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RED

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You will find listed in the contents index below, the first installment of "Red," a particularly fine serial by THE POPULAR favorite, A. M. Chisholm. Don't fail to get in on the start.

Volume XCV

Number 4

TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular
Magazine

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Twice-monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Owner, G. Smith. President: George C. Smith; Vice-President and Treasurer: George C. Smith, Jr.; Vice-President: Ormond V. G. H. Secretary: Ormond V. G. H. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$1.72. Foreign, \$5.40. This issue dated May 7, 1929.

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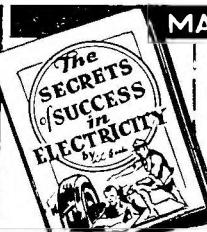
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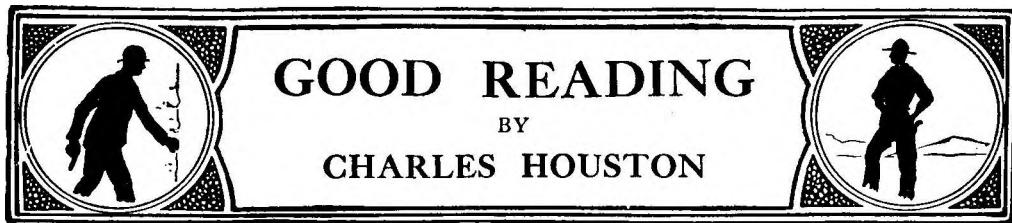
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HE was popular enough. Men who came into contact with him in a business way liked him, respected his industry and perseverance, but—

But somehow Carleton never seemed to get out of the rut which was being traveled by an army of passable, likable, colorless young men.

"Colorless"—that served to describe Carleton adequately. "The trouble with Carleton," said one of his executives, "is that he has no imagination, no fire. He can't seem to grasp situations. If he would ever let his mind play around a bit, you might see something."

And then Carleton fell ill, and one day in the long convalescence which followed, a friend brought in a book. For the first time in his life, Carleton let his mind play.

It's an old-enough saying, but it's still eternally true—that about all work and no play and the dullness of Jack. And it's as true of mental dullness as of physical.

Carleton made this discovery. He discovered that reading can be downright fun. Hitherto, he had read to some "purpose." Technical books, "success" books, books that had for their objects the making of more money—all very good in their way. But now he was finding that they were not enough.

It was a plain case of malnutrition of imagination. His fancy had been

starved. Fiction was a diet as essential to the rounding out of the man as calories and vitamines.

Carleton read fiction and more fiction. He exulted in his release from the humdrum world. He came out of the hospital a very different sort of Carleton.

No, I'm not going to tell you that by reading good fiction, you will immediately get to be president of the company. That didn't happen to Carleton. It doesn't happen in real life. And this is a true story.

All I want to do is to point out that in Carleton's case—as in the case of so many others who have gone on and up—the exercise of the imagination which follows the reading of fiction was mighty beneficial.

After such an exercise, one comes back to the job mentally set up. For a little while, fancy has been foot-free and there has been a fascinating holiday for the mind amidst the most thrilling surroundings.

There is a famous publishing house on Seventh Avenue, New York City, which for years has been conducting mental excursions into "realms of gold." It is Chelsea House.

From the presses of Chelsea House, come the foremost work of America's fiction men, those whose pens have set free the imaginations of men and women from coast to coast.

Following are brief notices of some of the more recent Chelsea House offerings which are for sale at your nearest dealer's:



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Do you know that pearls need nourishment, and if they are not frequently worn, they droop and languish, and their value diminishes?

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BLACK SKIN AND BROWN, an Adventure Story, by Don Waters. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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THE ROAD TO BROADWAY, a Love Story, by Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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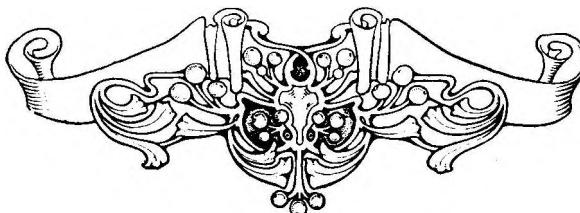


WHITE WOLF'S LAW, a Western Story by Hal Dunning. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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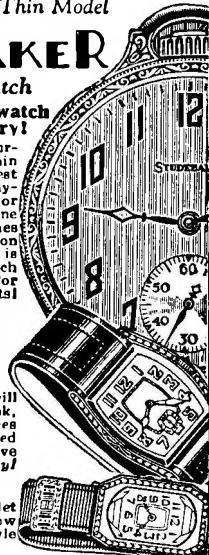
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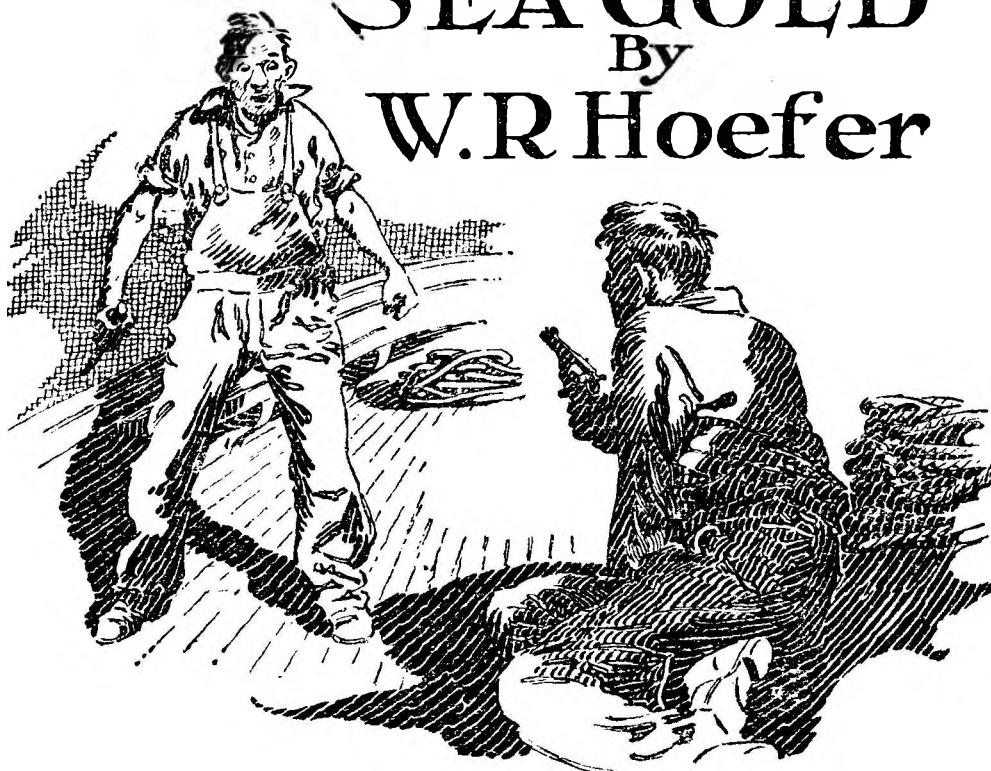
The Popular Magazine

VOL. XCV

FIRST MAY NUMBER

No. 4

SEA GOLD By W.R. Hoefer



When Jason Sheraton smashed a bottle over a waiter's head, he plunged from a life of metropolitan luxury to something far different on the Florida Keys.

CHAPTER I.

A PRODIGAL RETURNS.

THE House of Sheraton, Precious Stones, was closing its doors. For a hundred years, almost to the day, it had stood in Maiden Lane like a symbol of faith to the trade. From the day when Enoch Sheraton, that intrepid old sailor and trader, had

left the sea and started the business with a tiny shop and a fistful of pearls from the Persian Gulf, the Sheraton word had been as another's bond, the name a synonym for business stability.

Many things, of course, had changed during that long span of a century of trade. Under the capable hands of successive heirs the business had grown from personal barter to wholesale mer-

chandising that reached five continents. The House had changed from a single-story frame shop in spacious, flowered grounds, to an imposing edifice of stone and six stories and no grounds at all. The original stock of pearls had come to include almost every known precious stone and the personnel had multiplied many times.

But through it all, two things had remained unchanged. The House of Sheraton had continued in the original location in Maiden Lane; and the name, to the last, meant the same as it had a hundred years before. "As good as Sheraton," they still said in the trade, to signify worth in this new century as they had in the old.

And now, with the death of Jeffrey Sheraton, the last head of the firm, the House of Sheraton was closing its doors. Behind those doors, in the large, old-fashioned office at the rear of the ground floor, signatures and seals, affixed to important-looking papers, had ended the legal existence of the firm.

There were five about the time-scarred oak table: old Peter Grayden, the lawyer; Jason Sheraton, grandson of the last head of the House; Carol Hoyt, a young woman of twenty-four to whom Jeffrey Sheraton had been godfather; Miss Ladd, who for sixteen years had been his personal secretary; and Henry Bouchard, the erstwhile New York manager, who, during the owner's long illness, had been practically in control of the firm.

For several minutes they sat there in the musty stillness like mourners at the last rites of a departed soul. Then the lawyer turned his snowy head from the pile of documents with saddened eyes. The firm of Grayden had administered the legal affairs of the House of Sheraton during all of those hundred years.

"It is finished," said the lawyer gently. And the words seemed to hold a double significance. For not only had

the century-old firm just legally expired, but, in the settling of its obligations, any financial expectations of Jason Sheraton and Carol Hoyt, the chief intended beneficiaries of the will, had expired with it. The supposedly large estate of Jeffrey Sheraton had shrunk to a pile of received bills and his last will and testament proved to be just a scrap of paper.

The Hoyt girl, her blond loveliness further softened by the pale sunlight of the fading afternoon, gently echoed, "It is finished." And Miss Ladd silently nodded. To them both, as to the old lawyer, the House had always seemed a living, human organism.

Henry Bouchard laughed shortly. He was a bulky, saturnine man of forty-five, with great energy and aggressiveness and no gift or regard for the social graces. Himself a tireless worker, he had the worker's natural dislike for the idler—and an outspoken, rather bullying manner of expressing it.

"Finished," he said brusquely, "is correct." He looked over the fashionable figure of Jason Sheraton with unfriendly and disapproving eyes. "The prodigal has returned," he added, "and there isn't even a fatted calf left for him."

Jason lighted a monogrammed cigarette and tossed a careless and perfect smoke ring toward the high ceiling.

"So it appears," he drawled in his pleasant baritone. "Yet the prodigal is hardly to blame for that, is he?"

The ex-manager's evident disapproval of this last of the Sheratons was shared, in some degree, by all the others in the room. But there was this difference: that, whereas none of the others seemed to approve of him, all of them appeared to like him; and the Hoyt girl, to judge by her look as she studied him, seemed to like him very much indeed.

This, however, was quite natural, for while one may properly disapprove of a young man who, in thirty years of life,

has never performed any useful toil—as, indeed, he had never needed to—it was difficult to dislike so agreeable a person as Jason Sheraton.

He was, usually, even tempered and affable, always interesting, magnetic; and, if he had never proved himself a productive son of Adam, at least he was the most engaging of companions—not the least gift in the world—when given half an opportunity:

When not given this opportunity, however, the engaging grin could disappear quickly; and at these times the trim, athletic figure could move with disconcerting and effective swiftness.

And this threatened, for the moment, to be one of those times.

The ex-manager indicated his further disapproval by a grunt. "Perhaps the prodigal isn't to blame," he rumbled. "Still, if he had remained at home and committed some useful toil occasionally, instead of loafing all over Europe, the gesture, at least, would have been more praiseworthy. But perhaps," he added, "it really is easier on the conscience to blame your grandfather for any disappointment."

Young Sheraton's eyes narrowed, though his perfect teeth still gleamed through his engaging grin.

"On the contrary," he replied, "my grandfather, dear old chap, is the last I'd think of blaming for anything. I happen to know that he was one of the most capable men in the jewelry business, if it comes to that—until his illness.

"But when, with another man in charge, a business worth several hundreds of thousands of dollars melts to nothing in less than three years, mere mention of the prodigal is rather rotten taste, isn't it?"

Bouchard flushed angrily. "You are insinuating—" he began.

"Nothing whatever," the other drawled blandly, lighting a monogrammed cigarette. "I'm merely re-

ferring to an evident and not wholly un-painful situation. Losing a fortune for your employer—if we are to be plain—isn't exactly capability. Even the prodigal, by doing nothing, has hardly been guilty of that, shouldn't you say?"

"Guilty!" The burly man caught up the word in a flash of temper, then shrugged. "Evidently," he said with scorn, "you aren't aware that this country has passed through hard times and an actual panic only a couple of years ago. You wouldn't have heard of things like that—in Nice or Paris or London."

"Oh, yes, I heard of it," the other smiled. "And I also heard that all the other big gem firms, in sound condition and under efficient direction, easily weathered the gale."

"Perhaps you weren't informed of the loss of that shipment of pearls from Burma—always a possibility in the importing business," Bouchard continued. "You were playing polo in England at the time, I believe."

"Yes," the other drawled, "I heard of that, too. And I have heard of a thing called insurance in business, as well."

"But never against the river pirates of the East," Bouchard retorted. "There seem to be a lot of things about anything as productive as business that you don't know. However," he added brusquely, getting to his feet, "why should I account for myself to you?"

He reached for his hat, nodded jerkily to the lawyer and the two women, and left.

Peter Grayden placed his papers in a battered brief case and also rose. "Mr. Bouchard is naturally a bit upset," he said to Jason Sheraton with his slow smile. "You must make allowances, Jason. Conditions have been trying for him—a number of things that one couldn't foresee occurred. And then that loss of the Burma shipment—it was the last straw, my boy. Forty

thousand dollars' worth! Without your grandfather's hand at the helm, the firm was unable to survive it." He glanced up at the portrait of Enoch Sheraton, the founder of the business.

"Pearls founded the House—and pearls brought about its fall," he mused; and with a final glance at the portrait of the intrepid old sailor on the wall, turned and left.

When the door closed on the departing figure, Miss Ladd turned to Jason Sheraton with a perplexed frown. "Mr. Sheraton, here's something I think you ought to see," she said rather impressively.

She took a sheet of paper from her hand bag. "It's a copy—very faint, you see—of a note. I found it under three of our letterheads, as I was cleaning out my desk drawers. A carbon sheet was under the bottom one, carbon side down. And then this note under it. It looks as though this copy may have been accidentally made. As though the writer didn't know a carbon sheet was under the other papers on the desk before I put them in a drawer."

Sheraton bent puzzled brows over the crisp, longhand writing, which ran:

Sea gold in safe. Your report unquestioned, O'Hare. Company to be formed as planned, but not until after your English contract expires and you return. Best to wait some time, anyway.

There was no signature.

"Do you recognize the writing, Miss Ladd?" Sheraton asked.

"It's Mr. Bouchard's," she replied.

"And O'Hare—do you know the name?"

She smiled. "He represented us in India. He represented an English firm, too. He sent the official report of the loss of the Burma shipment of pearls."

"But sea gold!"

"That's what prompted me to save the note," Miss Ladd replied. "Mr. Bouchard always called pearls sea gold."

"M-m-m, it looks interesting," Jason

observed, still puzzling over the bit of writing.

"That's just what I thought," the sharp-featured, capable lady, who had been in many a clash with the dominating ex-manager, replied a bit grimly. "Well, I must run along to an engagement. I just thought you'd like to see it, Mr. Sheraton."

"I'm plenty glad to have seen it, thank you, Miss Ladd," he replied with a grin that held a grim little touch of its own. "I have never been able to love that man, even with the utmost effort," he added thoughtfully. "And if our Mr. Bouchard has left undone those things which he ought to have done—and especially if he has done some of those things which he ought not to have done—well—" The gray eyes hardened.

"What do you think, Carol?" he inquired when Miss Ladd had left.

"I think you had better not do anything rash," Carol Hoyt said severely as she studied the fashionable, engaging figure with sober eyes.

"Sea gold in safe," quoted Sheraton. "Why, that may mean that Bouchard stole that shipment of pearls!"

"It may also mean something entirely different and proper," the girl reminded him. "Please try, for once, not to be too impetuous. It has always gotten you into trouble, Jason. Even with your grandfather."

"Granddad and I always understood each other perfectly, except for one thing," Sheraton replied soberly. "He simply could not understand that I was never made for business, dear old chap. It was the only difference we ever had."

"And it sent you pleasure seeking about the world and kept you apart for years," she reminded him.

"It wasn't the pleasure I was after," he protested. "It was just cussed restlessness. I always wanted to be master of one of those sailing ships and go about the world. Like those bully old boys up there." His glance lifted from

the melting eyes before him to the dimmed oil portraits on the walls, where the grim eyes of Sheratons of another day, all sea captains, seemed to be looking down on him with disapproval. "But the day of the windjammer was about over. And granddad insisted on business instead of Annapolis as the next best thing. So, after prep school, I just lit out and started roaming. It's in the blood, I guess."

"And now there isn't anything left," she replied softly. "Jason, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to tie into some work for the first time in my life—any kind of work that'll bring me enough money for two. And then I'm going to marry you, my dear," he replied with his likable grin. "In fact," he added, "I might do the marrying right away. Carol. If I find that our Mr. Bouchard, bless his ugly mug, has lifted the firm's pearls, I'm going to take them from him, give him the most beautiful walloping a domineering bully ever got, and then, after a doctor, we'll look up a nice old minister."

She shook her head. "You'll have to make yourself useful, first. You've had too much money as it is. You're thirty years old and in all that time you've never done a thing you didn't want to. Or a really worth-while thing. Polo and big game hunting and gambling. And you have so much ability." The sweetly curved lips were severe but the soft violet eyes held a wistful look as they studied the altogether agreeable figure of the last of the Sheratons.

"Jason, Jason," she said in a tone of regret, and again glanced up at the purposeful eyes of the grim old sea captains on the dim walls. "They did things."

"Well," he said, smiling good-humoredly down at the serious face, "I may do something, too, even if our Mr. Bouchard really hasn't those pearls and even if none of the great captains of

industry want a nice, inexperienced young man in their business. There was another Jason, you know. And he went out hunting and came back with a golden fleece. If I could bring one back to you, you'd just have to marry me, you know. It's always done as a reward in the books. But first I'm going to call on you this evening."

"No, you can't. I'll be away—*busy*," she emphasized. "I teach a class of foreign youngsters twice a week in a settlement house in Christopher Street."

"No matter. I'll call on your mother, then."

"Can't. Mother's busy this evening, too. Club work."

"Then your dad," he persisted. "I'll take him on for some billiards."

"Dad's down in New Orleans—on business. You see," she laughed, "you'll have an awful time getting any one to loaf with you. So what *are* you going to do, if you don't get busy right off and find some work?"

"I am going to get busy," he declared as she gathered her things. "On our Mr. Bouchard. He's having dinner tonight at Monet's Restaurant, I heard him say. So, if I can't call on you tonight I'm going to make a little unexpected call on him. And I'm going to make him tell the real, unvarnished truth about that note that mentions the sea gold or he isn't going to be able to tell any one anything, for some time to come."

"Jason, that note may be a perfectly innocent thing, she warned.

"That," he replied grimly, "is just what I'm going to learn."

CHAPTER II. SOME WORDS AND MUSIC.

AFTER Carol Hoyt left him, Jason Sheraton strolled up Broadway to the subway entrance with a thoughtful frown shadowing his usually carefree features. Life, for the first time in the

thirty years of a hitherto pleasant existence, was presenting serious complications.

A financial vacuum, so to speak, now existed where a most comfortable income had always been. A supposed inheritance of many thousands of dollars had suddenly vanished. Accordingly, life being real and life being earnest, as he had learned in the copy books, one just naturally had to go to work; and he possessed no experience, aptitude nor recommendations for such endeavor.

But at the moment, Carol Hoyt concerned him most of all. Though he had known her all her life, it was only now, when he had nothing but himself to offer her, that he realized how very much he wanted to marry her.

"What a mess," he thought, removing his expensive straw hat and running slim fingers through his crisp, close-cropped brown hair. "She won't marry a chap who doesn't do something worth while—and she means it; I know that determined little chin—and I haven't the faintest idea how to do something worth while. Besides, what shall I marry her on?"

He grinned wryly as he counted his money while buying the subway ticket. A five-dollar bill and some change represented all of his earthly wealth. It was true, he reflected, that he could pawn a number of personal belongings. But it was equally true that his bill at the uptown club where he had lived since his return to New York would easily balance any sum thus realized. Well, he'd simply have to borrow a couple of hundred from a friend and then look about for something with a decent salary attached.

In the meantime there still remained this man Bouchard. Perhaps there was hope there. If the note was as indicting as it seemed and the man had really lifted that Burma pearl shipment—Young Sheraton involuntarily doubled a

hard, brown fist. Well, in any event, he'd take *something* from the fellow, if only by way of satisfaction.

At Seventy-ninth Street Sheraton left the subway, turned to Central Park West and his club, where he had a cold plunge and a bite of dinner, and at seven o'clock was again on his way downtown for Monet's restaurant.

It was a flashy, though expensive place near Broadway, up a narrow flight from Thirty-ninth Street, with garish decorations and atmosphere and an unsavory reputation that was ignored by the police in deference to its owner, an influential politician. A quartet of Negro entertainers jangled a current popular air on stringed instruments as Sheraton entered the crowded premises, and an almost bare and decidedly noisy chorus had just galloped out upon the small dance floor to begin the cabaret performance.

Monet, the proprietor, bull-necked and gross, sat enthroned in a chair near the cashier's desk by the entrance, chewing a cigar as his beady little eyes, glistening in the fat-incrusted face like raisins in a half-baked tart, shrewdly scanned the incoming guests. At Sheraton's mention of Bouchard's name his thick lips spread to a smile. He and Bouchard, intimates for years, had known each other in the French Quarter in New Orleans before coming to New York.

"Mr. Bouchard? Sure. He's having dinner up on the gallery. Stall No. 7," said Monet, jerking a fat thumb over his shoulder.

Sheraton mounted the carpeted stairway at the left, traversed the row of private dining stalls to No. 7 and parted the velvet drapes that had been drawn to for privacy.

"Come right in," the big man, who had just set down a bottle of wine, called over his shoulder. Then, glancing up, he scowled at the intruder. "Oh, it's you," he observed with disagreeable

emphasis. The man's eyes were unnaturally bright and his words a trifle thick. Clearly he had been drinking.

"Yes," the other drawled, "it is I."

Bouchard laughed insultingly. "Well, what can we do for the prodigal?" he asked with a slight hiccup. "A small loan? Sure. It's tough to be cut off suddenly from a fat income—earned by the sweat of other folks."

Sheraton drew the carbon copy of the note from his wallet and spread it upon the table. "We can explain this bit of authorship for the prodigal," he replied, his eyes hardening as his gorge arose. "And we can do it without any personal references."

Bouchard started slightly at sight of the note, then laughed. "Well, what about it?" he demanded.

"That's for you to explain, I fancy," the younger man replied. "Perhaps the carbon copy was a trifle accidental—and unknown? It's your writing. Miss Ladd testified to that. And sea gold refers to pearls. She testified to that, also. It seems you have some pearls safely put by somewhere. And it appears, too, that a pearl shipment from Burma went astray and was reported lost in transit."

"Why, that Burma matter was all settled weeks ago," the other blared. "And the entire estate's been settled—and closed."

Sheraton nodded. "Of course. But it can always be opened upon a show of fraud, or plain theft." He thrust his fighting chin close to the bulky's man's heavy jowls. "Could it be possible," he asked softly, "that our Mr. O'Hare made a false report—at the instigation, perhaps, of our Mr. Bouchard?"

The latter rose heavily to his feet. "Are you trying to call me a thief?" he demanded with a black scowl. "Is that what you're trying to do?"

"I'm trying to get the straight dope on that Burma shipment and on that sea gold you've cached away somewhere.

And I'm going to get it, too. Don't make any mistake about that."

"Sure I've got some pearls," replied Bouchard. "O'Hare and myself and another man made a lucky buy. In fact we're going into business on them, now that Sheraton's is closed. And they aren't the Burma shipment, either, if you must know. But where we picked 'em up is nobody's damned business—yours, least of all."

"Bouchard," declared the other, carefully examining the face before him, "you lie."

The big man lunged toward his companion in a rage, but the movement was suddenly checked as a hard, brown fist hooked against his mouth. He staggered back against the wall, pressed the waiter's bell button with the motion, and with a smothered curse lunged forward again. And this time Jason Sheraton knocked him down.

"Now I want the truth. Out with it!" snapped young Sheraton; but just as he stepped back a burly waiter noiselessly entered and grasped him about the body from behind.

"Out with ye," the waiter blared, immediately sensing the situation and trying to swing the struggling figure out of the inclosure. "No rough stuff goes here, m'lad."

Bouchard struggled to his feet and joined the attack. Young Sheraton kicked him in the stomach, and then the waiter's great hands slid from his victim's waist up to his throat.

"Out with ye, ye—" the waiter repeated, adding a vile epithet that sent his adversary's gorge soaring.

Mad with the insult and nearly blinded by the choking, Sheraton wrenched himself free with one final, despairing effort, reached for the wine bottle on the table, and, completely dominated by his rage, brought the vessel down smartly upon the bullet head that was half turned from him.

There was a low, gurgling cry,

drowned in the greater sound of jangling music from below. The waiter swayed a brief moment like a sapling in the wind, then crumpled to the floor, face downward, with a dull thud.

"The swine," said Sheraton, stepping back coolly to examine his bleeding knuckles, his wrath evaporated with the deed.

Bouchard glanced down at the huddled form, then stared and continued to stare, with a sort of fascination, as the drunken vapors gradually oozed from him. The figure looked oddly inert and so fearfully still. He bent over the body, a tremor running through his own. He touched the man and his fingers encountered something warm and moist. He saw that a thin, dark ribbon of blood was trickling from the man's bristly hair onto the carpet. He reached under the body but felt no heart action. Then, with tense eyes, he turned the head and held his face against the gaping mouth—and could feel no warmth.

He rose unsteadily, clutching the curtain for support, his heavy face paling with the passing moments as Sheraton stood by, examining his scarred knuckles.

"My God!" gasped Bouchard.

"Don't stand there like a blooming fool," said Sheraton nervously as a feeling of apprehension began to mount within him. "I've only knocked him out." But the other man's eyes wiped the final trace of hope from his own.

Bouchard shook his head, slowly, indictingly. "You've done it now. You've killed him." He again glanced down at the huddled form with awed eyes and wiped his thick lips nervously. "He's—dead."

Sheraton paled. "Dead!" he repeated dully. And the thought vaguely occurred that he hadn't even had a real look at his victim.

Henry Bouchard nodded.

"It's murder," he said in a thick

whisper, as the music from below burst forth more joyously than ever.

CHAPTER III.

FLIGHT.

THE word flamed across Jason Sheraton's mental vision like a burning torch as the realization of his position came with an awful clarity.

The act must be discovered almost any instant. Bouchard himself, if he were innocent in the matter of the note, might notify Monet downstairs or the police at any moment. Or another waiter might happen in, or Monet might decide to call on his friend. Sheraton glanced about swiftly. Bouchard was again bending over the still form, picking something from the carpet near by.

Sheraton stepped noiselessly outside, hurried swiftly downstairs, and the next minute was outside, mopping his perspiring face in the warm, June air. Around the corner into Sixth Avenue he hurried, up the avenue to Forty-second Street, where he turned into Broadway to become swallowed in the before-theater crowds in that congested thoroughfare.

Near the Times Building he felt for his watch and gasped in dismay as his groping fingers found the end of his broken watch chain that dangled free from a vest button. "My watch is up there. It may be in the man's hand," he reflected. "It was hanging loose after he grabbed me. He must have torn it away in the fight. And it's engraved with my name!" It was, he supposed, what Bouchard saw as he again leaned over the still body.

Sheraton swiftly considered. He must get away, immediately—but to a large city. And with only five dollars and some change in his clothes, Philadelphia was the best chance. He made for the subway steps. There was a train out of Jersey City for Philadelphia, he knew, and a few minutes later

he was thundering down to the ferry in the subway.

The long wait in the railroad station was torture, but, as the train pulled out at ten o'clock, he felt his first sense of relief and began to consider his possibilities.

He would have to use another name, of course. He would have to dispose of everything on his person that could identify him. And he must try to get out of the country in some way. Perhaps there'd be a boat he could ship on out of Philadelphia.

It was past midnight when Sheraton left the Broad Street Station in Philadelphia, and in that cheerless hour a change occurred within him. The fear of the hunted was upon him and for the first time in all his life his attitude toward existence became defensive. Already, as he walked along Broad Street, his senses were acutely alert for the first sign of hostile authority and his every act was now prompted by a defensive thought or instinct.

Instinct, it was, that led him to Race Street and down Race toward the Tenderloin atmosphere of Franklin Square, where, in a side street, he got a room in a cheap hotel. Shortly after seven the next morning he sought a near-by barber shop and entered one just opened for the day. A filthy place it was, down a short flight of broken stairs from the street. The barber, as garrulous as he was untidy, peppered his patron with a fire of comment while his curious eyes traversed the fashionable figure.

"Out kinda early, ain't ya?" he offered, wondering why this man had favored his shop.

"Late," lied Sheraton. "Just getting home."

"From a drunk," thought the barber with a knowing grin. "Wasn't nowheres near the murder, was ya?" he asked suddenly, shooting a keen glance at his victim as he applied a sour towel.

"Murder?" the other drawled with simulated unconcern as his nerves leaped. "Has there been one?"

"Surely. Early this mornin'. 'Bout half past one. At the Far East Restaurant. Chinese joint, you know, not far from here."

Sheraton went away from there as soon as possible and entered a cheap, dirty lunch room several squares distant. There, perched up on a stool at a lunch counter, he picked up a morning paper left by a departed patron and scanned the sheets, without seeing any word of his affair. "News isn't out yet," he mused with great relief. But back again in his room, where he had registered as Robert Kernan, the feeling of the hunted came over him more strongly than ever.

His nerves were jumpy, becoming more so with every stare at his well-groomed person; and the shabby furnished room, with its temporary privacy seemed like a sanctuary.

He removed his cuff links, engraved with his initials, opened a window facing a depressing vista of ugly back yards, and threw them, in different directions, as far as he could. Then a careful examination of his clothing satisfied him that he had rid himself of everything which might serve to identify him. His watch was gone. He seldom wore jewelry and had left the club without even a scarfpin or a ring. A fountain pen and pocketknife, each with his name, had been tossed from the car window en route to Philadelphia, the tailor's labels were cut from his clothing, and all he had left in his coat pocket now were an empty, unmarked card case and a small notebook from which the inscribed pages had been torn.

All that day he clung to his room, and most of the evening, giving up another dollar to occupy it for the second night with a pang, as he noted the remaining change, ninety cents—all he had left.

Hunger drove him forth after eleven o'clock that night for a bite at a near-by all-night lunch room. There, glancing furtively over a neighbor's shoulder at the evening paper, he read the blaring headline across the front page—and experienced conscious relief. The big type shrieked the latest development in a political scandal then holding the city's interest. He glanced lower to a local burglary headline and smiled. And then, over the man's partly raised arm, in a lower corner of the sheet, he saw it.

He knew that eventually he would see it. Earlier in the day he had bought a paper and failed to come across it. But here it was, burning into his brain like words of flame:

JASON SHERATON, YOUNG CLUBMAN, WANTED FOR MURDER.

The headlines were small and the man's arm concealed the remainder of the story, a brief one, from his gaze. But the fugitive had seen enough. He paid his small score and left the place, his senses acutely attuned to every passer-by as he went back to his room.

The following morning he carefully sallied forth again for a meager breakfast, then strolled to a labor agency in Vine Street. Here, he knew, was the one chance to obtain work without references or having his past gone into. Besides, some one there might be able to tell him about shipping out of the country. Laborers were usually birds of passage.

It was still early, and the agency door, not yet opened, was besieged by a rough-looking crowd of shaggy humans. A well-dressed young fellow near by, with a turn for philosophy and a moment to spare, eyed the mob in cynical amusement and explained to Sheraton.

"It's a laboring job the Far Eastern Coastline is building down on the Flor-

ida Keys. They're shipping men from here and New York."

The fugitive's interest immediately fired. The Florida Keys! The next thing to being out of the country. In a flash the possibilities of the thing came to him. Complete escape from the police—a Heaven-sent chance, it seemed.

"Taking anybody?" Sheraton inquired, concealing his interest.

"Any one—who can stand the grind," was the reply. "Not thinking of shipping down yourself?" the man added, laughing.

"Well," drawled Sheraton, "it looks as though it would be amusing."

"Amusing!" The other chuckled. "Amusing isn't the word, unless you've a unique idea of humor. This is heavy laboring work. The heat down there is terrific at times. The pay is small and they have to stick it out quite a while to get enough money to come back. There's been malaria, too. Practically the tropics, you know. But those are only the beginning of the difficulties for a man of sensibilities."

"And what are the others?"

"The association with your fellow man," the philosophical one replied. "That's bad enough at the best, at times. But down there!" The merry grin broadened with further reflection on the human animal. "The labor situation here is unusual, you must understand," he continued. "Because of the heat, the character of some of the jobs, the pay, the discomfort and isolation—you'd be miles out in the ocean, away from things, you know—the railroad has been unable to get much of the usual kind of labor—the Italians, the Polacks, the bohunks and other foreigners—to go down there. They've heard about it and they've been turning up their collective nose at the job. So they're shipping down Americans to build the road. The only big engineering job that's ever been built with practically American labor. And the only Americans who'll

go down, as a class, are those who *have* to go down or starve. It's the final chance for most of them. Of course some rovers and adventurers go, but in the main it's the derelicts."

He chuckled. "You know what that means, of course. They ship from the lodging houses, the park benches, the water front—the jails, even, when they get out. It's the sweeping of the nation. Yet how the human animal clings to life, even such life!" The chuckle increased. "It must be a city of lost souls, down there. Think of it, my friend! Away out there in the ocean. And one couldn't escape contact with his loving fellow man even in his thoughts. It would give a chap like *you* mental nausea."

He looked Sheraton over with keen eyes in great amusement and left.

"A city of lost souls!" the latter mused, a bright glint in the clear beam of his cool gray eyes. But he wasn't thinking of its effect upon him. He was thinking, instead, of how completely submerged his identity would be among this element. The law would never find him down on the Florida Keys among the human sweepings of the nation. The law would never even think to look for Jason Sheraton, the supposed wealthy globe-trotter, down there. He could be safe until he earned a stake and moved on. Havana was only a step. And Europe could be next. Then London or Paris—and safety!

He removed his tie and coat, loosed the soft collar of his silk shirt, smudged his face and hands with a bit of dirt and then joined in the stampede as the doors opened. An hour later he was signed up on the job under his alias and was directed to return to the office at five in the afternoon.

He was back long before five, after furtively loafing about in near-by streets; and at six, the crowd, in charge of a man from the office who was to accompany them on the pilgrimage

south, left for the dock of a boat for Savannah.

It was a motley crew, a hundred strong, that boarded the fruit boat in a noisy, jostling scramble over the beckoning gangplank. It was a rabble of broken, empty pasts, sprinkled with purely restless, adventure-seeking spirits and a handful, doubtless, of the proscribed, fleeing the law.

Of earthly goods there was little, among the entire mob, save the rags they stood in; and that little was carried aboard in cloth sacks and dirty bundles that gave the bearers the appearance of emigrants seeking a promised land.

Musical tastes were not lacking. Sheraton saw, glancing about. A chunky man with pock-marked face and bleary eyes, carried a banjo, carefully wrapped in burlap. The end of a clarinet protruded from the ungainly bundle of another, who had a broken nose; and a huge man with ugly, yellow, broken teeth and tobacco stains streaking his blond beard, had salvaged a harmonica as well as a pair of rubber boots from the wreckage of his forty years. The stale odor of whisky was heavy in the stampede across the gangplank, and several sang and tottered as they moved.

"Some mob," a companion, standing off at the edge of the crowd, observed. "But," he added, at thought of the several years of confinement at hard labor hanging over him, "there's worse things than that, eh, friend?"

And as the rattle of the gangplank sounded, Jason Sheraton, alias Robert Kernan, thought of the grim walls of the penitentiary up on the Hudson River and nodded.

CHAPTER IV. SOUTHWARD HO!

THAT night some of the tattered rabble, plumbing the murky depths of their beings for the spirit of gayety, held high carnival aboard the trampish

fruit steamer. After mattresses were distributed about on the darkened deck and most of the crowd had tumbled onto them for the night, a comically high voice with a touch of brogue started the festivities with a humorously intended story.

A wave of hoarse chuckles and guttural exclamations swept the deck shadows after this bit of vulgar diversion and dark forms on scattered mattresses stirred to expectant wakefulness. From a dim recess by a hatchway came another offering, more thickly incrusted in oaths than the first, and approval came in another gale of throaty appreciation. Then, from the dark over at the starboard rail, a hairy throat started a ribald song. As verse after verse of the doggerel ascended to the blinking stars, the chuckles thickened to a muffled roar, until, at the conclusion of the outburst, there was an ovation of husky appreciation.

Another vocal selection enticed the cork from a hidden bottle which was passed about, and soon other bottles were unearthed from pockets and bundles.

A long pull at one coaxed the harmonica from the pocket and a tune from the mouth of the mountainous man with the yellow teeth and blond beard; and then other forms rose with the soaring spirits. Shadowy figures left their mattresses and merged in the center of the deck. A hurried colloquy and some urging brought forth the owners of the clarinet and banjo. And the trio of musicians then gave an impromptu recital of ancient tunes in varied keys and somewhat original settings that set the frowzy audience into a clamor of applause.

More liquor was guzzled and the festivities sped up. A bandy-legged little man of forty-five accomplished a buck-and-wing dance on the tilting deck. A long man, with mournful face and shaggy hair recited, "The Face On the

Barroom Floor" to such advantage that a big man over near the port rail, be-fuddled from his solitary bottle of gin, sobbed and cursed until the ensuing laughter and oaths drowned the wailing sound and allowed the banjo to begin plunking again.

Soon the hilarity reached the stokers below, and three of the burly Negroes, thick ebony arms a-glisten with running perspiration in the meager light of a hatchway lantern, flashed ivory teeth in expansive approval of the proceedings. And then, without warning, the gayety suddenly turned to throatings of anger and the deck was swept with the rumblings of strife. The mountainous man, it later appeared, had resented an imputation of the clarinet player as to his musicianship. Oaths were bandied, epithets tossed, finally blows exchanged; and in a moment the pair were in a struggling embrace as the drunken crowd urged them on and took sides. A bottle hurled in the dark crashed to the deck. The mêlée became general, and a score of snarling, cursing, striking, wrestling shadows weaved about fantastically in the dimness as the vessel rushed on through the black water.

"If the whole ship's crew ain't up in a minute there'll be murder," some one observed to Sheraton, standing at the fringe of the commotion; but a moment later the captain and a mate, closely followed by the colored stokers, were up on deck.

"What the hell's all this!" the captain snarled in a rage, flashing a light that disclosed a solid jaw and a blue-nosed revolver. "I'll have every one of you dirty bums in irons in a minute." For the briefest moment a mutiny threatened. Then the voice of authority, which they instantly recognized, and the glint of the revolver, which they knew meant business, cowed the rabble, and in a few minutes they had slunk back to their mattresses. Two hours later most of them were asleep, with

their tipsy snores rumbling over the throb of the engines in the dark.

But for hours Sheraton lay awake, with the vulgarity of the motley mob still so heavy in his ears that he turned his eyes up to the stars for relief. And in that moment of detachment, as the silver lights in the purple distance drew him from his surroundings, the sympathetic eyes and the sweetly curved lips of Carol Hoyt came before him like a final mockery in his plight.

If she could see him now, amid this squalor and these companions, and with his haunting fear of the law! He laughed aloud to the stars—a laugh that was hard and mirthless, yet cynically appreciative of a fantastic fate. He thought of his life in Paris and London, so close in point of time, so distant in actuality; of his luxurious club in New York; and last of all of the man Bouchard. Then he abruptly turned his face from the heavens to blur out the vision.

At Savannah, where the water trip ended, the ragged crowd was herded aboard a train for the remainder of the journey. As the train swayed southward in the thickening heat it became a more bedraggled mob than ever. The night dragged painfully by, with the men sitting up in the crowded, dirty day coaches as the train jerked and sputtered and choked mile on mile through the increasing desolation of the South.

Past gloomy pine forests, through dreary wastes of scrub and sand, through Georgia and down into Florida the caravan rumbled on. Solitary Negro huts, dotting the landscape at lonely intervals, reeled behind and with each desolate mile farther into the gathering heat the hunted feeling lifted from Sheraton, alias Kernan, more and more. His vision of the uniformed officers of the law, the constantly expected touch on his shoulder, seemed fainter and fainter with the increasing desolation.

As they left Homestead, the last real

pretense at habitation, and chugged through swamps and dank, tangled growth of the gloom-wrapped Everglades, the fugitive knew they were nearing the country's end. The monotonous *click-click-clickety-click* of the train wheels seemed to be pounding a singsong cadence of ever-increasing safety into his tired brain.

But it was early on a sweltering morning, with the heat at over a hundred and the thoroughly bedraggled crew already wilting under the hot sky, that he felt the first real thrill of relief; a thrill that set his brain swimming, as the tension of his nerves suddenly loosened. For a glassy expanse of blue water was unfolding before them on either side and he knew that the law, as well as the Florida mainland, was left behind.

The ocean! The country's end—and safety! The thought brought an audible sigh of relief as the taut nerves relaxed. He glanced at his hard-faced seat companion and the latter returned the look with the same feeling behind it.

"It's a helluva long ways back to a cop," said he with a wide grin; and Sheraton, alias Kernan, soberly nodded.

The train crawled after that; over miles of concrete construction that loomed before them in the distance like a fairy bridge of marble, suddenly sprung up through the heat vapor over the water.

It was the famous "ocean railroad," at last; miles of viaduct, with alternate stretches of steel-girder spans laid over concrete piers and giant arches of solid concrete. What had been "Forrester's Folly," when it was merely the dream of Forrester, the builder, was now an ever-growing reality that would span the ocean from the Florida mainland to Key West, a hundred and twenty miles away.

A railroad over the shimmering ocean! The poetry of it and the drama

stirred Sheraton's imagination as he gazed ahead at the dancing heat waves.

At Marathon, the final point of construction to date, the train made its last, dragging stop. The sweat-streaked mob was herded from the blistering coaches. They stood upon the coral key, a miserable, wilted rabble, sweltering in their rags and grime under a noonday sun of melting brass in an onyx sky that poured its white heat in a bitter flood over this tiny island, seventy miles out in the ocean.

Behind them the road reached back to civilization, a streak of white over the beryl sheen of tropic water, melting away into the distant haze. Before them lay the dot of land on the water, naked to the raw heat of the withering sky. And then came the endless expanse of sea.

CHAPTER V.

MARATHON.

THE crowd gaped about in humid curiosity. Fifty yards ahead stood the frame building that housed offices of the railroad—bare boards simmering in the hot waves. To the left of that, a dining hall listed its ugly, unpainted head to the sun, and further off a number of small shacks added an intruding touch of life on the isolated little key. Down at the water's edge a gasoline launch, wide-bellied and roomy, waited at the little wharf, while a blunt-nosed lighter, loaded with sand, anchored a hundred yards out, and a flat-bottomed, paddle-wheel steamer in the easy distance were further evidence of this new activity on the lonely spot.

At the farther end of the island, perhaps a hundred yards from the company buildings, flourished the only vegetation and outdoor protection from the hostile sun.

It began in straggling scrubs of bush and coarse jungle grass dotted at intervals with sun-bleached rocks and graduated into a miniature jungle of palm

trees, creeping, choking vines and tropical plants and weeds, which extended in a thick tangle to the ocean's edge.

The thick bit of woods, with its deep shadows and inscrutability had, somehow, a sinister aspect. The heavy shadows were sullen in their gloom. The wild-grown depths were murkily forbidding. Save for the absence of swamp, it was almost a transplanted bit of the Everglades. A squalid Negro shanty skulked behind a cluster of palms where the shadows began to deepen, and off near the water's brim the shadowy forms of Negroes were occasionally discernible, slinking away from the sun glare.

"That looks cool," one of the men said plaintively, pointing to the thick tangle of trees and vines as he wearily mopped his dirty face with a bandanna handkerchief. "I wish I was back there in them trees, outa this blasted sun."

The man from the labor agency laughed.

"You want to keep away from there, when you come back here to Marathon to cash in and quit," he said. "That's the Rocks."

"The Rocks? What about 'em?" asked another.

"Oh, nothing. Only there's some Negro shacks back there where they sell liquor to men off the job. The men always got a good roll of money when they quit. But when they wake up from their drunk back there in the woods their roll is gone. And they have to ship over again on the job."

"What if they don't?" some one asked.

The informative agency man laughed. "Well," he replied, "you can stay back on the Rocks like a lot of animals and crawl out when some more guys come along to beg for your eats. Or you can wait till night and try tapping 'em on the heads yourself if you're real desperate. But that strong-arm stuff don't work so good when you been laying

around a few days with an empty belly. You ain't got the guts. But I guess some have tried it. Some guys even tried it on the Negroes, once."

"Yeah?" chorused several.

"Yeah," yawned the agency man. "Tried to get their own money back. Three of 'em. One was rolled for nearly six hundred bucks. He sweat blood down here nearly two years for it. Swore he'd never ship over again. And the Rocks got it in one night. But them three went right back to the Rocks to get it."

"And what happened?" asked the bandy-legged man.

The agency man stretched himself in the heat. "They didn't get it back," he replied casually. "And they didn't ship over, either. And nobody ever saw them take the rattler back North, neither."

"Croaked?" some one asked.

The agency man's eyes were inscrutable. "Well, the ocean's a right handy burying place," he said.

"Say, how's the work graft down here?" asked the mean-eyed, pock-marked man.

"Oh, some of the jobs ain't so bad—if you can stand the heat ten hours a day—and most of the night. But these lads that said they'd die before they shipped over again was in the bull gang, you see. And the one had nearly two years of it."

"The bull gang? What's that? Is it tough?" The queries popped from the bedraggled questioners as they crowded closer to the talkative man from the Philadelphia labor agency.

He laughed reflectively. "Oh, the bull gang's soft, fellows," he replied. "All you do is bull cement, in hundred-pound sacks, ten hours a day in the sun. It cuts your skin and you sweat blood there instead of sweat and you inhale cement until you got concrete lungs. But aside from that it ain't bad a-tall." He bit off a chew of tobacco. "So re-

member, men: when you land back here at Marathon again with your money from the job, stay away from the Rocks. Even if your throats are dry as all hell for a drink. You stay away. I'm telling you. Stay clear, what I mean."

The mountainous man with the yellow teeth and the harmonica shifted his huge tobacco quid and spat contemptuously.

"Aw, can that guif," said he. "What's them Rocks, anyway? When I get my roll an' blow back here to cash in an' mosey back North I'm gonna beat it right back there for my drink. And I'm comin' right out again with my money, too. Now whaddaya know about that, huh?"

"I know I've heard other fellows make their brag just like that," was the reply. "They always say, 'Just one drink,' and they end up broke. Only one train a day out of here, you know. Plenty of time to get a big snootful back on the Rocks if you miss it and have to stall around all day and all night. Stay clear of the Rocks, my bucko."

But a chorus of derisive laughter, led by the mountainous man, was the sole reply to that.

An office man, dapper in white shirt and trousers, approached, scanned the faded crew in businesslike fashion, then led them to the dining hall. After dinner they were herded out into the sun again to wait in line before a frame shanty for booking.

At half past two the shanty window shot up and the long line slowly advanced as the men were examined, registered and sorted into groups for the different jobs on various keys along the line of construction.

Sheraton, with some thirty others, was directed to the launch at the dock and when all had been booked the craft vibrated with the *chug-chug-chug* of the engine, backed from the wharf, swung

about and they were on their torrid way over the burnished water to Pigeon Key, several miles to the southwest.

A youth in a white cloth hat stepped from the engine room and a gabble of questions from the men sprawled about the burning deck immediately pelted his ears. He was a friendly young man and undertook to satisfy the curiosity of his passengers.

"Knight's Key," he explained, pointing to a busy bit of land to the south, where the line of completed concrete arches westward stopped and new construction was in progress.

"Those arches 're about thirty feet above water and maybe sixty feet long. Gonna build them on concrete piers over to where you're all going at Pigeon Key. Then right on to Key West. The whole viaduct from back Homestead way on is near a hundred and thirty miles. Takes an awful sight of cement. And sweat."

His face was solemn. His tone almost mournful. But amusement lurked from his eyes as he looked his frowzy listeners over.

He pointed to a scowl-like hulk moored alongside the wooden framework of an arch under construction as they neared a key. The barge was alive with figures, busy as ants at the machinery on it, while a derrick, with a huge, iron-jawed bucket at its end, swung the mixed cement from the barge, up over the wooden casing and, opening its great jaws, spewed the sopping mixture in.

"One of the mixers," the youth explained, "have to mix the cement right on that barge and hoist it up into the wood casing. When it sets hard they remove the casing." He glanced soberly at the sun-cooked crowd. "You boys ought to of got a job on the mixer, instead of where you-all 're going."

He yawned. "Wouldn't want you boys' job," he said casually, as they got further out into open water where a group of men on a raft were jamming

long, steel rods into the ocean bed, their bodies and arms moving up and down in jerky unison. He pointed to the group. "Even that there job is better'n yours. They're the stenographers—with their pencils. They're workin' hand drills, boring the ocean bottom, to dynamite for the caissons and cofferdams. Pretty hard work. Blisters your hands pretty bad. Aches your arms and back, too. And ten hours out there in the sun makes some of the stenogs keel plumb over, sometimes. But you ain't got dry cement to inhale out there. Don't get chafed and cut with it, either. You boys ought to of tried for that there job, I reckon."

The hearers stirred uneasily.

He pointed out other incidents of the work as they left the drillers behind, but always, though his face was solemn and his voice sad, his lively eyes held lurking amusement.

"The *Two Sisters*," he informed, as a flat-bottomed steamer passed, its paddle wheel churning the water in fussy commotion. "Draws only a few feet of water. Got to, on this job. Goes in mighty shallow places near the keys. There's a catamaran over yonder. Why didn't you-all get a job on her crew?" he inquired sadly.

Another key, the most inhabited little island they had yet seen, hove into view and the launch made straight for it. Several large frame structures reared above the white, flat edge of land; row on row of white tent tops fairly covered the place; and at the near end a great frame shed stood, with a long pier near by that reached out over the water for several hundred feet.

"Pigeon Key," the youth mournfully announced, as the launch slackened speed and carefully nosed in to the pier for a landing. "It's where you boys all got to stay."

He clambered from the craft to the long wharf and walked along with them, his voice, as he rambled on, condoling,

but his crafty eyes always belying the voice.

"See this here dock? Long one, ain't she? Well, you-all'll have many a nice walk along it. Up and down. Up and down. And that there shed. Big one, ain't it? Holds I couldn't say how many thousand tons of cement. They store it there. *You* store it there. You-all will get mighty well acquainted with that shed. You fill it up and then you try to empty it. Fill it up and try to empty it. Got lots of time to get acquainted 'round here, boys. Ten hours a day on the Far Eastern Coast-line. And you-all get a dollar a day for it—with your flop and chuck tossed right in, free and gratis."

His lips twisted to the faintest of grins as he scanned the frowzy crowd in the misery and sweat. "One whole buck a day. Only ten hours. And all the cement you can carry. Sun's always nice and warm, too. Won't freeze like you-all do yonder up No'th." He absently hummed a gay little air. Then he fitted words to it.

"Dollar a day on the F. E. C.—'Forrester's Easy Coin."

Jason Sheraton felt a wild impulse to slay the youth.

"Say, kid," another growled with an oath, "tell me something. You been hanging crape over us ever since we started. Ain't there one, single, blasted thing about this job that's good? Ain't there anything good about it?"

The youth deftly rolled a cigarette and turned a doleful gaze upon the speaker. "Yeah," said he sadly. "It's only the first six months that's the hardest. But you boys should of got a different job." He shook his head. "Unless you-all like cement."

"What is this job?" demanded another angrily. "What outfit are we in with, kid?"

The youth removed his white hat, mopped his sweat-running brow with his

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shirt sleeve and looked more condoling than ever.

"You-all 're in the bull gang," said he sadly. And as he left them, the singsong tune, with the words, "Dollar a day on the F. E. C.—Forrester's Easy Coin," fell from his lips.

CHAPTER VI.

PIGEON KEY.

THE little coral island, that for ages had tranquilly rested in the soft blue of the shimmering sea, flat beaches bared naked to the tropic sky, blinking and bleaching in the white sun glare, with only the cries of the wheeling, swooping gulls to break the hot stillness, was now a veritable city.

One of several construction camps on the keys, it housed half a thousand men on its brief acreage and now, in the topaz afterglow, with all the toilers back from the jobs, it had the fretted look of a seething habitation.

A grotesque city it was, shabby in fabric, weird in structure and atmosphere, ridiculous in its pretensions and pitiful in its bravado and attempted gaiety. It was a city without a gentle touch, with not a feminine presence in all the male harshness, nor a tree, plant or even a flower growing there to soften its human ugliness.

But it had the relentless, pulsing spirit of the city breed, with all its grim force and emotional conflict. The denizens were a sophisticated lot and cosmopolitan, too, as was evidenced in the naming of location and thoroughfare, by rude little signposts at each lane and pathway between the white tent rows and frame buildings.

The first comers to the camp, drifters from the four corners of the country, had asserted priority rights in labeling the narrow little paths with names borrowed from their home sections of the country.

The chief thoroughfare, which ran

the length of camp from the open space about the water tank near the western end, to one of the camp kitchens near the long wharf on the eastern side, was Broadway, fifteen feet broad in spots.

Californians had put Kearney Street on the local map at the southern side. The open space at the water tank, a common meeting place at night, was Copley Square, while Philadelphians had selected the path running by one of the mess halls at the southeast end for another Market Street.

At the water's edge on the northern side, the row of frame shacks that housed the foremen, aloof from the tents, was Riverside Drive, and Chicagoans had preserved Michigan Boulevard behind the camp doctor's shack near the water at the southern end, while a St. Louisan, determined on civic recognition, had intruded upon a section of numbered lanes between tents with Oliver Street.

The sole foreign touch was the pathway where a double-floored, frame structure, that housed some sixty Spaniards from the Cayman Islands with the few other foreigners, was located. A far-drifting hobo with a smattering of Spanish, doubtless irritated at the moment by the nocturnal twanging of guitars in this barnlike edifice, had christened this street, "El Place de Toro." And, "Some bull!" was the invariable comment of newcomers after hearing the voluble chatter of the Latins.

Sheraton, with the pock-marked man named Trager, the mountainous fellow of the harmonica and tobacco-stained blond beard who was called, "Big Alec," and a sad-faced man with a drooping mustache and a glass eye, known as "Cyclops," were assigned to tent No. 9 in a row toward the western end of the key, not far from the water tank. No. 9 Bowery, was their local address.

The mob he had come down with, Sheraton saw was typical of the en-

tire camp. This was forcibly impressed upon him at supper that evening as he sat with two hundred of them in the big mess. It was a knife-shoveling, food-snatching, free-spitting lot of guests, yet the chief thought in the fugitive's mind as he watched them was the fact that he still had liberty and that the law was miles and miles behind him.

With others he strolled out over the ocean on the long pier to catch a breath of air and reluctantly dragged himself back to the tented city and his own hot upper tent bunk after a couple of hours. Pale flickers of candlelight, quavering in the white-canvased rows, dotted the island as he returned along Broadway, although the miniature city was already settling to a doze.

Bits of song and an occasional note of harsh laughter punctuated the stillness as he passed. Shadowy figures crossed his in the narrow lanes and once, at El Place de Toro, a mild flurry of excitement brought a score of neighbors to sudden wakefulness.

A love ballad in wailing Spanish, to the jangling accompaniment of a guitar, had suddenly disturbed the still night air. A bawling American voice, cursing the singer, his guitar and nationality with ungentle emphasis, followed. There was a crackling exchange of excited Spanish. American terms, picturesque and most impolite, followed. There came a swift stir in the abode of the foreigners; another in the complaining tent. More language, from both sides, followed.

Then the burly American, naked, as he had been lying on his stilling bunk, rushed out and with an accurate swing to the jaw knocked the musical Latin down. The latter, his white teeth gleaming in the candle flicker, picked himself from the sand and hotly rushed at his assailant. A knife blade flashed in a swift arc. There was a hoarse cry of pain and rage, the two shadowy fig-

ures grappled and a small crowd of nude forms quickly gathered from nearby tents to gleefully watch or separate the combatants.

The burly man dripped an additional string of oaths, the Spaniard rubbed his jaw and replied in kind, but more musically, while the crowd languidly sifted back to the tents and the frame building. The lights there then went out.

"What's the excitement?" a half-dressed form, arriving late on the scene, inquired.

"No excitement, fellah," a voice drawled from the dark. "Bloke busted a greaser on the chin. An' the greaser tried to knife the bloke. Thass all. Lemme sleep." The late comer left. Sheraton passed. And the next minute all was quiet and peaceful near the turbulent "place of the bull."

Sheraton strolled to the water tank in Copley Square for a drink and returned to his tent in the Bowery. His three companions of the journey down were already asleep in their upper bunks, always allotted to newcomers, Big Alec and Cyclops filling the inclosure with rumbling snores in different keys. In the dim light of two candles on cracker boxes in the center of the tent three of his other tentmates regarded him, from their bunks, with sullen disinterest. The wiry, red-haired man, he learned next day, was employed on a dredger; the other pair, big-limbed and husky, were on one of the mixers.

But after he had stripped off his sweat-soaked clothing and climbed aloft to the stuffy confines of his upper bunk, all speculations about his companions left the fugitive.

Despite the closeness of his hot perch he was soon in a sound slumber. And his final reflections, as he was dozing off, were the alternating depressing and grateful thoughts that it would take many days and almost unthinkable hours at a dollar a day before he could safely continue his flight; and that here, with

the human backwash of the nation, he was completely concealed from the searching eyes of the law.

CHAPTER VII.

MERRY-GO-ROUND.

AT five o'clock the next morning the camp was astir. Sheraton slid from his perch, hurriedly washed at a bucket outside and joined the throng at the long tables in the nearest of the twin mess halls. At six he was down at the end of the long pier with a hundred others, and the bull gang began its day.

A "cement boat," a three-masted schooner lying a few hundred yards off in the glassy water, was in with her periodic cargo of cement in hundred-pound sacks. She was partly unloaded, two lighters, burdened with the stuff, laying anchored up against the dock. And as a score of bullies set off in the launch *Evelyn* to complete the discharge of cargo, the remainder of the gang, under direction of the lean, steel-eyed foreman, a man with a cutting voice and an apparent mania for accomplishing work, started to haul the cement from the lighters to the big shed at the far end of the long dock.

A pair of hand cars waited on tracks with a pair of bullies to load them. Two long planks reached, at a sharp incline, from the nearest lighter to the dock above. Then, as two more bullies down on the lighter lifted the hundred-pound sacks to waiting shoulders, the others in a long, trailing queue from dock to lighter, stepped up in turn to receive their burdens, stagger up one plank to the hand car and troop down again on the other plank for another sack from the lighter.

As partial protection against loose cement from bursted sacks, each man wore, over his head and dangling down behind over his shoulders, an empty cement sack, slit open along one edge, like a hood.

"Like bloomin' Arabs in a bloody desert," observed a newcomer, an English cockney, as he squinted at the slowly moving human queue with the weird-looking, cowlike head coverings. "And it'll be 'ot enough for a blinkin' desert when that blawsted sun starts blazin'."

The notorious bull gang was under way. The lean-jawed foreman barked and goaded. The parade began, a constantly moving, winding, human loop. Up one plank with their hundred-pound burdens, down the other to receive more. Sacks burst; loose cement lay thick about the place, settling everywhere, covering every one and everything. It lay, inches deep, over the deck of the lighter where the loaders stood in it to their ankles. It sifted in a thick film over the hooded toilers, wafted into throats, poured down unprotected necks, trickled under clothing, over sweating, straining bodies.

The sun blazed forth. The merry-go-round continued. Loaded hand cars were hauled up the track, the sacks stored to the roof in mountainous piles in the immense shed, the cars returned to the dock, and again the loop was formed. The newcomers wabbled up the incline, rubbed increasingly raw shoulders, and cursed. The veterans enjoyed the humor and guffawed.

Shoulders were scraped raw; weary legs tottered; the loaders, after a half hour's work at lifting sacks, changed places with carriers as their finger tips, cut by the gritty powder, seeped blood

The newcomers staggered and cursed. The veterans staggered and joked.

"Don't give up, kid," advised one, as a sack fell from the crimson fingers of Sheraton. "Only nine hours more."

"First six years 're the hardest," offered another; and a flood of persiflage followed.

"Hustle it a little, Duke. Slip me my package. I gotta beat it home to the wife. What kinda service do ya call this?"

"The company gives you a whole dollar for only ten hours of this. Don't waste their time."

"Will you take it with you or have it sent?" other loaders inquired of rookies as they plunged the sacks heavily upon raw shoulders.

And hour after hour, round after round, the hooded loop, a weird, ever wilting merry-go-round of humans continued. When it lagged the foreman's rasping voice whipped it into renewed vigor. When a man collapsed, companions peppered his cement-caked ears with jocular advice. By ten o'clock most of the newcomers were in a state of sagging exhaustion.

The sun was high now, a blazing ball of molten heat that dripped its white rays in a parching flood. The lighter, ankle-deep in a muck of loose powder, cooked and simmered beneath the white glare. The human beasts of burden reeked with running sweat and cement, hands and bodies a pasty mess of grime. The gritty dust covered everything; filled the pores of the teetering bullies, their mouths, conversation, and apathetic minds. It was lifted, cursed, carried, discussed, fought, breathed, endured.

At last, with the sun at its cruelest, came eleven o'clock and the signal to knock off for the midday dinner.

At Sheraton's table the talk of the newcomers was chiefly on the topic of quitting. "Me, I'm through," a bulky, hard-featured man of middle age announced as he speared a slice of bread with his knife after audibly straining his coffee through a cement-caked mustache. "What a graft! I been on some tough ones in my time, lads. In the silver mines in Peru when they laid me in the cooler there once off ship, even. And once I even did a short stretch coaling ship at Port Said with the coolies. But none of 'em ever like this. Me, I gather my half-day's pay and then I blow."

That opinion was general and like comment ran about the long table. Then a veteran, absorbing the talk with a sardonic expression, entered the conversation.

"Back where are all you blokes gonna go when you quit?" he asked artlessly.

"Back to Philly, where we come from," some one replied aggressively. "Back to any blasted place out of here, Jack."

