

Bertrand W. Sinclair - Dane Coolidge and others.

FIRST SEPT. NUMBER

ON SALE AUG. 7, 1929

The Popular★

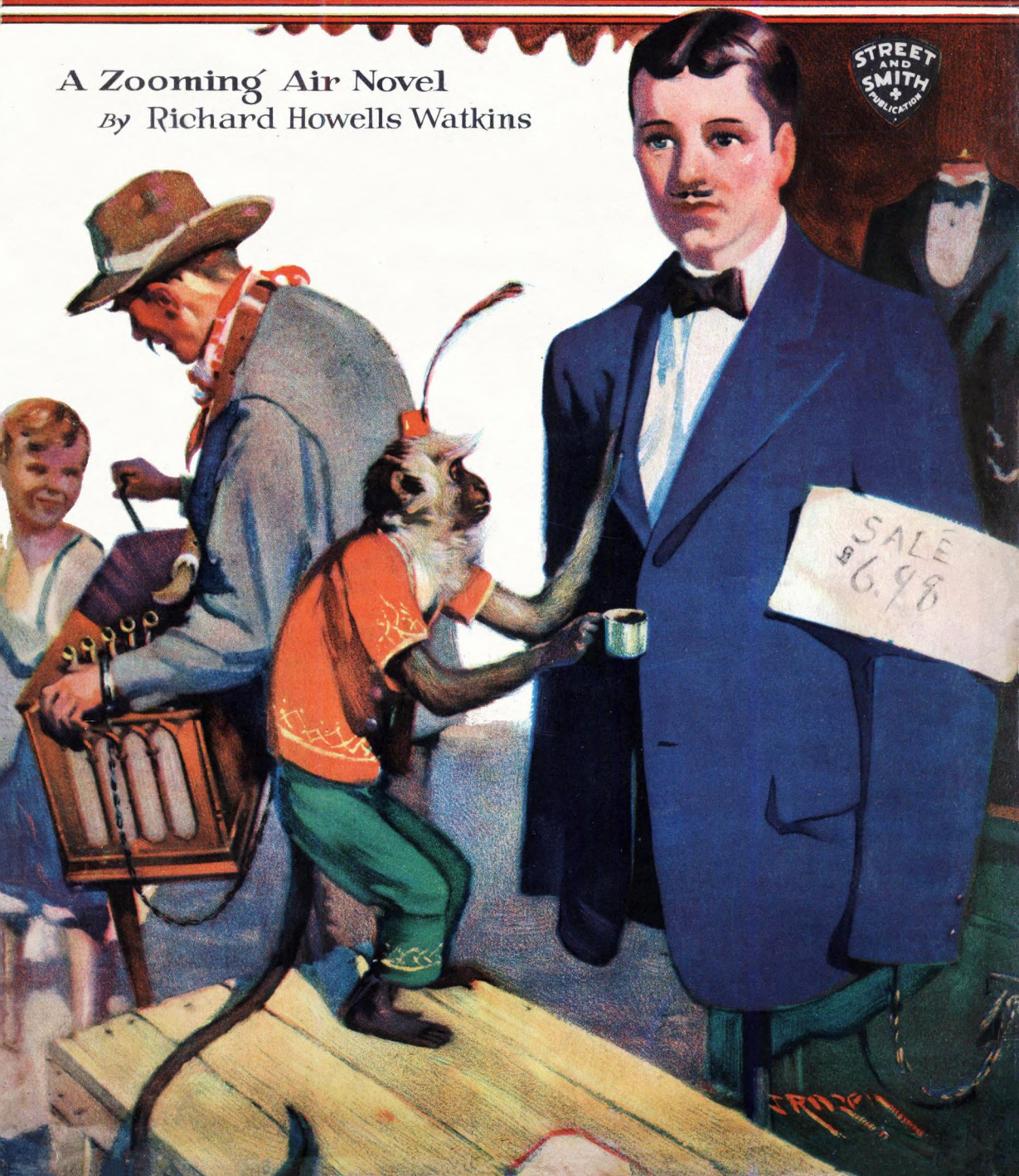
MAGAZINE

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A Zooming Air Novel

By Richard Howells Watkins

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J-28



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Gillette



POP.

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On sale the 7th and 20th of each month

**IN THIS ISSUE
FULL THROTTLE**

By Richard Howells Watkins

A complete novel of to-day, when airplanes zoom and air stocks boom.

Volume XCVI

Number 6

TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular
Magazine

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If you have been thinking of "taking a course" but have held back because you were afraid you didn't have education enough to learn better-paid work—if you have hesitated to take the risk that it would actually land you in the better position and increase your salary—then here's the best news you ever heard in your life!

I want to tell you about DRAFTING, and show you that it offers you everything in pay and opportunity that you could hope for. I want to show you that a fine Drafting job is now easily within your reach. And I want to set before you an amazing plan which we have worked out with the co-operation of some of the biggest employers and engineers in America, to prepare you at home, in spare time, get you the job and raise your pay—absolutely without risk of a penny on your part.

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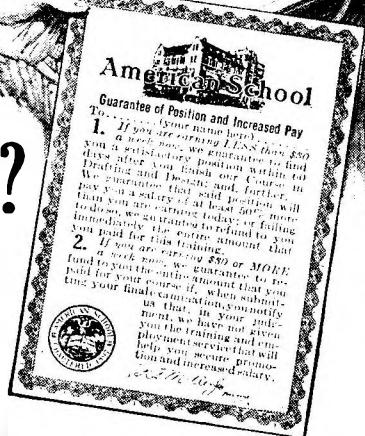
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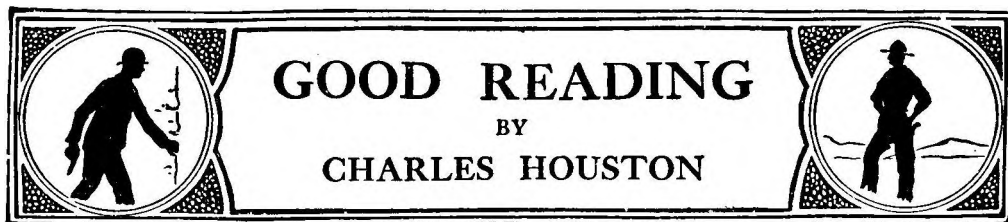
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mind the vision of his girl back home who would some day be the first to cross the bridge.

And then another girl came out of nowhere, a girl dressed in trousers and a flannel shirt like a boy's, and before the young engineer could stop her, she had swung down the lone cable above the rushing waters and was the first of her sex across.

From this thrilling start the book plunges the reader into a maelstrom of adventure. There are those who would destroy the engineer's lifework and come dangerously near doing it. But always he has for ally that girl whom he almost hated at first, the flaming beauty who swung down the cable.

There was a time when it seemed as though the maker of the bridge would never see the wonder of the finished product. His enemy had thrown a bomb which blinded him.

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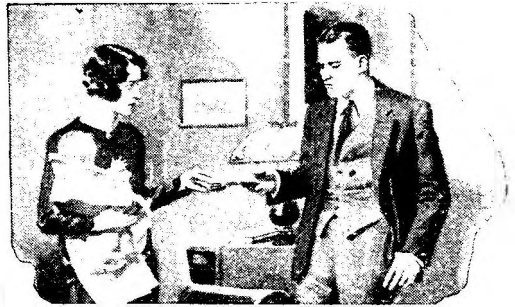
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TAYLOR HAT & CAP MFRS.,
Des't L-120, Cincinnati, O.



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"I HADN'T received a raise in years and my small salary scarcely lasted from week to week. Margaret scrimped and saved and did all her own washing and housework, but the bills kept piling up and I could see she was always afraid I would lose my position. But still I kept drifting along in the same old rut.

"Then one day I met Tom Wilson, who used to work right beside me. He told me he was making \$3000 a year and had a nice home in the suburbs, a new car and everything. I asked him how he happened to get ahead so fast. 'Oh, I got tired working for a small salary,' he said, 'so I started studying at home through the International Correspondence Schools.'

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THIS IS NOT A MAGAZINE CONTEST

Some Person with a Sharp Eye is Going to Win

If you can find the lucky key, you may win. You do not have to buy or sell any magazines to win any of the 21 big CASH prizes. We are offering these prizes to quickly advertise the name and products of the Paris-American Pharmaceutical Company. To make them better known, we are dividing our profits and absolutely giving away the \$2,000.00 CASH first prize, 20 other CASH prizes and in addition a new HUDSON TOWN SEDAN for promptness. What's still more, duplicate prizes will be given on all awards in case of foul ties.



Auto Goes for Promptness Winner Gets CASH and AUTO BOTH

Here is a treasure chest and ten keys, one of which will open the lock. Find the right key. Make the \$2,000.00 yours and get the HUDSON TOWN SEDAN, too, for promptness. There's too much at stake for you to delay a minute. These keys are all the same size and apparently are exactly alike. If your eyes are sharp you may find a key different from the other nine. The top, the bottom, the shaft, the notches or anything else is likely to be the point of difference. If you find the right key, it may mean \$2,000.00 and the Hudson or \$3,500.00 cash if you prefer.

If you find the Right Key, mark it with an "X" and Mail this Ad Quick

Put an "X" on the key right away if you find it. Cut out this ad and rush it to us at once. Be quick—because the first prize winner, if on time, gets the \$2,000.00 CASH and a new HUDSON TOWN SEDAN, too—or \$3,500.00 in all. If you win the \$2,000.00 CASH first prize you will want the new HUDSON TOWN SEDAN. Send your answer TODAY. We will forward you at once complete rules of this prize offer, telling you how close you are to winning, how to get the \$2,000.00 first prize and make the new HUDSON TOWN SEDAN yours. There will be no delay in giving you your award, so mail your answer at ONCE.

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See your dentist every six months. And every morning and night when you brush your teeth, brush gums vigorously. But be certain to use the dentifrice made for the purpose . . . Forhan's for the Gums.

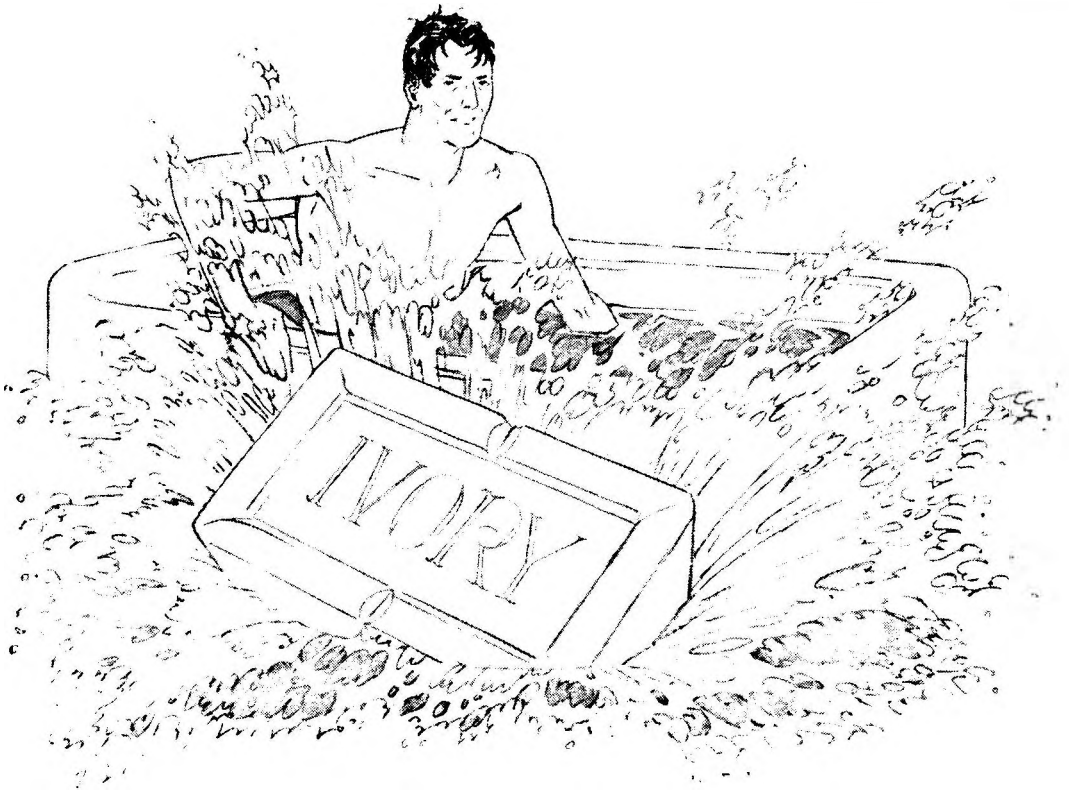
A few days of faithful brushing will prove its worth to you. You'll be delighted the way your gums look and feel. Forhan's helps to firm gums, keep them sound, thus warding off such dread diseases as Pyorrhea. In addition it cleans teeth and helps to protect them from decay. Get a tube of Forhan's from your druggist, today, 35c and 60c.

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Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's for the gums



YOUR TEETH ARE ONLY AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GUMS



Splash in!

Old man Sun! When he's got you nearly to the melting point, you can still laugh—and splash back at him!

Where? In your tub, of course, that's filled to the brim with coolness as fresh as a clear mountain pool.

Blissfully submerged . . . that will be you. Blithely afloat—that's sure to be Ivory! And when your wilted spirits have completely revived, the friend of millions of American

bathers will demonstrate anew its genius for quick-rinsing foam!

Splash! There goes the last Ivory bubble away. Cleared of perspiration, the skin seems to breathe gratefully. And even if the shoulders and arms are blushing with sunburn, they have nothing to fear from Ivory's refreshing foam. Isn't Ivory safe even for a baby's peach-blossom skin?

Old man Sun, here's a person who's serene and happy at the climax of your hot summer day!

. . . kind to everything it touches · 99⁴⁴/₁₀₀ % Pure · "It floats"

A MINUTE WITH— Calvin Johnston



HIGH PLAY!

SURPRISING as it may seem, New York, the "story" city, should have its chapter in the storied rough-and-tumbles of adventuring skippers and their seven seas. In the early '90s, when clippers still moved much of the world's cargo, the tug fleet of New York harbor took up their voyages where sail left off, and came in for the thrill and tragedy of adventure's end.

Imagine a seventy-footer with a crew of seven, leaving its wharf on the usual gamble—for gamble it was, according to Cap'n Henry, sometime of the good tug *Dorothy Annan* and still of the North River front. The stake, of course, was a ship with its cagy skipper calling heaven and hell to witness that tug captains wanted the profits of a voyage to take you to anchorage.

Cursing by megaphone must have enabled these hoarse old sea dogs to work a load of grief off their chests, after which they took whatever bargain offered. But if inbound ships were few, a skipper might dicker till some boat, cruising out of luck for two or three days with coal running low, began slashing rates, from one hundred dollars to seventy-five dollars, to fifty dollars, rather than lose out on expenses. This in good weather. In storm, that tug

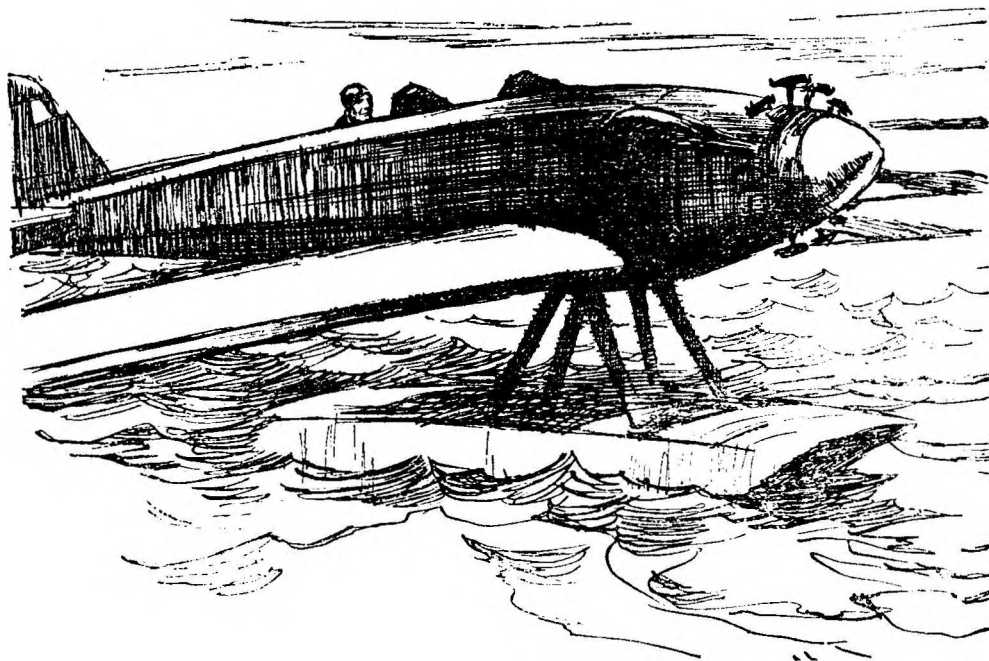
captain who, far off Sandy Hook, first spied mast or light from his watch tower of mountain wave, bid once for the prize and got it. Then into the lee of the tall hull, wallowing around as if to escape that thread of hand line which meant the captivity of the harbor. The hempen hawser was paid out, stiffening in winter under the hands of the clumsy, flapping figures on the misted, icy deck.

All features of rescues from storm-pounded wrecks were in this routine work, except one. There was no applause from spectators for the crew, which instead was cursed by megaphone. All death brought was its own reward, and still men liked the job which had such tragedy as this to offer:

On a November day in '93, six tugs, Cap'n Henry's among them, were outside, in hazy weather and a choppy sea. And while the sun looked on from an untroubled sky, trouble fell upon the waters from the north, in gusts, a half gale, a dry hurricane. On that day five tugs, the *H. S. Nicholas*, *E. S. Atwood*, *Robert Harden*, the *Governor*, *Edward J. Boylan*, with every man of the five crews, gambled and lost. Only the *Dorothy Annan* managed to turn in the trough of the sea and get back. High play!

FULL THROTTLE

A Complete Novel by
RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS



CHAPTER I.

THE CRASH.

PAUL THORNE eased the climbing seaplane into a glide as he snapped off his stop watch. His eyes, which had been darting rapidly from one instrument to another during the swift, skyward sprint, came to rest on the altimeter. He grinned broadly, like a boy who has unexpectedly run across a large piece of pie.

"Not a bad climb for a seaplane," he murmured. "Nearly sixteen hundred feet a minute, and I still had some gun left."

He adjusted the stabilizer control. Then he took his hands off the stick and let the ship handle itself in the smooth,

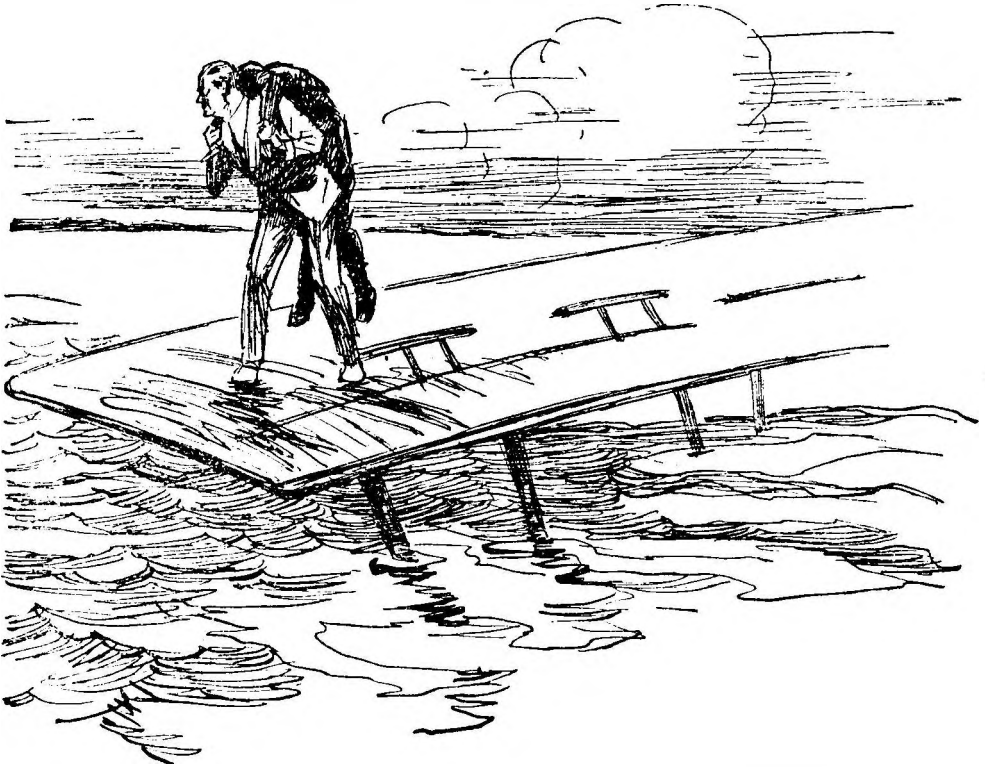
warm air. He noted on a pad strapped to his leg the results of this rough test of the plane's performance. It was satisfactory, though not revolutionary.

"All we need is some money to build 'em with," he told himself, with just a flicker of a frown. "A fast, steady ship without tricks or bugs is what aviation needs. This is it."

Dependability rather than startling performance was what Paul Thorne and his partner, Grant van Ryn, had aimed at. Paul, despite his youth, had made a name for himself in the handling of record-breaking ships. And he had observed that such ships broke not only records but their own wing spars, the bones of men, and the hearts of women.

