Author of "Hunting the Mountain Skrim," and other stories.*

In a previous story of a nimble and noisy Nimrod, Mr. Waxman gave us something novel and stimulating to laugh over. Here is some more of his ludicrous pencraft, relating an absurd adventure in Africa. In this field of humor we think Waxman has few equals.—THE EDITOR.

THE old Hindu saying "*Tikka gharry nulla chunga sindh*" (literally "Fate her tricks doth strangely play") was never more abundantly substantiated than in the fall of 1923 when I happened to pay a secret visit to British East Africa in search of a cargo of Mivenwort. That in itself was unexpected enough, but the romance of even that uncanny experience was completely overshadowed by my extraordinary hunting expedition which resulted in a Giant Bildik (*Pcnellibus Ragusa*) falling to my gun.

Even to this day, in spite of the fact that the mounted head of the beast is on my dining-room wall, I cannot help thinking how queer it is that a home-loving, middle-aged manufacturer of knit goods should happen to be the *only living white man* to have shot and killed a Giant Bildik. The bare notion that I should ever live to see—much less kill—a Giant Bildik was,

prior to 1923, beyond my wildest dreams, firstly, because I had never even heard of the animal and, secondly, because it was generally believed that they had been extinct for a decade.

In the fourth volume of Paget's "Memoirs of a Trekker" (Boden & Co., Manchester, 1884, 6 vols. 84/-) he refers to the government report of the Guffy expedition into Mombassa in 1826 when no fewer than *four* Bildik hides were secured, but it is worthy of note that this was twenty-three years before the gickleberry blight swept over East Africa and destroyed the only food the Goomle antelopes could feed on; and thus by wiping out *these* pretty creatures utterly did away with the only prey of the Giant Bildik itself!

As I have already intimated, I do not pose—or rather, did not, prior to 1923—as a *Lompi Shikar* (mighty hunter), so

that not the least interesting part of my almost incredible narrative is the explanation of just how my unexpected triumph came about.

I mentioned, if you remember, at the beginning of this story that I had originally gone to British East Africa to buy a cargo of Mivvenwort and as perhaps some of my readers may not be familiar with the intricacies of certain phases of the knit-goods business it may be as well to elucidate a little.

To make matters perfectly clear, then let me say that before crude cotton is brigged with the teased woolen fleeces at the mill, in order to reinforce the woof before weaving commences, the process known technically as "smulling" is put in operation. Now, one of the perennial difficulties of our business is to secure enough gelatinous extract of Mivvenwort for this vitally important smulling process and in all my thirty-five years' experience I have never known the market to be so empty of that precious product as it was in the fall of 1923.

Quite by accident one day while I was waiting for a shave, I came across an article in a magazine on "The Primitive Practice of Entsgen in Nairobi" in which it was mentioned that the Mivvenwort crop had been unusually large that season. The instant I read that casual reference to Mivvenwort an idea flashed upon me. Why not visit the source of supply and perhaps corner the entire market? Why not combine business and pleasure and visit Nairobi?

**N**O sooner did I decide to take this step than I ran, unshaved, out of that barber shop and began secret preparations for my voyage. First of all I took pains to let it leak out among the trade that I was going to California on a selling trip. Then I made my will, turned in my car, bought a complete Oriental traveler's kit, secured my passports, and in less than thirty-two days after reading that magazine article I stepped off the P. & O. steamer *Olaf* at Barassi.

From Barassi I took one of the native

*klumfas* to Yekt, the central port for the Mivvenwort export trade. When I reached that fly-blown spot, with characteristic American speed that utterly took the British, Portuguese and Malay shippers off their feet, I contracted for the entire year's crop in something less than eight minutes and at a figure exactly forty annas per rel less than I had expected to pay!

Then I found, to my dismay, that the return boat for Aden was not due to arrive for eleven days, so you can imagine with what joy I accepted the hospitable offer of His Excellency Sir Rapson Spittlebooth (the resident general of the district) to be his guest at his *patba* (literally *kuki* or *zappa*) four hundred miles in the interior where, he informed me, all kinds of big game still abounded in spite of the drought, snakes and missionaries. It took a three-day *trck* to reach Punta, where we were met by excited hordes of *wakamba* (native chiefs) in regulation mufti, ears pierced and everything, who kept dancing around our escort beating their *lilkups* and exclaiming in shrill head tones: "*Bwana Bildik wok dek Bildik.*"

I asked Sir Rapson Spittlebooth what their song of welcome meant and he told me that they were trying to let him know that a Giant Bildik had been seen in the vicinity, but that he didn't believe a word of it. He told me he had spent twenty-one years in Africa and had never yet seen even the sporran of one of the beasts. The *wakamba*, however, so persisted in their story that they *had* actually seen a Bildik that Sir Rapson, to quiet their fears, told them that I was a great game hunter newly arrived from *Dolla-rubi* (literally Money Land, the native name for America) and that the very next day I would hunt the Giant Bildik and relieve the anxiety of the village.

At this, the entire tribe salaamed and greeted me with loud cries of "*Azboi, azboi!*" (mighty one). Not desiring to spoil Sir Rapson's opinion of my countrymen, I did not dare ask any further questions, but the reader can imagine the consternation I felt when I discovered that

Sir Rapson was not joking when he told the *wakamba* (natives) that I would start off on *safari* (quest) the following day to hunt the Bildik.

Sleeping that night was a matter of considerable difficulty, due no doubt to the strange beds. Very early the next morning, while the stars were still shining, Sir Rapson and I, with a few hundred beaters, set out in a couple of *dahs* completely covered with netting on account of the *elo* flies. In order not to arouse the hermit gazelles, poolas, lions, cheetahs, zimbs and other carnivora known to frequent that particular section of the country it was decided that Sir Rapson was to drive his *dah* southward while I was to drive mine to the east and we agreed to meet at eight bells for tiffin back at the starting point of the *safari*, if we could find it. He very kindly allowed me an escort of fifty bearers, one snootie, a *mamba* leader, two gun carriers, six fire poodahs and a bell ringer in case of danger. Added to this retinue was my personal guide, Guaso, a huge Somali who knew three or four fractured words of English.

WELL, as soon as we reached the hinterland, Sir Rapson and I parted company and I began making my way toward the sun, as Guaso informed me that the Giant Bildik always feeds in the cool of the morning with his eyes away from any glare. We made very slow progress at first as I, of course, was not accustomed to crawling on my stomach through miles of tall spear grass while red ants fed freely upon my person. Needless to say, I was in a very excited state of mind and the proximity of Guaso bearing two .303 Clabbersley interlocking rifles carelessly pointing my way, by no means added to my nonchalance. It was a monotonous trek broken now and then by a pause to retrieve small reptiles from my underwear or to repair more or less acute damages to my epidermis.

After a two hours' squirm we reached the very heart of the jungle and I was suddenly awakened from a gorgeous nap by Guaso yelling to me, "*Impshi! Impshi!*"

(There! There!) and on a slight knoll, not one hundred feet away from where we were hiding behind a clump of *bonga* trees, stood the queerest-looking mammal I had ever laid eyes on. It had the body of a large *gilse*, though its façade extended farther: its head was like a colossal *rottin* with something of the lion, too, about the ventricles; it stood exactly eleven feet high and swung its curious *double tail* with a graceful motion, killing the cow birds resting on both right and left flanks at one and the same time.

My heart beat like a stock ticker as I beheld this behemoth. All of a sudden it raised its head down the wind as if it scented either Guaso's presence or my own, and I'm inclined to think the odds are in Guaso's favor, judging by my own nose's reaction to the swarthy fellow. As the pungent odor of my six-foot Somali reached those gaping nostrils, the Bildik gave a roar that sounded for all the world as if an entire year's output of static had suddenly been released in that jungle.

On he came straight toward us, roaring, screaming, crashing through the brushwood. Fascinated I stood, hypnotized and helpless as a bird in front of a vampire snake. I couldn't have fired at the brute for all the money in Wall Street.

At last, just as the Bildik was within thirty yards of us, I was suddenly inspired to give vent to an old college yell, and dropping everything I had in my hands I ran rapidly forward to take up another position. Guaso, still carrying the rifles at a dangerous angle, fled with me. I didn't even turn my head until we had arrived well over a mile away from where we had been hiding.