"Got any money?"

"Money! Say, what would we be doing down in this hole, the last stop this side o' hell, if we had any money?"

"Then how you gonna get back?"

"Why, on the train, of course," came the reply. "Company ships you back where they got you, don't they?"

The other man laughed, loud, long and with genuine mirth at a gem of humor like this. He turned to a neighbor, another veteran of the job and roared again.

"Them new blokes 're all gonna go back North," he informed his friend. "They ain't got a thin dime among 'em. And they won't have a pay comin' till there's ice on the cement. But that don't matter a damn, that don't. The company is gonna kindly ship 'em all back to dear old Philly again." And both men burst into gales of laughter.

"What's all the joke, fellah?" a new man demanded belligerently. "Company's gotta ship you back where they get you from, don't they?"

"Sure," assented the other. "If you got the price to pay their fare. Otherwise they dump you bucko lads just where they landed you when you come down here. And that's Marathon. And Marathon's seventy miles out in the old drink—see? You-all got to stick in the old bull gang, bo."

The verbal bombshell exploded with sickening impact.

"You're stuck way out here in the ocean—and they don't take you back?" wailed one.

"Yeah. They don't."

Pained and astonished glances followed. "Well," some one suggested, "we can all do a Weston out of camp, can't we? Ain't no one gonna stop us, I guess."

"No one," the veteran agreed. "You boys sure have got a inalienable right to walk right out of this here camp. But the question before the house then arises, where you-all gonna stroll to?"

"Why," stammered another new bully lamely, "any place."

"But," the other explained, "there ain't any place around here, kid. From Marathon it's seventy miles before you get clean off the ocean to mainland, even. Then there's a right nice mess of mainland. All swamps and Everglades. Then you get another little drill of about eighteen miles more through Everglades till you get to Homestead. That's nearly a hundred miles, by anybody's pedometer. No place for grub unless you like snakes and alligators. And no main stem to work or houses to panhandle or parks to flop in or gin mills to snag free lunches out of. Nothing but ocean and swamps and desert.

"Except the sun," the man chuckled. "There's always the sun down here. But if you think you can drill a hundred miles through swamps and desert and over the trestle on the ocean without water or grub and the sun sweating your brains to mash, then you might make Homestead."

He reflectively picked his teeth with a fork. "In Homestead they ain't even got a town hall. A couple shacks and a dawg let's that place out. What'll you do then? Pine forests come next. You hit Miami. But they're so sick of Northern bos since this job come along, they'll run you out if you look cross-eyed at a beef stew. But maybe you guys can fly or something."

"Couldn't a guy ride the rods of that train out of Marathon?" inquired some one hopefully.

The man grinned. "Only the one train a day. And they go over her with a microscope lookin' for wise bos."

"Bet I could ride her," bragged a new man. "I'd ride in the water tank."

"You couldn't even ride her in the water *cup*," he was informed.

"Well," said another man defiantly, "say what you want, but there's a lot of guys must of come down here and quit before they collected enough pay to ride back on the cushions."

"Sure is," agreed the veteran.

"Then what happened to them guys?"

"You can figure it out yourself," was the reply. "If they couldn't stand the graft down here, with three good squares a day to work on, what chance did they have of gettin' through that drill back to somewhere, with no grub?"

Sheraton, who wanted to go forward instead of back, turned to the speaker. "Any way of getting to Key West without money?" he asked.

"Sure," the man chuckled. "Two ways. Get a job up the line near there and go in a company launch. Or walk out over the ocean, from key to key, like you read about in the Bible."

"But if you can't *do* the bloody work?" a little man with a comically tragic face insisted.

The informative man rose and yawned. "Then," said he, "you can quit any time you want. They just can't make you work, brother."

CHAPTER VIII.

FORRESTER'S EASY COIN.

THE strains of Big Alec's harmonica floated into the tent from just outside. Farther off, from the direction of Copley Square, came indistinct rumblings of torrid conversation with the customary blasphemous trimmings. The bullies were complaining of the water shortage, the water train having been delayed up the line. At El Place de Toro the usual banjo tinkled. Then si-

lence fell over the camp. It was nearing nine o'clock.

Jason Sheraton, alias Robert Kernan, turned his raw, burning body on the hot blankets in his upper bunk and thought of many things. It was the end of Robert Kernan's first day's work in the famous bull gang. And it was the first day's work—for money—that Jason Sheraton had ever committed.

A grin, faint but holding a touch of real amusement, came to him with the vision of Carol Hoyt. "If she could see me now!" he mused. "Well, when I did decide to become useful I sure picked out real work." The wry grin widened. "Even Carol can't complain now."

The red-haired man entered, lit a candle, stepped to a card tacked on the tent post near his bunk and marked the card with a pencil stub. Sheraton watched his absorption curiously. Then the strains of the harmonica ceased and Big Alec entered, removed his cement-caked rags, lit a foul pipe and also watched the absorbed man.

"What's the card for, 'Red'?" he rumbled. "Keep account of all the wealth you make down here on that?"

Red stirred. "That's my going-home card," he replied, pouring some makings on a cigarette paper.

"Home!" Big Alec derided. "I didn't think any blokes down here had a home."

"They ain't," Red agreed. "But most of 'em keep these going-home cards, just the same. Home is any place outside of this hole." He removed the card for Big Alec to examine. Several columns of small crosses marked the length of the card and after these were an entire column and part of another of single pencil marks.

"All them crosses was single marks first," Red explained, pointing with a dirty finger. "That's the number of days I gotta put in down here yet before I can get back to New York. Every

day I finished means one more buck. So I add a mark to the next single one and make it a cross—see? I got three and a half rows of crosses. I been down here all them days. Only thirteen more days and I can blow. And kid, won't I be glad when I make that last cross!"

"I got to have one of them cards, too," the big man decided. He found a pencil and a piece of cardboard and a moment later was busy with them. "One hundred marks," said he then, glancing up. "One hundred days—one hundred bucks—and then Big Alec blows. I got one day in already." And with great satisfaction he made a cross of the first single mark.

Sheraton listened at first with a satirical smile. The proceeding seemed so childish. Yet, the next moment, he had decided to figure the exact number of days he would need to make the sum he required for further flight and have a going-home card of his own.

"A lotta guys," observed Red, exuding a smoke cloud, "they come down here and they figger out they'll blow with maybe a hundred bucks, just like you." He grinned reminiscently. "But that's before they got many days in. After they get a good smell of the graft they change their minds, if any, and their calculations. Then they decide they don't need no hundred bucks clear. They'll be satisfied fine if they get enough to land back in New York or Philly.

"So they erase a flock o' them little marks. They work a few days more and pretty soon they bust up their figgers again. They think now if they ever get back as far as a civilized burg like Jacksonville they'll be plenty satisfied. So they erase some more marks." He chuckled. "And when they finally quit and buy a ticket back on the company's own road, they find all they done by sweatin' out their brains in the cement and all is just pay the company

to bring 'em down here and bring 'em back—as far as Jacksonville, or so." He threw back his carrotty thatch and roared with glee. "Maybe you guys don't know yet you owe the company sixteen dollars for bringing you down here? Well, it's so."

The mountainous man bellowed his rage. "You mean sixteen days down in this muck before I got a copper of my own!"

Red nodded. "One bloke," he continued, "kept rubbing out his marks so often that when he blew last week he had only enough coin to get him to Miami. But even that got him past the ocean and by the Everglades. He only had to drill a couple hundred miles more to get where he could locate another nice job."

Again Red chuckled and chuckled again. This disclosure was always one of the choice bits of humor of the place.

Big Alec's fierce eyes glared. But with an upward glance at the feverish Sheraton in his stuffy bunk, his good humor returned.

"What's the matter?" he asked, thrusting his ugly, bearded face close to the fugitive's as his huge bulk towered over the upper bunk. "Don't like this kinda work, hey, Duke?" He laughed in unholy glee. The innate difference between himself and Sheraton, a difference he had immediately sensed, angered him; and already, in their brief meetings, it was clear that there was to be small affection lost between them.

Alec bit off an enormous chew from a messy tobacco plug. "Got one of your kind down in the muck with us at last, huh?" he exulted. "I don't know from how high up you come, fellah. Pretty high, I guess, from your talk. But you're down with us common blokes now. And I guess you stay down, too. Lots of guys, as tough as you, ain't ever been able to get up again once they get down."

The other ten occupants, always

eager for diversion, listened expectantly.

Sheraton turned over in his bunk and his burning eyes settled narrowly on the big man's gross features.

"Well, I don't hear you giving three cheers over your own scraped hide," he retorted. "When we knocked off this afternoon you were bellowing like a sick bull."

The other spat on the floor. "Maybe," he rumbled. "But I'll be on this here job long after you're trying to drill back North, with your tongue curling up in your mouth for a drink like burned bacon."

Sheraton winced as his raw shoulder was scraped on the woolen blanket. "Don't fool yourself," he replied pleasantly. "I'll be down here still, collecting my dollar per diem, when you're burning up back in the jungle on the Rocks they talk of. You may get your roll, Mr. Hercules. But your kind seldom keeps it. Your appetites are too strong—and your mental stamina too weak."

Later he was forced to smile at himself as he recalled this bit of ill-tempered badinage. This grotesque little city, in which men were reduced to primal appetites and elemental emotions, was able to get almost any one into a state of mind for childish repartee.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. KERNAN MAKES SOME MARKS.

WITH most of the other new bullies Sheraton, in some way, got through that second day in the bull gang and that evening made out his own going-home card and tacked it to a board of his bunk. Only, he grimly reflected, the term was a gross misnomer in his case.

It was Saturday, with to-morrow a full day of rest and there was noticeable joy in the camp at the prospect.

The pock-marked Trager, his shifty,

squinting eyes sparkling in the pale candlelight with the thought, started a ribald song in the tent. Big Alec bared his yellow, fanglike teeth in a grin and brought his inevitable harmonica into play; and Cyclops, his single orb blinking comically, added a shaky tenor to the musical offering.

Sheraton lay silent on his bunk. When the noisy outburst had subsided the huge man glanced at the fugitive in sullen dislike. The latter met the look with an unfriendly one of his own; and each caught, unmistakably, the feeling and meaning of the other. It seemed impossible that this pair could remain cooped in this little abode, evening after evening, with their tempers and sensibilities scraped as raw as their skins at every grating touch of their opposite natures, without an open clash at some time.

Big Alec finally dropped his glance under the other's steady, hardening eyes, and bit a chunk from his plug. Sheraton indolently withdrew his look and rolled a cigarette. That was all. But it was a silent duel, none the less, and each realized it.

On Sunday the water train from up the line made its delayed appearance and Sheraton grabbed a bucket to join the rush to the big water tank, then spent a painful hour with soap and fresh water in removing some evidence of the bull gang from his lacerated skin.

Trager produced a deck of cards and with Cyclops, Red, and another of the older ten occupants seated about a cracker box, soon had a pinochle game started. Big Alec lolled just outside the tent in a shady spot in the sand and his harmonica was soon competing with the jangling instruments over in the place of the bull.

Near noon the lazy comments of the card players rose to blasphemous dispute, then epithets and threats filled the hot atmosphere as Trager and the surly faced Red faced each other belligerently.

But though a fight appeared imminent for a moment, the nonplayers were too uninterested in anything save their orgy of inaction to do more than toss indolent glances toward the disputants.

About two o'clock an actual clash occurred three tents away, at No. 6 Bowery. One of the numerous crap games had been going on there. With real money involved, a player was caught in the capital offense of cheating with doctored dice. Some two dollars lay in the pile of silver on the tent floor. Two dollars was twenty hours of cement and tropic sun and blood seeping from raw finger tips and drooping backs. It was two more little crosses on some one's going-home card. It was too much to risk against dishonesty, even here, where innate honesty and ethics seemed rather at a considerable premium in any of the players.

An angry accusation was flung, verbal filth came in a flood from the cheated. A blow was struck, a cracker box hurled, a knife drawn and the general mêlée was on.

As it progressed from the tent to the Bowery, the local pinochle players rushed, with others, to the sandy pathway and looked on in glee. But others merely thrust indolent heads outside just in time for the end of the fray and to see the largest combatant, who had been engaged with two others, wipe the trickling gore from a battered nose and gashed eye and rumble terrible threats as friends led him away. A mere fight was too common an occurrence over which to lose precious moments of idleness and rest.

Monday found the camp grumbly rousing itself for another week of muck and toil, with the growls of the famed bull gang loud in the land as the bullies gathered at the cement shed at six o'clock. The day passed for Sherton somehow, as the others had, and again he dragged himself back to the tent in the evening and made another

little cross and again bathed the raw spots on his aching body.

After that the days dragged by in a monotonous, sweltering procession, one like the other, except for the anxiously awaited Sundays. There was little of relieving incident and no variety in the work of the bull gang. With the cement boat gone, the stuff was loaded from the shed to lighters which were towed to different points along the job at other keys. And when another boat came in, the process of again filling the big shed was continued.

Each evening the bullies made additional crosses on their cards, and each night, as they lolled about in the heat and the irritating presence of each other, the feeling between Big Alec and Sherton grew and smoldered. There had been no open flare-up. But several times a clash had been imminent when each was in a particularly belligerent mood from the heat, the lacerating cement on their sagging bodies, or the plain annoyance at sight of each other.

Red, as he had promised himself, quit at the end of thirteen days, packing his meager belongings—a razor and strop, a pipe, extra shirt, overalls, canvas shoes and a pair of dice—that last evening, with joyous curses on his lips at the prospect of his release and glee-ful badinage for the luckless remaining ones. And the following day they saw him for the last time as the timekeeper's launch passed the long dock.

He roared his glee at the toiling crowd on the simmering dock as he waved his good-by.

"So long, you poor blokes," he howled. "Only seven hours more. Don't get sun-struck. Don't inhale too much cement. Give you a concrete lung. Ta-ta, bullies!"

The bullies waved back, longing on their dust-caked features as they replied in kind to the speeding launch that quickly disappeared in the hot mist over the ocean.

"Look out for the Rocks, you red-headed ape." "You'll be back, kid, after they roll you on the Rocks." "Shall we save a bunk for you in our tent, Red?" "Send us a card from back North, Red." "Aw, he'll never make it way back North."

"The Rocks won't get me," Red howled back before the launch was out of hailing distance—and when, after two weeks, he hadn't returned, it was assumed by all that he had successfully escaped the mental hazard of the famed Rocks and reached "back North."

The last four comers to the tent shot dice for the vacant lower bunk. It was won by Big Alec, who deposited his belongings and great hulk in the more convenient, less stuffy lower berth that evening, with a jeering remark to Sheraton, whom he had finally beaten out for the place in the progressive dice game.

On the first of October Sheraton had fifty dollars. As he made a cross of that mark and then counted the actual money, the urge to quit surged through him with an almost overwhelming fierceness. But fifty dollars, he realized, was a scanty money stake for a fugitive in a protracted flight from the country. Through most of that night he fought with himself; but the next morning found him with a new card made out for seventy-five more days, and again in the line of hooded bullies at the sun-flooded dock.

He must have sufficient money to insure escape from the law, he knew, and it seemed so utterly safe down here with the country's human backwash while he was getting that money.

With the exception of a man working on a dredger, the oldest tent resident of all, the erstwhile new bullies in No. 9 Bowery were the veterans of the tent now, the other older men having followed Red's example and left shortly after the flame-haired one's departure. They left with the customary jeering

for the remaining laborers and received the usual warnings about the Rocks.

CHAPTER X.

EXIT CYCLOPS.

MANY more laborers quit the camp early in October and many others took their places as new batches of derelicts, drifters and fugitives came down from New York and Philadelphia.

A number of shifts had occurred at No. 9 Bowery. One man remained only two days, another but five, each quitting, after fearful and awesome curses for the heat and cement, only to be replaced by others. And as each newcomer luckless enough to be assigned to the bull gang endured the beginner's usual period of hopelessness, Cyclops, Trager and Big Alec, as sophisticated veterans, guyed them and laughed while Sheraton regarded them noncommittally or with casual friendliness. Always they were the usual type, and always, with their first day's stay in the bull gang, their blasphemous wails were loud in the land.

Cyclops, whose real name—as was the case with most—none of his companions knew, left also, with a stake of only fifty dollars and not more than half of the marks on his going-home card crossed off.

It was fear of the autumn hurricanes that drove him, with many others, from the job at this time. The fury of the equinoctial storms down here in the semitropics was now the chief topic of conversation on Pigeon Key, all of whose denizens had heard tales of disaster wrought by the fall hurricanes in other years.

The story of the four storms which had swept the work and destroyed parts of this ocean railroad—before the reinforced arches were decided upon—had gone the rounds again and again. And the tale of the famous hurricane of 1906, which had swept a houseboat

with a hundred and fifty men aboard out to sea, smashed it to far-flung bits of wreckage and included scores of lives in its destruction, had been handed down and told and retold like a fearful legend, with varying accuracy.

Already several high winds had swept the little island, giving hint of their potential fury as they rattled tent flaps in wild tattoo and threatened, in the fearful minds of many of the ignorant, easily worked upon men, to sweep the flat bit of coral key clear of its city of tents and flimsy structures.

During the most savage of these storms, with the tropic rain pouring in a deluge and the terrific wind whipping the ocean to an incipient frenzy, the biggest scare occurred. The workers out on the ocean for miles along the job—the “stenographers” on their rafts, the men on the mixers and high up in the frame work of the arches under construction over near Knight’s Key, several miles east—and all craft along the line, the *Two Sisters*, the launches, dredges, catamarans, scows and lighters, had been ordered in for safety.

The Pigeon Key inhabitants had fled to the reputed safety of the big cement shed, with its weight of thousands of tons of cement, to wait for the passing of the threatening danger. As they waited in the dim retreat, wild tales were passed about, furbished with imaginary trimmings and enlarged upon until some of the men were even then in a panicky state. And that evening, after the wind had subsided, although word was officially sent out that the danger was past, many decided to quit immediately.

Cyclops packed his scant belongings that evening for departure on the morrow.

“Ain’t gonna blow the job with only fifty dollars, are you?” demanded Alec jeeringly, in great mirth at the man’s fright. “I thought you was gonna stick it out to a hundred markers, ‘Blinkey.’ ”

“Not me,” the other replied amid a flood of oaths, his single eye blinking in fear and disgust. “I’m gone, I am. I wouldn’t stick down in this hole no longer for a million dollars. It ain’t enough they roast you alive and sweat out your blasted insides and leave you get all your hide scraped off so’s you can’t hardly walk. But you gotta get hurricaneed, too. When it comes to them hurricanes I’m gone.”

“What you scared of?” demanded Trager. “Storm’s all over. Stick it out and blow with me and Alec.”

But Cyclops stubbornly shook his head.

“If you coves stick down here you’ll blow together all right—right out into the blooming ocean—you will,” he warned. “Like them poor lads four years ago. Look what happened them poor guys! About a thousand of ‘em in that double-decker barge. All drowned like rats. Some of ‘em killed outright when she busts up on the dog-gone reef and the rest swept right on out to sea with the pieces. Gawd, I can see them poor blokes now, I can.”

The vivid picture of his imagination was reflected in the horror of his ugly face.

“I can see them poor rummies now. I can hear their bloody screams and all. About a thousand of ‘em. Me! I’m gone, I am.”

Big Alec and Trager roared their mirth at the fear-struck face and Sheraton smiled at the recital of the famous catastrophe. He knew the propensity for exaggeration among the inaccurate minds of the place. And though he was well aware of the fury of some storms in this region, he still was inclined to believe this particular tale a legend of the job.

Dirks, the tentmate who worked on the dredger, however, on Sunday evening, as the pair dangled their legs over the long dock, verified the story; but the actual loss of life was reduced in

his accurate telling to a hundred and thirty men.

"Yes," drawled Dirks, a man of good intelligence, "it happened, all right. And it's got them all so scared that any kind of wind these days gets them panicky. I got the yarn from a foreman who was working there at the time, when I was located over on Knight's Key. The hurricane tore the two-story barge, filled with men, from her moorings at Long Key and drove her across Hawk Channel, then smashed her upon a reef. A hundred and thirty were killed and drowned."

He musingly watched the wheeling gulls over the blue water.

"It was quite a job to repair the damage to the road. But not so much trouble to replace the men." He grinned as he rolled a cigarette. "Plenty of derelicts and drifters to be had these days."

CHAPTER XI.

HARK, HARK, THE DOGS DO BARK.

THE twilight was deepening to purple dusk as Sheraton returned from the long dock and turned into the Bowery, when he came upon Big Alec and the man Trager, just outside the tent.

He ignored the huge man's surly glare and failed altogether to notice the equally hostile frown of the mean-eyed Trager. The ill-favored pair were engaged in a wordy wrangle about lights in the tent. Big Alec, it appeared, wished to scrawl a letter and had found no candle on the cracker box, and, it being Trager's turn to replenish the supply, the huge man was voicing his ill-feeling in no uncertain language.

Sheraton stopped to roll a cigarette and stood by, idly listening.

"Now you just mosey along and get them light sticks from the commissary." Alec was angrily ordering his friend. "It's your turn to get 'em this time. That new cove, 'Camel-face,' got 'em last time and you follow him."

"Aw, don't be in such a rush," Trager protested. "We'll get the candles. This new guy Hudson'll be along soon."

"I ain't gonna wait for Hudson," replied the other. "You just beat it along, now. Damned pronto, too. Anyway, it ain't Hudson's turn."

"Aw, leave him do it, anyway," Trager grinned. "He's a good-natured slob. He'll do it. What's the use my going when we got a simple guy like this Hudson around?"

Sheraton, his impatience stirred at this attempt to further impose upon a much-imposed-upon new bully, intruded on the pair.

"If you were in the least sporting, Trager," he declared, "you'd do something for little Hudson occasionally in return for his favors, instead of continually trying to put something over on him."

Trager turned with a mocking laugh. "Say," he replied, "where do *you* come in on this, *you*—" and he applied the same vile epithet that had so aroused Sheraton's rage in Monet's restaurant, up in New York.

The fugitive, instantly in the same fury at the word, strode to the mocking man and with the back of his hand slapped him viciously across the mouth. "You cheap little rotter," said he.

Trager staggered back, snarled his surprise and anger and, reaching for the knife in his hip pocket, rushed forward. But Big Alec stepped up quickly and pushed him back.

"I'll kill him," fumed the smaller man, struggling.

"You leave this cove to me," ordered Alec, his great, hairy hand easily thrusting the other back. "I been waiting for a chance like this ever since we been together in the same tent. I got a few things to say to him. And I might just as well say 'em now and leave him know just where him and me stands. This bloke's gonna be *my* meat."

He stepped up to Sheraton, as a crowd from near-by tents collected, always glad of the diversion of a fight. The two stood there with their long-smoldering hate at last openly flashing in their eyes.

"Mr. Kernan," began Alec, sarcastic emphasis on the first word, "it's pretty near time for you to know, in front of all these blokes, that Trager and me got a pretty big bellyful of your swell ways and manners in our tent."

He bared his yellow teeth in a menacing grin.

"You seem to have an idea you're something made to special order by God Almighty. You must have the notion that you're a dook or something. The bloody Dook of Pigeon Key, maybe." He laughed aloud, pleased with the thought, as the phrase rolled from his thick lips. "Yes, sir, Mr. Kernan, you must think you're the bloomin' Dook of Pigeon Key."

The motley mob about them, excited by the impending clash, roared guttural approval and edged close, like a pack of wolves, waiting for the kill.

"But you ain't, Mr. Kernan," suddenly roared the huge man, his feeling tumbling forth in an uncontrollable torrent. "You ain't! Whatever you was once—and I guess from your looks you slid down from pretty high up—you're down with my kind now. And you ain't a bit better'n Trager or me."

The spectators edged closer still.

"We got you way down with us now," Alec exulted, his baleful eyes glowing his hatred as he stared at the other's agreeable features. "Way down in the old bull gang."

He pointed to Sheraton and addressed the crowd.

"Look at 'im, fellas! Ain't he a hot swell now, huh? He sweats just the same as the rest of us. He ain't got any more clothes than us now. He gets just as tired. The cursed cement cuts him up just the same as us. He

ain't a damn bit better'n any one. And yet he's got a notion he's the bloody Dook of Pigeon Key!"

A wave of raucous laughter swept up from the crowd, which again edged forward.

"Get back, you coves," roared the big man in his bullying way, thrusting the nearest roughly from him. "Get back, there. I'm handlin' this bird. You ain't gave me a real chance to talk turkey to you before, Mr. Kernan," he continued, his hostility mounting with each word now. "But now it comes to a show-down and you don't get away with your swell air any more. You just hit Trager. And Trager's a friend o' mine, see?"

"And exactly what," asked Sheraton, his voice growing quieter as his own anger mounted, "are you going to do about it?"

"I'm gonna make you apologize to my friend—and do it in front of all these blokes here," Alec roared, his feeling rising with the other's apparent coolness. "Tell 'im you're sorry, damn you."

"I don't apologize to bullying braggarts," Sheraton replied, his bold eyes glinting dangerously as he swept the huge man from head to foot.

"Tell 'im you're sorry."

"What a chance!" the other replied, icy disdain now in the narrowed eyes.

The evident disdain broke down the last bit of restraint in the huge man, whose rage rushed out now like a flood over a broken dam. With one great fist he clutched the other by the shirt front, pulled him forward and menaced him with the other hairy fist. "Tell 'im," he blared hoarsely. "I'm gonna have this one thing to remember your swell kind by. I'm gonna put it over on one of your class for once. Tell 'im, you——"

At the repetition of the epithet the smile left Sheraton's face and it paled. He jerked himself free, springing

madly forward, planted a stinging blow squarely on the gaping mouth of the giant; and before the latter could move, had followed with a fusillade of sharp, vicious, punches on the gross face. They were punishing, cutting blows, short-arm hooks, expertly snapped over with flashing speed and as the astonished victim staggered back before the savage assault of swiftly smacking fists, the blood poured from his face in a stream.

But after the first minute of surprise, Big Alec, collecting himself, emitted a bellow of rage and rushed forward, swung a ponderous fist that landed high on his opponent's forehead and knocked him reeling back into the crowd.

The smaller man, a fine athlete, leaped back to the attack like a fury and the moh roared its glee. Again the huge man got the range and swung his great ham of a fist and again the other went hurtling back into the crowd. He picked himself up, shook his misty head and rushed in once more, like a fighting terrier at a great Dane, while the roars of the crowd mounted.

He was a fine boxer and seemed, in his white anger, to possess twice his normal strength; but this was a battle ungoverned by any orthodox boxing rules. The next flurry was brief and cruel. Big Alec rushed in close, caught his opponent's head under a gorillalike arm, and with the head in chancery rained blow after blow upon the features of his helpless victim, to the accompaniment of his own bellows of rage and triumph and the continued howls of the pressing crowd. The battered face was rapidly being beaten into a crimson pulp when the huge battler stumbled over a tent rope and fell to the sand, carrying his foe with him.

Sheraton wrenched himself free, staggered the other with an accurate right cross, kept him off balance with a swiftly following left swing and then leaped in close and was savagely ham-

mering the gory features before him to a red mess in his turn, when a foreman rushed up.

"What's all this? Get back," he ordered, elbowing into the crowd and up to the combatants. The moh growled defiantly. "Get back," the foreman, accustomed to handling such scenes, barked again and when several disappointed spectators cursed openly in mutinous refusal, he drew an always ready revolver and fired a shot over their heads. The crowd scattered like rabbits in scared flight. The foreman pulled the still grappling pair apart.

"A fine-looking pair," he snapped with heavy sarcasm, taking in the battered faces. "Any more of this and you're both fired." And pocketing his gun, he left them by themselves.

They stood there, silently eying each other through their blood. Then the huge man spat out a tooth and wiped away the blood that trickled from a corner of his mouth onto his beard.

"The next time it won't end like this," he rumbled, breaking the taut silence. "The next time they might find your carcass floatin' out in the ocean, Mr. Kernan."

The latter, his face an unlovely crimson smear, slowly recovered his breath then thrust his swollen features up close to his adversary's, his eyes still glinting icy wrath as his puffed lips parted in a bloody smile that held no mirth.

"If you ever use that word to me again," he said quietly, "I'll kill you, Alec." There was unmistakable threat in the tone. He spat out some blood. "I mean it," he added with conviction. "I'll kill you, regardless of any consequences. And don't think I'm not capable of it. Some one else once used that word to me, and—" His caution mastered his feeling just in time to check the rest of the intended sentence. But a knowing look slowly grew in the huge man's glowering eyes with the words.

"Some one else used that word, too—and *what*, Mr. Kernan?" he said meaningly, his ugly, gore-spattered face close to his companion's. "Finish it. What happened? Did you *croak* him? Is *that* why you're down here in the muck with us? Dammie if I don't think it is. A cove like you don't get away down here unless he's beating it away from the cops. And the cops are after him for something like—*murder*."

Sheraton paled beneath his gore at the words. Alec noted it and leered in triumph. "And I guess your bloomin' moniker ain't Bob Kernan, either, maybe, if the truth was known. I'd like to know what it is. Maybe I'll find out some way," he added thoughtfully. "I'd sure like to. The reward'd come in nice and handy. And it must be a big one—for a swell, high-toned cove like you, *Mr. Kernan*."

The latter quickly recovered his aplomb and rolled a cigarette. "Wouldn't you like to, though?" he asked, mockery in his voice. "And I'd like to know a bit more about you, my sweet friend. I wouldn't put it past you to have killed several people—by safely knifing them in the back."

And then, ignoring each other, silently they went down to the ocean together and bathed their bruised faces in the smarting salt water.

No further words were exchanged between them in the tent that evening, but the big man continued to glower menacingly. Trager, too, glared his hostility for Sheraton. And at the latter's answering glance, one that looked threatening, Trager suggestively opened and closed the long blade of his big clasp knife.

Sheraton watched the knife blade as it glinted brightly in the candle flicker on the cracker box, and, just before turning in, as suggestively picked up a near-by hatchet from the floor and placed it carefully beside him on his bunk.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTER MR. SCAMMEL.

IN the following week two events occurred, of minor importance in themselves but of more than passing interest to Robert Kernan, of Pigeon Key. One was the appointment of Big Alec as sub-foreman of the bull gang. The other was the arrival of the new bully known as "Gypsy" Scammel.

Alec, who received his distinction because of his size and strength and reputation for successful bullying, was made "straw boss" upon the arrival of a new lot of laborers from New York.

Five hundred had arrived on Monday, Pigeon Key receiving a hundred and fifty of them, half of whom were added to the bull gang, which, despite recent depletions, was now a hundred and forty-five men strong.

The progress of the construction work to a point near Pigeon Key made the increased number of bullies and another foreman necessary for a time. The section of viaduct which was to bridge the ocean between Pigeon Key and Knight's Key, about five miles east, was completed to within less than two miles of the former island and the crew of the mixer working at the new arches was now to be supplied with cement from Pigeon Key instead of Knight's Key, as before.

The giant viaduct was every day reaching out nearer to the local camp and other workers from other points swelled the local population. The carpenters on the wooden arch frames now lived on Pigeon Key, as well as all the drillers in the general vicinity. These "stenographers" were working so close to the local camp, indeed, that the nearest of them, as they stood on their rafts drilling, were almost within hailing distance of the toiling denizens on the long dock.

Accordingly, the bull gang now was frequently divided into two sections,

one gang remaining on the long dock to load lighters for near-by keys, the other often leaving with a load of cement for the mixer. Slocum, the regular foreman, usually accompanied the crew who left, leaving Big Alec in charge of the bullies on the dock.

Sheraton received the news of Alec's new authority with secret dismay, realizing that he would now be annoyed and discriminated against. The discrimination began immediately. The trips out to the mixer, a change from the monotony of the regular cement bulking on the dock, were sought by all the men. But the new straw boss saw to it that Sheraton never went on these preferred jobs. Indeed he constantly kept him under his watchful, glowering eye, now.

The new man known as Gypsy quickly got on Sheraton's nerves as much as the big straw boss did, however, and made himself as disagreeable. A black-haired, swarthy individual, with a dark stubble on his face that emphasized his black look, the man was bull-throated and stocky, with bunchy shoulders that gave the impression of great physical strength, and there was a surly cast to his hard, uncompromising face.

Of the type, in coloring and feature, that is known as black Irish, he lacked the derelict look that usually characterized newcomers and, somehow, to Sheraton did not seem to really belong in this retreat of derelicts and fugitives. But he was as uneducated and blasphemous as the rest and, for some reason, from his first sight of Sheraton on the dock, appeared to instantly dislike him as heartily as did Big Alec, with whom he immediately became chummy.

Sheraton first noticed the man on Tuesday morning. The bull gang was crowded at the end of the dock, immediately after breakfast, waiting to begin the long grind, the newcomers standing about uncertainly, awaiting instructions. Slocum had gathered his men together to wait for the broad-bellied launch,

which was to take them out to the mixer with a lighter of cement in tow, when Gypsy Scammel came up.

Sheraton donned his improvised hood and spoke to a companion. At sound of the cultivated voice, so unusual in the place, the swarthy newcomer turned in surprise, gazed intently at the speaker and then scowled in open hostility at the still-discolored visage of the recently battered young man.

The latter returned the scowl with an amused shrug of his expressive shoulders, deliberately turned his back and walked away. The newcomer's scowl deepened at this.

Sheraton noticed the man again a half hour later, hooded and dusted white with cement like any veteran bully, standing with Big Alec down on the lighter being loaded. Again the man accorded him a black stare of dislike, said something to Big Alec, at which both looked in the direction of the fugitive.

Sheraton knew they were discussing him and as he passed the pair in the slowly moving loop he caught some words of Big Alec.

"Why," the huge man was saying, "that's the Dook of Pigeon Key. He's a real swell, he is." He chuckled. "Yessir, the bloody Dook of Pigeon Key, Paddy. Favorin' us with his presence down here. His moniker's Bob Kieran." And Alec's sardonic laugh boomed forth at his humorous attempt.

The intimacy and apparent friendship of the duo puzzled Sheraton in the next few days. The straw boss constantly used his authority to give the swarthy man special consideration on the job and they were together a good deal, both at work on the dock and in the evening.

"They're as thick as thieves," the fugitive mused, and wondered if they had known each other before coming down here.

During the second week and the third

the swarthy Gypsy's hostility increased, if anything, although Sheraton avoided him as much as possible, through pure dislike. But it appeared difficult to avoid that black scowl. A dozen times a day on the dock he encountered the dark, intent eyes, piercing his consciousness like the stab of a hot iron into flesh. The fellow seemed to be continually watching him, always with that cloudy look on his surly, pugnacious face. And even after work Sheraton met the intent gaze in the most unexpected places.

Once, over in El Place de Toro, just before turning in one evening, Sheraton bumped squarely into a dim figure in the dark lane and upon testily glancing up met the eyes of Gypsy Scammel. The latter scowled blackly in the faint starlight.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bob Kernan of Pigeon Key," said he, with heavy sarcasm and walked off to his tent in Fifth Street. The emphasis on the name gave Sheraton a feeling of uneasiness for the moment.

December and January crept by with agonizing slowness and the usual irritation of mind and body. Big Alec and Gypsy Scammel continued to scrape his sensibilities and stir his temper many times each day. But each evening—and though the sun still poured white wrath over everything at certain hours, the nights had become bearable—he received his daily thrill in taking down the card from the bunk and adding another little cross.

In the first week in February Big Alec, to Sheraton's great satisfaction, quit, his decision forced by the company order that thenceforth work must be continued through the full seven days a week.

"I'm through right now," the straw boss announced, as he wiped a trickle of tobacco juice from his close-cropped blond beard. "Nobody pulls that kind of stuff on Big Alec. I wouldn't work

Sundays without my day of rest for nobody this side of hell."

Trager decided to accompany him and the pair packed their earthly belongings that night and left the next day, hurling the customary taunt at the others on the dock as they departed for Marathon in the timekeeper's launch. The usual warnings to "look out for the Rocks," were flung after the pair in reply, with Alec's mocking laugh of contempt floating back in boisterous derision.

Sheraton's relief at the big man's departure vanished the next minute as he learned that Gypsy Scammel now had his friend's job of straw boss. His dismay increased the next day when the black-browed Gypsy moved into his tent and usurped the vacated cot of the departed Alec.

"Just thought I'd come and room with you, Mr. Kernan," Scammel said with a knowing grin. "I'm just so dog-gone proud to get a chance to live right in the same joint with a real dook—and the bloody Dook of Pigeon Key, at that—I don't hardly know what to do. Besides," he added, leaning meaningfully toward the other, his black eyes tense upon the high-bred face, "besides, I sorta have a hankerin' to keep my eye on you."

"Do all your looking while you can," Sheraton advised coolly. "Because I don't intend to enjoy your delightful company a great while longer."

"You aim to quit soon?" the other inquired, immediately interested.

"As soon as I finish up a column of those little crosses on my cards," Sheraton dryly replied. "I'm afraid I can't stand a great deal more of either my surroundings or you. But you're due for rather a protracted stay, I'm afraid," he added. "When I'm waving farewell, you'll still be waiting at the dock; waiting and sweating."

But to that, Gypsy Scammel only grinned knowingly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOOK WOULD ABDICATE.

THE new subforeman continued the many persecutions practiced by his predecessor, even to keeping Sheraton from the diversion of trips to the mixer, now mixing and pouring its concrete a mile from the key. But the latter continued to go out to the dock each morning, firm in his resolve to last another day, and to return, wilted and spent in the evening, to add another little cross to his card.

But finally, on the last day of February, he told himself he could hold out no longer, the last column of little crosses being completed. That evening he took down his card and figured his coming pay, counted the currency he had from other monthly pay checks cashed at the commissary store and found he had a stake of a hundred and thirty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents.

He rose from his bunk with an indescribable feeling of relief surging through him, lit a match to the card, and, with tentmates curiously watching, saw the bit of pasteboard flare up, blaze for a few moments, then curl to a wisp of ashes on the tent floor.

"What's the idea?" inquired the straw boss, his hard eyes intently taking it all in.

"The idea," Jason Sheraton replied with an annoying grin for his whilom tormentor, "is that I shall not need a going-home card any more. I'm going away to-morrow. I'm through with Pigeon Key. I'm through with the bull gang and the cement and the heat and sweat. And"—he rose and smiled blandly—"I'm quite through with you, my sweet, delightful friend."

He floridly bowed, his magnetic face alight with an ironic smile.

"I've sweat blood as well as sweat." He held his finger aloft, still raw from a recent session at loading. "I've burned

and ached and endured and cursed. For over eight, creeping, hideous months I've remained in the muck of this delightful little isle of pleasure and repose—for one hundred and thirty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents."

He lit a cigarette and tossed a smoke ring airily toward the surly Scammel.

"And to-morrow I'm going to leave for distant parts."

The other bullies, sitting in the dim flicker of the candles on the cracker box, most of whom had liked Sheraton, watched him a bit dolefully. One of the newer bullies, a sad little man of forty, with nearly a hundred uncrossed marks on his own card, glanced up with a muffled sigh. "You mean," he asked, "that you're gonna beat it, dook?"

Sheraton glanced about the group, forgot their coarseness and vulgarity and saw them only as a collection of unfortunate, painfully weary men, with very many big looming marks still uncrossed on their little cards.

"Yes," he replied with a friendly grin. "I'm leaving in the morning. And I only wish all of you chaps were able to make it, too."

Then he stepped to his bunk and stripped the dust-caked rags from his trim limbs, caught up a water bucket, and left the tent.

He had a delightful hour of loafing the next morning while waiting for the local office to open and get his pay check. And after that he packed his few belongings in a clean cement sack, ready to leave. But before leaving for the short dock near Riverside Drive, where a launch for Marathon was shortly due, he turned his gaze about the tent for a final, lingering survey, and then he bid the place, that for over eight, painful months had been his home, an ironic farewell.

A feeling of vast relief, a delightful feeling that swept his senses like an exhilarating breeze, surged through him as he turned from his own bunk.

Thoughts of Marathon, then Havana and Europe paraded through his mind in joyous procession. Freedom! Safety! He had plenty of friends in Europe. He grinned joyously as the words lit his mental vision. Once again he counted over the roll of greasy bills, placed them with the company pay check, thrust the whole into his trousers pocket, and, picking up his bundle, turned for the doorway.

"Where d'ya think you're going?" The heavy, rasping voice fell upon the fugitive's ears like a spirit-deadening dirge. He glanced up from the sudden shadow across the doorway, into the swarthy face of the straw boss.

"It's none of your damned business, of course," the fugitive answered easily, "but I'm going to Marathon, my friend."

The other man slowly shook his head.

"No, you ain't, *Mr. Robert Kernan*," said he. "You're gonna go down to the dock and *bull* cement. But first you're gonna hand over that roll of money. Fork it over."

Sheraton's easy smile broke out. "Really!" he drawled.

"Yes, reely. Fork it over," rasped the other harshly, blocking the entrance.

The fugitive stared his surprise. Then all his feeling for the other blazed out in sudden anger. "Stand aside," he said impatiently, "or I'll leave your body here unconscious before I do go." He stooped and picked the tent hatchet from the floor.

"No, you won't," the other declared slowly, confidently, drilling his companion with his tense gaze. There was something ominous in the man's quiet assurance. Sheraton felt it and his buoyancy began to slowly leak from him. "You tried that rough stuff once. Only it wasn't a hatchet that time," said the swarthy man steadily. "But you won't pull it now. Not if you got any sense a-tall."

He thrust his face near the other's.

"Not after I tell you—your—real—name. And what I got on you." The words dropped haltingly from the coarse lips, falling upon the listener's consciousness like the somber beat of a funeral knell.

The color slowly left the fugitive's face. He moistened suddenly parched lips with his tongue. He tried, desperately, to force back the apprehension that mounted within him. He tried to tell himself that the fellow was merely bluffing. But in his heart he knew that it wasn't so. He knew, as he gazed back into the confident eyes of the man, what his words were going to be.

"What do you think my name is?" asked the fugitive in a pale voice. "And what do you think you've got on me, Scammel?"

Gypsy Scammel's black eyes held the other man's in a tense, triumphant look.

"Your name—your *real* moniker—is Jason Sheraton," was the quiet reply. "And what I got on you is—murder."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DOOK REIGNS ON.

THE final words fell like an icy drop upon the fugitive's hot brain and froze his senses to momentary numbness.

It was out at last! The gruesome word and the name—his own, that for months he had feared to hear—were uttered aloud.

For tense seconds they stood there, gazing into each other's eyes. Then the harsh laugh of the accuser broke the spell, bringing back the fugitive's thoughts in a desperate rush. His grip upon the hatchet handle tightened. His arm swung slowly backward. But in the next instant reason returned. His hold relaxed and the weapon slipped from nerveless fingers to the floor.

"So you are a detective, after all?" he said slowly. The voice was colorless and the face looked suddenly hag-

gard. "I discounted that possibility the first day, when you didn't take me in. Well, let's have a show-down, Scammel. What do you think you know?"

"You killed Mike Raglan," was the reply.

"I don't even know the name," said the fugitive.

"Maybe not," responded the other dryly. "The papers ain't particular about the monikers of common guys. Unless they do the croakin'. Mike Raglan"—the black look returned to the speaker's face—"Mike Raglan was my best pal. And you croaked him in cold blood. You done it with a wine bottle—if you want exact facts—on a night last June, in Monet's Restaurant up in New York."

"How do you know?"

"I was there the night you done it. No, I didn't see it pulled. But I saw you come in and I saw you go out. And a guy you know—friend of Monet's, named Bouchard, saw you do it and even found your watch there. I helped carry poor Mike out when the cops came. I worked at Monet's with Mike. And I knew you from your being in the place before, with your friends. Oh, we all knew you there—Jason Sheraton, the high-toned swell!"

The passionately working face was again thrust close.

"And every night afterward, for days and days, I hoped they'd get you and hang murder on you and send you up. Mike was the best pal I ever had. But you got clean away—so everybody thinks—except me."

A heavy scowl clouded the hard face, already flushed with black passion.

"And then they gave me the sack at Monet's one night when I came in drunk. And I soon got up against it. Work, I found, was pretty hard to get. So when things got too bad I shipped down here with a lotta bums from the parks. And then, the very day I landed, I spotted you."

"So you're not a detective?" asked Sheraton hopefully.

Scammel shook his head. "Them blokes 're still lookin' for you."

"Why didn't you expose me when you first saw me?"

"I did come near making that mistake," replied the other with a harsh laugh. "I was gonna do that when I lamped you on the dock. When I see you, cement, sweat and all, down here in the common muck with the common muckers of the bull gang, I was so excited I come near squealing on you right then."

"And you're not going to do it now?" Hope struggled more strongly.

"Not yet a while." The swarthy face grinned evilly. "I pretty soon saw what kind of a job this bull gang was. And what I didn't know about it I got from the squawks of the other bullies. So I got a swell scheme. Maybe, I thought, they'd only hang second-degree murder on you, if I turned you over. And you might not get the chair. Twenty years in Sing Sing'd be pretty bad for a swell guy like you, all right. But it wouldn't be bad enough. You'd still be drawing your breath. And poor Mike Raglan's dead. So I got thinkin'. Sing Sing's bad enough, I thinks. But the old bull gang down here's worse—when you know you *gotta* stay down here."

The fugitive moistened his dry lips as the man's plan dawned on him. "You're not going to try to keep me down here?"

"I'm *gonna* keep you down here. You can't get away. Ocean all around. Even if you did get to Marathon I could have 'em phone some cops over from Key West. But they wouldn't even have to hold you there. Railroad's the only way you can get out. You'd probably starve to death tryin' to make it by walkin'. Even by train, if you had some dough, they'd wire ahead and get you. And without any money to get

out by train this is the best prison I ever heard of. I got you, Sheraton. They say this job might be finished in another year. It might. Then again it might take longer. No matter how long it takes, though, there's always time, before it's done, to send you up then. But while it's on—one year or two—you stay down here." The swarthy face lit with satisfaction.

"You get it, dontcha?" he continued. "The worst of the heat'll be coming on again before many months. And always the cement. In your eyes, in your nose and throat; in your blasted hide itself. And the sweat mixed with it all over your aching body.

"Your fingers sweating blood and the chafing so bad between your legs sometimes you can hardly mosey from the dock to your tent at night. Seven days a week!" The hairy throat chuckled, though the malignant eyes showed no mirth. "The slaves that built them pyramids didn't have much on you, building this railroad, for a tough life. You get it, dontcha?"

The fugitive got it, all of it, and the light died in his bold eyes, leaving them like burned-out cinders. Yet, even now, he clung to a thread of hope.

"You'll have to stay down here all that time, too," said he. "Can you stand it, Scammel?"

The latter nodded.

"As long as I know you're suffering. And I'm straw boss, you know. I don't build the cement. But I'd stand hell itself to get you down there with me. Besides, I'm gonna get more out of this than just satisfaction for poor Mike Raglan. *You'll be workin' for me.*"

"You don't mean—you can't mean—that you intend to take my measly wages?" The fugitive's eyes came to life in a sudden blaze of indignation.

"Every pay day, after you cash the checks at the commissary for me. All but five dollars a month. I'll leave you that for smokes and things. I ain't

heard of a reward out for you and I'm gonna get something out of this."

"Why," exclaimed the other, "that's blackmail, Scammel. Common, dirty blackmail!"

"It is," was the response. "But yours is murder."

"Well, suppose I don't submit," the fugitive demanded, after an angry pause.

"Sing Sing's the answer—or maybe the chair. Unless you got a lotta money for fancy lawyers. It might be worse down here than up the river. But I guess you'll choose it. You still got *some* chance down here, if it is slim, you know.

"A miracle *might* happen. A hurricane might come up next fall like the one four years ago, that got a hundred and forty blokes. And it might get me and not you. A ship might pick you up at sea and land you way over in Liverpool, like it did one guy picked up at sea in that storm. There's always some chance down here—while you still got your breath—and liberty from the law. A miracle might happen. But up there in Sing Sing, well— Now fork over that roll you got."

At thought of the loss of the paltry savings of all the months in the bull gang of Pigeon Key, at remembrance of what he had given in exchange for the money, for days and weeks and months, Sheraton's gorge rose, engulfing his reason for the moment.

He rose from the bunk he had sunk to and swept the swarthy face with a glance of defiance.

"You go to hell!" he replied through set teeth.

"Fork it over."

The fugitive's lips tightened and he did not stir.

The crunching sound of footsteps on the pebbly pathway outside floated in to the two men on the still, morning air. The straw boss stepped to the doorway and glanced outside, then returned.

"All right," said he, with an air of finality. "Frelson, the boss of the carpenters, is right outside the tent. I can step out there this second and tell him you're Jason Sheraton, wanted for murder—and show him a newspaper picture to prove it—or I can leave you keep on being Bob Kernan for a while. C'mon, call the turn," he snapped impatiently. "Which is it? Sheraton or Kernan?"

For a brief instant hot emotion and cold reason battled in fierce conflict in the fugitive's tortured mind as his thoughts searched about desperately in an attempt at a decision. The mere thought of losing the hard-won savings and the long-awaited chance of escape from the place was maddening. But capture and imprisonment were unthinkable. He felt imprisoned in a mental vise, held there, struggling, by the two immovable sides of the dilemma. Then cold reason slowly won and he made the inevitable choice.

Gypsy Scammel was right. There was always a chance down here. It might never come off. Fate—a fate that now seemed always malicious—might divert it from him. But it existed. Up behind those walls of the big penitentiary, however, there was no chance. His reflection was swift. His decision was made. He drew the precious roll of money from his trousers and flung it on the floor.

"There, damn you!" he said with quiet fury.

The other man picked it up, counted the wad of bills, made a mental note to have the check cashed the next day and pocketed the roll. "All right, Kernan," said he, with emphasis on the name.

"Scammel," said the fugitive, "I'll get you for this. I don't know how, but the chance will come. If you drive me too far I'll kill you, anyway, despite any consequences."

"No you won't," was the easy reply.

"Not while you still got any sense. The minute they found my body they'd all know you done it and you couldn't get away. And I'd be missed inside an hour. One guy like me can keep a secret—when it pays him to. But a camp of six hundred guys can't, even away out here in the ocean. You'd be done for then."

He started for the door, then turned. "I gotta get back on the job now. I'll give you a little vacation till noon. At twelve o'clock you be out at the end of the dock," he warned. "No damn nonsense, either. Every hour you don't work costs me money, y' know." And he was gone.

The fugitive mopped the thick beads of perspiration from his hot forehead and for many minutes sat there, bitterly reflective, his buoyancy of the early morning turned to stark dejection. Then he left the tent, with sagging frame as in a daze, absently took a drink at the Copley Square tank and strolled, with aimless step, out to the end of the short dock.

Off in the near distance the creepy gray body of a shark, white belly bright in the glistening sun as it flashed into momentary view, showed for an instant like a sinister portent of the place. The sharp cries of the white gulls, gliding and wheeling in the still air over the sun-beaten water, fell upon his ears like plaintive notes of despair. And the muffled sound of the launch riding by toward Marathon sounded like a somber call of derision.

The timekeeper was in that launch, he knew, going toward the company pay office, where he himself had expected to be in less than an hour. His eyes were longing as the boat grew smaller in the distance; and for many minutes he sat there on the pier, long after the launch had disappeared, the light in his gray eyes dimmed to a faint smoldering as he tried to beat back the murky thoughts that kept rising.

But his fine courage finally asserted itself and he clutched at the thin thread of hope that remained.

"Scammel's right," he told himself, grimly pulling himself together. "A miracle might occur down here. But up North, up the river, once behind those walls, I'd be gone."

He got to his feet with sudden energy, his eyes again glinting, his mouth indomitable. He'd wait and watch, for months and months, if necessary, and be ready to take instant advantage of that miracle—if it ever occurred.

At noon he was again down at the end of the long dock, under the blazing sun, hooded and in line, ready to start in on the afternoon's grind. His fellow bullies stared their surprise at seeing him again but his forbidding face silenced their intended facetiousness.

The curiosity over Sheraton's unexpected return to work was still evident that evening as his tentmates gaped at the forbidding features. But at about ten o'clock that night the common interest at No. 9 Bowery was suddenly transferred to another, as a figure unexpectedly filled the tent entrance, gazed dully about the candle-lighted place, and then sank to a vacant hunk.

The creature's face, fringed thick with a growth of ugly, dark beard, was drawn and haggard as well as scarred and beaten. The mean little eyes, furtive and fear-struck, looked, in their hollow sockets, as though he was close to starvation as well as horror, and there was an animal look in the unlovely, pock-marked face that held the attention in gaping wonder. The miserable creature stared stupidly about for a moment; then, with a sound like a half sob, half curse, he buried his face in his grimy hands.

A bully stepped from his bunk and placed a hand on the man's shoulder. "Why," said he, looking about at the others, "it's Trager. He never got back North at all!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROCKS.

THE seven tent occupants, in various degrees of dishabille, gave over intentions of retiring and crowded about the almost unrecognizable figure crouched near the candle.

"Sure enough, it's Trager. We thought you and Alec made it back North. What happened, Trager?"

"You look almost starved and kinda scared. Did ya have to ship over?"

"Where's Big Alec?"

"Where's your banjo?"

"Musta had a lotta booze, huh?"

The questions and comment peppered the ghastly figure from all sides. The pock-marked man raised his head and peered dazedly at the curious faces with his bloodshot eyes.

"It was the Rocks. They got me," he replied in a husky whisper, and shivered a little, though the night was oppressively warm. A man handed him papers and tobacco. Trager rolled a cigarette with fingers that shook like aspen leaves in a sudden stir of air.

"D. T's," observed a bully with a wink.

Trager overhearing, shook his head. "No D. T's," he replied weakly. "The Rocks: they got me." And again he shivered as if in horror of the very name.

"They got your bank roll?"

"They got your banjo?"

"They got everything—they got me nerve," was the awed reply.

"What happened?" demanded the straw boss brusquely. "Where's Big Alec?"

"Alec made it—at last," Trager replied, looking up dazedly. "He got his guy, an ironworker, with a big roll. And he's made it North, at last. I tried to do it like he did, then. It was a cove from Ohio Key, with a nice stake. But I could hear the scream of the other bloke yet. It stuck in me ears—and I

kept seeing the blood. I can see it yet. So I didn't have the guts to do it when I had the chance—so I hadda ship over." The words came forth in a broken string.

One bully, with a display of attention amazing for the place, lit a match and considerably touched it to Trager's cigarette. Another got him a drink of water. The unusual attentions were warranted by the situation. Here was first-hand evidence, and news, of the Rocks, the famed mental hazard that had balked so many from the prayed-for goal of "back North," and caused them to ship over on the job.

"What happened?" growled the impatient Gypsy, again. "Don't go rambling like that. Spring it."

Trager inhaled deeply and then withdrew the cigarette from flaccid lips with his quivering fingers. "That mornin' we left, Big Alec and me—— When was it? Two months ago? Three?"

"Three weeks ago," laughed a bully.

Trager blinked his astonishment. "Three weeks ago? You ain't kiddin' me? Gee, it seems like a couple months. Well, that mornin' we left, we hit Marathon nice and early and we have a talk, Alec and me. First we was gonna beat it right back in the woods and get a drink. But we heard so much about the Rocks we says, 'No,' when we stop to consider. 'We'll take the train right up North, get off at some stop on the way later and get us a bottle.'

"The blasted Rocks wasn't gonna get us. We'd fool 'em all and get away clean with our bank rolls. So we sit down outside the office there. Train time's two hours off. Sun begins to pour down like a furnace and sucks the sweat out of us in buckets full.

"Half past nine comes. It seems like a week, waitin' there. Alec looks at me. I look at Alec. There's the Rocks, not five minutes away, and it looks cool."

Some one laughed. "Cool, the devil! Youse blokes had drink on yer minds."

Trager nodded. "Yeah," he admitted. "We couldn't keep from thinkin' about that, neither one of us. Here we been sweatin' on the job all them months with nothin' but work and cement and heat. Ain't even had a single drink in all that time. It makes me tongue stick to me gullet just to think of one."

"And here we both got a nice roll o' money on us. No boss to bother you. No work to go to. Train time a long ways off and nothin' to do but think about how a shot o' licker'd taste. Alec licks his lips kinda mournful and looks at me. I lick mine and then I look at Alec.

"'We better stick it out till train time,' I says. 'Too late to be sorry afterward, when we got to ship over.'

"Alec cusses some but the shippin'-over part hits him and he says, 'Yes,' too. So we wait some more. We wait and wait. We're sure it's a couple minutes to eleven now. We get up to mosey up the line to get our tickets. A bloke from the office comes by. We ask him the time, to make sure. It's only a quarter to ten! Alec lights a cigarette and plays a tune on his harmonica. Then all of a sudden, he quits and groans.

"'No harm gettin' just one half pint and bringin' it back here,' he says. 'I got a little pleasure comin'. I been sweatin' seven months for it.'"

Trager rolled another cigarette as the others knowingly grinned and waited for the aftermath.

"Well," he continued haltingly, "me, I give up, too. Seemed like that train never would be ready. We go down toward the woods. Before we get in among the trees very far they's a guy comin' at us through the jungle grass. His eyes look hungry. He's whiskers all over his face. Clothes all torn. He whines a little for a piece o' change to get somethin' to eat with."

"We just pass on and he keeps fol-

lerin' on behind. Then another guy comes from behind the trees. It gets me kinda leary. Just like wolves, slinkin' after us, they was. But Alec just laughs when I say something. 'Them coves?' Alec says. 'You ain't scared o' them, are ya?'

"We go deeper in the woods and it's gettin' thicker and darker, now. We see a little shack where some blacks sell crackers and tobacco and stuff and we buy some cigarettes and then ask about some licker.

"The two smokes 're big and husky, with arms like a gorilla. One of 'em says to foller him. Just then one of the white guys near us pulls me arm and says, 'Don't you know me, Trager?' And when I take a good slant, it's Dutch. He never got back North either."

"Not St. Louis Dutch, from the next tent?" some one asked.

Trager nodded. "St. Louis Dutch—who quit the week before me, with two hundred and fifty bucks that took him nearly a year down here to get. I slipped him four bits and he buys a couple boxes of crackers and shovels 'em in his mouth like he was a starving dawg. Remember that heavy guy—Porky? I see him in the woods next day, too. And 'Husk' Leary, that big-mouth bloke from the tent over in Kearney Street. But his mouth wasn't so big then. He'd been in the jungle three weeks before he could make hisself ship over with them others a couple days later.

"They was all like a pack o' wolves, they was. Nerve all gone. Some of 'em'd get down on their knees, almost, and whine for some money. But you knew if they saw you down, the hull pack of 'em'd be on you right off."

"Then you got the stuff?" asked the straw boss.

"Yeah. We went with the two smokes deeper in the woods and down near the ocean they dig up a pint for

us from somewhere. I hear afterward they get it off white blokes who run it in at night on a fast launch. They got to get it secret like that. Illegal stuff. No revenue on it."

The little man grimaced. "It was fierce stuff—this 'third rail.' But we been eight months waitin' for it! We finish the pint, then we get another. By then me old knob is buzzin' around. That stuff just kicked you inside out. Terrible! But I still got a little sense left and I says to Alec we oughta be gettin' back for the train and he says, 'Sure, after just one more pint.'

"We had it. By that time neither one of us cares if they's any rattler going North a-tall. We get some more and some more and walk round through the woods with it—and that's the last I know about that drunk. We both wake up that night laying under some trees."

"Rolled for your money, huh?" asked a bully.

"Every copper. Even me banjo and Alec's mouth organ is gone."

"The black guys got it?" asked Scam-mel.

Trager shook his head.

"We thought it was them, first. Alec gets up and bellers around and says he's gonna go right after them smokes and get it back. So we start back through the woods. It's maybe eight o'clock and so dark in them trees and vines we can't see a thing. We don't locate the black coves and the shack we was at is closed. 'Well, we lay around a while, and then, about a hour later, we hear some sounds from way back in the woods near the ocean. And it's my banjo and Alec's mouth organ playin'."

He wiped the heavy perspiration from his forehead. A man again handed him papers and tobacco. "What then?" asked the donor of the makin's.

"Then we sneaked through the trees where the sound come from and down at a open space on the beach there's a

fire, with eight blokes sittin' around it. They're all drunk; laughin' and yellin' and one's got my banjo and another cove is got Alec's mouth organ.

"All white guys, they are. From the job. Been rolled on the Rocks and stayin' in the jungle there till they get up gumption enough to ship over. They must of got Alec and me and rolled us for the money when we're sleepin' off our drunk.

"We each get a tree branch for a club and we sneak in on 'em. Big Alec yells for his money. They just laugh. Then Alec grabs the banjo from the one and the fight starts. Gee, it's fierce. Worst I ever see."

The bloodshot eyes blinked comically in excitement at the recollection.

"The hull eight of 'em drunk and me and Alec got hangovers. What a scrap! It's like animals in a jungle after a while. Roarin' and snarlin', bitin' and scratchin' and gougin', after we lose our clubs. Big Alec is like a madman, bellowin' like a bull till I thought you could almost hear it over on Pigeon Key, while he knocks 'em over, right and left. When he loses his club he swings my banjo and busts it all to pieces on a cove's head and then he starts in with his hands. Four and five on top of him at once, chewin' and clawin' at him. But he keeps shakin' 'em off.

"Pretty soon a cove knocks me out and when I come to life again there's Alec, still shakin' 'em off and bellowin'. But they got him, too. There was the eight of 'em. One bloke finely comes up behind and knocks him out with his own club. When he comes to his senses again we're both tied up against a tree yards from the fire and they're sittin' around the fire again, cuttin' cards from a deck some bloke had, to see which the lucky ones'll be."

The speaker paused and puffed a cigarette butt. Then he indicated his nose. "Me nose was bust. I had one

of me ears nearly tore off. Alec is bleedin' where a guy bit his cheek and one eye is closed. And of all the eight blokes around the fire there ain't one that ain't like a dawg just out of the pit. Well, we sit there, tied up, and hafta watch them bloody coves around the fire. That's the only light they is, besides the stars. But can hear every word they say."

"What was they cuttin' the cards for?" asked a bully.

"To see which ones go North on the train and which ones ship over again next day. There's enough of our money left to get three of 'em pretty far back North.

"It's all quiet—not a sound but the fire cracklin' and a little *swish-swish* from the ocean where a mite o' breeze stirs up the water—when they cut. Then all at once they's a scrap started among themselves. They ketch one bloke cheatin'. Finely that dies down, too. They split the rest of our bank rolls among the lucky three and then they sneak off in the trees in the dark and leave us tied up there.