Paul had flown the worst of the freak

**A Vibrant, Human Story of the Air World of To-day—of Two
Ambitious Young Airmen, a High-spirited Girl, and a
Malevolent Financial Genius.**



speed ships with a steady hand and then, just as steadily, he had turned his back on them. When he and Van Ryn staked their money and their reputation on creating a ship, they had built one that would stand the gaff—take the bad breaks with the good—and still come through to a soft landing. It was a distance speed ship, not a sprint ship.

For a moment Paul looked over the side. The Sound, which had been so broad a minute ago, was considerably narrower when viewed from this altitude. Brig Cove, where he and his partner had their hangar and small shop, was behind him. Ahead the shores of Connecticut and Long Island, like cupped hands, inclosed the blue waters of the Sound. A tug, with a tow of

coal barges, a steamer or two, and a dozen small pleasure craft were in sight.

Paul looked for a flying boat that had been practicing landings while he made his tests. He saw it at last, almost in the middle of the Sound and down on the water. He looked at it again.

There was something wrong with that craft. At this height Paul Thorne could not tell what made him think so, but he knew it nevertheless. Hastily he swung his ship around and headed for it in a steep power dive.

Soon he could make out that the flying boat lay in the water, rather than on it. The hull had filled and one lower wing was crumpled.

A man of powerful build was climbing up onto the upper wing. Paul saw

the big man pause, with one foot on the motor, bend down and reach for something. With a single heave, he drew up out of the water a smaller, crumpled figure and slung it up onto the wing. Then he followed.

As Paul leveled off near by to set his seaplane on the water the big man sighted him, and waved a hand in an abrupt gesture. It was a movement that acknowledged his coming rather than implored his aid.

Paul taxied rapidly toward the wrecked flying boat. The man remained standing upright on the wing. His right hand clutched the collar of his small, motionless companion. The giant seemed unaware, as he stood there, at ease, that his gripping hand practically suspended the other man's body in the air.

Paul cut the throttle to idling speed and drifted in, eying his own wing and the wing of the crashed flying boat intently.

"Hello!" he hailed. "Can you walk out to the wing tip and climb onto mine?"

"Right!" the big man roared. Slinging his smaller companion over his shoulder, he moved with sure, light steps along the slanting plane. As the wing of the seaplane drew close, he jumped for it and made it with a foot to spare. Leisurely he walked along Paul's wing to the fuselage. He paused there, lowering the squirming burden he carried into the forward cockpit. Then he smiled coolly at the pilot. He was no more ruffled than a man who had been taking a leisurely stroll.

Paul Thorne saw that the man was as powerful as he had first appeared to be, but not as young as his easy activity had strongly suggested. His face was leonine. Lines cut across his forehead, and ran down his cheeks. His broad chin had a cleft in it. One day he would be portly, but not for some time yet.

"Thanks for the prompt rescue!" he

said, in a rumbling bass and laughed at his own predicament. "This"—he gripped the small man's collar again and lifted him up in explanation—"this alleged aviator tried to make a new low-altitude record."

The small man in the leather coat gave vent to a gurgling sound and with great difficulty fought free of his companion's hold. There was a tint of purple in his complexion. He gasped several times and turned a snarling, pointed and somewhat bloody face from the big man to Paul Thorne.

"I didn't dive her!" he rasped. "The wheel bucked in my hands and, before I could pull her out of it, the wing-tip pontoon touched. It wasn't my fault, Mr. Keever."

Mr. Keever smiled pleasantly into the small pilot's gashed face. Then his light-blue eyes invited Paul Thorne to join in his amusement. "Since you went through the wheel so thoroughly yourself, Rip, and didn't hurt me, we'll dispense with the inquest," he said.

The small man named Rip sat on the edge of the cockpit and stared thoughtfully at the remains of the flying boat. "The only way I could figure it would be that the elevator control wires got ——" he began; but Keever cut in, as genially as ever:

"We'll dispense with the autopsy, too, Rip. You weren't handling that boat right. That's why I directed you to practicing landings. I hope you aren't losing your skill, Rip. That would be sad—after five years with me."

Rip looked up uneasily. "That wasn't it," he protested. "You ought to know how good I am at the controls."

Paul Thorne watched silently. For a man who had been crashed and thoroughly wet by a careless or inattentive pilot Keever was singularly lenient. Paul felt some pity for the shivering, bleeding and anxious Rip, even though he knew that the small pilot's explanation was ridiculous.

"We're all apt to slip a bit, sometimes," Paul said to Keever. "Ships aren't like automobiles yet."

"Slip yourself!" Rip Bronson snarled, burning a hostile countenance on Paul. "I don't slip."

"You've relieved my mind, Rip," Keever interposed smoothly. "I thought you had slipped, and that this gentleman had kindly helped us out of a wet situation."

Rip scowled, but Keever ignored him and addressed Paul:

"My name is Keever, sir."

"Mine is Thorne."

Keever raised his eyebrows. "Paul Thorne—winner of the transcontinental race?" He looked intently at Paul. "Yes, I recognize you. Of course! I've seen your picture often enough."

"I've had it taken too often," Paul Thorne answered. A rather bashful grin spread over his young, weathered countenance. "Not because I wanted to, particularly."

"I understand," Keever laughed. "The press photographer is ubiquitous and more intransigent than the tax collector. Rip, do you feel like contradicting Mr. Thorne again?"

Bronson, who had been examining Paul with grudging respect, muttered something.

"What do you want to do?" Paul Thorne asked briskly.

"If you'll put me ashore anywhere, Rip and I will get across somehow to my yacht," Keever said. "She's lying off Halford on the Connecticut shore now."

"I'll take you over," Paul Thorne volunteered at once.

"Thanks, but I couldn't ask you to make a"—Keever's eye rested for an instant upon Rip—"an aerial taxi driver out of yourself, Mr. Thorne."

"No trouble at all," said Paul. "I'm just test-hopping this ship, anyhow."

He stepped out of the rear cockpit onto the fuselage and moved toward the

other compartment. "I'll have to get these three fifty-pound sandbags out—had them in for ballast," he explained. "Then the ship will carry us all."

"Allow me!" said Keever. He bent and effortlessly lifted the bags with one hand. One after another he dropped them into the Sound.

"As for that flying boat," he said, looking at the wreckage, "if it acted as Rip here says it acted, it deserves to sink. I will send men in my yacht tender to see that it does."

"But it must be worth——" began Paul, and then stopped.

Keever smiled again. He dismissed the crumpled flying boat with a wave of his hand. "It is far easier to write off a bad investment than to try to save it," he said. "The sooner it sinks the sooner my faith in aviation will return."

He settled down comfortably in the cockpit beside his pilot with the air of having dismissed a subject.

Paul Thorne returned to the operating compartment. It was not his business if a man wished to throw away thousands of dollars. The motor was still idling. Although the seaplane was designed to carry only two men he had no difficulty in taking off. He seized the opportunity during the short flight to Halford of making note of the seaplane's straightaway air speed and rate of climb under this additional weight.

As the Connecticut shore approached, Mr. Keever turned and pointed downward to the right.

Anchored well out from shore was a beautiful schooner yacht—a tall-masted, slender-sparred ship whose brasswork glittered afar. Her deck planking seemed as white as her sides.

Paul Thorne, peering over the side, saw six or eight men at work on her deck.

"I must be carrying Cræsus himself—or else King Midas!" he muttered. "Keever! I don't seem to remember the name. Still, I suppose there must

be plenty of millionaires I never heard of."

He spiraled down and set the seaplane on the water close to the starboard side of the ship. Keever stood up in the forward cockpit and silently raised a hand to the deck.

Instantly, as he was recognized, there was precipitate action aboard the yacht. An officer aft shouted a command and two men leaped down the gangway into a mahogany motor boat. A few moments later the tender was steered with consummate skill alongside the fuselage. Evidently Mr. Keever was well served.

The millionaire nodded to Rip, who scrambled down into the boat at once. Then he turned to Paul Thorne. His face was beaming with enthusiasm.

"I am amazed at the performance of this seaplane," Keever said. "Even in so short a flight I am amazed, Mr. Thorne. Can I not persuade you to come aboard the *Valhalla* with me and tell me something about it?"

Paul Thorne flushed. Praise for his partner who had designed this ship was praise for him, too. Moreover he was quite willing to inspect this beautiful schooner.

"I'd like to see your yacht if I can find bottom here with my anchor," he said. "And I'll talk my head off about this Thornryn any time you want!"

Keever did not offer the services of his crew in this task. He assisted Paul in paying out the rope himself. And Paul Thorne, appreciating the delicacy of this compliment, conceded that Keever was a gentleman as well as a millionaire.

When they reached the white deck Rip scurried instantly away to attend to his injuries. Keever paused, dismissing with a nod the sailing master who came toward him.

"It's comfortable under the awning, aft," he said to Paul. "Or if you prefer, the cabin. I must change into

something not so soggy, if you will excuse me."

Paul Thorne walked aft. He felt slightly out of place on that scoured white deck. Since he had leaped into world-wide fame by winning that bitterly contested transcontinental race, the barriers erected around many select circles—social, financial, even diplomatic—had been thrown down at the sound of his name. But Paul Thorne, possessed of a sense of humor as well as a sense of proportions, had stubbornly repelled all attempts to lure him into places where he might be considered more a curiosity than a guest.

He had been invited to deliver lectures, fill pulpits, write books, head business ventures, sell life insurance, attend dinners, dances and the like, and to lend his name, for a consideration, for testimonials to the efficacy of half a hundred products that he had never tried. All these things he had refused. He was a pilot—a flying man—he constantly reminded himself, and none of these invitations had to do with the air. But he felt that there could be no harm in spending half an hour aboard this yacht of a man with whom he had met by chance.

"He wants to know about the seaplane," he murmured. "Perhaps it is time Van and I let somebody hear about it. Soon we'll be wanting to sell 'em."

He did not know, any more than the unfortunate Rip Bronson knew, that his meeting with Julius H. K. Keever owed nothing whatever to chance. And he could not have guessed, even had he known so much, just why that meeting had been so carefully arranged.

CHAPTER II.

THE BUBBLE BREAKER.

FLYING!" said Julius H. K. Keever. "Flying! The shadow of wings—the thrum of motors—is over the whole world at last. It's come! It's here!"

He leaned back in his deck chair and sent a cloud of smoke swirling from his cigar into the still air between him and Paul Thorne. More than ever he gave the impression of a man who never did anything, the possessor of boundless time. Through the cloud of smoke his eyes, mild light-blue eyes, dwelt upon Paul Thorne's chest. They were less evident, those eyes, behind the tobacco screen, but now and again when they raised to Paul's face they glinted quite brilliantly.

"Boom days have come to flying in the United States," Keever went on. "Boom days—if you can employ that word 'boom' when you mean something permanent and secure. Flying is not a risky stunt or a passing fad, but a new and incomparably better means of travel than man has ever before possessed. Realization of this has suddenly swept over the nation."

Paul Thorne nodded. He knew all this, but it was pleasant to hear it voiced so convincingly by so solid and conservative a citizen as Julius H. K. Keever.

"Small air-transport companies are suddenly finding themselves prospering unbelievably and their demand for planes is swamping the few comparatively small airplane and motor factories. Flying circuses in rickety planes are touring the country, educating more people than they kill. Reliable operators are establishing aerial taxi and sight-seeing services at the airports that are springing up where once were meadows. Scores, hundreds of the best youngsters in the country are crowding the air schools. A wonderful time!"

Mr. Keever paused and then leaned forward in his chair impressively:

"The sons of the men who viewed automobiles with a skeptical eye, the grandsons of the men who watched the slow extension of the railroads with derision—these men, after a short period of doubt, accept the airplane in a sudden flood of belief. The physical world

has changed fast in the last twenty years; men are accustomed to change. They can accept even revolution, for revolution in transportation is what flying means. Isn't that so?"

Paul Thorne nodded again. Certainly this was true. He had only to appear in a public place to hear voices begin to buzz, eyes begin to stare, simply because he was the winner of an air race. The people's heroes now were all men of the air. The magazines, the newspapers, the radio stations all caught the drift of popular thought and magnified and served it sedulously.

His thoughts were interrupted by the abrupt, noiseless appearance beside him of a stout, squat man in a uniform as spotlessly white as the sides of the ship. He bore a tray, with a bottle and glasses upon it.

Paul shook his head. "Thanks—no," he said. "Without getting lyrical about it, I'll say that I've noticed that highest gas doesn't mix with other volatile liquids."

Keever nodded instant approval. "Take it away, Smithers. How about lunch? A pleasant place for lunch, out here under the awning."

Thorne shook his head. "Have to push on soon," he explained. "We're trying to get through these tests."

Mr. Keever sighed. It was almost the sigh of a middle-aged, settled man. "How I'd like to be in the thick of it, like you and your partner!" he murmured. "Converting ideas into blue prints—blue prints into planes—and turning those planes out by the hundreds—the thousands—eager to get into the air."

Paul Thorne smiled rather apologetically. "We're only in the idea and blue-print stages now," he explained. "This ship, and a couple of others, are all we have, and we aren't selling those to eager thousands yet."

"But you will," Keever assured him. "You will!"

Paul did not answer. After Mr. Keever's inspiring pictures of the huge development of aviation in the United States the hangar and shop of the Thornryn company seemed very small and inadequate. To get even so far Paul had sunk all his prize money and Van Ryn a lesser amount. They could have had more money at the price of independence, but they had considered that price too dear. This was their show—Paul's and Van's.

Keever had been studying his guest intently. Now he laughed. "I can read you," he said. "You think it's a long way from blue prints to quantity production. Let me tell you, Mr. Thorne, it's a longer way from daydreams to blue prints of something worth building. And you've got it, Mr. Thorne! Even I, a mere layman, can tell you that."

"It's a good ship—thanks to Van Ryn," Paul agreed, and his eyes dwelt with quiet approval on the anchored seaplane. Then he moved uneasily. Keever might advance some proposition such as other men of money had made.

But Keever made no offer. He seemed almost to have forgotten Paul as he stared out over the blue water. "If I was only young enough I'd be in it up to the neck myself," he said, seemingly thinking aloud. "But what could I do in aviation? Lend somebody else the money to have fun with. I'm too old to be useful in the youngest and fastest business in the world."

He came out of his meditations with a quick lift of the head and laid a hand on the arm of Paul's chair with impressive deliberation. "Look here!" he said. "Take just a word of advice from an old stager who has dabbled in various human enterprises. Never let control—absolute control of your company—get out of your hands. Don't do it! Go slow if you must, but hang onto fifty-one per cent at all costs."

"Van and I feel that way about it," Paul said.

"It's the only healthy way to feel," Keever asserted warmly. "You'll have temptations. I could name thirty men—acquaintances of my own—who'd lend you, with your name and knowledge, and Van Ryn, with his genius, all the money you'd want. But you'd pay with a yoke on your neck for every cent of it."

Paul Thorne murmured agreement. He was relieved that Keever had had no ulterior motive in inviting him aboard.

Keever's eyes dwelt with frank admiration on the Thornryn.

"I don't understand how you get such speed out of a ship of that comfortable size," he said. "The speed creations I've seen have been dinky little things that needed a small jockey to pilot 'em."

Paul smiled and rose. "That's Van's hobby," he said. "He's always working to reduce air resistance without cutting down size. Van's something of an authority on parasitic resistance, streamlining, and high-lift stuff. And he really applies what he knows, which is the ticklish part of the job."

"All Greek to me," Keever laughed. He accompanied Paul Thorne to the gangway. An engineer and sailor instantly hurried to the tender. Keever leaned lazily on the rail. "I'd ask you to come and call on me again, but I don't know where my home will be by this time to-morrow."

"You live aboard?"

"Saves rent," Keever nodded, smiling. "Besides, it's healthier."

"It must be healthy," Thorne agreed. Certainly Keever looked healthy enough.

The millionaire laughed at Paul's sidelong look at his big body. "When I say healthier I mean safer," he said. "There's no cure for a bullet, properly placed."

"A bullet?" exclaimed Paul Thorne, startled.

"A bullet." Keever chuckled, with

no appearance of concern. "No, I'm not a bootlegger, or a smuggler, or anything of that sort," he assured Paul. "But two gentlemen whom I succeeded in putting in the Federal prison at Atlanta escaped recently. I have reason to believe they dislike me. Yes, I think I may say I have material reason to believe so."

He tapped his side just under the right armpit with a solicitous finger. "Fortunately," he added, "their aim is as reprehensible as their purpose. However, I mustn't bore you with my troubles."

His manner forbade further questions. Paul Thorne shook hands and invited him to visit Brig Cove some day.

From the schooner Julius H. K. Keever watched the seaplane depart, waving his hand in a single leisurely gesture of farewell.

Rip Bronson, coming up on deck as he heard the roar of the seaplane, watched Paul take off with a jealous professional eye.

"How would you like to be able to fly like that, Rip?" inquired his employer.

"Give me a ship like that and I'll fly like that, boss," Rip retorted. His manner was distinctly more familiar when he was alone with his employer. "What do you expect me to do with an old style box-kite like that one we had?"

"Crash it," Keever answered. "And you did."

Bronson winced. "What were you chewing the rag with him for all this time?" he asked. "Was he tellin' you how luck and a tail wind put him ahead in the transcontinental?"

"He didn't mention the matter, Rip. He is a gentleman. I was trying to induce him to take a position as my personal pilot."

Rip snarled portentously, and his mouth leaped open for a flaming retort. Then, catching the indolent amusement on Keever's face, he scowled and said

nothing. Though Keever allowed the small pilot much latitude in speech, Rip rarely got much pleasure out of it. He was an outlet for Keever's sarcasm; that was all.

Keever laughed softly. "Boom days!" he murmured in derision. "Boom days, Rip. That's what we were talking about. Only this time the boom is a wonderful boom that won't ever blow up, Rip. People will always keep on being wild about flying and kiting aviation stocks. Whatever goes up, in this case, Rip, will not come down, because it's an airplane."

Bronson looked shrewdly at his big employer. "Don't kid yourself that flying isn't going to stay, boss," he said.

"Thank you, Rip," Julius H. K. Keever said gratefully. "I was forgetting that—probably." His eye dwelt with mock humility on his pilot. "I should have remembered that the first companies in any new field are the ones that invariably grow and prosper. Take the automobile industry, for example. All the big motor companies to-day are the ones that started out in 1895 to make cars. Aren't they? None have fallen by the wayside—busted."

Rip Bronson stirred uneasily at the irony in Keever's tone. "Quit kiddin' me," he protested. "Maybe nine out o' ten of these new little plane companies will go under. But what's that got to do with us?"

"Nothing to do with you, Rip," Mr. Keever spoke indulgently, as to a child. "That's why you're taking orders from me. But a boom means something to me. It means action—*joie de vivre*."

"Like Florida, huh? You certainly cleaned up then."

"Boom days!" murmured Keever. "Days to stir the blood—to make men act on impulse—to make men jump before it is too late—to act first and to think later—to think too late, in fact. Boom days! How I love boom days!"

"There certainly ought to be some

way to make a little cash out o' flying—not that you need cash," Rip said. His small black eyes peered curiously at the blank face of Julius H. K. Keever. His boss was many things to Rip Bronson—a tyrant, a friend, a paragon, but most of all he was an enigma. He accomplished so much, but always with either a disinterested air or a sneer for his own triumph. Rip was not fond of monotony, nor was his master.

"Cash!" repeated Keever. "Cash! You have a vulgar mind, Rip. Could I not live and enjoy myself without money? Do I need a yacht to savor life? Could I not exist without fools like you attending me? Not cash, but the contest for cash, Rip. Not the dull triumph but the keen fight."

Rip stared, fascinated, at his employer's face. It had become animated, that indolent face, and the customary good humor of the broad mouth and the mildness of the blue eyes were gone. Keever had the look of a viking then—a fierce sea king who wrested from others what they held dearest, destroyed or scattered the loot, and wandered on. On to other conquests or to death! For to the Norseman death was but the prelude to a heaven of never-ending battle; it was as dear a thing as conquest.

"How men will fight for money!" Keever muttered. "How wildly they scuttle about during boom days, as the bubble swells. Even a fool can make money then, Rip, but when the bubble breaks—then the wise men rake in all the counters and watch the fools squirm. But the wisest man of all, Rip——"

Keever paused, with thoughtful eyes.

"Yes?" said Rip.

"The wisest of all is the man who pricks the bubble, Rip."

"And the richest, too?"

"The richest, too," Keever agreed indifferently.

"I wouldn't mind some solid cash o' my own," Rip Bronson declared with frank covetousness.

"Then always remember, Rip, that virtue is its own reward," Keever said, with sardonic earnestness. He tapped Rip's breastbone impressively. "Eschew virtue, Rip; eschew it. Now sagacity is a different matter. Sagacity has other rewards for an ardent materialist like you."

"Sometimes," Rip confessed, "I don't think I'm so damn smart as I might be."

"In serving me you are revealing cleverness of the highest type, Rip," Keever assured him, not more than half in jest. "Stick around, Rip. I need a body-guard, as you know. There may be pickings soon."

He turned away from Bronson and strolled aft. His manner was that of a man without a care, but his eyes, straying down the Sound, had a certain abstraction in their depths.

Rip watched him go. "Pickings!" He moistened his lips.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLUE HAT.