THEN and then only did I venture to reconnoiter, and what a sight greeted my eyes! The Bildik was frantically champing up and down in a circle just where I had been standing not five minutes before. In fact that beast was roaring with helpless rage on the very spot I had so recently vacated. I saw him try to lift first one foot, then the other and then sink back as if he were floundering in a quick-

sand. He acted as one caught in a trap and could not make the slightest headway.

At first I could not fathom the mystery of his helplessness. Why did he not move? Just what was it that held him captive? At last it dawned upon me! In my precipitate haste, as I told you, I had dropped everything I was carrying and had utterly forgotten that among my possessions was a large sample of gelatinous Mivvenwort.

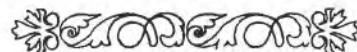
It was in *that* that the Giant Bildik was hopelessly stuck. Nothing on earth can extricate anything animate or inanimate that is once enmeshed in that deadly glue-like substance. Bidding Guaso remain where he was, out of danger, I boldly took one of the .303s from him and rushing boldly back to where the Giant Bildik was bogged, I shot the beast right behind its *metso* and down it toppled instantly, with a crash.

At that, pandemonium broke loose. My beaters, carriers, guides, bearers, and fire poodahs began singing their triumphant *horua* as they danced wildly around my kill. The bell ringer then started to perform and soon the whole jungle reverberated with such a medley of noises that Sir Rapson Spittlebooth came *trekking*

along in great anxiety, fearing the worst for me. Imagine his utter astonishment to discover me sitting on the left rump of my "bag" (sporting term for one's kill) calmly reading the latest market report on knit goods that I happened to have in my pocket. The natives prostrated themselves in front of me and bestowed on me the title of *Tumba Tumba*—the highest honor, Sir Rapson told me, ever given a Rotarian.

**WHEN** we finally had time to examine "the terror of the jungle" we found it measured twenty-six feet from the cribri-form plate to its hind swisher. The hide stretched completely across two and one half *erms* (rough native calculation), the double tail alone measuring several *yzos*. The meat, when cut up, weighed three tons, which I divided among the boys.

Little needs to be added to this bare recital as the scientific record is already bound in the annual reports of the Royal Society while the commercial aspect of the case was very ably treated in a recent issue of *The Knitters' Review and Buyers' Guide*. I only hope that what I have here written may inspire some other members of our great industrial centers to venture forth and do likewise.



### SUPERB PISTOL PLAY

**B**RIGADIER-GENERAL DAINGERFIELD PARKER of Washington, tells the story of how "Wild Bill" Hickok, the famous scout and killer of "bad men" back in the 'sixties, shot two men to death simultaneously.

The men were enemies of Hickok, who was then serving as sheriff of a Western frontier town, and one advanced upon him in front while the other closed in on him from behind. Hickok, as cool as a cucumber, shot the one in front and in the same moment, aiming by means of a mirror that was in front of him, shot the one behind him without turning around. If he had tried to take time to turn before shooting, he would have been killed.

On another occasion in 1868 or 1869 General Parker saw Hickok at Fort Harker, and the scout proposed that, as the weather was severely cold, they have a little refreshment. As they talked, the general commented on the fact that Hickok looked thin and run down.

"I'm not surprised," Hickok replied simply. "An enemy of mine put some powdered glass in a drink of whisky I took with him, and it raised the deuce with me."



# Macumber Combs the Air

By Robert H. Rohde

*Author of "The Lion's Mouth," "Hunted Down," Etc.*

**The Great Macumber picks up a radio clue and averts a tragedy.**

THE telephone at best is an untrustworthy instrument; and the Reverend Doctor Jerome Stivers, moreover, had been agitated to the point of absolute incoherence when he rang up the Rawley and poured his troubles into my ears.

In the circumstances, since Macumber has since elected to make humorous capital of my report to him that evening, I am impelled to offer these straightforward and valid observations at the very outset. They are to be taken neither as an apology nor a defense. Merely—they explain.

It was shortly after eight thirty when the phone conversation—if conversation it can be called—was concluded. The Great One came in not more than five minutes later, filled with the exuberance he seems always to breathe in with the winter air.

“Nippy night,” he remarked, dropping his overcoat over a chair and sending his Stetson sailing for a fair fall onto its peg on the distant rack. “I suppose that you’ve—”

What the supposition was I have yet to learn. He broke off suddenly, and his eyes narrowed as he regarded me.

“Give me the news, lad!” he commanded. “Something’s in the wintry wind. You’re looking your solemnest!”

“A friend of yours,” said I, “happens to have got himself into a sort of solemn situation. And he’s looking to you to pull him out. It’s Stivers.”

“Eh?” The sharpness of Macumber’s tone was gratifying. “You wouldn’t be meaning the dominie, youngster?”

“But I would. Doctor Jerome Stivers is the man, and the mess he’s got himself into is hardly one to make merry over. As near as I’ve been able to gather, the doctor has lent himself to a bit of gayety that’s come to grief. He had strayed into a studio party. Imagine that!”

The announcement failed to impress the Great One as I had anticipated it would.

“My imagination’s not baffled,” said he, blinking. “There are studios—and studios. Not all studio parties are of the Hol-

lywood and Greenwich Village ilk, regardless of all the ideas you may have plucked out of the daily pinks. Doctor Stivers might with perfect propriety have—”

“His party this evening,” I interrupted, “appears to have been a hectic one. I believe the place was raided. At any rate the words ‘outrage’ and ‘police’ kept recurring in Stivers’ burble.

“Also, I understand, some enthusiast present made what is known in the vernacular of the wide studioless spaces as a gun play. Whether this preceded or followed the arrival of the police, I’m sure I can’t—”

I paused and listened. An elevator had stopped down the corridor. The passenger it had discharged was coming toward our door, and coming with a rush. His pace was a dogtrot.

“That should be the doctor now,” said I. “Get the details from *him*—if you can. I wish you better luck than I had.”

I HAVE made worse guesses: Stivers it was. He gasped a greeting to Macumber and collapsed, panting, into a light chair that creaked and swayed under his plummeted weight. Immediately he launched into exposition; but his early words, muffled by the handkerchief with which he dabbed at the perspiration coursing down his cheeks, came thickly.

A swift expression of concern passed over the Great One’s face. It vanished with a reassuring improvement in the articulation of our caller, due in some part to the dropping of the drenched handkerchief and in another part to a regaining of breath.

“I’ll have the fellow up on charges!” was the first comprehensible utterance of the Reverend Doctor Jerome Stivers. “I’ll have him before the commissioner. He—he as much as insinuated that I was under the influence of liquor!”

“Inconceivable!” murmured Macumber. “A policeman, was it?”

“A little man clothed with too large an authority,” snapped the clergyman, the purple growing brighter in his cheeks. “What they call, I believe, a desk lieuten-

12A—POP.

ant. I have his name. He’s not heard the last of me.”

The Great One delivered himself of a cluck of commiseration.

“Surely you’ll not tell me, dominie,” said he, “that you’ve been subjected to the indignity of arrest.”

Stivers stared at him.

“How’s that? Arrest? Who said any such thing? You’re remarkably obtuse, Macumber. I had this Lieutenant Larkin on the telephone; he happened to be the officer in charge when I called police headquarters.

“The man didn’t seem to find me intelligible. Naturally, I was unstrung. He could have made allowances, instead of suggesting that I take a nap and call again. When one has just had a pistol thrust under one’s nose—has stood all unprepared on the brink of eternity—”

The Great One’s eyes widened.

“Aye!” he ejaculated. “The party *did* get rough!”

“Party!” echoed Stivers.

“Archie tells me you were in some studio, and—”

“That’s quite right. It was in our studio that the outrage occurred. The KTOM studio, you know. Surely you recall the liberal donation you made toward the apparatus last year.”

“It had slipped my mind. That radio business, you mean?”

“Precisely. For the last eight months we’ve been broadcasting nightly programs of music and inspirational talks from our neighborhood house. From seven o’clock until—”

Doctor Stivers had use for his handkerchief again. He was perspiring afresh.

“A disturbing thought has come to me,” he groaned. “Our broadcasting hours are from seven to eight thirty. But to-night, after all the excitement, and due to it, I—I’m afraid I forgot to sign off. Heaven knows how many people may be waiting in vain for KTOM to continue.”

“From what I’ve heard of the radio public,” smiled the Great One, “the mail should bring you a fair estimate to-morrow. Dismiss the question until then,

dominie. In the meantime, I'd thank you to tell me what was this in the air to-night."