"We get loose maybe a hour later. The fire's out—nothin' but a black pile o' burned sticks left and empty booze bottles layin' around. It's pretty dark, even in the open under the sky on the beach. Awful quiet it is—and awful lonesomelike, too. Seems kinda creepy back there with trees all around us except in front where the ocean stretches out, and only the stars up above for light. Only sound is when a little breeze comes up and the water washes along the shore a little. That makes it lonesomer than ever. That damn *flap-flap-flap* on the beach sounds sorta like a mournfullike callin' away off there. We listen, but they's no sound of the gang, so we quit and flop in the woods that night."

"See 'em again next day?" asked some one.

"No. We started out next mornin'

to mosey up the line to the railroad station for the three that won the money. But a couple coves from the company offices sees us, bloody and all, and they tell us we can either sign over for the job or heat it off the company property. So we hafta get back in the jungle."

"And you stayed there till now?"

"We hadda—or ship over again. And when we think of them months in the bull gang—just to get enough stake to get back North broke again—we can't do it. Big Alec keeps sayin' he'll never sign over. He's gonna wait and get some other bloke's roll like they got his."

"Well, for a long time there ain't any chance. Every mornin' we come out the woods and watch for fellahs blowin' the job, cashin' in and comin' to the Rocks for licker. Most of 'em don't come a-tall. They're cagy. They get to Marathon close to train time at eleven o'clock, get their money, and make the train out safe. They ain't takin' no chances on the Rocks. Some come back in the trees, get their booze, take a couple swigs and beat it right out. Others, they miss the train and got to stay over at Marathon the hull day and night, until the next train. And some o' these play it safe and go right over to the hotel shack and stick there. But a few of 'em can't stay away from their licker that long and they come back in the jungle and get their booze. When they do that they're mostly gone if they don't come right out."

"We tail after 'em all, Big Alec and me, with some other fellahs on the Rocks. We all sneak out like a lotta alley cats and foller the blokes with money off the job. But for quite a while there ain't any luck. They all go in the woods and come right out again."

"How did you get your grub?" asked Scammel.

Trager passed a hand wearily over his eyes, as if to erase a vision. "We

didn't get much grub," he replied dully. "Some days we didn't get any. Then some fellahs'd give us a little change. But most of 'em just give us the laugh. And others seemed kinda scared and leary. Heard all about the Rocks, I guess. And when they see us after 'em they hustle past fast. And sometimes the black guys'd chase us back. All of them fellers was pretty well heeled. One is got a knife in his belt. Others, they got rods showin' on 'em."

"One time," he continued, "we didn't get anything for maybe three days. Then two men in a skiff landed on shore and they had a few oysters they give us. They was sponge fishers, I guess, and they said they got the oysters off the ocean bottom out in deep water."

"Oysters!" Scammel exclaimed. "Where's oysters around here?"

"Well," Trager insisted, "these come from near here, all right. But they wasn't any good eating." He grimaced. "They wasn't like any oysters I ever seen, either. The shells inside was whiter and smoother than any I ever saw before. Guess they ain't much good for anything."

Sheraton's eyes lit with interest.

"Just where did those men get the oysters from?" he asked.

"About five miles straight south from Marathon," was the reply. "That's what they said. Out in deep water. They was after sponges and they scraped up these oysters from the ocean bottom. They's a little bit of an island out there. Most of it's under water, though. First oysters they ever saw around these parts, they told us. But the darned things wasn't any good for eating." Again the man grimaced.

"Well, anyway," he continued, "after we was ready to eat almost anything I says to Alec, I says, 'I'm gonna go back and sign up on the job. I can't stand this any more.'

"But Big Alec starts in cussin' something awful. Then he gets mad and

says to beat it if I wanna. But he's gonna stick right there on the Rocks till he gets his man, if it takes all year.

"He looks almost like a wild man, now, with his beard gettin' longer and shaggier every day and his cheeks kinda sunk and his eyes are gettin' a wild and fierce look, too. I begin to get scared of him, sometimes. And then, this mornin'"—the voice became more halting—"Big Alec does get his man. He's on his way back North now, at last. And me—I hadda sign over."

The voice thinned to a whisper.

"What happened?" inquired several in unison.

The shaken little man brushed blood-shot eyes with trembling fingers as if to keep out a sight. Some one gave him another cigarette.

"What happened?" the others repeated.

"Sure—spring it," snapped the straw boss impatiently.

A trace of horror showed in the speaker's eyes.

"Well," he continued, "it's this mornin'. It's about ten o'clock," said he huskily. "We come out from the trees. We ain't had nothing to eat since noon, the day before. We're all bit up from mosquitoes and I'm feelin' kinda sick. It was damp layin' back there on the ground all them nights.

"I says to Alec again, 'I guess I gotta go up to the office and sign over,' and just then a cove, right off the job, comes toward the Rocks, countin' a roll o' bills that'd make you cockeyed. He's one of them ironworkers, we find later, and was with the gang layin' the trestle work on the finished arches around Knight's Key. Them blokes get big wages and better eats then we do, ya know. When Big Alec spots that roll, his eyes get wilder and hungrier 'n ever and he grins, kinda funny."

"That's my guy now. I got enough o' this dam Rocks stuff," Alec says, kinda fierce and sudden.

"'What you gonna do, Alec?' I ask him. His eyes look so wild I think for a minute he's gone crazy. It makes me leary. He stoops down and picks up a club of wood layin' in the grass. It's about two feet long, and heavy.

"'I'm gonna get back North,' he says, sharp, like he means business. 'I'm gonna get my guy right now. And I ain't gonna wait for him to get drunk, either, and let somebody else beat me to him.'

"He hides the club behind him, then he tails on after this ironworker cove, me after him. Well, they keep on going. The trees and vines get thicker and thicker and pretty soon I lose sight of 'em. They must be close to the ocean now, I figger. I'm maybe fifty yards back."

The cigarette slipped from the yellow-stained fingers and the halting speech stopped as the little man shuddered slightly.

"Well, then what?" demanded the straw boss.

"Then," Trager replied, in a subdued voice, "then, all of a sudden, I hear a yell from back there—and then a kind of scream. What a sound! Then they's another scream—a long one—awful scared, and toward the last pleadin'like. I can feel myself shaking there in the jungle grass. I listen—kinda sick—for a long time, it seems—but now it's all still again. Then I hear branches breakin' and there's Big Alec bustin' through the trees on the dead run. He slings away the club and keeps right on comin' through the jungle.

"I called out to him when he goes by but he looks like he never even heard me. His face is white. His yellow teeth 're showin' in a funny kind of grin. But his eyes! They ain't grinnin'. He keeps right on going, out the woods, past the pay office and up the line to the railroad station. And that's the last I see of Big Alec. A guy tells me afterward he's on the rattler

when she pulls North a few minutes later."

An onlooker noisily struck a match to his pipe. Sheraton stood silent, a fascinated look in his eyes. Then another scene flashed into his mental vision—a scene in a restaurant up in New York—and a guilty flush spread over his features.

"So then you signed over, hey?" some one asked.

Trager came from his reverie with a start. "Then I signed over. I hadda. I couldn't stay another night on the Rocks—back in them trees and vines and jungle grass. I had a swell chance to get back North, too. Nearly as good a chance as Big Alec. It was a cove from the job, just after cashing in. He come in the woods after his licker and I sneaked along after him. I even had the luck to come past the club layin' in the grass next to a rock where Alec thrun it. I picked it up and crept after the cove. Just one wallop it would of took. Nobody around but us. He never even heard me. I swung back me arm—but I got chicken-hearted. I couldn't make good on it."

The intonation sounded like an apology.

"I was all set—and then I heard the screams of the other cove, that iron-worker. I—I—didn't have the guts. So—I hadda ship over," he concluded weakly.

The straw boss stretched himself and yawned, audibly. "Well," said he in a casual tone and with a glint of humor, "you can start right in again now to flirt with the sun and cement for another try back North. Be down at the dock to-morrow morning at six, sharp. Another cement boat's in. Me, I'm going to hit the hay."

The other bullies followed suit, all except Jason Sheraton, alias Robert Kernan. He rolled another cigarette and stepped outside to smoke it in the soft starlight, his forehead creased with

a thoughtful frown as he sent a half dozen perfect smoke rings aloft toward the bright stars.

"Oysters!" he mused, again and again. "From the deep water, about five miles straight south of Marathon, at a bit of land mostly submerged. And the oysters there weren't the eating kind, either!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

MARCH dragged by, heavy-footed. In company with Scammel, Sheraton cashed his monthly pay check at the commissary store, wrathfully paid the money to his companion, and received, as agreed, five dollars for tobacco and other incidentals for the month.

The usual quota of men quit the job and were replaced by others. And, as usual, a few of those leaving so gleefully, returned, after a brief experience on the famed Rocks, to begin the grind all over.

June arrived in a welter of heat and the bellowings and blasphemy of new bullies was again loud in the land. Always the grind continued, for ten hours a day, seven days a week, without relieving incident as before. And always the fugitive Sheraton watched for the accident that he thought of as "the miracle," which would free him from the bondage of Gypsy Scammel.

There was, too, another tiny thread of hope that he clung to in his thoughts, usually in the hot evenings, as he watched the golden drippings of moonlight dancing on the cobalt reach of the distant water.

He could not forget Trager's mention of the oysters brought in by the sponge fishers at Marathon. Those oysters, according to the little man, had not been the usual, edible kind. And something kept telling Sheraton that they might mean pearls. Always, with the thought, the fugitive's eyes would liven, only to

dim again to smoldering wrath as the burly straw boss came by.

It was about the middle of September when the latter rounded up some forty of the bull gang and astonished them by ordering the lot to their tents, to immediately pack their belongings and prepare to leave Pigeon Key. Sheraton was among the number who gladly flung off their dusty hoods as others crowded about Scammel to ply him with questions.

"The idea is," Gypsy replied, "that from now on, you coves I picked out are gonna live over on Ohio Key. Not enough work left for the whole bull gang here any more, since the viaduct's finished way past Pigeon Key."

The forty, accordingly, packed for the transfer early in the afternoon, scrambled aboard the *Evelyn* and arrived at Ohio Key at about three o'clock.

Sheraton, as he had expected, found himself assigned to a bunk in Gypsy Scammel's tent. The distribution of mosquito bars should have hinted a warning to the newcomers, who had been subjected to no mosquitoes on the treeless level of Pigeon Key. But instead, the innocent arrivals casually flung the netting upon their bunks in superior mirth at the implied necessity and sauntered forth in holiday spirit to explore their new surroundings.

This island, also, was a tiny city of white tents, row on row, with a few frame structures added, bared to the relentless beat of the tropic sun, with the white glare over everything and the bluest of blue water all about, stretching away to the horizon.

It was more attractive—to the eye—than the flat key they had left. Here small patches of shrubbery grew and the thinly scattered palms that met the vision were a picturesque relief after the naked waste of Pigeon Key. A straggling string of tree grew near the two mess halls set partly over the wa-

ter in a declivity at the southern edge of the island, and on another bit of land a hundred yards west there was still thicker vegetation and a long row of good-sized palms to lend a charmingly decorative effect to the landscape.

The camp commissary and a few other frame shacks stood on this further bit of coral, connected with the main part of Ohio Key camp by a long, wooden trestle built over a shallow lagoon between.

Soon, however, the new arrivals were cursing this eye-relieving growth fiercely. They had scarcely finished supper when they knew they were in a mosquito-infested camp—in the very lair of the pests, in fact, with escape from them quite impossible.

In thick little clouds they made their attack, swarming over the entire key. Everywhere the humming, biting pests made their swarms and the camp became a congestion of violently slapping, cursing inhabitants. Despite the heat bonfires soon dotted the island and many of the harassed denizens sat before the smudges and sizzled.

Even the older inhabitants were not at all agreed upon the best method of defense. Some wrapped themselves in blankets, with hands and face guarded, and paraded up and down the long bridge over the lagoon, hour after hour, until exhausted enough to sleep despite the pests in the tents.

Others, unable to endure the additional heat of blankets, walked more rapidly, enduring the bites, the while, but becoming exhausted for sleep much earlier. And the rest merely hung about the hot smudge fires before their tents all evening, going to bed when sleep became possible. And, whereas at Pigeon Key the chief topic of conversation had been the going-home cards and how soon one could "blow," the main discourse here was centered upon the best method of enduring the camp enemy.

However, the actual working day of the bull gang was more agreeable than before. For while they still had to pull cement, their surroundings were more interesting and the actual labor a bit more diversified.

Each morning they scrambled aboard the launch *Evelyn* and, sprawled about her wide deck, had the unique enjoyment of a ride of a half hour or more while being taken out to the mixer or to lighters near the big machine-rigged hulk, where they were set to work at their specialty of transferring cement. It was the nights, now, that the bullies found most difficult to endure.

Soon, however, Sheraton's mind was again on his individual predicament and he was once more stirred to hope of escape. For the equinoctial storms were already on the way and now was the likely time for a chance at freedom, if it was to come.

With every high gale that swept the tiny island and set the canvases violently flapping and with each furious downpour that swamped the key with its splashing, heating tattoo of rain, his hopes rose higher and higher. With tingling anticipation he watched the frightened denizens about him when the gales assumed an alarming ferocity, driving craft and men to shelter. And he intently eyed the glowering Gypsy when an especially furious gale whipped the ocean to an angry, white-topped, seething mass of action that caused the *Evelyn's* skipper to turn back for the key, although it was midday and they were just going to work from dinner.

"It might be one of them hurricanes like the one they got down here in 1906," growled the sub-foreman, when the men were safely landed on the key. He pointed to the glowering sky and to the small skiff, broken from its mooring, which was skidding out on the sea before the gale like a wild, scared thing.

"Ain't you scared?" he asked Sheraton curiously, observing, with a trace of

awe, the man's cool, unafraid eyes so watchfully upon him. "Some of these typhoons'll sweep everything along with 'em. This might turn into a blasted hurricane, you fool. Ain't you scared?" he demanded. He was, like the others, candidly frightened.

The fugitive slowly shook his head, his eyes grave as they surveyed the collection of stupid, fear-struck faces about him.

"No," said he calmly, the words almost smothered in the roar of the wind. "I hope it is the hurricane—may God forgive me," he added to himself, again watching the frightened mob. "I may get free of you at last, then. I may get killed in it—but I'm glad to gamble death against freedom."

The others, astonishment in their fear-creased faces, half believed the man was mad, and huddled still closer together in the protection of the low mess hall to which they had scurried.

But even this storm, like the others of that year, passed without the distinction or wreaking the destruction of a hurricane. And again the fugitive's hopes fell.

His thoughts were desperate that evening as he sat alone on the beach, listening to the softly lapping waves. The stars were out again, a silver shower in the purple velvet of the sky, and the opaline moon dripped a golden radiance over the drowsing sea as the musical swishing of the waves sounded like a lullaby on the soft air.

Back of him the bonfires flared with mocking brightness again, after the wind and the rain. Shadowy figures weaved past the clustering tents, casting great, fantastic silhouettes upon the white canvases as they moved before the light flares.

On the long bridge the blanketed stragglers, an Indianlike parade of stoic misery, moved in solemn procession. The thin strains of the ever-present harmonica stabbed the hot stillness from a

fire near by; and the silver tinkle of a mandolin, wafted from the row of tall palms across the channel, indicated some one's determined effort at pleasure. And from down near the twin mess halls, the wheezing sounds of bagpipes assaulted the night in the most incongruous note yet heard on the place.

Like a tormented soul, cast up in the beguiling beauty of the murmuring beach, the fugitive sat there for lingering minutes. Then Gypsy Scammel came along to break his black silence.

"Not much chance for that miracle now," the saturnine Gypsy grinned. "Looks like the storms are about over. I guess this was about the last."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIRACLE.

OCTOBER passed and with it, as the straw boss had predicted, the autumn gales vanished. November entered calmly; and with the changed condition of the elements, Scammel again taunted the fugitive. It was on a day near mid-November. The ocean, placid under the burning noonday sun, stretched away in glassy expanse with scarcely a ripple to ruffle the glinting surface. The men were leaving the key for the ride out to the job after dinner, and the pair sat smoking up in the bow of the *Evelyn*.

"Well, I guess the chance for the miracle's all gone now," Scammel chortled. "Storms are over. And you won't be here next fall for another chance at 'em. By the first of the year they figger to have the road up clear to Key West. Gonna have a big celebration when she's done, I hear. Some big guns are gonna come down and spout about it. Senators and all. Maybe even the president'll be there. Of course we might be down a few months longer to finish up things. But we won't be here next fall for a hurricane to save you."

"And when we're through here—what then?" the fugitive asked curiously.

Scammel looked knowing. "I might turn you over to the cops then—or, if I see it's gonna pay me, and you behave yourself, I might take you along into Mexico on a job there. And still keep my trap shut—if you work for me there."

The fugitive was thinking of this remark when they knocked off work that afternoon and the wilted bullies scrambled aboard the *Evelyn*, which waited alongside the mixer to bring them back to Ohio Key. Mexico, he mused, would suit him all right in the circumstances. If he escaped there, he'd have a greater chance of remaining undiscovered until he could get to where he wished, than he would have in the United States.

He abstractedly boarded the craft, picked his way over the lounging figures on the already well-filled deck, and, at the end of one of the double rows of men already roosting there, perched up on the last bit of unoccupied space on the roof of the engine room.

A second later Scammel came by, just too late to grab the place, his favorite spot. He scowled at the abstracted Sheraton and then seated himself on the deck floor, just around the corner, at the end of the engine room, with his back at the engine-room doorway.

The craft was badly overloaded when she started off, every foot of space on the deck, on the engine-room roof and even on the elevation above, where the skipper stood at the wheel, being occupied. Perhaps seventy men—part of the mixer crew as well as the bull gang—were crowded upon the squat little craft.

She was just swinging clear of a lighter when the *Two Sisters*, her great paddle wheel at the front churning the water to foam, arrived near by, also loaded with tired, grimy men from an-

other part of the job. In a moment the workers aboard both craft were hurling joking comment back and forth as they sped side by side.

For about a mile and a half the chorus of rough badinage continued and then, as the remarks became more personal and acrid, a spirit of rivalry sprang up which extended to the two skippers.

"We'll beat your dinky little tub in," the captain of *Two Sisters* called.

"No chance," the other skipper returned. "That big crab of yours couldn't do six knots in a storm." And in a moment the badinage of the men rose to a high pitch of boisterous excitement as the race for Ohio Key started.

For more than two miles they raced on even terms, the men yelling like Indians at the chance bit of diversion. Then, as the water became more shallow in spots, the *Evelyn*, which drew more water than her rival, was compelled to swing to the right a little, to strike the channel to the key, about two miles away.

The big, flat-bottomed steamer, her paddle wheel furiously churning the water in front of her, drew a trifle ahead. Her passengers howled their joy. Then the man down in the little engine room of the launch opened her gas engine up wide, grinned broadly and climbed up on deck for a glimpse of the increased excitement.

He got it very soon—more excitement than he had ever dreamed of. His craft drew up on even terms with the other and so close that the cheering of the men aboard both vessels was now a mingled chorus of hooting and yowling. Another minute and the *Evelyn* had forged ahead.

The man at the wheel, to take a direct course for the key now, shot his craft across the bow of the steamer, cleared the giant paddle wheel in front nicely, with a few yards to spare, and then, directly in the path of the great,

churning paddles, the keel of the launch struck the ocean bottom. The skipper, with his badly overloaded boat, had miscalculated the channel as well as the vessel's increased draft.

The *Evelyn* skidded a few yards, lurched drunkenly and then stopped. The man at the wheel turned pale. And within a brief, awful moment, the joyous howls on the overloaded craft became screams of terror, and the madly boisterous crowd was a horror-stricken mob.

"I left the channel—we're on the bottom. Jump!" warned the skipper and leaped into the water as the huge paddle wheel behind, its great blades revolving like a furious, human thing, loomed up above the horrified men, nearer and nearer.

For several awful moments they watched the approaching monster, too fear-struck to move. Then came a bedlam of hoarse yells and frenzied curses and the deck of the grounded launch was alive with a clawing, tearing, fighting mob of yelling humans, as the close-packed, frowzy creatures struggled for the bow of the boat and began leaping into the sea.

A crash sounded above the bedlam and the craft shivered like a palsied thing. Then another crash and another shattered the air as the huge blades struck the stricken boat in savage, wild revolution. As crash after crash followed the stern of the launch began to sink into the ocean bed under the smashing beats. The frenzied press on deck thinned out as the men fought through to the side and leaped overboard like scared grasshoppers. And then the great wheel, like a relentless monster, with its insistent smash, smash, smash, began crawling up along the imbedded wreck and the struggling creatures still on deck, gazing up stupefied at the creeping ogre, fought more frenziedly than ever.

Along the stern the thing pounded

and crashed its way, up to the deck of the engine room, and the sound of splintering, tearing timber assailed the panicky ears as the roof of the engine room was smashed to kindling. And high above the pounding crashes and the splintering of timbers rose another sound that lingered in the ears of the hearers for a long time afterward. A voice, hoarse and beseeching, was screaming, in plain terror at first, then in agony.

The screams came from beneath the revolving monster, out of the shattering wreck, a solo of agony and terror, high above the bedlam chorus of wreckage and fear.

The pounding became slower, stopped. And as the engines of the steamer were reversed the giant crab backed off the launch wreckage as the cries from beneath grew fainter and fainter and then ceased. A muffled groan or two came from the tangled mass that had been the *Evelyn*'s engine room. And then all was still.

The terror-struck rabble had been through an age of fear; but the thing was over in a few, hideous moments. Sheraton, with readier self-possession than the rest, seized an ax at the bow, sprang to the wreckage and began madly chopping away. Another man quickly followed and out of the splintered pile they carried a still, mangled body.

As Sheraton peered down at the victim's features, still twisted in terror and agony, a gasp escaped him.

"Gypsy Scammel!" he breathed, palping, as he realized the scant margin of his own escape. If he had boarded the *Evelyn* less than a minute later and the straw boss a few moments sooner, their positions would have been reversed—and he would have been the bloody thing he now stared at.

The victim, either held motionless by terror, or perhaps trampled underfoot in the mad rush of the frenzied mob,

had evidently been hurled partly through the engine-room doorway and then caught beneath the shattered roof.

Those still on the deck of the wreck gathered about the mangled form.

"Dead?" asked one.

"Dead!" Sheraton started at the word. Perhaps this tragedy was the long-prayed-for miracle. If this still body was, indeed, lifeless, he was free! Free to acquire another stake and then to get away.

He bent down and detected a faint heart action. Then a scarcely audible groan escaped the unconscious form.

Sheraton straightened up and slowly shook his head.

"He's still alive," said he.

A dozen hands transferred the body to a rowboat lowered from the *Two Sisters* and then to the steamer herself, now lying off a short distance, her terrible paddle wheel quiet. And a half hour later, with the *Evelyn*'s passengers aboard, the larger craft was making for Ohio Key, leaving her shattered victim rammed into the bed of the placid, serenely smiling ocean.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXIT GYPSY SCAMMEL.

AT eleven o'clock that night Sheraton received word that he was wanted in the tent at the western end of the key, where, attended by the camp doctor, the mangled man lay. Flipping away his cigarette, the fugitive rose from the smudge fire and followed the messenger through the narrow lane between the white tent rows with a mixed feeling of curiosity and apprehension.

"Perhaps the game's up, at last," thought Sheraton. The straw boss was conscious, he assumed with a grim look, and had sent for him. "He's probably going to expose me, now that he's helpless and fears for his hold on me. Wants me to hear about it. He'll want his revenge for the death of his pal.

His hatred is great enough for that—even if he should be dying. He probably wants to gloat over me now," the fugitive mused.

For an instant the impulse to make a last, desperate attempt at flight, even now, gripped him. He stopped uncertainly, glanced about the fire-dotted island. Then, with a look of resignation, his shoulders suddenly drooping, he stepped toward the tent.

The doctor, a full-blooded, assertive man, met him at the tent entrance.

"How is he?" the fugitive asked dully.

"Can't live," was the blunt reply. "Internal injuries. May not last long enough to get him to the hospital up the line. But he's conscious and wants to see you. Got something on his mind. He was so insistent I decided it best to humor him. Good friend of his?"

Sheraton gravely shook his head. "He'd hardly tell you so."

"Well, don't stay too long," the medico snapped.

Sheraton entered the dimly lighted tent, stepped past the improvised table loaded with medical paraphernalia, and bent down over the ghastly face.

"How are you, old man?" he asked pleasantly.

"I'm—gone," was the faint reply.

"Oh, no you're not," the other lied.

"Yes," was the rejoinder. That sawbones can't—kid me. I can tell it. I guess you always can—when it happens." The words came slowly, in painful periods of effort. "And I gotta get something off my chest—before I go. Get closer."

The other bent closer to the pain creased face.

"I been puttin' it over on you—Sheraton," continued the weak voice. "I ain't got a thing on you. You ain't wanted by—the cops."

"What!" gasped Sheraton.

"You never croaked—that bloke."

"What's that!" The amazed listener

bent down closer still to make certain he had heard aright. "I didn't kill Mike Raglan?" he breathed.

"No."

"Who did?"

"Nobody—yet."

The hearer's astounded eyes eagerly searched the ashen face.

"Are you telling the truth?" he asked sternly. "How do you know, Scamme?"

What seemed the faintest tracing of humor came to the hard countenance, through the pain.

"Because," was the reply. "I'm—Mike—Raglan."

"*You're* Mike Raglan!" Sheraton peered closely into the drawn face, amazement in his own grim eyes. Then he slowly shook his head. "Impossible!" said he—then, to himself. "He's delirious."

"It's the truth—God's truth," the weak voice insisted. "I'm Mike Raglan. You all but did croak me, Sheraton. There's the mark on my skull yet. They thought I was dead when they found me. I was in the hospital—more'n four months. But I pulled out—that time."

"But the newspaper!" exclaimed the incredulous Sheraton, after a moment's astonished silence. "A Philadelphia paper said I was wanted for murder. I saw it myself."

"A newspaper guy—friend of Monet's—was in the joint when Monet came up, I heard later. He thought I was dead, like Monet did. And he beat it right off to his paper. Hadda ketch her before the next edition went to press. It got in just the one edition. Then the news come out I was alive yet, they told me afterward."

And then Sheraton saw it. Although the New York paper had killed the story after printing it in one edition, a Philadelphia paper had used it before a correction came out. "But your name?" he asked. "You signed up in New

York, as well as down here, as Paddy Scammel. One of the bullies who came down with you told me so."

"The New York cops wanted me. I stuck up a bloke there when I come out the hospital. I was broke—and hungry—and Monet wouldn't gimme a job. I found they was shippin' the down-and-outers down here so I signed up under the fake moniker."

"When you saw me that first day on the dock and recognized me—how did you know that I still thought I was wanted for murder?" pursued the other, as the thing began to seem more clear.

"I didn't—at first. I was nearly knocked stiff when I saw *you*—a toff—down here in the bull gang—like any common mucker. I asked Big Alec about you. And he says he didn't have no real dope on you; but from your looks and somethin' you let slip out one day, he doped it out you was wanted by the cops for croakin' a guy for callin' you a name. He even told me the name—the one I called you that night up in New York. It all came to me then. I saw you still was in mortal fear of the cops—that you thought you had croaked me—and you was wanted for murder. And when I saw you didn't know me a-tall I doped up my scheme. I knew I had you then. A feller'll do anything to cover up a murder charge."

"You knew Big Alec before you came down here?"

"No. He just got friendly right off—when he saw we was both out to do you. But I never let on what I had on you."

The astounded Sheraton mopped his dripping face.

"But wasn't I wanted at all? Didn't Bouchard—"

"This Bouchard got his friend Monet and then the cops after you right off, I heard. He was sore—said he was gonna get you—send you up. But after the second day, when they saw I wasn't gonna croak, all they had against you

was assault. And when you lit out they dropped that."

"And I've been through all this, everything down here, all this time—and I never really need have left at all!" the still bewildered man gasped. He gazed sternly at the other. "You're telling me the truth, Scammel—Raglan?" he demanded. "You aren't playing some ghastly joke?"

"It's the God's truth," was the solemn reply. "I hadda tell the truth—get it off my mind—when I knew I was gonna—go." The voice became weaker. "I can't make it up to you—but they's most of the money left—and some of my own." His eyes rolled upward as he tried to turn his head to indicate something. "Under the pillow—a package—get it out."

Sheraton carefully reached under the man's head and drew out a flat package, wrapped in part of a cleaned cement sack. At the other's direction, he opened it. There were parts of two newspapers there, one containing the original story of the murder charge. The other was a more detailed account of the assault in Monet's restaurant, saying the victim had not died and might recover. As the second paper was opened a bundle of bank notes, tied together with a string, dropped to the floor. Sheraton slowly picked up the money.

"There's four hundred and twenty there—all I got from you and some o' my own. It's all yours now. I can't make it up to you for keepin' you down here—but money always helps—it's the main thing with most—in this world."

Sheraton rapidly calculated the amount taken from him, counted off two hundred dollars, and replaced the rest, with the papers, under the pillow.

"Take it all," urged the weakening voice. "It's no good—where I'm going."

But Sheraton shook his head and pocketed his share. "Give the rest to

some poor devil down here," he advised. "I can get away, now."

"This Bouchard is got your watch," continued Raglan. "He turned it over to the police—when they was still after you. But they give it back to him—for you. Git closer."

Sheraton placed an ear close to the slowly moving lips.

"You want to watch out for this Bouchard—and Monet, too."

"Monet?" asked the other, surprised.

"Sure. Him and Bouchard 're in some deal against you. I used to listen outside, when they'd get together in my stall up on the balcony at Monet's. That's why I couldn't get my job back there—they caught me listenin'!"

"A deal against me? Monet, too?" asked the surprised Sheraton.

The mangled man tried to nod. "Something about some pearls. Monet's get 'em in his safe—third floor—business office—restaurant. They was afraid Bouchard's stuff 'd be searched some time—"

The voice was so weak now that it was scarcely audible, and the hairy, saturnine features were more ghastly than ever. The man was clearly sinking rapidly, yet, as Sheraton rose, there was silent appeal in the dull, black eyes, that was unmistakable. Sheraton again leaned over close to the man's lips.

"I'm sorry. But, you know—if you hadn't of put me in the hospital—I wouldn't of been down here myself—neither. Sorry—Sheraton," Raglan whispered, getting the words out with difficulty.

"It's all right, old chap. It's all over now," replied the other reassuringly.

"You was a—game—guy—bo," came in the faintest of whispers. "Game. So—ry—good-by."

The pained eyes closed. Sheraton gazed down at the coarse, ugly face in the pale candlelight for several moments. He brushed away the horde of humming mosquitoes from the still

form, mopped his sweat-dripped brow, and gazed again.

"Good-by, Mike," said the ex-fugitive gently, and softly left the tent.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEYOND THE ROCKS.

FREE! Jason walked slowly back to his tent, his mind a confusion of shifting thoughts and impressions. He could shout his name aloud for all the camp to hear, now. He need never have fled. And Gypsy Scammel, dying back there in the eerie light by the ocean, was Mike Raglan, who had never been killed in Monet's Restaurant at all! He could leave the place in the morning. He could have left any time! The months down here, the physical agony, the mental oppression—he need never have endured them at all!

It was all like a crazy dream—a fantastic, weird, impossible dream. Sheraton passed nicotine-stained fingers across his eyes, and with an effort brought himself back to his surroundings to assure himself that they were real, after all.

Two of his tentmates, sodden, weary creatures, were still seated at the dying fire. He spoke to them. They replied. He felt of his stiff, filthy, khaki trousers. And it was real cement dust that met his touch. Yes, the surroundings were actual.

Off on the long wooden bridge, the last straggling paraders, in quest of exhaustion for sleep, some wrapped in blankets, were monotonously strolling up and down. He saw the light flare as one lighted a pipe. He heard the thin strains of a harmonica from another. And the weird noise from the bagpipes back near the mess halls. The sounds were real. He actually was down here. And yet he was free. He could leave in the morning!

With the complete realization, the hunted feeling and the mental weight

that had pressed so heavily upon his consciousness for months, vanished. And in their place came a flood of relief, vast and indescribable, that seemed to engulf his entire being and leave him momentarily weak and exhausted.

He sank to the ground beside the dying fire and rolled the inevitable cigarette. And in the blue smoke haze, as the waves, gently caressing the bosom of the white beach came to his ears like a lullaby, he was seeing Carol Hoyt, melting-eyed, sweetly curved lips so very serious, as she had been on that fading afternoon in the old office up in New York, speaking to him about work.

Work! Young Sheraton chuckled in sheer exultation as he gayly slapped a vagrant cluster of mosquitoes settling on his bare, tanned arms. He had never known that such work existed. Yet, he reflected, there would be more work, different, but almost as grueling, before he "made back North."

He flipped away his cigarette butt and rose from the smoldering embers, as he called into the tent for Trager.

"How's Gypsy?" another bully inquired, also rising.

"Going pretty fast," Sheraton replied.

The man slapped himself viciously. "Damn them pesky mosquitoes. Wonder who'll be straw boss?" he yawned.

Trager emerged from the tent, sleepy-eyed and grouchy. "Whaddaya want, Kernan?" he growled.

"I want to give you a chance—a real chance—to get back North," the other replied, taking the man off to one side.

Trager's mean little eyes popped in surprise as he passed a hand over his pock-marked face. "You kidding me?" he demanded. "I got so many of them little marks on my going-home card left uncrossed it makes me cockeyed just to count 'em."

Sheraton grinned good-humoredly. "Never mind that," said he. "I'm quitting in the morning. And before I strike back North I'm going after some

of those oysters you spoke of, the night you came from the Rocks. But I'll need help. If you care to quit, and go out with me while I gather them, I'll buy your ticket back North, and give you a bit of a stake for when you land there, besides. I'll get you a ticket over the rails to Jacksonville. And another by boat for Philadelphia. It's cheaper that way. This work may take a week. Maybe longer. But it'll take you months in the bull gang to get out of here otherwise."

"You'll get me back North?" the man gasped.

Sheraton nodded. "And I'll buy the ticket. No more Rocks for you. You don't get even a thin dime in cash from me until you're on the train. How about it?"

"Say," began the amazed bully, "if you ain't kidding me—"

"It's on the level," the other assured.

"But them oysters ain't any good a-tall," the other explained, moved by some unaccustomed urge to an impulse of honesty. "Why, I couldn't hardly eat 'em a-tall, Kernan. And they was funny-lookin' things, the ones I had. A couple of the shells had holes in 'em."

"I'll gamble on their being any good," his companion assured with a grin. "And it sure will be a gamble. But I've a strong hunch about those oysters, Trager. And I'll gamble enough to get you back North, with a little stake, on the hunch. I'll see you at breakfast in the morning."

In the morning, joining the usual breakfast rush, Sheraton and Trager dawdled through the meal, dallied as they shaved, and, after obtaining their pay checks from the camp office, luxuriously loafed about the almost-deserted island until the *Two Sisters*, on her way to Marathon, touched at the camp.

As he was leaving the camp for the last time, the doctor hailed Sheraton.

"How is he?" the latter inquired.

"Passed out a few minutes ago. Just

going to Marathon for instructions," was the reply. "He left this for you."

The medico handed Sheraton two hundred and twenty dollars. "Said he owed you more than that. But it was all he could do, now, to make it up to you. Said to make you take it. It seemed very much on his mind when he knew he was going to go. A debt?"

Sheraton shook his head. "He didn't owe me anything, doc. We were quits. He kept me down here. But I sent him down here."

The doctor, a wise young man in his generation, who had heard many things down here and suspected more, grinned knowingly, then produced a small revolver from a hip pocket.

"Scammel said to give this to you, too. As a keepsake. Seems rather an appropriate gift to remember *him* by, at that," he added.

Sheraton pocketed the weapon and the money and at a blast from the boat the trio left for the wharf. At half past ten they were at Marathon, where the two ex-bullies cashed their pay checks.

Sheraton then engaged one of the office men in conversation and at the end of a half-hour talk left the office, with Trager watchfully in tow, to speak to the camp steward. And from there went to the wharf, where Sheraton dickered with a lean, drawling sponge fisher in an enormous straw hat, whose skiff was lying up at the dock.

By noon the skiff, a poky, broad-beamed boat with a single tattered sail, was loaded with provisions from the camp kitchen, a keg of fresh water, a week's supply of tobacco and matches, a large coil of rope, a small basket and a fifty-pound piece of concrete, formed from a hursted cement sack that had been on the beach in the rain.

Sheraton, still keeping a watchful eye on his companion, then stepped back to the office and deposited the gun and the balance of his money with the office

head, took his receipt, and again the two went back to the skiff.

A half hour later, maneuvering the poky craft with all the skill of his sea-going forbears, he was rounding the wooded point of the Rocks and heading for a coral reef that projected from the water in an island several miles away.

A short distance from the island, which was scarcely a hundred yards long, Sheraton hove to, lowered the sail, and heaved the rusty anchor.

Trager leaned back in the stern and lit a vile pipe, lazily watching his companion rig a tarpaulin as an awning, for protection against the searing sun.

"Might as well be as comfortable as possible," Sheraton observed, getting out sandwiches for a noonday bite. "No telling how long we'll be here."

The other yawned luxuriously, laid aside his pipe and bit hugely into a sandwich. "Suits me," he mumbled between munches. "This here's got it over the old bull gang like a tent. But what," he inquired, plainly amused, "are you gonna do with a lotta bum oysters? I told you the ones I had wasn't any good a-tall, Kernan. You don't expect to sell 'em, do you?"

Sheraton settled comfortably against the port side of the boat and finished his sandwich. "That," he replied, reaching for the tin water cup. "depends on what's in them."

"You don't expect anything to be in them shells except some bum oysters, do ya?" Trager chuckled.

"The odds are plenty long against it," the other replied. "But they're shorter, at that, than they might be, from the looks of several things."

CHAPTER XX.

THE GEM OF THE OCEAN.

THOUGH he had known little of the business operations of the House of Sheraton and not much more about most of the gems it had dealt in, Jason Shera-

ton, like all of his ancestors, did know a few things about the only precious gem to come from the sea—the pearl.

He had handled and learned about pearls even as a small boy, much of his knowledge having been given him as a sort of heritage which had been handed down to Sheratons from one generation to another. He had seen the satiny gems displayed in the most beautiful of settings in the finest jewelry shops in the world; and he had seen them fished from their ocean beds by divers in several of the seven seas.

He knew that though the real home of the pearl oyster is in the Pacific and that most of the finest pearls come from the Far East, this wealth-producing gem had been found in quantity in the Gulf of Mexico, near the West Indies, and in the Caribbean Sea.

Also, he knew that, while the pearl oyster in the Pacific is commonly found within coral islands, in the water of lagoons, high-grade shell frequently is obtained from deep water outside the coral reefs.

The odds against the pearl fisher, in even the best of fishing grounds, could be long enough, of course. In some places, he was aware, the ratio of gems to shells was only one to a thousand—a long enough gamble, in all conscience. Yet he had seen native divers in the Persian Gulf make a haul from a sand bank off a tiny island of the Bahreins that averaged a gem to every forty shells and netted a small fortune for some one for a half day's work.

And here every surface indication was favorable. Trager's description of the mollusks he had received from the spongers pointed, not only to pearl oysters, but to actual pearl-bearing shells.

A pearl, Sheraton knew, is really a membranous deposit, secreted by a sick mollusk to protect itself against intruding substances within its shell that irritate it. A tiny marine creature, or even

a grain of sand, finding its way inside the covering, might cause this irritation and consequent extra secretion of the shell animal. Or a sea parasite, boring through the rough outer shell, might do it. And from Trager's description, some of his shells had been pitted with these holes and all had been irregular in shape, some stunted in growth and others marred with excrescences—all indications of pearl-bearing shells.

Besides, the coral formation in this spot, the hard, sand bottom and the depth of water were additional indications of these water gems. A weighted line dropped overboard when he first hove to had shown a water depth in this location of seven fathoms and more.

This mollusk was not, he supposed, very prolific in this region. Indeed, he had always supposed them to be very scarce, if not practically nonexistent here. But one of the tropic storms or some other whim of nature might easily, he knew, have caused a small colony of the water animals here.

But, stronger than all of these indications, stronger than anything else connected with his coming here, a sort of premonition—or, as he put it, just plain "hunch"—had been his chief urge. Pearls had founded the House of Sheraton. Pearls had largely brought about its fall. Pearls had always been a kind of Sheraton symbol. Would they now raise up the House? The hunch returned to Jason Sheraton more strongly than ever as he dreamily watched the blue wisps from his cigarette fade to nothing in the hot air.

With a start he returned to his physical surroundings and began to disrobe.

"What you gonna do?" Trager inquired. "How do we get them bloomin' oysters?"

"I'll do the getting," Sheraton replied, standing naked except for a pair of abbreviated drawers about his trim waist. "You just stay in the boat and do as I say."

"Not gonna go in after 'em?" the other persisted, glancing doubtfully down into the clear depth of water.

"Have to," returned Sheraton. "Unfortunately they don't come up when you whistle for them." He was an expert diver and swimmer, very much at home in the water, and his companion's evident concern brought a grin. "But first I'm going to see what it looks like down there on the bottom."

"But ain't there sharks in the ocean?"

"Plenty. Though I don't think they come in this close. However, if they do—and you don't see me for a couple of minutes—you'll know I'm wrong."

He poised for a moment on the gunwale of the boat, and the next moment was cutting the water in a graceful, slanting glide. It was close to two minutes later before he reappeared, some twenty yards from the boat, and returned with a long, easy, overhand stroke.

"They're not very thick right here," he explained, shaking the water from his eyes. "Most of the oysters are over in the shelter of the coral reef, I guess. But I'm going after them all and I'll start here and follow around after them."

He uncoiled the great length of rope, fastened one end to the basket he had brought, the other to the concrete rock.

"All you have to do, Trager, is to sit here in the boat, pull the basket up when I give the signal, then pull this weight up each time after I go down. Sure, I'll take it down with me. It's what the native divers in India and Polynesia call a sink stone. Some of them always use a weight to pull them straight to the bottom."

With the weight and the basket he slipped over the boat side and disappeared. He reappeared in less than a minute, as Trager, at the signal, pulled up the basket filled with oysters and then hauled up the stone. The basket was emptied in the boat bottom, the

diver took a short breathing space and went down again, returning with another basketful. After a dozen times or so, the boat was shifted a little and the operations repeated.

It was grueling work for the diver, and the rests, as the afternoon wore on, became longer and longer. Yet it was about five o'clock, with the force of the sun almost spent, before he quit for the day.

Early the next morning the monotonous, exhausting operations were continued and, though the Indian native's diving day is usually ended by noon, the determined Sheraton continued, intermittently, until near sundown.

Day by day the work continued, the load of bivalves rising higher toward the gunwales as the craft was worked around back of the coral reef. Once, on the third day, and again on the seventh day, Sheraton was obliged to return to Marathon and the camp chef for additional food supplies and fresh water.

Each time, as they docked, Trager, who was becoming restless, suggested opening the shells on shore before returning to the coral reef for more—and each time Sheraton firmly refused to do so.

"We'll get the hard work finished first," he said. "The pleasure comes later." And he grinned as he recalled that with him it had not always been thus.

Finally, on the tenth day, the diving and collecting were ended and the isolated oyster bed fished clean of all save the young bivalves. Again they returned to the dock at Marathon for supplies and water; and this time Sheraton, after a glance at the unscrupulous-looking face of his pock-marked companion, went to the company offices and retrieved his gun before returning to the boat.

"Ain't you gonna open up them oysters here on the dock where it's

handier?" Trager, who was eager for his pay and some liquor, demanded.

Sheraton shook his head. "I prefer privacy—especially with so many of our ex-bully friends camping back in the jungle on the Rocks."

"But all your dough is back in the company office. What could they rob you of?" the other persisted.

"Pearls—perhaps," was the laconic reply.

The stocky little man's evil eyes glittered.

"So that's what you been after, hey? Pearls!" he said with a knowing look.

"That's what I'm after. And if I get them, that's what I'm going to keep," Sheraton replied dryly. "And don't make any mistake about it."

"Pearls, huh?" Trager repeated, his shifty glance traveling from the loaded boat to his companion and back.

"Pearls," the latter assented, feeling of the gun in his hip pocket.

CHAPTER XXI.

SEA GOLD.

OUT near the coral reef early the next morning, the search began, with Trager opening the oysters and Sheraton searching for the pearls. But when over two hundred bivalves had been opened with never a sign of even a tiny seed pearl, the eager gleam in the latter's eyes faded, though his lips tightened in greater determination.

Then, when about fifty more had been searched, his prying finger encountered a tiny, round object imbedded in the mantle of a mollusk.

Sheraton carefully removed the globule, which looked like a frozen milk drop, and his gaze livened.

"That one of 'em?" Trager inquired.

His companion nodded. "It isn't worth very much. It's a seed pearl. Just a few grains in size. But it's a pearl. From the shells, I knew they'd have to be here."

Ten minutes later he discovered another, larger pearl, of about fifteen grains, but flattened at the back, where it had grown against the shell. It was an inferior gem, very imperfect in shape. But it sent the embryo pearl-fisher's hopes up several more degrees.

Noon came before any more were found, when three successive bivalves disclosed the white treasure. One pearl was small, irregular and of little value. Another was about twenty grains in weight and of a symmetrical pear shape. And the last proved a real find.

It was a pearl of the first water, with a perfect skin and fine orient, free from any blemish and an almost translucent white. Sheraton judged it to weigh perhaps forty grains and guessed its worth at several hundred dollars.

After lunch there was another long lapse in the treasure finding. But at five o'clock another perfect gem of about thirty grains, a delicate pink-white in color and of perfect texture, was found; and after that, within a space of twenty minutes, three more of about half the size came to light.

They knocked off work then, for a long dinner hour. But after sundown Sheraton rigged up a lighted lantern on the mast and in the dimly streaming rays the pair continued the hunt, accompanied by loud wails of anguish from Trager.

"I didn't bargain for any overtime work," he asserted.

"You didn't bargain at all," his companion reminded him. "But if you think ten hours in the hell gang is an easier day's work than this, at a whole lot less pay, I guess we can arrange it for you." Whereupon the disgruntled man subsided.

The night search discovered nothing of value; but when Sheraton finally retired for the evening on a pile of sacking, after a solitary smoke under the brilliant stars, he was satisfied that his hunch had been correct.

Here was treasure—real treasure. He knew it. The rest of this trove ought to contain at least a proportionate value to that already discovered. And there was always the chance for a really remarkable find in a single gem.

But though his mind was now at ease regarding the fact of treasure, his nerves were in a jumpy state at every thought of its safety. With each passing light over the distant water he felt of the gun that bulged under his hip. And at every restless move of the other man, sleeping at the far end of the boat, he stirred watchfully.

Once a fishing smack, moving, with her dim lights, like a specter over the water, passed within a hundred yards; and, again, a small yacht, atwinkle with deck lights and gay with music and laughter, left a wake not sixty yards from the coral reef. At each approach, the treasure hunter stirred to sudden wakefulness and watched, a hand on his gun, eyes strained upon the moving lights, until the craft vanished into the distant gloom.

The working hours of the next day were even longer and the find considerably greater. Noon arrived with only half a dozen gems of only fair size to show for the hundreds of mollusks thrown overboard. But shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon a free pearl, fully half an inch in diameter, was discovered. It was a flawless specimen, perfectly spherical, of a most delicate, satiny texture, a translucent white in color, with a warm, iridescent glow.

"Sea gold!" Sheraton breathed, as his companion looked, with mouth agape, eyes evilly aglitter. "It's a perfect drop of sea gold. I'll not find a more exquisite pearl—certainly not a larger one—in all the rest of the lot."

But he did, not an hour later, when a globule the size of a marble, of a pale rose tint as delicate and warm as the afterglow of a tropic sky, rolled free at the pressure of his eager finger.

"Oh, man!" Sheraton cried, in an awed tone. "Isn't it a beautiful thing?" He carefully examined the perfect skin, without speck or flaw. "I'd hate to part with a beauty like this at any price."

"How much *is* it worth?" asked Trager, his eyes greedily dancing.

"It depends largely upon who wants it. I wouldn't even attempt an estimate," Sheraton replied. "But how I'd like to be able to afford to keep it myself. This beauty is certainly the queen of the lot."

And it was. Not that day, nor the next, nor the fourth and last, was anything discovered to approach it. If the half-inch gem of the day before weighed eighty grains, as Sheraton estimated, this must go to more than double that, with its value per grain rising sharply with the weight increase.

On that second night Sheraton forced his grumbling companion to continue work until ten o'clock, and on the third night the pair toiled in the pale light of the lantern until midnight. It was seven o'clock of the fourth night when the last shell was opened, examined, and then tossed overboard. The food, stretched to slim rations the last two meals, had just lasted. The water supply was almost exhausted. Trager had been grumbling for hours.

Sheraton stretched himself, yawned, wound a string firmly about the mouth of the improvised cloth bag into which he had placed his treasure, carefully replaced the bag inside his shirt front and rolled a cigarette. Trager sat back, scowled and lit his vile pipe.

Burned almost black by the many months under a tropic sun, ragged in their bull-gang tatters, they looked like two derelict castaways on the broad expanse of darkening water as they sat there, silently smoking for several minutes. Yet one man possessed a small fortune and the other man, furtively eying him, was well aware of it.

Trager glanced toward the wooded point of the dreaded Rocks, a vague, dark patch, now, in the distant gloom. And with the glance a plan formulated in his unscrupulous mind. He recalled the scene of Big Alec and the hapless ironworker. He had missed his chance then. But he must not miss another—a far bigger one. If only he could persuade his companion to go back to the Rocks—for even a few brief minutes!

For some minutes he craftily watched his companion's dreamy look, then broke the silence.

"Well," he ventured with well-simulated indifferences, "we might as well go in now, I guess."

Sheraton, coming from his pleasant reverie with a start, firmly shook his head. "We'll go back in the morning," he declared.

"Now, listen, Kernan," the other broke in angrily, "you hired me for certain work and that work's done. I'm going in to-night and you can get me my ticket and pay me off."

"I also promised myself that I'd get you back North," Sheraton replied. "I took that responsibility upon myself when I hired you. And I'm going to see that you get back North, Trager. There's many a bully down here that deserves the chance more than you do, Trager. But I feel I owe you something for mentioning the oysters you had on the Rocks that night."

"Why, sure I'll go back North," the other replied, cannily keeping his temper. "That's just where I been trying to get for nearly two years, ain't it? But if we go in to-night we can get a good flop on land at the frame shack they call a hotel there."

"Certainly we could. But *you* wouldn't," Sheraton said. "You'd be back on the Rocks for drink. And then you'd be just where you were in the first place."

"Listen, Kernan, I'd come right out. You can go in with me and bring me

back," Trager said, concealing his eagerness.

His companion doggedly shook his head.

Trager was about to burst into a tirade of vituperation, when another idea checked him. "Well, all right," he said, with a show of reluctant resignation. "But you'll start in early in the morning, won't you?"

"Early enough to get that eleven o'clock train north," the other replied dryly. And again there was silence.

Trager smoked a while longer, then yawned loudly, made a remark about "being dog-gone tired," and "hitting the hay," and lay upon an old sail in the bottom of the boat. A few minutes later his rumbling snores were sounding over the still water.

Sheraton sat smoking for an hour or so longer, then he, too, emitted an audible yawn, flopped down upon the pile of burlap sacking in the stern of the boat, and ten minutes later, though he usually slept quietly and soundly, his snores were mingled with his companion's.

The pock-marked man's eyes opened the merest trifle, though his snoring continued. For a quarter of an hour he lay like this, watchful, unstirring. His companion's dim form was unmoving. For another quarter of an hour the ugly faced man listened, still unstirring. Then, at no move of his companion, he raised his head the merest trifle. His own snores gradually ceased. His companion, lying as still as a log, snored on.

Trager half raised himself, then, his nerve momentarily failing him, he lay down again. An hour later his companion's rumblings had subsided and in their stead there was only the sound of deep regular breathing.

Trager carefully reached for the knife he had used for opening the oysters, silently opened the longest blade, and listened again. Carefully he rose to hands and knees; silently he

crept across the length of the boat. A scant yard from the prone figure his right arm raised and the blade glinted faintly in the starlight.

But before the arm could descend the other figure was sitting erect and the blue barrel of a gun gleamed in the deck shadows.

"The slightest move and I'll shoot your eyes out," said the wide-awake Sheraton in a voice that was quiet, but penetrating and as hard as flint. The surprise startled the would-be assailant into a cry and his nerve completely left him.

"Throw the knife overboard," Sheraton commanded.

With a trembling hand the other obeyed.

Sheraton rose, grasped the man by the shirt front in a viselike grip, and jerked him to his feet.

"What a pitiful creature you are," he said with quiet contempt. "And how transparent! Why, I knew what was in your mind before you lay down. It fairly shrieked in your eyes. And your trying to get me back on the Rocks—at night! A child could have read your thoughts.

"And you thought I was sleeping!" He laughed with quiet scorn. "And believed that I thought you were sleeping! Better give up any idea of ever playing the villain, Trager," he advised. "You simply haven't the nerve for it."

"I didn't mean nothing," the other man, still badly shaken with the surprise, finally found voice to say huskily.

"Nothing at all—except to get rid of me—and steal the pearls." Yet, despite the deep scorn in the narrowed gray eyes, a touch of regret crept into the voice of the younger man.

"It's too bad, Trager," he said musingly. "I thought you'd appreciate the chance you were getting. I was going to give you a tenth of the value of those pearls, too, as a surprise—the Bible's

tithe. I don't believe many of you chaps down here have had much of a chance at things. But now— It's too bad." The voice held real regret.

"No, I'm not going to do anything to you," he added as the other man regarded him a little fearfully still. "Not this time. Go back and lie down. But don't make another mistake like that—or you will be hurt—badly."

The man slunk back to his end of the boat. Sheraton lay down at his end. And the rest of the night passed with only the musical murmur of the waves breaking the peaceful silence. Both men were quiet.

In the morning, without once addressing his companion, Sheraton raised the sail and returned to Marathon, turned the hired craft back to its owner, obtained his money from the company office and then paid for breakfast for both in the camp mess hall.

He then purchased two railroad tickets to Jacksonville and stayed close to Trager until the train pulled out for the North at eleven o'clock, with them both on board.

As the train speeded up over the ocean trestle on the first leg of the journey, the seventy mile stretch to the mainland, Sheraton turned and spoke to his companion for the first time.

"Here's enough money for passage back to Philadelphia by boat from Jacksonville." He counted out some bank notes. "And here's fifty dollars more to help you get a start in Philadelphia. I'd advise you to go all the way to Philadelphia before getting anything to drink—if you must have it. But you can do exactly as you please without any interference from me. I ought to see that you get all the way safely. But I'm afraid I'm not enough of a Samaritan for that. Trager, I wash my hands of you."

He left the man and went into another coach. And that was the last he saw of his companion of many months.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BACK NORTH."

IN Jacksonville Sheraton went directly to a clothier's shop for a complete change of apparel, then spent the better part of two hours in a barber's chair. It was many months since he had been in anything but his bull-gang rags, and as he inspected his reflection in a long mirror he had the feeling of looking at a total stranger.

That evening, on a coast-line boat bound for New York, he slept between sheets for the first time since landing at Marathon, and when, the next day, lounging in a deck chair, he found himself in conversation with an attractive young woman, he realized that this was the first woman he had spoken to in almost two years. The last with whom he had really conversed had been Carol Hoyt, up in New York.

Carol Hoyt! Again he saw her, as she had been that mellow June afternoon in the high-ceilinged, old-fashioned office in Maiden Lane; her soft eyes so very serious, her parted lips so very, very inviting as she chided him about work.

Work! He grinned absently, as his fingers, fumbling for the inevitable papers and makin's, encountered a box of ready-made cigarettes, instead.

It was noon when the boat docked at West Street, in New York. Sheraton entered a waiting taxicab and a few minutes later was entering the office of an acquaintance in Maiden Lane. The man, a gem expert, examined his caller's deeply bronzed face curiously. "You've been away, haven't you? On pleasure bent, as usual," he asked.

"On treasure bent," the other corrected. "Jason, like his famous mythical namesake, has been after a golden fleece, among other things. And he'd like an expert idea of just how golden the fleece is."

He drew the bulging, improvised bag

of coarse cloth from his pocket, unwound the dirty string, and emptied the contents over the square of dark velvet cloth on his friend's desk, removing the paper wrappings about the larger gems.

The expert, a most self-contained individual named Leacock, said nothing as he glanced over the small heap of satiny-skinned gems, of all sizes, many hues and assorted values. But as he picked up the largest pearl and closely examined its translucent sheet for specks and other flaws and then carefully went over several of the other large ones, his keen eyes were glowing.

"Mr. Sheraton, are you importing, now?" he asked, leaning back and studying the other man. "You never were in the business when your grandfather lived, I recall. But you clearly know a bit about buying pearls, for all that."

"I didn't buy them," Sheraton smiled. "I fished them. Myself. Went down like the Indian natives, with a sink stone."

"In the Persian Gulf—or the Aru Islands?" Leacock ventured, fishing in his turn. "The only pearls I've ever seen to equal those two large ones came from there."

"These didn't," Sheraton replied. "No one could ever guess. And I'll never tell them. But I want to get an approximate idea of their value."

"It will have to be approximate," the other man said. "There's no telling what a collector who really wanted this large rose pearl, and who could afford it, would be willing to pay if you waited for the right buyer. But I can tell you quite closely what you can get for the lot from most any importer on the street here."

He reached for pad and fountain pen, minutely examined the larger gems, carefully appraised the smaller pearls, putting figures upon his pad the while, and then turned back to his caller.

"Sixty-five thousand dollars is a careful appraisal," said he. "Any big

dealer will give you that for them. If you shop about for price a bit, I rather think you may find one who'll go ten thousand higher."

"And that's a wholesale figure?"

The expert nodded. "For a wholesale lot. But," he emphasized, "that's placing merely the usual market value on this pale-rose beauty." He turned the large pearl about in his fingers almost reverently. "As I say, this one might bring almost anything—from the right collector, who values beauty for itself—and can afford to indulge his æsthetic desires."

"Thanks, old chap. That's all I wanted to know," said Sheraton, paying the appraiser his fee.

"You're not selling?" the other asked, as Sheraton made ready to leave.

"Not that way," was the reply. "Except, perhaps, a few of the medium-sized gems, to realize some capital. I'm going into business myself."

Leacock smiled. "Glad to hear it," he said. "Maiden Lane just doesn't seem like itself without a Sheraton in it. And don't be in any too big a hurry to let that big beauty go."

"I'll not," the other promised. "I'll try to hold out for one of our real moneyed people. An overpaid movie star or prize fighter may be interested in it."

He left, dawdled about in the downtown streets a few minutes to drink in the sight of crowds of well-dressed people, then sought out a restaurant in the vicinity where he had a leisurely luncheon. After that he took a taxicab uptown and at about two o'clock alighted at the brownstone residence of the Hoyts in Park Avenue.

"Just tell Miss Hoyt it's a friend," he directed the maid, a recent acquisition, who answered his ring and waited for his card. And, grinning like a schoolboy, he tiptoed after her to the drawing-room.

But at the entrance he stopped short and the grin faded to a surprised frown.

Carol Hoyt was there, an even more attractive picture than he had visioned, as she sat before a small rosewood desk. But also, sitting so close to her that a vagrant strand of her goldenrod hair swept his broad shoulder, was a young man who, clearly, was more than a casual caller. He was a good-looking young giant—offensively good looking, Sheraton decided—with almost classic features, jet-black, crisply waving hair and the hint of an Irish brogue in a vibrant voice that, the eavesdropper dourly admitted, was most agreeable.

Sheraton was just about to step back, out of view, when the girl glanced up.

"Why, Jason!" she cried, springing up, wide-eyed. "Where on earth *have* you come from?" She infolded one of his bronzed fists in her two soft hands and closely inspected the deeply tanned face. "It *is* you, Jason! We've wondered and wondered what became of you after that—accident. Won't mother and dad be delighted to see you!"

"I'll be equally delighted to see mother and dad," he replied in a dry tone, as the young man with the fetching brogue got to his feet and looked his handsomest.

"What *have* you been doing, Jason?" she asked, still looking wonderingly at him as at an apparition.

"I've been working, Carol," he replied. "Yes, really. You painted the beauties of toil so alluringly the last time I saw you that I decided I must try some of it."

"Perhaps," the young man with the brogue suggested good-humoredly, "you'd both rather excuse me, just now—"

The girl laughed. "How stupid of me, Jason, this is Mr. O'Hare."

O'Hare! Sheraton immediately recalled the note Miss Ladd had found in her desk, with its reference to the

stolen pearls—forty thousand dollars' worth of stolen pearls. His eyes narrowed menacingly as he took a step toward the other man.

"Delighted to know Mr. Sheraton," the latter began.

"And I'm delighted to meet you," Sheraton replied a little grimly. "Mr. O'Hare," he added in the quiet tones that usually preceded swift action, "isn't there a small matter of some sea gold that you may know a little about?"

"Why, Mr. O'Hare knows all about it, Jason. Nearly all," Carol Hoyt exclaimed.

"Then perhaps Mr. O'Hare will tell me what happened to it?" Sheraton replied in a hard voice. If the fellow thought he could not only steal forty thousand dollars' worth of pearls but could also still the suspicions of an innocent girl like Carol Hoyt and then worm his way into her affections—well, he was more brazen than most crooks—and more mistaken.

The charming Mr. O'Hare emitted one of his easy, rumbling laughs.

"Just where those pearls are, is the one thing I cannot tell you, Mr. Sheraton," he replied. "But I have most of the other facts regarding them." He regarded Sheraton with keen eyes that seemed amused. The latter's ire mounted still higher.

"And what?" he inquired in icy tones, "are these facts?"

"This man Bouchard," O'Hare began, "when your grandfather was dying and helpless, evidently arranged what he thought was a perfectly safe plan for stealing that last shipment of pearls from Burma. But though he was in pretty complete charge of things over here, the package would pass through more hands than his own and have to be accounted for. Miss Ladd, for example, was a bit too watchful to suit him. And there was the important matter of the customs duty. Once he had used the firm's money to pay that

duty here, the executor of the Sheraton estate, if no one else, would have been annoyingly inquisitive about the whereabouts of the pearls.

"So he conceived the idea of having the pearls lost—over in India. And he must have a responsible person over there to officially attest to that loss, for the firm.

"I, as it developed, was that person, the only one he could get who would be satisfactory.

"I first suspected something, though not the right thing, when he cabled me to send that shipment to E. V. Cordell. It seemed a bit peculiar, because I had bought the pearls for the House of Sheraton, at Bouchard's direction. I cabled back for a confirmation, thinking a mistake had been made. A confirmation was sent. So, as your grandfather had advised me of Bouchard's complete authority in such matters, I had to ship them that way.