AT a sober hundred miles an hour Paul Thorne hopped across the Sound to Brig Cove. He had now enough data to satisfy even Grant van Ryn. Unlike most aeronautical engineers, Van Ryn did not regard a ship's failure to perform in accordance with theory as an insult, but as a challenge.

As he flew, Paul permitted himself some speculation concerning his recent host. Keever was certainly an unusual person, not alone in the agility and strength of his body but also in the agility and strength of his mind. Every facet of the man's personality seemed scintillant, interesting compelling; even the fact that he had deadly enemies added to his luster.

Brig Cove crept into sight ahead. The cove formed a tree-clad, sloping amphitheater for a small arm of the Sound. Over it Paul circled once, losing alti-

tude. Then he glided toward the shore of Brig Point and, sideslipping gently, set the ship down close to the diminutive marine railway that marked the plant of the Thornryn company.

Ike Smith and George Fenwood, mechanics in sea-whitened wading boots, helped get the ship on the truck and started the small motor that hauled the plane up the inclined rails to the level in front of the hangar.

Paul sought his partner. He found him in the office. Grant van Ryn, a chunky, square-shouldered man whose face always bore a puzzled look, was thoughtfully twisting his slide rule in his hands while he eyed disapprovingly his latest drawing of a wing-tip pontoon. He came out of his study promptly at the sight of Paul and nodded toward the other desk.

"Girl brought a note for you," he said. "A pretty girl."

Paul chuckled. "Must have been pretty, if you noticed her," he said. "What did she look like?"

He smiled again as Van Ryn wrinkled his brow in a painful effort to visualize the pretty girl.

"She was—she was quite like other girls, except that she was pretty," Van Ryn explained, and made a vague gesture with the slide rule to improve his description. "I—ah—I couldn't say what gave me that impression but I am sure it was correct. She had on a blue hat, I believe, and she just put her head in the door, handed me the note, said, 'For Mr. Thorne,' and vanished."

"Thanks," said Paul. He did not look at the note. Since he had leaped into fame by a lead of thirty-seven minutes in a race across a continent he had received a number of missives from ladies, none of which had caused his heart to beat faster. When Paul's thoughts turned to matrimony he would be the pursuer, not the pursued. Just now he was wrapped up in one thing—the Thornryn monoplane.

Grant van Ryn brightened when he saw the pad of test data that Paul carried. "How did it go?" he asked briskly.

"We've got something, just as she is," Paul answered. "First of all, she's dependable. And for her size and power her speed is startling. Her climb is enough to make a man stand up in the cockpit to cheer."

Van Ryn beamed.

"I'm not the only one who thinks so, either," Paul said. "I've had an adventure along with my dull morning's work."

Briefly he outlined his meeting with Julius H. K. Keever. He dwelt more in detail on Keever's admiration of the seaplane.

"Of course he's not an engineer or a pilot, but he's owned planes and flown in planes for years, and he noticed how peppy and unusual she was in just that short hop. And I wasn't flying full throttle, either. We've got something, Van."

"If we had something he would have offered to take it over, instead of advising us to retain control," Van Ryn said skeptically.

Paul laughed. "You old misanthrope!" he charged. "Keever has enough enemies now without adding you to the number by trying to take your pet ship away. Besides, he has plenty of money—more than he wants."

"More money than a man wants is usually lots of money," Van Ryn said cautiously. "We'll need almost that much, though, when we try to build a factory to start production on these ships."

Paul grunted. Both he and Van Ryn disliked the financial factor in flying. Time after time they had postponed serious consideration of what to do after they had designed, constructed, and tested a plane that represented a distinct advance over present-day machines. Now the plane had to be built

and sold in quantities. But how? Their plant was more an experimental station than a factory.

Paul scowled at nothing, dropped into his chair and picked up the note that Van Ryn had spoken of. It was a single sheet of paper, folded in an intricate way to make up for the lack of an envelope. He opened it, read the scrawled words, and read them again before they assumed any significance in his abstraction:

Keep away from Keever if you don't want
to be hurt.
VERITAS.

Paul Thorne got to his feet. "I'll be—switched!" he exclaimed. "Look at this, Van! A threat!"

As Van Ryn read it, Paul stared over his shoulder at that single sentence. It's very baldness somehow lent the message strength. To Paul Thorne, remembering Keever's gesture toward his wounded side, and his jest about the healthiness of living aboard a yacht, there was a distinct menace in the words. This was not a joke.

Van Ryn put the sheet of paper down. "She was an extraordinarily pretty girl," he murmured, rather regretfully. "What was it that Keever told you about his enemies?"

"He didn't tell me much," Paul answered. "He said that he'd been responsible for getting two men into Atlanta prison, and that they had escaped. Since that he'd been shot in the side—or grazed, anyhow. That was why he was living on the yacht."

"Atlanta's a Federal prison, isn't it?"

Paul nodded. "That doesn't reveal much about what Keever had them jailed for," he said. "Bootlegging, mail robbery, smuggling, dealing in narcotics, using the mails to defraud, mutiny on the high seas, treason—there are lots of methods of getting into a Federal jail."

He scowled again at the message. "Keever ought to know of this," he decided. "I don't believe it will do him

much good, but he ought to know. That handwriting's disguised or—— Look at it, Van! It's just scrawled. Without claiming to be a handwriting expert I'd say a right-handed person had written that with his—or her—left hand. And in a hurry, at that."

"It was written in a hurry, certainly," Van Ryn agreed. "And your acquaintance with Keever isn't more than two hours old now."

"That's so," Paul conceded. "That flying boat cracked up a little before eleven o'clock and it's not one now."

He stopped and his jaw sagged slightly. Grant van Ryn looked up at his partner. Plainly Paul had been struck by a disconcerting thought. Van waited, fingering his slide rule.

"That crash!" Paul said at last. "Van, that little pilot, Rip Bronson, told a very fishy story—at least it seemed fishy to me. It was something about the wheel bucking in his hands while he was flying low, so that the wing pontoon touched and piled her up before he could regain control."

"And you think——"

"He may have been telling the truth," Paul said. "I thought he'd been careless—but Van, a man that tries murder with a gun wouldn't be averse to tampering with a boat's controls if he got a chance, would he?"

Van Ryn nodded soberly. "It would be a very efficient way to wipe out an enemy, provided that he didn't mind getting the pilot, too."

"His enmity might well extend to Rip Bronson, who's been working for Keever for years," Paul said. "I have an idea that Bronson is pretty close to his boss."

"It's plausible——" Van began; but broke off as Paul suddenly started for the door. His partner paused by his desk and caught up Van's pair of binoculars.

"I'm going up to the head!" Paul called, as he ran.

Sprinting around the side of the hangar, Paul ascended the short, steep path that led up to the top of the bluff. There was a road out to Brig Point, but Paul followed a footpath along the cliffs. The headland was not more than a quarter of a mile from the Thornryn base.

The point, projecting slightly beyond the coast line, made a good post of observation. Arrived there, Paul swept the Sound with a quick glance, his attention centering on the channel. Then he clapped the glasses to his eye and stared attentively at a small boat.

The binoculars brought the craft quite close. Paul recognized it as the beautiful mahogany tender of the *Valhalla*. It was proceeding toward the Connecticut shore. Paul made out that the boat was towing something behind it. Staring intently he saw at last that the thing was one of the wings of the flying boat.

There was no trace of other wreckage anywhere. Paul realized then that Kcever had kept his word. The tender had either sunk the remains of the flying boat or had come out to do so and found that it had already gone under. Now the boat was towing away the wing that had torn loose and might prove a menace to small-boat navigation.

"Too late!" Paul recided. "If there was any evidence of tampering left in the wreckage it's at the bottom, now."

Disappointed, he turned to go back. The sound of a racing, jangling motor reached his ears and he looked toward the road. He was not alone on the point. An old Ford roadster which had been parked at the end of the road was now being turned around hastily.

Paul's glance was casual, but suddenly became intense. The driver of the roadster was a girl—a girl in a blue hat!

Paul sprinted toward the car faster than he had run toward the point. He saw the girl's head raise in a startled, involuntary glance in his direction, and

he realized that she had probably been watching him covertly.

Her attention now was on getting the car turned on the narrow road. The gears clashed and ground in reverse and in low as the machine jerked backward and forward. At every cut of the wheels it came closer to completing the turn.

Paul Thorne did not call out. He devoted himself to running. With pumping lungs he drew near as the car, with a final churning spurt in low, straightened out and started precipitately away from the point. Paul jumped for the running board. His head, bobbing forward over the door, almost struck the girl's.

She put on the brakes with a quick thrust of her foot. Then she turned to him.

Paul realized instantly why his unobservant partner had noticed that this girl was pretty—though pretty was not the word he would have used. Her face had none of the heavy solidity of classic beauty; in Paul's dazzled eyes it established a new standard of beauty and abolished all others. And the new beauty did not preclude such blemishes as a slight tilt to the nose, a tiny upper lip, and features of a fragility rarely seen.

Her hair was very black, yet her eyes were very blue, and this contradiction in terms of type was accentuated by her fair skin of fine texture and the most delicate of coloring.

The faint flush upon her cheeks was rapidly becoming more pronounced as Paul Thorne stared at her. Her mouth, obviously soft and tender, was now under tension.

"Do—do you wish to speak to me?" she asked. Her voice was quick and musical, and something in it hinted of the South.

"I certainly do," Paul Thorne answered. "Yes, I do."

He had had a pressing reason for

stopping this girl, yet now the reason was by no means as pressing as his desire to look at her. Moreover, threats, crashes and treachery did not seem proper topics.

She waited a moment or two, and then spoke again. "Perhaps you had better tell me what it is. Don't you think so?"

He realized that he was still standing on the running board, much as a robber or a policeman on business might have stood. He stepped off at once, but kept close to the car.

"Sorry," he said. "My name's Paul Thorne."

He waited expectantly for some sign or word from her and she waited just as expectantly for him to go on.

"How nice!" she said at last. "Was that what you wanted to tell me, Mr. Thorne?"

Despite this delicate thrust, he was conscious that this girl, below the surface, was very much on the defensive. Her voice had conveyed uninterested politeness—and something more. He looked up at her hat. It was certainly a blue hat—a very blue hat.

"Thorne," he repeated, gathering his wits. "I received your note. I'd like to have a talk——"

"You got my note!" she repeated. She drew a deep, quick breath, color fairly rushed into her cheeks, and she withdrew from him the barest trifle in her seat. "Really, Mr.—Mr.—you are either the victim of an unfortunate mistake or a very clumsy and unpleasant sort of person. Good-by."

With finality she put the car into gear. It quivered and moved forward, past him.

He stood mute and immovable. The car, chugging briskly, rose over a crest in the road and vanished toward Brig Harbor. Paul Thorne, feeling his chin in a numb, involuntary way, finally roused and walked slowly across the grass to the footpath.

"Great Peter!" he muttered at last. "What a girl!"

He plodded on, very much confused. Ordinarily he thought as quickly as he acted, but something had seriously disturbed his reaction time there beside that dusty old car.

"I can't figure out whether I want her to be the girl who left that threat or not," he muttered. "If she did leave it I'm more apt to see her again. But do I want to see more of a girl who's involved in some sordid or murderous plot?"

He walked on—a dozen steps.

"I do!" he said. "Damn it—I do!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLOTTERS.

THE visit to the Thornryn plant that afternoon of Lieutenant Commander Shafton, U. S. N., an old flying pal, kept Paul busy, but not too busy to forget the girl in the blue hat.

Her face, now portraying guilt—now innocence, but always provocative, was in his eyes. Even while he pointed out to Shafton the merits of the three Thornryn ships in the big hangar, and later while he threw a ship around in the air as a practical demonstration of maneuverability, he saw her.

He remembered how that most charming flush had come over her delicate white cheeks when he looked at her, and how much more vivid it had become when he mentioned the note. He wondered how she would look when she smiled—and all this while he delved deep into technical discussion with Shafton or risked a series of flipper turns that required concentration upon other things than a girl.

Only once, just before the naval airman left, did he succeed in removing Paul's thoughts from that haunting image.

"You know how high a lieutenant commander ranks in naval aviation cir-

cles, Paul," he said, with a grin. "About ankle high to the deuce of clubs. So don't take this too seriously, but I have an idea the navy is interested in your ship."

"That why they pushed you down here to-day?" Paul asked.

Shafton nodded. "Not officially," he said. "There's been some chatter about the ship—I know you're not keeping it a secret—and the big guns may give you a small order—if you could handle it."

That was all that Shafton could say. Van Ryn, who had to go to the city to consult a brother engineer, and Paul accompanied Shafton to the station in a taxi. Paul thought regretfully that Thornryn's ability to turn out even a few ships was doubtful, unless they got hold of some money.

After the train had pulled out Paul walked back along the Brig Point road, which kept to the top of the wooded bluff overlooking the cove. He wanted to think, and here he would not be disturbed, for even at this time of year, mid-July, the road was little used. There were no houses on this side of the cove. The broad, level stretch of land above the sloping shoulders of the bay and beyond the Thornryn plant was held by an estate that was waiting for a favorable time to develop it.

Paul had a decision to make. He felt that he should warn Kever of his suspicions concerning the crack-up that morning and of the threatening note that had been sent to him. How much of the girl's part in it—if she had any part—must he reveal?

While he tried to separate thoughts from visions he caught sight of a car on the dusty road ahead. It was far out toward Brig Point but it was coming toward him. And, unless he was still mixing dreams and reality, it was the old roadster that the girl had driven that morning.

Paul stepped off the edge of the road

and leaned against a tree, watching. Should he try to speak to her—or what?

He never had to decide, for the car stopped a long way from him. The girl got out and with considerable effort pulled down two rails that closed a gate on the cove side of the road. Then she drove the car off the road and disappeared among the trees. Probably she had not seen him; possibly she had merely ignored him.

"What's the reason for driving that car into the woods?" Paul asked himself. "I know a flivver can do anything, but it's a steepish slope down to the water."

He stepped along hurriedly. At the spot where the car had left the road he found that the rails had been replaced. He climbed the fence and followed an old, faintly rutted trail that moved in no certain direction through the cool pine woods. He had not traced its windings far into the shelter of the trees when he came upon the car.

The girl had left it there on the trail after turning it around so that its battered radiator pointed toward the road. She was nowhere in sight.

Paul hesitated. Where had she gone? Since she left her car here it was obvious that she was coming back. But had she gone down this way to spy upon the activities at the hangar or to leave another note? Why had she hidden the car so carefully?

"I'm going to find out," he informed himself. "You wouldn't think a girl like that would do anything underhanded, but——"

He left the road to its meanderings and moved slowly down through the shadowing, sighing pines in the direction of the plant. He had been wishing to see her again but now he wished heartily that he had not sighted her. This sneaking about irked him.

The trees were not thick, nor was there any undergrowth to afford concealment. He walked on steadily over the

carpet of pine needles, combing the slope with quick, keen glances. Within a few minutes his eyes caught the gleam of the white hangar through the trees. If the girl had come to watch the Thorn-ryn plant she had not followed this route.

He circled about the hangar and the long, bare building of corrugated iron behind it. This rude shed housed the office, the wood and metal-working departments, motor-test room, and other branches of the skeletonized plant.

Nowhere did he get a glimpse of her. She had not come down this way. Disappointed, and wondering why he should feel so, he climbed up on the platform in front of the hangar and looked along the shore.

From the side of the cove a gayly painted blue canoe was gliding out into view. It was not too far away for Paul to see that the girl who was propelling it with long, steady strokes was the girl of the blue hat.

She was not wearing the hat now, nor her light-tan coat. The slowly waning sun bathed her slim white arms with flashing radiance. Paul watched her easy, graceful control of the canoe while he struggled with some dim idea that he had seen a girl in such a canoe here in the cove before.

"She's been about for several days," he muttered. "I know I've caught other glimpses of her when I've been landing or taking off. Funny I never really noticed a girl like that! Where is she going?"

It was probable that her destination was the little water-side colony of Brig Harbor, in the inner shore of the cove. Paul hurried into the office to get Van's binoculars again. Then he watched her land at the town pier and make fast her canoe.

"I guess she is staying at Brig with her family," he decided, lowering the glasses. "I'd bet a million to a cookie she had nothing to do with that note."

He raised the glasses and looked again. What he saw made him feel that perhaps he had offered too great odds. For the girl had not left the pier. She was stepping down the gangplank that led to Zeb Stead's little ferry launch. And the ferry's terminus on the Connecticut shore was Halford, where the *Valhalla* now swung at anchor!

"Great Peter!" Paul Thorne muttered. "More uncertainty! I can't stand this. There must be some simple and innocent explanation of her part in this mess."

He looked at his watch. The launch left in ten minutes. Impulsively Paul turned and walked into the hangar. He would have denied that he was following a hunch.

Ike Smith and some other mechs were going over the plane that Paul had stunted that afternoon for Commander Shafton's benefit.

"Run her out again, Ike," he said glumly.

"Yes, sir," said Ike, who was a privileged character, with withering sarcasm. "If you nail a roof over that cockpit you could live in her fine. You only had her out about six hours to-day."

"Gas her for four hours more, then," Paul directed. "Don't wait for me to-night; just leave the dinghy at the buoy."

"You'll fly yourself so stale you won't be fit to wind a watch," Ike growled, as he obeyed.

Fifteen minutes later, as Stead's old motor boat was waddling out of the cove around Brig Point, Paul lifted his ship off the water. His jaw was set, and so, too, were his plans. He would convince himself of this girl's innocence and then forget her.

Flying low, he headed westward along the coast, until he was out of sight of the ferry. Then he headed across the Sound and landed at a speed-boat and seaplane factory at Blythe, a little Connecticut town two miles west of Hal-

ford. Some of the Thornryn work that could not be done at Brig was done here. Leaving the seaplane at a mooring, with his helmet and goggles, the only signs of his occupation, stowed in a side pocket, he taxied to Halford.

There is a considerable difference between crossing the Sound at two miles a minute and crossing it at seven miles an hour. It was well past dinner time, so Paul did part of his waiting at Halford in a restaurant. Then he strolled down to the dock where the ferry landed.

From there he had a view of the Halford Yacht Club, farther out on the tiny, muddy estuary that served Halford as a harbor. Once he saw the mahogany speed boat of the *Valhalla* creaming up the water as it sped toward the club landing stage. The tender landed only one passenger, a very fat, short man who moved with dignity off the landing. Paul recognized him as the steward of the *Valhalla*. He carried a bag and was no longer clad in the white uniform that made his bulk impressive.

The next moment Paul forgot the steward, for his impatient eyes caught sight of Stead's wheezy little motor launch plowing up the harbor. Hastily Paul put the corner of a lumber yard between him and the old dock. The few passengers that trickled off the ferry moved briskly up toward the main street, as if to make up for the time lost on the decrepit boat. Among them was the girl.

Paul loitered far behind her. This trailing business lowered his spirits abominably. "I feel like a pickpocket—and a third-rate pickpocket at that," he mumbled. But despite his depression he doggedly followed.

The girl hunted up a modest little tea room in a side street and Paul cooled his heels in a doorway while she ate a hasty dinner. It was past sunset when she came out, looking at her wrist watch.

He walked after her again. "I ought

to be arrested," he told himself. "There's no sense in this. Who said chivalry wasn't dead? Well, I'm trying to exonerate her, anyhow."

The girl left the town behind her. She entered a road leading along the muddy, narrow tidal stream that emptied into Halford harbor. There were neither cars nor people on that uninviting way. The odor of the black mud of the stream, the growing darkness and the sinister whisper of the breeze in the rank sea grass combined to produce a feeling of desolation. The girl's hurrying figure ahead was bent slightly forward and her step was quick and short. It was as if she forced herself to walk this dismal path.

Half a mile from the houses of Halford the girl turned into a footpath through the rank grass toward a shanty that loomed on piles at the edge of the winding stream.

Paul walked on, but at a slower pace. At the point where she had left the road he halted and watched with straining eyes as she approached the black, unfriendly shack. She mounted several steps that raised it well above the level of the marshy bank. The door opened almost at once.

Framed against the light within, a man's figure, a slender frame in silhouette, met the girl with polite, inclining head. Then the door shut behind them. With its closing the yellow light within the place was completely masked. The windows of this dubious shelter were singularly well curtained, nor was there even a crack illumined beneath the door.

Studying the shack intently, Paul walked toward it. His feet, pressing upon spongy turf or roots of sedge grass, made no sound. Even when he drew close, he could see no sign of light within. After examining the raised platform that made a sort of porch before the door, Paul moved around to one side.

The piles that supported the building

above the level of the highest tides also lifted the windows above the level of his eyes. The crazy stilts supporting the rear of the shanty sank down into the mud and water of the stream, and directly under the house a rowboat, aground in the silt, was tied to a post.

"Now what do I do?" Paul muttered. Returning to the front, he climbed up on the porch. He liked this shack less than the road that led to it. The girl had come here voluntarily, of course, but she did not belong here. His own rôle of shadower was less distasteful now, since it might also become the rôle of protector.

As he moved cautiously toward one of the black windows a plank in the flooring groaned loudly under his foot. The sound seemed to fill the air. Paul leaped instantly from the porch and squirmed under it.

He heard the door swing open, and then the quick stamp of feet overhead.

"It was nothing," a high tenor voice declared reassuringly. "The damp here makes the whole shack creak—or else the piles are settling."

"It sounded to me like a footstep," another voice—a voice slightly quavering, as if with age or weariness—replied. "We'll be going, anyhow, Ward. You've heard what Miss Penfield has reported. There's nothing else, is there, Joyce?"