"I can't," remarked Stivers obliquely, "decide whether the man is a lunatic or a scoundrel. Not for the life of me. But he's one or the other, and I owe a duty to the public at large. He must be found, and placed under the kind of restraint best suited to his case. Sane or insane, he's a menace."

Macumber dug with his pipe into the depths of the tobacco jar.

"You've not told me whom you're talking about," said he, "and yet if yours were another profession, dominie, I'd offer to wager you that there's a connection between this person and the pistol lately introduced into your interesting conversation."

"There is. A totally unexpected connection. When he produced the weapon it was—well, as if I were now to draw a packet of playing cards from my pocket. Or a flask."

"Preposterous!"

"Nevertheless, the analogy is a fair one. Farwell is also a man of the cloth—or so he has represented himself to be. But after all that has come to pass, I doubt that any Reverend Fowler Farwell exists. I mean to say, I don't believe the man owns the name he claimed."

"From which I gather he's not an acquaintance of long standing."

"Until Friday last I never saw him—nor heard of him. But he was an extremely personable man, and I had absolutely no reason to suspect he was not what he said he was."

"Farwell—false or not, it's the convenient name to use—came to me at the neighborhood house and introduced himself. Just one week ago to-night, that was. He said he had heard much of the good work being carried forward under the banner of KTOM, and asked if he might not be present during the broadcasting of one of our programs.

"It was then nearing seven, and I was only too pleased to invite Farwell into the studio. He manifested a high degree

of interest in the apparatus, and seemed rather enthusiastic in regard to my talk and the singing of our quartet.

"It is the most marvelous of privileges, doctor," he said, "to speak thus to a great unseen congregation; to send golden words, as it were, winging into the Infinite. What I have seen and heard here this evening has been the inspiration of a wish.

"I should like to share this boon with you—yes, and in some part, at least, the burden of expense. A proposal has already taken definite form in my mind. May I ask you to hear it and consider it?"

"For a half hour after we had signed off Farwell sat with me in my office, which adjoins the broadcasting studio. He told me that he had considerable private means; had, in fact, resigned from a harassing charge in Ohio on his inheriting of a substantial fortune a couple of years since.

"At KTOM, as you may imagine, we are often pressed for funds to carry on the work; but I was really more impressed by Farwell's earnestness than by his offer to defray a portion of the broadcasting cost. Before we parted I had agreed that talks to be delivered by him should become a regular feature of the KTOM program.

"I assigned to him the period from ten minutes after eight until twenty after. A too short time, of course, for anything like a well-rounded sermon; but you must realize, Macumber, that even seconds have an exaggerated value on the air.

**O**N the following night—Saturday—Farwell was with us. It seemed that he feared to trust himself to speak extemporaneously, for when his turn came at the microphone he brought out a type-written script and read from it.

"His discourse, for what there was of it, struck me as excellent. It was, however, inconclusive. That is to say, it ended most abruptly. It was the sort of thing which one would have expected to run to sixtlies and seventhlies."

"Without setting up as a higher critic of

pulpit oratory," remarked the Great One, "I'd call the abruptness excusable."

DOCTOR JEROME STIVERS ignored the interpolation.

"This sudden termination—this biting off, as one might say," he continued, "was characteristic of the several sermons read by Farwell before the microphone. Mark that, please. There is an explanation, which I shall shortly reveal.

"On Sunday night, owing to technical difficulties in the way of putting our regular services on the air, we do not broadcast. But on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday nights Farwell put in an appearance at the studio, and spoke. And on each of these nights, before leaving, he insisted on giving me a ten-dollar bill as his personal contribution to KTOM.

"He was not one to linger. After that first evening it became his practice to bid us good night immediately after his time at the microphone had elapsed.

"A wire came to the studio on Wednesday night just after I had announced the concluding number of the program. It was from a listener in Englewood, New Jersey. The exact text I cannot recall, but the telegram ran something like this: 'Farwell fragments very good. Why no credit to Van Cliff?'"

MACUMBER repeated the name.

"Van Cliff? Doctor Herman van Cliff, did he mean, dominie? Dead, isn't he?"

"He has passed on," said Stivers softly. "But he left behind him a great series of sermons that will never die. My own library contains two volumes of them. In the second volume, acting on the suggestion of the telegram, I found the sources of Farwell's genius.

"The man had lifted bodily from Doctor van Cliff's work the paragraphs which he had palmed off upon us and our radio public as his own. At least he had permitted us to infer that his remarks were original—which amounts to the same thing.

"It was a rank imposture. I resolved to have a frank talk with Farwell at our

next meeting. Perhaps, though, I should not have made a direct issue. Up to that time, you must understand, he had conducted himself in an irreproachable manner.

"But as it transpired, I did not see Farwell again until this evening. Last night he did not appear. Instead, I was waited upon by a most unprepossessing person who explained that Doctor Farwell could not be with us, and said he had come in Farwell's stead.

"This substitute called himself Doctor Dingley. He was a tall, spare man, in an ill-fitting frock coat, and it struck me that his eyes and his general cast of countenance were singularly hard for one of our calling. That was truthfully my first impression of the man, I assure you; and I was shocked to detect an unmistakable aroma of drink about him as he walked with me into the studio.

"I was in something of a dilemma—was tempted, indeed, to deny him the privilege of the microphone. But in the stress of announcing and directing the program I had to put the problem from my mind.

"While the self-styled Doctor Dingley had certainly been indulging in liquor before coming to the studio, there was nothing in his earlier actions to indicate he had indulged to excess—granting, for the moment, that the merest taste of the stuff is not morally and legally an excess. He kept to himself; took a chair in an out-of-the-way corner, lighted a cigar and entertained himself by reading and rereading the typed sermon script with which Farwell apparently had armed him.

"We are usually, as I have indicated, most punctilious in adhering to the time schedule at KTOM. But circumstances last night were extraordinary. It seemed to me desirable, if the thing could be done without too great unpleasantness, to drop the Farwell proxy talk off the program.

"A telephone call from a lady in Brooklyn suggested an opportune way. Mr. Glauber, the tenor of our Fourteenth Presbyterian choir, was just concluding a most stirring rendition of 'The Palms,' and the

lady on the wire earnestly urged that we prevail on him to give an encore number.

"It was then within two minutes of the beginning of the period allotted to Farwell. By allowing the encore it occurred to me that I might, by seeming oversight, absorb the ten Farwell minutes into the musical program, and then dispose of the Dingley person with an explanation and some perfunctory apology.

"With me to think was to act. I whispered to Mr. Glauber and the accompanist and stepping to the microphone announced that by specially telephoned request the gentleman who had been heard in 'The Palms' would sing 'There Is a Green Hill Far Away.'

"As I turned away to give place to Mr. Glauber, I found myself facing Dingley. His watch was in his hand, and his expression was most unpleasant. He spoke with force but not with dignity.

"'Your friend,' he said, 'can rest his pipes a while. This is our time, and I'm taking it. Fair is fair, and orders are orders.'

"Whereupon, rudely elbowing aside Mr. Glauber and myself, the impossible Dingley took a position before the microphone and began to read so rapidly from the sermon script that his words tumbled one over the other.

"There was nothing to do but permit him to proceed. When he had finished the reading—well within his time limit—I made vigorous remonstrance. But Dingley was again in a good humor; quite mellow, in fact.

"'Wouldn't change watches with you,' he said. 'Yours must be off. If there's any damage, put it on the bill. Good night, all!'

"After that disgraceful episode I was resolved, as you may be certain, to have no further dealings with Farwell. Indeed, I somehow had a feeling that I should see no more of him. But at eight o'clock this evening he walked calmly into the studio, and greeted me as cheerily as if nothing could possibly have happened to estrange us.

"My one response was cold. At once I

reported the condition and conduct of the man he had sent to represent him. Farwell appeared deeply distressed.

"'Poor Dingley,' he sighed, 'is a strange combination of strength and weakness. It grieves me to hear that he has turned again to the cup. Some time I must give you the man's history, doctor. Surely when you know the facts your heart will go out to him as mine does.'

"I shook my head and reserved comment. My mind had been made up beyond possibility of compromise. But I was still rather curious in regard to the borrowed sermons. I asked Farwell whether he had used them before or had written them especially for radiocasting.

"He walked blindly into the trap.

"'Oh,' said he, 'they're random thoughts I've been dashing off from day to day. I'd like to hear your opinion of them, doctor.'

"'Are you sure of that?' I asked, looking him full in the eye.

"Farwell's expression underwent a swift change. Something curious—challenging—came into his direct gaze.