"My first real suspicion came in a note from him that followed, written in an apparently joking way. In it he intimated that some very easy—and large—money might be made through the simple act of my officially attesting the loss of the shipment in India—for the benefit and records of the House of Sheraton.

"I tumbled to what was in his mind immediately. E. V. Cordell—a friend of his, undoubtedly—had received these pearls and paid the duty on them and they now had disappeared. But there was still Sheraton to be satisfied. Sheraton money had purchased them, through myself, in Burma. But if an official attestation of loss, by river pirates in India, could be produced by their Indian representative, it would cover everything.

"Well, the pearls were gone and I could not put my hands on them. I could not even produce the note as proof against Bouchard because he had written it with disappearing ink and I then

held only a blank piece of paper where his writing had been. The man seemed to have thought of everything.

"So I decided to fall in with him but wrote him that I'd have to have more complete instructions and would insist on knowing his plans fully before I'd help him. He thought he had me then, I presume, as he could produce my letter against myself and I could produce noting against him in case I accused him.

"Then he wrote me, telling me not only his scheme in detail, but suggesting a plan of going into partnership with him in the gem trade and with a friend of his, whom he refused to name just then. I presume he thought he was leaving no trail still, for this letter was in disappearing ink. But I had it photographed immediately upon reading it, before two Indian police officials as witnesses.

"There were other letters and a number of short notes. I had them all photographed and witnessed as before. Then I wrote you, as chief beneficiary of your grandfather's estate, asking how to proceed. But you had disappeared and the postal officials couldn't locate you, Mr. Sheraton."

The latter, whose ire had disappeared as his astonishment increased, grinned reminiscently.

"Even the police," he replied, "couldn't have located me then."

"So I wrote to Miss Hoyt, as the other beneficiary. She consulted her lawyers. And they all decided, and I agreed with them, that as they could not locate the pearls, which were obviously not in Bouchard's possession, it might be more profitable to wait, instead of prosecuting him. Especially as I was held by my contract to an English firm for more than another year and prevented from crossing over here. It seemed the clever thing for me to continue to play Bouchard along, apparently plan to go into business with him

and his friend when I could come here, and in that way, perhaps, discover who had the pearls."

"And two weeks ago Mr. O'Hare came over here," Carol explained. "We've just been looking at the photographs of those letters." She indicated the photos on the desk.

"But I don't know yet where those pearls are cached. Nor even who Bouchard's partner is—unless it's this unknown E. V. Cordell," O'Hare put in. "However, he has suggested a conference to-morrow night, at Monet's Restaurant, to make plans for getting his proposed firm started. And perhaps he'll disclose his partner, at least, then."

Sheraton chuckled. "I can tell you who his partner is now," he said.

"Who?" the others asked, in surprised chorus.

"Monet."

"Monet! Why, isn't it at Monet's that you had that trouble before you left, Jason? And how do you know?" The questions popped from the girl faster than they could be answered in turn.

"And those pearls are at Monet's, upstairs in his office safe," Sheraton said.

"But how do you *know* that, Jason?" Carol Hoyt demanded.

"That," he replied, with an amused twinkle at the two pairs of mystified eyes, "is a long story."

CHAPTER XXIII. WAYS AND MEANS.

HER violet eyes still wide with wonder as she regarded the ex-fugitive, Carol Hoyt started another question, then helplessly flopped into the nearest chair. "But where," she finally managed to ask, "did you *learn* this, Jason?"

"Down on Pigeon Key," he replied, also seating himself, as O'Hare followed suit.

"Pigeon Key!"

"It really exists," Sheraton assured her, "though perhaps it is about the last stop this side of nothing."

"But *how* did you learn it?" the still-mystified lady demanded.

"From Gypsy Scammel."

"Gypsy Scammel!" she echoed.

"Alias Mike Raglan, the waiter at Monet's I thought I had killed that night," Sheraton explained. "The police really were after him. I'm afraid I haven't been keeping very choice company. It was a case of two fugitives meeting at a logical, common point."

"Could you produce him as a witness?" O'Hare wanted to know; and Sheraton gravely smiled.

"Not this side of eternity. He was dying, the night he told me. Passing out in a tent by the ocean. He gave me the information in almost his final words. But I know it's the truth. Monet is Bouchard's partner in the pearl theft and in this proposed gem firm they plan to start. They were pals down in New Orleans, in the French Quarter. And the Burma pearls are in Monet's safe, up in his office."

"And this unknown E. V. Cordell?" O'Hare queried.

"I heard that name for the first time from you, to-day," replied Sheraton. "I fancy, though, that it's immaterial who he is. Bouchard himself, or possibly Monet, may have received that consignment under the Cordell name. Or, if E. V. Cordell really exists, he's probably an unimportant figure in this. Used merely to receive the Burma consignment and to pay the customs duty, to cover up the tracks of Bouchard and Monet."

O'Hare nodded. "That sounds reasonable. Monet, presumably, paid the duty on the pearls here as his interest in the deal?"

"I think so. He could easily afford to. They could double that money several times if they sold the pearls right, you know."

O'Hare tapped the photographs of the Bouchard letters and frowned perplexedly.

"Well," said he thoughtfully, "I don't know exactly how we ought to proceed. There seems to be enough evidence to convict them of theft, though they are a slippery pair and even that isn't certain. But getting back that Burma consignment is the chief thing you're after, of course. And if they get any inkling that they're suspected and liable to prosecution, they'll transfer the pearls elsewhere."

"Apparently Bouchard doesn't entirely trust me, yet. He's kept his partner under cover, so far. And has sheered off the subject each time I've inquired about the pearls. Evidently he wants to get me tied up legally with this new gem firm he intends to start, before he'll disclose anything."

"Well," said Sheraton doggedly, "we've got to get those pearls. Miss Hoyt has an interest in them, you know."

"But only a small interest compared to yours, Jason," Carol reminded him. "Your grandfather intended almost all of the estate to go to you. That twenty-five thousand dollars he mentioned for me in the will he expected would be only a small fraction of what he was leaving."

"Nevertheless, I'll see that you get it," Sheraton assured her. "And if I can get it out of that Burma consignment, there'll be plenty left for me, don't fear. Forty thousand dollars' worth of high-grade pearls over in India can be worth a whole lot more than that over here. What time is this meeting you have with Bouchard to-morrow night?" he asked O'Hare.

"Bouchard is to phone me the exact time this evening," O'Hare told him.

"Then you phone me the exact time right after—at my club," said Sheraton. "It's to be at Monet's Restaurant? That part's certain?"

"Upstairs, in the office," O'Hare replied. "I imagine Bouchard intends to introduce me to Monet as 'our partner,' at last. He even intimated that we're to draw up the legal agreement of the firm. He's anxious, evidently, to get it going. Feels quite sure that the affair of that Burma consignment has been completely forgotten by the executors of your grandfather's affairs, at this late date." He rose to leave. "I'll see that you get the time of the meeting promptly, Mr. Sheraton," he said. "When shall I see you again?"

"I can't tell," the latter replied, "until I get your phone message to-night."

When O'Hare had left, Carol Hoyt turned to Sheraton. "Jason," she cried impulsively, as she noted the look in his narrowing eyes, "you won't do anything foolish? Promise me you'll not do anything without careful thought."

"I promise," he assured her with an amused smile. "You're concerned in this, you know, Carol. And anything that concerns you will always be given my most careful thought."

"I'm not joking," she said soberly.

"Jason, I've a feeling that this thing might be serious. Promise me that you'll be careful in any steps you take with Bouchard. You don't like him. And you still have a feeling of revenge, for him, I know. I can see it in your eyes."

"If anything did happen to me, would it matter to you, at all?" he asked.

"It would matter a lot," she said frankly. "You won't do anything reckless, Jason, will you?"

"You can just bet I won't," he replied with conviction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. MONET ENTERTAINS.

BUSINESS before pleasure," that musty maxim of commerce and copy books, is doubtless a sound and excellent precept. Yet, even in busi-

ness, there are exceptions to all rules and proverbs. And with the portly, not to say fat, Jules Monet, good business man that he was, the exception was generally the rule.

Pleasure before business was usually the rule at his establishment, for, say what you will, a guest expertly filled with pleasure in the way of food, drink and cabaret infusions, always finds it easier, later on, to attend to the unpleasant business of the bill.

Even with his personal guests and more intimate victims, the wily Monet followed this practice, on the theory, no doubt, that the way to a man's pocket as well as his heart lies through his stomach—and the consequent numbing of his wits.

Accordingly, on the following evening when Bouchard, O'Hare and himself were gathered in the sumptuous business offices upstairs to discuss business, the pleasure came first.

In a word, Monet was entertaining, hugely and lavishly. He was hugely entertaining to the keen young O'Hare, who saw through him from the first and was privately enjoying it, and he was lavishly entertaining them all.

The dinner was famous, a procession of courses such as only a few other establishments of the day in New York could have produced. The wines and, indeed, the hard liquors, were the best in a house of noted vintages. The service was flawless.

It was eleven o'clock in the evening, the revelry down below would soon be at its height and the conviviality of the trio above had already reached that altitude. Cigars—expensive ones, imported for the gilded trade—had just been passed around and were already lighted and glowing when the heavy-faced, dew-lapped Monet decided that there had been about enough of the pleasure and that business was now in order.

He said as much, leaning toward his

two companions in his heavy, impressive manner.

"Well, we had about enough of pleasure and I guess it's about time we got down to this business," he announced.

The man Bouchard nodded agreement. "Yeah, let's get to business," he rumbled.

And the keen young man with the slight brogue acquiesced. "Time for business," he murmured.

The unanimity was beautiful, especially when a fourth voice expressed the same opinion in no uncertain terms.

"That's right. It is about time we got down to business—real business." It was a baritone voice, vibrant and penetrating and, though easy and pleasant, it undoubtedly meant what its message said.

The trio glanced up at the open door. Young Mr. O'Hare smiled. The portly host blinked and glared alternately at the intrusion. Bouchard, as his whisky glass slipped through suddenly nerveless fingers to crash in pieces at his feet, just sat and stared, his thick lips gaping.

The intruder locked the door and placed the key in his pocket, stepped leisurely to the opposite side of the room, locked the door connecting with the rest of the suite and placed that key in his pocket, sauntered back to the heavily laden table and bowed.

"So sorry to intrude, gentlemen," he said with his most winning smile, "but it really is about time for business."

"Sheraton!" Bouchard gasped.

"The guy that beamed my waiter!" Monet gulped.

"Both," said Jason Sheraton.

"Why—why, I thought you were out of the country," Bouchard stammered.

"I was, strictly speaking," Sheraton said. "But I've returned, you see, my friends."

The astonished Bouchard rapidly collected himself. "I'd advise you to go right back where you came from," he

bluffed. "Don't you know that man you hit with a bottle that night is dead?"

Sheraton nodded. "Yes, I know it."

"Then don't you know the cops might be here most any minute?" asked Monet, attempting a bluff in his turn.

Again the young man nodded. "Almost any minute," he agreed. "But not for me. Mike Raglan's dead, true. But he died down on Pigeon Key, not many days ago. I was with him, almost at the last. And that's why I'm here. Mike told me one or two things that were interesting, before he died," Sheraton added.

Bouchard turned a bit pale.

"He told me you had my watch," said Sheraton.

Bouchard looked relieved. "Sure, I've got it," he said readily. "The police turned it over to me. I've been waiting for a chance to give it to you."

"Well," drawled Sheraton, "that chance is now. That's what I came for."

"You didn't suppose I'd try to steal it from you, did you?" asked Bouchard sarcastically.

"Well, I didn't know. I'm not taking any unnecessary chances with you," was the reply. "I'm in rather a hurry. So, if you'll give it to me now——"

Bouchard glanced at Monet and the latter nodded acquiescence. "Sure, I'll get it for him. It's in the safe. But we might as well get rid of him. I don't want any more rough stuff here like I had with you and Raglan that night. This is a gentleman's place."

"So glad you told me," smiled Sheraton. "Well, let's have the watch. I must be going."

Monet went to the heavy safe near the south wall, stooped before the combination, and in a few moments was holding out the watch. Sheraton took the watch and Monet was about to close the safe when the former spoke.

"Leave it open," he commanded, and the winning quality was gone from his

voice. Monet was staring into the barrel of Mike Raglan's gun, in the hand of Jason Sheraton. "Mike told me something else, too," Sheraton continued. "He told me that a certain consignment of pearls from Burma, that never reached their rightful destination, might be found in this safe. Hand them over, Monet."

Bouchard made a motion toward his hip pocket but the lithe and powerful young O'Hare was upon him in a single, lightninglike pounce.

"Get that package of pearls out—damned pronto, too," Sheraton ordered, "or this finger'll get nervous. It's itching now, in fact. I'd just love an excuse to ruin both of you. And nobody'd even hear the shots with that infernal cabaret racket downstairs. Get them out." He prodded Monet's fat paunch with the gun barrel.

"Take it easy," the latter protested, fear in his eyes. "I'll get it," and he reached into the safe again, unlocked a cabinet there with a key from his key ring, then handed Sheraton a package. The latter loosed the cord, tore the heavy wrapping paper, broke the lid of the thin, mahogany box and glanced within the velvet case. He grinned and tied the package again.

"But I paid the customs duty on them pearls," Monet wailed; and there was anguish in his shifty little eyes as he thought of the thousands of dollars that duty had been.

"So good of you," Sheraton smiled. "It saves me just that much money."

"But you're going to return what I paid, ain't you?" pleaded Monet, almost tearfully.

"Not a dime of it," the young man assured him pleasantly. "However, in consideration for the generous act, I'm not going to call in the police now—if you and friend Bouchard are out of the country within ten days. The other countries ship us plenty of crooks, so I rather think we might occasionally re-

turn the favor. Especially as the balance of trade in that line is against us. Remember, both of you, if I can locate you in New York, or anywhere else in this land of the free, after ten days, I'm going to have you arrested."

He turned to O'Hare. "Well, I guess that's about all, isn't it?" he asked.

Young Mr. O'Hare smiled and rose. "Yes, I think so," he said. "We've had our pleasure and now we've completed our business." He turned to the other two men, who were staring at him in amazement. "It's too bad we didn't complete the details for going into business together, gentlemen. I certainly could have learned some interesting business methods from you both. But I've agreed to go with another firm—whose methods are perhaps somewhat more orthodox—and legal."

Bouchard sounded suspiciously as though he was about to choke. "You mean—you never intended—going in with us!" he stuttered.

O'Hare nodded. "That's it. I was onto you from the start, Mr. Bouchard. But you had already received the pearls by that time, so I had to proceed with a bit of caution. By the way," he added, "if either of you gentlemen is a collector of interesting photos, I can give you prints of some that are really unique."

He chuckled as he glanced at the beaming Sheraton and the touch of brogue in his rich tones thickened with his amusement as he spoke again to Bouchard.

"These photos are exact reproductions of some very lovely missives you wrote me on the subject of pearls—and theft. That disappearing-ink stunt wasn't bad, Mr. Bouchard. But it might be well to remember that these photos are always available—in case your ten-day stay in this country is extended. No, I shouldn't try England, next. I'm informing friends there. Yes, they're in the police department."

"Au revoir," Sheraton said pleas-

antly. But the portly Monet said never a word in reply, and his friend stood shaking, as in a rage, muttering horrible words to himself.

Sheraton unlocked one of the doors and he and O'Hare left the room. Downstairs, when the skinny, blondined girl soloist of the cabaret had ceased shrieking enough to make oneself heard, O'Hare halted his companion.

"It's rather a shame to let those two go free," he said. "The police ought to have them. It's not too late. Shall I get warrants?"

But Jason Sheraton shook his head. "I've got the pearls back, now. But in a court case they'd be evidence. And you know how long evidence can be kept in some of our courts when shyster lawyers decide to delay action in a case. Besides, we really ought to reciprocate with some of our foreign neighbors in an exchange of crooks. We've been terribly lax in our exports in that regard."

He stopped in a dark recess just outside the building and, drawing the gun from his overcoat pocket, began filling the chambers.

"There's been so much trouble with these pearls already, that I'm taking no further chances with them until I can get them in my club safe," said he.

"You mean to say," asked the surprised O'Hare, "that the bally gun was never loaded at all?"

Sheraton replaced the gun and nodded. "No, it was an empty weapon I had on Mr. Monet. But you see, I had promised Miss Hoyt not to do anything rash," he replied.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOUSE OF SHERATON.

AFTER an interval of almost two years, the House of Sheraton, which, for a century, had stood in Maiden Lane like a symbol of faith to the trade, was reopening its doors.

The firm was renting a small office suite on the second floor of the building it had once owned, and as yet there were neither furniture nor office personnel in the suite. But, again, the House of Sheraton stood in Maiden Lane, at the old location.

It was late afternoon of the day following Mr. Monet's delightful little party. Jason Sheraton was there, as, indeed, he had been for two hours, getting the office key from old John Monahan, who had been the building superintendent for thirty-eight years, and opening the doors of the new firm with his own hands. And the fascinating Mr. O'Hare was there, as was Miss Ladd, who had forthwith quit her stenographer's job in a macaroni factory in Harlem upon receiving young Sheraton's message early that morning.

Miss Ladd, sitting upon a window sill in lieu of a chair, absently twirled her hand bag and glanced about the bare rooms in her businesslike way.

"This would be a good place for my desk, Mr. Sheraton," she observed. "I'd like it near this window, if you can manage it."

Jason Sheraton nodded. "You can have it built right in the window casing if you like, Miss Ladd," he said. "You can even have two desks. Besides being the best stenographer in Greater New York and environs, it was your tip that turned up that Burma shipment, you know."

The door opened just then and Carol Hoyt, sweeping the bare suite and its occupants with puzzled eyes, entered.

"Why, Jason," she said, "you here? Mr. O'Hare telephoned me to come down here on a matter of business. And Miss Ladd! What is all this?"

"It's the House of Sheraton," Jason replied, his perfect teeth gleaming in the widest of grins. "Infernally messy and unprepared for immediate business, and renting in a building it used to own—but it's the old House, just the same.

Awfully sorry we can't offer you a chair, Carol. But there are several more window sills and perhaps I can find a nice clean place on the floor."

"The House of Sheraton!" She beamed at the trio and glanced about at the messy, bare rooms affectionately. "You're starting it again, Jason? And you're going to *work*?"

He nodded. "I don't want to startle you too much, Carol. But since my novel experience of the past months I find I'd be bored stiff doing anything else. But, of course, pearls are a bit easier to handle than cement."

The bewilderment in her eyes increased. "But what's this business I was to come down here for? O'Hare said it was something or other about the estate."

"Yes, it is." Sheraton produced the package of Burma pearls. "You see, Mr. Bouchard really had borrowed them, as I suspected that day downstairs. And he then kindly loaned them to a friend, Mr. Monet. Charming fellow—gave the nicest party, last night. And he was keeping them in his safe. But I persuaded him to give them back. So you see you can get the twenty-five thousand dollars granddad left you, as soon as I can turn part of these pearls into cash."

"But I don't want it. He left the bulk of the estate to you. He supposed it would be many times this amount. My intended portion would be only a small fraction of these pearls. Forty thousand dollars' worth, you said?"

"Yes. But that's the price over there. They're worth considerably more than that, resold properly, over here." He grinned. "And besides, the sale value above the foreign cost will be almost clear net. Mr. Monet, delightful chap, he is—paid the duty, you know. That amounted to quite a few thousands—and is always added to the price here."

"But most of that twenty-five thousand really belongs to you. Won't you

put it into your business, Jason," she persisted.

"All right, I'll put it in," he agreed, "for you. That'll make you a partner in Sheraton's."

"And just how are you starting in?" she inquired. "Is this package of pearls enough to—"

"It would be, for a small start. But Mr. O'Hare is also a partner. And he's putting in enough real cash, besides real experience, to allow us to start right, without sacrificing any of our stock, now that you're a partner also. However," he explained, "that's only part of the story."

He produced the improvised bag, stiffened in spots with concrete specks that still clung to it, and displayed a handful of pearls. Then, from an inner pocket of his coat, he withdrew the two largest of the gems from the ocean bottom near the coral reef beyond the Rocks, together with a half dozen others of unusual size.

"Oh, aren't they exquisite! What beauties!" she cried. "Jason, where *did* they come from?"

"From the ocean bottom, down near where I've been learning how to *work*," he told her. "I went down for them as the native divers in the Far East do, with a sink stone and in my native diving suit."

"Surely not alone, old man," O'Hare put in.

"No," Sheraton told him, "I took a chap along. Man named' Trager I'd worked with for months and months. He relieved me of some of the work. Drew up the sink stone and the oysters, after I'd fished them. And when I'd cleaned out all the beds down there he opened most of the oysters. Yes, he relieved me of some of the work. He wanted to relieve me of my whole catch too, that final night out on the ocean. There were only the pair of us out in the little skiff—with a fortune in this cement-rotted bag in my shirt, to be

had for the taking." He nodded to the other man's next question.

"Yes, he tried to take them. Came at me with a knife, the one he used to open the oysters, as he thought I lay sleeping—"

"What happened?"

"He didn't get them," was the reply. "But I don't know as I can entirely blame him, poor old Trager." Sheraton turned the largest of the pearls about in his lacerated finger tips. "What a beauty it is," he said musingly. "How can you really blame any one for trying to get *this*?"

Carol Hoyt took the gem from him and also turned it about in her slim fingers as she fascinatedly watched the pale-rose sheen of the translucent skin warmly shimmer and glow.

"What an exquisite thing it is!" she cried. "Isn't it beautiful! And you brought it up from its bed yourself, Jason!"

He soberly nodded. "It's the golden fleece. I told you I might bring one back, just as the other Jason did, Carol. And this is it. And how I shall hate to part with this pale-rose beauty," he added, looking at the gem in the girl's soft palm.

"I shouldn't do it," O'Hare said, "until you get the buyer who appreciates it—and who can afford it—at its proper price. It's a museum piece. I've seen nothing so fine that didn't come from the East. And few to equal it even from there."

"That's about what Leacock told me," Sheraton replied.

"But he didn't tell you all he knew," O'Hare went on. "Even when he said that this one might be sold for more than his estimated price on the usual grain basis for that size. He knew as well as I do that the money value of it is limited only to the desire of the right collector."

"He said about that, too," the other stated.

The young Irishman grinned and his trace of brogue increased, as usual, with his increase of interest on the subject.

"But he didn't emphasize it, as an appraiser selling his knowledge should. I dare say he has that right collector in mind." The grin spread. "I have several right collectors in mind, too. In fact," he said, "there's an ugly old dowager over in London whose chief mania is pearls. And her chief distinction is money. If she should really take a fancy to this one when I show it to her my next trip over—well, the firm will have some profit-taking. And I rather think that once she sees it, she'll simply have to have it, too."

"We'll deal in other stones, too, won't we, Mr. Sheraton?" asked Miss Ladd, who already had the same feeling of belonging to this firm that she had always had with the other Sheratons. It was a feeling that the macaroni company, despite its satisfactory remuneration, had never succeeded in capturing.

"Yes," Sheraton assured her, "as soon as we make a good turnover of pearls and can expand. But sea gold will always be first. Pearls founded the House. And now pearls have continued it. We've all of us prized them for their beautiful selves, first of all. In fact, old Enoch Sheraton acquired that first lot of pearls from the Persian Gulf—the pearls that founded the House—as a gift for his wife, because he loved their beauty. But when she died before he could return to her, and he had decided to retire from the sea anyway, he went into the trade with them."

Carol glanced up at the bare walls. "What have you done with the old Sheraton portraits, Jason? We shall have to have them about the walls to loog down on us, as at the old office."

Jason nodded. "We shall," he said. "They were stored when the office was dismantled. But we'll have them on the walls here when the rest of the

things are in. It wouldn't be the old House without those grim-eyed, bully old chaps looking down at us, would it?"

He glanced at the girl with a quizzical look.

"But I've done something that even those old lads never did, Carol. They sailed the seven seas and poked into almost every corner of the world and saw almost everything and did almost as much. But even they never went down after pearls themselves. And what a thrill they missed. It's better than bringing down your first elephant with the last shot in your express rifle when he's charging you."

"I don't believe they ever did," she replied. "It was splendid. I said you could do anything you wanted to. Once you really decided you wanted to. But everything's splendid now, Jason, isn't it? The House of Sheraton! How your grandfather would have loved this moment. And I believe you know as much about pearls themselves as the other Sheratons did. I really do."

"Except how to sell them—and manage the business—and how to buy them—and a few other things," he said. "But I know even more about how to track them to their native lair and go down and bring them up. However, there's Miss Ladd to help with the managing. I always did think she's forgotten more about this business than Bouchard ever knew—"

"Bouchard!" Carol exclaimed, suddenly recalling the night before. "Jason, what's happened to him? You didn't do anything reckless!"

"I drew a gun on him and threatened to spread lead all over him and his friend—"

"Jason! You know that you promised—"

"But the gun wasn't loaded," he continued.

The businesslike Miss Ladd, who had been looking over the rooms and jotting

things upon a paper pad interrupted them. "I've made a list of the office equipment we'll need, Mr. Sheraton," she began. "And we ought to have another clerk and an office boy, of course, and—"

"Get everything you want, Miss Ladd," he said airily. "You're the office manager. Get plenty of clerks and desks and office boys and telephones and whatever else they use in offices. And we'll get the stones, O'Hare and I. It's a good thing that bright young man is in the firm," he added to Carol Hoyt. "He knows even more about precious stones than he does about crooks. He could buy 'em from the Hebrews and sell 'em to the Scotch. I do believe, and get wealthy."

"I'm so glad you seem to like him," she said. "The first time you two met I rather had an idea you didn't care for him."

"The idea," he replied thoughtfully, "was right. I don't think I have ever disliked a nice young man so heartily as I did him that afternoon I saw you two together."

"But, of course," she said, "you know more of him, now."

"Not only of him," he replied, "but of his family. Yes, I've learned that he has one. A wife and three delightful youngsters, over in England. I could love him for his wife and children alone. But, of course, since knowing about them, I'm discovering more fine things about him each time we meet."

Miss Ladd briskly announced, just then, that she was going. "So many things to do. Telephone connection, too. And I'll have to arrange with the electric protective company for burglar-alarm service for the safe. I must fly." The door banged and she was gone.

O'Hare left a few minutes later; and when the door closed after him, Sheraton beamed.

The sun, streaming through the windows in a pale flood, was bathing the

girl in a soft light as it had that afternoon nearly two years before. She glanced up at the remaining young man and smiled. "The House of Sheraton," she said musingly. "Jason, isn't it just too splendid!"

"Splendid!" he repeated. "And you're part of it. Carol, do you remember that last afternoon before the accident at Monet's? I told you then that I was going after Jason's golden fleece. And that after I found it I was coming back and marry you."

She nodded. "I remember," she said softly.

"And you said that I'd have to learn to do something worth while. To work. Well, I have learned to work. I've learned it so well that now I find I've simply got to keep on doing it to keep interested.

"And I found the golden fleece. And brought it back to you. It's a real golden fleece this Jason brought back, too. Sea gold! No fleece was ever whiter than those pearls. And none much more golden in treasure."

"It's all too wonderful," she said.

"But not wonderful enough—for me, yet," he replied. "You asked me not to be reckless last night. Carol, would you have cared so very much if something had happened to me?"

"Oh, Jason, I would!" she cried, her eyes suddenly misty. "It would have made all the difference in the world, to me. I knew it that night I heard you had disappeared. I've always known it, I think. But I didn't realize it until then."

"And do you think," he asked, when she was in his arms, "that you'll want to go on, always and always, with this last of the Sheratons? He isn't like those others, you know, those bully old boys who'll be looking down on us from the office walls."

She held him closer as he pressed his lips to her sun-kissed hair and nodded. "Always and always," she said. "They were wonderful. But even they never went right down to the bottom of the ocean for their golden fleece."

SOUR DOUGHS DEMAND THEIR DAILY NEWS

IN Alaska, a fifth as large as the continental United States but boasting barely fifty thousand residents, there is a healthy demand for the daily news, and as a result there are dozens of publications in the Territory. Seven of these take daily news dispatches from one of the large news services. The largest newspapers are published at Ketchikan and Juneau, the former city—on the extreme southern end of the southeastern part—having a Sunday edition as well. In addition, there are countless radio sets in the Territory now capable of picking up news and other program broadcasts from stations in the States.

LAND OTTER PLAYFUL

UNIQUE other quadrupeds, the land otter, young and old, unite to play. Outdoor lovers of the Northern States, of Canada, and Alaska, probably often-times have observed them chasing each other about as dogs or children might do.

The otter slide is perhaps the most common proof of this playful instinct. Making use of a high and steep bank, generally of clay or other slippery formation, they select a roundabout path to reach the top and spend hours climbing up only to slide down into the water.

Largely by reason of this the otter is quite easily domesticated, and makes a fascinating pet. He is graceful and pleasant in appearance.



TWO-WAY TRAIL

By Clay Perry

A romance of Alaska—treasure house of strange stories of men and women and life in the raw.

THE old sour dough, "Shorty" Freem, began the serious operation of lighting his pipe. It was serious for two good reasons: first, because the mercury had dropped to fifty below during the afternoon; and, second, because there was some doubt whether he could ignite the old heel that was left in the bowl of the cracked corn-cob.

He got a splinter from the fire, sheltering it with a gnarled and horny hand

until the flame crawled up the stick and scorched his thumb.

He applied flame to the cavity and pulled hard until with a sputter and a flicker it went out, drowned by thick vapor from Shorty's lips.

Thin smoke mingled with the steam as Shorty thrust his hand back into his mitten and beat his knee to restore circulation to his fingers.

Gresham watched him anxiously. He was "looking color"—not the kind of

the old Klondiker had dug for, underground, but human color, "human interest." This was what his paper had sent him for, along the old gold trails of the Yukon—to exploit the romance of the region in which interest had been revived.

Gresham believed he had got Shorty started in the right vein at last. It was time, for they were far out on the trail and so far Gresham's prospecting had been disappointing.

On the steamer, up from Seattle, he had thought himself lucky to strike up an acquaintance with Hartwell, who admitted to being an ex-miner and who was going in over the old trails again on some errand.

But Hartwell proved taciturn almost to the point of being speechless, and Gresham concluded that he was one of those modern miners—agent for a syndicate which washed gold out of the hills by hydraulic pressure and got rich without romance. However, Gresham found that Hartwell knew how to pick a guide.

And here they were, almost one hundred miles above Dawson, camped in the firs—and Shorty, the guide, was telling a story of the old days in Dawson during the gold rush.

It was so cold that the dogs had burrowed in the snow bank. The sun set at three, for the long arctic night was beginning to close down.

Shorty had piled up a sloping bank of eight-foot logs against two young trees, six feet apart, for a Siwash fire, and all three men had scraped the snow up for the bank shelter on the other side. They waited for snow to melt in the kettle for boiling up.

Hartwell sat in his robes, propped against the Yukon sled, his face covered by the hood of his parka so that only the glint of his eyes was visible in the firelight.

They were remarkable, deep-set, far-looking eyes, bright with some strong

inner fire; young eyes in a deep-lined face which was made to seem older by the frame of snow-white hair and brows that spoke of a day of suffering—perhaps tragedy. How Gresham wished he could get *his* story!

However, it was something to have got Shorty started. He was telling a tale of Dawson in the winter of the food panic and the fire—and of a girl who had sold herself at auction from the bar of a dance-hall saloon.

In the pause for pipe lighting Gresham grew doubtful whether Shorty had finished or not, and he asked a quick question to make sure—a question about the girl and the man who bid highest:

"How did they come out?" he inquired.

"Why, I never heard," was Shorty's maddening reply. "I never heard how they did come out. But I reckon," he added judicially, "that they was only one way they could've come out. Seemed a shame, for she was a likely-lookin' gal."

He flung some more snow in the kettle, looked reproachfully at his pipe, whose stem had clogged—frozen up—and gave a little grunt and hunched closer to the fire. Gresham despaired. But Shorty resumed talking.

"It was a lot of fun at the time," he said, "but I was sorry it happened, because I got to know somethin' about her and how and why she come into the gold country. 'Cap' Hanson told me. She come up the Yukon to Dawson on his steamer, from Fort Yukon. It was the last boat that got to Dawson that season."

Shorty drew a long breath and sighed a spurt of steam.

"It seems," he drawled, "that there was a man named Clark——"

Gresham chuckled inwardly, for his training told him that the old man now intended really to tell the story he had only sketched before.

The bundled man, who was leaning against the sled, made a movement. It was only to draw his parka hood closer.

Shorty pulled another log onto the fire. The heat was flung back from the Siwash wall into their pitlike shelter, and happily there was no wind.

Gresham burrowed in his robes on the boughs which made a floor and which would be their bed.

"The way I get it," Shorty resumed, "this man Clark bringed the gal into the country to help her locate her brother, who was supposed to be somewhere in the vicinity of Circle City, mebbe at the Birch Creek mines. They come up from Seattle to St. Michael's Island early in the summer, caught a river steamer up to the fort, and it was there I first run across the trail.

"People said she seemed to have plenty money. They was a lot of us had it in them days—money to burn and not much to do with it but burn it. Up in Dawson, the winter before, food was so scarce that we went on rations. The winter follerin' they was plenty of food, but you could pay a dollar a pound for jest dog food, and whisky was fifty a gallon and jest about as fit to drink as kerosene which was the same price.

"But then they was the fire that wiped out most of the stores and saloons. It looked, for a while, like another winter on rations. No chance of anythin' comin' upriver. Why, I paid a dollar apiece for candles—and ate 'em! Learned the trick from a Eskimo. Money to burn—but not candles.

"Well, the gal put in a few weeks around the fort and then went up the creek to Circle City and cruised around the Birch Creek district. Then she caught the last steamer up and landed in Dawson.

"This man Clark was on the same boat, but Cap Hanson told me they wasn't together—any more. It looked queer, because he was supposed to be

a relative of hers of some kind. And he bringed her in. But the gal kept shy of him on the boat, and when she landed at Dawson she streaked off by herself. Clark tried to foller her, but she made it plain she was through with him.

"The next thing I knowed of, Clark, he settled down in Louse Town with a Injun squaw, jest across the creek. Of course, they was plenty of men in the diggin's which had entered into companionate arrangements with the female denizens of Louse Town, and they managed to live it down. The trouble with Clark seemed to be, he lived down to it."

Shorty put some more sparkling white fluff in the kettle and watched it become yellowish water, for the kettle was old and rimed with tea stain.

"The gal," he said, "went to work at Aleck's Place. It seems her money had run out. On the other hand, Clark seemed to have plenty. Used to see him around Aleck's. He gambled quite a little. Everybody did—but we gambled for fun, most of us. Clark took it serious—damn serious. He got hisself disliked.

"After a while only a chechahco or a stranger would sit in a game with him. He got to be called 'Chesty' Clark. Almost everybody had a nickname of some sort. Some of them fitted and some of 'em sounded queer—there was 'Cut-throat' Johnson, for instance. But the reason Clark was called 'Chesty' was not because he was always braggin' or had a big chest. It was because he played his cards too close to his bosom to suit the free-and-easy habits of most of the miners.

"They was another feller who was called by the name of the 'Red Rover.' He had reddish hair, and some one said they'd seen him a thousand miles upriver from Dawson the winter before, and some one else had seen him almost as far downriver. He had a dog team!

I'm a nut on dogs, anyhow. One of the huskies that's curled up under that there snow bank is a grandson of Whitenose, which was the Red Rover's lead dog.

"Well, jest two days after he struck town he got into a game with Chesty and was cleaned.

"I seen that game. Everybody seen some of it. The Red Rover made a sociable event of it. Every time the pot was opened he'd buy a round of drinks. He liked fun. When he'd win a pot he'd set 'em up—and then when he begun to lose he set 'em up, too, laughin' like a kid. The gals hung around and seemed to be pullin' for him—but Chesty kept on winnin'.

"This here gal I been tellin' you about—I forgot her name; seems to me it was May or—"

"Never mind the name," came the unexpected interruption from Hartwell, his words breaking on the frosty air like icicles.

Shorty looked up quickly. He reached for the tea sack and sifted some dusty particles into the briskly boiling water. His wrinkled, seamed face was squinted up against the heat. He looked a veritable patriarch of the trail. And yet his hair was only touched with gray. Hartwell might have been the elder.

"Anyhow," Shorty continued, fumbling the cups in his mittened hands. "she kept sort of away from the table where they were playin', until along toward the last. I remember seein' her standin' behind Chesty's chair a little ways, with a look in her face— Well, when Chesty raked in the last pot the Red Rover looked up, grinnin' like the kid he was, flung his hands wide open and sat back and said: 'Sold! Nothin' to do now but travel.'

"Then I saw his eyes fly wide open as he saw the gal.

"I'll play you the last pot against your dog team," Clark offered.

"Well, she was a good-lookin' gal. Aleck always prided hisself on havin' his gals dressed in real Paris style. Evenin' gowns an' silk stockin's and high-heeled dancin' slippers. They was all good lookin', in their way, but this gal stood out from the rest like a thoroughbred. She was a picter. But it was the eyes—I got a habit of watchin' people's eyes. If it wasn't for that I might never have noticed how them two looked at each other. Everybody else was watchin' the Red Rover's hands, palms up on the table—and Chesty's claws rakin' in his winnin's. A pile of money and a big poke of dust and some nuggets—I reckon the tea's ready now."

Shorty tipped the boiling kettle so that the dark fluid ran into the ready cups, warming by the coals. Hartwell pushed back his parka and lifted a steaming drink to his lips. Gresham noticed his eyes—again. Then he looked at Shorty. The old man had one eye squinted against the flare of the flames, but the open one was focused on Hartwell.

Gresham sipped scalding tea and cleared his throat.

"It was her brother, eh?" he ventured.

"Who?" croaked Shorty, his voice cracking. He spilled some tea on his mitten. "The Red Rover? Well, I thought they knowed each other. Seemed as if he was flabbergasted to see the gal there and in that costume. And it seemed as if she was hit hard, too, seein' him settin' opposite Chesty Clark with empty hands and empty pockets. But only their eyes that said anythin'. The Red Rover got up. Chesty Clark turned around and seen the gal standin' near by. He picked up a poke of dust and tossed it at her, with a nasty laugh.

"Tuck that away," he says, 'where I can find it—later.'

"She caught the bag, held it in her

hand and hefted it a minute. Then she tucked it in her bosom and patted it softly.

"'I'll put it away,' she says, 'where you will never touch it! It belongs to me—and more—you dirty thief!'"

"Aleck had started up the noise which passed for music and the dancin' had begun and they was only a few that caught on to what was passin'. I was one of them few—and the Red Rover.

"Chesty Clark, he went livid and made a lunge for the gal. He took a swipe at her with his hooked fingers, tryin' to grab the poke, and tore her dress a little. The next thing he was flat on the floor and the Red Rover standin' over him. Everybody crowded around and begun formin' a circle for a fight—but shucks! they wasn't any fight. Chesty Clark was all through—and besides, the poke of dust he'd flung to the girl was in his claws again, and he snarled somethin' about the gal not bein' able to take a joke. Then he dragged his freight out.

"The gal disappeared.

"It was the very next day that the word went round town about a queer thing that was goin' to happen at Aleck's Place. The story was that one of the gals was goin' to have herself auctioned off to the highest bidder."

Shorty tested out his pipe. It had thawed out and with a refill it worked.

"At first," he went on, "we took it as a sort of a put-up job to advertise the place. It sounded, the story did, like a hoax, but we was willin' to be entertained even if the joke was on us. So the advertisement worked.

"Everybody who could walk was at Aleck's long before ten o'clock, which was the time set for the auction. When it got out that it was the new gal who was goin' to be the one, the excitement was pretty high. Myself, I couldn't quite see why. Then I learned that she had discovered that her brother was dead. Yes, sir, he was one of the boys

that never even got over Chilkoot Pass. I reckoned it that the gal had been purty hard hit and was desperate. I had the idee she was a good gal. So did Cap Hanson. But here she was at Aleck's Place, broke and without a friend or relative—except Chester Clark, of course, and he was a queer sort of a relative. I figgered she was afeared of him.

"Well, when Aleck helped this gal up onto the bar at ten o'clock and announced the terms of the auction, you could've heard a button bust off. everythin' was so quiet.

"'This lady,' he says, 'has agreed to be auctioned off to the highest bidder, to be his housekeeper for the winter, to live with him as his wife until spring, and to collect the money, which will be deposited with me as the company agent'—that was the Alaska Company —'which I promise to hand to her when the break-up comes. Or, if either party to the agreement isn't satisfied, or either one breaks it, he or she can quit and they'll split the pot and call it off any time. Gentlemen, what am I offered?'

"The biddin' started off brisk as hell. I put in a bid myself. Not that I wanted the gal to keep house for me—because I was satisfied with my own cookin', but I felt, like a lot of others, that she ought to git a show. She gave us one. She was a pictur. She had on a dress of velvet and satin which gleamed smooth and shiny under the big oil lamp which hung over the bar. It was a black dress. It matched her hair, which was just as smooth and shiny and black. And her eyes. She was a good-lookin' gal. White as milk, except for a little rosy flush in her cheeks. She held her head up and smiled.

"Chesty Clark made the first bid. 'One thousand dollars,' he said.

"'Two thousand!' snapped a voice close behind me.

"I turned and see it was the Red Rover. His face was as pale as—as the

gal's and more so. His eyes was black—around 'em. He looked as if he had been on a tear or hadn't slept much or somethin'. I was surprised to hear him bid because I knowed he was broke. I guess I looked surprised. He gave me a grin and a wink and then his face set-tled back into a sort of frozen mask.

"Clark raised it to twenty-five hundred. The Red Rover's lips set and his eyes narrowed. He didn't say anythin'. Right there I put in my little two cents' worth. I said: 'Twenty-eight hundred.' In two minutes it had gone to four thousand. Somehow it seemed to stick there. It wasn't such a pile of money. As much and more was lost and won by a good many of the miners every night at Aleck's at poker.

"But Aleck, he sensed somethin' wrong. He had been a hoss auctioneer down in the States for a spell. He knew his job. He asked the gal to walk up and down the bar, and while she did he begun to ballyhoo.

"They wasn't any horse talk in what he said. Nobody did any jokin'. It was all serious and quiet. Red Rover, he hadn't made another bid. Chester Clark was high man. He looked pleased with hisself, but not pleasin'.

"'What am I offered, gentlemen?' Mr. Clark says four thousand.' Aleck was sweatin'. He was workin' hard. I give him credit; he wanted to get the girl a good grubstake.

"Somebody said, *sotto voce*, near by me: 'Clark is married, ain't he?'

"'Not on this side of the creek,' was the answer, and it got a snicker.

"'Four thousand, once! Going once! Going twice!'

Aleck stopped, because the gal made a motion to him and spoke up:

"'Mr. MacDonald hasn't given you all of the terms of the auction, gentlemen,' she said in a clear voice. 'He has forgotten to announce that I reserve the right to refuse any bid that is made.'

"The silence got dense for a minute.

Then a cur'ous murmur went up. Aleck broke right in. 'That's right,' he says. 'I forgot to announce that. The lady makes her own choice or refusal. Four thousand three times and—'

"'Forty-eight hundred!' sang out the Red Rover, like the crack of a dog whip.

"'Forty-eight hundred is bid by Mis-ter—'" Shorty was choked by a sudden fit of coughing.

"'Drat this old sewer!' he snapped, glaring reproachfully at his pipe. With an angry movement he tossed it into the coals, but lunged after it with mittenend hand at once and raked it out into the snow.

Neither of his hearers smiled or moved or spoke.

"Chesty Clark come right back with a bid of forty-nine," Shorty continued in a husky tone, "and there the biddin' stopped again. It stopped because the Red Rover was dickerin' with me. I'd told him, the previous day, that I'd like to own his dogs. He was makin' me the offer. He asked twenty-five hundred for 'em—five of 'em. I didn't try to beat him down. A good dog was worth four or five hundred dollars in Dawson that winter.

"'Forty-nine hundred is bid by Ches-ter Clark of Louse Town,' yelped Aleck. 'Going once!'

"I refuse that bid, Mr. MacDonald," came the gal's voice. 'I learn that Mr. Clark already has a housekeeper.'

"Everybody turned to look at Chesty. He got red in the face and so mad he could only splutter. He had a scab on his chin where a fist had hit him, and a bump on the back of his head where it had hit planks the night before.

"'Which sets it back to forty-eight,' announced Aleck. 'Do I hear another?'

"'Five thousand dollars,' came the quick answer—from the Red Rover.

"'And sold!' sung out Aleck, quick as that. 'To the red-headed gent in shirt and pants over there beside Shorty Freem.'

"A laugh went up. It was the first time any body laughed out loud since the auction commenced. It died down right away, because the Red Rover plowed through the crowd to the bar and turned around and stood there, facin' us, with his arms folded.

"I want to make an announcement," he says. "I want you all to hear it. In the first place," he says, "I haven't got five thousand dollars. I've got twenty-five hundred. Here it is, Aleck. I just sold my dog team to Shorty Freem to raise it. If you, Aleck, and the lady will trust me, I'll agree to produce the other twenty-five hundred before the spring break-up. But to make this all on the square, I want to say that, right here and now, I am making this lady an offer of marriage, to take it or leave it, now or later."

"He turned and looked at the gal. She was shakin' her head. I seen her lips move, but it looked as if she hadn't spoken a word out loud. It turned out, though, that she had. Aleck told me afterward that she said to the Red Rover: 'I'll trust you for the money. I want it and need it—but I can't take it under any conditions other than those that were made before the auction.'

"After that she vanished from the saloon hall. Red Rover stuck around, and Aleck hung him up for credit. He bought drinks—but didn't take any liquor bissell. Chesty Clark got drunk and tried to pull a gun out of his boot, and the Red Rover floored him and took the gun away, and that was all the excitement they was.

"But the next day"—Shorty retrieved his pipe, which was now covered with a coating of ice, from the snow, and pocketed it regretfully—"the next day the gal and Red Rover was gone. They quit town. I never seen 'em afterward and I don't know how they come out."

Gresham groaned, but he had sense enough to hold his tongue this time.

Perhaps Shorty was only putting another period to his peroration. The silence persisted for so long that he ventured a remark.

"Well, the girl had courage," he said. "Didn't she ever come back to collect?"

"Oh, she had courage, all right," Shorty agreed heartily. "I don't know about what she did. I don't know how it come out. I could guess. There was only one way it could come out, to my way of thinkin'. It was a one-way trail she traveled, son."

"What do you mean?" Gresham sat up abruptly.

"This here old trail is—or was—a one-way trail for women, up above Dawson, son," Shorty replied good-naturedly. "I mean, no woman ever went out, upriver. They could and did come in that way, from Juneau over the Pass and through the Rapids and so on. But goin' out, it was always down to St. Michael's by river boat and catch the first steamer for Seattle. This gal went upriver."

"You mean she——"

"Once I thought I did see her, afterward," Shorty went on doubtfully. "I couldn't be sure and I didn't ask questions. Besides, she was travelin' the wrong way. The woman I mean was travelin' upriver, too. She was in a hurry. She was all bundled up to the eyes and didn't talk much, and I didn't annoy her with questions."

Gresham winced but pretended not to notice the slap.

"You had her as a passenger?" he inquired.

"Yep. And the travelin' was bad. It was spring. Shucks! it couldn't been this gal, May—er—whatever her name was, because she'd have been goin' downriver. She'd have paid her passage. I never seen Aleck to ask him if she did collect. He died."

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Gresham. And then, with sudden inspiration, born, perhaps, out of the un-

canny sixth sense of the good news reporter, he turned to Hartwell and said: "What do you make of it, Mr. Hartwell? You've been in this country. Did you ever hear—" He paused. Something seemed to halt him. Something stood like a shadow—or a flicker of light—on the frosty air, between the huddled man against the sled and himself. It was silence.

Shorty Freem piled more logs on the fire. It was long past the usual hour for turning in but the spirit of sleepless curiosity, of unanswered mysteries, seemed to tingle in the air, like the frost. The wilderness crackled with cold all about them. Now and then a tree exploded like a bomb. A wolf howled.

The men's eyes were drawn to the fire as to a magnet.

"Yes, I've been in this country," came the unexpected remark from the taciturn Hartwell. "I've camped on this very trail. Going over it again brings back old memories, some of them bitter and some of them sweet."

Gresham pricked up his ears, for the voice had a ring to it, a rhythm to it which seemed, somehow, familiar. It was the voice of a man accustomed to express himself—and all this time he had been silent. Something had unlocked his tongue. Gresham locked his own tightly behind his teeth.

"In the first place, Shorty," Hartwell went on pleasantly, "I've got to disagree with you about the Dawson trail being one-way for a woman. I won't quarrel with you about it because I understand you made the statement as a sort of parable in connection with your story of the girl."

"I'll agree with you that she had courage," he continued, his voice rising more clearly. "She needed it to get herself out of Aleck's hell hole. I suppose that it would do no harm to try to guess at how they came out," he finished, sinking back against the sled again.

Once more Gresham groaned, but this time inwardly. He almost cheered at the next sentence Hartwell uttered.

"Let us suppose," Hartwell said, "that in the grip of grief and fear the girl was insanely desperate; that she wanted to get out of the country, and that something put the crazy notion in her head to sell herself as—well, perhaps as many women she had known had done. Under social contract. Marrying money. In order to make a decent guess," he apologized with a smile, "it is going to be necessary to make some analyses and establish some motives and set up some assumed facts as a theorem. Suppose she feared Clark because—he was her stepfather. Suppose that her life at home had been unhappy. Suppose her only brother, a year younger than herself, had fled from home and struck out for the gold fields.

"Their mother was dead, let us say; she had been married, very young, to a man much older than herself—a wealthy man whom she did not love. Her second marriage to Clark, a man younger than herself, was a rebound from her first mistake—and it proved but a second mistake.

"Her daughter was just blooming into womanhood and the mother saw in her, shortly, an unconscious rival for the fitful affections of her young husband. A situation such as this might give the girl a background and help us make a logical guess. Clark was a scoundrel—you've made that clear, Shorty. Particularly despicable where women were concerned. Worse even than Aleck."

"The mother died, leaving the girl to the tender mercies of her stepfather. She died with her son's name on her lips and pledged the girl to find him. The girl could hardly hope to make the journey into the Klondike and the Yukon alone. In her innocence she did not dream of her stepfather's feeling toward her. She gladly accepted his

offer to accompany her. She was just coming of age when the journey began.

"When she reached Fort Yukon she was of age—in years and in experience—for she had learned of Clark's feelings and been frightened by them. Terrified, she made a frantic search for her brother, and Clark followed her relentlessly. She had trusted him in everything—even with her money. And—suppose he kept it?

"My guess is that he would be capable of that—and her words, as he flung her the gold, seem to prove it. He had followed her to Dawson, knowing that what little money she had with her soon would give out. And then—her brother was discovered to be dead. It had been a one-way trail for him.

"Fear and grief! These were enough, combined with loneliness and the strange, rough ways of the mining camp, to drive her to the seeming refuge of Aleck's Place. It was not until after she had been there for a few days that she really discovered what an Alaskan dance-hall saloon meant. Possible disgrace was added to her grief and her fear. It almost unbalanced her mind. Then she met the Red Rover. She felt that he had become infatuated with her almost at first glance—not knowing he had seen her before, on the boat, and had followed her, too.

"She thought of suicide. She was afraid. Aleck's was no refuge. Aleck, in his own way, had made her understand that. Girls who were willing to be entertaining to miners with money were too plentiful at Aleck's Place for him to be tolerant of one who was frightened—and grief-stricken. In the courage of desperation she evolved this plan to sell herself at auction. It had been her own mother's way."

The last sentence came out like a flash of an icicle touched by fire. It gave Gresham, hardened news hound, a start. He hardly breathed, as he waited for Hartwell to continue. The "analy-

sis" Hartwell was making had got to be more than that. It was parable. Gresham waited for it to become something more.

He studied Hartwell's face and saw that it was really young, despite deep lines and snow-white hair and brows. It was strong, peaceful, good to look upon. It thrust out of the furred hood of his parka in cameo, and seemed in place here in the frosty wilds. Gresham wondered just why Hartwell was traveling this trail. He had been unable to find out by any of the questions he had asked.

"When the Red Rover knocked Chesty Clark down for touching her, the girl knew that here was a man who would, and could, protect her. Something electric had passed between them at their first meeting of glances. Perhaps she did recognize him as a man she had seen on the steamer. To be sure, she knew that he had been cleaned out by Clark, had no money, and perhaps she had heard the old Alaskan proverb—that a man will not fight for his wife but he will fight for his dog. And she wondered whether he might sacrifice his dogs to get the money. I assume that she did not dream the bidding would go half so high.

"When she found Clark was bidding above any one else, she grew more frightened and, there on the bar, as she walked up and down, showing off her attractions like a slave on the block, she framed up the saving portion of the auction agreement—that she might refuse to accept the bid of any man she did not like.

"Women are far more clever than we give them credit for," resumed Hartwell; "clever even in their desperation. And besides, the girl had the background of a more sophisticated civilization than Dawson could boast. And as you have described it—the Red Rover made the winning bid, if not the highest bid, and won her."

"Sure thing! But it was highest, too. He bid five thousand."

"This was late in the fall, you said, Shorty?" inquired Hartwell musingly.

"It was October."

Gresham remembered distinctly that Shorty had not defined the time at all except that it was winter. His nose tingled.

"You have freighted food and supplies out to the most isolated spots in the country, in the dead of winter, to some stubborn old sour doughs who stuck to their diggings," Hartwell said. "Not all the miners huddled in town and gambled, drank and danced. And some of them were without dogs, too. So that it was perfectly possible for the Red Rover to pack out, afoot, to some claim he had located back in the hills—and the girl with him, bearing her share. She would do that. I picture her as being proud and brave and willing."

"You bet you! A magnificent gal for her age! Strong and able to stand a lot of hardship."

"It was early enough," Hartwell went on argumentatively, "to kill some game and jerk meat and dry fish. A log hut with double walls, air space between, a good stove made out of telescoped kerosene tins. Credit established for a grub-stake of tinned things; salt, beans, sugar. Some clothing and blankets."

"They would be able to trek back in the hills two hundred miles before the worst weather came, safely hidden from Clark—or anybody else. She didn't want her mother's widower killed—by the Red Rover. Not even though he was the gray wolf on her trail. Woman's reasons. We don't understand them very well. Her mother had loved Clark. That was enough."

"On the trail together, young, strong, looking gold. Their spirits would run high. The girl was free of the shadow of Clark and the dance hall. The Rover had proven himself decent. Winter

would pass quickly. In the spring she would book passage on the first steamer out. When the savage coast of Alaska and the Aleutians had faded from view, all that portion of her life would be past and forgotten. In the States no one would know.

"The winter passed."

With those three words the very last vestige of Gresham's professionally skeptical doubt, concerning what sort of fanciful stuff Hartwell was giving them, vanished. Yet he was puzzled. Why did Hartwell talk in parable? He thought Shorty looked puzzled, too—or was it merely that he listened, with his wrinkled face all squinted up as he hunched over by the fire and looked stupid?

"Spring approached," Hartwell continued, "and the claim, upon which the Red Rover had counted so much, had yielded less than three thousand dollars' worth of gold. It had been frozen up too hard to pan out gravel or sand. They had burned out dirt with fire and picked it over. They quarreled one day because Red declared he would go down to Dawson and sell out the claim so that he could pay his debts.

"'You mustn't do that,' she objected. 'I believe there is a rich vein here. You've got enough to pay your debts—because I shall take only what you posted in cash from the sale of your dogs. I'll split with you. It's pretty good wages for a housekeeper, that twenty-five hundred.'

"'You will take it all!' he insisted. The quarrel grew bitter.

"The next morning the Red Rover woke with his feeling that the cabin was empty except for himself. And it was. The girl had packed her sack and gone. How long she had been gone, he did not know. Full daylight was coming, the summer solstice, when it is daylight all the time and warm.

"The Red Rover trailed her thirty solid hours without stopping, and yet

did not overtake her. He came, however, to the end of her trail. It was a gorge in the ice of the river. Twenty feet deep, to the rushing, boiling water—and her footprints at the edge. The ice had broken through.

"He risked his own life, crossing at another place to try to pick up the trail on the other side, hoping against hope that the break-up had come after she crossed. There was no trail on the other side.

"There on the ice, with the raging, raving torrent grinding, groaning, thrashing its way toward the sea, in the birth pangs of the spring break-up, Red Rover crouched and suffered the harsh agony of a man with a broken heart. He knew then how much he loved the girl. He had fought it all winter. The quarrel had come because he loved her. He had bought her at auction—for the winter. But he had held out to her, at all times, her chance for freedom, when and if she wanted it. Never again had he proposed what he had announced publicly at Aleck's Place—marriage. Nor had she reminded him of it. Probably she had taken it as a flourish, an attempt on his part, gallant enough, but insincere as gallantry is likely to be, to save her face. At any rate—this was answer enough for him. So he thought. But there was another answer.

"He found it in his pack later—a note she had written him in farewell. It ran something like this:

"I am sorry, but I can't go on with this. And I can't take your money. Not any of it. So, I am going back to Clark. I have a claim against him and I'm going to collect. I was foolish not to do it, in the first place—but I was afraid. This winter has taught me to be afraid of no man. You taught me that, so I owe you—much. God bless you. Good-by.

"When Red Rover finished reading this tear-stained note, it was stained with fresh tears—his own. He knew then that the girl had fled from him because

she loved him. She was going back to Clark—No, she could not do that! Because—she was dead. The river had her. She would reach the sea, perhaps some time—free forever.

"And now the full force of new suffering had him. His agony left its mark upon him. Back to his cabin he went, because he could not bear to be with men, to face them. What would they say when he came out—alone?

"At the cabin the irony of fate thrust itself upon him with more mockery. He struck it rich. Baking sour dough bread in a hole in the ground, between gold pans, he exposed a vein richer than he had even dreamed to find there. It was a bonanza. You've heard of the Ashpit Mine, Shorty?"

"Um!" grunted Shorty, as if he had been pricked awake from sound sleep with a jab. "I should say so! That's one of the few claims the original discoverer wouldn't never sell. Why, the railroad built a spur up to it, the other side of the next big ridge, but they is an old trail cuts across to it from this one, only forty miles from here. I've passed that branch party often and I allers thinks of the time I let off a woman passenger there, and she—"

"I've been there," cut in Hartwell. "I know something of its history. Well, that was Red Rover's find, and it was no joy to him when he found it. Only mockery. He went into a sort of melancholia, all alone there, and finally into a fever which was something like brain fever. In his delirium he lived, over and over again, the quarrel they had had—the last words he had snapped at her.

"And then he went back, in his memory, to the auction and lived that over, too. With the clairvoyance of the half insane he saw that the girl had loved him from the very first and, with a woman's desperate cleverness, had managed to have him the successful bidder at the auction.

"She had loved him; she could not let herself be bought and paid for—and he believed she had grown to despise him and herself, too—so that she had started back. Back to Clark.

"If he had not quarreled with her, if he had but reached out his hand to her, two days before, if he had repeated his proposal of marriage to her, she would be with him, alive, to dance upon the golden floor he had scratched into the light in his fireplace—and they would have gone out to Dawson together.

"As it was, he descended to the lowest depths of brooding sorrow and despair. He lapsed into veritable insanity; he scarcely ate; he went about blindly for hours, calling her name. He forgot to drink, and sleep was never with him. Shorty, I would like another cup of tea."

Shorty started as if he had been shot. He poured tea for all of them. It was bitter, brackish, full of ashes. Gresham could not down it. Hartwell, however, swallowed it greedily and as if it were sweet nectar.

"Um! that tastes good. I think I'll never get over liking the taste of strong, hot tea. I went without anything to drink, once, for a long, long time. A cup of hot tea was the first thing I remember tasting. Perhaps that's the reason— Oh, you were right about your woman passenger, Shorty. It was—we shall call her May, though that wasn't her real name—"

"Then the girl—wasn't dead?" exploded Gresham.

Hartwell smiled, and his smile was like nothing Gresham had ever seen on a man's face—peaceful, tender, beautiful.

"No! Oh, no! She had gone down-river on the ice for several miles, unaware of her danger. She walked the surface of a hollowed-out ice gorge—and it caved in after she had passed. The Red Rover couldn't even have

guessed that, when he came to the trail's end, at the brink of a fuming torrent.

"She went to Dawson, and there she found that Clark had been shot to death in a brawl at Aleck's, caught cheating. His money—including what he had held out from her—went to her. He had piled it up, playing a crooked game, plenty. She could have chartered a steamer for Seattle. The old—" Hartwell checked himself.

"Well, she did start downriver on the first steamer out," he continued. "She announced publicly at Aleck's Place that the agreement was broken. She refused the stake that she might have taken—because, you see, it was the break-up. The time was up.

"It was at Fort Yukon, wasn't it, Shorty, that you picked her up and brought her back—over the old 'one-way trail' for women? You sold her your dog team—the one you bought of the Red Rover. You sold it to her for just what you paid for it—twenty-five hundred dollars. And up ahead, at the branch trail, where it goes over the ridge, she left you and went in alone with a load of provisions. With a bale of clothes—like a woman. Some more tea, please?"

Gresham shook his head when Shorty questioned his thirst with a look.

"And so," Hartwell went on, refreshed by a dark draft, "they came out together, after all. No, they didn't go down to Dawson. They went on, upriver, up past White Horse Rapids, over Chilkoot, to Dyea, to Juneau, and, by steamer, home. Which proves it a two-way trail—for one woman, eh?"

"The exception, which it proves the rule," Shorty answered.

Gresham expelled a breath.

"That is a story," he said. "But how did you get to know it so well? Did you ever meet the Red Rover?"

"Yes," replied Hartwell. "In fact, I'm up here on business for him. Going up to the Ashpit Mine, over the old

trail, for the fun of it. He intends to bring his wife up next season to visit the old claim—and the old cabin which they shared. It is still standing, though moved to another spot. You see, like a woman, she wanted to know just how the Yukon took it after all these years. Down in the States, of course, nobody knows—and they *never will know.*"

He paused abruptly, and Gresham felt the chill of cold, very suddenly—and Hartwell's eyes upon him, though he did not meet them.

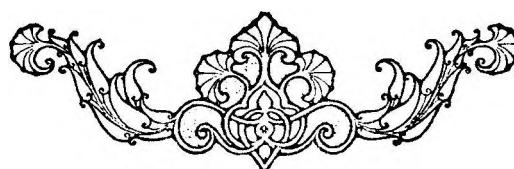
"Well, no," Gresham said, "it could hardly be told down there."

There will be another story by Clay Perry in an early issue.

Then he gulped strong tea avidly, being mighty thirsty all at once, and didn't mind that it was cold tea and more bitter than when it was hot.