"Nothing, father," the girl answered, in a low tone. Paul heard the words with a sense of shock. She needed no protection if her father had awaited her in this place. He listened in a sort of stricken daze as she went on: "I feel sure that Keever wasn't injured at all, but the other man—Bronson—may have been."

"We appreciate your keen vigilance, Joy—Miss Penfield," Ward, the man with the high voice, said. "I hope you won't find your watch on Thorne and the others too irksome."

"I will keep on," the girl said quietly.

"Oh, I forgot—there was a visitor this afternoon that Thorne took up in the seaplane. No one I knew."

Paul heard her speak his name with no delight. She was acting as a spy on him—had been acting as a spy for some time. What was this sinister game in which she was engaged?

"If only my appearance or Young's in broad daylight did not mean arrest— instant return to that unspeakable jail, you may be sure we would not burden you with this task, Miss Penfield," Ward assured the girl. His voice was urgent with sincerity.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of our safety," the old man answered. Paul Thorne recognized now in his uncertain voice the same intonation, the same slight accent of the South, that he had remarked in the girl's. "We will do our share about Keever and Thorne if you do yours, Ward—and you, too, Dick Young."

"I'll do mine," another man whom Paul had not heard speak before, answered. His voice was rasping, uncultured and full of some ill-suppressed feeling. "And I'll do it soon, too. You'll be surprised, Major Penfield."

He laughed harshly—a most unpleasant sound.

"Good!" murmured Joyce's father. "But we must go."

"I think it wise," Ward agreed in his peculiar tenor. "Smithers will be here soon; you would not care to meet him."

"I would not, sir," Penfield answered wearily. "Come, Joyce. Good night, gentlemen."

Joyce's voice and that of Ward and Young mingled in an exchange of brief farewells; then footfalls sounded on the porch steps. Paul watched the girl he now knew as Joyce Penfield moving slowly with her father away from the shack. He was pinned to his place beneath the porch by the two men who stood on it just above him. His attempt to convince himself of the girl's

innocence had failed dismally. She knew that the two men were escaped convicts. She knew that they were out to get Kever. And Kever had been wounded in a previous attempt at assassination. What kind of girl dwelt behind that beautiful and appealing face. Paul scowled in the darkness. The two men on the planking over his hiding place made no move to reënter the house, but stood there, apparently watching their visitors depart.

"Some girl, huh?" Young muttered.

"Shut up!" Ward commanded the other tensely.

"Why should I?" Young demanded belligerently. "I'm just as gone on her as you are."

"Some one's coming—passing them on the path," Ward whispered.

Young growled in his throat and feet shifted stealthily on the boards above Paul's head.

"It's all right!" Ward said suddenly. "It's Smithers. That you, Smithers?"

"Yes, sir," answered a voice, oddly dignified, almost pontifical. "I am 'ere."

Paul caught sight then of a wide figure approaching. He realized instantly with a prickling of his scalp, that this was Kever's solemn steward. Certainly he had located a queer nest of conspirators.

"Come up, Smithers," directed Ward. His voice was friendly, and yet there was a note of menace behind it. "I'm glad you didn't keep us waiting, Smithers."

"I am always prompt, sir," the steward protested. He tramped heavily up the steps. There was a shuffle of feet and then the door closed again. They had reëntered the house.

In an instant Paul was up on the porch again. He edged cautiously to the nearest window. Some black drapey had been nailed around the frame inside, but several of the panes were cracked and one of them had lost some

glass. He found that he could hear very well.

"No, sir," Smithers was saying stoutly. "It is not my intention to continue to reveal my employer's private affairs to you."

"No?" Ward replied. There was still that note of malicious amusement in his voice. "Not even if we cross your palm with another hundred dollars?"

There was a short silence. "Well, sir, something might be arranged," Smithers said softly.

"You're right, Smithers; something is going to be arranged," Ward replied briskly. "When you took the hundred, Smithers, you shouldn't have given us that sheet of paper with Kever's scribbles on it. What he had written, Smithers, was just a few idle words without significance, scrawled idly while he was thinking hard; but it happened to give us a pointer. Kever would be annoyed to think you had sold it to us. You should have told us about it, not given it to us. You understand what I mean, don't you?"

"You couldn't——" the steward gasped.

"You're wrong, there, Smithers. We could send it to him, with a full explanation of how we'd gotten it. The thing's of no value to us now, and Kever knows we're gunning for him. No, Smithers, plainly your wages have ceased, but your work has just begun. We need a spy on the *Valhalla* and—— Do you see that?"

Ward's shrill voice had suddenly become plainly threatening.

There was a sudden shriek inside the room. Immediately, with a report like a gun, the door flew open. Smithers, with another shriek, burst onto the porch. His fat, round body seemed to shoot off the porch like a projectile, without the aid of his legs. He thudded on the sedge grass and then plunged on, blindly, toward the road. Something more than Ward's voice had frightened Smithers.

Paul's eyes leaped to the doorway. A thin little man crouched there, illumined from within. He was motionless, save for his right hand, which held an automatic that weaved to and fro, commanding the grass. He seemed to be waiting for his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom.

"Stop, you fool!" he cried. "Stop or I'll——"

The voice was that of Ward and there was rage, a deadly, unreasoning rage in it. Paul, on pure impulse, leaped for him and struck down the leveled pistol.

Despite the stunning surprise of that attack from the side, the small man recovered promptly. Snarling, he sprang at Paul. Like a creature with claws he seemed to fasten himself, hand and foot, to the pilot's larger form.

"Young! Young!" he shrieked, as Paul began to shake him off. "Club him! Or shoot, you fool. Shoot!"

Another man, a man with a flattened nose and a broad face tapering off into a small chin, had rushed out onto the porch. His eyes were peering uncertainly in the darkness but revealed the glint of blue steel.

With a final wrench Paul plucked off his assailant. He half flung, half pushed the man into Young's arms as he came plunging toward the struggle. Whirling, Paul reached to the flooring for the gun he had knocked from Ward's hand. To his surprise he found that Ward had already kicked or fought his way clear of Young and was down on his knees. Even as Paul's hand reached out, Ward's darting fingers caught up the pistol. Behind Paul, Young's gun boomed out and a narrow plank near his head suddenly disintegrated.

Paul waited no longer. He leaped off the porch. With doubled body he pelted through the marsh grass just as Smithers had done. Shot after shot boomed out after him, but he heard no whistle of bullets near him. They had lost sight of him.

"Lovely bunch!" he muttered, slackening his pace and listening for sounds of pursuit. "I suppose I should have knocked 'em both out and eaten 'em without salt or pepper, but I'm glad I didn't try too long. Young couldn't have missed my head by much."

Breathing heavily, he walked back along the dismal road, but not without an occasional look behind. At Halford he made his way to the docks and looked about for a boat. He must warn Keever of these conspirators—all of them.

"All?" he asked himself. "Must I? Why does a girl like Joyce Penfield have to mix herself up with such things? Maybe I'd better keep her out of the mess until I've talked to her."

He glanced down the harbor toward the distant anchorage of the *Valhalla*. Then he looked again, more sharply. There were plenty of glittering lights around the Halford Yacht Club anchorage. But farther out, where the riding light of the *Valhalla* should have gleamed, there was on the water only a silver path leading up to the moon.

The *Valhalla* had moved on.

"Sailed—without her steward," Paul commented. "That must mean that she'll be back in a day or so, anyhow. I guess Keever's safe for the night."

With a guilty feeling of relief he hailed a taxicab to take him back to his seaplane.

CHAPTER V.

AMBUSH!

THE next morning was not too good for flying? Gray clouds hung over the Sound. The banks of mist extended reaching fringes down to within a few hundred feet of the earth.

Paul Thorne kept his ship roaring along in the clear air just under the cloud banks. Despite the low ceiling he was running off a hundred-mile test for straightaway speed with a new pair of wing-tip pontoons.

Paul had warmed the ship up for the

tryout by running across the Sound to Halford to tell Kever of his discoveries, but the *Valhalla* had not returned to her anchorage. Then he had started the test hop. He was in a hurry to complete this job. Although Van Ryn was never satisfied with his own creations, Paul had won his reluctant admission that the ship was proving itself almost as fast as he could make it. But Van was still holding out his approval of the pontoons.

Paul grinned, though a bit ruefully, as he recognized the Connecticut coast town that was fifty miles from Brig Point. He noted the time as he passed a lighthouse offshore, swung the ship up on its wing tip and headed homeward.

"If I let Van get away with it he'd spend three years more on this job to add about seven miles an hour to its speed," he confided to the wind stream that was swirling around his head. "I've got to be practical for two and treat him rough. It's time to do something with this plane."

His grin merged slowly into a frown. Thorne had come to see that the Thorn-ryn partnership was running into a thicker and more bewildering mist than the one just over his head. Van's little stake was gone, and practically all his own as well. To show for it they had a tiny plant and a fine ship. The plant was worth little but the ship was worth a great deal. The trick was to cash in on it without selling it outright. Neither partner would agree to part with the ship. It was their pride; their life. But how could they start production? That was the question that had suddenly crystallized in Paul's mind since his talk with Julius H. K. Kever.

It was all very well for Kever to talk about retaining control of the ship, but he had not told them how to do that and still rent or build a factory, fill it with men and machine tools, and manufacture ships, all without money.

They had planned vaguely to attract capital and interest in the ship by entering it in the Harmsworth Reliability Cup and mopping up competitors. They still intended to win that contest, but a definite connection between victory and quantity production was entirely lacking.

Paul was still mulling this over as, about halfway back to Brig Cove, he noted that the clouds were getting lower. Almost imperceptibly they were reaching toward earth. Though he held his altitude to keep his speed constant he turned a vigilant eye downward to make sure that the mist and water did not meet. If they did, he would be flying through a fog and forced to make a blind landing.

Steering by compass, Paul kept his motor revving at an unvarying rate, and through occasional holes in the vapor saw enough of the drab coast line to check his position.

Off a buoy marking a ledge beyond Brig Point he completed his run. Making a quick note, he cut his motor and glided in to cut over the point. His eyes, turned downward, caught a glimpse of a white ship anchored well out beyond the headland. He looked again and recognized Kever's beautiful schooner.

"He's come to pay a visit," Paul decided. "Now I can warn him that his enemies are active. But——"

He leaned far over the side and stared down at Brig Point. Ragged wisps of mist below him somewhat obscured his view, but he made out, nevertheless, that Joyce's disreputable old car was not there. Neither, as far as he could see, was the girl herself. His disappointed eyes swept down to the rocks at the extreme tip of the point. Suddenly he made out the figure of a man. He was standing upright on a flat rock, with his arms doubled up to his face.

"He's using a pair of glasses!" Paul murmured. "And he's watching Kee-

ver's yacht. I wonder if that means anything."

As the ship swept closer to him the watcher below heard it coming. He jerked his head upward. Paul got an impression of a white face above a small gray beard. Then, moving over the rocks with an attempt at haste, the man took refuge among the nearest trees.

"Isn't anxious to be seen!" Paul muttered. "That may be one of the gang."

He glided on and picked up the diminutive Thornryn plant ahead. Then he made out the *Valhalla's* mahogany tender tied up at the landing stage. There were three men in it.

Looking again, he caught a glimpse of the big, familiar figure of Keever on the platform in front of the hangar. He was alone, and walking toward his motor boat.

Paul's eyes suddenly squinted and focused with extreme attention on the tender. There was something queer about the attitude of the three men in it. One, a man in white uniform, was lying supine upon the floor boards. His arms and legs were flung apart and he was motionless. The other two, in darker clothes, were crouching, with their heads below the gunwale. There was in their positions a strained, menacing vigilance.

Paul, a hundred feet above them in the air, sensed that at once. Ward and Young! The thought stiffened him in his seat. Coming in out of the clouds with a silenced motor, he could see everything, but Keever, on the pier, saw only a deserted boat. It was an ambush!

Paul's hand leaped to the throttle. He thrust the stick from him. The ship plunged downward. He latched back his throttle. As if he were aiming a gun, Paul aimed the seaplane at the motor tender.

From tense inaction the scene below burst into instant turbulence. The larger of the two attackers with a single

glance upward, cut loose at Keever with an automatic. The other man, with snakelike agility, whipped an arm skyward and poured a stream of fire at the diving seaplane.

It was quick work on their part, but Paul's swoop had warned Keever.

None too soon, Paul pulled back upon the stick. Another instant's delay would have sent the seaplane nose foremost through the tender in the slime of the bottom.

As it was, Paul got the ship out of the power dive at the very moment when he expected to hear his pontoon smash down on the boat. At a terrific speed he shot along over the surface, far beyond the tender. Banking steeply, he kicked the seaplane's nose around and stormed back.

Keever had a pistol in his hand now and was charging the boat. Both men fired at him. He bent low as he ran, to get the planking of the dock between his body and the barking pistols. The smaller gunman—Ward, Paul guessed—ceased firing and leaped into the control seat of the speed boat. He thrust it into gear and opened the throttle wide. The tender spurted away from the dock before Keever was within ten feet of it.

Paul, banking again, swirled around to pursue. But the small man steering the tender had no intention of matching its speed against the seaplane's. He wrenched the wheel around and sent the boat headlong toward the nearest side of the cove. It struck the beach hard and ran half its length out of the water. The two men, half flung, half jumping, landed on the sand. They picked themselves up instantly and clambered up the rocky shore line. As Paul shot overhead they raced into the cover of the pines.

In a ship with a low speed of fifty miles an hour it was not possible to follow or search out fugitives moving on foot in the woods. Paul, after a single circle over the trees with his eyes fixed

fruitlessly upon the impenetrable screen of green boughs, landed hastily.

Keever, with a mechanic or two beside him, was kneeling upon the landing stage as Paul taxied up to it. He leaped ashore with the anchor rope.

"Hurt?" he asked.

The millionaire had ripped up the right leg of his trousers to get at a wound in his calf. He turned an undisturbed face to Paul and continued to wrap his handkerchief around his bleeding leg.

"Just a flesh wound," he explained. "Not much more than a burn, in fact. I don't know whether to cuss you out for spoiling things or thank you for saving my life, young man. I knew there was something queer awaiting me at the tender."

"You knew it?" Paul exclaimed.

Keever nodded. "Jessup, the boatman, wasn't in sight. And the motor was running. Jessup is always in sight and he doesn't idle the motor unless I tell him to do so. Yes, I knew."

Paul Thorne looked keenly at Julius H. K. Keever and Keever returned the glance with cool assurance. "I wanted to settle the thing," he said imperturbably. "But I wasn't expecting them both. And I didn't score a single hit. Not one!"

Certainly Keever looked like a fighting man, with his broad shoulders, his deep chest, his lionlike face, and his firm chin with the vertical furrow scoring it. His eyes were mild enough; but it was a deceptive mildness, Paul realized, like the mildness of his deep voice.

"Do the police know——" Paul began

"The police!" said Keever scornfully. "Those two are escaped convicts. But does that prevent them from walking abroad in the daylight and laying traps for me? They're too clever for the police."

In the beached motor boat, not two hundred yards away, Rip Bronson sud-

denly popped up and hailed Mr. Keever. "Jessup's coming round. He got a hard rap on the skull but he's all right."

Keever raised a hand in acknowledgment. "Good!"

Grant van Ryn, panting hard and followed by Ike Smith, came out of the woods. His clothes and his face alike showed the effects of a chase through the bushes. He climbed up on the landing.

"Those—those murderous sneaks got away!" he said with furious indignation. "Got away in an old Ford hidden on the other side of the woods."

"An old Ford?" Paul muttered. "Parked in the woods?"

He had not had time to tell Van Ryn of Joyce Penfield and the old roadster that she had left among the trees.

"Parked in the woods," Van Ryn confirmed. "A roadster!" He turned to Keever. "Who are these men?"

"Two mail swindlers and general bad eggs named Jim Ward and Dick Young," Keever answered. "I had them jailed once for defrauding hundreds of unfortunate people in a Florida land-fraud game. The Federal authorities have their description."

"I'll call up the State police at once," Van Ryn declared. "They may pick them up before they get off the island."

Mr. Keever shrugged his shoulders as Van Ryn hurried into the office. "Engineers have methodical minds," he commented good-humoredly. "If a man shoots at you, have him arrested. Unfortunately those two undoubtedly prepared their exit. They're cured of being arrested."

"Have they any accomplices?" Paul asked tensely.

"I can't think of any one else who would take up killing me in a serious way," Keever replied lightly. "But judging by the letter that your partner showed me just now these two are vindictive enough alone. Imagine threatening you merely for associating with me!"

I presume I'd better be moving away from here."

Paul laid a hand on his arm as Keever, with a smile, turned toward the beach. "Don't go on our account," he said. "There was a man on Brig Point watching your yacht intently through binoculars. And I have something else to tell you, too."

Keever laughed. "People are always watching my yacht through glasses," he said. "The *Valhalla* isn't a bad-looking schooner."

Paul nodded. "That might have been it, though he ducked into cover when I passed overhead," he said. "And——"

"So would I duck, if you came over too close. You pilots have no idea how near and how formidable an airplane overhead appears." He waved a hand in a wide gesture of dismissal. "Let's forget it all," he urged. "They'll take to their holes for a long time after this failure."

Paul Thorne shook his head resolutely. "I'm not satisfied that your crash in the Sound was an accident. And I have reason to believe that there are more people concerned in this attack today than you think. If I were you I wouldn't forget it."

Julius H. K. Keever looked at the sober-faced pilot with eyes grown suddenly keen. "You have reason to believe," he repeated. "What does that mean? More threatening letters?"

"No," Paul answered slowly. "Not more letters. I—I'm not yet at liberty to tell you how I know, but I am confident that Jim Ward and Dick Young have allies. I, for example—I know positively that your steward, Smithers, has been bribed to act as a spy on you."

The millionaire laughed. "And that is why I sent Smithers ashore last evening with orders not to come back. I caught him going through my attaché case. Much good that sort of thing will do them."

He laid a hand on Paul's shoulder.

"Quit worrying about me," he counseled. "I'm too old a bird to be brought down by popgun methods. Look here, neither you nor your partner have been so impolite as to inquire why I am here. Well, I am here on business."

"Business," Paul repeated. He looked at the millionaire thoughtfully.

"Yes, business," Keever said. He chuckled as if he had not a care in the world. "No, I'm not trying to buy you or grab control. It isn't big business; it's small business."

He paused, seemingly to enjoy the curiosity Paul's face expressed, and smiled almost benevolently. He took out a bulging brown wallet and pulled a slip of paper from it. Then:

"Yes; small business, but important to me. I want to put in an order to buy the first seaplane you manufacture. Here's a check for five thousand as a first payment to clinch the matter. I think even Rip Bronson could fly a Thornryn seaplane!"

CHAPTER VI.

RIP ASKS A QUESTION.

HALF an hour later Julius H. K. Keever leaned back in the only arm-chair possessed by the Thornryn partnership and shook a monitory head at Paul and Van.

His great muscular bulk seemed to dwarf the small office to the size of a clothes closet and his expression of fatherly disapprobation made the partners seem like two boys in for a curtain lecture.

"You, Mr. Thorne, must be a very great pilot, and you, Mr. van Ryn, a most talented engineer," he declared ironically. "Only by crediting you with supreme genius and utter absorption in your respective fields can I understand your abysmal ignorance of finance. It is shocking!"

His smile took the sting out of his words.

"Shocking!" he repeated. "On your own say-so you have sunk practically your entire capital in creating a fine product, without having made the least effort toward providing for manufacture and distribution."

Neither Paul nor Van interposed any defense just then. Mr. Keever's voice was authoritative and he made it plain that he wished to convey his opinion without interruption.

"I presume you expected that the excited world would make a path to your door as soon as the ship was built," he said. "Well, let me inform you that both Mr. Emerson and his celebrated mousetrap theory are out of date. The world won't make a path to anybody's door unless that person not only has something good but has also, by scientific merchandising, advised the world of that fact."

He paused, his eyes shifting from one to the other. "I will now anticipate your defense. You will say that you had to spend all your money on working out your seaplane, or else skimp on that part and produce an inferior ship."

Grant van Ryn nodded instant assent.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Keever violently. "You, Mr. van Ryn, have held highly important posts in the engineering departments of several of the largest airplane companies in the United States. You, Mr. Thorne, are one of the best-known and most successful pilots in this country. You possess the confidence of millions of people. And you, too, had an idea and a certain amount of money which you were prepared to stake on it."

"We didn't want to go to Wall——" began Paul.

"You didn't have to go to Wall Street, if by that you mean you didn't want to sell out to some banker and become salaried employees of a company," Mr. Keever said with emphasis. "It isn't one man with a million dollars who finances new projects these days. It's a million men with one dollar that do it."

He leaned forward. "Do you understand? You should have said to the general public: 'Here is an idea for a better type of airplane. It is presented to you at a time when there is an overwhelming and unsatisfied demand for planes. The men who are back of the idea and putting their own money in it are Paul Thorne, practical pilot, and Grant van Ryn, aeronautical engineer. They intend to control the company so that they may work out their idea unhindered. They point out to you that it is a speculation—since all new enterprises are speculations—but they consider the prospects bright. Do those of you who can afford to speculate wish to buy stock in this enterprise?'"

"How——" began Paul.

"It's done every day," Keever said, anticipating the question. "It's not works, but faith that new ventures are founded upon. You have a much better proposition to offer than most people that start companies."