"'Let me hear it!' he rapped out.

"Then and there I accepted the challenge.

"'If plagiarism were a capital offense, Farwell,' said I, 'you'd need go no farther to hang yourself. What your game may be, or how you expect to profit by it, I can't fathom; but you've brought discredit on KTOM and on yourself.'

"'In your preachings you've been cribbing right and left from Herman van Cliff. If it's your intention to continue putting his words on the air—which in itself, I'll grant you, is a laudable enough project—I must request that you make arrangements with another broadcasting station.'

"I expected, of course, a denial or an explanation. Farwell offered neither. He met the charge with a broad smile.

"'We'll thrash that out later, doctor,' he said. 'Just now there's hardly time. I'm not counting on using more than two of my ten minutes this evening. There are only a few words I wish to say.'

"I held firm.

"Not one minute, and not one word, Farwell," I told him. "Our revised program doesn't permit of it. I'm sorry, but that's the situation."

"Some of that singular hardness I had observed in Dingley's eyes came into Farwell's."

"You've cut me out of my time—tonight?" he demanded.

"You are not on the program," said I.

"In that case," snapped Farwell, "the program will have to be changed again!"

"Impossible," I said; but I must confess that even between the syllables of the word my voice lost that finality at which I had aimed.

Farwell, as I spoke, had reached under the skirt of his coat. Suddenly I found myself looking into the mouth of a pistol!"

**A**N ejaculation of astonishment came from the Great Macumber.

"And this was in the studio, dominie?"

Stivers nodded.

"It was. But none of the others present realized that I stood there in their midst with one foot literally in the grave. Oh, there was murder in the man's eyes, Macumber!"

"My first thought was that I had a maniac to deal with; and after I had sent a desperate glance about the room the situation developed as all the more horrifying.

Farwell and I had been conversing in low tones in a corner remote from the microphone. The person nearest to us was the operator. He was busy at his apparatus, of course, and had seen nothing.

Mr. Glauber was listening in at the receiving set we keep tuned with our own station, so we may be assured that all goes well. The rest of the singers were grouped at the piano with their backs toward us. As quickly as it had taken shape, I abandoned the thought of making an outcry. I felt, altogether, that it would be best to humor Farwell.

"There's no need to excite yourself," I said, as soothingly as my own agitation would permit. "No matter what you wish, you will not find me unreasonable."

Farwell slipped the hand that held the pistol beneath the breast of his coat.

"It's nine minutes past eight now," he whispered. "When that violin solo's over, just you march to the microphone and announce that old Doctor Farwell is the next batter up. Otherwise——"

"I'll do it," said I. "Consider that you have my promise. You may speak as long as you care to."

"I told you two minutes would be enough for me," said Farwell. "That goes. But tricks *don't* go. Not a word to anybody, understand!"

"When you've made the announcement, I want you to stand by me—stand where I can see you. If you make trouble, say your prayers first!"

The fact that Farwell had whisked his weapon out of sight scarcely lessened my uneasiness. Discretion dictated that I obey him implicitly. My nerves were already in a ghastly state, and my heart was pounding so violently that I feared it might be permanently affected.

Far from seeking any way to turn the tables, I was obsessed by worry lest Farwell suspected me unjustly of an attempt to betray him and act overhastily. That he would shoot me down without hesitation I was in no mood and in no position to doubt. And I do not doubt it even now.

"It was only by a supreme effort that I held my voice steady when I stood at the microphone a moment later. But control it I did, and no one was the wiser when I had announced Farwell.

"But when the announcement was made, the last of my strength was gone. Farwell's hand remained beneath his coat—clutching the pistol, I knew. I grew giddy before his sinister stare. I felt myself about to faint, and dared not give way."

**M**ACUMBER'S finger tips drummed a tattoo on the table.

"I can appreciate your feelings, Doctor Stivers," he said. "Please don't harrow yourself needlessly by bringing them to mind. What of Farwell? What was his swan song from KTOM?"

Stivers regarded the Great One reproachfully.

"Can't you understand, Macumber, that my thoughts were less on Farwell's words than on——"

"Aye; but these must have been words worth hearing—words to remember. Else why should the man have been so set on airing them?"

The clergyman shrugged.

"It would be idle," said he, "to attempt to account for the vagaries of a diseased mind. I can tell you only that it was another sermon—a very short one and a ragged one—which Farwell broadcast from KTOM to-night.

"I cannot even give you the exact text, but to me there was a shuddering implication in the source. It—it was from *Erodus*!"

Macumber sighed.

"It's to be regretted," said he, "that a full transcript of the gentleman's radioed remarks isn't available: for the problem is a pretty one. But go on with your story, dominie. We've brought Farwell to the microphone—and then?"

"He was as good as his word. Within the couple of minutes he had commanded the man had concluded his talk and gone swiftly out of the studio. So abrupt was his termination this evening that the discourse was altogether pointless.

"Before I could realize it was possible for me to breathe freely again Farwell had vanished. Never have I heard a more welcome sound than the hurried clatter of his footsteps on the stair.

"Mr. Glauber, noting my pallor and alarmed by it, came solicitously toward me.

"'You are ill, doctor,' he said.

"'We stand in the valley of the shadow,' I gasped. 'Lock that door! If Farwell returns, deny him admittance as you value your life!'

"Then I rushed into the office, locked that door too as an additional precaution, and snatched up the telephone. It was my misfortune to get the man Larkin on the wire. Failing to make him grasp the situation I thought of you, Macumber, as a

friend and neighbor to whom I could look for advice. You have had more dealings with violent men than I; you have a flair for the inexplicable. I've not forgotten your amazing accomplishment in that Reinitz business. With all this in mind, I called the Rawley and——"

"And gave my able young assistant," smiled Macumber, "an opportunity to exercise his extraordinary deductive faculties. But so far as advice is concerned, Doctor Stivers, I'm not sure you stand in immediate need of any.

"I believe that the incident—in its relation to you, at any rate—is closed. Farwell won't be likely to be giving you any further trouble. On the contrary, he'll rather be avoiding you."

The clergyman passed a trembling hand over his forehead.

"I wish I could think so," he said dubiously. "Yet if the man is demented, as certainly it would seem, how can I know peace? Might not his disordered brain entertain an idea of returning?"

"Tush!" cried the Great One. "Regarding his object I'm as deep in the dark as yourself, dominie; but unquestionably your Doctor Farwell suffers from the same form of dementia that afflicts the quick brown fox. Be certain he's had his money's worth out of KTOM and is through with you.

"But if it would give you comfort to have the police on the lookout for him, by all means get them busy. The youngster here will be pleased to run down to headquarters with you. There'll be profit in his company, for you'll find he knows the ropes."

## II.

**S**TIVERS, too strongly on his dignity to be discursive, transacted his business with the police with unexpected celerity, and in less than an hour after our departure for headquarters I was back at the Rawley. I brought news with me.

"Doctor Stivers," said I, "had an even narrower squeak to-night than he realized. The radio-mad Farwell was a patient in the Lewiston State Hospital until ten days

ago, anyhow—and they had him ticketed there as a homicidal case."

"Stuff!" hooted Macumber.

"The story of the escape was printed in the newspapers," I reminded him. "It came back to me when they spoke of it at the detective bureau. The descriptions tally."

"Yes?" chuckled the Great One. "And who would Dingley have been, then?"

"I give up," I confessed weakly. "The doctor didn't mention Dingley to the police. He telescoped his tale of terror into a two-minute narration for their benefit. How do *you* account for the man, maestro?"

Macumber resumed his pacing of the rug, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"For many months back," he said after a little, "I've been looking to find the radio hooked up with rascality. Now the thing has come to pass—and thanks to Stivers we've an inside track."

"The man who called himself Farwell was of course using KTOM to convey information to some confederate—some one he couldn't reach in any other manner. Last night, I fancy, a more pressing business interfered with his visit to the studio, so he dressed up Dingley and sent him. You recollect that Stivers remarked the poor fit of Dingley's coat, lad?"

"I do," I admitted. "But what meaning might have been concealed in the preachings of Doctor Herman van Cliff I can't conceive."

The Great One halted his march and cast an impatient glance toward me.

"To resurrect a word that was born of the war and perished with the peace," said he, "Farwell's sermonizing was camouflage. A few interpolated words, innocent enough in themselves, would have turned the trick handily."

"It was altogether a neat conception. KTOM was selected by Farwell, I fancy, because it struck him it would be comparatively easy to pull the wool over the eyes of its unworldly management."