"Of course," Hartwell went on casually, "nobody would know the Red Rover to-day. He's changed so. You'd never know him, Shorty. He was red-headed when you knew him, and now his hair is as white as my own."

"Well, I dunno," drawled Shorty, with the sidelong squint he had, and with his one open eye looking at Hartwell; "I dunno about that. I got a habit of watchin' people's eyes."



CONCERNING EUROPEAN FASHIONS

A WOMAN immigrant who recently crossed the Atlantic to join her husband, landed at Ellis Island, only to find there a letter from him announcing gently but firmly that another fair charmer had stolen his heart. Grief-stricken, she decided to return to her people in Europe. While waiting for a steamer, she was called on by an Ellis Island representative of the Daughters of the American Revolution, to whom she confided that she possessed only one dress.

"That won't do at all!" exclaimed the sympathetic lady of the D. A. R. "We'll furnish you with the material and you can make a dress for yourself before your boat sails."

But when the material was delivered, the immigrant's face looked longer than the cloth itself. Make a dress out of that? Impossible! Absurd! If she went home wearing such a short, tight, and altogether revealing garment, her relatives would scorn and ridicule her. They would turn her out.

The D. A. R. representative halted the shrill protestations with a promise to bring as much dress material as the heart of any woman could desire. She did so. The immigrant made the dress, and displayed herself in it to the lady of the D. A. R.

"Ach! You see?" she exclaimed delightedly. "Dis is de correck fit. Dis is de style, de fashion among de nize people of Europe. It is grand!"

Her benefactor looked—and measured. The skirt was seven yards wide. That is to say, twenty-one feet. That is to say, two hundred and fifty-two inches.



Chester

MILD *enough for anybody*



What a cigarette meant there

Forty hours in the wireless room, sending, sending, sending . . . till help for a helpless ship is drawn across hundreds of miles of storm-wrecked ocean. And afterward, only one comment: "Good thing we had plenty of cigarettes!"

What a cigarette means *here*

Forty hours at the curing-barn—the most anxious hours in all the tobacco season.

The last wagon in from the fields, the barn full, the fires lighted—now the delicate work of curing commences. Day and night, day and night, watching thermometers, tending fires, adjusting ventilators—with loss of a year's work the penalty of carelessness, with loss of flavor the result of haste.

Vastly important, of course, are the later ageing and blending—but to this tireless vigil at the curing-barns you owe no small part of Chesterfield's flavorful and satisfying mildness.

Liggett & Myres Tobacco Co.



*From 800 to 1,000 pounds
of tobacco can be cured in
this barn at each "firing."*

field

.... and yet **THEY SATISFY**



RED

Red Hand wanted a certain big bridge contract, fight for the job, in which a certain charm

CHAPTER I.

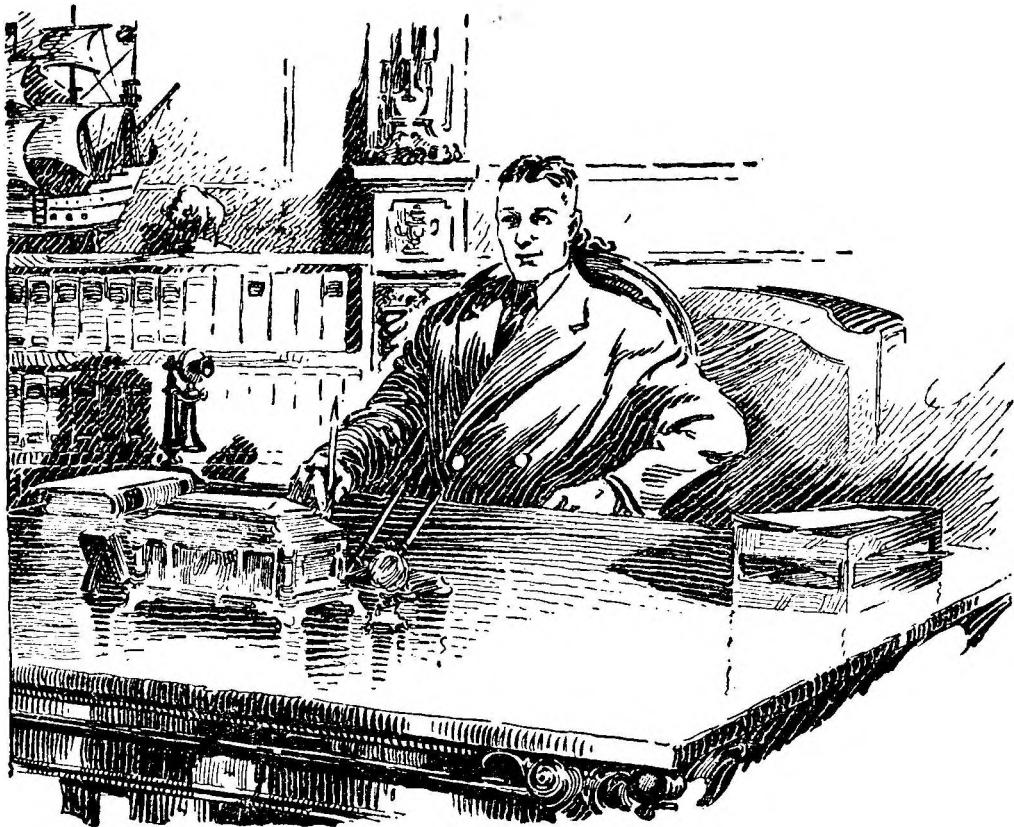
STIFF COMPETITION.

I COULDN'T very well explain in a letter, 'Red,' " Eddie Martin said, "and, anyway, I wanted you here. When you and Carmichael were down before it looked like plain sailing; but now it seems that you're going to have stiff competition."

In a second-floor office overlooking the main business street of Winota, the principal town and port of the Grand Bay district, two young men sat facing each other across a desk.

The one behind it, tilted back in his chair, was slender, dark, with a keen, intelligent face, a humorously cynical mouth and eyes to match it. The other, who sat nursing one knee in clasped hands had held a disreputable brier between his teeth, possessed unruly, upstanding red hair, eyes of a very clear and cold blue, some hundred and seventy pounds of compact body, and the engaging facial expression of an amiable but not-to-be-trifled-with bull terrier.

The name of this reddish young man was William Benton Hand. By profes-



By A.M.Chisholm **In Six Parts - Part I**

and wanted it bad. This is the story of his
ingly saucy young lady plays her full part.

sion he was a civil engineer, and in the dear, dead days beyond recall—more specifically, his college days—he had been known to crowded grand stands as "The Red Hand," with more or less sanguinary variants descriptive of a supposedly natural tendency toward homicide. But away from the football field everybody had called him simply "Red," as most of his intimate friends did even now.

However, those days when he had been a gridiron star of the first magnitude and a mitt artist with a reputa- which had reached even scornful pro-

fessional circles, were long ago and far away; and his athletic bumps had been succeeded by those of the game of life, which had turned out to be considerably harder—and for the most part unsalved by applause.

Bill Hand, after taking his degree, had put in some years on various forms of construction work—including railway and other construction in France under the difficulties interposed by shell and other fire—and had gained a good deal of practical experience and little else. He had then formed a partnership with another engineer named Car-

michael. Each had a little money, and, tempted by an opportunity which offered, they had tendered for a small contract, and had made a good profit.

It then occurred to them that it might be profitable to go into the contracting business, with special reference to structural jobs in which they hoped to utilize their professional knowledge. They were excellently equipped technically, but inadequately so financially, as the event proved. The business proved a sink for such money as they had, and jobs became hard to obtain. They began to find out that apparently there was more to securing paying contracts than merely tendering bids therefor.

In the present case Hand was in Winota in connection with a contract to be let for the building of a bridge.

Winota, though a comparatively small town, was the largest one as well as the principal harbor on the Grand Bay. It was situated in Barton County. Across from it, on the other side of the bay, lay Trent County, a long peninsula lying between the bay and the great lake. Up to this time communication between Barton and Trent had been by ferry in summer and by ice in winter. Now, however, the counties purposed connecting themselves for traffic by means of a bridge across the bay itself.

The bay was a great fresh-water estuary some fifty miles in length, varying in width, but comparatively narrow just above Winota, where the Belle River, once a famous logging stream, debouched. At this point there were shoals and a couple of small, rocky islets, which made the bridge project feasible. It had been talked of for years, furnishing a local political football; but now apparently it was going through. The necessary expenditure had been approved, plans had been prepared, and tenders had been called for.

Bill Hand had been apprised of this by Eddie Martin, now a lawyer in Wi-

nota, a former friend of his college days. He and Carmichael had come down and looked over the ground. The job was exactly in their line. It would be a big one; they needed the money; and they needed the job as something they could point to by way of construction record—for so far they had little of that. They were anxious to make a reputation.

So they went over the ground carefully, got their data and copies of the plans and specifications and went home to figure it out with a view to tendering, a task which needed care in an unsettled market for labor and materials. While thus engaged, Hand had received a brief note from Martin suggesting that his presence in Winota was advisable.

"So we're going to have stiff competition, eh? Well, that's natural. We expected it. Whose?"

"Did you ever hear of the P. W. McGarry Construction Company?" Eddie asked.

Red Hand's expression changed swiftly from careless inquiry to lively disgust. "Oh, Lord!" he ejaculated piously, "are we up against that high-binder again?"

"You know the concern then?"

"I should say we do! We've bucked them for good jobs twice already, and lost out each time. Far's we're concerned, Pat McGarry's the curse of the world."

"Why did you lose out?"

"You tell me," Red returned sadly. "He's too crooked for us, Eddie."

"Crooked?" the lawyer queried alertly. "How? Do you mean he cuts under you and scamps his jobs—that sort of thing?"

"Not a bit like it," the red one returned ruefully. "His tenders were higher than ours. And so far from scamping his jobs, he does darned good work, right up to specifications. Of course, if there's a loophole in 'em he'll

find it; but that's up to the other fellow."

"But that doesn't make McGarry crooked," Eddie said.

"Well, perhaps I should have said that he's too smooth for us. His horning in here," the red one added gloomily, "is rotten luck."

"He hasn't got the job yet. Your chances are as good as his. I don't know much about him, but as I sized him up when he was here he's a good deal of a roughneck."

"Rough as they make 'em," Red agreed. "But you don't have to be a highbrow to handle rocks and dirt and steel and men. He can hire technical men—good ones. If old Pat can read and write, that's about all. He began by slinging a muck stick on a railway grade, and got a foreman's job because he could whip half a dozen men at once. They had good, tough crews in those days, too. Then he got some sub-contracts for himself, and then went after the big ones. Now he has money, credit, a splendid outfit, and a big reputation. You've got to hand it to a man like that. He's clever as the devil. He doesn't just tender for jobs—not by a darned sight!—he goes right after them. That's part of his organization—getting the jobs—and it's good. A fellow named Sheahan handles that."

"Sheahan was with him here. A good-looking chap about our own age or a little older. A good mixer, well set-up, well-dressed—a little too well-dressed, if anything."

"That's Jack Sheahan—'Gashouse' Jack, 'Gentleman Jack.'"

"I've heard those names somewhere."

"You've seen 'em in the sporting columns some years ago. He was a good light heavy fighter about the time we were at college. At first he was known as 'Gashouse' Jack Sheahan, and then the papers took to calling him 'Gentleman Jack,' because he dolled up and pulled the 'gentleman' stuff."

"I remember now. So that's Sheahan. He doesn't look like a pug."

"You mean he doesn't look like an illustrator's conception of one. A leather-pusher is a human being. Some of 'em look like cake-eaters—till you lamp 'em over a set of five-ounce mitts. Sheahan was good; fast, tricky, packed a punch and could take it. Mean streak, though. Liked to cut a set-up to pieces. I came," he added reminiscently, "near mixing it with him once."

"In the ring?"

"He'd have murdered me in a ring. This was one of those accidental affairs. It was down among the side shows at an exhibition in a town where he was putting on his act. He and a couple of friends came barging along, and he shoved me. I didn't know who he was, but the shove seemed personal, so I shot a shoulder into him, and he came back with a left hook that had a sleeper ticket if it had landed.

"So, as compliments seemed to be flying, I slammed him in the armor belt, and it was like punching a balloon tire. He has darned good abdominal muscles. When I felt 'em and got a full flash of his map, I knew I'd struck trouble. But his friends jumped in and told him not to take a chance on hurting his hands. So it blew over with a little ordinary cussing, luckily for me."

"You're not so sure of that," the lawyer commented dryly.

"Oh, well, I might have given him an argument," Red admitted modestly. "In a stray roughhouse you can't tell what will happen. Different from the ring. Anyway, next time I saw him he was out of the ring stuff and with McGarry. Don't think he remembers me, and I'm not reminding him. He isn't stressing his ring record—doesn't like to be reminded."

"He struck me as being a pretty smooth proposition now."

"Struts his stuff all right and gets by with the crowd," Red agreed. "He's

McGarry's right bower. Then he has a sort of fixer, a shyster lawyer or lawyer's clerk who calls himself Calhoun—but I'll bet he was born 'Cohen'—a real downy bird. Oh, I tell you, McGarry's well fixed for underground workers."

"What do you mean by 'underground'?"

"I mean he pulls wires. He doesn't just tender for a job and let it go at that. I'll bet he's been busy down here, or you wouldn't have sent for me."

"I wonder! I'd like to ask you an impertinent question."

"Shoot!"

"How are you and Carmichael—as a firm—fixed financially?"

"We're not as strong as we'd like to be," Hand returned frankly. "We've lost some money. But we can pay our debts—and we can swing this job if we land it, if that's what you're driving at."

"No question about that last, is there?"

"Of course we'd have to arrange for ordinary financial accommodation; but we could do that if the contract contains the usual clauses for payments on progress estimates, as I assume it will. And now, what's behind this?"

"There is a rumor which I have not been able to trace to its source, to the effect that you might not be able to finance the contract to completion—in other words that you might fall down on full performance of the contract if it were awarded you."

"I can tell you the source of that in a holy minute," Red Hand stated indignantly. "That's McGarry's fine Eye-talian hand."

"Well, you can see the prejudicial effect of such a rumor. If you fell down, it would mean that the town and counties would be left with an uncompleted job on their hands, which they would be forced to complete as best they could, and naturally, if you went broke, without recourse. Even a bond

wouldn't be satisfactory, because the idea is to have the bridge built at the earliest possible date, without any hitches."

"I get you," Red nodded. "I didn't tell you McGarry was a hard proposition? Now you see what we've been up against. His reputation gives him an edge to start with. We've never had a big job. Then, to make it binding, he starts this yarn, and it pretty nearly gives him a cinch."

"It begins to look that way," the lawyer admitted. "I don't know what wires he has pulled, but I know he came here and made a good impression—that of the head of a big concern, able to take hold of this job and rush it through. He gave a talk at a luncheon of one of our public bodies, and so on. Gave a little dinner to a few of our leading citizens, too, I heard. I wasn't one of them."

"Part of his game," Red nodded. "He's clever, I tell you. And I'll bet he's been busy with stuff that doesn't show. He's got some of those leading citizens pulling for him, somehow."

"In what way, do you think?"

"That's hard to say. But construction means the purchase of all sorts of supplies which might be bought locally. Perhaps some of your merchants are members of the town council. At least they have influence with it. Then you have a couple of banks. The contractors' business will be worth having. I don't know all the angles of it, but I'll bet McGarry has fixed up a nice little bunch of local boosters for himself. He'll plant in the minds of a good many people that they themselves will benefit more or less directly, personally, if he gets the contract. Nothing exactly crooked about it, not bribery, but rather more effective and a darned sight less expensive. I can't prove anything, and it wouldn't do any good if I could, but I'm morally certain that's his system."

"Can't you play the same game?"

Red Hand shook his head regretfully. "I'm the poorest fixer you ever saw—unless it's Carmichael. Old Mike is rather worse than I am. It's not that we're too high-principled. We just don't know how. If I tried anything like that I'd be too raw—or not raw enough. Not in my line."

"This is my home town," said Martin, "and I know almost everybody. But unfortunately my influence isn't worth much just where you need it. I'm like you—no lobbyist. Still, we won't give up the ship."

"What I've told you is mostly supposition. McGarry's best work doesn't show. Why, if I were a member of your council I'd give him the job myself. The worst of it is that though I think I know some of his plays, I can't figure out any way to block them." And in perturbation of spirit he rose and began to pace the floor, at last pausing by the window, where he stood scowling upon the street, his head wrapped in an aura of pipe smoke.

To Red Hand the sledding just then looked bare and uphill. Life at the moment was not only real but tough. He and his partner needed this job if they were to keep their business heads above water. But McGarry already had beaten them out on two jobs and seemed in a fair way to do so again. Red's thoughts found expression in a single word supposedly descriptive of lost causes.

As he uttered it aloud, with vicious emphasis, he became aware of the startling circumstance that a most personable young creature of the female sex pursuing her way on the opposite side of the street, had glanced up and apparently greeted him with an airy wave of the hand. Whereat, being essentially a man's man and deeply distrustful of the alleged gentler sex as well as extremely nervous and inclined to dumbness, both literal and figurative, in their presence, he retreated from his post

of observation much as he might have dodged an unexpected attention in the form of half a brick..

"What's the matter?" Martin asked, as this precipitate action followed the single word.

"A girl," said Red, tactfully passing the buck, "flagged you."

"Me?" the lawyer queried from the virtuous low-visibility of his desk.

"Well, it's your window."

"And it's daylight," Eddie Martin pointed out with a grin. "It's your subtle attraction, Red. You merely stand at a window in a strange town and—"

"Forget it!" Red growled. "I don't know a single girl in this burg, and I don't want to. They make me tired—the average run of 'em. Always did. And I make 'em tired. They've got no use for me. Stand-off." And dismissing femininity in the mass with a scornful gesture, Red dug out the dot-tle of his pipe, broadcast it in the general direction of his friend's wastebasket, loaded his faithful companion afresh with the black blend that ordinarily soothed his spirit, and once more began to pace the floor.

"Now, about spiking this rumor, Eddie," he began—but as he spoke there was a tap on the office door.

"Just a minute, Red," said Martin; "I'm expecting a wire. Come in," he called.

And in response to this invitation the door opened to frame a being whom Red Hand recognized with dismay as the young lady who had waved him the airy greeting a few moments before.

CHAPTER II.

A SHY LITTLE PANSY.

AT this closer range Red Hand's startled inspection gave him a general impression of a slim, clean-run young person in the lightweight division, with wavy brown hair in a becoming bob,

smooth tanned cheeks of that peculiar shade of well-being known as "the pink," and wonderful, trustful, appealing, innocent brown eyes which opened widely in apparent surprise at beholding him and then fell modestly before his masculine if slightly frightened stare.

Red, though flurried as he invariably was in the presence of any female who had not achieved the presumably safe-and-sane status of a grandmother, admitted to himself that this girl—no doubt Eddie's—was restful to the eye. She was as pretty and sleek and silky as a young setter or a bay filly. Her eyes in fact put him in mind of a setter's—they were intelligent. Red's mind, it will be observed, ran to homely comparison. He was in complete accord with the gentleman who from extensive experience announced that the more he saw of men the more he admired dogs. She seemed to be a shy, modest, scary little thing; nervous perhaps at coming to see Eddie in his office—or perhaps at not finding him alone. Of course she had never flagged him, Red—no. A girl like that, a modest, shy little pansy—

"Oh, I'm so sorry," the pansy was saying in a voice that struck Bill Hand's ears pleasantly as being exceptionally clear and melodious—as musical, say, as a hound's first questioning note on a fresh-struck trail, which in his opinion was supreme harmony, sweeter and truer even than the rollicking, crashing *tow-row* hunting chorus on a breast-high scent—"I'm so sorry. I didn't know you were not alone, Eddie."

"Didn't you?" Martin commented in a tone which sounded strangely sceptical. "Come in, Alicia, and allow me to present the stranger within our gates to whom you just wig-wagged."

"Oh, I didn't!" the young lady thus addressed protested in charming confusion, though her brown eyes cast at Martin that menacing flicker colloquially termed a "dirty look." "Or if I

did, Eddie dear, I thought I saw you at the window, of course."

"Eddie dear." Eddie's girl. Sure! He was some picker at that—if you like 'em young and innocent and *in-génue*. He, Red Hand, preferred 'em—always strictly theoretically—more grown-up, with more sense and more weight, able to talk intelligently to men on such serious topics as guns and dogs and boats; and perhaps able to use a sixteen-bore or take the stick of a thirty-footer in light airs. Bill's ideal woman, so far as her mental and physical limitations permitted, should be a helpmate and companion to man—that was her job. Bill in theory held that the buck-squaw system with some slight modifications was intrinsically sound. Still, this girl of Eddie's was a smooth blend which might possibly improve with age.

"Yes, naturally you'd mistake him for me," Martin was saying with uncalled-for sarcasm. "But to fix his identity, let me present him. Miss Burdette—Bill Hand, one of my best friends."

For a moment Miss Burdette stared with what seemed to be amazement or even recognition, and then with a shy smile extended slim, tanned fingers which Bill nervously engulfed in a broad paw as he uttered an inarticulate sound supposedly indicative of pleasure.

To his surprise the hand was not soft and yielding, but was exceptionally firm, from which he might have deduced its intimate acquaintance with golf clubs, tennis rackets, or even the household broom. But as always under similar trying circumstances his mental processes were a trifle confused. He now got a square look, broadside to broadside, at the brown eyes which were raised to meet his. They put him in mind of the loyal, trustful orbs of his own beloved Floss—more specifically "Deerwoods' Flossie," English setter.

female, white, black and ticked, as stanch and well-bred a lady as ever held a wily old grouse for the gun. And, lest it be thought that this comparison was derogatory, let it be known that in the Red Hand's view Floss' eyes were twin jewels of beauty unsurpassable.

"I hope *you* don't think I waved to you, Mr. Hand," the owner of the jewels appealed in shy trust. "Of course I couldn't—I mean, not knowing you or—"

"Not at all." Red gulped nervously, "not at all. That is, I mean, not at all."

"I like the way you hold my hand," the shy little lady murmured softly. "But don't you think—just yet, anyway—and before Eddie—"

Red, discovering to his amazement and unspeakable consternation that he was still holding those slim, firm fingers, released them with the unseemly haste of one dropping a hot plate, and blushed furiously. To think that he—he!—should have stood like a darned fool holding a girl's hand—and Eddie's girl's hand at that!

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, partially recovering power of speech. "I—I didn't mean—"

"Alicia," Martin reproved his putative fiancée sternly, "have you no sense of shame?"

"But I told him as soon as I decently could." Miss Alicia defended herself plaintively; "and really he didn't hold it so very long. It didn't seem long to you, did it?" she appealed directly to the transgressor.

"No—that is—I—uh—" Red stammered feebly.

"Pause, breathe deeply, and strive to collect the faculties," Miss Alicia suggested kindly.

Whereat the Red Hand nearly choked. Actually this girl—this shy, shrinking pansy!—was kidding him!

"Alicia, you little demon," said Martin severely, "some day I shall shake you till you rattle, and I'm not sure that

this isn't the day. This young lady," he went on to Bill, "is noted for her ability to drive strong men to desperation. When she saw you at the window she experienced the emotions of the tigress when it beholds its natural prey. You were a stranger, fairly young, not bad looking—from across the street—and in my office—which, of course, is a guarantee of respectability. So she flagged—"

"Slander!" the young lady interrupted. "I'll have the law on you, Eddie. Is your window the only one in this building?"

"It was the only one which framed Bill at the time."

"Yes. But, you see, Bonner & Grant's offices are just above yours, and Susie Wilson is their stenographer, as well as being a particular friend of mine."

"A very fair impromptu effort," the lawyer admitted. "But like all hand-made evidence, it has its weak spot. It is badly shot by the fact that Miss Wilson is at Oak Point on her holidays."

"You know far too much about Susie Wilson's movements," the young lady counter-attacked promptly. "I'm surprised at you, Eddie."

"Do you say you saw her at that office window?"

"This shows me," Miss Alicia returned calmly, "what a nuisance the legal mind would be to live with. No, Edward, we should not be happy."

"You confess, do you? For once!"

"To be perfectly frank," the young lady returned, "I saw somebody at your window, and thinking it was you, of course, I waved a friendly hand. When I discovered my mistake I was *so* ashamed—"

"So," said Martin, "is your Aunt Caroline?"

"Well, but, Eddie, you've no idea how mortifying it is to a sensitive girl to see a man dodge back from her friendly greeting. The brutal masculine

mind simply can't appreciate a woman's delicacy of feeling in such matters. You *did* dodge, you know," she accused the culprit directly.

"Let me apologize for my friend," Martin grinned. "He isn't brutal—he's merely girl-shy." Here the maligned Red was understood to murmur manly protest. "If he dodged," continued Eddie, "he was, in my view, justified. It was his manly intuition, the instinct of self-preservation—"

"Shut up!" said the man of intuition.

"You'll realize the stark truth of my words if you stick around. And now, Alicia, since you have had a close-up of Bill—for I assume that is why my drab office has been brightened by your fair presence—"

"How cheerfully insulting you are, Eddie," the owner of the presence interrupted. "I'll pay you for that one of these days. I was coming to see you, anyway."

"What for?" Martin asked with suspicion.

"To sell you tickets for the Charity League hop at the Country Club. How many?"

"One."

"And one for Susie Wilson—two?"

"One."

"Oh, very well. You have a shocking disposition. How many, Mr. Hand?"

"Bill's out, Alicia. He won't be here."

"How many, Mr. Hand?"

"Well—er—I'll take two," Red surrendered weakly.

"Be a man!" Martin urged. "Don't stand for this hold-up. You never dance, anyway."

"I'll give 'em to somebody," Red explained unconvincingly. "Good cause, charity. Always support charity."

"She'll make you support Faith and Hope, too," Martin predicted.

"You embarrass me frightfully, Ed-

die," Miss Alicia stated calmly. "Just to show you that I appreciate Mr. Hand's kindness, I'll tell you what I'll do. If he is in town for the hop, he may be my escort, if he likes. There, now! And you know perfectly well that I don't have to ask for one. What do you say, Mr. Hand?"

"Why—uh—" Red stammered, appalled by the prospect opened by this most unconventional invitation but unable to think of valid excuse for refusal. "If I'm here—give me great pleasure—'preciate honor—kindness—stranger—assure you."

"Now, see here," said Martin, "Bill's a human being. He isn't a Christian martyr, and I doubt if he's even a Christian. You're not to frame anything on him—you and your crowd."

"I told you I was playing fair."

"Well, that's good enough," Martin admitted. "Bill is going to be famous. Some day you'll be telling your grandchildren how you met him."

"The little dears!" Miss Alicia exclaimed apparently entranced by this remote prospect. "Yes, my darlings," she went on in quavering, reminiscent accents, "one bright summer's day in the long ago when I was but a young girl—will you hand me my shawl, Edith? Thank you—I was selling tickets for a charitable purpose, and so far overcame my natural maidenly shyness as to call upon the judge, your grandfather, in his office—though, of course, he was not a judge nor your grandfather then, and neither of us suspected that—"

"Which last is true, anyway," Martin interrupted. "Listen to me. Bill Hand is the man who is going to build our bridge."

"Really!" said Miss Alicia with polite interest. "I thought that Mr. McGarry—but I suppose it is really the engineers who do the work, isn't it? Perhaps Mr. Hand is Mr. McGarry's chief engineer?"

"Not by—" Red Hand began impulsively, and checked himself. "Well—uh—hardly!" he substituted, less forcibly.

But the girl's remark had changed the atmosphere. The men exchanged glances. Sensitive to the change, she regarded them inquiringly.

"What is it? What did I say?"

"You see," Martin explained, "Car-michael & Hand—that's Bill's firm—are tendering for this bridge contract themselves, in opposition to McGarry."

"Oh, but of course I didn't know that. I'm sorry."

"What made you think McGarry was going to do the work, Allie?"

"I don't know. I just had that impression. I suppose I must have heard somebody say so. It may have been dad or some of his friends who come to the house. Why?"

Martin explained frankly. "If people's minds are made up in advance we want to know why. If your impressions represent the attitude of your father and his friends they really cut considerable ice."

"I'll find out, if you like."

"Please."

"No." Bill Hand put in unexpectedly. They looked at him in surprise. "Not fair to ask a girl to tip her father's hand," he explained diffidently.

"I suggested it myself," Miss Alicia reminded him.

"All right from your standpoint," Bill admitted. "Not from mine, though. I know you wouldn't do anything that wasn't all right, as you see it."

Miss Alicia regarded him speculatively. His standards of business ethics seemed to differ from what little she knew of those of her father and his associates.

"Thank you. But you don't know very much about me, Mr. Hand."

"Not yet," said Bill.

Miss Alicia's face expressed the surprised approval of a conscientious

teacher who gets a correct answer from a supposedly backward pupil.

"But," Bill added, "now and then I can tell a good deal about some people as soon as I see them."

"A mind reader!" Miss Alicia suggested with faint irony.

"Oh, no," Bill negated, "nothing like that. I mean, I go a good deal on some people's eyes."

Miss Alicia was not unaccustomed to complimentary references to these organs. Imaginative young gentlemen on favorable occasions had alluded to them as "stars of hope," "twin beacon lights to guide," and like original metaphors. She rather hoped that Bill would pull a new line. So far he had seemed tongue-tied. She had suspected him of being incurably girl-shy. Now, however, he seemed to be doing better. He might be one of those animals which are said to respond to kindness.

"And what can you tell about me from my eyes?"

Bill suffered a relapse. "Well—uh—I didn't mean that I could tell much. It's just that your eyes put me in mind of Flossie's."

Miss Alicia stiffened. This was not, or should not be, in the deck. Married or even engaged men under thirty-five should be made to wear some insignia of status. Eddie Martin should have told her. She inquired coldly:

"And who is 'Flossie,' please? Your fiancée or your wife?"

"Oh, no," Red replied with simple faith. "She's my dog. English setter. A peach. She's—"

And Martin, bowing himself forward upon his desk, snorted. Miss Alicia gasped.

"Are you—actually!—comparing my eyes to a dog's? How immensely flattering!"

Red realized dimly that something was wrong. Obviously the young lady did not appreciate the high compliment he had paid to her orbs. That, of

course, was her ignorance of dogs. He hastened to put matters right.

"No, no, I'm not comparing them, not in that way. Big difference, of course. Floss' eyes are wonderfully intelligent—"

Martin yelped in unholy glee. Miss Alicia, reddening for once in her young life, cast a scathing glance at his shaking shoulders.

"If your dog's eyes are intelligent, Mr. Hand, I'm surprised that mine should resemble them." Which at the moment they didn't, even to Red Hand. They had ceased to bear any likeness to the loyal, trustful orbs of the perfect Floss, and had become twin storm clouds charged with lightnings. The net result of his well-meant tribute was disastrous.

"I didn't mean anything like that," he disclaimed desperately. "I just meant that something in yours put me in mind of hers."

"But not intelligence?"

"No." Red shook his head slowly. Women didn't understand. "I told you I didn't mean that. It's hard to explain, if you don't know dogs. But if you know a dog and he knows you, when you look into his eyes you can see something looking back at you—something sort of—of—well, straight and clean and true-blue. Something you can bank on, if you get me. Floss," Red concluded, getting on firmer ground, "has beautiful eyes and just as beautiful a disposition."

For a moment this somewhat confused explanation seemed to fall a dud. But suddenly the storm clouds lifted; the warm browns came back, and a little twinkle presently replaced the lightnings.

"I'd like to see this Floss of yours some day. And now I must run on. Thank you both for buying the tickets. Good-by."

Red Hand, slightly dazed, saw the door close behind her. He continued

to gaze at it while mechanically he loaded his pipe.

"Well," Martin grinned, "what do you think of that young lady?"

"Your girl—is she?"

"Not guilty, m' son."

"Called you 'Eddie dear,'" stated Red, whose ideas as to expressions of affection, both verbal and active, were those of a vanished era.

"The greatest humiliation of my life," the lawyer returned, "was on a bright summer's afternoon when I was a young man of ten. By every law, human and divine, from Moses to the Constitution, I was entitled to play ball with the gang. But instead, I was forced to wheel a squalling female brat up and down our best residential streets to give her the air, while her mother and mine held high converse. The razzing I got from the boys who saw me thus occupied is still green in memory. The brat has grown into the young lady who has just left us. In return for giving her the air at that distant day, she has given me the air ever since. Fall in love with her, if you like. You'll have plenty of company."

"You're not talking to me," Red told him loftily. "I've no time for girls. They make me tired."

"This one will make you more than tired—she'll drive you crazy. She'll kid the eternal life out of you—and make you like it. But for all that, she's a square little sport, and any man who sizes her up for a piece of fluff on her line of chatter makes a serious mistake. She has brains, that young lady, and good, cold nerve. But," he added, frowning, "I don't like that idea she had about McGarry. I'll bet she got it from her father."

"Who is he, anyway?"

"Didn't her name tell you?"

"I didn't catch her surname. You called her 'Alicia' and 'Allie.'"

"Alicia Burdette. Her father is George W. Burdette, president of the

Commercial Bank and half a dozen other local enterprises. He's our biggest financial gun. At present I'm a little in his black books. Took a case against his bank and won it. He isn't a bad old scout, in spite of a short temper and a few fussy mannerisms. Shrewd, sound business man. Allie is his only child. He has money and a blood pressure. For which reasons he'd make you an excellent father-in-law, Red."

"No chance!" the Red Hand growled. "Think he's backing McGarry?"

"Hard to say. He won't show in it, if he is. I don't like the look of it. He has a good deal of influence. I keep out of local politics myself for business reasons, but I think that a few of our leading citizens who never hold office themselves practically control our town council."

Red grunted. This was not encouraging.

"As I understand it, the tenders will come before your council, plus members of the two county councils?"

"Eventually. A special committee will report the tenders to them."

"Makes quite a large body. Pretty good men all around? Business men from town on your council, I suppose? Farmers and country merchants from the counties?"

"That's about the composition. Yes, pretty good men, most of them—except, perhaps, some from the lower end of Trent. They have a queer crowd down there."

"How is that?"

"Well, the upper end of Trent is good farming and orchard country and well settled. But the lower end is brush and swamp and marsh, and thinly populated. It is good for shooting and fishing and not for much else. It was settled by a few families of hunters and fishermen in the early days, and their descendants still live in much the same way—by gun, trap and net—and a little moonshine."

"Sounds ideal," Red approved cordially. "Arcadian."

"They have another line now, according to rumor—rum-running and smuggling."

"Everybody smuggles, given the chance," Red observed tolerantly. "Always did. French brandy and silks, and the good old lugger. Mere peccadillo."

"Perhaps—when it's in moderation. They run booze one way and merchandise the other."

"Good, sound economics," Red grinned. "Maxim of all transportation companies to avoid the empty haul."

"Yes. Anyway, they haven't any roads to speak of down there, and don't want them. They use the water for transport as their ancestors and the aborigines used it. They didn't want any bridge and voted solidly against it. They're against progress and settlement. They wanted to remain in their isolation."

"Most of this so-called progress is the bunk, come right down to case cards," the red one stated with conviction. "It's not such a boon, come to skin the hand close. Especially roads and settlement. Mostly all you get out of 'em are neighbors you don't like and a lot of tourists that fish out and shoot out every living thing and make every decent camping spot look like hell's back yard."

"You belong back in the Stone Age," his friend told him, "in a cave with a few nice, congenial, neighborly bears, a form-fitting suit of red hair, and a club."

"I'd get along," Red stated with confidence, "and I might like it. No chance, though. These Arcadians are opposed to the bridge, you say. Then if they think I'd make a mess of building it they ought to be for me. Is there any head man in this crowd of fundamentalists?"

"Their reputed leader is—or used to be—an old water rat named Phelps—

also called 'Cap'n Saul' and 'Uncle Saul.' But more recently—this is rumor merely—I hear of three brothers named Conables. I don't know the ins and outs of it, but from what I gather, it's a case of trade rivalry plus the ambition of young bucks to oust the old leader and command the herd. These Conables are said to be a tough lot. So is old Phelps, for that matter."

"Ought to make good, paying clients if they shoot each other up or run foul of your beloved law."

"I don't touch the criminal side. Not in my line."

"You're lucky to be able to choose. Well, Eddie, Mike and I need this job in the worst way, and I'm going to camp down here in your town for a while, though I don't see just what good it will do. McGarry seems to have the inside track."

"I wish I had some definite advice to offer," the lawyer regretted; "but the plain truth is that I haven't. About all I can do is to introduce you around and let folks size you up. Without flattery, you create a favorable impression when you allow yourself to do it. Then there's your old athletic record."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake don't mention that," Red protested. "That's ages ago. What do your business men care about a line-bucker? You mention college stuff to most of 'em and it puts their back hair up. That's one thing I've learned to keep my trap closed about."

"May be something in that, once in a while," the lawyer admitted. "All right. Unfortunately I have to go out of town for a few days, but I'll take you around to some of the business men right now; or, if you prefer, I'll leave you letters of introduction."

"Suppose we let that go till you come back," Red suggested. "I think I'd like to look around for myself for a couple of days. Nobody knows me. A stranger can ask questions, and nobody

thinks anything of it. People will spill a lot of local stuff to him which they'd keep to themselves if they thought he had an ax to grind. Yes, that's what I'll do. Then, when you get back, you can introduce me around, if it seems worth while."

CHAPTER III.

AN INFORMAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE.

A STOUT, reddish-faced but otherwise iron-gray gentleman, was Mr. George Wheeling Burdette, clean shaven except for a clipped mustache, impressive in speech save when a somewhat choleric disposition gained the upper hand, and dignified in carriage. In business hours he wore an aspect of frowning concentration, as one immersed in if not submerged by, large affairs. Originally an artificial front, he had worn it so long that it had become part of his main structure.

He was a good business man. He had a finger in most of the local financial pies, and though nobody could call it a crooked finger, he was expert in bending it sufficiently to extract the juiciest plums. He was a successful man of assured position, knew it, and expected to be, and was, treated with deference.

For young men generally he had a large if tolerant contempt, regarding them as half-baked products of the oven of life, of which he himself was a substantial, well-iced cake.

He came in contact with more than the usual number of adolescent and young adult males. Ever since his only child had attained years of indiscretion—say, seventeen or thereabouts—young men had cluttered up his residence and infested the highways and byways leading to it. He flushed them from the metaphorical tall grass of nooks whence they took fluttering wing. They got under foot, and exasperated him by their nervous efforts to get from under.

Most of them were afraid of him, and showed it, which exasperated him the more, as a cringing dog invites a blow from a short-tempered master. Those who were not, he inconsistently considered humptious and fresh. When he condescended to talk to them, they were apt to be tongue-tied or nervously garrulous. He found their efforts at conversation idiotic, though they were at pains to agree with what they thought to be his opinions.

Moreover, he knew what most of them were earning. Some of their salaries he paid himself and made mental notes—which would have amazed the said young men, who fondly imagined entrée to his house to be a step toward business advancement—not to increase.

True, none of these sap-headed cubs—as he mentally classified them—so far had made any apparent impression on his daughter. But you could never tell. Girls who would inherit more than she, had been known to develop strange and deplorable infatuations.

If George Burdette did not approve young men, still less did he understand young women of the present, whose dress—to call it that—would have blocked traffic in the days of his youth; whose speech and conventional unconventionalities would have debarred them from polite society of that period. Not that Alicia herself was an exponent of the extreme in either respect. Extremists might have considered her somewhat old fashioned. Her speech was not profane: she smoked little: as alcoholic beverages dulled her mental edge instead of keening it, she barely tasted them; and her dress was always in good taste. Her father had little fault to find with her habits, speech or apparel.

But as much could not be said of her views and friendships. She was regrettably irreverent in her attitude toward the obese gods of long custom whose divinity in George Burdette's

youth was unchallenged save by crazy theorists. There was no question of her discretion; but unfortunately she made no distinction between young men and women of the first financial families and those of no family at all to speak of—or best not spoken of. She possessed a large and catholic acquaintance among such indispensable but submerged beings as stenographers, nurses, saleswomen and teachers; not, be it understood, young women who followed these callings light-heartedly as fads or to earn pin money, but to whom such employment was grimly a living. He did not like these friendships, and spoke of them to Alicia's mother, who liked them as little, but was equally powerless to interfere with them.

Both father and mother disapproved their daughter's fondness for sports formerly considered exclusively masculine. They could remember when croquet was considered a good athletic game for young women.

George Burdette himself played what he called golf, which brought him into valuable informal contact with other business men. He seldom played more than nine holes, and when partnered with any one giving down the milk of human kindness the twosome halved without playing No. 6, which involved a drive across a bushy little ravine. As Mr. Burdette invariably found the bottom of this hazard with his ball, and less frequently the ball itself, something is to be said for this omission. After all, golf is—or should be—a recreation.

After the exertion involved in shooting nine—or even eight—holes in the sixties when all was going well, he was wont to revive his flagging energies with a couple of highballs. He then drove home to dinner with the hearty appetite produced by open-air exercise. After which he slept it off in an easy-chair. On awakening he was apt to feel dull and was inclined to be irritable.

Nobody but his daughter ventured to disturb these health-restoring slumbers.

On a certain evening, Mr. Burdette, having appeased his eight-hole appetite in defiance of theories of dietary moderationists, sought his accustomed comfort in a deep armchair in the room euphemistically termed his "study," in the soothing company of the evening paper and a stout cigar. Shortly the former drooped upon his knees and the latter went dead. Retaining the extinct weed between his teeth, as a dying but game bulldog his hold, Mr. Burdette slept the sleep of the just gorged.

Miss Alicia, entering purposefully, surveyed her comatose parent critically and perched on the arm of his chair.

"Dad!"

"Whuh!" Mr. Burdette responded from the depths.

His daughter expertly removing the cigar from his oral orifice placed her red lips against his auricular orifice and blew therein.

"H'ho!"

Whereat Mr. Burdette came back to life and its problems.

"Dammit, don't whistle in my ear!" he exclaimed paternally. "And don't bother me when I'm reading. Gimme that cigar."

"I'll get you a fresh one, darling. There! Smoke and tell me that you love me."

"How much do you want?" Mr. Burdette inquired with fatherly intuition.

"Is that nice?" his daughter reproved him in injured tones. "I don't want money."

"You feeling all right?" Mr. Burdette queried with natural anxiety.

"Splendid. I just want you to tell me something about the bridge that's going to be built across the bay."

Mr. Burdette stared. Interest in structural enterprises was a new trait in the young lady.

"What do you want to know about it?"

"I want to know who is going to build it."

"How do I know?"

"Well, I've heard that it was that Mr. McGarry who was here to see you."

"I understand he's tendering," Mr. Burdette admitted cautiously.

"What does that mean?" Miss Alicia inquired with limpid innocence.

"Why—uh—it means he tenders," Mr. Burdette explained enlighteningly. "Puts in a tender," he elaborated brilliantly.

"You do put things so clearly," his daughter told him admiringly.

"Well, it's quite simple," Mr. Burdette said modestly. "Any fool could understand it."

Miss Alicia overlooked the implication. "I think I do, now that you have explained it," she said humbly. "A tender is the same as a bid at bridge, except that the lowest bidder gets the contract."

"Well—uh—not necessarily the lowest."

"Why not?"

"Well—ahem!—there may be reasons. For instance, if you wanted the best dental bridgework you wouldn't go to the cheapest dentist." Mr. Burdette made a note to remember that. It was one of those pat things. Impromptu, too.

"But if the bidders are all good, does the lowest win?"

"Uh—um—well, usually."

"Not invariably?"

"There are no invariable rules in business," Mr. Burdette stated didactically. "And it's full of wheels," he added practically. "You wouldn't understand. Now run along. I'm busy."

"So that really there isn't anything conclusive about the lowest bid?" his daughter persisted. "Have you anything to do with these bids?"

"Not a thing," Mr. Burdette replied thankfully.

"But you have a great deal of influence."

"Well——" Mr. Burdette admitted modestly, and was struck by a sudden suspicion. "What are you asking all these questions for?"

"I don't want that old McGarry to get the contract," Miss Alicia stated bluntly.

"You—don't want——" Mr. Burdette began in amazement. "Why not?" he demanded.

"I don't like him."

"Why, you don't know him."

"Well, I wouldn't like him if I did."

"That's silly. No reason at all."

"It's a perfectly good reason. And, besides, I want Carmichael & Hand to get the contract."

"Who," Mr. Burdette demanded, "in blazes are Carmichael & Hand?"

"A firm of contractors—engineers."

"Well, let 'em tender."

"But you just said that didn't mean a thing."

"Well—ahem!—I merely intended to——"

"Will you be an old darling and use your influence for them?"

Mr. Burdette promptly refused to be a darling.

"Certainly not."

"Why not?"

"It would be most improper."

"More improper than using it for that old McGarry?"

"Who told you I was using it for him?"

"Nobody. But aren't you?"

"Nonsense! Bosh! Why are you interested in Carmichael &—whatever the other fellow's name is?"

"I'll tell you if you'll tell me why you're interested in McGarry."

"I'm not interested at all, except as a citizen and a taxpayer."

"Pooh!" said Miss Alicia. "You've been living with us for a long time, darling. Tell the truth, and shame the nasty old devil."

"Alicia! you forget yourself!"

"Right out of the second act," Miss Alicia nodded approvingly. "You say it beautifully." She clasped her hands, her expression one of sad appeal. "Remember, father. I am your only daughter!"

"Thank God!" said Mr. Burdette devoutly. But for some reason which he was unable to explain he never could keep up a "heavy" rôle with this daughter of his. His attempts to do so usually collapsed, to his disgust. Like many men accustomed to be taken seriously, he had no defense against an opponent who refused to play the game that way.

"You really mean that I'm all in all to you?" his daughter suggested cheerfully. "That's it, isn't it? Say it is, and I'll kiss you."

"Don't be a darned nuisance," Mr. Burdette returned as crossly as he could under the circumstances.

"I'll kiss you anyway. There! And you *will* use your influence, won't you?"

"No."

"Not for me?"

"No!"

"Not for your only-thank-God girl?"

"No, dammit *no!*"

"Lord," Miss Alicia quoted humbly, "if you won't help me, don't help the bear." At least promise me you won't pull for McGarry."

"I won't promise anything. These matters are outside a young girl's sphere."

"I'm afraid," said Miss Alicia sadly, "that you are trying in your own dear way to tell me to mind my own business."

"Best thing you can do," Mr. Burdette assured her with paternal politeness. "Men's affairs aren't things for girls to mix up in. Keep out of 'em."

His daughter rose from the arm of his chair. "You know best, of course, father," she said with exemplary meekness.

"Of course I do," Mr. Burdette returned with conviction. Generous in victory he added: "Ahem! if you want to trade in that roadster, tell 'em to come in and see me about it. Now run along; I'm busy." He was quite sure he had thoroughly squelched whatever fool notion had entered his daughter's sleek but immature brown head.

Outside, however, the daughter shook that head reflectively. "So he *is* pulling for old McGarry! And he's pulling strong, or he'd have promised me. Well, all right. I don't suppose it ever occurred to him that I have quite a drag in this town myself. It didn't occur to Eddie Martin, either. Maybe I'll show 'em." And with this cryptic inner resolution Miss Burdette shortly left her home in the roadster above mentioned, at a speed charitably overlooked by Officer Terence Dillon of the local police.

CHAPTER IV.

BEARDING THE LION.

BILL HAND registered at the Bay House, Winota's leading hostelry, and proceeded to look around him. He had no settled plan of campaign. He desired to find out more about what he believed to have been McGarry's subtle propaganda, with a view to counteracting it, but he did not know exactly how to go about it. To Red Hand, the paths of intrigue were blind alleys. He was a good fighter, afraid of no odds in open combat, but he was, and regrettably knew himself to be, lamentably deficient in knowledge of tactics and strategy of the sort employed by his rival.

So far as he could ascertain from casual conversations and leading questions, McGarry seemed to have made an excellent impression generally; that is, when Red broached the topic of the proposed bridge and asked a question or two about its construction, the other party to the conversation was very apt

to mention McGarry. It seemed to be assumed that he was the man for the job. And nobody at all mentioned the firm of Carmichael & Hand. Bill's name, when he gave it, told nothing. Nobody had heard of him. One citizen put it succinctly:

"There may be a number of tenders; but if the town and county councils have any sense they'll give the job to somebody they know can do it, and do it right and do it quick. This McGarry who was here has a big reputation—"

And that seemed fairly representative of the general attitude.

Then occurred a piece of rotten luck. Eddie Martin in his absence had been knocked down by a car and seriously injured. He was apparently suffering from concussion and possibly a fractured skull. It was unlikely, the newspaper story said, that he would be out of hospital for some weeks.

That left Bill in the air, so far as an ally was concerned. Now the lone hand which he had elected to play temporarily was, for practical purposes, permanent. He had made no progress nor did he see how he was going to make any.

At this stage, when he had wasted several days and found himself no farther ahead, he decided to change his tactics for more direct ones. As a beginning, on the principle that if you are going to swim it might as well be in deep water, he made up his mind to call on and sound out that eminent pillar of local finance, George W. Burdette, whose chief claim to fame—at least in Bill's opinion—lay in his paternal relation to Miss Alicia.

Bill had not seen that young lady since their initial meeting; but somehow, strangely, her image and thoughts of her persisted in a secluded pigeon-hole of his mind heretofore occupied by the perfect Floss and her predecessors. He did not consciously think of Alicia very often; it was more that he was

continually aware of her existence. As to her father, he had seen that gentleman afar off. To Bill's possibly prejudiced eye no resemblance was apparent; indeed that gentleman's possession of such a daughter seemed a remarkable illustration of the inscrutable ways of Providence.

The prospect, as indicated by these long shots of Mr. Burdette, seemed unpromising. From Bill's shallow trenches, he loomed as a formidable position, strongly fortified, with considerable wire. Nevertheless Bill made up his mind to a frontal attack without preliminary bombardment, to find out for himself whether Mr. Burdette's undoubtedly local influence was committed to McGarry. With rare cunning he selected as the most propitious time for this interview, which he rather dreaded, the hour just after lunch, as being that most likely to find this financial lion in a purring, non-man-eating mood.

At this hour, then, he entered the Commercial Bank where Mr. Burdette had his business being, and was passed along by a fat youth who stared at him with deep suspicion from behind a grille, to a young man with varnished hair who was labeled "Inquiries." This young man, also regarding him with professional suspicion, extended to Bill a form on which he was requested to state his name and business, in accordance with the best modern time-saving methods, and, when Bill had done so to the best of his ability, vanished with it within a structure with walls of opaque glass, apparently the presidential lair.

On the day selected by Bill to make his acquaintance, Mr. Burdette had lunched an out-of-town visitor at the Country Club, where his repast had consisted of two dry Martinis, ox-tail soup, beefsteak-and-kidney pie, with two kinds of vegetables, and all washed down by a bottle of genuine British ale, followed by strawberry pie with ice

cream on top, cheese, black coffee with cognac, and cigars. On the whole, Mr. Burdette—in the English sense—had done his guest extremely well, with intent to do him better—in the American sense—later.

He had then driven back to his office, where he endeavored to bring his mind to bear upon the contents of some letters of his own morning dictation ready for signature. Mr. Burdette, to his credit and occasional profound thankfulness, never signed anything without first visualizing it in court in the hands of unfriendly counsel; and then he did so with misgivings. He was aware of the malevolent capacity of the written word to lie in wait for years and then rise up to confound its author; and he believed wholly in the theoretical wisdom of Monsieur Talleyrand's advice never to write a letter and never to destroy one. Unfortunately the exigencies of modern business prevented literal compliance with this excellent maxim.

He ran his eye down the neat typing; but the eye was heavy and the lid inclined to close upon it. Relaxation in the mad rush of modern life is strongly recommended by high authority. Mr. Burdette relaxed. He slid gently down in his chair, his cigar as on another occasion still firmly held between his teeth, while from the presidential nose issued sounds suggestive of a throttled engine gently idling with an occasional miss.

A discreet knock made him start into wakefulness with a disturbing flutter of the heart. He blinked, caught up the letter—upside down—and frowned at it with an air of concentration.

"Come in. Well, Williams?"

Williams of the varnished hair, a young man who hoped to rise to higher things by being deaf, dumb and blind on occasion and in agreement with his superiors at all times, extended the form on which Bill had stated his name

and business, or had endeavored to do so.

Handwriting is said to be indicative of character. If so, Bill's stamped him as being complex. As a boy, his script had been the despair of his teachers. Even then it had refused to conform to accepted letter formations. As Bill progressed in life he placed his dependence on the machine for business letters, and he seldom wrote others. He could read his own writing when it was not too cold, and that was good enough for him. For his own purposes he had evolved a system of short longhand or long shorthand; that is, he cut most of his words in two and joined the halves. But, glanced at casually, the writing seemed to flow. Only when one looked for its meaning did it refuse to give it up, and force the reader to do likewise. As for Bill's signature, it was his own and far from Spencerian.

Mr. Burdette blinked at the card, held it off and had recourse to his glasses.

"Mister—huh!—Mister—what the devil's this signature, Williams? I can't make it out."

Williams, unhappily conscious of an error of omission in that he had omitted to ask the signatory that question, did the best he could.

"It looks like 'M. B. Healey' to me, sir."

"It don't to me. It looks like something 'Van Horne'."

"I think you are right, sir," the discreet Williams agreed rashly.

"You think I'm right; you *think* I'm right! Why didn't you ask him his name if you can't read writing?"

"Shall I ask him now, sir?"

"Certainly not. Don't be a fool. I mean, don't be more of a fool. What does he want to see me about? On the card, is it? Well, why couldn't you say so? What's this? 'Reaping?' No, that isn't it. 'Re option?' 'Re option Acme.' What's 'Acme'? Is it a stock?

Is it a mine? What the devil is it, and what have we to do with it?"

"I think, sir, those words are 're opening account.' He wants to open one with us."

"He does! Is that all? Dammit, Williams, am I to be interrupted by every Tom, Dick and Harry who wants to open an account? Do you realize that my time is valuable, Williams? Do you realize, Williams, that my mind is occupied with more important things than routine matters? Is my train of thought to be broken in upon by every cursed triviality? Tell this Van Horne or whatever his name is to go to—ah—that is, tell him to go to the cashier."

"I suggested that, sir, but he insisted on seeing you personally. He seems to have something to do with the bridge which I understand is to be built, and so—"

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Burdette with sudden interest. "Why didn't you say so before, without all this unnecessary preamble? Learn to save my time, and your own as well. Time is money, not to be wasted in this institution. The bridge, huh? Did he say he was connected with— Well, show him in."

So Bill Hand came in, and being in wished that he were out. What he had scrawled on the card was the flimsiest excuse, but the best he could invent. Obviously you cannot ask a bank president if he is party to a scheme to cold-deck you; nor can you say that whether he is or not, you admire his daughter's eyes.

Mr. Burdette was sure that he had never seen his caller before. This young Van Horne—if that was his name—seemed slightly nervous; but Mr. Burdette was accustomed to that in young men in his presence.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Van—uh?"

"Mr. Van—uh," when enunciated around and through a cigar, sounds

sufficiently like "Hand" for practical purposes. Bill was not hypercritical as to pronunciation.

"Why, yes, Mr. Burdette, if you can spare a few minutes."

"Your card"—Mr. Burdette referred to it—"says that you wish to open an account. Pleased to have it. The office will attend to that. Was there anything else? The clerk—er—suggested that you were—ah—connected with our bridge project."

"I hope to be," Bill replied; "I hope to be intimately connected with its construction. In which case we shall require certain banking facilities."

"Why, certainly," Mr. Burdette assured him with sudden warmth of manner. "That has been arrang—— I mean, that is understood, of course. Very glad to afford you any facilities. That's what we're here for. Try one of these cigars, Mr. van Horne. I think I have heard—somebody—speak of you. Perhaps you are one of the engineers, or possibly a subcontractor, or in the steel or cement line. Your name is familiar, though at the moment I can't recall——"

"I don't think you have my name quite right," Bill put in. "My name is 'Hand'—of Carmichael & Hand. My partner and I are tendering for the construction of this bridge."

For a moment Mr. Burdette's cigar, which he had removed for clearer expression of his cordial sentiments, hung suspended about a foot away from his mouth.

"I—see," he said at last slowly, and put it back again.

"Yes," Bill pursued brightly, having made his plunge. "Of course, if we're successful, as we have to be, we shall have considerable banking business. In addition to our account we may wish to make certain financial arrangements. So I thought I'd drop in and get acquainted with you as the head of *one*"—he permitted himself to stress the last

word slightly—"one of the local banking institutions."

Bill was rather pleased with this speech. It was businesslike and yet crafty. It contained a fairly broad hint. He told himself that he was no slouch at the diplomatic stuff when he really got going.

"I—see," said Mr. Burdette again.

Only that and nothing more. Like the Raven, he seemed confined to one phrase. The remark, though possibly adequate and apposite, contained no new conversational suggestion. It seemed up to Bill.

"Uh-huh!" said Bill as brightly as he could.

A pause, which lengthened.

"And this," said Mr. Burdette, referring again to the card, "is the account you refer to, I assume."

"That's it," Bill admitted. "Nothing certain about it yet, of course; but I like to have matters in train."

Mr. Burdette removed his cigar and inspected first one end and then the other with deep interest. So this was a member of the firm in whose business affairs his daughter had exhibited an extraordinary interest; a firm as he had heard which never had done any business and likely never would do any; a shoe-string organization. Could it be possible that she was interested in this Hand? God forbid!

"Naturally we shall be very pleased to have your account when circumstances justify you in giving it to us. Was there anything else, Mr. van—uh—Mr. Hand?"

There was nothing else. Bill had intended in the course of friendly conversation to mention casually that he had had the pleasure of meeting Miss Burdette; but the friendly conversation had failed to come off. A hard frost had cut down its bloom. The after-lunch mood was disappointing, resembling a before-breakfast grouch. Bill had intended also to speak of prejudicial ru-

mors affecting his firm, to dissipate them; but he knew when the cards were running against him. He rose.

"Well, I won't take up any more of your time, Mr. Burdette."

"No—uh—I'm a little busy to-day. Come in some other time when you—uh—if you—yes, good afternoon."

Red Hand emerged from the bank with a feeling of bafflement which was

becoming chronic. Mr. Burdette's original cordiality, followed by the abrupt change of manner when he had stated his firm's name and business, were not encouraging. Considering that gentleman, more than ever he was impressed by the inscrutable mysteries of life. How could a hard-boiled old financial egg like that have such a daughter? It was beyond Bill.

To be continued in the next issue.



THE LADY LINDY KISSED

COLONEL CHARLES A. LINDBERGH, whom a thousand hero-worshiping flappers have found to be unkissable, knows when a kiss is a compliment instead of a folly. Mrs. Henry Allen Cooper, wife of Representative Cooper, the dean of the lower house of Congress, tells a story to prove it.

It happened in the private office of Nick Longworth, speaker of the House, the day the great flyer was formally awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Among others present, was Mrs. Cooper, who, incidentally, is old enough to be the young colonel's mother.

When Lindy entered the office, she turned to another woman who stood beside her, and, commenting on his manly and attractive appearance, said she would like to kiss him. The flyer, who had precipitately fled from the offers of countless caresses from the girldom of Europe and America, heard Mrs. Cooper's wish, and with a graceful bow, stepped toward her, presenting his pursed lips as if for reception of the accolade of knighthood.

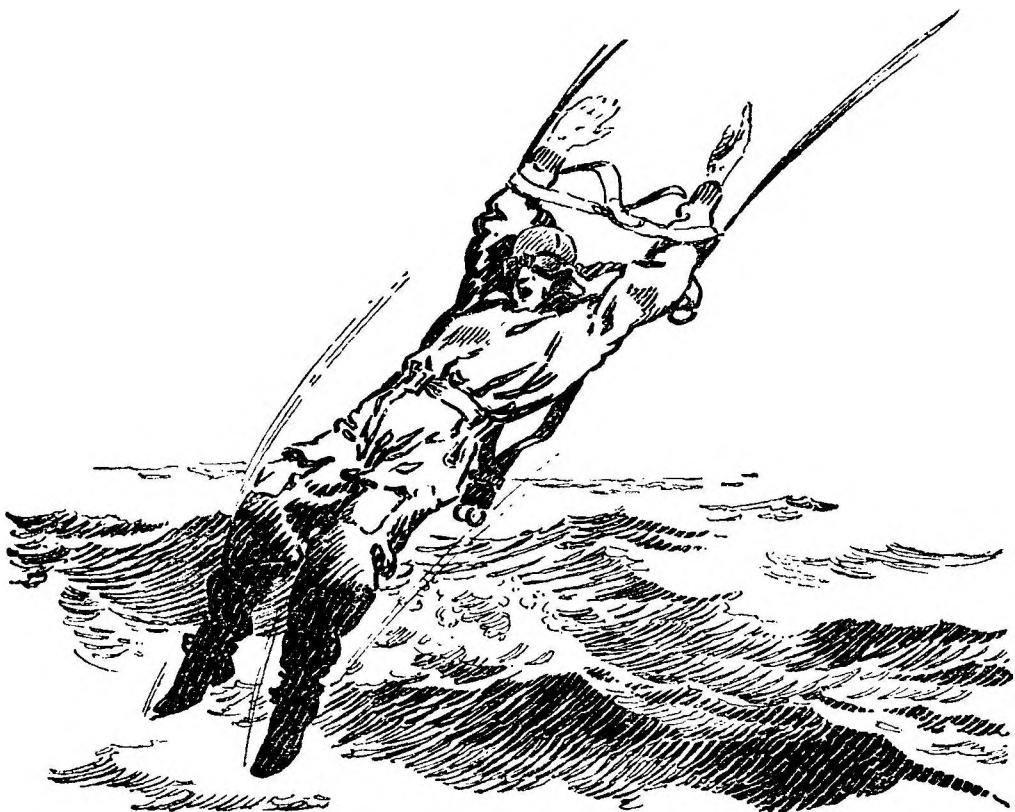


THEIR SENSE OF HUMOR

JESSE W. THRELINGER, the Chicago stockbroker, entertains the depressing theory that the American sense of humor is vastly overrated and that it is being slowed up by the national absorption in money-getting and materialism generally. He set out one day to prove his belief with this story:

"A Scotsman went into a fashionable jewelry store a week before Christmas to buy his wife a diamond ring, and when he opened his purse, the salesman was given the shock of his life when a June bug jumped out."

Threlinger tried that on three stockbrokers, three lawyers, and three physicians. Two of the brokers "got it" right off the bat; the third was still puzzling over it when Threlinger left him. Two of the lawyers looked blank for a second before laughing half-heartedly; the other saw it at once. It got home to one physician after a brief pause for reflection, and the other two asked in a broad manner: "Well, what's the rest of the story?"