Paul and Van looked at each other rather ruefully. They both had known vaguely that money was sometimes raised in some such way as this, but neither had connected what they knew with working out the Thornryn seaplane.

"The strange part of all this is that despite the serious blunder you have committed you can still do this to-morrow," Keever said tonelessly.

Both men looked at him eagerly.

"Now you've got a seaplane superior to anything now sold and a microscopic organization. You can put those facts forward, with some actual performance figures on the plane, and see if the public isn't willing to become your silent partner. I know the public will. And for incidental expenses you have the money I shall be glad to pay you in advance for the plane you will make for me."

"But—just how do we take the public in as a partner?" Grant van Ryn inquired, a trifle frostily. "Do we run

off a batch of stock certificates on a printing press and then go out with a bundle each under our arms and try to sell them along the public highway?"

"That's the rub," Paul Thorne agreed. "Maybe the public would buy stock in the Thornryn outfit, but we aren't salesmen."

Julius H. K. Keever chuckled.

"All that's standardized—just a matter of routine. The whole thing is handled in the financial district on a commission basis by what they call a house of issue—a firm that brings out and sells securities. The big thing is to get hold of an honest firm that won't try to charge you about a half or a third of the amount they get from the sale of the stock."

He nodded reflectively. "I can tell you of a dozen. But you must have friends or former business associates who can introduce you to a good company that has specialized in airplane stocks. Such a firm would have a big following of investors already interested in the future of aviation. There's Hallock, Spencer & Goddard, for instance."

Paul Thorne thought hard. It seemed very simple. "But if we sell the stock to the public how do we know that we will remain in control of the company?" he inquired.

"That is simple, too. You have two classes of stock. One class consists of founders' stock, or whatever you wish to call it, which has the voting privilege. You need only issue ten shares of this, and each of you will hold five shares.

"The stock you sell to the public is common stock. You specify that it is nonvoting. The average stockholder doesn't care about voting; what he wants is dividends. You can issue a hundred thousand shares, or more, just as you wish."

Keever paused again, as if to permit this to sink in. He smiled genially at their bewildered faces and then went on:

"Or, if you prefer, issue only one

class of stock and retain fifty-one per cent for yourselves, as compensation for your plane and your expenditure of time and money. It amounts to the same thing. I suggest that you figure on raising a million, or perhaps two million net for your new factory."

Both Paul and Van had listened with unswerving attention to all this. When Julius H. K. Keever spoke of a million dollars he did so casually, as if this were no great sum. And the personality of the man, virile and commanding, was such as to lend verisimilitude to his attitude. It was apparent that to Keever, a million was no great sum; in his presence it did not appear so tremendous an amount of money even to the two partners, who had now not a thousandth part of a million.

Nevertheless, some stubborn, fundamental clinging to reality caused Paul Thorne to ask, rather feebly:

"A million dollars! But—but where's the catch in all this? How—how is it possible that we can get a million dollars just—just by asking for it?"

"Ah!" Keever leaned forward and looked at them with sudden sternness. "There is a catch. I'm glad you realize it. You don't get a million—or two million. You borrow it. And on that million you must pay dividends. If you haven't complete faith in the seaplane, drop this stock company right now.

"You're risking a lot more than the people who lend you the million. You're risking your reputations. You're pledging yourselves to devote all your time and all your talents to the Thornryn company. If you don't make the company a success your stockholders and the public at large will regard you as either rascals or fools. You'll be excoriated in the newspapers, sued in the courts, perhaps jailed for swindling."

Keever stopped and pointed soberly toward the landing stage where he had so recently fought for his life. "Those two who attacked me—Ward and Young

—promoted a Florida land company. They sold stock and they sold land. The stock was no better than the land, which was worthless. I am convinced that they were swindlers, and knew that they were swindlers.

"Supposing they actually acted in good faith, but failed? What happened to them? They went to jail. Their lives are wrecked; they are hunted men; they are so desperate and so careless of life that they attempt to murder me, whom they regard as their persecutor. Take warning! Those two are not happy men. You two will not be happy men unless this seaplane is all that you say it is."

This was a new Keever, with all the jovial good humor and lightness gone from his stern, lined countenance. Neither partner flinched or permitted his eyes to waver from his face.

"The seaplane's all right," Paul Thorne said emphatically. "It's two or three years ahead of its time. There's no doubt about that."

"We aren't afraid to go ahead, sir," Grant van Ryn put in. "Barring some unusual misfortune, we can't fail to build and sell ships by the dozen, perhaps by the hundred, now that aviation has really come into its own."

Keever relaxed. He smiled at them and stood up. "Good!" he said. "I'm glad to see that you're confident. I have no more doubts about that seaplane than you have. I wouldn't have ordered one for myself if I had. But I wanted you to see clearly what you are letting yourself in for."

"That plane can't fail!" Paul Thorne asserted.

"I'm delighted to hear it," Keever declared genially. "Why? Because I'm going to be your largest minority stockholder. I know a good investment when I see one."

He moved toward the door and they followed. "But think this over," he warned them. "Get some advice. That

plan has lots of disadvantages. It's a moral as well as a financial hazard."

As Keever emerged into the shop with the partners, Rip Bronson slid off a workbench and walked over to him.

"The motor boat's afloat again, sir," he said. "She leaks some but she hasn't any holes in her."

"Good!" said Keever. He shook hands heartily with the partners. They walked with him toward the landing. "I'm running across the Sound to Halford now. I have some gentlemen coming aboard for luncheon. But I'll be back to-morrow; I want to talk you into letting me have one of these three experimental seaplanes instead of making me wait till your factory is built. We're lost without a seaplane, aren't we, Rip?"

Rip Bronson, walking behind his boss, directed a covetous look at the swift new machine that Paul Thorne had been testing that morning. "Sure, we're lost without one," he agreed.

"And then again, we may be lost with one, as we were yesterday, eh, Rip?"

Bronson writhed in silence.

The words recalled to Paul Thorne that he had not yet spoken fully to Keever about his theory of the flying boat crash on the previous day.

"I meant to suggest to you that that accident——" he began; but Keever, stepping into the motor tender, silenced him with a laugh.

"Before you returned Mr. van Ryn told me what you thought of that crash," the millionaire said. "I'm not sure I agree with you as to the cause, but at least I'm obliged to you for thinking about it."

Rip Bronson, at his employer's heels, looked back inquisitively and not too amiably at Paul Thorne.

The boatman, the unfortunate Jessup, was at the wheel of the tender despite a bump on the back of his head. At a word from Keever the boat churned away from the pier.

Rip Bronson waited until they had progressed only a hundred feet toward the *Valhalla* before he leaned back to address his boss.

"What did he"—he jerked his head contemptuously toward the receding figure of Paul Thorne—"say about that crack-up yesterday?"

Keever glanced at Rip fleetingly. His expression was shrewd as he averted his face again.

"He said he thought you'd crashed the boat on purpose," he answered easily. "He seems to think you don't like me, Rip."

"He's trying to grab my job!" Rip burst out.

"You flatter your job, Rip, if you think a peerless young hero like Paul Thorne wants it." Keever's face had a sardonic twist.

Bronson frowned again. "What were you talking to him and that moonfaced partner o' his so long for?" he demanded.

Julius H. K. Keever chuckled. "I was talking about morals," he explained, and the derision in his countenance persisted. "Beware of the man who speaks of morals, Rip. He is probably talking morality because that is the only form of exercise his morals ever have."

The diminutive pilot eyed his employer with a knowing air. "You going to gyp them?" he inquired.

Keever considered the question judicially. "No, I wouldn't say that," he answered. He turned toward shore and waved a hearty farewell to Paul Thorne before he went on:

"But I'm certainly not going to do them any good."

"How about these other guys, Ward and Young?" Rip persisted. "What are you going to do to them?"

Keever smiled with unfailing indulgence at this probing. "They're different," he explained. "I shall cherish them. Any fool can acquire friends but it is rare for a man to have two such

bitter enemies on call, as it were. I may find them useful a little later on in my new aeronautical enterprise. They certainly came in handy in my Florida operations."

Bronson's small eyes grew larger in his pointed, insignificant head. "I don't get it," he puzzled. "How——"

"If you got it, I wouldn't be talking to you, Rip," his employer said urbanely. "You'll know more later."

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGE OF SIDES.

THE Halford Yacht Club was neither an exclusive nor a wealthy organization. Its membership list was composed largely of summer residents of the little Connecticut town who desired to play tennis on its four indifferent courts or to dance on Saturday night on its indifferent floor. They ignored the nautical activities of the club.

The fleet of the club, in consequence, was composed of a motley collection of small fry—sailboats and motor boats, with nothing much over thirty-five feet, save, of course, the magnificent schooner yacht of Julius H. K. Keever, Esq. Although the burgee flown by the *Valhalla* was that of a noted yacht club, Mr. Keever had shown his appreciation of the facilities afforded him as a visiting yachtsman by joining the Halford Club.

It was a gesture much appreciated by the governors of the club. A yacht club likes to have at least one yacht on its list.

Among the other craft not strictly of Halford whose owners had also become members of the club was a rather scabrous white thirty-footer motor cruiser of the type built and sold by the mile. None of the older members of the club were particularly interested in either the craft itself or the two yachtsmen who lived on her.

The names of the owners, as inscribed in the records of the club, were certainly

not Jim Ward and Dick Young. Nevertheless the two men who spent so much time aboard her, and who never came ashore in the daytime, were Keever's two enemies.

It was not a bad hiding place, the cabin cruiser, for two fugitives from Atlanta with a certain amount of money at their disposal. It had the advantage of being out of the way of the police and yet of being close to Julius H. K. Keever. From the boat's dirty portholes the *Valhalla* was visible not more than three hundred yards away. A few other boats swung at anchor between these two crafts, but little occurred on the schooner's deck or in her tender that was not observed aboard the dingy thirty-footer.

On a warm, sunlit day a week or so after the startling session of gunplay at the Thornryn plant, Ward and Young looked at each other warily in the cabin of the boat. There was a fine-weather haze over the water but neither man appeared to appreciate the advantages of being afloat during the stifling summer days.

Dick Young, with his thick, heavy body propped up in an unmade bunk, consigned another cigarette butt to the floor, rubbed his flattened nose and muttered an expletive. Days of close concealment had told on him. The veneer of manners he had once possessed had quite vanished.

"This cabin ain't as big as the quarters we had at Atlanta, and it's a damn sight hotter," he growled. His eyes, nondescript in color, slanted resentfully toward Jim Ward.

The smaller man, quite undisturbed by the heat, sat bolt upright on the other berth, with his short, thin legs tucked under him. His black hair, shining like melted tar, swept back from his forehead and followed the curve of his small head without a single strand in disorder. His white teeth, large and regular, gleamed in his muddy face as

he turned his head briskly toward his cabin mate.

"Why don't you go back to Atlanta, then?" he asked conversationally. "Your membership hasn't expired."

Young failed to see the joke. His eyes brooded on the floor boards. "I had his damn hog face right on the line o' the barrel and I missed him clean!" he muttered. "I can't dope that out."

He raised himself up to the small porthole, rubbed at it with his sleeve, and then glowered through it at the motionless *Valhalla*. His partner studied him with wise, bright black eyes.

"Maybe I can help solve your problem, Dick," Ward said suddenly. "You had cartridges in your gun, but no bullets."

"What!" cried Young. He projected himself from his berth in a single heave of his body and stood over Ward, glaring fiercely. "How do you know? Who switched on me?"

Jim Ward gave no sign of fear of the big man towering so threateningly over him.

"I did. I did the switching, Dick."

"By God!" cried Dick Young. His big hand fell on Ward's thin shoulder like a blow and his increasing grip wrenched the smaller man out of his bunk. "I been wondering about you, Ward! So you sent me up against Keever without no lead in my gun!"

"Yes," Ward admitted. "But it was only fair that you didn't have lead in your gun because Keever didn't have any in his. I had bullets in mine, and I plugged him once in the leg just to give him a slight jolt." He laughed softly to himself. "Hasn't it occurred to you, bright boy, that he'd have killed us both if he'd been shooting anything but blanks?"

Young's eyes bulged. He did not relax his grip.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "Spill it all, if you've got anything to spill. And be quick, too, you crossing weazel,

or I'll shift my fingers over to your gullet."

"I'll start when you've taken that filthy ham off my shoulder," Ward retorted. His eyes gleamed. His voice rose shrilly, almost to a shriek. "Sit down!"

Young's grip relaxed. Sullenly he slumped back upon his mattress. His pale eyes were still vindictive.

"What happens if you succeed in your very laudable ambition to kill Keever?" Ward asked calmly.

"He goes to hell, and burns there!" Young rasped. His lips curled upward in an expression of most savage hate. His splayed nostrils dilated and his whole face became hideous with delight. His eyes seemed to be seeing something.

"Perhaps," said Jim Ward. "I join you in your orthodoxy. But what happens to us? Has the healing tonic of liberty so far restored your sanity that you can think of something else besides killing Keever?"

Reluctantly Dick Young dismissed that horrible vision that had dwelt with him so long in prison. Slowly his face lost its animation and he looked toward his mate.

"Well?" he demanded.

"That's better," said Ward. "Listen! It amused Keever to make us officers of a big corporation, to take us into his clever plans—though not all the way in—and then to grab everything and let us go to jail to pay his shot as well as our own. That's Keever. Deep stuff. Finesse. Amusement as well as money."

"Put up a statue to the——" Young snapped.

"I would—if it would help us get something back. But here's what I'm trying to beat into your skull: The way to get Keever is not to kill him right now. That would make us penniless fugitives without any more help from Penfield—chased harder than they're chasing us now—with nothing at the end

of it but a bullet in the head from a cop or from your own gun—when we got tired of running or they caught up. Keever'd enjoy that. Alive or dead—he'd enjoy us slinking and running the rest of our lives."

"I'll risk it," Young muttered.

Jim Ward surveyed him intently.

"How about making him do the slinking and running for a while?" he suggested. "Can any man—even Keever—stand knowing that any minute a bullet may go crashing through his head? We can wear him out!"

He paused, and read no violent disagreement in Young's face. Then he continued:

"If he gets enough strong hints from us, the time's going to come when he'll be glad to dicker with us—pay us off. Once we get back a wad of cash we can hire enough lawyers to square our conviction and our escape, too."

Young shook his head. "I won't sell him his life," he said stubbornly.

"I'm not asking you to," Ward replied, as patient as ever. "What I mean is that we should break his nerve and get hold of some of his money—our money. Then, when we've got ourselves fixed up, we can square it—your way—with him. Let me arrange that."

Young shook his head at that last sentence, but Ward went on:

"You can do the killing, but you don't want the glory of it, do you? I'll pass the credit for it on. There's others besides you and me with a motive for killing Keever."

"Who?" demanded Young, shooting a glance through his yellow eyebrows at Ward.

"Our friend and associate, the Honorable Major Carter Loomis Penfield," Ward answered smoothly. "Certainly Keever raised more hell with his life than he did with ours, even."

Young grunted.

"And the major's rather ancient—he can be spared," Ward pointed out. He

emitted a high note of laughter. "Joyce is old enough to get on without a guardian, now."

Young looked up at Ward again, a single darting slant of his eyes, but full of keen estimation. Then he studied that insinuation.

Quickly Ward broke in on his obvious thoughts of the girl. "The major will be easy to frame," he suggested.

"Well——" Young said unwillingly.

"I'm glad you're beginning to use your head again," Ward approved. "We've got to work out the plan now." He passed a packet of cigarettes to Young and leaned forward confidentially.

"It would be most unhealthy for us to try any close-contact stuff with Keever now. He's on the alert."

Young muttered grudging assent.

"I staged that party at the Thornryn plant to jolt Keever and also to prove to you that killing Keever right now is too much for us. If I hadn't persuaded Smithers to replace the clip of steel-jacketed bullets in his automatic with blanks you'd be in a morgue now."

"I wonder if Keever caught on to that," Young speculated.

"We can't tell, but we know we need another spy on the *Valhalla*, and we need one badly. We haven't sighted Smithers on the yacht since the night he got away from the shack and Thorne jumped us."

Young scratched his pointed chin, scowling at this recollection. "I'd like to know how that damned aviator found out at the shack," he muttered. "It was him, all right; his face showed in the lamplight as he reached down for your gun."

"He got there by following Joyce," Ward answered. "He must have become suspicious of her. But it's turned out right for us. Now Joyce and the major are both dead sure that Thorne is doing Keever's spy work as well as hooking up with him to gyp the public

in this new company." He gestured toward a newspaper clipping and Young picked it up.

"The Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation!" Young said with a sarcastic snarl. "If Keever works his racket from the background, as usual. President Paul Thorne's office will be in Atlanta inside three months."

"That's where you're wrong!" Ward declared, with a meaning grin. "Here's how we jar Keever and square things with Brother Thorne at the same time. Instead of everything going splendidly with the new company at first, they'll go sour—very sour. Maybe Thorne or that other bird will get killed. The stock won't rise. If accidents happen nobody's going to blame a couple of guys in a motor boat anchored in Brig Cove."

Young stared at his partner with sudden admiration. "And I thought you were yellow!" he muttered. "You mean—we——"

Ward nodded. "If necessary," he said. "It won't be anywhere as risky as getting Keever and it will throw a real scare into him. He'll come across when we ruin his plans, smash his dupe before he can use him, and continue to let him know that he's never safe. That kind of worrying will get any man in time."

"I guess you're right," Young admitted. "Bleed him—first one way and then the oth——" He stopped and raised his head alertly.

"What's that? Is it——"

The sound that had halted his enunciation of policy was the increasing roar of a motor. He started for the cockpit but Ward pulled him back. "Stop, you fool!" he cried. "D'you want to be spotted?"

Peering through the tiny portholes, they waited. Neither man could see the plane, but its roar set up a drumming in the cabin. Their watching developed into acute apprehension as the explo-

sions grew to a thunderous cacophony. Then, abruptly, the motor stopped. The scream of wires, the whistle of a propeller, took its place; but the change merely emphasized the nearness of the plane.

Suddenly, through the open cabin doors, the seaplane leaped into their sight. It had passed close over them and now slid clumsily into the water just astern of the boat. It bounced violently and then smacked down on the water again. Bounding and falling, the seaplane finally came to rest on the water. It was a Thornryn.

The ship, as it lay motionless, was framed in their sight in the narrow space between the awning over their cockpit and the stern rail of their boat. They saw Keever in the forward compartment turning to his pilot. He shook his clenched fist and bellowed angry profanity at the man at the controls.

The two watchers then realized that the blundering landing had been as narrow an escape for the seaplane as for themselves.

"That's not Thorne; it's Rip Bronson," Ward whispered. "Keever always did give Bronson hell."

Young did not answer. His lips were parted in snarling, uncontrollable fury. One hand was reaching toward his hip pocket.

"Wait!" Ward commanded. With frantic haste he pushed shut the cabin doors. "Remember! Money first—then get him!"

Young's rage subsided as Keever was shut out of his sight. "All right," he muttered. "But——"

"Keep still!" Ward commanded contemptuously. "I want to see this. It may mean——" He did not finish, but gently eased open the doors again, so that they might see.

Keever's spasm of wrath was over. Bronson opened his throttle and the seaplane surged over the water toward the *Valhalla*. Near the schooner a cork

buoy bobbed on the waves. Bronson taxied toward this, cut his motor, and slid hastily from his cockpit down onto the seaplane's float to reach the mooring. Hanging onto a strut, he stretched an arm out for the buoy, but missed it. The seaplane drifted past it.

The trifling mishap roused Keever to another outburst. He leaned over the side and waved a menacing fist at his pilot. Then he shouted an order to the yacht. No command was needed, for the tender was already on its way toward them. The men in the motor boat tossed Rip Bronson a line and towed the plane back to the mooring.

"Here's where Bronson gets more hell," Ward muttered. "The old bull's wild with rage. Look at that!"

As soon as Keever had stepped aboard the motor boat he had turned and gripped his diminutive pilot by the shoulders. He shook him violently, like a mastiff worrying a rabbit.

Rip Bronson, squirming free, suddenly bounced back toward his employer. He was in a blind rage. He flung his short arms at Keever's face, his fists doubled up and flailing.

Keever stepped in, seized him by the ribs, and hurled him down into the bottom of the boat. Rip lay still a moment. When he jumped up a pistol in his hand sent a glint of blue across the water.

Keever struck out. His powerful right arm, sweeping around like a scythe, caught Rip on the side of the head. The force of the blow knocked the smaller man clear over the side of the boat. He disappeared under water. A moment later his head broke the surface. He was conscious and quite undaunted. His voice, rasping, furious, babbled invectives as he swam toward the boat.

His master leaned over the side. The roar of his laughter came to Ward and Young, undaunted by distance. Rip wrenched off his helmet and flung it

violently up at Keever's down-turned head. The wet leather smacked in the millionaire's face.

Instantly Keever's anger revived. "Swim—if you want to come aboard!" he bellowed. He motioned to the sailor at the wheel and the screw of the motor boat buried Bronson's head in a gush of foam. The boat drew rapidly away from him.

Treading water, Rip Bronson shouted something that was drowned out by the exhaust of the motor. Then he turned his back on the yacht, tender, and seaplane and swam toward the nearest moored boat. He rested by it and looked across the water toward shore. It was plain that Rip had resigned.

The tender followed an undeviating course to the *Valhalla*.

"Keep away from that porthole!" Ward cautioned Young. "He may see us! I guess Keever's lost a pilot, all right."

"It's about time Bronson got sore," Young said. "Keever always handed him a lot of nasty chatter, and he'd take it like a sheep."