"With Stivers' station closed to him," I observed, "it shouldn't be hard to pick up

Farwell's trail. I don't suppose there are more than a dozen or two broadcasting studios, at the outside, in the city. By keeping in touch—"

"You're wrong there!" cried Macumber. "Depend on it, lad, that Farwell's done with broadcasting. His actions this evening were proof of that. It would have been a last message he was bent on getting over—and a vital one. It stands to reason. So our task's not to find Farwell himself, but the one with whom he was communicating."

I COULDN'T restrain a smile.

"If you can suggest some method of tracing a call made by radio," I remarked, "you'll have accomplished a greater marvel than the wireless itself."

The Great One wagged his head soberly.

"I'm sure it's simpler than it sounds," said he.

"Your man might be a thousand miles away."

"No; not more than fifty miles. I can be positive about that."

"How so?"

"I've been using the telephone on one matter and another during your absence, lad. Fifty miles is the broadcasting radius of KTOM—the limit. It's not, thank the Lord, one of the powerful stations."

"I still see no cause to be sanguine."

"You don't, eh? Think over the problem carefully, youngster. It was no whim, we may be certain, that led Farwell to make use of the radio. The expense, the bother and the risk would all have argued against it in the ordinary course."

"Men of the Farwell type, we'll assume, are likely to take the easiest way in all things; it is that disposition which turns them to crime. Thus we may safely argue that Farwell's friend, though not more than a half hundred miles from us, is somewhat peculiarly situated. That is to say, he'll not be accessible by telephone or by telegraph."

I offered what occurred to me as a distinctly practical suggestion.

"How about a letter, maestro? Surely there's no place within fifty miles of New

York—within the metropolitan district—where mails aren't delivered."

"Quite right," admitted the Great One. "But this business of Farwell's would have been urgent. In witness of that I refer you again to his conduct at KTOM to-night.

"It was such as to suggest urgency, wouldn't you say? No, a letter would not have done, regardless. I've wasted no time in speculation along *that* line."

MACUMBER nodded toward an atlas which lay open on the table at his side.

"Now and again," said he, "we read that the police are 'combing the city' for some one particularly wanted at headquarters. The picturesque phrase means no more than that they have embarked on a thorough and methodical search; and method would apply just as well in a combing of the air.

"You'll note that on this map of southern New York I've drawn a rough circle around the fretwork that indicates the position of the city. Call the penciled line a cordon. Our man's inside it, for only a freak of radio would waft KTOM's waves beyond—and Farwell, surely, would not have been depending on freaks in any such imminent enterprise as his must have been.

"In which direction shall we look? To the north we have Westchester and a slice of Connecticut; to the west, Newark and suburban New Jersey; to the east and south, Long Island, Staten Island, Sandy Hook and the salt-blue sea."

I echoed the Great One's last word—fairly shouted it.

"The sea! That's the answer, maestro! It must have occurred to you."

"Aye, it did," said Macumber placidly. "At the very first; even before I'd turned to the atlas."

"If your theory's right—if Farwell really had a message for some particular person—everything's explained. His friend is on a vessel somewhere off the coast.

"It's a ship of the rum fleet, of course. No mails, no phone, no telegraph wires out there—and KTOM has been employed

as some kind of bootleggers' intelligence station. Stivers *will* faint when he hears that!"

THERE have been times when I've seriously questioned the quality of the Great One's sense of humor: the prospect of Doctor Jerome Stivers' consternation seemed to hold no ludicrous appeal for him. He regarded me with unimpaired solemnity.

"The single-track mind—" said he—and then the sentence thus begun was interrupted by the jingle of the telephone bell.

It was the hotel office calling, announcing a visitor.

"Some one named Bernard wants to see you," I reported.

"Have him brought up," directed Macumber. "It's a young fellow on the *Sphere*—a reporter friend of Billy Race's. Did I tell you I'd had Billy on the wire while you were downtown with the dominie?"

"You didn't."

"I phoned the *Standard* to learn what sort of power KTOM had, and when I'd finished with the radio man I had the operator switch me over to Race's desk. He's the *Standard's* night city editor now, you know. There was a little matter in the news I wanted to consult him about.

"It was at Billy's suggestion I got in touch with Bernard. That fierce rivalry of the press that we read about doesn't seem—ah, there's his tap!"

I opened our door to a tall, dark, alert-eyed youth whose gaze swept from me to Macumber and then came almost reverently to rest on the green-labeled bottle of MacVickar at the Great One's elbow.

Macumber followed his glance and grinned.

"Not the least of my magic," said he, "is that by which I evoke these excellent speerits in days of drought. You enjoy a nip, do you, Mr. Bernard?"

The eyes of the young man from the *Sphere* clung to the MacVickar.

"If that label means what it says," he avowed with enthusiasm, "you can't whis-

per an invitation so low that I won't hear it."

The Great One shook his head sorrowfully.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that the last drop has been poured."

He shook the bottle, and then with a rueful smile held it neck down. Empty it was.

"I'm sorry, my boy. Ah, badly disappointed, are you? We can't have that—not if we must call upon speerits of another sort to replenish the MacVickar!"

Macumber picked up a glass from the table and struck it sharply against the side of the bottle. When he passed it to the astonished journalist a miracle had transpired; in the glass a fluid which gave off an aroma not to be counterfeited had materialized.

"A bit of ice and a little soda for Mr. Bernard, lad!" cried the Great One. "And while you're at it, glasses for ourselves. What has been done once can be done again. So-o! You see!"

The reporter sniffed suspiciously at his Scotch and soda and then tossed down half the contents of the magical glass at a gulp.

"No smell of brimstone—and no taste of it, either," he said. "That's a trick I wouldn't mind adding to my own repertoire, professor."

"I'll explain it to you some day," smiled Macumber. "Just now I'm afraid we haven't the time to spare. You phoned to them up above?"

"Yes; a half hour ago."

"We'll have the coöperation I suggested?"

"A paper with a half million circulation," said Bernard, "usually gets all kinds of coöperation. Don't worry. We own the place for the night."

"Any mention of the circumstance that I had called?"

"Gleason said he'd heard from you. Wouldn't tell me more than that, though."

"That's good! Evidently my warning took root. I begged him to keep his own counsel. Whispers travel fast and far in his domain, and it would take only a word to upset our plans."

The *Sphere*'s young man restored his empty glass to the table.

"By the way, professor," he remarked, "you haven't let *me* know exactly what the program is."

"Why, I don't believe I have!" grinned the Great One, and caught up his hat. "Shall we be going?"

### III.

IN Times Square, at the Rawley corner, the Great Macumber chartered an automobile. It was not one of the ordinary snub-nosed taxis in which he usually rumbles about town, but a sleek and long-hooded motor which might, except for an inconspicuous "For Hire" placard, have been a private car.

I didn't catch the directions which Macumber gave to the driver, nor was he pleased to reveal our destination when he climbed into the tonneau beside me. Young Bernard sat on the front seat with the chauffeur, and thus my project of gently pumping information from him en route was nipped.

Twice we were flagged by traffic policemen, for the Great One evidently had made it clear that we were in a rush. It was well we had the *Sphere* man along; he had some sort of badge at sight of which the bluecoats waved us on.

Our way lay north. In half the time a lumbering metered cab would have taken for the journey we had put the boulevard lights behind, flitted through Yonkers and were racing over a twisting and hilly road from which I could see now and again the twinkling of reflected lights awash in the Hudson.

Over the hill road we traveled for the better part of an hour. It was close to midnight when we whirled into a little town, coasted down one last steep hill and drew up beside a gate in a lofty and gloomy granite wall.

Beyond the gate were buildings of the same gray stone; long, ugly buildings with long slits of windows curtained in steel. Before Macumber spoke I knew where we were. A half dozen times I had had a view of the old prison from the Albany

boat, and the sight was not one easily forgotten.

A chill passed over me as the gate swung in and we entered a flag-floored courtyard. Within the walls that inclosed us were no less than a dozen men who but for Macumber would not have come here, caged and vengeful men who might now be looking down on us from the dark embrasures.

Not more than a hundred yards from us, certainly, were the Cardelli brothers—the three who had sworn the vendetta and who must be counting the days now that freedom lay ahead within the year. Safe under lock and bar they might be, these brothers of the blood and the rest, but there was no comfort in the thought of their proximity.