GIVE 'EM ROPE

By Holman Day

Trundy, the Banksman, had an original mind. Read how he prevented another fellow from stealing his best girl, and be convinced!

ASNOOTY motor yacht, leaving Jackport harbor and headed for sea, crowded a dingy Hampton boat over against the muddy embankment of the dredged channel.

With all his breath Sawt Trundy, making port in the small craft, had squawked his tin horn, but the signal availed as little as the chirp of a katydid against the oncoming of a lawnmower.

To be sure, the Hampton boat, fishing type, did not class high when com-

pared with the yacht; but Sawt Trundy, late Banksman captain, was nobody to be run under by a haughty prow or crowded by a plutocratic hull. He used language handily when the yacht swept past.

Her captain, pacing the bridge, kept his attention on the channel. The owner, loafing in the deck chair, languidly flipped a cigarette butt over the rail and did not bestow even a side glance on the fount of able profanity.

Sawt, voicing lurid hopes for a later

meeting, noted name and hailing port on the stern of the departing yacht: *Selma*, New York.

Being rather full of the subject, Sawt had something to say about that yacht when he reached the wharf at Jackport.

He was promptly informed regarding the *Selma*, its owner, his manners, his methods. At the moment the wharf loafers were talking of little else. Jackport, a dozy hamlet made up of a railroad station and a few houses, had found Mr. Clarence Anson an amazing irruption instead of a mere visitor. Nobody understood why he had picked upon remote Jackport as a point at which to meet his yacht.

He had arrived there, however, in smashing fashion, swooping down in an airplane which, after it had circled several times, was brought down in Cale Burson's oat field—though everybody ought to know that July in eastern New England is too early in the season for oat mowing. Cale was reasonable regarding the damage done to his crop, and Anson slapped on fifty dollars more than Cale asked for—hauled out packets of fresh bank notes and flipped off the bills as indifferently as a man handling corn husks.

"Showing he didn't earn it himself," stated an informant. "Had it left to him, of course. And having his fun with it while he's young. Too bad you didn't slam into him with your boat, Cap'n Sawt, and get a fistful while the grabbing is handy in these parts."

Sawt Trundy scowled. "I have earned my money all honest and square with these here!" He spread his calloused palms and flexed the muscles of his arms. "And I'd like to use 'em on that damnation dude and his skipper."

"You might ease your feelings a mite by going up to Cale's field and licking them two fellers left to keep guard over the flying machine," suggested a man humorously. "They're boarding with

Cale. One of 'em steers the thing and tother handles the ingine. It's a soft snap, all right, loafing around here for a couple o' weeks till their boss gets tired o' salt water." He sighed. "It must be slick to have so much money."

"Money is usually p'ison stuff unless you earn it yourself," declared Trundy. And then he strode away up the wharf, a stalwart young chap, his swinging gait expressing manly confidence in himself.

"That's real he-talk and I like it," commented one of the group.

Another snickered. "It would sound better to me if 'twasn't Sawt Trundy making it. Oh, I'll admit he's an up-and-coming critter! Else he wouldn't have been a master at twenty-two. But go and ask 'em out on Quossock Island and they'll tell you he's right now got his eyes on money he didn't earn."

"Uh-huh! I've heard the talk," admitted a lounging. "The widder old Tans Watson left, hey? Waal, she's young and a darn good looker, and so is Sawt; and if a match is in the making betwixt 'em, maybe he's doing his best to overlook the money hindrance in her case."

"Oh, yes! He's doing his best, all right," said a scoffer. "Throws up his master's job so he can hang round Quossock, fitting out a crowd of lobster men to keep her canning fact'ry going."

"It's said as how the best way to show love is to make sacrifices," purred an old chap. "The widder must realize that a Banksman skipper ain't making a come-down in the world unless there's love pushing him offm his perch."

"Lemme tell all o' you this much," rapped out a man who had been holding his peace: "Delora married old Tans for his money. We all know it. Any girl doing such a thing shows a poor streak."

"I don't like to hear women slurred," protested one of the group.

"I wouldn't stand for nobody else to

mention a poor streak in Delora," retorted the detractor. "But I'm her uncle and have got full right to say what I want to say about my own fambly." He babbled on: "I'll add that Delora is whiffle-headed and right now is han-kering for a lot of mushy love to make up for what she didn't get while she was married to old Tans—and she'll never get her kind of lovey-dovey dam-foolishness from a Banksman skipper. Sawt Trundy is too square-toed for a girl like she is now. The idee is, he looks the best to her of anybody on Quossock and so she is leading him on. But I'm hoping she'll get her eye on somebody else and whiffle. She would have her spell o' foolishness and get everlastingly over it. Sawt is too good a lad to be put onto the rocks after he's married. If I only knew a reli'ble romanticker—and that's what Delora is reelly looking for—I'd tip him off. She'd prob'ly learn her lesson. After gitting sick o' fluff stuff she'd be satisfied with solid goods."

"If you happen to ketch aholt of what you're looking for, and he does go out to Quossock, I wish you'd slip me word of it," suggested the humorist in the group. "I'd relish seeing a Banksman skipper take in sail on a romanticker."

Then the humorist stretched his legs in a stroll; he went up to Burson's oat field.

The two guardians of the airplane were couched on matted oat stalks, taking it easy in the shade cast by one of the plane's wings. The mechanician was strumming on a guitar and singing for his own amusement. The humorist, closing in on the pair, took heed of the words of the song, which were concerned wholly with true love.

There is sly malice in any humorist. This one sat beside the singer, broke in on the song and spilled information about the rich young widow who was lonely on Quossick Island and hungry for romance.

"If I was a young feller with your looks, What's-your-name, I'd go stand outside her house and sing a few pretty songs about love; then maybe a match would come out of it. Old Tans Watson left her a lot of money."

A bit later the humorist continued on his stroll, hoping he had planted mischief which would sprout; he had refrained from mention of the Banksman skipper who might have something to say to an interloper.

As soon as the mumble of the informing voice ceased, the pilot came out of absorption in his magazine and was aware of a sparkle of lively interest in the eyes of his mate, who was gazing at the departing caller.

"What was that old blabber handing you, Mert?"

"A ticket to the big show, maybe! Go on reading your story. I'm thinking up the plot of a better one than you'll find in that magazine."

A little later the plotter interrupted the reader, relaying the information about the rich young widow.

"And I was born and raised on Quosock Island, Dick," he ended. "I used to buzz around that girl when we went to school together. But she took the cash and let the romance go. Guess she wants to make up for lost time. I know her nature. With the right kind of a grand-stand play I can grab her off. Look a here, Dick! Be a good pal, and I'll give you a cut-in on this."

"If your grand-stand stuff means a play with this plane, then it's nothing doing—not by a damn site! What did the Big Boy say he'd do to us if we make even a sparrow hop?"

"Oh, I know what the orders are! But he'll be gone for two weeks, anyway, and in that time the two of us will grow mule ears, loafing here in this oat field. Now, see here, Dick——"

The pilot sliced his palm through the air and was more profane in his refusal.

The subject had been opened up,

however. For two days the topic was a shuttlecock between the two.

The tedium of the oat patch had its effect on the pilot. He agreed to take a chance on flying to Quossock. This was after he had received a written agreement from the mechanician, who promised orally in this fashion:

"It's as good as cash, that paper, Dick. I'll be working fast. If she won't elope and marry me, I'll sell her an interest in our airplane company." He winked. "We'll start one. What'll be a good name for it?"

"Labrador and Liverpool Transatlantic," the pilot suggested. "A gold brick needs a good polish. All set! I'll drop you on that island—seeing you say it's too rocky for a landing; I'll head east out of sight, circle, come back here and wait, having something to think about so as to while away the time. But don't keep me waiting too long, else I'll fly out and drop bombs on you."

On that understanding, the two operated.

So it came to pass that toward Quosock, on a July day, an airplane came roaring out of the western heavens. The folks of the rock-bound island tipped up their chins and opened their eyes.

The plane circled, banked and slowed. Something was launched and hurtled downward for a few hundred feet before a parachute snapped out into a huge blossom. A man dangled under the parachute. While he descended he swayed vigorously, endeavoring to steer the 'chute and make a landing on Quosock. But he was wrestling against a smoky sou'wester. The stiff wind carried him eastward along the trail of the plane, which buzzed on its way into the blotting haze and out of sight.

Saw Trundy was the first among the islanders to grab in on the situation. He had a reputation for quick thinking and snappy action. He ran down to the fish wharf, unmoored his power

boat, kicked the fly wheel of the motor and went boiling away toward the spot where he reckoned the visitor would be boring a hole in the sea.

Trundy was near the scene when the new arrival made his splash.

The spread of fabric sprawled on the sea, and the frothing surges quickly cuffed it into shapelessness and tangled its lines.

Trundy drove his craft into the mess, got hold of the edge of the 'chute and overhanded with all his muscle. A flabbier man would have failed. A man of less agility would have been heaved out of the boat by the steep-sided billows racing under the thrust of the sou'-wester. At last he dragged the helpless fellow over the gunwale along with the fabric and snarled lines. The man was at the last gasp, no doubt of it.

Trundy, balancing in his tossing boat, clasped his hands under the salvaged person's middle and jounced vigorously until groans as well as water issued from the gasping mouth.

Then the life saver pulled off the aviator's helmet and masking goggles.

"Hellamitey, it's Mert Somes!"

Consciousness returning, the rescued man blinked into the glaring eyes of his rescuer.

"I've got a danged good mind to heave you back," threatened Sawt Trundy. "You stole my naphtha boat to make your get-away from Quosock. Don't try to tell me you didn't. And to get back here you must 'a' stole a flying machine from somebody. I'll bet dollars against clam shells. Ain't you a hired man for that dude who landed in Jackport?"

"No!" lied Somes. "I'm president of the company that owns that airplane. I'm sending it east on business. I thought I'd drop in on the old home place. The sight of it made me homesick."

"Been missing it, hey? So much so that you plumb missed it, trying to land

on it." It was a sour reception for the returning native. "Well, I suppose I'll have to ferry you ashore. If I heave you back into the drink, them witnesses on the wharf will swear me into jail."

A little later, approaching the fish wharf slowly because the parachute was dragging overside, Trundy shouted and announced the identity of the arrival. All the men, women and children of the hamlet were crowded on the wharf.

Mert Somes dried himself in the sun on the porch of Watson's general store, where he informed listeners that he had made good in flying, was having a summer vacation and had been given a lift on his way to Quossock by one of his planes. The plane, he said, was headed for Labrador to scout for a landing field, to be used by a syndicate which was getting ready to start regular air service to Europe.

"I'm president of the company," he stated proudly.

"This news is right between us home folks, understand," he warned. "I've got a big lay in the concern and I'll never have to worry ever again about money. I ain't worrying any now, for that matter," he stated with the complacency of the well-fixed capitalist. This was interesting because the islanders beforesome had rated him as "no good shakes." But the airplane exhibit was rather convincing.

Before a week had gone by, Mert Somes was getting his feet placed. The manner of his arrival, in spite of the accident, had made him a new kind of a hero on Quossock. When he walked on his rounds of the island and dropped hints about how the money would come rolling in, the folks sidled up to him. Especially did the girls bask in his favor. Delora Watson gave him much attention. A flyer was so romantic!

Sagacious oldsters perceived that a big situation was developing, and they began to gab prophesies that there would be a b'iling hotter than any ever

brought to a steam in the Watson lobster cannery.

Mert Somes was hanging around the Widow Watson more assiduously as the days passed.

Unmistakably a lively scrap was in the offing. Although Mert Somes had swooped from the skies with the manner of an eagle, Sawt Trundy possessed the stout qualities of a sea lion and had a hasty temper.

Making a call at the Watson home, he met Somes coming out. Trundy attacked the situation bluntly.

"Here's the point in this case, Somes: I'm building a business that's going to keep me living here on this island. I shan't stand by and let you cut me out with Delora. If I do, the old wag-tongues and snickerers will make this a hell for me all the rest of my life. I'm planted here, I say, while you're free to go on the wing. I'm advising you to hop off this here twig and mate up somewhere else."

Somes lighted a cigarette and stuck it into the corner of his mouth to prop a sneer. "I do fly for a business, but I ain't a sand peep skittering up into the air when you flap a hand at me."

"Making it a stand-off, are you?" demanded Sawt Trundy, narrowing his eyes.

"Maybe you could call it that if you're bound to stick on a tag."

Trundy doubled his fist at his side and inspected the visage opposite his own. But he spied Mrs. Watson observing from a window. He walked straight toward her, hunched his shoulder and bumped Somes out of the path; the latter staggered and fell under the impulse of the collision.

With the privilege of an understood suitor, Sawt walked into the house without formality of knocking. He confronted the young woman in the sitting room and demanded: "What's the big notion—letting *him* hang around?"

Delora tiptilted her chin. Trundy in

his ire found her manner an offensive copying of Mert Somes' impudence.

"How dare you make a spectacle out in plain sight for everybody to see?"

"It wasn't as big a show as I ought to have made. I'll be doing that later if he doesn't back away and keep his place."

"Sawt Trundy, you know perfectly well what Quossock is, and what shame and scandal will be stirred up for any woman when men fight about her. You give me your solemn vow and pledge you'll stay away from Mert Somes."

"Not till he gives me a pledge to stay away from *you*. I've just asked him to do it, and he made a snoot at me. If you want to stop trouble and prevent scandal, you tell Somes he can't come into this house again."

"If you begin now and show yourself to be jealous and domineering, I can depend on it that you'll be a worse tyrant after marriage. I've seen too much of that in families on this island."

"It's up to the man to have the say."

"That's only the old-fashioned notion—and Quossock is way behind the times."

"Huh! Been taking lessons from the cuckoo that has flopped down here, have you?"

"It will help the women on this island if an up-to-date man posts them on how mainland women are getting their rights these days."

"Look a here; if 'Cuckoo' Somes has roosted here to turn any such trick as that with the womenfolks, I can see where us men will spice up things with a tar-and-feather bee."

Militantly she declared.

"The women will show their mettle in protecting him. I'll lead 'em. If you're thinking of stirring up the men, you'll do well if you give them my warning at the same time."

Sawt Trundy was distrusting the strength of the leash on his temper. He swung from her and went out.

In the yard he turned and went back to the window when she raised the sash and called to him in low tones.

"Both of us are high-strung," she reminded him. "Our spats in the past have never settled something which must be settled."

"Which one is to be boss, hey?"

"No, sir. Making marriage a partnership mutual and agreeable—that's what must be settled. The thing should be tested ahead. If the parties don't come up to the test in respecting each other's opinions and rights and so forth, conditions will be worse after the parties are tied together while they fight it out. I'm testing you now in the matter. Will you apologize to me for your rude actions and talk to-day?"

"I ain't of a notion to roll over and sneeze when you waggle your finger."

"Very well! I'll save myself from worse later on. Go away and stay away." She slammed down the window sash.

He felt like pushing a fist through the glass. However, he restrained himself to a big slam of the gate when he went away.

Trundy knew how to talk to lagards on the Grand Banks, but he had never known how to express his emotions to a woman. His sense of conflict had always been his urge when he went after what he wanted. He had fought the sea from the time he was able to swing an oar. Therefore, ingrained in him was the conviction that winning was attended by struggle instead of mere speech. Any woman, he knew, liked to hear pretty phrases. But, in his sea-trained conception of manhood, such a line of talk seemed to run the risk of showing a soft streak.

Probably Cuckoo Somes had been feeding to her some of the lollipop stuff! Pondering on this phase, Trundy specially concentrated his mind on Somes.

Any man who deals long with the sea develops an intuitive sense of hazards.

Mert Somes would be a dangerous catch for any girl. Before he departed from Quossock he had been as worthless as a sculpin.

According to Trundy's scornful estimate of mainland conditions, a young fellow of Somes' character might be expected, to develop his mean traits rather than discard them.

Therefore, a peculiar but, considering Trundy's temperament, a perfectly natural, situation developed. He had been lukewarm in his love-making, he realized, but he resolved to put extra hot stuff into a defense of Delora against Mert Somes. This promised activity was right in Trundy's line—he relished a fight. Prospects were excellent. He clicked his teeth and smacked his lips.

He decided that the time was not ripe for a decisive run-in with the intruder. Sawt controlled himself. He must be justified by something which was not merely jealous rancor; a fight on that basis would settle nothing and would stir scandal which would everlastinglly set Delora against the aggressor. She had warned him.

Taking precautions against too sudden temptation to maul Somes, Sawt stocked his Hampton boat and set away to the westward, saying nothing to anybody about his plans or destination. He frequently made trips of this sort. His scattered lobster fleet required close watching.

After an absence of two days, he started on his return trip toward Quosock. He had given Mert Somes plenty of rope, he decided, and the excuse for the run-in might be ready and waiting.

In addition, he did not like the weather prospects. One of the regular August fogs was heralded by a slaty bank on the sea horizon.

Sawt's apprehensiveness was well based. While he was making way up a broad reach in the forenoon, the wind shifted and the fog came tumbling in

from the ocean and blanketed the craft. He kept on steadily for several miles, after he had taken his bearings from a can buoy in the reach.

He carefully conned his compass, aiming for a fisherman's cut between islands and the mainland, hoping that the fog would be partly banked off by the wooded heights. In that region he knew every cut, gut and channel, though such passages off the steamboat routes were unbuoyed.

He fetched into the mouth of the cut he was seeking and was heartened by a thinning vapor which enabled him to find his way alongside reefs and the island shore. When he issued from this channel he was obliged to plunge into the blankness of a dungeon fog.

A bay of some width gashed the coast line at this point; the sea opened from the mouth of the bay and that mouth had gulped fog aplenty. But Sawt knew his waters and aimed across confidently toward another cut.

He was not blowing his tin horn. He preferred to use his breath to keep his pipe going. Even in clear weather a keel seldom slashed the water of that bay. There were no houses or harbors along its shores; nothing to make an errand for a boat.

Suddenly a whistle began to hoot from somewhere out in the stifling fog murk. It was a staccato, spasmodic tooting. Somebody was in a scrape, Trundy knew, and he headed for the trouble according to the code of the men of the sea.

After a time, guided constantly by the tooting, he broke out a yacht barely under headway. The yacht was the hateful *Selma*. Trundy stopped his engine and floated close aboard.

A man in a skipper's uniform demanded from the bridge:

"Where's the bell buoy that ought to be here?"

"There never was a buoy of any kind in this bay."

"But one is given on this chart," stated the captain, brandishing the roll of heavy paper. "And more'n that, I saw it last week."

"Where do you think you are?"

A spruce young man, the owner, came to the elbow of his skipper. The latter shouted in the pompous fashion of yacht captains talking to nondescript natives 'longcoast:

"I know where I am all right enough. I'm entering Jackport Harbor, and there ought to be a bell at this point."

Sawt let loose some of his grudge.

"If you was five miles farther to the west'ard and was having better luck than you seem to have in finding things, you might possibly chance onto that bell."

"See here! Do you think I'm five miles off my course? Be careful how you talk about navigation to a St. John captain."

"All right! Speaking special careful, I'll say that the Bluenosers I've seen 'longcoast us'ally carry an up-and-down pinwheel for a compass, are lost if they can't get nigh enough to an apple tree on shore for their bearings, and guess their weather from a barometer given away with a pound o' tea. Also, how long ago did you lose your old fore-and-after dogbody and get your chance to straddle on a good yacht?"

"You go to the devil!"

"I ain't headed that way. But you are, unless you take soundings damn sudden and drop killick and wait till this fog lifts."

The young man pushed past his cursing skipper.

"Hello, man out there! I own this yacht. I must—must get to Jackport at once. Kindly point the way."

"This ain't a city street corner, mister. You're inside a nest o' reefs and islands, and you're past 'em only by luck o' fools or angels. You'll get out o' here only by a lot o' zigzagging, and I can't explain to you how to do it.

Drop your killick, I tell you! You'll have to wait."

"But I *can't* wait," lamented the owner. "I must get to Jackport at once even if I have to swim. I'm desperate."

"You do look and sound that way," sourly acknowledged Sawt, picking up an oar and sculling to counteract the drift of the tide and the slow movement of the yacht—the skipper had prudently stilled the motors by a single bell clang.

"Plainly you're a native. I'm begging you to pilot my yacht to Jackport. Money's no object."

"I ain't in the market, mister."

Then they heard the popping of a motor's exhaust, the sound growing louder. The yacht owner tooted the whistle in the eager hope of attracting a more amenable pilot.

Trundy sat beside his engine and waited. Here came some person who was evidently at home in these waters, possibly one of his own lobster men. Trundy would not allow one of his men to serve, he decided.

When the approaching boat became partially visible, emerging from the thick of the fog, Trundy leaped to his feet and bored with his gaze. The craft was a sizable motor packet. He recognized it as the Watson private boat. Old Tuckett was at the wheel—and Ben Tuckett did know his short-cut channels.

However, Sawt was less interested in Tuckett's seamanship than in the packet's passengers. In the cockpit were the Widow Watson and Mert Somes. The latter immediately tipped his aviator's helmet over his eyes and yapped orders of some sort of Tuckett, who shifted helm, sheered away from the yacht and drove into the fog.

Trundy's thoughts ran like chain links through a hawse hole. He let himself go full tilt into the spirit of conflict. Fear of starting scandal had restrained him on Quossock—had made him feel awkward because he was not

grabbing in with his accustomed sailor-man snap when tackle was threatening to give way. But now he was feeling perfectly natural again—he was full of fight and the lid was off!

He did not bother with any more thinking. He acted. He needed a craft with more speed than his Hampton boat could manage.

His boat was only a few fathoms distant from the yacht, but he did not take the time to scull; he started the motor and headed for the cruiser's bow, hailing the deck hand who was manipulating winch and davit, making ready to drop the anchor.

"Don't leggo that killick!" He stopped the engine, swung close aboard and hove a coil of towline at the astonished deck hand. "Carry the painter aft, son, and make fast with plenty of scope, so she'll top well. Hold taut while I scramble up."

Trundy leaped, overhanded the line and landed nimbly on deck. For a moment he stood there, hand scooped at one ear, listening. Over the sounding board of the sea he could hear the popping of the packet's unmuffled exhaust. So old Tuckett was going to the west'ard! To Jackport Harbor? Were the two passengers aiming to make the noon train? Were they heading for the county seat? This looked serious. Quosock folks always tripped it to the county seat for marriages.

Sawt trotted along the port alley and swarmed up the ladder to the bridge. The yacht's captain was alone there, interrogation points crinkled into the tough hide of his visage.

"What's all this shift-pardners fandango sigerfy?" he demanded hotly.

"I'm piloting you to Jackport, skipper."

"But you said—"

"*Saying* is furled! *Acting* is now h'isted and is full apeak. Give her the bell!"

"No, sir."

"Where's the owner?"

"Gone below."

"Let him stay there. I don't need him." Trundy set himself at the wheel and yanked the bell pull. "He says as how he's got to get to Jackport—and them's orders till he countermands 'em. And drop that fist o' yours into the lazy-jack! It's my style to hit awful hard on the comeback." Sawt was grinning. Here was promised combat. Fight was welcome. He felt in proper fettle, and showed the feeling so avidly that the Bluenoser was deterred.

"Look a here, man; there ain't no need of you and me coming to blows over damfoolishness."

"How come foolishness?" queried Trundy, twirling the wheel without looking at him.

"It's only a girl case. It's all account of love," rattled the captain. "And, of course, you and me are the kind that wouldn't give half a hoot into a scuttle butt about love stuff or for the sake of any girl. But he's got lonesome all of a sudden and he has telegraphed to the girl he's engaged to and asked her to come to Jackport on the noon train, and he'd be there to meet her and her aunt. So he thinks he's got to be there. And that's the damfoolishness I've spoke of."

This was a hot one, reflected Sawt, considering his own immediate interest in Jackport, a girl and the noon train! He bellowed to a deck hand who had emerged from the fore hatch:

"Hi, there, man! Flatten yourself on your belly in the peak and watch close where fog and water meet. Report reefs!"

"We ain't going to resk it, I tell ye, getting through this stuff to Jackport!" barked the skipper.

"I might say as how your owner ought to be there to meet the women-folks, if I felt like saying anything. To save him more worry, skipper, he's *a-going* to be put ahead o' that steam

train. And you batten hatch on your gab!"

"And how about the worry o' getting there?" demanded the captain.

"I'm tending to that part, ain't I? Hi, there, man forrards! Sharpen your eyesight! You ought to be seeing reefs."

The captain flared into hot temper.

"The hell about *your* worry! All the worry is mine. I've got the responsibility. If this yacht is slammed onto the rocks I'll be losing my master's papers, my job, my standing and—"

"Don't lose your shirt. Keep that on," advised Sawt.

"Breakers dead ahead, sir!" bawled the lookout.

"Fine!" declared Trundy, with the tone of one who had heard good news. "All fine and dandy!" He spun the wheel and gave the engineer the jingle, calling for full speed. "This fog is sure thick as a pan o' skim milk, but now I've got some bearings."

At that moment the owner came on the bridge. He exhaled the odor of strong liquor.

"Hoorah! We're on the way. Captain McCopp, I went below and did what I seldom do. I took a drink. I felt I wanted to drown my sorrow because everybody was leaving me in the dumps."

"Mr. Anson," raged the captain, "you'll be left in a worse place if you don't make this fool lay offm what he's doing."

"If he's taking me to Jackport he is doing exactly what I want him to do," stated the owner. His elation was torched by his drink. So was the resentment previously roused by his captain's blundering performance as it had been exposed by a native. Therefore, Anson taunted indiscreetly.

The captain walked to the end of the bridge and made strange sounds.

Then from forward came hoarse yelping: "Breakers ahead, sir!"

"O. K.!" cheerily cried the pilot, bringing around the careening craft in a half circle. A few moments later two small islands were silhouetted against the white pall. "Now we're all set to go somewhere sensible!"

"Jumping Jesse, there ain't no room to go betwixt 'em," clamored McCopp, noting the aim of the yacht.

"You ain't trying to tell me about Peter and Paul Nubbles, I hope," railed Trundy. "Bold water and five fathoms in that gut!"

While the Bluenoser stood on tiptoe the yacht foamed through the passage. Again Trundy half-circled in his course and the lurch of the craft sent McCopp on a trot toward the pilot.

When the captain was within reach, Trundy yanked away a bos'n's whistle, breaking the cord which was slung around McCopp's neck.

While the captain goggled, trying to understand this fresh enormity, the pilot blew a shrill blast and listened intently for the echo. It came. Sawt stopped, counting seconds.

"Ragged Island cliff to port—half mile."

"I'll say this is wonderful, man," shouted Anson. "But what does it mean?"

"It means you ought to have a reg'lar tickler put in—that's a high-pitched whistle to hunt echoes with. All the passenger packets in these inside waters use ticklers in a fog. Count seconds till the echo comes back." He glanced at the compass and eased the yacht to a new course. "It's dead open-and-shet from now on."

McCopp, roaring wordlessly, plucked an ornamental belaying pin from a rack.

He came along the bridge and yelled:

"Damme if I don't make my bigness 'stead o' letting a fool go on and tin-whistle this yacht to Tophet and make me lose my master's papers."

"I'm the owner and I'll take all the responsibility," declared Anson. "By

the way, as I think it over, you're no longer my captain. You're fired, McCopp!"

"I'm captain till I'm landed and relieved by regular papers!" snapped McCopp. "That's marine law. And an owner who's teed up with hooch ain't no—"

Anson was too dapper to be a fighter, but he snapped into that insult with a tiger howl and leaped at the defamer, hopping back, however, when McCopp swung the pin.

"Bear in mind I'm on the bridge as master and I'm backed by marine law!"

"How about such law, Mister Man?" Anson demanded, turning to Trundy.

The latter slipped a gasket onto a tiller spoke.

"He'd be right about marine law if law was working now out here. But law ain't working. However, *I'm* working."

Sawt, at last welcoming actual combat with the manner of a starved man going after food, flung himself at McCopp, caught the descending pin on a palm which was flint-sheathed by rope hauling, yanked the weapon away and heaved it, then beat McCopp up, dropped him half senseless and rolled him in a cocoon, using a coil of handy breast line.

Again Sawt took the wheel.

"Now I can tend to real business without having my mind took off by law yap. Law can be argued later in court."

"You bet! By lawyers hired by *me*," stated Anson. "All I'm worrying about is getting to Jackport ahead of that noon train."

"That's what I call not having a worry in the world."

"Hooray! This has been very exciting. I never hit a man in my life. But I'd really relish the feel of a tingle in my fist. I think I'll dance down and calm my nerves with a bit of a drink. I'll bring one up here for *you*."

"I never tech the stuff," growled Sawt. "And I'm asking you to lay off any more talk." He was now saturnine. Having attended to the troubles of others, he was devoting himself to his own problem.

The yacht was rounding the harbor bell by the time Anson came again on the bridge. He was swaggering a bit. He bent over the trussed-up ex-captain and invited him truculently to come along into court. Then Anson leaned from the end of the bridge and saluted the bell dong-donging on its platform:

"Keep it up! It sounds like a wed-ding."

Trundy, twisting at the wheel, growled and gritted his teeth.

The fog had cleared in the upper reach when the yacht entered the dredged channel. The Jackport wharf was in sight. The bridge clock had clicked a warning that it would soon sound eight bells—noon. In the remote distance a locomotive hooted.

"Will we make it?" asked the owner anxiously.

"Depends on your footwork whether *you* make it," retorted Trundy brusquely. "I shall make it." His mind was easier now; he was on the bridge, bossing the yacht which had haughtily elbowed him into the mud of that channel.

He was obliged to con carefully the narrow way ahead; but from the corner of his mouth he said his say to the ex-captain, helpless on his back:

"McCopp, I believe your name is. Well, McCopp, a few days ago you swaggered down this channel, all so top-lofty, and crowded my Hampton into the mud. That's why I hit you harder to-day than the case really called for. But I've been a Banksman skipper and I act 'cording to notions and training."

"I don't remember crowding your boat," confessed the other meekly; "and if a Banksman skipper was in it, then

all I can say is I made one hell of a mistake. Cap'n, I'm laying nothing against you now. And I made another mistake in my trying to fetch this harbor to-day. I'm telling you, cap'n, you are smart, able, shipshape and seaman-like and I'm sorry we misunderstood each other."

"The cross-off is O. K., with me," stated Sawt cordially. "I'd untie that reefing if my hands wasn't so busy. Mr. Anson, I'm asking you to do that chore. And if you'll call it a draw with Cap'n McCopp, I'll take the kindness as my pilot's fee and consider I'm paid mighty handsome."

Promptly Captain McCopp was restored to his feet and to his master's status.

As the yacht was rounding-to off the Jackport wharf, the hoot of a locomotive sounded again. The yacht's anchor splashed.

Trundy did not ask for the dingy to be swung over; to save time he used his own boat to convey Anson and himself to the wharf.

Sawt led the way to the railroad station on the run. Well ahead of Anson, Trundy tore around the corner of the building and confronted Delora and Mert Somes.

With grinding brakes the train was coming to a stop.

Trundy shouted: "This train hangs up here less'n a minute! That minute ain't going to be wasted in gabble if I can help it!"

He leaped at Somes, beat down the chap's attempted defense, knocked him flat, dragged him around in the dirt, took pains to blacken both eyes of the victim, pulled him to the nearest car as the train halted, thrust him up the steps and heaved him in upon the floor of the car in front of halted passengers who were about to alight.

Trundy marched past Delora, dusting his hands.

"The bridegroom is all safe on board,

waiting. Yours truly, with all kind wishes for a merry married life."

Anson had been dancing around this scene of fracas, shouting incoherent protests. He leaped in front of the departing victor, elbowing away the young woman, who was delivering incoherencies of her own.

Irately Anson demanded: "What the devil do you mean, smashing my mechanician? Have you started out to lick every man in my employ?"

"I sure have—if any more of 'em come bumping into my private business!" declared Trundy with savage vigor.

"But you never saw that man of mine before—you—"

"Hold on, mister! He dropped offin an airplane down Quossock way; he swelled around for a week saying he owned the machine and was president of an airplane company, and he—" At this point Sawt choked back words. "But the rest of it is my private business. Good day!"

The young woman set her clutch on Trundy's arm.

"How dare you insult me in public, hinting that I was running away with Mert Somes?"

Anson got in his word.

"Aha! I see the point better! My dear young lady, that renegade deserved what he just got if he has been using my plane against my strict orders."

"All ah-boo-ar-rd!" droned the train conductor; he raised his hand. The locomotive barked; the cars trailed slowly past.

Anson shook his fist at a face framed in a car window.

"I have a mind to wire and call for his arrest for grand larceny, but—" He was hailed by a young lady who beckoned impatiently when he looked her way. He turned and trotted to meet her.

Sawt and Delora heard the dialogue before greeter and greeted met.

"What was the meaning of that dreadful row, Clarence, dear?"

"From what I gather, sweetheart, a cheap bounder was trying to make off with a chap's best girl."

"This is simply terrible!" Delora gasped. "Get me away from here, Sawt."

Sawt Trundy hesitated.

"Sawt Trundy, do you believe for an instant that I would elope with that mushy fool?"

"It honestly doesn't seem like you would," he admitted. "But the way you hipered away with him into the fog —waal—"

"I didn't want a fight to start. Sawt, I'll own up to the gospel truth. You know yourself how all the talk now is about flying and the profits that can be cleared, and all such. Mert Somes

made a fool of me. I agreed to go to the shire town and draw some money and invest it with him. I'm awfully ashamed—but it's the truth."

He patted her arm, saying:

"I had to act quick on account of the train. But if there had been time for any explaining talk, I reckon I'd have licked him just the same. So that's all right."

"I'm very much obliged to you for what you did, Sawt. Now come home with me in my boat; we'll tow yours. Listen. I'm asking you to take the wheel of my boat and steer it. You understand what I mean, don't you, Sawt?"

She raised appealing eyes to his grateful gaze.

"I get you, Delora!" he replied with unction.

Holman Day is a regular contributor to this magazine.



THE "TIRED BUSINESS MAN"

HUMORISTS and providers of theatrical and other forms of entertainment have written and talked so much about catering to the "tired business man" that the fellow "back in the sticks" often pictures the typical captain of industry as a physical wreck trembling on the verge of nervous prostration and peevishly calling on high heaven ten times a day to witness that the slave builders of the Egyptian pyramids shouldered no such back-breaking burdens as his and that the gladiators of ancient Rome fought no such crucial battles as he puts up every hour against merciless, marauding, and bloodthirsty competitors all set to tear his heart out the first time his vigilance against them relaxes for a fraction of a split second.

Lest a business man in the hinterland take this sort of thing seriously and begin to portray and pity himself as doomed to a similar fate, it is well to point to the career of a business man of France. He is Emile Herzog. While he was yet in his callow youth, he got rich as a textile manufacturer at Elboeuf. He went into the World War and won fame and promotion in the French army. He came out and resumed the job of getting richer as a manufacturer. He made himself an authority on the various philosophies of the world. And under the pen name, André Maurois, dashed off such "best sellers" as "Disraeli," "Ariel," and "Colonel Bramble," which last has gone into one hundred and five editions.

This Herzog career is enough to put over the idea that a business man anywhere can reel off an imposing volume and variety of work without even suspecting that he is "tired."



The ROMANCE of By H. de Vere

The first honest story about South

NORTH of Natuna and nearly in the latitude of Laluan lies Fovea, a little, lost island inhabited mostly by butterflies, orchids, flying foxes and spirit crabs.

These white and spectral crabs are not found, I think, in the islands round about. The butterflies and moths also present remarkable specimens for the consideration of the collector—or would if a collector ever came.

"No one ever comes here." That is what Fovea says to you after you have become acquainted. Words spoken by the wind in the mangroves and the beating of the blue and patient sea on the

little beach facing eastward, from which you can see sometimes the smoke of the Malacca-Hongkong mail boats on the far horizon.

I was there only two days and the place struck me so much that I chanced to mention it to a man I met at Chale's Hotel, Malacca.

A gentleman by the name of Duffy. Mr. Duffy was a very rough diamond. He had started in life as a cabin boy and was proud of the fact; sailing ship, steamship, cable, salvage work—he had been through the lot, emerging at the age of fifty or so with the honorary title of captain, an unquenchable thirst and



CAPTAIN DUFFY

Stacpoole

Sea island castaways ever written.

a little fortune scraped together somehow out of tin—also a face forcibly carved and steadfast looking as the face of a figurehead.

The captain moved uneasily in his creaking basket chair, then, calling the native boy who was on the hotel veranda, he pointed to the empty glasses on the table by which we were sitting.

"*Macham Taddy*," said he, which, translated means "the same again." Then: "Fovea? Oh, yes, I know the place. Ought to." He hung in irons for a minute till the drinks came along. "Funny, you talking of that place, and of being there two days. Well, I've

stuck it there near three weeks; hove on the beach as you might say. It's not more than a hundred yards before the trees begin north and south of that lump of rock above the tide marks, and I reckon I know every yard of that hundred. Remember that lump of rock near the middle standing there like a bollard? I've put in many an hour sitting on that rock, wishing for ships.

"You see, there's no harbor, so the junks don't come—though Saigon's only a biscuit toss off; there's no copra, there's no rubber and there's no tin. Against all that there's no mosquitoes or Dutchmen; against that there's no bars.

Remember that little trickle of water that comes down from the trees and makes a sink by the big tree fern? That's the long bar of Fovea and many a drink I've had there, lying on my face like Nebuchadrezzar.

"What I'm saying happened only a few years ago. I was in Canton. I'd gone there to see a Chinaman over a tin proposition that turned out trumps, and I was full of buck and beans, at a loose end as you may say, and looking for fun. I went into Charlie Brent's to look for it, and there at the bar was standing Captain Bill Travers.

"That chap ought to have been born a bishop; sure as death if he put foot on a ship he'd sink her or she'd catch alight or lose her sticks or start a butt or bust her boilers. But it was never, somehow or other, his fault, and the companies didn't spot him for a hoodoo till he broke the back of the *Ararat*, seventeen-hundred-ton freighter, on the Paraeels. Then they fired him and marked him 'dangerous' among themselves, and he went hunting for another ship—which was like hunting hell for violets—and here he was in Charlie Brent's.

"'Hello, Bill,' I says. 'What are you doing now?'

"'Pigs,' says he. He was captain of a pig boat, chink owned and manned and running from Canton.

"And one hour after meeting him, I'd booked to come along with him as passenger, for fun—you can get a lot of drinks into an hour, with a chap like Bill to do the talking and Charlie to do the mixing. Also, you can hear a pig boat near as far as you can smell it. A cargo of grunters is better'n a siren and you've only got to twist one of their tails to set the whole lot off.

"I reckon they could have heard us at Hongkong as we put out of the Canton River and a rat got loose among them. Night it was, and when they weren't 'hrrumfing' and snoring, off they'd go

like half a million cartwheels wanting greasing.

"'You'll get used to it in time,' says Travers. But the time never came, for next night the chinks rose and took the ship, knocked Travers on the head and hove him over—and they bottled me in the glory hole where paint and carpenters' tools were kept; then they took the ship's money and half a boatload of prog, opened the sea cocks and left her to scuttle.

"I didn't cut my way out till morning, and there we were, down by the head, all the pigs drowned, and the water washing inside of her like the washing of a beach every time she moved to the swell.

"There were bulkheads that kept her still floating and Fovea showed right ahead to s'th'ard. Nothing to push off in but an old collapsible that the brutes had left by chance, and nothing to take off in her but half a ham we'd had for supper and was still on the table with biscuits and butter, though the floor of the cabin was six inches deep in water—lazaret flooded, of course.

"Well, sir, I got that collapsible together and got her over on the starboard side. The ship was listed so that there wasn't more than four foot of free board, so, getting over the boat was easy. I waited while the drift took us along closer to the island, and then, all of a sudden, came a hang which was a bulkhead giving, and following that came a noise like an elephant gargling his throat.

"I didn't wait—I pushed off in the old floating umbrella just in time to get clear of the suck of her, and then I watched her sink, funnel under, truck under—gone!

"Bad to look at, even though she was what she was—four hundred ton of rusted plates and an engine that an old flivver would have sneezed at. But a ship for all that. It's bad to look at a ship going under. I've seen it three

times and every time I've been near sick in my stomach."

"How far were you from Fovea?" I asked.

"A matter of two miles nor'-nor'-east," replied the captain. "Current with me, so I wasn't long getting to the beach. The sight of that stream coming down eased me a lot. I was mostly fearing there wouldn't be water. Trees don't always spell free water, but there it was, and beyond in the wood I saw custard, apples and bananas—same as you may have seen them right back beyond that big tree fern.

"That's how I was fixed with crabs and shellfish for grub—a blessed fruit shop with nothing to offset it but a few biscuits and half a ham. Lucky I had been able to bring off a boxful of matches so's I could roast the crabs; but I've never wanted to look at a ham again.

"There I was, and you can imagine—nothing to do after I'd made a tour of the place and woods, nothing to do but sit and wait for a ship and wonder what sort of damn fool I was for signing articles as you may say with Travers. A free man linking on to a hoodoo like that, and I'd have felt worse in my mind if I'd known I hadn't done with him yet.

"The only bright spot in the ointment was the fact that the chinks hadn't searched me and taken my money. I'd managed to brain two of them with a clinker bar before they shoved me into the paint shop, and then I reckon they were too scared of me to let me out. Twenty-two hundred dollars I had on me in American notes, and I'd sit and count them and count them till common sense came along and clapped me on the shoulder and said, as plain as the parakeets screeching in the trees: 'Bill Duffy, give over fooling like this or you'll go bughouse and imagine yourself a bank teller. Go and build a shack for yourself among the trees—never

mind if you don't want it, it's something to do and something to keep your mind busy.'

"So I did.

"I built a shack, cutting branches with my knife and twisting canes to make the walls, and thatching it with palm leaves. I built it in that little clearing by the water sink, and when I'd put the topknot on I laughed. Guess what that thing fetched up in my mind. Well, I'll tell you. Did you ever see the house a bower bird builds? Well, that was it, same as if it had been photographed and made ten times bigger.

"I've seen the chap dancing before it to attract the hens. The chap I saw had laid out a little garden with shells and blossoms and such, and there he was dancing in it and the hens sitting round.

"'Well, there's the shack finished,' I said to myself, 'and nothing more to do.' And right on that, common sense comes along again and claps me on the shoulder and says: 'Bill Duffy, if you want to keep the madness off you, do what the A'mighty had in His mind for you to do when He showed you that bird away there in Borneo. He knew what was coming to you: He's sent me to give you the hint. And you take it, and put your back into it and made a garden.'

"Pretty dangerous advice, mister, for if things hadn't happened as they did, the next ship coming along might have found me imagining myself a bower bird instead of a bank teller. However I made the garden, fetching shells from the beach and laying them out, and getting blossoms and sticking them in the ground.

"I hadn't no more notion of making a garden than you'd have of making an airplane. I just did what the bird had showed me what to do, which shows that birds may sometimes teach humans. And pretty it looked when I'd finished with it, notwithstanding that it

came to me all of a sudden I'd nothing more to do—unless I started on another shack.

"'Why,' I says to myself, 'if I go on making shacks and gardens all over the place, next ship that comes along will maybe find me imagining myself a house builder 'n' decorator. What about that?' I says to Common Sense, but she'd hove off. Not a word from her, and down I lay that night and dreamed I was a beaver—same as I've seen them by Moose Lake—and I was building and building, putting in hot-water pipes so that the bower birds mightn't feel the cold—a man all the time, but a beaver—you know the sort of sludge—till all of a sudden I was woke up by a clap of thunder.

"I heard it rolling over the sea, and then I heard the crying of sea gulls. Then I lay waiting for the wind and rain which didn't come.

"There are no sea birds round Fovea, as you know, but I didn't think of that. Time wasn't more than midnight, I reckoned, for the first thing Nature gives a chap on his lonesome like me is a watch which hasn't got no second hands but can tell him noon and midnight pretty accurate.

"'Funny,' says I; then I was asleep again, solid."

Captain Duffy reached for his glass, finished it and put up his thumb to the waiter who had appeared again on the veranda.

"*Macam Taddy*," said I, indicating mine.

Then I waited for the story to go on.

But the captain seemed up against an obstacle.

Then I saw that it was not a kink in the story that was holding him, but some vision of memory. It was evident that the hotel veranda and the sunlight and the palms of the hotel garden and the table by which we were sitting and myself were, for him for the moment, nonexistent.

Then he came back to himself with a jolt.

"Solid—till I woke with the para-kets screeching in my face and it an hour after sunup, as innocent as a babe of all that had been happening in the night.

"What had been happening in the night began in China where the fighting was going on and where they wanted ammunition. Six cases of gelignite the French mail boat from Rangoon to Canton had aboard her in the forehold, labeled 'chocolate,' and some Frog must have gone smoking a cigarette there or something—though how he got there is beyond me, unless they'd taken the hatch cover off. Anyhow a fire must have started and she blew up and went down like an old tin can. It all came out afterward.

"That was the clap of thunder I'd heard, not knowing that the screeching of the sea gulls was the passengers clinging to spars and drowning—all but one.

"All but one—and when I came out on the beach that morning, there she was.

"A young female dressed for dancing same as you see them on board the liners. I didn't know there'd been a dance on board the hooker; I didn't know any damn ship had blown up. I just came out on the beach and there she was, and an elephant playing the fiddle wouldn't have given me a greater setback. Then I saw a big spar half beached by the falling tide and I began to tumble to the situation.

"I came toward her, but she didn't heed me. She was sitting there and seemed to be talking to the sea, all dithery and waving her hands for all the world like a girl I'd seen acting at Portsmouth in a play where a chap poisons his uncle pouring stuff in his ears and—"

"'Hamlet'?"

"That's her—and one shoe off, lying

on the sand. She'd been drenched, but the sun had dried her, and there she was, wild as a coot, clean out of her mind for the moment and minding me no more than if I hadn't been there.

"I picks up her shoe.

"'Now, then,' I says to her, same as if she'd been a child, 'come, put it on,' just as if we'd been shipmates. And at the sound of my voice she seemed to come together a bit and she looked at the shoe and then she looked at me and then back at the shoe; and then she gets up all tottery and holds out her hands like so, as if she was calling on the saints to see her and the fix she was in; and then something caught back in her throat and—off she went.

"It was like a dam bursting—laughing and crying, crying and laughing, and when I got a hold of her it was like holding an earthquake till she went limp so's I could have hung her over one arm like an overcoat.

"I got her to the shack and laid her out with my coat under her head. She'd gone right bang asleep. I've seen a chap do that after he'd been beat up by a lot of chinks; I reckon Nature just steps in and pulls down the blinds.

"Anyhow, there she was, shut-eye for twenty-four hours, and she came to next morning bright and herself again.

"I tell you I'd had a night of it—afraid to wake her, afraid she wouldn't wake up, crawling on my hands and knees to listen if she was alive and breathing; and when she woke up, maybe you'll believe me or not, she had no more idea of what had happened than a child unborn.

"She remembered coming on deck after dinner to dance, but she was cut off from there at the waist, so to speak. I had to tell her I reckoned the ship she was on had blown up and she'd come ashore clinging to the spar. She gave me her own name and the name of the ship; she'd been traveling alone from Malacca to Canton there to meet her

people. She was as sane and sensible as you or me, but she couldn't remember the blow-up.

"Brains are queer things; a chap gets a belt on the head and he doesn't remember getting it, nor he doesn't remember anything from maybe half an hour before he got it—I've seen that myself. Same with her in a way.

"That girl must have seen things and heard them, too—enough to raise the hair on your head, but the A'mighty had just snuffed the recollection of them out.

"I didn't grumble. She recollected enough of that ship to give me no end of trouble inventing lies. You see, naturally, being warm-hearted, she was anxious to know what had become of the captain and crew and the other passengers; and I said they were sure to have got off on a raft, what folks didn't get off in the ship's boats.

"She asked why they hadn't come to the island; and I told her there was a big current that would make it easier for the boats to push west for the mainland. She took it all in, trusting as a kitten, settling down as you may say, in her basket and beginning to take notice of things.

"I gave her a custard apple and some bananas and then I went off into the woods to hunt for some avocados I'd seen the day before, telling her I wouldn't be more than half an hour gone and reckoning she'd settle down better alone.

"Up on the high ground—if you took notice—there's a bald patch where the trees don't grow. I didn't bother about the avocados; I just sat down there on an old stump to get my bearings and see what was best to be done.

"The thing had hit me in the eye, so to speak—you can imagine. A young girl in that rig-out and me alone with her and she as innocent as what you please, and the whole thing coming of a sudden.

"I fixed it in my mind that she'd keep the shack and I'd build myself another away at the other end of the beach, and when I'd got that straight there wasn't much else to think about—except food.

"Well, I couldn't do more for her than I was doing for myself, and what between crabs and custard apples and bananas and such, she'd have to make out—so she did, and never grumbled."

Captain Duffy paused and seemed plunged in reverie for a moment—a dream happy yet unhappy.

"That next three days wasn't like—well, it was like the biggest lie a man ever imagined. You'd know if you could have seen her—never a grumble, always smiling, happy as a child. And yet a woman all the time—and such a woman! A man doesn't know what a woman is till he has to fend for her and get her food and be all alone with her.

"She'd come and watch me building my shack—and, 'Aren't you going to put a little garden to it?' says she one day. She'd been greatly hit by the garden with the shells and truck. I hadn't told her what had put it in my head and I didn't want to, but it came to me as she said that, that things were shaping that way if I didn't look out.

"But I needn't have worried.

"The lease was up. If I'd been alone on that damn place I'd be there still, maybe, but being as I was, wanting nothing more in this world or kingdom come, the lease was up.

"That rent was owing, and the brokers coming in, and they came in a damn old trading schooner, the last of her kind and the worst, owned by McCalums of Singapore and bound for Canton. Water she wanted, and fruit.

"When I saw her standing in and sure to be full of gaping ballyhoos, the first instinct that came to me was to cover the girl.

"I told you how she was rigged—all right for a dance room on a ship, but

even there pretty much wanting, especially under the arms, so I got her into my coat. It was Shantung silk; I'd bought the suit new at Canton, and you may judge by my size that it fitted her. And so I put her into it. She looked up into my eyes, raising her chin—Gosh!" He broke off and reached for his glass.

"Did you?" said I.

"Did I what? No, I didn't—no, there was no kiss. I reckon hell's full of chaps sitting round and wagging their heads and saying: 'No, I didn't—might have done, but didn't!'" Then, after a pause:

"What stood between me and her all through was that rig-out she was in, I believe. If she'd been an ordinary female dressed as such, things might have been otherwise. You see it had put up a sort of bar between us—as it might have been saying: 'Here's a lady in distress.' And not only that, but it seemed all the time to be punching in the fact of the difference between the likes of her and me. I'm not anything more than the A'mighty made me. A rope's end taught me all the dancing I know, and I learned French swabbing decks on an old drifter out of Cherbourg. We weren't the same brand of goods. She was a lady—all the same, things might have been different if it hadn't been for that."

I took it that he was speaking of the dance dress, which had evidently cranked up his inferiority complex in some curious way.

"Or maybe not," he went on. "Anyhow, there was the schooner coming in and she dropped a boat and took us off. McRimmon, the captain, had his wife on board and the next thing was she and the girl were clacking and throwing their arms round one another, and Mac—he'd got a long white beard and so took advantage of it, as you may say—kissed her."

"His wife?"

"No, the girl. Well, he wasn't the chap to give something for nothing, and so he charged me ten dollars, he did, for the lift to Canton, and bunked me in the fo'c's'le, seeing that the girl had the only spare place aft.

"She'd come up in that mail boat to meet her people at Canton.

"She'd told me all about herself at Fovea and how her father was in business at Shanghai. She'd left Shanghai and come down to visit her aunt or some one who was living at Malacca, and the arrangement was she was to be met on her return by her people at Hollyers Hotel, Canton.

"Well, sir, when we fetched Canton, and I'd paid McRimmon his ten dollars for the lift, and got her into a cab and took her to the hotel, there was no people to meet her, only a telegraph from Shanghai saying they were delayed and giving the date of their arrival—adding up which I found I'd have her two days to myself and no McRimmons to butt in.

"So I left her at the hotel, where I booked a room for myself as well, and bunked off and got a shave and hair cut and a new suit from Silver's, and a panama and a malacca cane; saw the shipping people and gave evidence about the blow-up—and back I gets to the hotel, only to find that the damn ball dress had fetched me in the eye again.

"She'd gone to bed.

"She'd landed in a mix-up of what she'd wore at Fovea and what Mrs. McRimmon had lent her. There wasn't much to notice to my mind; but she thought different and she'd done a dive between the sheets till the milliners had time to fix her up. The hotel manageress told me they were working double shifts and reckoned to have her fitted by the day after to-morrow.

"Day after to-morrow!

"Well, what did it matter to me? I was saying we weren't the same brand of goods—and that's the truth. All the

same, feelings have nothing to do with that. I wanted her—yes, sir, I'd have gone through hell 'n' fire for that woman, and I'd have yanked her with me through a hedge of relations half a mile thick and her clinging to me and tellin' them all to go to blazes. But I hadn't a chance, so it seemed to me as I stood in the hall with the hotel manageress telling me that.

"I sent word up to her, hoping she was all right, and she sent word down to me saying she was, with kind regards. And I sat in the lounge waiting, hoping every time I saw a bell hop it might be another word from her, but nothing came but newspaper men—chaps from the Canton *News* and the Shanghai what's-its-name, all wanting the story of how it happened.

"I tell you by next day the whole wide world was wanting to know how it happened, not meaning so much the blow-up of the mail boat, but the girl's escape. It was going round and round the world like a squirrel in a cage, that yarn, how Captain Duffy had saved her and how they were on an island together. McRimmon and his crowd had been talking and the slosh journalists from hell to Hakodate had got the whisper—— Well, you can think!

"I was close as an oyster about myself; but McRimmon wasn't. And next day, opening the Canton *News*, I found myself in print a yard long. I was Captain Duffy, a fine, good-looking, up-standing feller full of chivalry, but so modest that it was hard to get me to speak of my doings. It gave the lie to facts and the looking-glass, but I swallowed it. I reckon it fed some hungry spot.

"I said to myself that night—she was still in her room—I said to myself that when her people came, if she was not down before then, I'd run up the flag and tell 'em straight: 'Duffy's the man who's going to have your girl. He's got forty thousand dollars in the Hong-

kong-Shanghai Bank. He mayn't be a scholar, but he's a fine, good-looking, upstanding feller, full of chivalry but not too modest to claim the woman he wants.'

"That's what I told myself not knowing I was still being trailed by that ball dress and those milliners and their delays.

"If I could have got that girl alone that night I could have done the trick and she'd have hauled down her colors; but the fitters and riggers held her, as I was saying, and when she come out of harbor next day— Well, it was just like this:

"I was sitting in the lounge just at noon when the glass swing doors flung open and in came her people—dad, mother, and a young chap with pomatummed hair and an eyeglass, followed by chinks carrying their luggage. And at the selfsame minute, like a thing in a stage play, down the stairs comes she in a white dress looking like a snowdrop, as you might say. And that young fel-

ler with the eyeglass runs to her and gives her a kiss you could have heard all over the shop.

"And she hadn't any brothers or sisters; she'd told me that when we were talking of her family.

"When a gun's bust, you can't fire it again. There's things that can't be done twict if you don't do them once, and Captain Duffy he took his hat and went out on the hotel front to look at the weather—which was fine. He didn't go back to that hotel. Didn't bother about having his luggage sent for; took the Rangoon boat which was due out that afternoon, and left them to hunt for the fine, good-looking, upstanding feller that was too modest to wait for thanks.

"Do you believe in that yarn about Adam 'n' Eve? I don't. 'Pears to me if he'd been the same sort of mug as me and waiting for that girl till she was dressed, he'd have been waiting —anyhow, that's my personal experience and opinion."

Another of H. de Vere Stacpoole's stories will appear in a future issue.

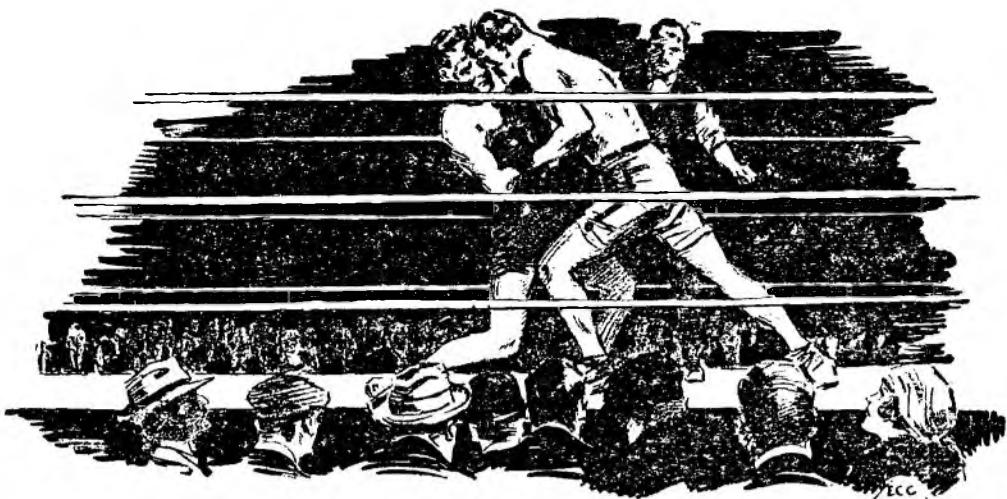


HOW TO KNOCK HOME RUNS

IT should now be a simple matter for any baseball player, boy or man, to stride proudly to the plate, and, with a well-directed swing of the bat, "knock the ole apple outa the lot." The one and only King of Swat, the inimitable "Babe" Ruth himself, has given away the secret of how to slam a homer. He did it in a radio talk to boys.

"Get the stance," he said, "that throws all your power into your swing. Bend your head so that your eyes are on a line with the pitcher's arm. If you find you are not doing this, lift your head a little, just enough to get your eyes in line with that arm. Then step into the ball with the right sort of swing.

"Fellows ask me about golf. Golf will help any ball player's hitting. The golf swing is the best known way, it is the perfect way, to hit any ball with a stick. Get the old golf swing to meet the ball squarely and it's gotta go. Swat it on the nose, and that's all there is to it."



“In this Cor-nah-h-h!—The New World’s Champion!”

By William Hemmingway

Who will be the next champion of the world?

ONE thing is sure: the next Champion of the World is walking among us every day, unsung, unnoticed, unguessed by us all. When—probably long before the end of this year—he has jabbed, jolted and right-crossed his way to the crown, thousands of hindsight prophets will say, and believe, that they could have pointed him out long ago. But the annoying fact is that no one has pointed him out thus far with any degree of certainty. I like my friend Edgren’s description of the coming man—a lad who carries within the limits of one mere mortal frame the qualities of Corbett, Jeffries, Fitzsimmons, Dempsey, Firpo and an army mule. To these I would add the magnificent egotism of John L. and the careful, accurate, prudent,

dauntless conservation of Tunney. There’s our man—ataboy, champ!

This world, Stevenson wrote to his friend Henley, is still a fine gymnasium, full of sea bathing and horse exercise. That was true, of their day; but just now this world is a fine boxing ring, full of trial bouts and elimination contests to determine who is the best man. And, just as likely as not, the best man is some youth going along without benefit of ballyhoo but well furnished with strength and speed and full of assurance that he is bound to win to the top. Without that spark of the divine fire no man can conquer.

Tunney had it; so had Dempsey, most colorful of all the moderns; so had “Robert the Red,” who lived through to baldness and the nickname

of "Old Fitz" before his sublime self-conceit was justified. Sullivan, as he scowled at the enemy from his corner and swooped to destroy him, was animated by the thought: "I can lick any man that was ever born of woman!" Made it good, too, for twelve trying years. Jim Corbett, who conquered him, felt victory in his hands as soon as the match was made; and refused to talk about the coming battle with the "Terror of Mankind," but gave me three columns about the play in which he was going to act as soon as he won. No champion ever needed the Scotsman's prayer, "Lord, gie us a gude conceit of oorselves." He is born with it, and as long as he lives it grows.

And of all the claimants of the title now in sight none has the divine spark hotter than Tommy Loughran of Philadelphia, champion of the light heavyweights. Before the dust of the Tunney-Heeney fight had settled, Tommy filed with the New York and Pennsylvania Boxing Commissions his claim to the championship Tunney vacated and announced that he was willing to fight through all the elimination contests, et cetera, necessary to prove his right to the crown. New York's appetite for battles of the big fellows having been killed by the promoters' enormous prices, Loughran got a match at the Philadelphia ball park at the end of September with Jack Gross, a real heavyweight, who topped him by an inch or two, outweighed him by twenty pounds, and had a record of knocking out twenty-one opponents in thirty fights. No easy match. Moreover, Gross is a left-hander, and of all nightmares that afflict a fighting man the southpaw is the worst.

Loughran, undaunted by Jack's recent victory over Roberto Roberti, champion of Italy, calmly waited for the big fellow to attack with a long right lead and countered with his own right, again and again. Tommy stag-

gered Jack in the third round and shook him severely in the ninth, but the big southpaw was still going briskly at the end of the tenth round. Tommy got the decision—but only on points, and this in spite of the fact that he had built himself up to one hundred and eighty-three pounds for the occasion. I doubt whether the extra poundage did him much good. Ovila Chapdelaine, once famous "Rapier of the North" and best remembered as Jack Delaney, also built himself up above his normal one-seventy-five to meet Jack Sharkey, the swift big sailor from Boston. We all remember with sorrow how quickly his light went out that night.

Every man has a weight at which he is most efficient, and as a rule it is about halfway between the starveling thinness that some need in order to make their class limit and the overbuilt bulk that others imagine will help them to best men in a higher class than their own. It was a wise old Englishman of generations ago who coined the phrase. "A good big un can beat a good little un." Nearly always he can—and does. That great Scottish Corinthian known to sporting fame as Captain Barclay, who invented the grilling pastime of walking a thousand half miles in a thousand consecutive half hours and won countless contests of skill and endurance, was a keen patron of the ring. He studied it from within. He formulated the rule that a good man—a *good* man, mind—of twelve stone was big enough to beat anybody. Twelve stone is one hundred and sixty-eight pounds.

Probably a genius of that size in Barclay's day could best all comers; but for every boxer who fought in that day there are scores now—yes, hundreds. They come now from all the countries of the world except vegetarian India, whereas in Barclay's time they grew only in Britain, with a rare challenger from America and an occasional freak from France or the Low Countries by

way of amusement. Without disparagement it can be said that the Gypsy, Jem Mace, barely above the middle-weight limit, held the championship of England for years because the competition was not one tenth of what it is now. The same conditions kept Tom Sayers, of similar size, on the throne before Mace; and when John C. Heenan, a really big American heavy, fought Sayers, he bashed him severely in spite of Tom's game struggles and had him practically knocked out when the English champion's partisans broke the ring, walloped every one in it except Sayers—and the referee called the fight a draw!