"Looks as if he'd been saving it all up for Keever," Ward muttered thoughtfully. "Rip would have plugged him in another minute."

Ward risked a glance through the porthole. Rip Bronson was swimming toward them, for their boat was near his course toward shore. Ward closed the cabin doors.

"Keep quiet now," he warned. "He's headed this way and he may rest at our mooring."

They waited, with ears alert for sounds outside. Soon they heard the regular splash of the swimmer's arms and feet. It drew very close. They heard a hand thump against the side of the boat, and then a scraping.

"He's coming aboard now!" Ward breathed. "Not a sound!"

By ear they could trace Rip Bronson's movements. He was panting hard as he

pulled himself up over the side and into the cockpit. When he recovered his breath he broke out into a whispering flood of profanity. He cursed Keever and then cursed his boots, which he was trying to get off. It was strange to hear him revealing his angry, incoherent thoughts aloud.

"If I had another gun I'd blow his head off!" he babbled. "I'll get one—I'll get one—and when I do I'll ask him to take me back. Then—the swine! The dirty——" He raged on, but always his mutterings came back to the subject of a gun.

"Where'll I get one?" he whined. "I've waited too long to bump him off. Maybe there's a rifle or something on this——"

His hand touched the doors and pushed them back. He stuck his head into the cabin.

His babble came to an abrupt stop. He stared with small, popping eyes at the two men. Young's hand slid again toward his hip pocket. Ward gripped the hand silently, halting the movement.

"Ward!" muttered Rip Bronson. "Young!"

Slowly he started to withdraw. Then he stopped, and astonishment was succeeded by a grim vindictiveness on his face.

"I haven't seen you," he said hoarsely. "I'm through with Keever. Here's a tip for you. Keever's careless on the yacht. He takes his coat off. His automatic's in his coat pocket. If I don't get him first you're welcome to him. Good-by!"

"Wait!" Ward said softly. "Come in, Rip. I want to talk business to you a minute. If you really want to get Keever maybe we can show you a way to cash in, as well."

Rip Bronson appeared to hesitate. He looked quickly toward the yacht. "I'm afraid they can see me," he objected.

"You can swim on in a minute,"

Ward persisted. "He'll think you are resting. Come in for a moment. It'll pay you."

"All right," Rip agreed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHALLENGE.

PAUL THORNE, president of the Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation, should have been test-hopping a sea-plane, but he was paddling a canoe. His brain reproached him at every stroke of the paddle, but he kept on, nevertheless.

In the midst of multitudinous duties and problems Paul had been carrying on with himself an exasperating and futile debate. The subject was whether a girl with the delicate beauty and impertinent charm of Joyce Penfield could be as bad as he had proof that she was. An accomplice of assassins and a spy upon his own activities! And yet—was she as bad as that? He wanted to be certain that she was. Then he would forget her. At least he told himself that he would.

There was nothing of the carefree holiday maker about Paul as he shoved his borrowed canoe out toward the end of Brig Point.

Every day since the attack upon Keever on the Thornryn landing Paul had observed the glint of binoculars from the rocks of a tidal islet off Brig Point. Some one was looking across the crescent shore line at what was going on at the plant. And Paul had seen Joyce Penfield's blue canoe far out on the waters of the cove passing between the point and the little village of Brig Harbor. The old Ford roadster in which Ward and Young had escaped was no longer visible.

"I don't know what I'm going to say to her, but I'm going to say something!" Paul muttered. He dug his paddle viciously into the water and sent it swirling behind him. At the pace he

set he was not long in reaching his objective.

As Paul approached the islet he saw nothing of the girl. He circled it, looking for a spot where he could run his canoe alongside without holing it on the granite. There was a breeze from the southwest offshore, and choppy little waves just big enough to make a canoe dance were rolling across the cove and splashing up on the rocks. In the lee of the islet Paul saw a ledge sloping down into the water. He grounded the canoe and jumped into the shoal water.

Scrambling up the rocks, Paul suddenly came upon a little gray man sitting on a sort of natural platform overlooking the cove. Paul stared at him in disappointment. This must be Joyce's father—the man that Ward had addressed as major. Of Joyce there was no sign.

Old Penfield looked up at him abstractedly. "How do you do, sir?" he said in an uninflected voice. "You have chosen a pleasant place to come ashore."

Paul nodded. From his unagitated greeting, Penfield obviously took him for an exploring vacationist. But Paul recognized Penfield as the man on the point who had been keeping an eye on Keever's yacht on the day of the attack on the millionaire.

Seen close, Penfield conveyed an impression of grayness that was more than a color; it seemed to be the very tone of his personality. His suit, slightly shabby, was gray. So, too, were his eyes behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, his thinning hair, and his carelessly trimmed beard. Even his skin—the wrinkled, pallid skin of an old and weary man—had a tinge of that prevailing grayness in it. His expression was somber, and he looked almost ill.

A vague instinct of hospitality roused Penfield from his meditations and he gestured with a frail, slow hand toward the blue water and the green land be-

yond it. He spoke again in his soft, drawling voice:

"A lovely prospect. A real sweep of beauty and color."

"Yes," Paul agreed curtly. He had not come here to discuss landscapes with an old man.

"It is lovely, but I have seen more beautiful scenes, and far more vivid coloring," Penfield rambled on. "Deep blue water—far deeper blue than the bluest sky, shoaling to a translucent green that can never be seen this far north. Are you familiar with Florida, sir?"

"I've been there a few times," Paul answered. "I know the coloring you describe."

His eyes were fixed on a pair of powerful binoculars that lay beside Penfield. Those were the glasses with which Joyce and her father spied upon him. He had come at the wrong time to confront the girl. As for the father—Paul's eyes dropped upon Major Penfield with a mixture of pity and contempt. Not an antagonist to be feared—this gray old man with his talk of Southern scenery.

"Florida!" murmured Penfield. He was no longer speaking to Paul, but merely thinking aloud. "Jamesville! A lovely green land and a fine, gentle people. Friendly—trusting—too trusting. It would be warm there now, but not with a warmth that any reasonable man could dislike. Ah, a terrible thing, to have to leave such a town. Will—will we ever return?"

He ceased to speak and stared out over the water in a deep reverie. Sitting there with his head sunk on his chest, the shabby little man looked like a lonely Ishmael, an outcast from his people.

All at once he became aware of Paul Thorne's puzzled eyes upon him. He stood up abruptly, picked up the binoculars with a forced briskness and swept the cove in a perfunctory way.

"Yes, a fine view," he said, in a different voice. He stared steadily at the Thornryn plant. Then he turned the glasses toward Brig Harbor.

"Here comes my daughter—" he began with a sudden eager lift of the voice, but stopped himself and offered the glasses politely to Paul.

Refusing them with a word of thanks, Paul looked toward the blue canoe coming toward the islet from the inner end of the cove. It was moving rapidly because the wind was behind the paddler.

Paul was in a quandary. These were hard adversaries to fight, these two. They were protected by weakness and by sex, yet in a way they were deadly enough. He remembered their allies, whose eyes they were, as they crouched with automatics in their hands in Keever's tender. Weakness could be vicious, too, and so could woman.

Abruptly he said a word to Penfield and scrambled down to his canvas boat. He shoved off and stroked strongly toward the blue canoe that headed for the islet. It came on, steadily, making no effort to avoid him. Well out in the bay they drew together.

Paul Thorne swung his canoe around and brought it alongside the girl's. He grasped her gunwale and drew the two craft together.

Her color was high and she tilted her chin toward him defiantly, but she said nothing. Her blue eyes, bluer than ever in the midst of the blueness of sky and water, sparkled in spirited challenge. With his hand on her canoe, holding it and her powerless to move, he felt that she was more fragile than ever.

"I want to speak to you," he said curtly.

"I am quite unable to prevent it, out here—alone."

She made him seem heavy, brutal, unutterably crude; but he kept a tight grip upon the gunwale, nevertheless.

"I agree that your friends Ward and Young would make an adequate guard

for you ashore," he answered. "They're excellent—gunmen. I ran from them last time we met. But that is not what I want to say."

"No, it doesn't sound as if it was," she murmured.

He smiled. "True. But here's the point of this cowardly waylaying. I must tell you that I know that you and your father are watching us, Miss Penfield. I know that you are working with Ward and Young, those amiable convicts. We're prepared, and so is Kever. There's nothing to be gotten out of us. The game's up. Hadn't you better quit?"

He kept his eyes fixed on hers as he spoke. And she met his eyes with her head held high. Words trembled on her lips and rushed out the moment he ceased to speak:

"We really haven't started. We've tried to appeal to Kever and he met us with bullets—bullets! We've tried to warn you not to go into this miserable business, but your greed exceeds your honesty. You'll sell your reputation, your skill, your courage, for money! A lot of money, of course, but tainted money! You'll find we haven't started!"

Paul Thorne's steadfast jaw sagged almost imperceptibly. This spirited retort had some sort of conviction of right behind it. Or was it just emotion—feeling instead of reason—partisanship instead of right. He wished that he knew more about how girls thought.

"How much of that do you believe?" he demanded.

She made a quick little gesture, as if to imply that she had no other words to convince him. And then, immediately, she spoke:

"What are you selling to the public for two million dollars? That tiny shop and your seaplane. Is that a bargain for the poor people who buy your two hundred thousand shares of stock? Is it?"

Again the impetuosity of her attack

quite staggered him. He had come to accuse, and he had been accused. It was ridiculous, of course, but he could not have her charge him with roguery.

"They aren't paying that for the plant and the ship," he said. "They're paying it for——"

"For your reputation!" she flashed. "They know your name so you sell that to them. How much good to them is your reputation? It is valuable only to you—and you've put your price on it now! Two——"

"You don't understand," he insisted. "The stock——"

"But I do!" she broke in. "And others will understand, too. Others will be watching you soon! Kever's partner! You—an aviator who has been highly honored in this country!"

"Kever is my friend. Can you compare him to your friends?"

"They are innocent!" she cried. "They may be crude, of little education or culture, but they are honest. They are persecuted, pursued, but they are fighting bravely to prove their innocence. And they will, in spite of Kever; and in spite of his other—servants."

"You have been imposed upon," he declared. Her picture of Ward and Young roused his wrath. "Do honest men try murder?"

"Lies! Kever's lies! They have a right to defend themselves when he attacks."

"They are thugs!" he told her. "If that is a lie it is my lie, as well as Kever's."

She looked at him with withering scorn, but now he held his own in the matter of meeting eyes. "You have said what you wished to say, I presume," she said coldly. "Will you let me go now?"

He released the gunwale of her canoe.

"Think!" he said, sheering away. "Think! Find out what really happened there on our pier the other day. Find out about the other attack they made on

Keever, and how they tried to kill me over at Halford."

She did not answer until she had paddled several strokes toward the islet. Then she turned her head to him.

"If you and Kever are so wronged, why do you not urge the police to find Ward and Young?" she asked, across the widening gulf of water. "With money and influence on your side are you still afraid of the law?"

He did not reply to that challenge. They were too far apart about the facts for argument; their talk was merely accusation and counter accusation. What use was that? She thought him a swindler, and he knew her to be either a witless fool or an exceedingly clever adventuress. And this was the worst of it: that he could not believe her lacking in brains.

CHAPTER IX.

PERPLEXITIES.

BACK at the shop Paul Thorne put his elbows on his desk and his head in his hands. He had a great deal to do and he didn't feel at all like doing it. He wanted to think over everything the girl had said. There was nothing in it, of course.

Would the confounded, perplexing girl ever cease to trouble his mind? He doubted it. And hardly less peculiar than her connection with this gang was her father's. What had such a pathetic figure to do with would-be murderers?

"Jamesville, Florida!" Paul muttered. "That's where he came from and that's where he wants to return. Isn't that — Yes, that's the town that Cliff O'Farrell's living in!"

He picked up a telegraph blank and wrote a long message.

"Trust Cliff to come through with the answer!" he said, as he finished it. Cliff O'Farrell and he had been through some tight jams in the air—so tight that Cliff would do him a favor even if it involved the job of writing him a letter.

Temporarily relieved, he succeeded in turning his thoughts to his own affairs.

In the past two weeks bewildering things had happened very fast. The stock issue had been arranged with remarkable expedition.

Keever, always with that air of casualness, had done it all. He was like a Jinn to whom nothing was difficult. He had written for Paul at one sitting the letter in which Paul, as president of the company, supplied Hallock, Spencer & Goddard, Inc., with the data about the company and the seaplane on which the stock issue was based.

A golden, optimistic summary that letter had been, too. It was full of most complimentary references to the present plant, the present personnel, the amazing performance of the seaplane, and the need for immediate expansion.

Paul, reading it, had felt that the Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation was already a large, substantial and busy company. A bit dubiously he had suggested to Kever that the letter was really too optimistic. Kever had been highly amused.

"Pessimists can't sell stock," he pointed out. "You've got to look on the brighter side of your company or investors certainly won't. Hallock, Spencer & Goddard are entitled to some cheery information to work on. The seaplane's really good, isn't it?"

Paul Thorne had said emphatically that it was. He was prepared to prove that any day.

And while the issue was pending, Kever, as an advance payment on a block of stock he intended to buy, had presented them, through Hallock, Spencer & Goddard, with a certified check for a hundred thousand dollars.

"Get things going on this," he had advised them. "You tell me you need a flying field as well as a seaplane base. How about getting a long term lease on this flat tract of ground above the plant? There'll be no trouble about it."

And so it had proved. Keever was usually chary of making suggestions, but when Paul and Van consulted him they found their biggest problems melting away before his keen brain. They were out of their element in organizing a company and getting immediate delivery of the various machine tools and equipment they required; Keever was in his. He got what he wanted; his lifted eyebrows when a sales manager doubted his ability to make instant delivery seemed a sort of challenge and brought rapid results.

"A modest beginning, but plenty of room for rapid expansion," he told them, lounging lazily in a chair. "Don't be surprised at anything that happens to you. The demand for planes has just barely started. You ought to figure on a floor space or at least two hundred thousand square feet. You've got to organize a selling agency as a separate entity; run a few seaplane lines along the Atlantic coast and go after mail contracts. How about a training school for pilots here as well?"

Sitting there at his desk, Paul Thorne's mind reverted to the stock issue. They had divided the issue into ten shares of founders' stock, with voting privilege, and two hundred thousand shares of common. The common was in every way similar to the founders' stock save that it was nonvoting. It was offered at ten dollars a share on the open market. The Founders' stock Paul and Van Ryn shared equally. In the ownership of this lay the control of the company.

Keever had explained that it would be fair to place a value of about three hundred thousand dollars on the plant, seaplane and other assets which the company took over. The partners had demurred at this valuation and finally decided to make it two hundred thousand dollars, payable in stock. Of the remaining stock, one hundred and thirty thousand shares were put on the market

and a block of fifty thousand shares was held in the treasury of the company for later financing.

"And this silly girl accuses Van and me getting two million from the public for my name and the plane!" Paul muttered indignantly. "That shows how little she knows about finance—how unreasonably prejudiced she is against Keever."

Of course, to be just, the public was paying the Thornryn Company more than a million and a quarter dollars. The public was getting only stock for that money—stock with very little of tangible value behind it. Unless the company made good that money was lost irretrievably—the public would get nothing back. In a sense, Paul reflected, Joyce Penfield was right when she said he was selling his reputation. People bought stock because of his reputation and Paul would certainly have no reputation left if that stock did not become valuable.

The president of the Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation rose hurriedly from his desk. He had no intention of losing his reputation. He must work—work—work—to get something of tangible value back of that stock. They must soon have a modern factory producing efficient seaplanes and selling them at a reasonable profit.

He strode through the shop where a crowded band of draftsmen now sat at their boards, finishing up final plans for a plant.

On the landing stage he found his seaplane resting on its big-wheeled cradle, waiting his orders.

"Throw her in!" he commanded the mechanics, and the cradle rolled down the rails and deposited the seaplane in the water. At the present moment the Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation, having sold a seaplane to Julius H. K. Keever, had only two planes left. Paul, in addition to all the other details, was spending about six hours a day on those

experimental planes, testing, simplifying, changing and changing back again.

Every detail must be right and as simple as they could make it, for the ship was going into quantity production—so many a week—perhaps so many a day—and no changes possible. It must be right—just right—before the word was given that started men and mechanics to work on the first float, the first fuselage, the first pair of wings.

His continuous work in the air had to be done with great caution. The two ships were all that the Thornryn Aëronautical Corporation would have to show of its wares until the factory was ready for action. A minor crack-up would be serious; a major smash would be a disaster. Paul climbed into the cockpit as carefully as if he were getting into an eggshell.

News of this ship had spread abroad at the time of the stock issue. Paul had been startled by the number of articles in the newspapers and technical magazines. The publications seemed to pick information out of the air.

A good many old friends in the game were buying stock—betting on him, as they phrased it—and others were willing to buy ships on faith.

At this very minute the largest problem before Paul was in the first public demonstration. John Blythewood, president of the American Aërial Transit Corporation, had not asked for a showing of the new seaplane; he had demanded it.

The A. A. T. C. was a huge consolidation of a dozen smaller transport organizations and its president could not be refused. One man, he had the power to buy more seaplanes than Thornryn could hope to turn out in a year. Blythewood was hard-headed, impatient and dictatorial, but he was just. Paul had set the date, and the date was now only a week ahead.

And if the Thornryn seaplane came through that trial, there was a far more

grilling one just a week later. The seaplane must shed its float and wing-tip pontoon, take on landing wheels in their place, and invade the field of land planes. Paul and Van had determined to have a serious shot at the Harmsworth Reliability Cup. The contest for this trophy was governed by conditions that barred out flimsy racing ships with the single virtue of speed. The planes competing must have a specified factor of safety, must carry a load, and must demonstrate their speed over a considerable distance. In the final analysis, of course, the contest was a race—a race of four hundred miles. The ship that combined reliability with speed would win.

For a company whose highest ideal was dependability, the winning of that cup would mean success. Paul Thorne tightened his jaws.

But the cup race was in the future. The job ahead was the nerve-racking, delicate task of getting the ship into prime condition and keeping it in that condition.

With his motor snarling Paul lifted the ship off the choppy water into the brisk southwest wind. Before he settled down to work he spared a glance at the islet off Brig Point. He saw no sign of Joyce Penfield. There was no one on the island and no blue canoe on the water.

All Paul saw was a scabrous white motor cruiser dawdling along into the cove from the direction of Halford, and that unbeautiful craft he dismissed as being of no interest to him.

CHAPTER X.

"YOU SHALL NOT!"

BOSS, I'd rather be a one-armed wing-walker than try to keep those two lads quiet much longer," Rip Bronson declared. He kicked vigorously at an awning stanchion on the quarter-deck of the *Valhalla* to emphasize his uneasiness.

Julius H. K. Keever, stretched out in a steamer chair, heard his pilot's outburst without visible concern.

"Man is a curious animal," he remarked casually. "Here are you, Rip Bronson, as greedy a creature as I know, drawing pay from me and pay from Jim Ward, and still you aren't satisfied. Who else do you want to draw pay from? Thorne?"

Rip Bronson scowled and ignored this not too subtle reflection upon his honor. "I earn it," he asserted. "Every time I sneak aboard that leaky old scow to tell 'em what you're doing I get a chill. Ward sits on one side o' me and that gorilla Young on the other, both looking at me hard. It's only Ward that's keeping Young from slinging more lead at you."

Keever remained unimpressed. He yawned and tossed his cigar out into the creaming wake of the *Valhalla*. The schooner, under mainsail, foresail and two jibs, was beating, close-hauled, across the Sound toward Brig Cove. Keever was coming to attend the first demonstration of the seaplane, which was scheduled for to-morrow morning.

Rip uttered a growl of protest at the millionaire's lack of interest in his plight.

"Listen," he said earnestly. "Last time I saw them I gave them that line about you buying stock steadily. I explained that it would jolt you harder and make you knuckle under faster if they waited a while before they raised any hell with the Thornryn company. And they fell for it."

"Fine!" Keever applauded.

"They haven't done a thing to Thorne or the plant; they've just laid low in Brig Cove in that motor boat, waiting. But they won't wait forever. How'm I going to hold 'em in?"

"Tell 'em I'm buying even more stock," Keever suggested mildly. He eyed his creature with a sort of lazy indulgence that he displayed when everything was going very well with him.

"Suggest that if they delay another week they will utterly ruin me by engineering disaster for Messrs. Thorne, Van Ryn and seaplane."

Rip snorted. "They know they couldn't ruin you and they don't want to. They want to bleed you—and they want to start soon, too. Well, what are your orders?"

Keever had closed his eyes, but he opened them quite suddenly and looked at Rip. The pilot straightened up and listened with close attention as his employer spoke.

"It's this way, my intelligent friend: I'm buying Thornryn, but not much. A slight jolt will merely steady it and incidentally shake a few weak sisters out. Then it will continue to rise further."

"Yeh," Rip muttered. "But what will——"

"So, if your friends are bent on mischief, let them pull some—in moderation—to-night. Not much, you understand. Let them stage some little mishap that will quiet Ward and disquiet Thorne."

"Such as?" inquired Rip. His small eyes had narrowed, and were fixed unwaveringly on the millionaire's placid face.

Keever waved a hand in a gesture of indifference. "Oh—anything," he said. "Of course it would give the stock pause if this demonstration for Blythewood didn't come off because of some little mishap to the ships—both of them—to-night."