IT seemed we were expected. There were lights in the administration building directly ahead; a bulky man in civilian clothing rose from a desk to greet us.

Macumber held whispered conversation with him. Later, as we followed a uniformed guard along a corridor that led farther into the prison, the Great One explained:

"That was Gleason, the warden. You've heard of him, lad—the 'golden rule' chap?"

I answered him with a question.

"Where are we bound for now? Why didn't Bernard come with us?"

"The party is yours and mine from now on, lad," replied the Great One. "Our friend is going to keep the warden company. As for our present destination—this appears to be it."

The keeper had opened a door and switched on a light. We stood in what seemed to be a sort of storeroom.

"You'll take a big size, sir," said our cicerone, eying Macumber. He went delving into a closet, and I saw that the Great One was removing his coat.

"Peel, lad," he said. "If you'd be coming with me you'll have to dress the part!"

In another moment Macumber bowed before me transformed, his own proper clothing exchanged for shapeless and shoddy garments of the convict drab. He

stood by, grinning, while I followed his example.

"Your hair's a bit long to be entirely in character, youngster," he said critically, "but I'll chance you in the dark. Aye, but you've the makings of a bonny felon!"

Then, before I could speak, we were under way again. We passed out of the corridor into the night, and traversed another dim courtyard under a sky whose stars had been blotted out by clouds. Rain was beginning to fall in spattering big drops.

THE guard led us into one of the squat buildings; up a flight of narrow steel stairs; along another corridor lined with gratings. We were not the only ones on the move at midnight. A silent group passed us in the close way; falling, as did we, into single file when we met.

There were two men in the uniform of the guard, two in the drab. A light shone on the face of one of the prisoners when we were abreast and I perceived, with something of a shock, that he was no older than myself. Crime had not set its mark on him. He had a decent and a clean look.

Instinctively I set him down as a first offender, and I was still moralizing on the system which flings such men into the abyss with no attempt at salvage when we came to our journey's end.

We had arrived at a grating which stood open. Macumber gripped my arm and shoved me into the blackness beyond it, following along. The grating swung to behind us, and the footsteps of the guard—gone from us without a word—grew faint in the distance. We were alone in the prison cell.

I stretched out my arms. On either side my fingers touched stone; and from the stone a chill sweat was oozing.

"Cheerful diggings!" whispered the Great One. "Would you care to be a permanent guest?"

"I'd rather be dead," said I.

"You may think so, lad—now. But I fancy you'd make another choice if the alternatives were squarely before you. We

cling to life at the last, no matter how dismal. All of us."

I expected an explanation, and waited for it. None came.

"Aren't you depriving me," I asked after a little, "of a constitutional right?"

"What's that?"

"Is it proper procedure to lock a man in a cell without letting him know the reason?"

"You are here, dear lad," murmured Macumber, "as a material witness. Let that be sufficient for now. There's a bunk on your side which you may locate by sense of touch, as I've found mine. Rest upon it, and talk no more. All about us are men who sleep none too well at best. They must rise early. Be good enough to consider them."

The bunk was hard. But neither that fact nor the cold tempted me to make use of the blanket that lay upon it. I pushed it onto the floor and stretched out.

What light there was came from a far-away electric lamp at the end of the corridor. After a time, when my eyes had accustomed themselves to the gloom, I could make out the figure of Macumber opposite me.

For the thousandth time I marveled at the man. Quite as comfortably as if it were his own bed in which he was lying, he had dropped into a doze.

To me the situation was unutterably oppressive, all but terrifying. I smarted under a sense of outrage. In sleeping while I lay awake and alone, not knowing what was to come, it seemed to me that the Great One was guilty of a species of desertion.

Sounds of heavy breathing filled the darkness. Somewhere along the cell tier a man dreamed and cried out. A neighbor growled a sleepy "*Can it!*"

At intervals footfalls came to my ears, mostly in the distance; and then, at last, steps that approached. They impressed me as stealthy steps. I heard them on the stairs, in the corridor of our tier.

The darkness within the cell deepened. Some one stood at the grating, peering in, cutting off the light from below. Macum-

ber still slept. I felt the cold more acutely. For a moment the figure in the corridor was motionless, tensely listening. Then came a whisper.

"Lambert! Hey, Lambert!"

The Great One stirred.

"Hullo!" he answered drowsily. "What is it?"

"Get up! Come here! I can't holler what I've got to tell you."

I had thought at first that the man outside was one of the keepers; now I saw that he wore the convict livery. He stepped back, and I had a glimpse of his face as the light fell momentarily upon it.

It was a face infinitely more evil than the mere listing of such ugly components as an undershot jaw, high flaunting cheek bones and tiny darting eyes set deep and close against a twisted nose can imply.

Again the face pressed on the grating. The whisper became a wheedle.

"Lambert! You hear me? Get up! That's a good feller!"

Macumber was rising. He yawned and stretched.

"Well, what's the trouble?"

"Come here—up close!"

I saw the Great One move forward—and then I saw something else. I would have cried a warning, but horror froze the shout in my throat.

The man of the evil mask had been holding one hand behind him. The hand had moved, and light had shimmered on steel.

Another pace would take Macumber to the grating. The figure in the corridor had a new outline; the shoulders had lifted.

I managed to get out one word.

"Knife!"

A bigger sound drowned my voice—a crash of steel on stone. The cell door had flown open. There was a scream; on top of it a wail.

"My arm! It's broke!"

Then the rapid steps of men running, and pandemonium along the tier. Lights blazed on. They blinded me. I saw only a blur. The Great One's voice came to me out of it.

"A bad hour to be troubling the doctor, warden, but I believe the man needs him. I feared he meant mischief with the knife!"

BERNARD took a seat facing Macumber and me on the early-morning train, city bound, and balanced a sheaf of copy paper on his knee.

"Now, if you don't mind," said he, "I'll do my duty by the *Sphere*. Casualties first, please."

"Suggers," replied the Great One, "has a compound fracture of the right wrist—as I knew before the doctor did. The jujutsu stroke I was impelled to use on the fellow is always a bone breaker. My own scratch is nothing—a mere pin prick on the shoulder."

The reporter chewed at the end of his pencil.

"Gleason," he complained, "wouldn't tell me how much information your prize beauty yielded when you questioned him in the office."

"Then I'll tell you that Suggers 'came clean.' He mentioned two names, and the New York police are looking for their owners now. But please don't print that, Bernard, until the arrests have been made. For your private information, the two have recently used the aliases of Farwell and Dingley."

"How about Lambert?" was Bernard's next query.

"An officer should be on his way from town now with the habeas-corpus writ. Lambert will be coming down a train or two after us—and I doubt he'll ever be going back."

"Suggers' confession alone would clear him from the last suspicion of complicity in the Michelham murder. The man's as innocent as we are. Except for a funk brought on by damnably crooked legal advice he'd never have made a plea of guilty."

"He never was given a chance to tell his own story; and he was made to believe that the case against him was so strong that he would surely be sent to the chair if he stood trial. So he swallowed

a sentence of twenty years to life in silence."

Bernard leaned forward eagerly.

"Lambert told you what happened—that night?"

"He did," nodded Macumber. "He owed Michelham considerable money lost at cards, and went to him to confess his inability to make settlement in full. He was in the building when the shot was fired."

Lambert took the report to have been the back fire of a passing motor, and continued to climb the stairs. As he reached the second landing a man rushed past him—and that man, Lambert says, he is certain he would know again. But at the time, not guessing what lay ahead for him, he kept on.

"The door of Michelham's apartment stood open. Lambert rapped, waited a moment, and then walked in.

Michelham lay sprawled on the floor with a revolver at his side. Lambert was stooping over the man when he heard behind him the command 'Hands up!' It was a neighbor of Michelham's, and by him Lambert was held prisoner until the police arrived.

"Within an hour Attorney Felix Goldsinder had projected himself into the case. He came to Lambert unsolicited and volunteered his services. When he had heard his client's story he warned him not to repeat it to the authorities. The safe course for Lambert, he said, would be to refuse to answer questions."

The Great One packed his pipe and held a match over the battered bowl.

"That was the beginning of an amazing conspiracy," he went on. "I make no direct charge against Goldsinder, mind, for that is exclusively the affair of the district attorney and the Bar Association.

"But, between ourselves, I've not the smallest doubt that the lawyer all the way through was acting coldly and mercilessly in the interest of another client than Lambert—the man whom Lambert had seen in the apartment-house hall. That man, I have reason to believe, is a member of a certain close-knit underworld organization

from which Goldsinder receives a handsome annual retainer.