To a man up a tree that incident would look like anything but British fair play; yet the usually fair-minded Thackeray wrote of the disgraceful riot: "That crowd which came in and stopped the fight ought to be considered like one of those divine clouds which the gods send in Homer. . . . The *nodus* is cut; Tom is out of chancery; the Benicia Boy not a bit the worse, nay, the better than if he had beaten the little man. He has not the humiliation of conquest. He is the greater, and will be loved more hereafter by the gentle sex." This astounding conclusion shows to what lengths partisanship will carry an honest gentleman.

Some will say that Fitzsimmons was only a middleweight when he beat Corbett for the great title. Many good men and true believe that myth. I never argue with them. Far be it from me to take away one tittle of a great fighter's reputation; but on that fateful day I sat close to the ring at Carson City beside John L. Sullivan, and asked him how the two men compared in size.

"I'd say there is not more than six pounds difference between them," replied Sullivan, who had fought many hundreds of men, was an expert in judging the weight of fighters, had not touched alcoholic liquor in six months,

and certainly had no prejudice in favor of Corbett, his conqueror. Fitz was not weighed in public before the battle, and I had tested Corbett's scales and found them six pounds overweight. Worry and too much work had made him thin, and his friends fixed the scales to conceal that fact from him. I felt as sure as Sullivan felt that Corbett did not have more than six pounds advantage over Fitz, and I have estimated closely the weight of thousands of athletes of every kind on land and water.

All of this may seem far away from the question of the bold Tommy Loughran's wisdom in trying for the big title; but the point is here: even the mighty Old Fitz was only a little lighter than Corbett when he barely managed to best him, while the ancient champions of meager weight were largely favorites of Lady Luck and a limited field of rivals. The competition is so keen to-day and the number and quality of contenders are so high that it is long odds against a man who tackles a good fighter who outweighs him by a score of pounds. Yet the glory and money that flow to the Champion of the World are so great that Loughran cannot be blamed for taking a big chance for them. Thus far he has not shown the punch that will put down giants; but he has speed unlimited, fine ring strategy and the heart of a thoroughbred—good luck to him!

Johnny Risko, the Cleveland baker boy, also has been prompt to challenge the world by claiming the title and placing two thousand five hundred dollars with the New York Boxing Commission as a forfeit if he should fail to appear. He reminded the commission that he has beaten Jack Delaney; Paolino Uzcedun, of Spain; Phil Scott, of England; Johnny Squires, champion of South Africa; gigantic George Godfrey, the "Black Shadow of Leiperville," and other good men, including Jack Sharkey. He lost the decision to

Tom Heeney in the last elimination bout before the championship match. Johnny writes:

I stand ready to meet any and all contenders in the heavyweight division whom I have not already defeated. On the basis of my record, I hereby claim the world's heavyweight championship, and pledge to the boxing fans of America my best efforts in defense of the title against all comers.

But just how good are Johnny's best efforts? Risko is of the blocky, chunky build that combines great strength with rugged endurance but lacks something in the way of quick thought and high speed. He is gameness itself, and every man who has fought him remembers with respect his heavy clouts and his constant forcing the fight. But his style is monotonous. He never rises to one great moment and throws all he has into one last, world-shaking punch, as Dempsey did against Willard and Firpo and Tunney. His style is an aggressive jog trot. To see him in action against a good man is like watching a stout, well-trained cob trotting against a fiery roadster, bothering him somewhat perhaps, but not likely to beat him.

Josef Paul Cukoschay, the Lithuanian larruper, best known as Jack Sharkey of Boston, is full of fire and confidence, and would be the likeliest of all the contenders if he could think right all the time, whether in or out of the ring. His loyal friends already claim the championship for him. He is above six feet in height and more than two hundreds pounds in weight and has speed to burn. Moreover, he is of a delightful personality, friendly, boyish, full of good nature—the sort of man you instinctively want to win. He began to be a contender for the title about the time Tunney began, and now Tunney has won the title and tossed it aside, has a million or more dollars well invested, and has settled down as Benedict, the married man—while Josef Paul is still a mere contender! He is

no poor relation of the boxing game, though, for he has a handsome home in Boston for his wife and youngsters and a good bit of money invested in paying business. Alas! that the white bread of luxury has softened the once hardy gob! Dempsey hurt him. He is not nearly so tough as he was four years ago, when his name—a heartfelt tribute to that marvel of all gobs, honest old Tom Sharkey—began to be known in the ring. Far better for the fighting man to prowl solitary and hungry in the woods than to settle down, well fed and softly bedded, at his own fireside!

How would right thinking help Josef Paul now? By impelling him into the pink of fighting condition once more, if only he would work right and train right. Suppose he should go up to the Maine woods and work as a lumberjack all winter, coming out in the spring as lean and hungry as a bear. Tunney fortified himself that way. Then suppose Josef should put in six weeks at fast training, sharpening his marksmanship on first-class sparring partners, then take a few easy contests to bring him back to battle practice and ring wisdom—that would make him a contender in the highest degree.

But there seems to be no prospect of that kind of program for Jack Sharkey. He knows his business—he thinks—and no one can tell him. He had the best chance in the world to meet Tunney last year if only he had kept away from Dempsey, which he easily could have done with his great speed, and jabbed his way through to victory. But his vanity drove him to go in close and mix it with Jack. (Better for him if he had wrestled a grizzly.) His seconds begged him to stay away and win at long range.

"Why, I've taken all he has," boasted Sharkey, "and he can't hurt me." Poor fellow: it was not long before Dempsey finished him and sent him to the hospital. If he had been trying to commit

ring suicide he could not have gone about it more effectively; for the man who will go close and mix it with Dempsey, even to-day, is simply throwing himself to destruction. Ask Tunney. He knows. But poor Sharkey—it is quite possible that even now, after his melancholy experience, he does not realize that Dempsey was the better man. It seems probable that he will show some brilliant flashes in the elimination contests before the title bout, but it is hardly likely that he will be in it.

Knute Hansen, the hardy Norseman, is big enough and strong enough to do well in any company, and he has a beautiful and deadly right cross to the jaw. He beat Bertodolla, Monsieur Descamp's big man, at Copenhagen, for the championship of Europe, and he has done fairly good work in the ring over here; but, thanks to his developing on the Continent, where they have no background of masters of form and style and ring experience, he appears to lack the class and stamina necessary to carry him to the top, even though some call him the "Triphammer of the North." He does not thrive in a hail of hard punches.

Roberto Roberti, the best man in Italy, showed willingness and some speed in his American battles, but he is young and short of experience and has much to learn of the art. He proved his high courage by going through two hard fights with the handicap of two fractured ribs, afterward revealed by X-ray photographs. At the time of writing he is resting and letting the ribs knit; so he will hardly be in the hunt this year. But when he comes back he should give a good account of himself.

And what of Paolino Uzcudun, the "Bounding Barefoot Basque"? There is a colorful lad for you: rugged as our own old Tom Sharkey at his best, game as a bull terrier, always trying and never able to understand that any man

can beat him. But he suffers under two serious handicaps—short arms and the fact that he learned the fighting trade in Europe. Like Hansen, he has cumbered himself with a regiment of managers; so that whenever he makes a match he is surrounded by a squabbling syndicate, yet he may live through that disadvantage. Nothing can lengthen his stubby arms, and it is very hard to unlearn his early bad form, though Tom Heeney, who beat the Basque, says that one of his punches hurt him more than any one of Tunney's blows.

Nevertheless Paolino, as long as he lasts, will be a thorn in the sides of the champion and the near-champions, because he never ceases to attack and is so everlasting tough. A Spanish friend told me the other day how the Basque woodsmen find out who is their best man. Once a year the local best ones of the various villages meet at midday, in the presence of a great crowd from all parts of the province, and face one another around the banquet board. First they demonstrate how good they are by eating an enormous meal and drinking vast bowls of the heady wine of the country. The fellow who eats and drinks most is favored as the probable winner of the final test.

This is as follows: the contenders are ranged in a row, barefoot, upon a ledge of rock, each holding a long, sharp drill as big as a crowbar. At the word, each man begins to pound his way furiously through the rock with his drill, using only the power of his arms and back to drive it. For more than an hour you see the brawny arms rising and falling as they pound away for all they are worth.

The rock is of even thickness all along the line, and the first man to pierce it is the champion. Is any wonder that Paolino is tough and persistent? Yet it is easy to see that this kind of contest is not much of a prepa-

ration for the pugilistic championship of the world. Too bad they did not catch Paolino young and train him up in the way he should go.

Harold Mays has not made a lot of fuss about challenging, et cetera, yet he is a fine, big lad, tall, rangy and showing the fire and dash of a stake horse. When Tunney was training for his last fight, he suffered for lack of recent battle experience, a lack that cannot be supplied by the work of an ordinary sparring partner. Those lads, as a rule, are there to serve as moving targets, and devote most of their efforts to covering up and leaping out of range; for if you hit the champion, especially with a grinning crowd looking on, he is apt to make you pay for your fun by knocking you loose from your ribs or your teeth. Jim Jeffries at Carson City was one of the few sparring partners who constantly tried to hit his boss and acted toward him as if he were mere mortal man.

That was the kind of partner Tunney wanted, to make up for his long year out of the ring by giving him plenty of fighting, and that is just what Harold Mays did for him. He dashed at Tunney every round and maneuvered and slugged at him as if he wanted to knock him out. The champion never resented being hit, for he had the intelligence to know that this sort of practice would diminish his chances of being hit in the actual battle; nevertheless, pull his punches as he might, there were lots of times when he rapped Mays hard enough to put the ordinary big fellow down. Mays, instead of being discouraged, found these scraps inspiring. He "found himself," as the boys say; that is, he developed fighting ability to meet the champion on something like even terms, developed assurance and self-confidence that fed his ambition. And by the time Tunney was ready to meet Hceney, Mays was ready to face any man. He has done

enough work since that night to keep himself fit, and he promises to give any one a tough battle.

Phil Scott of England will probably try his luck in the eliminations, though he is a little bit delicate under heavy fire. Yet he has speed and is game and knows his business well. Johnny Widd of Sweden is credited with putting Harry Persson, his fellow countryman, down for a longish count, and he knocked out Erminio Spalla, a rough, big Italian, who once kept Gene Tunney hustling for a while. He is reported on his way to struggle for the crown—and emoluments. Then there is the Italian giant, Primo Carnera, a shade under seven feet in height and of good proportions, though as a rule these extra-sized fellows lack stamina in a bruising contest. Our own Jess Willard was never so formidable as he looked, and Carnera is so tall that he would dwarf Jess. Yet we cannot forget that Ned O'Baldwin, the Irish giant, was the best man of his day in spite of his enormous size. Mike Donovan called him the best ever. So if Carnera can use his gigantic stature to advantage, we may have to go back to Ferdiad and Cuchuillin to find a match for him.

Some believe that most of the men named above have been in the game long enough to get to the top, if they have the real stuff in them, and that the next champion is hard at work to-day in some college, or lumber camp or boiler shop. Maybe so. Joseph P. Ferry, boxing coach of the University of Illinois, rich in ring experience, declares that his pupil, Russell Crane, who had the honor of being chosen All-America tackle last year and is in constant training at football and boxing, is the coming man—that is, if he decides to go after fame and the million dollars waiting the best man to draw it down.

Crane is a little under five feet eleven inches, weighs one hundred and eighty-five pounds, is modest and polite, yet

has a swift and terrific right-hand punch, which he quaintly calls, "Mary Ann from the Kitchen." Mr. Ferry says: "Crane never steps back. He is game enough to go against a machine-gun nest if he had nothing but snow-balls to fire at it. He is the strongest man in college. Not a man on the campus can hold him in a clinch. He is a bigger Stanley Ketchel." I dare not go on: it all sounds too good to be true. Here's hoping he comes through!

Another good boy, possibly a champion in the making, is George Hoffman, a native of Yorkville, halfway up the East Side of New York City, who was a chum of Paul Berlenbach in St. Joseph's Parochial School. He supported his mother and three younger children by earning twenty-five dollars a week as an ironworker, and by way of recreation won his way to the amateur championship of the State and of the nation. They chose him to represent the United States at the Olympics, but he could not leave his family helpless, and, encouraged by the success of his friend Paul, turned professional fighter. He has beaten seven out of eight good big men, four of them by quick knock-outs; and as keen a judge as Benny Leonard picks him as a strong contender. Benny, you will recall, picked Tunney to win the championship from Dempsey, when all the world was running the other way, and he is the one fighting man whose judgment about others I respect above all the rest. He has wisdom.

One more young city boy who is believed to have a chance against the ruggedest who come from the wide, open spaces, where men are men, et cetera, is Al Lassman, the giant football hero of New York University. He has boxed a lot in private, and when he puts on the pressure they say no one can stand before him. Football has taken up most of his spare time during the last three years, but he boxes enough to keep his hand in. He is so

tall that when I look at him I think of what the native son told the Englishman about his redwood tree: so high that it takes one man to see halfway up and another man to see from there to the top. Also he is called "TNT" by his playmates, and he certainly justifies the title by his performance on the field and in the ring. His speed is amazing in one of his great height; he has fine coördination and no end of courage. Whether or not he will yield to the lure of the greatest of all sports remains to be seen, though many believe he will try his luck at it as soon as he is graduated from the University.

W. L. (Young) Stribling threatens to take part in the contest. There is the lad who earned the title of "The Georgia Peach" by his early work as a middleweight boxer in boyhood, and has now grown to full heavyweight size. To an outsider it appears as if the love of money has wrecked his chances of ever attaining greatness in the ring. His father and mother were acrobats, and they brought up their boy in a world of constant and careful, though not excessive, training. From childhood he boxed exhibitions in public, and long before he was half grown he was as ringwise as any veteran. But the too earnest devotion of his father and mother handicapped him. They not only supervised every detail of his daily life, his development, food, sleep, exercise, et cetera, but they taught him their ideas of boxing. Too bad.

Stribling was in high school when he fought Mike McTigue for the light-heavyweight championship in Georgia. Now, Mike had won that title from "Battling Siki," the wild black man who knocked out the elegant Georges Carpentier. Siki was rash enough to meet Mike in Dublin on the night of St. Patrick's Day. So you see Mike knew enough about these neighborhood decisions himself. When the smoke of battle lifted from Georgia, and the pale

Mike and his paler manager escaped to points north, they vowed, declared and averred that Georgia partisans showed them certain trees and promised to hang them softly thereon unless Stribling won. Stribling won; referee's decision.

Then the happy family bought a huge automobile, rigged it with kitchen, bed-rooms, *et cetera*, and toured the coun-try, boozing the champion light-heavy, picking up purses here and there for mediocre fights, always winning, mean-while saving railroad fares and hotel bills, and salting down plenty of bank deposits. They even carried a tutor to keep Willie up with his classes in high school—but they fought him far too often for his own good. Such a steady stream of battles would weaken a man; much more would they weaken a grow-ing boy.

When the lad met Paul Berlenbach in Madison Square Garden for the light-heavy title, all he showed was a wonderful ability to tap and clinch. As a boxer he proved himself a good run-ner and wrestler. To-day he has the build of Apollo, the strength of Her-cules, the light-footed speed of Ceres, and so on—but what's the use? He thinks he has reformed, changed his style and remade himself into a fighter. Perhaps. Yet somehow it makes you think of the classic question whether any one by taking thought can add a cubit to his stature. Can he? And can one who for years has followed a discreet program of tapping and clinching, and has grown set in that style, change his nature by taking thought, and thus become a real, fighting man? Is it not likely that the constant and merciless grind of the last five or six years has robbed the boy of endurance, of the stamina a champion needs? His father and mother and he have gath-ered a great sum of small money, but in the gathering they seem to have smoth-ered the boy's chance of ever fighting

to the throne. It is saddening to see such a dismal outlook before a youth who might have been king.

Smiling Tom Heeney is back from his wedding journey and visit home, ready to make good his claim for the crown, full of hope as ever, without a word of brag or bluster, but determined to force his way to the top. Tunney has a high opinion of him, and Tunney ought to know how good he is. When I saw Tom, two days after the big bat-tle, his boyish smile was as hearty as usual, and there was not a mark on his face, in spite of the wild cries that filled the air on the battle night. Certainly he looked one hundred per cent fit.

But what about his insides? Tunney gave him an awful rib-roasting that night—it took a tremendous beating to stop this stalwart football warrior—and any man who has been put through that process is in danger of being weakened for the rest of his life. It is, of course, possible that Tom has rallied from the smashing he endured, but we shall have to see him tried by ordeal of combat before we know where he stands.

The crowd sees blows to the head and face and whoops for joy; but very few notice the rips and jolts and straight rights to the ribs and abdomen. These punches often are short but carry the whole weight of the body with them. If the victim knows they are coming and has a chance to flex the abdominal muscles to resist the shock, he will not be hurt so much; but if they catch him while his mind is on something else and he has not set up this inner wall of defense, then he suf-fers agony at the moment, with the like-lihood of disablement ever after.

Old Fitz made play for Corbett's head from the tenth to the fourteenth round of their great battle, so as to coax his guard high. Jim's seconds begged him to be more careful with the old fox. "He has no weight in his punch," Corbett laughed them off; "he can't

hurt me." And still Old Fitz danced through a masquerade of deceptive taps on the jaw until Corbett was quite relaxed and thinking only of his face. Not till then did Fitz shift his right foot forward and loop upward the deadly left fist that sank deep into Jim's midriff, paralyzed him, and made the solar plexus a household word. Devastating as the blow was, Corbett recovered all his strength after some months, and in his twenty-three-round struggle with Jeffries fought the greatest fight of his life.

How different was the fate of Tom Sharkey, that night at Coney Island, when Jeffries drove his beamlike right into Tom's ribs and abdomen during twenty-five rounds. The doctor who attended him told me Tom had sustained two broken ribs, one "green twig" fracture—rib broken on one side but not quite snapped through the other—and that a few ribs were knocked loose from the backbone. Next day Tom, stretched on a bed of pain but smoking an enormous cigar and reading of the battle, told me Jeffries had not hurt him at all, though every time he breathed the ragged ribs raked his lung and made him cough. "Next time I fight Jeff—ugh! ugh!—I'll kill him—ugh! ugh!" he told me, and meant it.

But Tom never fought Jeff again. Jack Monroe took him in the third round a few months later, in Philadelphia; found him so easy that when Tom rushed into a clinch Jack pushed him across the ring and into the ropes. Tall Jack looked down over Tom's shoulder and winked at Charley White and me, then drove a straight right into Tom's midst, trying to drop him on our hats, under the lower rope. I whipped out the hats. An instant later poor Tom fell, sitting on the spot, his knees hooked over the ropes, and he out cold, dead to the world. The end of his career.

So you see the most interesting ques-

tion about Tom Heeney now is whether or not the body pounding he took from Tunney will wreck him as Jeff wrecked Sharkey. Heeney has lived such a clean, active life that we may reasonably hope to see him again at his best, though only the test of battle will make it a certainty. And if he is at his best, he will bother the boys a lot before they can get past him. True, his arms are short, but they are thick, and they move fast to deliver a hard sock. The greatest weapon he takes into the ring is his stout heart, that never falters, no matter how hard the going. When I ventured to suggest in these pages that Tom had a chance against Tunney, one genial critic—quite free from bias, of course—wrote in that that was all bosh and that I must have been bribed to write so.

Such gentle courtesy deserves a polite reply, and here it is: I was "sold," as they say, on Heeney by his good record and the smiling courage I saw him display under agonizing pain. And I still believe he has the heart to give a good account of himself in any company. Remember the finish of the late championship battle: the listening world heard the roar of the crowd; then the calm, clear words of Tunney; then the voice of Heeney, still trying hard to catch the breath that had been pounded out of him, barely recovering from stupor, but cheerily calling:

"Hullo, everybody! It was a good fight! Hullo, dad and mother, 'way down there at 'ome! I'm not 'urt! It's all right, dad and mother. *Kea-ora!*" (Maori talk, meaning, "Be of good heart!")

Well, there's another reason why I believe "Smiling Tom" has a chance. The man who can take such a hammering as that and grin and forget himself in his concern for others, is the man who will go far. *Kea-ora* to you, Tom!

Towering far above all the throng of contenders in popular regard, wor-

shipped by the crowd with all the fervor it bestowed on Bryan or Roosevelt, is the good old "Manassa Mauler," the "Cave Man," Jack Dempsey. After reading of any of the others, probably you have said to yourself: "Huh! I'd like to see him up in front of Jack Dempsey!" And with good reason, for Jack is a fighter who fights, who puts no trust in strategy or feinting, but just dashes in and drives home the sledge-hammer punch. He thinks the best defense is to knock the enemy cold; and it certainly is the best—if you can catch him. Will Dempsey try his luck again? Was his retirement absolutely the last, final fare-ye-well? We shall see. But can he punch as hard as ever?

Of course he can punch as hard as ever. The punch is the last thing a fighter loses. His legs may slacken speed and his stamina yield to over-work or soft living—usually the latter—but it is pleasant to know that the old punch that toppled the giant Willard and all the rest but Tunney is still in good working order, and that Jack can shoot it with all the old fury and crunching power whenever he sees fit. He has lived on Easy Street now for more than a year, which naturally must have diminished his vigor and endurance; but if he goes again up into the California mountains and works as hard as he did to get ready for Tunney and leads the simple life, there is no reason why he cannot come back almost, or

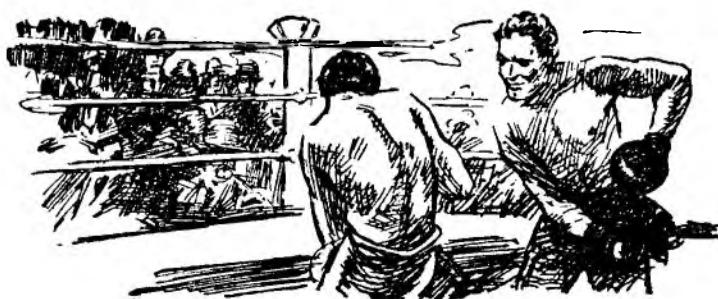
quite, as fit as he was in his two fights with Tunney. And all the world knows how very near he came to winning the last battle.

Not so long ago Jack was protesting that he had more money than he knew what to do with, and that he would never again risk taking punches on the head that might knock him loose from his wits and set him to cutting out paper dolls in the incurable ward. Quite right. But who is there in sight likely to land effective punches on Jack's dome? Few, if any, with Tunney out—if he stays out, which looks probable.

Jack's venture into the drama has been what the boys call a flop. A bit of ready money would feel good in hand. So about the only thing unsettled is the money question. As to that, did you see the modest dispatch in the papers the other day from the Far West? A trusty friend showed the reporter a letter he had received from Dempsey, in which he said that he really does not want to fight any more; that certain people are begging him to fight—and that any one who wants to make him fight will have to pay him five hundred thousand dollars. Need I say more?

Then gie us yeer hand, ma trusty freend,
And here's a hand o' mine:
We'll hae a richt gude slugging match,
For the sake of Auld Lang Syne!

Articles and stories by William Hemmingway are regular features of these pages.



THE EXPLORER

By W. E. SOLENBERGER

I HAVE seen a trackless valley,
 Filled with virgin spruce and pine;
I have smoked a pipe on mountains
 Where the very sky seemed mine;

I have wandered through an outland
 Where the rivers were unnamed,
Full of countless, chartless rapids
 That no man has ever tamed—

A wild country, old and shadowed
 By a past that's living still—
The ancient trees stand rooted
 Where the ancient beasts made kill;

The ancient rocks are splitting
 Foaming torrents that have flowed
Since the very dawn of history—
 When the mighty glaciers rode

Straight across primeval mountains
 On their slow, earth-crunching feet;
I have seen this untouched region,
 And it's facing a retreat!

For earth is man's inheritance,
 And his breed, unlike the rest,
Cannot leave it as he finds it—
 Though he finds it at its best!

The PATIO of GONZALEZ



Mat Sears, a Nantucket Islander, fired with an adventurous urge, went to New York, where for four years he worked at odd jobs, hoping for the opportunity that would send him afar. His chance came when Lever, an antique dealer, employed him to go to Bogotá, Colombia, to "steal" a patio. Lever, representing a millionaire, had bought the patio and arranged to have it shipped—a hard job, for Bogotá is far inland, in rough country, and high in the mountains. The war had come, and Colombian currency had dropped in value. The owners of the patio demanded more pesos to make up for the drop. The millionaire objected, but finally had to pay a greatly increased number of pesos. Then a law was passed, forbidding the exporting of art treasures. Infuriated, the American commissioned Lever to have the patio removed by hook or crook.

Mat sailed for the tropics, left the steamer at the Colombian coast and proceeded up the Magdalena River by boat. On this craft he met a Colombian, Morales, who invited Mat to dine with him, his aunt, and cousin. The aunt, Señora Openza, did not warm to Mat, but the girl, Mercedes, was very pleasant. Mat fell in love with her. The dinner's charm was marred by the appearance of Ramón Garcia, a Colombian colonel, who had been courting the girl, and whom Morales had tried to avoid.

The next morning, while chatting with Morales, Mat dived overboard to save a drowning native child. He had just about succeeded when a cry from the passengers directed his horrified gaze to an alligator behind him.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

OVERBOARD.

BANG-BANG! A wave, caused by the diving of the great alligator, swept over Mat's head. When he came up, the steamer was towering over him and two black deck hands were lying on their stomachs, stretching out their hands to him. He passed up the child and swung himself on board.

He had seen Morales standing at the rail with a heavy revolver in his hand and knew that it was the *Bogotáno* who had saved him.

Morales had fired, not into the open jaws, but at the small, red eye of the big reptile, and one of his shots had entered at that vulnerable spot just as the jaws were about to close upon the victims.

Mat, soaking wet, clambered up to



By
Fred MacIsaac



In Five Parts—Part II

the top deck and was surrounded by delirious passengers who were determined, both men and women, to plaster him with kisses.

He fought good-naturedly against this demonstration and finally escaped to where Morales was standing with a contented smile on his face.

Behind Morales stood Mercedes and Señora Openza, wearing expressions of such admiration that Mat felt repaid for his perilous ducking.

Mat wrung the hand of his friend without saying a word.

"Felicitations," smiled Morales. "I never expected to greet you again."

"You wouldn't if you hadn't come to my rescue. Thank God, you had a gun on."

"I took it out of my bag this morning and buckled it on," said the *Bogotáno*, "for reasons which you may suspect. It came in very handy."

"Señor Sears," exclaimed Mercedes, extending both her hands to the American, "that was the bravest thing I ever saw! My heart stopped beating."

"You should save your admiration for the marksmanship of your cousin," Mat smiled. "Anybody can swim."

Señora Openza added her congratu-

lations so volubly that Mat only understood half of what she had to say.

"There wasn't a person on board who would have dared to go into the river," stated Morales. "It was only a native child and the risk was appalling."

"But that baby has a soul!" exclaimed Mercedes.

"True," smiled Morales; "so it would have gone straight to heaven. But adults are heavy with sin. It's not only the crocodiles, Sears, but the river teems with venomous water snakes whose bite kills. Distressed as I was, I would not have dared to jump into the river, and I tried to restrain you."

"I doubt that," Mat laughed. "Perhaps if I had thought of alligators and water snakes, I wouldn't have jumped either."

"I know you would," declared Mercedes, whose eyes were wet from the thrill she had experienced. "Now you are about to be adored."

The black woman whose child Mat had saved had approached and now threw herself on her stomach, crawled to Mat's feet and kissed his shoes.

From that position she expressed her admiration of the hero, her remarks punctuated by a chorus of agreement by

the mob of deck passengers who had formed a circle; but none of the text was understood by Sears, who stood grinning and greatly embarrassed.

Morales put an end to the scene with something appropriately said, and then took Mat by the arm with an apology to the ladies and led him to the American's stateroom. There Mat proceeded to change, while the Colombian sat on a cot during the operation.

"I strapped on the gun because I did not know what Garcia might undertake to-day," Morales said. "He was on deck when you were brought on board, but, you notice, he did not approach. I saw him glowering from a distance when my cousin was holding your hands and rhapsodizing over you. Have you got a gun?"

"No," replied Mat. "I never thought I might need one."

"I doubt if you will, but that fellow is as poisonous as a water snake. And he hates you because Mercedes seems to like you. I have a pair of revolvers and I'll make you a present of one of them. Wear it—but, of course, I need not warn you that the consequences of your using it would be greater to an American than to a Colombian."

"If you really think it is necessary to—"

"Otherwise I would not make the suggestion." Morales was silent for a moment. "Señor," he said then. "I want to tell you that it was a fine thing you did. If I began our acquaintance by making use of you, as I confessed last night, I wish to say now that I shall be proud if you will consider me your very good friend and never hesitate to call on me at need."

"I consider you my savior," returned Mat, moved by his vehemence. "I certainly am glad to have you as my friend, and you know that I am for you, first, last and all the time."

They shook hands gravely.

"You must understand that the word

'friend' means more with us than with you and we do not use it lightly," continued Morales. "To a Castilian, friendship is a deep obligation, and there is nothing he would not do for his friend. And he expects his friend to feel equally bound to him."

"I'm satisfied to have it that way," smiled Mat.

"When we reach Bogotá, you will reside in my house and my family will be yours, and my purse is also at your disposal."

"That's wonderful of you, old man. However, I have a special reason for wishing to go to a hotel—a reason I may tell you later."

"It will be, of course, as you prefer, but my house will be open always."

Of course, the special reason why Mat could not accept the hospitality of the young Colombian was his purpose in Bogotá, which was the violation of the law of the republic. Since he was determined to make some kind of attempt, it was to be expected that he would be captured and punished; and it would be disgraceful for the Morales family to have been entertaining a criminal as a guest.

On the other hand, he was delighted to have made a friend of Morales, not only because he liked him and was in the way to worship his cousin Mercedes, but because there might be some legal way, undiscovered by his own principals, by which the patio might be sent to its rightful owner. However, until he had seen the patio, and acquainted himself with the laws concerning it, Mat could not even make a beginning of his task. And in the meantime, being young and an optimist, he was eager to improve the shining hour in the presence of melting blue eyes.

Upon his return to the deck he was met by the captain of the steamer and escorted to the salon, where a reception had been arranged for him hastily. He stood beside the skipper as all the

first cabin passengers paraded before him, being introduced, shaking hands, and murmuring compliments about his courage and felicitations upon his escape.

Mat suffered frightfully during this ordeal. He was able to sympathize with Lindbergh while he envied the ability of that international hero to carry off such a situation. Forgetting completely his Spanish, he babbled idiotically in English and understood almost nothing of the effusive compliments paid to him by the good folks of Colombia.

Señora Openza gave herself airs during this reception, since the hero was one of her party, and Mercedes' blue eyes danced at his obvious embarrassment. Garcia was conspicuous by his absence from the reception.

Released at last, Mat sought the deck and, seeing the girl seated with her mother in rocking-chairs on the shady side of the boat, moved toward them. But he hesitated when he saw that Garcia had joined them. Seeing him pause in his progress, Mercedes beckoned to him gracefully with her fan and he took courage.

"I am sure the *coronel* wishes to add his felicitations to those you have already received," said the girl, with a little malice.

Garcia smiled and bowed, declaring: "But surely, I intended to tell you in the salon how much I admired your courage and quickness, Señor Sears."

Garcia's eyes were not smiling as he spoke, but Mat accepted the speech at its face value.

"It was an impulse, sir, and nothing to cause such a fuss. I am still terrified when I think of that alligator, and I shall be grateful all my life to Mr. Morales for his wonderful shooting."

"We Colombians pride ourselves on our marksmanship," replied the officer. "Had we declared war on the United States in the days of the Panama question, I am sure your countrymen would

have been compelled to respect our army."

"We respect it without asking for any such test," replied Mat.

"Men are always talking war or politics," complained Mercedes. "The first is horrible and the second stupid. Do you dance, Mr. Sears?"

"Very badly, I am afraid."

"Or tango?"

"Not at all."

"The *coronel* tangoes marvelously; and Garcia's dark face lighted with pleasure.

"If the señora consents," he said eagerly, "I am sure I can collect an orchestra from among the deck passengers and we might arrange a ball."

"Why not?" said Señora Openza, when he had repeated his remark in Spanish.

Mercedes clapped her hands. "Splendid! A ball in honor of the ship's hero."

"Oh, please," protested Mat. "Can't we forget all about that?"

"An excellent idea," declared Garcia. "Consider it arranged, ladies. For to-morrow evening."

"And you shall have the first dance, Mr. Sears," promised Mercedes. "You may only have one, for you will be expected to dance with all the ladies."

Garcia grinned amusedly. If Mat had to dance with all the others, Mercedes would probably grant several dances to himself, so he was very much in favor of making Mat the guest of honor.

"The guest of honor should be Señor Morales," Mat protested. "His bullet saved both the child and myself."

"Ah, but Juan ran no personal risk," said Mercedes, with a kind glance at Mat. "No, I think you must be our lion, Mr. Sears."

"If it wasn't for the chance to dance with you," he replied significantly, "I'd not show up at this ball. I've had enough of being lionized for nothing."

Garcia nodded. "I understand your feelings, señor, but we need an excuse to persuade the ladies to dance, and I hope that you won't cause our party to fail."

"I'll play the game," Mat said, with a self-conscious smile.

"Did Morales happen to explain why he was wearing a revolver at the time?" asked Garcia casually.

With a shake of the head, Mat replied:

"I didn't ask, but I am sure he would tell you if you asked him."

Garcia shrugged.

Mat, wishing to get really acquainted with Mercedes, hoped he would go away. But Garcia had no intention of departing, and engaged the girl in a conversation in Spanish which the American found himself understanding fairly well, but which he was too uncertain of his own vocabulary to attempt to enter.

After ten minutes the señora complained of the insects and carried off her daughter to their cabin, whereupon Garcia bowed stiffly to the young American and strolled away.

O'Connor and Brown, the oil men, now descended on Mat and carried him into the barroom for a drink.

"That was some stunt you pulled, kid," said Brown. "We were sitting here and didn't know what was up until we heard that 'spig' shooting. Imagine getting your leg bit off by an alligator! Have a brandy. It gives me a chill to think of it."

"Catch me going swimming in water where one of those things is liable to be taking a snooze," observed O'Connor. "Believe me, if I never wash till I wash in a river, I'm going to be awful dirty. It took a Yankee to show these spigs a thing or two."

Mat looked nervously around, for the young man was talking loudly and it was certain that several of the Colombians at hand understood English. He

caught a black look from a brown man at the next table.

"Pipe down, you fellows," he warned. "These people don't like to be insulted any more than we do, and you're going to live in their country."

"We should worry," retorted Brown. "They know better than start anything with Americans. Will you give us a knock-down to that blonde you're sitting alongside of in the dining room?"

This was very embarrassing for Mat. He was not a snob but he knew that Morales and the señora would resent very much the presentation of the two rough diamonds to Mercedes.

"These Spanish people are very formal," he evaded, "but if a good opportunity occurs I'll do so."

"There is a palula," admired O'Connor. "She's got blue eyes and yellow hair. Imagine her being a spig."

To hear her called such a thing infuriated Mat, but there was no sense in fighting with his own countrymen in a barroom.

"I wish you'd drop that word," he said. "The people down here consider it insulting and you'll get into serious trouble. Besides, it only applies to half-castes on the beaches of Central American countries. Where are you fellows going?"

"Antioquia. Got to report to a dump called Santiago. We go to the end of the line on this mud scow and then board the rattler. Have another drink?"

"Can't carry it," replied Mat. "See you later."

He escaped, relieved that their careless chatter had not embroiled them in an argument with the denizens of the smoke room. Although Sears had had no more experience of South America than his two compatriots, he had read much and they had read nothing. Compared to him they were babes in the woods, and something was likely to happen to them unless they mended their

ways; in fact, it was surprising that some Colombian fire eater had not already attempted to correct their manners with a gun or a knife.

Meeting Morales on deck, Mat expressed his fears for the safety of the Americans.

"I don't think anything will happen to them on the steamer," said the *Bogotáno*, "so long as they stick to liquor and don't attempt to flirt with the native women. A great many Americans of their sort travel on these boats on the way to the oil regions. They speak a slang and with a diction that is hard for our people to understand, and they are usually willing to buy drinks for the crowd. So they are like the goose that laid the golden egg. I'm very sorry for those young men because they weaken themselves by excessive drinking, and the climate gets them if they stay here long enough. If they survive they lose their contempt for our people and become useful residents. I understand that Garcia is arranging a ball in your honor. '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*'"

"What does that mean? I never studied Latin."

"Beware of the Greeks, especially when bearing gifts," laughed Morales.

"Of course, I don't want to be the guest of honor at a ball. But how can he have an ulterior motive in that?"

"Most likely he considers it an excuse for dancing with my cousin, and I can't very well prevent that. Just the same, let's keep our eyes open."

Mindful of his understanding with Morales, Mat endeavored at meals to refrain from betraying his overweening attraction toward Mercedes, and his apparent indifference naturally piqued her interest. She skillfully drew him into conversation, asked questions which he was compelled to answer, and when she saw his eyes she knew that she pleased him.

Her four years in school in America

and her long association with an English governess in Bogotá caused her to speak English perfectly, yet there was a delicious huskiness in her intonation, relic of the throatiness of the Spanish tongue, which fascinated Mat.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO IN THE MOONLIGHT.

TOWARD evening of the second day on the *Magdalena*, the sky became clouded and there followed a downpour of rain such as Mat had never seen. When it grew dark and the storm continued, the steamer sought the river's edge and made fast to trees, her captain having decided that it was unsafe to proceed until daylight.

Slight as was the progress of the steamer, it had produced a mild breeze which mitigated the heat and disturbed the mosquitoes. Now, the rain having ceased, the heat became intense, and multitudes of night-flying biters settled upon the devoted company. Passengers took to their cabins, closed the windows and covered themselves with mosquito veils.

Mat suffered intensely from the heat and was unable to sleep, rolling in torment upon his hard bed, regretting his choice of this method of transportation, wondering how he could endure six more nights of it—yet rejoicing that he was on the same ship with Mercedes Openza.

After many hours a ghostly light penetrated his cabin window—the moon had pushed aside the clouds. It grew brighter and presently he heard a bell ring, and then there came a shaking and chugging which indicated that the steamer was under way once more. He rose and dressed rapidly, determined to spend the rest of the night on deck.

When he emerged from the companionway the boat was already in mid-stream. The river was bathed in bright moonlight. The motion of the vessel

had temporarily dislodged the swarm of mosquitoes. Drawn up in a long row was an array of empty rocking-chairs—no, not all empty, for, as he moved toward them, a small, black figure which was curled up in a huge rocker stirred, a black veil was lifted and the face of Mercedes was smiling at him.

Mat stiffened as though shocked by electricity, then strode to her side. She put a finger to her lips.

"Speak low," she cautioned. "We are right outside my cabin."

"May I sit down?" he asked softly.

"Why not?"

He dropped into the chair at her side.

"Gee, this is wonderful!" he sighed.

"Perfectly ecstatically beautiful," she agreed. "The moon on the river, the black line of the distant shore, and we, sailing smoothly through the silent night."

"Oh, yes; but I meant finding you here. I think two people can enjoy a scene like this better than one."

"Indeed yes. I was unable to endure the cabin any longer, and mother was sleeping soundly, so, when I discovered we were moving again, I slipped out into the air."

"I haven't slept a wink so far tonight, and I thought I might as well be on deck. I have never had a chance to talk to you alone before, señorita."

"I am well chaperoned, am I not?" she sighed. "You have no idea how stupid it is to be chaperoned after years of freedom in an American school. Mother clucks over me as though I were a chicken which had just come out of the shell, and forgets I have been out from under her wings for years."

"I suppose you are eager to see Bogotá again," he said, for lack of something better.

"Of course, I am anxious to see my father and my young sister, but I dread going back to Bogotá," she replied frankly. "It's hateful."

"But I understood it is a beautiful city."

"True, but it's absolutely medieval, Mr. Sears. You have no notion how benighted our people are—in their views, I mean. They haven't progressed since Spain in the days of Philip II. Life is one religious ceremony after another; women are almost cloistered in their homes, and there is no freedom in marriage as there is in France and America. Of course, it is all right for the women who know no other life, but it is criminal to send a girl north to school and then bring her back and stuff her in a hole."

"But you have lots of dances and parties, so Morales tells me."

"Stupid, I assure you—the stiffest, most formal things you can imagine. Why, if I should dance the 'Black Bottom' at one of our *bailes*, they would immure me in a convent for life."

"Er—can you?"

"What?"

"Dance the 'Black Bottom'."

She giggled. "Champion of my class in school. Are you married, señor?"

"No, certainly not. Why?"

"I just wished to know. Shall I tell you something? All Bogotá girls who have been educated in Europe or America pray every night that they may marry a man who will take them away."

"Do you?" he asked boldly.

She sighed. "No. It would be no use. My father is old-fashioned and he'll marry me to some grave young man who thinks Bogotá is the center of the world."

"Suppose you don't love him?"

Mercedes laughed bitterly.

"Love! How can one love persons who are presented by one's parents as eligible suitors, whom one meets most formally at a *baile* or a dinner when all our relatives are present. There must be romance to bring about love, and our alliances are entirely without it."

"But your Cousin Juan Morales tells

me he is in love with a Bogotá girl whom he met in the regular way."

"I know her. She will marry him, but she is not in love with him. She is in love with a handsome young soldier whom she has seen in church but with whom she has never exchanged a word. You will not tell him, of course?"

"Certainly not. I appreciate a confidence. But he deserves better luck."

"Oh, she will make him the sort of wife he expects and he will be satisfied. Our Spanish men are very gallant, but they are not the adoring husbands that American girls possess." She sighed. "I wish I might fall in love with an American who would carry me off in an airplane."

Her eyes were on him and they seemed to gleam in the moonlight. His untutored heart was beating wildly. He didn't know whether she was flirting or in earnest, and he had to find out.

"Do you think—do you suppose—could you fall in love with me?" he dared.

Mercedes smiled bewitchingly.

"How do I know? You have not made love to me. You have been very cold, señor. Now Ramón whispers his affection at every opportunity."

"I guess you can see how I feel about you," he defended. "I don't know how to talk about such things; I have never been in love before."

"Are you in love now?" she asked softly, her eyes alluring.

"I—I—"

"Ssssh!" she hissed. "Some one comes!"

A glance identified the figure which was approaching them. It was Ramón Garcia, his face was black with rage. He was trembling as he stood before them and bowed silently.

A titter from Mercedes did not soothe him.

"Señorita," he said in Spanish, "your mother would be very angry to learn

that you sit alone at two in the morning in the company of this North American."

"I have no intention of informing her. Have you?" she retorted boldly.

"Certainly not. But I suggest that you retire at once. The night air will do you an injury."

"I could not sleep, and came out for air. The señor also came out on deck, and, naturally, we talked. You forget I was educated in the United States."

"I regret the fact," he said angrily. "May I suggest that you go in?"

"Alas! the moon goes behind a cloud. It is no longer agreeable on deck," she sighed. "Good night, Señor Sears. I trust you will sleep. Your solicitude for my health, *Coronel* Ramón, is touching."

She rose as she spoke, laughed exasperatingly, nodded kindly to Mat, flitted to the door of her cabin and disappeared within.

Garcia turned and inspected Mat, who remained in his chair after having risen upon Mercedes' departure and reseated himself.

"Señor Sears," said Garcia softly, "you annoy me."

"You don't say so!" replied Mat insolently.

"However, I bear you no ill will, for you could not be expected to understand that one does not converse with a Colombian young lady, unchaperoned, at two hours of the morning."

"I am sure the Señorita Openza knows how to take care of herself," Mat replied easily. "I encountered her by accident and, being acquainted, we exchanged a few remarks. If it was wrong, the young lady would have notified me and I would have gone away. Since she made no objections, I fail to see where you come in."

"Permit me to inform you, then, that I expect to make that young lady my wife."

"Well, when she is married to you—

if that ever happens—I presume she may do as you tell her. It seems to me that she is her own mistress at present."

Garcia sighed. "I see it is useless to talk to you. Do you happen to carry a weapon, Señor Sears?"

Mat lifted two clenched fists significantly.

"A revolver or a knife, perhaps?" suggested Garcia.

"Sorry."

"We are alone, the deck is empty, and the time is opportune. If you are unarmed I shall be glad to lend you a knife or revolver—whichever you choose."

Mat got up and confronted the officer.

"You are suggesting a duel?"

"Something like that. Are you afraid?"

"Yes," Mat said frankly. "I haven't the slightest desire to shoot or be shot, to cut you or be knifed. I don't like the notion at all. Besides, I supposed duels had certain formalities—seconds and things like that."

"I dispense with them."

"Even if we had seconds I wouldn't fight. Nothing doing, Garcia."

"You are a coward. I supposed, after your gallery play of jumping in the river, that you were a man of courage."

"You can suppose what you gosh darn please!" retorted the Yankee angrily. "I'm not having any duels, thank you. What are you going to do about it?"

The handsome face of the Colombian was distorted by a contemptuous frown. "I have given you a gentleman's opportunity," he said; "but it seems you are not a gentleman—only a sneaking hound of a Yankee. You have intruded into my affairs and you refuse me satisfaction. I have no more to say at present."

Mat restrained himself with difficulty from replying, with a blow of his pow-

erful right fist, to the insult to his nationality. Undoubtedly Garcia was armed, and was trying to provoke him to attack so that he could shoot Mat down and claim self-defense.

"You go to the devil!" Mat ejaculated. Turning on his heel, he returned to his cabin. It took more courage to present his broad back to the Colombian than it would have done to face him in a duel; at every step he expected to feel the point of a knife between his shoulders. However, Garcia remained on the ground and made no move. He was not that kind of assassin.

Once in the stifling cabin, Mat sat down to think things over. Garcia was an active enemy from now on, and Mat would have to keep his eyes wide open. If the fellow didn't get a chance to injure him on the steamer, he might find an opportunity in Bogotá. Garcia was wildly jealous; no doubt he was convinced that the meeting on deck was prearranged—in which case he would not stop at murder. His enmity might seriously interfere with the success of Mat's mission.

But at the moment the bright smile of Mercedes Openza was worth a dozen patios and a score of enemies like Garcia.

That Mercedes liked him was very evident; that she did not share the prejudice of her people against marrying a North American, she had admitted. She had asked if he were married and complained that he had not tried to make love to her.

If he could contrive a way to take out the patio, he would have fifty thousand dollars, which would be enough to support a wife and give him a start in life. Mercedes was half won; she didn't care anything about Garcia. Mat would win her completely, carry her away and with her the ancient stones of the inner courtyard of the house built three hundred and fifty years ago by Gonzalez.

A man as happy as Mat was could

not be inconvenienced by trifles like duels, so he fell asleep and dreamed sweetly. Life, at twenty-five, is certainly worth living; love is the flavoring and danger is the spice of it. This was the high adventure he had dreamed of since his first talk with Captain Nickerson in the garden of the poorhouse at Nantucket.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRAP IS SPRUNG.

NEXT morning the steamer worked her way to the jetty of an island in the river called Santa Cruz, and the captain announced that the boat would spend an hour there taking on wood and cargo, and that passengers might go ashore.

Neither of the ladies had come down to breakfast; Morales had stated that he would not go ashore, and Mat lingered alone by the rail in the hope that Mercedes would put in an appearance. But she was evidently making up for lost slumber.

The island village, in appearance like a fairyland, persuaded him, in the end, to go down the gangplank. The foliage on the island was incredibly thick and of a tropic luxuriance never before witnessed by the American. The little houses, painted in every variety of color, thatched with palm fronds, stood in a row upon a high embankment reached by a series of stone steps. Most of the inhabitants, assembled on the shore, ranged in size from one foot to six feet, in raiment from seminakedness to nothing at all, and in color from pale yellow to jet black.

A row of huge mango trees grew along the water front; above and behind the houses were great trees of a variety unknown to Mat. He found a little cobble-paved village street which he followed, observing the habitations with wide-eyed curiosity. He passed a little church, thatched with palms like the other buildings, saw a dozen dark

men in white suits, seated in a tiny café, and in five minutes was out of the village on a narrow dirt road which seemed to lead into the heart of the jungle.

A vender, laden with dishes of all sizes and shapes made from the gourd tree, pursued him, and a small crippled man tried to sell him sleeping mats of brilliant shades and extraordinary patterns. Then a large black came from behind and shooed the peddlers away.

"Would the señor wish to see the 'House of the Miracle'?" he asked in Spanish. "It is only five minutes from here."

"I have not time," Mat protested.

"Yes. The boat will stay two hours. The fuel was not ready," the Negro replied.

"What is this House of the Miracle?"

"It was the dwelling of a holy man who cured all on the island of sickness, so that now we have no sick people. Even now, he who enters the house will be made well and have his heart's desire."

"Lead me to it," smiled Mat. "I'll take a chance on that miracle."

The black man grinned widely and took the lead. He turned off the road into a well-defined path, and in ten minutes rather than five they entered a clearing in the center of which stood a house some twenty feet square, constructed of white stone and thatched with palm. There was a heavy, oaken door which the Negro pulled open as he beckoned to Mat to enter.

Mat stepped in, looked curiously round and saw nothing, not even a chair or a table or a bed. The floor was of earth.

There was a slam behind him and he turned to find that the door had closed. Something thumped outside—a bar falling across it. Mat rushed to the door and tried to pull it open, but it was too stout—quite unshakable. He shouted but got no reply, and then he

understood that he had been led there by a trick and was a safely confined prisoner.

To understand how this had come about was simple enough now that he had walked into the trap. Garcia had determined to get rid of him, had followed him ashore, hired the big Negro to take him to the "House of the Miracle"—which Mat guessed to be the town prison and not in the least miraculous—and neatly lock him in. The steamer would sail. No other steamer going north would be along for a week, and the rival of the crafty colonel would be powerless to pursue his suit.

Despite the fact that our daily newspapers are filled with details of crimes varying in degree in horror and atrocity, the normal-minded American is very obtuse as regards danger, and Mat Sears had awakened in the morning entirely free from apprehension of peril. True, Garcia had challenged him to a duel and made vague threats—and before going to sleep Mat had felt that he had better keep his eye on the fellow. But the sunlight had chased away his fears and had drifted ashore without a thought of his unprincipled rival.

Although he was in the heart of a tropical country where civilization is a thin veneer, he had thought he was wrapped in an aura of American invulnerability. But Garcia, who was probably acquainted with Santa Cruz, had followed him ashore, found an agent and disposed of the cocky American with superb efficiency.

Toot-toot-toot! went the whistle of the steamboat, recalling her passengers who were wandering about the river village. Mat rushed furiously at the door, but it did not even creak as he crashed his shoulder against it. He attacked the walls—solid rock. The ground—he had read of prisoners digging a hole under the walls, and that might have been possible if he had had anything with which to dig, but there was not

even a stick of wood in the hut. His finger nails would have to do, he decided, and he dropped on his knees to begin the work. Alas! the floor was of heavy clay, hardened by long exposure to the air, and it resisted his nails.

He heard the farewell whistle of the steamboat. There were no windows in that hovel but there was a hole in the roof, ten feet above his head. If he could stand on a chair or table he might reach it, but there was neither chair nor table.

Perhaps he would be missed and the steamer would return for him. But he doubted that she would return, for she won her way upriver against the swift current too painfully to retrace her course for a single passenger. He would not be missed until lunch time, and it was possible that his failure to appear at table would not alarm Morales. Later in the day his friend might seek him out.

What would Mercedes think? Would she suppose he had deliberately left the steamer for fear of committing himself further in her regard? They had made a lot of progress before they had been interrupted by Garcia. She must know he would not have remained ashore voluntarily.

They would suppose he had wandered too far into the jungle and got lost, and would follow on the next steamer.

Meanwhile, what was going to happen to him? Nothing serious. All Garcia wanted was to get him off the boat, and he had succeeded—confound him!

Very crestfallen, very angry, very distressed, Mat paced the floor of his prison cell. Having counted on eight days in the company of Mercedes, he had had but two. They would go on to Bogotá when the boat reached La Dorada, the end of the first stage of the journey, and, even though he would see her again in Bogotá, the opportunities

afforded by the steamer voyage would be missing. Never again might he have a chance to carry on from the point where their understanding had been terminated.

Hours passed, every minute interminable, yet his watch finally informed him that it was but one o'clock in the afternoon. The heat grew intolerable, the humidity unbearable. Fortunately, however, the mosquitoes had not entered the hut, for experience had probably taught them there was nothing worth while within.

As the afternoon waned Mat grew hungry. He sat on the floor, his back against the wall, and fumed at his captor who was neglecting to feed him.

A repulsive gray lizard, about eight inches long, crept out of a chink in the wall and crawled across the floor. Although the thing was nonpoisonous and cowardly, Mat was unaware of this and shivered. He finally hurled his boot at the little reptile, which hastened to take cover. Despite the heat, he was ravenously hungry when darkness came; but his jailer came not. It was black as pitch in the hut and he dared not lie down and try to sleep lest the lizard return with reinforcements.

Eventually he slept in an upright position, and when it was morning a ray of sunlight came through the hole in the roof and hit him upon the eyelids, causing him to awake. He was utterly miserable; his stomach shrieked for succor. In all his life Mat had never missed a meal, and he supposed he would die of starvation if he did not eat for twenty-four hours. Until now he had assumed that his captivity would last only until the steamer was well on her way, but the impression stole over him that Garcia, not content with that, had given orders that he be left in this hole until he starved to death.

This was such a horrible thought that it caused clammy perspiration to break out on his forehead and, although

the hut was stiflingly hot, he shivered with cold. What would he do? In another day or two he would be too weak from lack of food and drink to act; he would grow weaker and weaker until he died. Drink! He was suddenly perishing of thirst. In a frenzy he attacked the heavy door again. Useless. The hinges were on the outside; the door opened outward yet it did not give in the least, despite his powerful lunges.

No breakfast. Hours passed somehow and lunch time came, but no lunch put in an appearance and the conviction grew upon him that Garcia had selected for him the horrible death by starvation. He cursed the man and swore to kill him if he was fortunate enough to escape. He wondered what Lever and Horton would think of him if they never heard from him again. When he was dead the Negro would thrust his body into the river where the alligators would rend it. The heat, the terror, the lack of food, made him feverish; his lips were parched, his soul cried out for water. He raved, he prayed, he blasphemed—and who can blame him?

It had begun to grow dark when Mat, lying in a corner gibbering, heard a bumping at the door. It was pulled open and the big Negro stood in the entrance, a package in his hands. The man wore no shirt, and a pair of incredibly dirty white trousers were his only raiment; but he wore a belt, and from the belt depended a long, keen, broad-bladed knife with a wooden handle, the type known as a machete, which is used for cutting sugar cane. On his face was an apologetic grin. Sambo had no orders to starve his prisoner, but he had been given a couple of gold pieces by Garcia and, his brain being turned by his astonishing wealth, he had hied him to a grog shop where he had drunk steadily all day. He had finally fallen into a drunken sleep which lasted twenty-four hours.

An hour before he had returned to life and remembered that the white man had not been fed. His intentions were to explain his dereliction from duty.

However, Mat, whose powerful frame had not wasted away as a result of thirty-six hours of fasting, emitted a bloodcurdling yell and hurled himself at the black man. The Negro dropped the bundle of food and reached for his knife, but a huge fist caught him on the side of the head and dropped him. With a bellow of fury he yanked out his cutter and got upon his feet.

Mat had not had sense enough to rush out of the open door, but had pounced upon the food; now he saw the native bearing down upon him with the knife held like a sword. Mat backed away, still carrying the package. The black grinned fiendishly and swished his weapon through the air—a blow of it would cut off a man's head. Sanity returned to Mat Sears; he felt in the package, found a whole pineapple and drew it out.

As the Negro closed in, Mat threw the heavy fruit, with all the force of a former high-school baseball pitcher, at the wicked face only six feet away. The Negro did not know how to dodge; it struck him between the eyes and he went over backward, the machete flying from his hand.

Mat stooped to pick up, not the weapon, but the pineapple, dashed out of the door, swung it to behind him, turned the big iron key in the lock, and braced the door with a piece of timber which was lying near by, and which, evidently, had been used by the black man for the same purpose.

Then he sank on the ground, and, unable to open the pineapple, tore off the skin of an orange with his teeth and devoured the luscious interior. He ate three oranges and two bananas and felt better; and then he began to marvel at his achievement in overpowering and penning in a huge black man armed

with a swordlike weapon—a feat for which he could thank his temporary derangement.

The Negro was banging on the door and yelping lustily, which caused Mat to smile joyously. The hut was some distance from any habitation, just a solitary building in a clearing in the jungle, and there was no danger of the black man being heard. It seemed to Mat that a good time to have him released would be subsequent to his own departure from Santa Cruz.

The fast, of course, had done Mat no harm, and his frenzy had been caused by his fear of having been permanently abandoned.

The thing to do was to get some sort of conveyance on the river and pursue the steamer. Soon he would have a reckoning with Ramón Garcia, and at the thought he smiled grimly.

He rose, brushed himself as well as he could, and strolled down the path toward the village. Night had fallen by the time he entered the outskirts of the tiny town, and lamps glowed in the windows of the long row of cabins. There must be some sort of inn in the place that should not be difficult to find, and there ought to be a police authority to whom he could report the outrage.

He found the inn—a large, thatched cottage near the church, the *café* of which was filled with blacks and tans who stared at him in astonishment. The innkeeper turned out to be chief of police as well, and he led Mat to a tiny room containing a canvas cot and then listened almost incredulously to his story.

"That big black was José Martez," he said. "He had gold money to spend yesterday and the whole town wondered where he got it. You are a great fighter, señor, if you overpowered him and locked him in the jail, and you have saved me the trouble of doing it. He is in the right place, and I'll let him stay there for a week or so."

"Was there no search made for me by the people on the boat?" Mat asked.

"No, señor. No doubt they did not miss you. Many passengers came ashore."

"Well, how can I overtake the steamer?"

The man shrugged and spread out his hands in a gesture of negation.

"That is not possible."

"Can't I get a motor boat?"

"There is none which could overtake the steamer; in fact, we have no motor boat just now. You will be comfortable here, and the next steamer will arrive in a week, unless she gets upon a sand bar.

"Airplane?"

"The seaplane does not stop here and the sea sled is not running this week."

"My luggage and my friends are on the boat."

"Take heart, señor. It may be that the boat will run aground, and then your steamer will overtake her and put you on board. The race is not always to that which starts first—not on the Magdalena River."

With this Mat had to be content. He purchased a pair of blankets and, after eating an omelet flavored with garlic, he turned in and slept twelve hours.

During the next three or four days he had ample opportunity to acquaint himself with the points of interest of the island of Santa Cruz.

Despite his anger and impatience, he could not but be impressed with the magnificence of that island in the great river. Every variety of tropic tree and plant grew there in profusion. The happy inhabitants had no living problem, for coconuts, mangoes, oranges, bananas, yams and spices were at hand and cost them nothing, while the river teemed with edible fish. Although the poorest inhabitants might have constructed their dwellings of mahogany or ebony, they preferred bamboo because it was easier to cut. Their clothing they wove from grasses.

What money the village possessed came from the sale of gourds from the gourd tree, earthenware jars, sleeping mats, and hammocks, the materials for which were free. Most houses had their own corn patches, and the women ground the corn in stone mortars. Sugar was made from the wild sugar cane in a primitive mill.

The climate, curiously enough, was healthy—no sick or maimed save one crippled vender of mats, and he had found his way there from Barranquilla years before.

Everything on the island was home-made save the bright-colored calico which some of the women purchased for church-going, and the cotton trousers of the men.

Mat made friends with the children and was followed by a mob of yellows, browns and blacks when he moved about the village. There was a plantation in the interior where white people lived in grandeur and state, but he saw none of them.

Under ordinary conditions he would have enjoyed his stay in this primitive and contented village, where the problem of living without working had been successfully solved. The innkeeper fed him chicken with rice, wild duck, fresh river fish, delicious yams and fruits—and all for a few cents a day. However, time hung on his hands—nothing to read, none of his own kind with whom to converse; and the curiosity of the villagers was annoying.

On the third day the whistle of a steamer far up the river drew the entire village to the high bank, from which all waited patiently until the vessel, a sister ship of the *Reyes*, bound downstream, slipped alongside the old quay.

Mat, dying for lack of excitement, was in the picturesque throng, aware that he was the subject of voluble and not always flattering comment from those about him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AIRPLANE.

Mat saw a score or so of white folks on the deck of the steamer. These eagerly filed ashore, and among them a man in the uniform of an officer of the steamer. Spying Sears, the officer came directly to him.

"Are you, by chance, the Señor Matthew Sears?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"I have a letter for you. It was given me by a passenger on the *Reyes*, who thought you might be found here. We tied up alongside of the *Reyes* two days ago."

Mat eagerly extended his hand and received a square envelope addressed in an unknown hand. Foolishly he hoped it was a note from Mercedes, but a glance at the signature showed that it had been written by Juan Morales. It read:

I am sending this through the hands of an officer on the *Bolívar* on the chance that you are in Santa Cruz. We discovered your absence at dinner on the day we left the island, and I immediately made inquiries. An officer reported that you had gone ashore, but did not remember that you had returned. I am certain that you did not desert the ship of your own volition, and I consider it unlikely that you failed to hear her warning whistle, so I assume that you were detained by force. If I were not compelled to remain with my aunt and cousin, I should return to Santa Cruz on the *Bolívar* to search for you, for I suspect the cause of your detention. Mercedes has confessed her indiscretion and the consequent argument with a certain person, part of which she overheard from her cabin window. I believe her statement—that you met accidentally on deck; but this other person would not believe such a thing.

I am hopeful that this letter will reach you and find you well, but I make it mild in tone lest it fall into wrong hands. I assume you will continue your journey by the next steamer, and I expect you to call immediately upon me at my mother's residence, Avenida Republica, where she will join me in welcoming you. Should you not put in an appearance in Bogotá within a week, I shall start back

for Santa Cruz; for I consider you my good friend, and it is my duty to aid you if possible.

Yours in much anxiety,

JUAN MORALES.

"What a good fellow. What a friend!" the American murmured as he finished this sincere and earnest epistle.

Then he was accosted by two Americans who asked the location of a tavern. One of these carried a motion-picture camera; the other was a salesman. Both were from New York. They marveled at his presence in that village, but were content with his explanation that he was left behind by the *Reyes* and would go on by the boat due the next day or later.