"Some little mishap!" Rip repeated admiringly. "What would you call a real jolt? If they lose those two ships they're out as far as Blythewood's concerned and also scratched in the Harmsworth cup."

Keever yawned and settled himself more snugly in his chair.

"Oh, no," he said. "I'd lend them my seaplane—your seaplane—for the cup race, Rip."

"Huh!" Rip ejaculated. Despite his keenest examination there was nothing to be read on Keever's imperturbable face.

"I'd rather like to lend these estimable young men our seaplane for the race, Rip," the yachtsman said thoughtfully. "Meanwhile—you may let loose Ward."

Rip sat down in the chair next to Keever. "That's good news, anyhow," he muttered. "I was afraid those birds would turn on me if I had to stall them off again to-night."

"Don't let them get too ambitious," Keever warned. "When I want them to try to ruin me I'll let you know."

"Say, I'll bet you've made a nice little hunk of money out of this stock already," Rip said enviously. "They put it out at ten. Where is it now?"

"Twenty-four — or thereabouts," Keever replied.

"Then—if you took a block of, say, thirty thousand shares, you've made almost half a million!" Rip gasped.

"Car fare," said Keever contemptuously. "As a matter of fact, I took somewhat more than thirty thousand shares, Rip."

"Hell!" Rip exclaimed. "I wish——"

"That's your trouble, Rip, you wish. You should do, Rip. Do! Not wish! Do I make myself clear?"

"But—I thought it was the down side you were going to cash in on?"

"So I will, and for real money, too. Large sums, Rip. If you sell fifty thousand shares of a stock you don't possess at twenty-four, for instance, and it drops—or is forced—down to about four how much do you make?"

"A million!" said Rip, dazed.

Keever smiled upon him. "Excellent!" he applauded. "Did you do it by mathematics or deduction?"

"But—look here, boss! How can you sell fifty thousand shares you haven't got?"

"That's what is known as short selling, Rip. A benevolent stock market

community has devised this maneuver so that you can make money on either side of the market—perhaps. But when Thornryn hits the skids, Rip, I expect to make somewhat more than a mere million. The idea is to sell short not only Thornryn but also a number of other weak air stocks that will collapse in sympathy with it. Stocks and sheep behave on similar principles, Rip."

"What are you telling me this for?" the small pilot demanded curiously. "How do you know I won't sell out?"

Keever shook his head, much amused. "You couldn't," he said. "How do you know when I'm going to act? That's the crux of it, Rip—the time; and I'm not confiding that to you. But I shouldn't wonder if you made a dollar or so yourself, if things go smoothly."

Bronson grinned broadly. "They'll go smooth or I'll run out of grease," he promised.

"Then don't let Ward and Young behave too roughly toward poor young Mr. Thorne until I'm ready to have him mashed," Keever warned. "If they desire action, point them at me. I need only Ward in this game; I don't mind eliminating Young."

The thin little pilot shuddered. "I'm not steering anybody to be killed, myself," he said. "Not me."

Julius H. K. Keever looked at him with frank curiosity. "You'll get over that," he promised, and then rose. "Squeamishness is like sea sickness, Rip."

Walking to the weather side he peered ahead. "We'll make our anchorage on the next tack," he estimated. "I'll have Thorne and Van Ryn aboard for dinner so that they won't interfere with your friends' party."

The evening was a perfect one for dining on the after deck of a yacht. The wind had died before sunset. Half an hour later it revived in the southwest and sent piles of cottony cumulus clouds

drifting across the sky with the pink of the afterglow upon them. Just above the eastern horizon an enormous, distorted pale-yellow disk gave promise of development into a silver moon later in the evening.

Always considerate of his guests, Keever had ordered the awnings removed that they might enjoy the glory of the night.

Paul Thorne delayed dinner half an hour by failing to glide down into Brig Cove until eight o'clock. Despite his lateness he had stayed to watch the mechanics fit his seaplane onto the wheeled cradle and haul it up the rails into the hangar. That done, he had come aboard.

After a day of trying out propellers to get the most efficient for his exhibition flying next day he was tired and inclined to be a bit thoughtful. Van Ryn, too, was somewhat subdued. He was suffering from a mild case of brain fag due to his efforts to design a factory at top speed.

Like a good host, Keever kept the conversation rolling. His steward, a man as fat as the departed Smithers, kept the courses moving to and from the chef's department with equal smoothness.

When Paul Thorne spoke after coffee had been served it was to break rather abruptly into his host's description of yachting trips he had made in Southern waters.

"I've been wondering about this stock," he said. "They telephoned Van this afternoon that it closed at twenty-six dollars a share. And we issued it at ten dollars! It isn't worth anything like twenty-six. What can we do to warn people it is too high?"

Julius H. K. Keever prefaced his reply with a laugh. "You can do nothing," he said. "When you issued that stock at ten dollars you gave your opinion that it was worth that price. But other people seem to think it is worth

various sums up to twenty-six. That's their opinion."

Paul moved his chair back from the table. "With great good luck we may be able to pay a dollar a share on the stock in a year or two. That's a good dividend for a stock selling at ten, but it doesn't amount to much for a stock that may be in the thirties or forties."

"In that case the stock will come down again," Keever remarked equably.

"I wish it would come down at once," Van Ryn put in.

"Perhaps we are too close to the company to estimate its prospects correctly," their host suggested with a genial smile.

Paul stood up and moved to the rail. The moon was higher, now, and was already casting a path across the water. Occasionally a hurrying cloud eclipsed it, but when the moon emerged again from behind the fleecy veil it was brighter than ever. The sight did not soothe Paul.

He was thinking of how Joyce Penfield would interpret the swift rise of Thornryn in the stock market. She could only believe that it was the result of stock-jobbing—manipulation.

Keever's voice followed him across the deck.

"Of course, Paul, if you and Van really wish to lower the stock you can do so."

Paul looked around at once.

"Quite simple," Keever explained. "You two sell your twenty thousand shares. That much stock will probably satisfy the demand and Thornryn will cease to rise and probably go down a bit. Then buy it back when the market sags and you'll have your stock and a neat profit."

Paul Thorne shook his head. "I don't want to make a profit on stock, but on planes," he said. "I think I'll keep out of market operations."

"Now I think you're wise," Keever said heartily. "In my opinion the stock

is worth thirty, at least, on prospects. Look at the volume of inquiries you've had about the seaplane! As long as you produce the ships, Paul, and you design them, Van, you'll have a big demand."

"Thanks," said Van Ryn. "It's a good ship, but I have a few more ideas about——" He relapsed into an absorbed silence.

Keever's cigar tip glowed and waned at slow, regular intervals. Paul looked out across the water toward Brig Point and on to where a dim light marked the hangar and shop of the Thornryn company. A little farther along the shore were the foundations of the new factory building. A road had been cut through the woods and one day, Keever predicted, a railroad spur would run along the shore from Brig Harbor.

But meanwhile there was work piled up on Paul's desk that he could do at night.

"I think, if you don't mind, I'll borrow your dinghy and go ashore," Paul decided. "I have one or two things to do and then I'll be ready for bed. I'll be busy to-morrow, showing Blythewood a few things."

"Don't leave us now!" Keever urged, with more than the mere politeness of a host in his voice. "You can't work all the time, you know. Sit here and watch the moon come up. It's a very soothing occupation."

"No, I think I'll be going," Paul answered.

Van Ryn, sensing that his partner wished to be alone and feeling, besides, quite comfortable in his chair, did not offer to join him.

"How about turning in aboard, here?" Keever pressed. "Plenty of staterooms all made up. You can be asleep in ten minutes."

"Thanks, but I'd rather not. I've a few things to do."

"Well, of course——" Keever rose politely. "I'll have Jessup run you ashore in the tender."

"Please don't!" Paul said. "I'd rather row myself. It's soothing to get out on the water after listening to a motor all day."

Keever paused. He seemed to be thinking. "All right," he agreed. "There's a dinghy at the boat boom now."

He summoned the man on anchor watch and had the boat brought alongside the gangway. Paul stepped in with a word of thanks to his host and shoved off from the white side of the schooner. Above him, Keever leaned on the rail and watched him pull away. He glanced speculatively toward the Thornryn plant and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, rejoined his other guest on the after deck.

Paul rowed leisurely toward shore. He skirted the tidal islet off Brig Point and pulled on over the black water in the shadow of the high, wooded shoulder of the land. The tide, he found, was sweeping him strongly on his way, so he rested on his oars. The night was very still. A big cloud blanketed the moon again.

The sound of voices—the quick, rebuking voice of a woman and the angry rasp of a man—aroused him. He turned and looked over his shoulder, deeper into the cove. He could not decide from which shore they came. And then, again, he heard them.

"No! You shall not!" the woman's voice came to him distinctly across the sleeping water. "No!" There was, despite its firmness, a note of alarm in it now, a tremulous suggestion of terror. And Paul Thorne, with a start, realized that he knew that voice.

"Hello!" he called impulsively. "Hello!"

There was no answer. Paul, listening intently, heard a sound that he recognized. Some one was rolling back the door of the hangar.

He bent and swung his oars in a sudden panic. The dinghy leaped ahead.

"Coming!" he shouted. "Coming!"

While he pulled, with all the might in his lean body, he turned his head in a quick glance toward the Thornryn plant. The moon was still under the clouds but he saw the handling platform in front of the hangar plainly. It was illumined, not by steady, silvery light, but by a red, flickering glare that came from within the big shed.

"Fire!" he gasped. "The ships!"

He pulled on, straining every sinew in his body to keep the boat jumping. Only once more he looked ahead.

The flames were surging skyward now and billowing out of the hangar. By their lurid light he could see on the platform three animated figures. Like creatures of an inferno they moved in a grotesque, glaringly lit struggle. One was a woman; the two others were men.

Suddenly the struggle ended; the larger of the two men had caught up the girl. He ran toward the edge of the platform, out of the wavering light. The other, after a glance at the blazing building, followed.

Paul pulled on. He was very close now. He swung his boat about to intercept any craft that might emerge from the darkness at the edge of the pier. But none came.

Close at hand he heard a heavy thud and then a scream. The girl's head reappeared; lithely she regained the platform. A man followed her. It was Young. Ward's high voice, falsetto with excitement, rose, cursing and commanding.

The nose of Paul's dinghy crashed against the beams of the marine railway. He jumped up and clambered onto the rails. His eyes were on the girl. She seemed bent on dashing into the burning hangar.

Young wavered as another yell of warning came from Ward, invisible in the shadows below the platform. Young stared at Paul; then leaped over the edge into darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHANCE.

PAUL ran on. Joyce Penfield was inside the hangar. With an arm shielding his head from the fierce heat, he rushed after her.

Just inside he came upon her. She had snatched a fire extinguisher from its hook and was pumping it valiantly upon a lake of fire that was streaming along one side of the shed. The flames, shooting high, were mushrooming venomously under the roof.

Paul saw that there was no hope of saving the building. That lake of fire was the contents of an overturned drum of gasoline. Most of it had drained toward the rear of the shed. The seaplane at the back was already on fire.

"Drop it!" he shouted. "Out! Quick!"

He flung himself at the cradle supporting the nearer seaplane. With all his furious strength he could not move it toward the track of the marine railway. The big, heavily laden truck with its iron wheels required a tractor or several husky mechanics to budge it. He caught a glimpse of the girl on the other side of the cradle, working in unison with him. She was gasping, terrified, but straining hard at the unwieldy thing.

"Out!" he shouted. "Out! There may be a blow-up!"

He glanced at the wing that was nearest the flaming side of the shed. Already the dope upon the fabric had ignited. The seaplane behind it was a mass of flames.

"One chance!" he muttered. He leaped up onto the float and climbed with the speed of practice into the control cockpit. One hand jumped to the starter; the other to the ignition switch. The motor could not yet be quite cold. Dimly he was aware that Joyce had followed him up into the fuselage. She clung to the side of the forward cockpit, her wide eyes upon him.

"Get down—or in!" he shouted.

The propeller was turning over slowly under the urge of the starter. Suddenly one cylinder fired; then the motor roared into full-throated action. Paul opened the throttle as fast as the motor would take gas. He felt the truck wheels groaning under him.

The blast of scorching air from the propeller was beating at his face. Tongues of flame, under the great suction of the whirling blades, leaped toward the engine.

Suddenly the terrific power of the propeller stirred the cradling truck into motion. Slowly, but with increasing speed, the roaring seaplane dragged itself on its cradle toward the door. The wheels rumbled on across the handling platform, faster and faster. The edge of the pier was only a few feet away; then, suddenly, it was reached.

The truck and its burden rolled over the edge. The heavy cradle fell away from the seaplane and dropped instantly into the black water. The plane, though its propeller was now racing at two thousand revolutions, had not flying speed. It nosed down toward the surface and its big float struck the water with a crash.

For an instant it seemed certain that the ship would roll over onto its back. But the float was buoyant; the water that had closed so quickly over the truck thrust the float upward again. The seaplane bounced; leaped ahead under the unremitting thrust of the air screw, and crashed down on the surface again.

Paul, one hand tense on the throttle, eased back the control stick with the other. The seaplane raised its nose; then planed along the water on its step. It kept bouncing off and on. Once the float struck something solid and the whole ship shivered.

Paul glanced toward the wing that had been close to the wall of fire. It was flaming brightly. The fire had gained a hold on the dope and the linen

it covered. The flames were creeping along the wing toward the fuselage, although the speed of the seaplane's movement kept sweeping them astern. When Paul cut the throttle that whole wing would blaze up. The fire would gush along the fuselage, enveloping everything. The ship, like its sister in the shed, was doomed. Unless——

Paul pulled back on the stick. The flaming seaplane charged upward into the sky. It roared away from the earth like a soaring rocket.

The pilot held it in the zoom with a gripping hand. His eyes were on the wing tip, watching the fire that now glowed, blue and red, at the trailing edge of the wing. It was attacking the linen of the aileron; when enough of the fabric of that control surface went, his power over the ship would fail.

Paul played his last trick. He pulled the ship out of the zoom and sent it knife-edging toward earth, good wing downward, burning wing pointed skyward.

His eyes were fixed on the water below. Oblivious of everything else, he studied the dwindling altitude—the scant, rapidly diminishing space between the sideslipping seaplane and the earth. When the plane's last moment had come—when the wing seemed about to plunge into the water—he pulled the stick over.

The ship righted itself like a thoroughbred. Once more it hummed along, just above the surface. Paul glanced toward his right wing. There was not the slightest sign of flame on it now.

That desperate sideslip had driven the flames upward to the burned over wing tip. They had died from lack of fuel. The terrific air stream of that drop toward earth had kept them from the inflammable dope scant inches beyond their reaching, greedy tongues.

With half an aileron or less upon that side of the ship, Paul Thorne wasted no time. He headed into the wind, cut the motor, and set the ship carefully upon

the water. For a hundred feet it skimmed along; then sank down upon the sturdy float.

Paul moved in his cockpit. He became aware that his body had been as tense as if in the throes of convulsion and now, as he relaxed, he felt the ache of all his tired muscles. He discovered that he had landed on the Sound, beyond the entrance to Brig Cove. Far away he saw the red flare that was the blazing hangar. No power of man could save it. The wind kept the flames away from the shop. That, at least, was safe.

"One ship left—and that badly burned," he muttered.

In the cockpit in front of him something moved. It was the head of Joyce Penfield.

Stunned, he grasped at the thought that she had shared that terrible flight with him—those perilous instants when he had fought fire in the sky.

"Is—is it all right now?" she asked in a small, quavering voice. Her face was very white in the moonlight.

"It's all right now," he answered mechanically.

The girl was shivering, as if with cold. "I'm so afraid!" she murmured.

He swung out of his cockpit and crawled along to hers. He took hold of the cold, trembling hand that she extended to him.

"This is the time to be afraid—after it's all over," he consoled her. "I didn't notice you in fear back there in the hangar."

"I was, though," she confessed. "That's why I climbed aboard with you. I think I was more afraid of the—the men than I was of the fire."

"Have you come over to our side, then?" he asked gently.

She shook her head. Already her spirit was returning. "I'm—I'm not on any side at all," she said, a trifle sadly. "I'm all by myself, I think."

She turned her face from him and

sat, crumpled up, with her head on the edge of the cockpit, looking down the moon path.

"I must thank you for what you've done," he said. "I saw and heard enough to know that you tried your best to prevent Ward and Young from burning the hangar and our ships."

She nodded. "We—we wish no lawlessness, but——"

Her voice wavered uncertainly. He broke in upon her:

"I wish I knew what hold Ward has over you!"

She started, and Paul caught the quick, searching glance that she gave him. He had guessed right. She had not been serving Ward willingly.

"He has no hold but the hold that any badly treated man has on a person who likes fair play," she replied.

"Tell me how he has been badly treated," he urged. "If you know, of your own knowledge, I'll believe it."

"Keever had him imprisoned with Young for Florida real-estate frauds that Keever himself engineered," she said.

"How do you know?" he persisted. "Tell me that. Were you close to Ward or Keever, so that you really know what was going on?"

She was silent—a silence that he felt was an unwilling admission on her part. "I know that Keever is an infamous and utterly heartless scoundrel!" she said at last. "That, at least, I can say."

It was his turn to remain silent. He felt as if a weighted net had been flung down upon his shoulders. Keever, that bluff and helpful counselor, a scoundrel!

"He has always been a loyal friend to me," he asserted.

"You said you would believe. Was that just a trick to make me speak?"

"No," he denied, "no trick, but what you say is incredible. Why should a man like Keever, with his cleverness and mental resources, be a rascal?"

"The answer lies in him—some distorted, ugly malevolency that is part of him. But—have you seen nothing—no indication of his baseness—his schemes——"

Her voice trailed away into silence.

"If you mean that I am involved with him in some questionable enterprise, I am not," he said, his voice edged by indignation. "He has proposed nothing—we have done nothing—that is crooked."

He gripped the fuselage with his hands, thinking hard, but he could see nothing that hinted of wrongdoing by Keever.

"This stock company——" he said, "there's nothing wrong with it. Van's seaplane is worth manufacturing. We're charging the company, Van and I, two hundred thousand in stock for the plane, the plant, our time for almost a year, and about fifty thousand dollars in cash that we've sunk in developing the ship. The money we've raised on the stock is for a big factory, machinery, wages—that sort of thing."

She put her hand on his arm suddenly, for a brief moment. Her face, her eyes, reflected a sort of rising horror.

"Then—if you're not Keever's partner in—in some dubious enterprise, you're to be his victim!" she quavered. "Like—like—that's it! You're to be his victim—his scapegoat!"

Paul Thorne laughed. It was rather a discordant and unpleasant laugh. "Thanks," he said. "Let me tell you that this company is Van's and mine alone. Keever's made suggestions but he has no voice, no power at all. His holdings consist only of nonvoting stock. You're wrong—I'm sure you're wrong about Keever."

She shook her head. "If I could only guess what he intends to do!" she murmured.

Thorne laughed again. "If you mistook Ward and Young for honest men

it is quite possible that you are wrong about Keever being crooked," he said abruptly. "And also about me being a fool."

"I—I have hurt your feelings, so, of course, you wish to hurt mine," she said quietly.

"Sorry!" he apologized. "But you're wrong about Keever."

"What can a man like you—an aviator who has spent his life in clean air—know about vile creatures like Keever and the way they work?" she asked earnestly. "How much do you know about such an indoor, city thing as finance?"

"Not too much about finance," he admitted. "But what can a girl like you know about a man like Keever—if he is what you think him?"

"A great deal!" she cried tremulously. "Far too much!"

Thorne bent down and picked up both her hands. He turned her toward him, so that he could see her face in the moonlight.

"Look here!" he said, and his voice was gentle. "If you think you can convince me that you're an adventuress—a woman full of knowledge of the guile and wickedness of the world—you're mistaken. I've been trying to think of you that way myself, for a long time, but I can't do it. You're a mysterious little girl, but a little girl nevertheless."

He felt her hands quivering in his, before she released them with soft decision. She did not speak.

"As for Keever," he went on, "he has shown no signs of the cloven hoof so far. If he does——"

"Then it will be too late to do anything," she exclaimed despairingly. "I know! I know!"

"Perhaps it won't be too late, now that you have warned me," he soothed her. "He may run into some unexpected obstacle if he is crooked. That's as far as I can go."

She nodded rather wearily.

"You must take me back now," she said. "My father will be worried. I did not mean to stay out in my canoe more than a few minutes. Then I saw them."

"Before you go—Joyce," he said courageously, "won't you tell me what hold—what circumstance, I mean, has allied you with Ward and Young?"

Sadly she shook her head. "I cannot," she said earnestly. "It—it's not my secret. Perhaps I may be able to tell you later on."

"Perhaps I'll forestall you," he declared grimly. "I'm going to do some serious searching for Ward and Young when we return. When I find them they're going to talk."

She stared at him in astonishment.

"Don't—don't you know? Didn't you see?"

"See what?" he asked. "You mean they had a speed boat or car to make a get-away?"

"Didn't you feel a hard jar that shook the machine as we were bumping over the water?" she asked. "The seaplane hit the rowboat that they were escaping in. I saw Ward distinctly. He—he was trying to jump over the side when——" She stopped, shuddering.

"I remember the jolt," he said gravely. "I didn't see anything. I—was busy at the time. We—we'll have a look for the boat."

He crept out on the burned wing and examined it as best he could in the moonlight. The wing tip was badly charred, as was most of the aileron fabric. Not even by keeping the aileron control hard over would he be able to fly the ship safely. And this ship was precious.