"The rest, Bernard, I don't need to tell you. Lambert, knowing he could not be placed in jeopardy again, wrote to this lawyer friend of his in Seattle. The friend came East, and began the investigation which resulted yesterday afternoon in the granting of the habeas-corpus writ for Lambert.

"With the Seattle lawyer's first appearance at the district attorney's office, the real slayer of Michelham and those shielding him knew there was something in the wind. They are far-sighted men, incredibly shrewd and unscrupulous. They were resolved that Lambert never should talk—shouldn't live to point out the man he had seen running through Michelham's hall.

**T**HREE were men in the prison on whom they could bank to commit any sort of crime for pay, inside or outside the walls. One of them was a trusty—Suggers, of course.

"Suggers was acting as night electrician at the penitentiary. He had the run of the place between darkness and dawn. And with Suggers there was a means of communication that defied walls and gates and bars—a means surer and safer than through bribery of guards.

"He was known to have access to the warden's radio set. It was he who had installed it. He had convinced the warden he was a radio expert, as indeed in a sense he was. At almost any time he could be at the instrument, under pretense of adjusting it.

"Tentative arrangements, as you already know, were made with broadcasting station KTOM on the outside. A time was set. On the monthly prison visiting day—which was the day following the KTOM deal—Suggers had a caller. The situation was explained to him.

"If certain things came to pass, he was told, it would be made well worth his while to put Lambert out of the way. Each night, precisely at ten minutes past eight, he was to tune in on KTOM. His

cue would come to him, if it came at all, at the beginning of an otherwise meaningless sermon.

"The quotation of a text from Exodus would mean that the district attorney had been persuaded to reopen the Michelham case, that a writ of habeas corpus had been issued—that Lambert must die before it had been delivered at the prison."

**B**ERNARD halted his scribbling. He looked up from his notes.

"Professor," he cried, "it's unbelievable!"

"Aye," said Macumber grimly, "but the confession of Suggers is back there in black and white. I'm not going beyond it."

"But surely the crime must have found him out! A murder in prison—"

"No," broke in the Great One, "the crime would not have found him out. Suggers is a deeper schemer than he looks. He had been promised ten thousand dollars for his professional services upon Lambert.

"He could afford to be generous. There would have been men to swear that Lambert had talked despondently; men to swear he had confessed his guilt in the Michelham case to them; others to swear that he had smuggled the knife from the prison kitchen to his cell. Even his own cellmate had been won by Suggers. The verdict must certainly have been suicide—and the Michelham matter must have been closed for good!"

The reporter lighted a cigarette and leaned back against the cushion.

"What a yarn!" he murmured devoutly. "The unbeatable beat! But do you know, professor, the most astonishing part of it all is the way in which you traced the signal through thin air from KTOM up the river."

**T**HE Great One frowned, as if struck suddenly by some unhappy memory.

"No," said he, "it's not that which will make the episode of KTOM stand out among others in my memory. The thing was simple, if one looks at it with a prac-

tical eye. The radio messages, obviously, would have been intended for somebody not to be reached in the ordinary way.

"At once I thought of a man on a ship. Almost immediately I visioned a man in a prison. Somehow that second conception struck me more forcibly.

"On speculation I put in calls for the three penitentiaries nearest to New York. In two of them there were no radio installations, and my idea lost a bit of its savor. But Gleason had a radio set. He told me of his electrical wizard, the trusty, Suggers.

"I wracked my mind for any item in the day's news which might prompt the delivery of so urgent a message into the prison as this one which had been put on the air at pistol point. None came to memory. I went through the papers again, more carefully; and I found an obscure paragraph which had escaped me earlier. It hinted at developments in a case I had considered closed—the granting of a writ in behalf of Lambert.

"It was the *Standard* I called first, for Billy Race is my good friend. There I learned that the waves from KTOM would be ineffective more than fifty miles from the studio, and my hunch that a sword of Damocles overhung Lambert was strengthened.

"I asked Billy Race what he knew about the Lambert matter.

"'Damned little,' he said. 'Somethin's

*Another story of the Great Macumber in the next issue.*



### DRESSING THE PRESIDENT

ONE of the indispensable perquisites of the presidency of the United States is a valet. When Mr. Harding went into the White House, he protested: "I never thought I'd have a valet wished on me! But, if I've got to have it, I guess I'll do it." He had not been in the White House twenty-four hours before the valet, greatly grieved by the width of the stripe worn on the trousers of formal dress in Ohio, abolished or demolished the garment and got others on a hurry-up order.

As a matter of fact, the valet is absolutely indispensable to a president, who has to be dressed with absolute fidelity to the prevailing fashion and has not the time to bother his head with such matters. The valet sees that he goes forth from the White House properly garbed on every occasion.

brewing, but the *Sphere* seems to have the story bottled up.'

"Then he gave me your name. What more need I say, Bernard? I called you, explained as much to you as I thought necessary and asked you to use your influence with Gleason to win me admittance to the prison and an audience with him.

"You did your part nobly, and the beat is yours by right. Good luck to you with it, youngster, and may a bonus dangle at the end of your string at the week's end!"

THE reporter's teeth closed again on the pencil end.

"I can't imagine the story being better," he said after a moment. "But you haven't told me everything, professor."

"Aye," protested the Great One. "I have! What else could there be?"

"You suggested there was something beyond your beautiful deduction—beyond even that hang-up battle of jujutsu against steel—that would make you remember this case. Come on, now! Be kind! What was it?"

Unhappiness illimitable came again to the face of the Great Macumber. There was a disturbance in his larynx, and when he had conquered it he turned to me.

"Lad," said he bitterly, "why could you not have dismissed that car when we walked into limbo? Can ye guess what the r-robbler charged me for five hours' waiting time?"

# A Chat With You

THE POPULAR," writes F. W. Cameron, of New York, "is certainly making history these last few months in the story-telling line. Have followed its advent since the first number and while magazines may come and may go THE POPULAR is destined to go on forever.

"Your 'Chat' in to-day's number makes a hit with me. By all means give us the longest and best book-lengths you can secure. I am looking forward to Stacpoole's new story with interest. 'Temescal' was a wonder—thanks to Knibbs. 'Selwood of Sleepy Cat' was one of the best. Marshall's last is a winner and Buck is in a class by himself.

"Here's what I would like to see—and you are running pretty near to form. A crackajack book-length every issue. Two splendid serials. I never read 'shorts.' Novelettes, in the making, are usually spoiled, for the themes are not properly worked out. Seemingly authors have a story in their system, they want to get it out, and they usually spoil it by trying to tell too much in a limited way. So novelettes seldom make a hit with me. The same goes for the short story.

"With the hundred and one fiction magazines on the market, THE POPULAR towers over them all. The women characters woven into your stories add zest without being the mushy type. The heart thrills originated by some of your authors are immense. See that your stories always include lovable women characters without bordering on the out-and-out love stories as featured in some magazines. That's all. Good luck!"

WITH Mr. Cameron's idea of the advisability of having a complete book-length novel in every issue we are in hearty accord. It shall be done to the best of our ability. We know of no better way of giving a reader his or her money's worth in a magazine—and that is what we are trying to do, month by month and issue by issue.

As for running two serials—is that such a good suggestion? What do you think about it? Yes, we mean you, the person who is reading this page at this moment. Do you want more serials or don't you? Is one serial enough or would you prefer to have none at all? Write in and tell us about it. We want to hear from you as an individual. We ourselves have a feeling that one serial is enough—even in as big a magazine as this.

\* \* \* \*

NOVELETTES and short stories? Sometimes after reading a bad specimen of either one we have felt as Mr. Cameron seems to feel. But never for long. We have read too many great novelettes and great short stories ever to condemn them as a class. To every story told there is a certain just and inevitable length. If it is told in less or more words it is spoiled by just so much. And some stories demand five thousand words for the proper telling, some twenty thousand, some seventy thousand. We have often said to authors: "Tell your story, tell it just as well as you know how. The length will take care of itself. Don't try to pad

it, don't leave out anything of interest. Never mind the length."

Speaking of novelettes, can you forget some of those that Chisholm has written for us recently? And how about the short stories Knibbs has given us?