Mat bought them drinks at his quaint little hotel and shook hands heartily when the whistle recalled them to the steamer. The salesman informed him that Bogotá was a dreadful hole, and the man with the camera, who was a travel lecturer, assured him that it was a marvelously interesting city.

When the steamer had moved on downstream, Mat found himself more impatient than ever for the upriver boat. Several hours later, some Indians arrived in a canoe and reported that the steamer was fast on a sand bar ten miles below the island, and would remain there a week or ten days until the river rose.

That night Mat wept from disappointment and loneliness.

He was awakened at six in the morning by the sound of hammering outside his window, which overlooked the river, and to his astonishment and delight he saw a seaplane floating below, secured by a rope to the quay. Two men were banging away at something under the hood of her engine.

He was dressed and on the quay in five minutes and hailed the workmen in English. A man with an oil-streaked face lifted his head and replied in a strong German accent.

"Where are you bound?" Mat asked, and his heart did not beat until he got the reply.

"Giradot," said the man, and returned to his hammering.

"Can you take a passenger?" Mat shouted.

The second man reared up and replied in perfect English:

"We have no passengers this trip. Carrying the mails. Cost you a hundred dollars if you want to come."

"Friend, you've booked a passenger! When do we start?"

"God only knows," was the disheartening reply. "Something wrong with the mag. How is the grub at the hotel? Never landed here before."

"Pretty good. Breakfast is on me," Mat promised.

"We'll be right with you. Lay off, Oscar. We'll eat and get to work afterward."

The two aviators climbed up on the float and shook hands with the passenger.

"How long have you been in this hole?" demanded the pilot, who was an American named Gleason.

"Five days."

"Gee! How do you spend the long 'winter evenings'?"

"Twiddle my thumbs."

Both men laughed.

"You certainly got a break," said Gleason. "In the first place, we never descend at this island; and in the second place, we can only carry two passengers and this is the first time in months we haven't been booked full. I think you may buy the drinks."

"You bet," said the German, whose name was Grosman. "Lots of drinks. Working makes me thirsty."

Mat, almost delirious with joy at being with his own kind of people, and at being assured of speedy rescue from this Edenlike prison of an island, dragged the airmen to the inn and commanded the best in the house.

"Why do you only fly to Giradot?" he asked after a while. "Why not all the way to Bogotá?"

"Two kinds of flying," replied Gleason. "We would need land planes from Giradot to the High Plateau, while we have to use seaplanes from Giradot to Barranquilla. Besides, transportation conditions from Giradot to Bogotá are not so bad; the railroads run all the way."

"But why seaplanes? Mat inquired. "After all, this is a narrow strip of river and you fly mostly over land."

"Not for a million would I fly a land plane over our route, young fellow. Do you realize that, aside from a few villages on the river front, a few ranches and plantations here and there, this country is an impenetrable jungle, inhabited by Indians who use poisoned arrows and blow guns, and by wild beasts, venomous reptiles and insects which would devour you in no time? Talk about the interior of Africa! It's civilized compared with the country back of this river valley. We might fly for hours without ever seeing a field where it would be safe to land, and a plane in trouble would tumble into the jungle and never be heard of again."

"I see. But the river winds and twists very tortuously."

"Oh, we short-cut a good deal, but we never get very far from the stream. And there are a great many lakes where a seaplane can descend in safety when we happen to leave the river valley."

"But I should think it would pay to have land planes from Giradot up to Bogotá."

"No," said Gleason. "To hear most people talk, they are not afraid to fly; but whenever there are other means of transportation, passenger planes do not earn their keep. The average man wants to stay on the ground. We do business on the Magdalena because the river boat trip is so horrible, but we would rarely get a passenger in compe-

tition with the railroad into Bogotá. And the government wouldn't grant a mail subsidy for that part of the journey.

"It used to take eight to twelve days from Barranquilla to Giradot, and a couple of days more from Giradot to Bogotá; say, two weeks at a minimum to get mail from the coast to the capital. Now, by plane and railroad, it takes three days, which looks like good enough to the mossbacks in Bogotá."

"I am anxious to overtake the steamer *Reyes* which left here nearly five days ago."

"She may be aground in the river around the next bend," laughed Gleason. "If we get away to-day we ought to catch her at La Dorada, where they take the short railroad around the rapids to Honda—provided, of course, that she has made good time."

"I suppose you fellows want to get back to work," Mat said naively. His anxiety to be on his way was so evident that the airmen laughed loudly.

"Come on, Oscar," commanded Gleason. "Let's get in as much as we can before we have to lay off for the heat of the day."

"What seems to be wrong?" asked Mat anxiously.

"Understand an airplane engine?"

"No-o."

"Then there is no use in telling you. Besides, we don't exactly know. When an engine dies on you it's necessary to try everything you can think of, and then it turns out to be something else. See you at lunch."

However they couldn't lose Mat like that, for he followed them down to the quay. There he was joined by the total population of the village who twittered and chirped and yipped with every blow of the machinist's hammer, until the sun directly overhead warned them to seek the shade.

Gleason and Grosman knocked off work shortly after. They had located

the cause of the trouble, but they had been compelled to take the engine apart to do so, and it would be several hours before they were ready to get under way. They turned in and slept for two hours after lunch, then returned to the plane.

But even then it turned out that the craft was not ready to fly.

"Have to wait till to-morrow," said Gleason. "She'll be ready to-night, but we can't do any night flying. Against regulations. We must always be able to see the river so we can descend at need, and this river isn't lighted like a New York boulevard. I know you are in a big hurry, Sears, but you've got to wait here till morning just the same."

Disconsolately, Mat led them to the inn where the airmen got accommodations and settled themselves to steady drinking. Although there was no ice plant in the village and the drinks were tepid, they took the misfortune philosophically.

"We might have been stuck in some uninhabited part of the river and had nothing to drink at all," grinned Oscar when Mat, who considered himself the host, was apologetic. "We'll try to be off at dawn to-morrow."

In the dawn they moved out upon the breast of a gold and mauve and crimson stream, and before he knew it Mat Sears was flying through the air for the first time in his life.

In the United States and on the Continent of Europe, passenger planes are very large, containing compartments where eight or ten persons sit comfortably in wicker armchairs and peer through portholes as though they were in a ship. Their sensations are very different from those of a flyer in a small plane. Mat sat in an open seaplane, strapped to his seat, while the breeze, created by a speed of seventy or eighty miles an hour, blew upon his face.

For five or ten minutes he was too

thrilled by the sensation of flying to observe much; then, as the plane darted through the air with less motion than a ship at sea, he was able to settle back and marvel at the panorama below him. A thousand feet up and Colombia had become a map—a vast, green expanse through which wriggled the river.

There were silver blotches of water everywhere, contrasting vividly with the dark and light green of trees and fields; small ponds, good-sized lakes, and tiny tributaries of the great river. Mat surmised that most of the solid land he looked upon was actually swamp, and he understood the impossibility of building a railroad through such a country.

After half a hour they flew low over a river town, the name of which Gleason shouted back to Mat but which he did not catch; then they crossed a wide area of grazing land where thousands of moving dots represented cattle—after which the jungle closed in again.

In the course of a day's struggle against the current of the river the steamer would tie up to the bank, after logging from fifty to seventy miles—a distance eaten up by the plane in less than an hour. In the future, of course, the river will be abandoned for all but slow freight, for the airplane is the only logical means of transportation in that country. Necessity will bring about a more general use of the air in Colombia than in the United States.

At the end of an hour or so they descended at a settlement called Barranca Bermuja—a place of huge oil tanks, long, low office buildings and a scattering of native huts—where the plane would deliver mail and refill her tanks.

"Has the *Reyes* passed?" Mat demanded eagerly of an American oil official.

"Oh, yes; she must be at La Dorada by now; should have arrived there last evening."

Again in the air, and the next stop

POP—11A

was Puerto Berrio, the biggest river town which Mat had yet seen—a town with a nice little hotel set in a grove of royal palms, operated by a German whose cook knew his business. They lunched there on good German fare.

Mat was already immune to the qualms which beset a neophyte in an airplane, and he thoroughly enjoyed the remainder of the journey. No longer were they flying over jungle and swamp lands. The country was dry; the river was narrower and ran through cuts and gorges at times; and in the distance the mighty Andes were rearing their heads.

They did not stop at La Dorada, where the river steamers ended their journey, and where the passengers traveled by rail around the rapids which made the Magdalena impassable for fifty miles. The plane descended at Honda, where the land travelers take a second steamer for the comparatively short voyage to Giradot.

At Honda, Mat was distressed to be informed that he could fly no farther, for news that the plane was without passengers had been radioed to this port and two Colombians had booked for the jump to Giradot. Mat must wait two days for a steamer from Honda to Giradot; thus he had lost his last chance of overtaking the passengers who had sailed with him on the *Reyes*.

He said good-by reluctantly to the aviators and settled down, not contentedly, at the hotel, in a town the heat of which was more devastating even than that of a night tied up to the river bank on board the *Reyes*.

CHAPTER X. THE ASTONISHING CITY.

TO Mat's delight he found his personal belongings in the care of the steamship company at Honda, with a note from Morales. It said that he had taken the liberty of leaving them there instead of taking them on to Bogotá,

because he assumed that his friend would have urgent need of them. He added that his aunt and cousin regretted exceedingly that Mat had departed so abruptly. All hoped to see him again in Bogotá.

The steamer trip on the upper river was not as disagreeable as that on the lower Magdalena, for they were now in higher, dryer country, and there was no longer as unendurable a plague of mosquitoes.

From Honda started the old Muisca Trail which was for centuries the only route to Bogotá—a trail so narrow that mules could only traverse it in single file, so precipitous that persons who were new to the mountains had their eyes bandaged during part of the way lest they grow dizzy, fall off their mules and drop three or four thousand feet in a few seconds.

Mat spent part of the time he was forced to remain in Honda in watching the trains of mules starting out and coming in from the trail.

At Giradot he left the steamer and the river at last and entered a narrow-gauge railroad which climbed slowly and laboriously the steep slopes of the Andes, twisting and turning, as is the way of mountain railroads, until it finally emerged upon a high plateau and made connections with the state railroad which runs direct to Bogotá.

He was astonished to see that this was a broad-gauge road, which made it necessary to unload all freight from the narrow-gauge line and load it again upon the plateau train.

Assuming he did succeed in getting his patio out of Bogotá, he realized that it must be reloaded on the mountain railroad at this point, unloaded at Giradot and placed on a steamer, unloaded at Honda and put on the railroad to La Dorada, transhipped to the steamer for Calamar, unloaded there and sent by rail to Cartagena or Santa Maria, and unloaded again and placed on a steamer for New York. The mass of stone would have to be loaded and unloaded seven times in this preposterous country.

That a big city could exist away up here was almost beyond belief, but then the mighty plateau, almost two miles above the sea, was itself almost too great a tax upon the imagination.

The train was starting for Bogotá—the most astonishing city in the world. Mingled with Mat's excitement at this prospect was also the pleasant thought that he would see Mercedes again, and Morales. And then he thought of García, whom he would also reëncounter, doubtless, and his face darkened.

He had, indeed, many reasons, besides that of the patio, for desiring to reach Bogotá soon.

To be continued in the next issue.



HE DEBATES, BUT NOT WITH WOMEN

WHEN Frank Edwards, newly elected mayor of Seattle, was asked to debate with Mrs. Bertha K. Landes, his opponent in the final election, he replied that any married man knows better than to debate with a woman. So that ended that.

Mrs. Landes was seeking reëlection. Former Mayor Edwin J. Brown, who was defeated in the primaries, threw his support to her in the last minute; but it was unavailing, the voters giving Edwards a majority of some nineteen thousand votes.

SAFETY FIRST

By BERTON BRALEY

HE never took chances. From earliest youth
He looked ere he leaped—and to set down the truth,
He never did very much leaping, in sooth,
 His caution forbade him to try it.
And as he grew older his caution increased;
He crossed at the crossings where streets were policed,
And never got reckless at party or feast,
 And always adhered to his diet.

He never was spendthrift with body or brain;
He always wore rubbers when out in the rain,
And always considered a castle in Spain
 As hardly a solid investment.
Romance and adventure for him had no lure;
To gamble with fate was a bit insecure;
He never did anything till he was sure,
 Nor knew what a foolhardy quest meant!

His life is a model of hard common sense,
He's never said, "Shoot the wad! Damn the expense!"
And now he lives stolidly off of his rents;
 His safety deposit has in it
A whole flock of bonds and investments that thrive.
He'll probably live to a hundred and five,
And never be really and truly *alive*
 For one single glorious minute!



MIDSUMMER NIGHTMARE

By **Will McMorrow**

The harrowing experience of Mr. Forrester, who had a twin brother.

AN amusing thing, you might think, to have happen to a perfectly sane and sensible person; but these amusing things are liable to have a tragic ending, and I wasn't at all amused, I can tell you.

This twin brother of mine—— I'm not boring you, I hope. Pullman smokers are inclined to make me talkative, especially when it's a long way between stops—— No, I didn't say between drinks—— Thanks, a lot. I don't touch it. Saw too much of its effects lately.

I was telling you about Jim, my twin.

Rather unfortunate chap. Funny the way those things crop out in families with no apparent reason. There was no taint of insanity in the blood as far as I know. His was *folie circulaire*, I

think they call it. Hallucinations. Thought he was some one else—that sort of thing. Thought he was Harry—that's my name—and that I was Jim.

Another hallucination was that he was a reincarnation of Julius Cæsar. Absurd, of course, and harmless enough until he began to put his belief into practice. When he walked into the town hall of his village and threw the mayor out of his chair, and later made a speech to the people from the balcony, declaring the country to be a conquered Roman province, something had to be done about it.

He'd made considerable money before his mind became affected, so he didn't have to go to a public institution. His friends had him committed to a high-class sanitarium, and his affairs were

taken care of by the court. I suppose his friends forgot him by and by; and there he stayed, undergoing some kind of treatment.

I wasn't in the country at the time, and I was his only living relative. I had been away ten years—since the time we were boys together. I doubt if any one he knew had any idea that Jim had a brother living. And if he claimed he did, it was probably put down to another hallucination. At any rate, I wasn't notified of his condition.

After our parents died, we had separated. We had quarreled over the inheritance. Before that, of course, we had been as close as twins usually are. Alike as two peas, too. Even to a scar that I carried on my right hand. There it is, you see. A knife wound I got as a boy while playing Indians with Jim. He deliberately inflicted a similar wound on his own right hand. Remorse or some such thing. He was a neurotic fellow, with the indications of an unbalanced mind cropping out even at that age. He later thought I had cheated him in some way in the matter of the inheritance, and was very vindictive about it.

Of course, I forgot all about the old quarrel when I heard—in a roundabout way—that poor Jim was insane.

I made it a point, as soon as I got here from Europe, to go and see him. It was a sanitarium run by a Doctor Swathmey. You know the type of place—secluded, expensively run, with all the latest baths and rays and devices to trick the immortal spark back into the clouded mind. Swathmey was a kind of a nut on the thing himself; believed in his treatments and charged well for them. He handled various cases—dipsomania, melancholia, and so forth—and did well with them, too.

It was by no means a poor man's place. No, thanks. I don't smoke. I'll explain that presently.

I took the train out of Penn Station

—this same line we're traveling on, by the way—and dropped off at a little station this side of Atlantic City. The station agent informed me that Swathmey's was a bare quarter of a mile up the road, so, even though it was a warm August afternoon, I decided to walk.

I strolled along the curving dirt road, meeting no one on the way. I guess it was too hot for Swathmey's patients to be out walking, and the country was not thickly settled—big estates mainly, with Swathmey's hundred-odd acres sandwiched in between two tracts of woods.

The place was not what you might expect in an asylum. Evidently it had once been a country place of some rich man—long, shaded avenues, big house in the center, gate lodge, farm buildings, and so on. Swathmey had erected some cottages for his people—little cheerful homes. There was nothing institutional about the sanitarium.

There was a watchman at the entrance—an old fellow with his chair tilted back against a tree trunk and a newspaper over his face, asleep at the switch. It was a lazy kind of an afternoon.

I didn't awaken him; it didn't seem necessary. There was a sign there requesting visitors to check canes and umbrellas and dogs, so I left my stick in the rack and went ahead. Several other visitors had preceded me and were walking up the roadway toward the cottages.

I followed, and came to a shallow, concrete pool, bordered with trees. Several patients were bathing quite peacefully and happily under the watchful gaze of a well-dressed, heavy-set man on the bank. No uniformed attendants about Doctor Swathmey's place. Nothing vulgarly suggestive of an insane asylum. But the bathing suits were exactly alike.

I caught sight of Jim almost immediately. He was standing in a bathing

suit by a row of tiny bathhouses under the trees. The method there was to have the patients dress and undress for bathing there rather than have them wandering about the place in swimming suits.

I recognized him right away. It was like looking at myself in the mirror—a bit thinner, perhaps, and some difference about the eyes, but unmistakably Jim.

He saw me, too, but appeared neither surprised nor delighted. I suppose in his mental state nothing appeared strange. I hesitated to approach him at once and we stood regarding each other for a full minute.

Then he put his finger to his lips, jerked his head toward the guardian warningly and beckoned to me to slip quickly inside the bathhouse.

I did so. I was not as well informed about the vagaries of lunatics as I am now, or I would have realized that it is not always advisable to humor them. But it seemed the thing to do.

He shut the door behind us and turned to face me.

"So you've come back," he snarled, "to do me out of my inheritance. To gloat over what you have done."

I began to wish I was out of that place.

"You're wrong," I said soothingly. "Don't get excited now. I heard you were here and I came to see what—"

"To see my captivity," he grated. "Cæsar in chains! The great—"

"That's utter nonsense, Jim."

"Jim!" He didn't raise his voice, but I could see he was enraged. "You still keep up that damnable lie! You're Jim Forrester and I'm Harry. It's a trick to get my money from me. You've told these cursed villains here that story. They pretend not to believe me when I tell them I have a twin and he is the real Jim. But now that you're here the truth will—"

"All right," I said hastily. "I'll ex-

plain to them. Just let me out a minute and I'll talk to that guard out there."

I turned to go, fumbled with the door-knob, and it seemed to me that a stroke of lightning had struck the bathhouse.

When I came to the door was still shut and I was lying on the floor. I felt my head that ached terrifically. There was a bump on the back where he had hit me, but no sign of blood. My clothes were gone. His bathing suit lay in a heap on the floor.

It took me a full minute, in my dazed state, to get the full import of what had happened. Then the horrible truth came home to me. With the insane cunning of his kind, he had trapped me and freed himself.

The full extent of that trap I did not realize until later. My first thought was to get out and give the alarm.

I dressed hurriedly in Jim's bathing suit, then threw back the door with a slam. The man who stood guarding the patients looked quickly in my direction.

"Careful, Mr. Forrester," he said good-humoredly, "you'll break the door."

I rushed up to him excitedly.

"Quick! Watch the gate! One of your patients is escaping! He got me in there and changed clothes!"

"Best get in the water with the rest, Mr. Forrester. It's wonderfully cool there, they say. Look how the others are enjoying it."

"Look here!" I exclaimed. "You don't get this. I tell you one of your people is getting away—in my clothes. Hurry! There's a train leaving in ten minutes—the one I was taking back to the city. Man alive, don't you see?"

"Easy, now." He seemed cool and detached. "Who is this party?"

"My twin brother—Jim Forrester! I came here to see him. He tricked me, switched clothing. I'm not the man you think at all. I'm Harry Forrester, the twin brother!"

"I see." He beckoned to a man pass-

ing by—a man as phlegmatic and solid and pleasant as himself. "Mr. Forrester has been having a return of his little trouble. That twin brother of his, you know. Will you let him explain to Doctor Swathmey? Just go with him, Mr. Forrester. The matter will be attended to satisfactorily."

"You don't believe me!" I cried desperately. "Meanwhile he's getting away. You may never locate him again. He'll disappear!"

"Oh, he'll be back." He patted me, not familiarly, but in friendly fashion, on the shoulder. "He usually does. Then you can point him out."

I stood gaping at him, trying to grasp the complete disaster that had happened to me. They took me for Jim Forrester. Jim was gone, leaving me in his place. We were as alike as two peas. I knew no one nearer than Europe who could prove I had not been in that sanitarium for six months. These people never believed Jim Forrester had a twin brother. To all appearances I was Jim Forrester, still carrying out the delusion that I was Harry Forrester. How could I ever prove them wrong?

Only in one way—by stopping Jim from boarding that train and vanishing forever.

I darted from beneath the man's arm, started running down the road to the gate, my bare feet scattering the pebbles. Behind me heavy steps pounded and the two men ranged alongside me.

"Now, Mr. Forrester," the first one pleaded, "we can't have this sort of thing, you know. It's all in good fun, but we must go about it regularly. Doctor Swathmey will want to hear all about your twin brother."

I struggled in their grasp.

"Let go of me! Damn your dumb heads. I'm not crazy! You're making a terrible mistake. The man you want is wearing my clothes right this minute. I must get to him before it's too late. Let go! Help here!"

People were beginning to notice the commotion. I could see the shocked glances the visitors were exchanging. What they were thinking was that this was not the reputation that Swathmey's had for order and discipline. My two captors probably agreed that it was a poor advertisement for the firm, for they began hurrying me toward the mansion.

I appealed to an elderly gentleman near by.

"You can help me! Go to the railroad station and see if there isn't a man there dressed in a brown suit and straw hat. He looks exactly like me. We're twins. Stop him. You'll know him by sight."

He walked away quickly, shaking his head. I shouted after him, and squirmed around in the clutch of the guards. Other guards appeared from nowhere as if by a signal, and I was carried, kicking and fighting every step of the way, into the big house.

That was my introduction to Doctor Swathmey.

He was a short, plump, blue-shaven man, with a pencil mark of a mustache above thick lips that were eternally smiling as he listened to what a man had to say, and black, staring eyes magnified behind thick glasses—eyes that were always watching, studying, analyzing, filing away for future reference. I learned to hate that eternal smile, and I learned to fear those gleaming, magnified eyes that were always fastened on me wherever I turned, that confronted me wherever I might chance to be—always watching you, studying you, filing away for future reference the slightest move, the least slip of tongue.

But I didn't know him well then, when I was introduced to him.

I explained fully, in detail, about the unfortunate affair of my twin brother, how I had come from Europe only recently and heard of his trouble, how I

had come to see him and how the trick had been played on me, and exhorted him to locate Jim before the train started.

He listened, eyes and smile fixed, and, when I had finished, reached quickly for my hand and looked at the scar on the back. The fact that it was there did not seem to surprise him at all. I explained about it. It was exactly as if I had tried to explain it to a squat, grinning stone god.

"Listen, Mr. Forrester," he said, and leaned across the desk as if trying to hypnotize me, "you—have—no—twin—brother. Try to think that. Try hard. It is a dream—a nightmare. You are among friends here. You will rest, take life easy, exercise as usual, think of nothing but cheerful, pleasant things."

"Damn it, man! You can't keep me here. I'm as sane as you are! I'm Harry Forrester. Jim is my twin brother—my twin—alike as two peas. Twins—he's played a trick on me!"

I rushed toward him, but my escort closed in quickly. They were practiced and proficient in handling situations like that. No rough handling, you know. Just a jolly, jostling crowd that took no offense when a shin was barked; and they even went so far as to pretend to me I was carrying a football down the corridor and that they were the interference.

I found myself in jig time immersed to the neck in a warm, fizzy bath in a contraption that gave me no liberty of arms or legs, and there I remained for several hours. If it did not make me any easier in mind it gave me time to think over my situation. I was calmer when they released me, and Doctor Swathmey visited me again.

He had another bespectacled party with him—a kind of consultant, I suppose—who was there to observe this latest development of a madman's malady. But it was an old story to them

—this delusion about a twin brother. They listened to my tale, nodded to one another. Swathmey asked me several questions, still smiling, still studying me as if under a microscope.

"In other words," he said blandly, "if I understand you, you are not the Jim Forrester who has been here for the past six months, but a twin brother whom no one has seen around here before and whom nobody believes in but yourself. You carry the same scar on your hand; you are a living image of the Jim Forrester who stepped into a bathhouse to dress for bathing. All right. Don't excite yourself. We believe you absolutely. Now, what happened in the bathhouse? Do you remember falling down or getting some kind of shock? Think, now."

"I was struck on the back of the head by my brother," I said. "Here—you can feel the lump yourself."

They both examined it. "Traumatic?" Swathmey purred to the other man. "I doubt it. Fainting fit brought it on, undoubtedly. But no direct casual relation. Delusional, of course. Remains fixed. Discuss it with you later."

"Listen to me," I said quietly. "I can see where I'm in a pickle here, but surely there is a way of proving my identity. I have friends in England that will vouch for my being the real Harry Forrester. Why not communicate with them?"

"Surely. By all means. Just let me have their names," he agreed. But I could see he was humoring me and had no intention of writing to these, as he thought, visionary persons. "You feel better now?"

"I'll feel better when I've seen the last of you and your asylum!" I exclaimed hotly. "Stop treating me like a madman. Take my finger prints if you like and compare them with this double of mine."

"We don't do that here, as you

know," he explained patiently. "If our clients did not object, their relatives might. This is not a prison. I think you had better rest now. It's been a rather strenuous day."

I argued with him, pleaded, explained over again the combination of accidents that had placed me in this terrible position. I begged him to send for the watchman at the gate where I had left my cane with my initials on it. Eventually he agreed to do so—rather in the hope, I think, that I would be persuaded to quiet down.

But there was no cane.

"A gentleman took it, I guess," the watchman said. "There were several canes there. I don't remember which visitor it was."

"Mr. Forrester," Swathmey told the watchman, "has been annoyed by a twin brother of his. Did any one—er—resembling Mr. Forrester come in at the gate? You would have seen him, of course."

The watchman shook his head.

"He was asleep!" I cried. "He didn't see me, naturally enough."

"I beg pardon, sir." The man reddened. "I was wide awake at all times."

He was protecting his job, of course. You can see that. And there was no earthly reason for him to admit being asleep at his post just in order to humor a lunatic's delusion. But the thought that this man's lying stood between me and possible freedom enraged me beyond measure.

I flung myself at him, got in a blow before they tore us apart—and back I went to the warm bath under the care of a couple of attendants.

It was a trap, and, struggle as I might, there was no way out.

What could I do? What would you have done? No, thanks a lot. No cigarettes. There I was in that man's hands. How I grew to hate him as the weeks went by, with his smile and his searching eyes and his damnable ques-

tions! Jim Forrester was gone—never came back. Anything might have happened to him. He might have wandered off a pier head or gone overseas. He was cunning enough, and the wallet in my coat pocket was well filled.

It was this wretched hallucination of his that doomed me. He had claimed he was Harry Forrester. No one believed in the twin-brother idea. If I could have gotten out I might have dug up some old family friend in our home town in Ohio who knew of the twins—who could have vouched for there being a Harry and a Jim Forrester. But I couldn't. I wrote letters, but Doctor Swathmey would not have strangers annoyed by his patients, and I suppose the letters were suppressed. It would look bad for his place.

Once, one of Jim's legal guardians came to see me. I told my story to him, talked to him intelligently of Europe; but when I claimed to be Harry Forrester he shook his head sadly. It was Jim's favorite delusion. He humored me, of course, but I could see it was no go. As far as he could tell, I was Jim Forrester, who had been placed in the sanitarium months before.

Look at it from their viewpoint. Jim Forrester, an inmate, had been taken that day to the bathing pool with the others. He had slipped into one of the bathhouses to put on his bathing suit. He had appeared shortly in great excitement, still laboring under the delusion that he was being persecuted by a twin brother, and told a story that was obviously part of that delusion. No one had noticed such a twin among the visitors. If the watchman had seen me enter—if I had only shown myself to Doctor Swathmey first! But it was too late to think of that.

I might have waited more cheerfully if there had been hope that my friends in England would grow alarmed by my disappearance. But I had no business connections; I had been living on my

inheritance that was invested in government bonds. Moreover, Jim, with my clothes on, my papers, my hotel key, my safe-deposit key, and all my records available, could adopt my identity. And he would, too, for that was his delusion—that he was Harry Forrester.

Of course, he could not duplicate my signature exactly, but even a halfway imitation would pass where there were no reasons for suspecting a forgery. He was capable of it. A man with delusional insanity can be perfectly sane on all other things but his one trouble.

And if he jumped overboard or turned the gas on, as was likely, that would be Harry Forrester's body and no questions asked.

Don't you see how impossible the thing was?

There was a way out, and only one.

That was to adopt Jim Forrester's identity as he had taken mine; to pretend that I was cured of this delusion that I was Harry Forrester. They would then release me. I would return to Jim's life and environment and quietly wind up his affairs, so that I could slip out of the country and marshall my proofs. Fantastic, maybe, but there was nothing else for me to do. As long as I maintained I was Harry Forrester, they would keep me in that sanitarium.

But I had to go about it carefully—no slips, mind you. I must convince Doctor Swathmey that he had achieved a real cure. To pretend and keep pretending, under the glassy scrutiny of those merciless eyes, meant that I would have to acquaint myself with the recent history of Jim Forrester, the faces of his friends, his habits of life before insanity had come upon him.

It took weeks of preparation, of watching and waiting, of matching my wits against Swathmey's. I made no mention of Harry Forrester, took all the weird treatments, the ultra-violet rays, the medicated baths, all the rigma-

role that they insisted on. It was amusing to watch Swathmey sometimes, but I did not let him see I was laughing at him up my sleeve. There were those penetrating eyes of his.

To-day—this morning, in fact—I took the bull by the horns. It was then or never. I walked into his office alongside my attendant. I had drilled myself in the part I was to play.

"What am I doing here?" I demanded. "Who is this man who follows me around? I don't understand. How did I come here?"

"Don't you remember?" Swathmey's smile and glittering eyeglasses were upturned to me. I passed my hand across my forehead as if dazed.

"No," I said slowly. "They tell me this is a sanitarium. There has been a mistake here. I'm Jim Forrester. The last thing I remember I was driving my roadster with Leo Presse"—this was the name of one of Jim's friends, which I had learned—"from the Seaboard Inn."

He asked me a lot of questions—searching questions about everything under the sun. I answered them in turn, carefully, guardedly. My liberty was at stake. If this failed, another chance might never come. He seemed almost convinced. He dismissed the attendant to wait outside. I sat down.

More questions. I knew he was trying to trick me, watching for the slip of the tongue. I dug my nails into the palms of my hands to keep from shouting out the truth—that what I was saying was a lie, that it was a damnable outrage to make me assume another's identity, that I was really Harry Forrester.

I denied having a twin brother, denied ever having been in Europe, tried to make it clear that this lie was the truth—and all the time those burning black eyes behind the glasses were boring into my tortured mind. All the time I was like a man sitting on top of a volcano

that threatened to smash this world I was building.

It came at last—the thing that I could not escape, the trap that I could not avoid, the truth that I could not deny. He turned for an instant to get some form from his desk, shoved with the other hand a silver box of cigarettes toward me.

I don't know what I screamed at him. Perhaps I didn't scream for he had no time to turn. I swung the silver box and crashed it down on his cursed head. The attendant ran in—he, too, fell before me. I had the strength of ten. Then the escape over the wall—this train rolling from the station—

You look pale, my friend. I have tired you with my troubles. But your offering me a cigarette. It started me talking. He offered me a cigarette, too. It was too much. I could deny—pretend that I was not Harry Forrester—that I was Jim, my twin brother—but to offer a cigarette! Can't you see how absurd that was of him? What a ridiculous anachronism?

To offer a cigarette to the great *Julius Cæsar*!

I had to kill him! There was no other way—

Here! Where are you going? Wait—there is something I must explain—you *must* understand—

Another story by Will McMorrow will appear in an early issue.



SUBMARINE SERVICE

WHEN submarines first became a part of the navy, the government had little trouble in getting officers and crews to man them. Going down under the sea then had the thrill and lure of a new adventure, and there were always volunteers for the job. But nowadays the "sub" stands, in the consciousness of naval men, for a gamble against death with a lot of hard work amid constant discomforts, and the result is that usually both officers and men are assigned without request by the navy department to underseas duty.

As a naval commander tells it, here is what happens when an order comes to a battleship commander to detail two junior officers for service on a sub:

"The captain lines up the younger portion of his staff, and, informing them what's wanted, asks: 'Are there any volunteers?' As a rule, this is met by silence. 'All right,' says the captain, 'you fellows will have to settle it among yourselves. If you don't, I'll have to assign a couple of you.' Then he stalks back to his quarters.

"The youngsters go down to their mess room, gather round the table, put certain marks on two slips of paper and toss them, with blank slips, into a hat. The hat is well shaken up, and in silence each man draws a slip. When all have drawn, they unfold the 'tickets.' One says: 'Well, I win.' Another repeats the phrase, and the two thus elected to the perils of sailing under the seas go off to pack up their stuff. When they're ready to go, some pseudo wit pipes up with 'Don't wear any lead in your shoes!' And the little drama is done."

The POPULAR CLUB

Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

EVERY effort is made, in getting out this magazine, to have everything in it authentic. When our writers go in for technical details, use phrases in foreign languages, describe geographical locations, allude to facts in history, we have such things checked up. In some degree it spoils a story for the reader if he reads something he knows to be incorrect.

A reader was once displeased with us because we wrote to him, in explanation of an error that had occurred in this magazine, that editors were only human, after all, and that something must slip through now and then. His reply was quite caustic. But it is true, just the same. Mistakes will happen. As a matter of fact, we even look apprehensively at the magazine when it is in print, hoping that every detail is correct.

You can imagine, then, how reassuring it is to get a letter like the following from Member George Hill, C. E., who is a well-known architect in New York City.

As a reader of THE POPULAR from almost, if not exactly, the first number, I qualify as a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

As one who was building railroads in Mexico forty-eight years ago, and whose work since then has covered from the St. Lawrence to Key West and from Bermuda



to Oregon, with incidental coasting from Cape Cod to Jacksonville, Florida, and a little along the Gulf coast, I think I am probably qualified to speak generally of the accuracy with which your writers portray the life of which they write.

It is true that there may be an occasional slip such as Mr. Rowland makes in the Second March Number, where he has a "Smoky sou'wester" making up in the evening on Long Island Sound. This might happen, though I've never known it to; but if it is necessary to the story I shall not complain.

And in the Second March Number there is a story by Leonard Lupton, "The Captain of the Night Boat," that is not up to your standard, for it is full of inaccuracies.

Taking it altogether, the record should be considered as practically perfect, accurate as well as very entertaining, and the selection so diversified and so good that I cannot make any helpful suggestion along these lines.



FROM THE WILDS OF ALBERTA.
SITTING here in our office in the heart of the greatest city in the world, we get a real and stimulating thrill when we get a friendly letter writ-

ten far, far away—out where there are not only no cities, but no towns, no villages, no hamlets, no people even—out where there is only the writer—and the wilderness. Such a letter, written about February 1st, came to us only a few days ago from Member Bob Biswanger, whose post-office address is Notikewin, Alberta, but who lives—Well, read Member Biswanger's letter:

Christmas Day I was on the trail to town. Made a hundred-and-eighty-mile drive in the bitter cold, over rough roads, with a wagon, and brought back every magazine on the stands, back numbers and all—nearly one hundred, all told.

The first January number of *THE POPULAR* was worth the trip alone. "Zitza," by Thomas Boyd, was almost a topnotcher. Better keep an eye on his work; he may hit the nail on the head yet. Hemmingway is always good. He is worth the price of the magazine any time.

But where in hell did you find A. M. Chisholm? I never had the luck to read him before. His "The Genial Mr. Palmer" is the best thing I ever read in that line. I would drive a hundred and eighty miles again to get another one like it. You see, there are a lot of us Mr. Palmers. We have been through the same mill. Chisholm has either been through the mill himself, or he has asked a lot of questions of some real men.

But, best of all, he knows how to tell about it. Lord, man! Years ago I was another Mr. Palmer in Bangor, Maine; in Boston, in Laconia, New Hampshire, and in a few large towns since I came West, twenty years ago. You see, I have been around some myself—from years at city work to most everything on the frontier.

For the last three years I have been ranching on my own on a small scale and running a hundred and thirty miles of trap line for pastime in the winter. I have six cabins, and use horses all the time, but they are good ones. Made one trip since New Year's. Going again next week, if the cold weather breaks—too cold for the horses now. I ride one and pack two with oats, and they rustle for hay.

Like Mr. Palmer, I have one real dog, three fourths husky. God help Airedale or man that would try to bother me.

It was down to fifty-eight below on the twenty-fourth, and not much better yet. I am the only trapper in the North that uses horses on a long line, so my horses have to

be good. For years I was on the range, riding summer and winter. But I quit working for others several years ago, and since then have been a guide for any part of Alberta, from Montana north, at anything from locating new ranches to taking mining engineers into the mountains or away north of here. My headquarters used to be in Calgary. I have taken men from many cities in the States out for sheep, goats, moose, and grizzly. Also had two of your New York ladies up in the Bighorn for grizzly and sheep. They all brought out heads and hides, and were more than satisfied. Every one raised my check as a present. And many of them remembered me at Christmas.

I hunt with a Savage .250. But on the trap line I use a .22 single-shot long rifle. And the good old Colt has not been off me for years, except when I sleep or am at home. I have killed a good many moose and bears with it and a few wolves. And, as one of our *POPULAR* authors said, "You don't often need it, but when you do, sometimes you need it awful bad." I would not be writing this to-night if it had not been on my belt sometimes.

But forget all this about myself. I only wanted to explain that there are thousands of us Mr. Palmers, who only see a town once or twice a year—or not so often. We are good spenders and are generally mistaken for suckers, or other fish, or some kind of an easy mark. Some of us are as much at home in an Eastern ballroom as we are with a saddle or toboggan, and take a few months' vacation now and again to see the outside world—either California or New York, for me. But it is four years since I was East. It is bad policy to stop a while in these Western towns. The fines are too heavy if you have any trouble to straighten out.



WILL THE GENTLEMEN RISE?

THE excellent taste of Member Gertrude Iffrig, of Vinita, Oklahoma, is shown by the preferences she expresses in her fine letter, below. All the stories she mentions have been approved by other members—and, in fact, we thought they were good, too.

Have just read Members H. F. and Wilfred Campbell, telling of their pleasure in reading A. M. Chisholm's "The Genial Mr. Palmer," and the spirit moved me to write and do the same. I certainly did enjoy it,

as I do all of his stories. In the first March number I think Will Beale's "The Unknown Trail" is a tip-top story. Another I enjoyed some time ago was Charles Neville Buck's "Marked Men." The stories about Mr. Plotkin, by William Hemmingway, I enjoy very much, too. MacIsaac and McMorrow are favorites of mine; but I like the entire magazine. My brother has bought it for a long time, and I read it as faithfully as he does. I like its wholesomeness and freedom from objectional trash seen so much nowadays.

There seems to be an occasion here for a return bow. Members Chisholm, Beale, Buck, Hemmingway, MacIsaac, and McMorrow—will the gentlemen rise?



APPRECIATION PLUS!

WHEN this letter from Member Fred Minter, of Clarksburg, West Virginia, arrived, we could not believe our eyes, for this is just the sort of communication that we have been tremulously hoping for—a letter that sums up and commends a number of the more important things we have been doing with THE POPULAR. Member Minter, here's thanks! Your letter shows keen observation, by the way—if you will accept a sincere return compliment.

I have been a reader of THE POPULAR and several other well-known magazines for many years, but never have I seen a magazine, in so short a time, make the strides that THE POPULAR has in the last four or five months.

Not only has your magazine advanced in the quality of the stories, but the make-up of the magazine in general has improved as well. Your new cover designs are very attractive, as well as educational, and place THE POPULAR in a class by itself in the all-fiction field.

The new department, THE POPULAR CLUB, is certainly a welcome addition to the magazine. Your policy of printing book-length novels and the generous installments of the serials, besides the short stories of agreeable length, cannot be improved upon, I think.

THE POPULAR is about the only magazine I read in which all the stories are of a certain high standard, even those of new authors who are not so well known. This is especially true of your fine short stories.

While all your authors are good, there are several who, because of their regular contributions to the magazine, are better known and hence more acceptable to me. Among these are Fred MacIsaac, Will McMorrow, Captain Ralph Guthrie, Clay Perry, W. B. M. Ferguson, and the author of "Sunset House," who has slipped my mind.

As long as THE POPULAR continues the policy it is now carrying out, it will not have to worry about making new friends and holding its old ones.

The author of "Sunset House" was George Marsh.

Editors,
The Popular Magazine,
79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs:

I liked, in this issue, the following stories:

Best: _____

Third: _____

Next: _____

Fourth: _____

My favorite type of story is:

Name: Member _____

Address: _____

Note: Any further comments will be very welcome. Special consideration is given to the preferences of our readers as expressed in their communications.

A Chat With You

IN a certain part of the Isthmus of Suez, which joins Africa to Asia, there are many narrow, parallel grooves worn in the flint which there forms the beginning of an old trail.

Those grooves have been worn by the soft, spongelike feet of camels, passing on caravans across the desert. You know how hard flint is. And those grooves are worn deep. Think, then, how many thousands of camels must have passed that spot!

They must have ambled along that trail thousands and thousands of years ago—long before the birth of Christ, before the days of Greece, before even the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt, led by the Prophet Moses. Perhaps—who knows?—Moses led his people through that very route, journeying toward the Promised Land.

* * * *

IT is remarkable to reflect that, ages before the days of history began, Arabs, clad in long burnoses, were majestically riding their patient, plodding camels across that flint, in the full light of the Arabian moon.

For them, times have not changed. Above them, along the ever-blue, irregular Mediterranean, men built cities, squabbled, and died; and the cities crumbled. And still the Arabs calmly rode their camels and gave thanks to Allah. Other cities began to dot Europe; great wars made the Continent tremble. And still the sons of Asia meditated beneath the eternal stars of the East, and their long caravans left endless tracks in the wind-rippled sand.

WE of the West, with our automobiles and airplanes and plumbing are too quick to regard as unprogressive these inscrutable men of the desert. They may actually be far ahead of us in wisdom. We are a young civilization. We have acquired knowledge—of mechanics, sciences, and so forth. But have we attained wisdom? The grimiest Asiatic has about him an air of latent kingliness that commands respect, and his dark eyes are deep with ancient wisdom.

Arabia holds many mysteries in her sphinxlike breast. Who knows the secrets she conceals above—aye, and below!—the sands. The desert is truly the spouse of Father Time—for both endure forever, both are incomprehensible.

* * * *

BEYOND Suez—what lies beyond Suez? There Asia begins. To grasp fully the significance of this you must picture yourself in Suez, the gateway to the Orient. Behind you lies the modern world—America, Europe, and all the sights and people that are familiar to you. Ahead of you, beyond Suez, sleeps a vast, dark continent—a dreamland of the past. Countless cities lie at rest under the sands; and the men that walk above them speak with strange, rapid tongues. The sun is merciless, the moon exquisite. In Asia you will find the extremes of beauty and of horror.

Let Roy Norton take you to that unknown region that he has called "Beyond Suez." The first paragraph of his novel, in the next issue, will show

you that he is on familiar ground, that he is one of the few white men who understand the Oriental character. Go with him on the hazardous expedition that he describes in his story, and learn for yourself what is "Beyond Suez."

ARE you reading the two serials that we are running now? You can start A. M. Chisholm's in this number, and it is not too late to begin Fred MacIsaac's. Both are worth your while—but, of course, you know that. You can lose yourself in either of these stories and read for hours with great enjoyment. Do you know, whenever a MacIsaac or a Chisholm story comes into this office, we somehow feel that all's well with the world. You prob-

ably feel that way, too, when you see one announced.

That next issue is going to be a good one. Will McMorrow's real-estate yarn is full of pep and humor—he's as fine at that sort of thing as in his Old Frisky stories.

And then you'll be reading Richard Howells Watkins' story, which has plenty of air thrills and human interest; an ingenious business story by Carl Clausen; and a heart-warming coastal tale by Holman Day.

Issues like the one you now hold in your hand, and the one that has just been described, make us feel sure that we are living up to our ideal—which is to give you "the best and brightest all-fiction magazine in America."

TO NEW WRITERS

The editors of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE would like to see your stories. They assure you of a sympathetic reading and a prompt decision.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

In the Second May Issue

Beyond Suez

A Complete Novel

Dumb-bells All

Nose Down

Red

A Six-part Story—Part II

No Quarter

The Patio of Gonzalez

A Five-part Story—Part III

Steady on the Helm

The Popular Club

A Chat with You

ROY NORTON

WILL McMORROW

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

A. M. CHISHOLM

CARL CLAUSEN

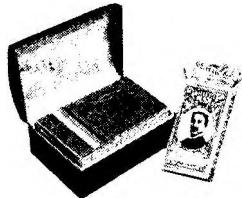
FRED MacISAAC

HOLMAN DAY

THE EDITORS
POP-11A

... and so to bed ... late ... too much supper ... wish
 I could get to sleep ... bad dreams ... business worries ...
 dog barks ... baby cries ... time to get up ... jangled nerves
 ... irritable skin.

—then is the time your skin
 needs the comfort of a fresh Gillette Blade



THE NEW FIFTY-BOX

Fifty fresh double-edged Gillette Blades (10 Packets of fives) in a colorful chest that will serve you afterward as a sturdy button box, cigarette box or jewelcase... Ideal as a gift, too. Five dollars at your dealer's.

down to the last squeeze and you scarcely have time to lather anyway; mornings when all the cards seem stacked against your Gillette. But slip in a fresh blade. Enjoy the same smooth, clean shave that you get on the finest morning.

You have to go through the Gillette factory to understand how it's possible to pack so much dependable shaving comfort into a razor blade.

There you see some \$12,000,000 worth of machinery invented and improved continuously for twenty-five years for just one purpose: to make the Gillette Blade—every Gillette Blade—do its smooth, expert job *every* morning for the thirty million Americans who count on it.

There you see in operation the unique system which makes four out of nine Gillette blade department workers inspectors—paid a bonus for every defective blade they discard.

At least a dozen varying conditions affect the comfort of your shave. But the Gillette Blade doesn't change. It is the *one* constant factor in your daily shave. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U. S. A.

THESE are mornings when a fresh Gillette Blade is better than any pick-me-up you can name.

And there are mornings when your beard is as tough and blue as your state of mind; when the hot water faucet runs cold and your shaving cream is



★ **Gillette** 

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY *Announces*

\$30,000.00

Read these simple conditions:

- 1 Any resident of the United States and its dependencies or any resident of the Dominion of Canada is eligible, excepting individuals and families of individuals engaged, either directly or indirectly, in the manufacture, sale, commercial finishing or professional use of photographic goods. This contest is strictly for the amateur. Contest starts March 1, closes May 31, 1929.
- 2 Any Kodak, Brownie, Hawk-Eye, or other camera producing negatives not larger than $3\frac{1}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ inches (positive size) and any brand of film, chemicals and papers may be used in making pictures for this contest. A contestant need not own the camera. The finishing, of course, may be done by his dealer.
- 3 Both ordinary contact prints, and enlargements not to exceed 7 inches in the long dimension, are eligible; but,
- 4 In the Special Enlargement Competition, prints having a long dimension of not less than 9 inches or more than 17 inches are eligible. Entries in the Enlargement Competition are eligible for Special Enlargement Prizes only.
- 5 Prints shall be unmounted, but an entry blank shall be enclosed. Use the accompanying blank obtain others from dealers; copy the form, or write Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.
- 6 An entrant may submit as many pictures as he pleases and at as many different times as he pleases, provided that the pictures have been made on or after March 1, 1929, and that they reach the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., by the specified closing date.
- 7 Entries in the Child Picture Contest to be eligible for the March award shall be received at the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y. by midnight of March 31, 1929, and for the April award by midnight of April 30, 1929. The child in the picture shall not have passed the twelfth birthday.
- 8 A picture that is to be considered in the Child Picture Contest must be so designated on the back.
- 9 In the case of other pictures, however, the entrant need not, unless he wishes to, specify into which of the classifications his pictures should go. The Prize Contest Office reserves the right to change a classification for the benefit of the entrant. If not classified on the back by the entrant, the pictures will go into the classes in which they are most likely to win.
- 10 Each prize-winning picture, together with the negative, and the rights to the use thereof for advertising, publication, or exhibition in any manner, becomes the property of the Eastman Kodak Company.
- 11 No prints can be returned, except that entries in the Enlargement Competition will be returned upon request. All mailings are at owner's risk. Do not send negatives until they are requested.
- 12 The decision of the judges will be final. In the event of a tie, the advertised award will be paid to each of the tying contestants.
- 13 All pictures will be judged 50% on subject interest; 25% on composition and arrangement; 25% on photographic excellence (correctness of exposure, etc.).
- 14 Mail pictures to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.
- 15 An entrant may receive only one prize. In case the judges select any entrant for more than one award, he will receive the largest thereof. If he wins, for example, a \$100 state prize in the Child Picture Contest, and if either the same print or another of his prints in the General Contest wins an award larger than \$100, he will receive the larger amount. The Eastman Kodak Company will consider the purchase of desirable pictures even though not prize winners.
- 16 Winners of the state prizes in the Child Picture Contest for March will be notified as soon as possible after March 31, and for the April Contest as soon as possible after April 30, 1929; winners in the Special Enlargement Competition and all other classifications will be notified as soon as possible after May 31, 1929.

Grand Prize \$2,500 . . . 11 Prizes of \$500 each . . . 11 Prizes of \$250 each . . . 125 Prizes of \$100 each . . . 1,223 Money Prizes in All . . . for snapshots, time-exposures, enlargements . . . only strictly amateur photographers may compete . . . Every picture-taker has an equal chance to win!



HIS is a contest for everyone. It is easy to enter—and there are 1,223 money prizes. Perhaps you have not taken more than a half-dozen pictures in all your life—you may never before have held a camera in your hands—yet your entry may please the judges most. And regardless of the make of camera you use—from an inexpensive Kodak, Brownie or Hawk-Eye on up to a camera of the costliest kind—your chance to win is just as good.

This prize money will not be awarded for technical skill alone. You do not need to be an experienced picture maker to win. The bulk of this \$30,000 will go to those who send in the most interesting pictures in each of 10 different classifications. Now is the time to get your camera into action. The opportunity to win a cash prize of anywhere from \$2,500 down is knocking at your door.

Here is the way in which the \$30,000 prize money is to be distributed. You may enter for each and all of the classes. Send in as many entries as you like. The more pictures you submit in this contest the better is your chance of being numbered among the 1,223 fortunate ones to win.

GRAND PRIZE—For the Best Picture of Any Type—The best picture of all of those submitted in the following classifications will be awarded a grand prize of \$2,500.

STATE PRIZES—For Child and Baby Pictures—\$11,400 will be awarded for the pictures showing the most interesting children . . . in both March and April \$100 will be given for the best child picture from each state of the United States and each province of Canada,* making 114 prizes in all.

*District of Columbia counts as one state; Hawaii, Alaska, and all other U. S. dependencies combined count as one state; the Maritime provinces of Canada count as one province. British Columbia and the Yukon count as one province.

Snaps as many youngsters as you want, from babies to boys and girls who are beginning to think of themselves as young men and women. Maybe there's a baby right in your own family that could help you win first prize by a big margin. Not necessarily a beautiful child, but one with personality, character, "IT"—in eyes and smile and dimples. Maybe there's such a youngster next door, or next street, but no matter whose baby it is, get the kind of picture that shows it at its best.

Every picture of children that you submit stands a chance of winning the Grand Prize; or any of the 103 prizes in each of four other awards. And even if you don't come in for a share of the prize money, you will, at least, have made an attractive picture to add to your collection. With a little patience, however, you can almost surely get a picture good enough to win. A striking

the Largest Prize Contest in Photographic History

in Cash Awards

for Amateur Picture-Takers Only

close-up of a boy or girl; a group at play; youngsters laughing, sleeping; in every-day clothes, rompers, overalls or fancy costume. Anything goes as long as it is a picture of children, and if it has the least spark of interest in it, don't fail to send it in. What looks to you like a "flop" may look like a "wow" to the judges.

This award gives you 106 chances to win: (1) You can enter the March contest for the best child picture from each state, (2) You can enter the April contest for the best child picture from each state, (3) The pictures that you have entered for the state contest during either of these months and pictures that reach Rochester during May are all eligible for the Grand Prize of \$2,500 or for any of the one hundred three prizes in Awards No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, or No. 10.

AWARD NO. 1—Scenics—For the best picture of any city or country outdoor scene . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. Here's your chance to capitalize your ability to spot an interesting outdoor subject. Landscapes and marines, distant and nearby views, mountains and water, nearby bits of nature composition, travel subjects and street scenes.

AWARD NO. 2—Informal Portraits—Pictures made at from, say two to ten feet distance, for the purpose of showing a person's features . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 3—Story-Telling Pictures—For the pictures telling the most interesting story . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Take picture in which children, adults or animals do something—anything except looking at the camera. For instance, a puppy pulling at a baby's sleeve; children in any form of play; father proudly exhibiting the new car to a friend. There are any number of opportunities for you to take pictures like these.

AWARD NO. 4—Sport Pictures—For the best pictures of sports and games . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. It may be skating or coasting or skiing—or baseball, tennis, golf. Hiking, too . . . and boating, archery, polo riding—all serve as opportunities to make prize winning pictures.

AWARD NO. 5—Animal Pictures—For the best pictures of pets, live stock, wild animals either at large or in zoos . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 6—Nature Study Pictures—For the best pictures of flowers, birds, butterflies, leaves, rocks, spiderwebs, any nature subject . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 7—Buildings and Architectural Detail—For the best exteriors of homes, churches, schools, offices, libraries, other buildings, or portions thereof . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 8—Interior Pictures—For the best inside views of rooms, corridors, staircases, or other portions of homes or other buildings . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 9—Still Life Studies—For the best pictures of art objects, curios, cut flowers, any still-life subjects in artistic arrangement . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 10—Unusual Photographs—For the best pictures made at night; pictures of fires, lightning, storms, silhouettes; or any pictures that are unusual either as to topic or as to photogra-

phic treatment . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Special Prizes for Enlargements—\$1,350—Any picture is a better picture when enlarged. For the best enlargements from negatives made on or after March 1, 1929 . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 and 50 prizes of \$5 each. Your film dealer or photo-finisher will be glad to help you choose a picture likely to win. (See Conditions Nos. 2 and 4.)

Each of these big cash prizes will have to be won by somebody . . . why not you! Aim at the big money and you stand an excellent chance of winning it or of coming in for one of the smaller prizes. Don't miss this chance of winning a share of the big prize money. There is always the certainty of being rewarded with some excellent pictures you might otherwise fail to get.

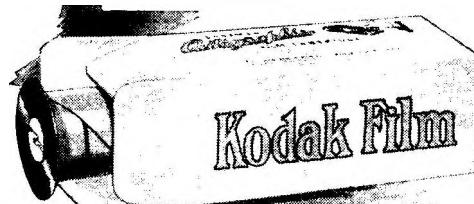
THESE ARE THE JUDGES. Observe how diversified are their interests and how broad are their viewpoints and experience. You must admit that no fairer Board of Judges could be assembled than that represented here:

Madame Galli-Curci, internationally known singer; Miss Ethel Barrymore, leading actress; Howard Chandler Christy, noted artist; Clare Briggs, famous cartoonist; James R. Quirk, publisher, Photoplay magazine; Rudolf Eickemeyer, distinguished photographer, Medalist Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; Hector Charlesworth, author, critic, editor "Toronto Saturday Night"; Kenneth Wilson Williams, editor "Kodakery" and photographic expert.

For the two Monthly Child Picture Contests, the following will be judges: James R. Quirk, Rudolf Eickemeyer, Kenneth Wilson Williams.

NOW—read the simple Contest Conditions and get your camera out!

Kodak Film in the familiar yellow box is dependably uniform. Reduces the danger of under- or over-exposure. It gets the picture.



PRIZE CONTEST ENTRY BLANK

Name..... *(Please Print)*

Street Address.....

Town and State.....

Make of Camera..... Make of Film.....

Enclose this blank with your entry and mail to Prize Contest Office, **Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.**

Do not place your name on either the front or the back of any picture. Be sure that each entry in the State Child Picture Contest is so designated on the back.

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR, Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 765, St. Louis, Mo.

YOU ARE WANTED TO RESILVER mirrors at home. Immense profits plating autoparts, tableware, etc. Write for information. Sprinkle, Plater, 333, Marion, Indiana.

AGENTS—90¢ an hour to advertise our goods and distribute free samples to consumers. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Co., 2557 Monmouth, Cincinnati, O.

\$50.00 Weekly. Men wanted to demonstrate and take ten orders daily direct from manufacturer. Amazing Magnetic Trouble Light. Sticks anywhere! More orders, bigger pay. Write for demonstrator and particulars. Magno Co., 6 Beacon St., Dept. 844, Boston, Mass.

MAKE \$10.00 EVERY DAY INTRODUCING New Automatic Window Washer. Amazing invention. Send for Free Sample offer. National Industries, 67 E. Lake St., Dept. 491-C, Chicago.

REPRESENT RESPONSIBLE MANUFACTURERS of tailored-to-order auto seat covers. Full or spare time. Biggest commissions paid daily. Write today. Costly and elaborate sales outlet free. Royalco, Dept. S, 129 S. Market St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: Be a thousand miles ahead of competition. Patented product housewives want. Commission in advance if wanted. Dept. C, Box 929, New Orleans, La.

Help Wanted—Female

HOMEWORK: Women wanting obtain reliable kinds write for information. Enclose stamp. Eller Co., 296-T Broadway, New York.

MAKE \$500 showing tablecloths. Save laundry bills. Women scramble for them. Sample free. Mohier, Box 453-W, Chicago.

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent" and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for inspection and instructions free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

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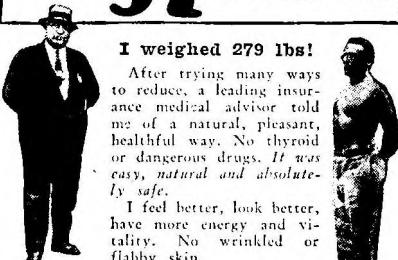


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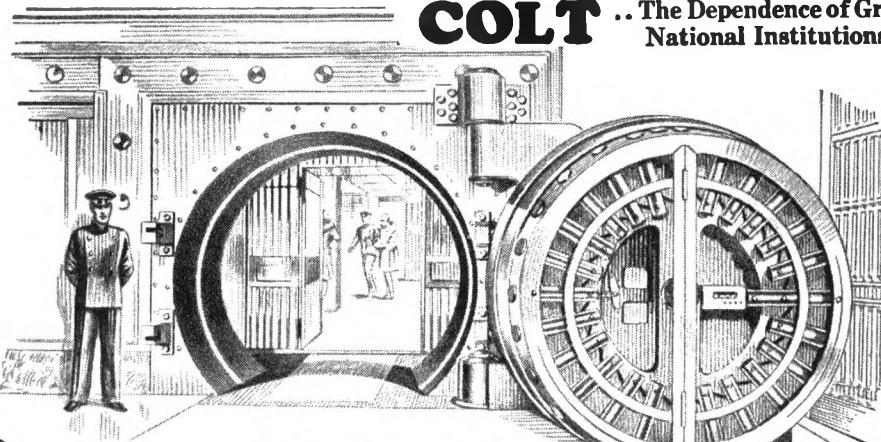
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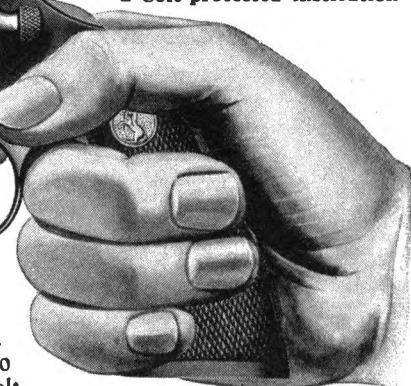
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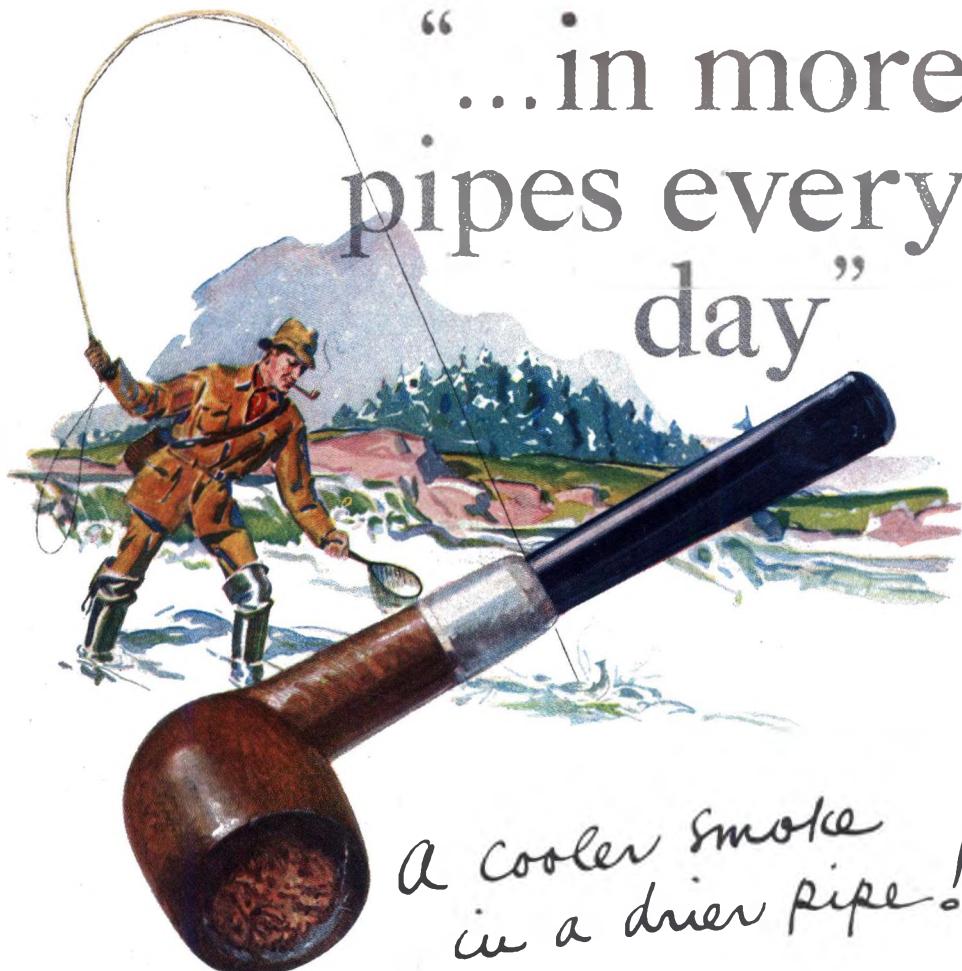
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