\* \* \* \*

ALSO, speaking of Henry Herbert Knibbs, we take great pleasure in telling you now that the next book-length novel to appear complete in the pages of THE POPULAR is his work and some of his best. "The Riding Kid from Powder River" and "Temescal" were great stories, but we ran them serially. The new novel is just as good—but you are going to get it complete in the next issue—a full, two-dollar book, unabridged. The name of the book is "The Sungazers." It is a romantic story of the West, of life in the open, of youth and love and thrills and excitement. There are Western stories of all sorts and we have read most of them. Some are good, some bad, some indifferent. The good ones are about the best stories of any kind being written to-day. This new long novel, "The Sungazers,"

belongs on the shelf with the superlatively good books. It is helpful, it frees the spirit, it thrills and stimulates. It has in it that charm and essence of poetry that is part of Knibbs and that places him in a class by himself.

By this time Mr. Cameron, whose letter opens this chat, has read Stacpoole's complete novel and knows that in that issue we have delivered the goods. This issue it is Francis Lynde. In the next issue it is "The Sungazers," by H. H. Knibbs—complete in the one issue. Does that sound like delivering the goods or doesn't it?

\* \* \* \*

WERE there no novel at all in the next issue it still would be worth the money. There is Holman Day with his rollicking story of the North Woods. There is Harwood Steele with his Indian tale of western Canada, there is Ernest Douglas with his stirring yarn of Mexico. There are Van de Water, Buck, McNutt and Rohde—all at their best.

But perhaps you would like it better if there were fewer short stories and more serials. At any rate, please let us hear from you.

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**Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1925.**

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Charles A. MacLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith,

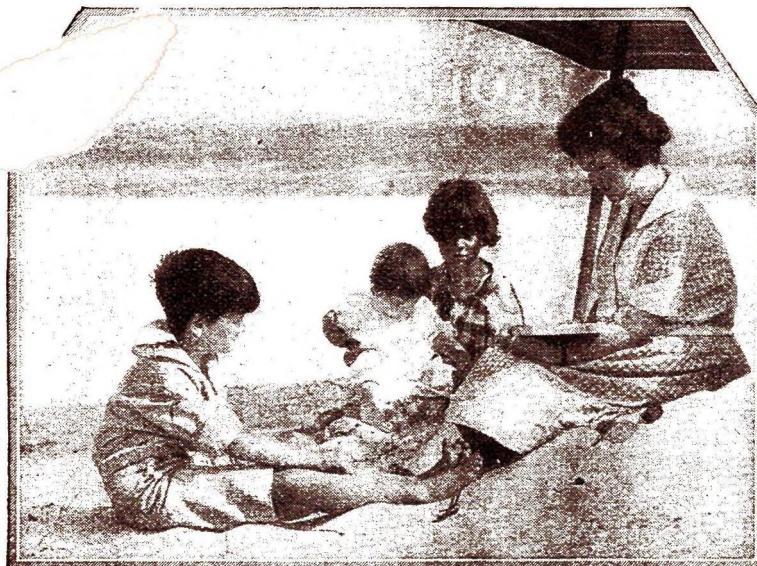
89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,  
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of March, 1925. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public No. 183, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1925.)



"IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR (1924) my third baby was born. Three months later found me with constipation, headaches and just dragging around—and three small children. I decided something had to be done. I started taking Fleischmann's Yeast, a cake morning and night. In a few weeks I was able to stop the use of cathartics; headaches and backaches were gone; and I had plenty of energy. I felt like a different woman."

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## You KNOW SUCH PEOPLE—

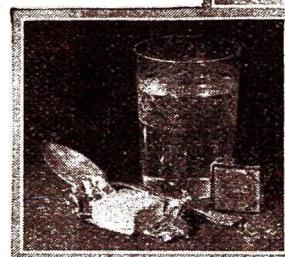
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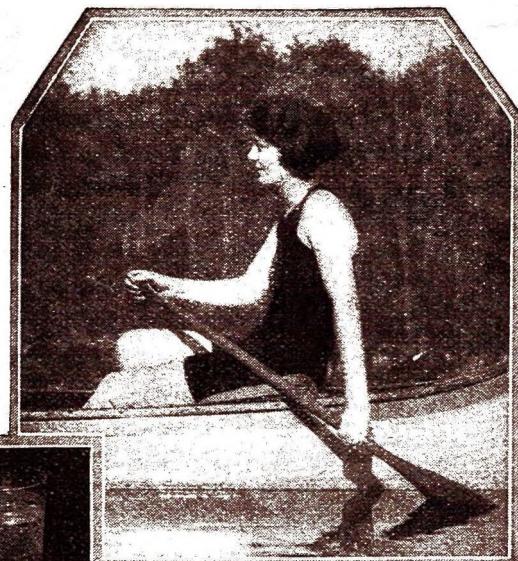
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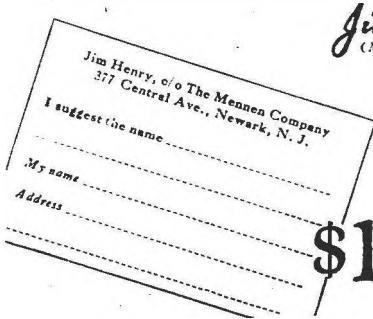
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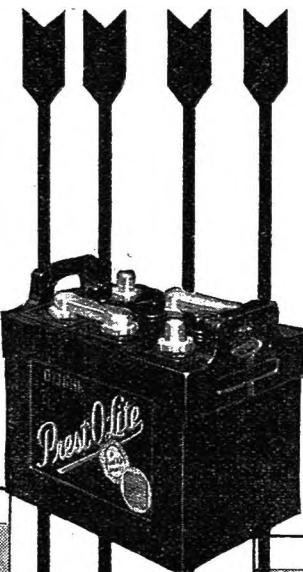
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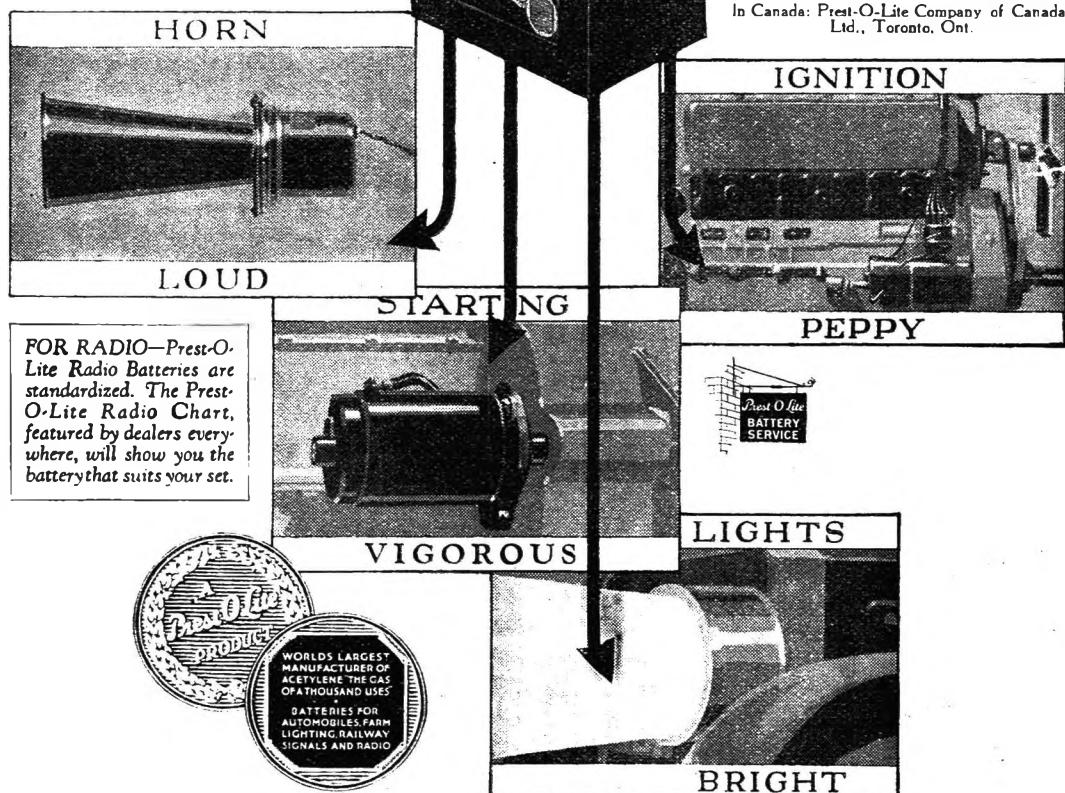


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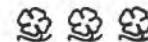
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