He returned to his cockpit and started the motor. Slowly, taking every care to spare the ship, he taxied back to Brig Cove. The wild flight from the fire had taken them well out into the Sound.

The *Valhalla's* gangway was ablaze with electric light as the crippled sea-

plane crept past. There were many lights in Brig Harbor, too, and on the water. Over at the Thornryn plant there was a red glow of dying embers where the hangar and landing platform had been.

Paul held his slow course along the shore. Well away from the smoking ruins he gently beached the ship.

Hardly had it grounded when Ike Smith, the chief mechanic, scantily attired, waded out to it. His eyes swept over the ship in silent estimation of the damage.

"Watch it, Ike," Paul said. "We need this ship."

He helped the girl down onto the float and then jumped into the water. He picked Joyce off the pontoon and carried her ashore. As he set her down on the beach Van Ryn, panting and white-faced, arrived.

"We've got most of this one left, Van," Paul said rapidly. "Miss Penfield saved it for us. But she doesn't want any one to know of her part. I'm taking her home."

"We'll keep still," Van promised. "But who——"

"Please organize an armed search for a rowboat I hit, taking off," Paul hurried on. "Ward and Young were in it, and if they're alive we want them as incendiaries."

CHAPTER XII.

YOUNG'S VENGEANCE.

JULIUS H. K. KEEVER had ceased, for the moment, to take life too easily. He had arisen with the sun on the morning after the fire. Now he was pacing the damp deck of the *Valhalla* with a thoughtful air. In one hand he held a filing card and occasionally he paused in his stride to consult it. His manner conveyed positive satisfaction.

That bit of cardboard contained all the records of his transactions in Thornryn common. Paul Thorne, not being acquainted with the complexities of "rig-

ging" a market, would have been surprised at the number of times that Keever had bought and sold huge blocks of stock. And Rip Bronson, Keever's trusted confidant, would have been surprised, too, not at the number of transactions, but at the final position indicated. For Keever was not still buying stock; he had unloaded all he owned. Keever mixed with his confidences to Rip Bronson a considerable amount of fiction.

The millionaire halted in his pacing abruptly, and went to the rail. The early-morning mist was thick. Through it the sun shone feebly—a mere red disk, instead of a fiercely radiant ball of flame. And the mist shrouded the water as well as the sun.

Keever listened intently. He heard the splashing and clatter of a small boat unskillfully rowed. It was drawing slowly nearer. He did not hail it, but waited impatiently. Finally it came into sight. The boat was one of the dinghies of the *Valhalla* and the oarsman, head craning over his shoulder, was Rip Bronson.

The pilot rowed an erratic course to the gangway, bumped into it, and made fast his boat.

"Thought I'd missed the ship," Rip said, as he ascended to the deck.

Keever motioned toward the stern. He did not speak until they were well beyond the hearing of the seamen who were washing down the deck forward.

"What did you find out?" he demanded. He leaned against the taffrail and surveyed his follower with intent eyes.

"Young wasn't killed," Rip answered. "He went over the side in a hurry before the seaplane hit the rowboat. Then he swam across the cove to the motor boat and hid all night in the cabin."

"How about Ward?"

Rip shrugged his shoulders. "Young didn't see him. He didn't waste any time looking, but he thinks the ship hit

Ward as he stood up to dive and killed him."

"Too bad!" Keever muttered. "I needed Ward alive—for a week more, anyhow."

Rip shook his head. "You're lucky he's dead," he assured his employer. "And you'd be luckier yet if Young was down on the bottom. You ought to have heard him talk about you just now. He said he was sick of fooling around Thorne when you were the guy he wanted to get."

Keever laughed. He leaned back at ease on the rail, with his elbows bearing half the weight of his big body.

"You better look out for that baby," Rip Bronson repeated soberly. "It was only Ward that was holding him back."

Keever declined to show any signs of anxiety. "If he wants to be killed I shall be delighted to be of service to him," he said. "You might keep me advised as to his movements."

"The less I see of that gorilla the happier I'll be," Rip declared. "I urged him to beat it but he just glared at me."

Keever nodded. "His manners are detestable," he agreed.

"By rights Young ought to be boiling over against Thorne and the girl, not you," Rip said. "It was the girl that called Thorne and it was Thorne that blipped him into the water. But he's still thinking of you and that stretch in At——"

He stopped as Keever's big fingers dug into his shoulder. The millionaire wrenched him around and glared into his face.

"Joyce Penfield called Thorne?" he snapped. "Why didn't you say so at once instead of babbling along about this fool Young. The girl knows Thorne, then?"

"He hasn't talked much to her," Rip said sullenly, writhing under Keever's powerful grip. "All I know is that she tried to prevent 'em from burning the

hangar and Thorne heard her scream. He came whizzing up to the burning hangar. While the girl was working a fire extinguisher he got one seaplane out. Then, taking off, he hit the rowboat and sideslipped the ship until he put out the fire on the wing tip. He couldn't ha' had much time to talk to the girl."

"When he flew back to the Thornnryn plant, had she gone?" demanded Keever.

Rip nodded. "The gang that tried to put out the fire didn't know she'd been there."

Keever took a turn or two across the deck, frowning. Then he stopped, looking out over the misty water.

"That's bad—bad," he muttered. "She helped him. And a man will believe things out of a pretty girl's mouth that he has every reason to doubt. If she tells him—I must do something about that! She's the only disturbing element in sight!"

Rip Bronson watched his boss in some perplexity.

"Anyhow," he reminded Keever, "the demonstration for Blythewood has flivvered."

Keever growled. "A minor victory," he sneered. "Small business. Those bungling fools——"

He stopped abruptly and stared forward, at the gangway that led down the side of the ship. A dirty old rowboat, moored by its short painter, was rubbing against the white side of the ship.

"Whose boat is that?" Keever demanded. He turned swiftly.

"Stand still, you!" a harsh voice commanded. Dick Young, his face contorted in a snarl of hate, was poised at the corner of the deck house. His leveled automatic covered Keever unwaveringly.

The millionaire halted in his steps. He stood there facing his enemy. His face had lost its momentary expression of surprise. One hand was at his side and the other had dropped negligently

onto the back of a deck chair. His mild blue eyes seemed merely casual as he surveyed the gunman.

"You, too, you crosser!" Young rasped, as his eyes flicked for an instant to the petrified figure of Rip Bronson.

"I'm not moving, Dick," Rip mumbled uncertainly. "What you calling me a crosser for?"

A grin that was merely an intensification of the snarl passed over Young's face. "I was under the stern while you were reporting to your boss, you spy! What Keever gets, you get!"

"My God!" muttered Rip. His knees were sagging.

Julius H. K. Keever smiled. "And what do I get, Young?" he asked softly. "More than I left you when you went to Atlanta, I hope."

"You get lead!" Dick Young's voice shook uncontrollably. His eyes blazed inexpressible hatred; his jaws worked convulsively. Keever's calmness roused him to a frenzy.

"Rip!" As Keever roared the word, his eyes, his head, his body all swung instantly away from Young, away from the automatic, toward the shrinking figure of his pilot by the rail.

Young flung himself around in the same direction. His gun arm hugged his side, as if to steady his aim and his finger tightened on the trigger.

Even as Keever turned and Young turned with him, Keever's right hand that lay on the chair back, jerked forward. The chair leaped with it, converted into a projectile by the single, terrifically powerful impulse of the big man's arm. Its legs left the deck; it shot through the air and crashed full into Young's body.

The man fell heavily. He was bowled over not by the weight but by the velocity of the deck chair. He sprawled on the white planking with the chair on top of him.

Keever followed his missile, as if

sped by the same impulse. His big body crashed down on the chair and the man beneath it.

Rip, still motionless by the rail, had a confused impression of Keever's right hand on the blue-black barrel of the pistol; then the pistol grip was wrenched out of Young's fingers. Keever's hand went high in the air, then hand and pistol came down again with lightning-like speed on Young's head.

There was a distinct cracking sound that turned Rip faint. Then he became aware that Keever was getting up, briskly. Once on his feet the millionaire bent and lifted the limp form of his enemy.

For just an instant he peered forward. In the bow, barely seen through the mist, the men of the watch were still busy with hose and squillees.

In two strides, Keever was at the rail. He heaved Young's body in the dark water and tossed the pistol after it. Then he leaned on the rail, watching intently.

"Heavy bones, Rip!" he commented coolly. "He went down like a chunk of iron. Too bad that seaplane hit him!"

Rip did not answer. His face was gray and he clung to the rail, looking inboard.

"Get forward and cast off that row-boat!" Keever commanded with sudden asperity. "Haven't you any nerve at all?"

Rip, with a weak gesture, indicated his inability to move from his position. His legs were quivering under him.

With an expression of disgust Keever left him. He moved noiselessly the few feet to the gangway, ran down it, and undid Young's knot in the painter with strong, sure fingers. He shoved the small boat away from the side into the fog with a swift movement of his foot. In an instant he was back at the taffrail again.

"Saves time and answering questions,

Rip," he explained. His eyes studied his pilot with acuity. "If they ever find him—it was the seaplane. Understand?"

Rip nodded silently. He was gulping air now as if he had been throttled.

"I don't like this squeamishness, Rip!" Keever's voice was somewhat less indulgent. "Control yourself! The incident is over."

"All right," Rip muttered.

"I want you to go ashore again," Keever commanded. "Hang around the plant and find out what's happening. I want news of Ward—what they're doing about the demonstration—whether Joyce Penfield has been there this morning or Thorne's been away—everything you can pick up."

Rip nodded obediently. He moved in sudden haste toward the gangway, but Keever's voice halted him.

"If you hear any chatter about borrowing our seaplane to carry out the demonstration to-day, Rip, express my regrets that we left it at Halford because a connecting-rod bearing had become loose in the motor. It will be ready for service in time for the Harmsworth race, however. Don't forget that, Rip."

Rip mumbled assent as he descended to the dinghy.

"Meet me at Brig Harbor about nine thirty," Keever instructed in his steady, mellow voice as the shaking pilot shoved off.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FLUTTER IN THORNRYN.

RIP vanished into the fog again.

Keever went below and ate a breakfast that the combined efforts of steward and chef had been able to keep hot for him. His face was placid enough as he ate, except when he thought of that meeting between Paul Thorne and Joyce Penfield.

"Unfortunate!" he rumbled. "The girl's a disturbing factor, even if he saw

her for only a minute. He'll want to see her again. And then—I can't afford to let that happen."

Keever had commanded the motor tender fueled and ready for a trip into New York that morning at nine, but after breakfast he canceled the order. Instead he went ashore in the tender, directing Jessup to land at the town pier at Brig Harbor. The fog had lifted and the smart little craft swept close by a dingy old motor cruiser at anchor in the cove. Keever did not favor it with a single glance.

On the other side of the cove, near the Thornryn plane, busy mechanics in boats were grouped about the anchored seaplane that was now the sole flying asset of the company. Ashore, carpenters were already at work among the charred remains of the hangar.

At the town landing, as Keever stepped out of his tender, his keen eyes noted the dinghy that Rip had used tied up at the pier.

He beckoned to Jessup, the boatman. "Find Bronson and have him here at the pier when I get back," he said.

Turning from the saluting seaman, Keever walked hurriedly to the Brig Harbor Inn, selected the most sound-proof of the two telephone booths in the lobby and called a New York number.

"Snyder?" he said, as a thin voice at the other end of the wire spoke. The voice became instantly subservient. "I won't be able to get to town to-day," Keever said, "but you can do what I want done. Watch the market. If the air stocks are soaring and the volume large let them run. If they show a tendency to waver—particularly if our stock does—sell ten thousand in thousand blocks in the weak spots—the weak spots—not the strong. You understand? I want to ease it off—not break it. Just a test as to how it acts on bad news—not a speculation. It would slide if you handle it right. I'll keep in touch with you by wire. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, waited a moment, and then called the Thornryn plant. He reached Van Ryn.

"I know there's nothing an outsider can do, Van, so I'm not coming over to disturb you," he told the engineer. "If anything should turn up I'll be in Brig Harbor or on the yacht. You may command me—anything at all, Van."

"Thanks!" said Van. Keever's keen ear was tuned to catch a jarring intonation, some incompletely suppressed emotion that would tell him Joyce Penfield had warned the partners against him. But there was nothing but gratitude in Van's voice as he went on:

"We'd not hesitate to call on you if there was anything. We've just called off the demonstration for Blythewood. Paul and the mechanics worked all night recovering the wing tip, but the float's damaged, too, and the ship isn't right. We'd rather have no demonstration than a poor one. Paul's still out at the ship. They're working to get her back in shape for the Harnsworth cup now."

"You'll win that!" Keever predicted with great heartiness. "I know it—I know! You're busy—good-by."

Again he hung up the receiver and then took it down to call New York again.

"Green?" he inquired. "I regret to inform you that the Thornryn plant has had a mishap, Green."

Rapidly he detailed the destruction of the hangar to the man at the other end of the wire, whose only comment was, "Yes, sir."

"If the newspapers haven't got it, let it leak to them at once," Keever instructed. "Demonstration for Blythewood called off, and so on. Don't let 'em know it's from you."

"I'll use a tipster to get it to them," Green agreed. "How bad do you want it to look, sir?"

"A setback—not a disaster," said Keever, and rang off.

"The disaster," he murmured as he

stepped out of the booth. "will come later."

He left the inn and walked back to the public pier. Rip Bronson was there, waiting beside Jessup. His face was still a bit yellow beneath the sunburn. He hurried to meet Kever.

"Demonstration off," he reported. "Ward isn't back on the motor boat, but his body hasn't been found. Probably got carried out to the Sound or is still on the bottom. Wreckage of the rowboat's been found. Joyce Penfield hasn't been near the plant to-day and Thorne worked on the seaplane all night."

"Good!" said Kever. "Another job. Rip. Stay ashore. Locate old man Penfield. He'll be mooning around the town or the point, wondering what to do now that his fellow conspirators have passed on."

"What'll I do when I find him?"

"Keep trailing him. If, during the day, you see the international code signal C—a white pennant with red ball in the center—hoisted to the peak, bring Penfield aboard. The motor tender will be at this dock, waiting, with the spray top up."

"B-Bring him a-board!" stammered Rip. He passed a trembling hand over his head. "Not—not to——"

"Not to kill him," Kever finished the sentence smoothly. "No, Rip. I just want to say a few words in his ear."

"How do I get him aboard?" Rip inquired, reviving rapidly. "He knows me. He won't come. Do I tap him on the conk and drag him down the street?"

"Tell him that the *Valhalla* picked up Ward alive last night. Say that I'm shocked at Young's death and have surrendered—agreed to make amends to Ward and to him. We want him to join in conference."

"That's easy."

"Don't let him see his daughter or any one else after you tell him. Make him get into the tender at once. When

you reach the yacht bring him down to the cabin. I'll do the rest."

"All right, only, boss, don't——"

"He's perfectly safe," Kever said impatiently. "He's taking no risk at all. The only gentleman to take risks or have risks thrust upon him, is Paul Thorne. That pleases you, doesn't it?"

The small pilot grinned maliciously. "Sure. I certainly hate these newspaper heroes. They give the real men in the business a pain in the neck."

He nodded to his boss and walked away to locate Major Penfield.

Julius H. K. Kever laid his big hands on the railing of the pier and stared out across the water. Between him and the Thornryn plant, the seaplane, with its circle of boats, rode the water. It seemed reasonable to believe that Paul Thorne would be out at the plane all day while Van Ryn superintended repairs ashore.

"I'd rather deal with Van than with Thorne," Kever decided. He permitted a fleeting smile to appear on his intent face.

He left the pier and walked up through the town to the Brig Harbor Inn. It was time to get a report from his marketwise but ever faithful sycophant, Snyder. He called the broker and listened to the obsequious voice. Thornryn was inclined to remain almost stationary after its sharp run-up of the day before. By the sale of a thousand shares at a propitious moment Snyder had turned its course slightly downward. And then a news ticker had topped out a report that part of the Thornryn plant had been burned down.

Kever's expression of satisfaction deepened on his face. "Sell five thousand—and if it doesn't rally, start selling more stock short. Not too much—just a few thousand. I want to break it to eighteen, but not below that. And cover—buy it back and get out of the market before two thirty."

"Before two thirty, Mr. Kever," the

humble voice at the other end of the wire echoed.

"Yes—two thirty." Keever smiled secretly into the receiver. "I have reason to believe that the stock will rally just before the close."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GENTLEMAN'S LOYALTY.

PAUL THORNE had worked all the previous night on stripping the fabric from the burned wing, replacing ribs at the wing tip, fitting new control cables to the aileron, and, in general, making a strenuous effort to get the ship in shape for the demonstration.

During the night there had seemed to be a chance that the ship could be made ready, but at dawn illusion was dissipated with darkness. Paul realized that the hard-used ship would neither perform, nor appear, remarkable enough to rouse the interest of a man like John Blythewood, to whom good ships were common. The Thornryn must be superlative to win his attention.

He had gone ashore just before nine o'clock to telephone the A. A. T. C. head that the demonstration was off.

"All right," Blythewood replied without rancor. "I'll see it at the Harmsworth race."

While Paul gulped down a pint of coffee and ate an egg sandwich, he had meditated upon telling Van what Joyce Penfield thought of their friend Keever. Van was busy setting his construction workers to rebuilding the hangar and ordering material. Worn out by his unrelenting organization work, he was in no condition now to bear additional burdens.

"We'll have a talk to-night, Van," Paul said, as he prepared to shove off for the seaplane again. Grimly he added: "We may be late for the demonstration but we're going to be early for the cup race."

Van nodded. "Good thing the land-

ing wheels and struts for the ship were in the shop, instead of the hangar," he said. "They're ready when you need 'em."

Paul paused at his desk, scanning the morning mail. He picked up one letter and put it in his pocket. The postmark was Jamesville, Florida, and the big, scrawling writing was that of Cliff O'Farrell, to whom Paul had telegraphed for information about the Penfields.

Later, while mechanics crawled over the ship, Paul read the letter:

You're not compelled to believe a line of this, if you don't want to, because it's all pick-up stuff—gossip and ground flying from around town. It was easy to get because the town's still talking of little else.

Major Carter Loomis Penfield was the town idol down here, at least among the older folks. He was the son of a Civil War hero and a kindly, public-spirited old lad. Not rich, but full of power and influence.

Came a big boom in real estate and two smart crooks got hold of Penfield. James Somebody Ward and Richard Longname Young. Ward was a slicker; Young portrayed the honest roughneck. They convinced Penfield that Jamesville was about to come into its own. He became president of the realty company they organized and was permitted, as a favor, to let his friends in on the ground floor.

You know what that means. Penfield had more friends than anybody else in the State and the crooks loaded them up with stock and with land. Yes, sir; such was their faith in Penfield and in Florida that scores of 'em bought land they must have known was worthless. That was the cleverness of it—they whipsawed the Florida residents, not simply the northern visitors, but when the visitors saw the local people getting aboard they climbed on, too.

Of course it blew up. Penfield and the two crooks were arrested for various things, including using the mails to defraud. Then something funny happened. Ward and Young pleaded guilty—actually pleaded guilty! They advised Penfield to plead guilty, too. They intimated that there was a Big Guy in the background who had enough influence to get them off with suspended sentences and fill their pockets with gold. The idea was that the Big Guy didn't want the company investigated too thoroughly for fear the prosecutor would come across his tracks.

Penfield refused to plead guilty and advised the others not to. He was convinced of the soundness of the company and the honesty of his two associates. As a matter of fact, it would have taken another war to convict Major Penfield, anyhow. The whole county was sore at him because he'd been a dupe, but not sore enough to put a Penfield in jail. There's loyalty down here.

Well, anyhow, Ward and Young pleaded guilty—and the judge socked it to them! No suspended sentence; no short term in a local Federal pen. It was Atlanta for them, and the Big Guy somehow cleaned them out of most of their cash, too, just to make them thoroughly harmless. In Atlanta nobody'd listen to them wail, especially when they didn't have enough money to get a really loud-speaking lawyer. They'd pleaded guilty, hadn't they?

But Major Penfield, though he'd been ruined, wasn't through. Here the gossip gets hazy, but he's known to have defended Ward and Young publicly as victims—like himself—of a gentleman higher up about whom he knew nothing but what the crooks had told him. He left town with his daughter. Later, somehow—so the rumor goes—he aided in the escape of Ward and Young from Atlanta.

Yes, sir! That's how far his defense of the persecuted innocents went—he snaked them out of Atlanta and got them clean away, so it is alleged. Of course Ward must have planned it, but in Jamesville, anyhow, Penfield is credited with pulling the trick on the outside. Naturally he never showed up again, and neither did his friends. Vanished—puffed out—erased from the earth as far as Jamesville was concerned. Must have been tough on the old boy, because he was always pretty far gone on his home, his town, and his State.

They think here, from what he said to one or two old cronies, that Penfield had some idea of bringing the big fellow to justice with the aid of Ward and Young. Then, when he'd got back some of the money that people here lost, he'd return and clear his own name. Sort of quixotic, that expedition, but I wish the old duck all the luck he needs. If you've run into him up North keep your face airtight, for he might possibly be wanted for his part in the escape of the two crooks.

His daughter went with him. They say here that she's a high-spirited thoroughbred who'd back her father to the limit, no matter what it cost her. He might have convinced her that his two associates are guiltless. To my way of thinking, Ward and

Young are just as twisted as the man behind them, only he's twice as smart as they two together.

Speaking of being smart, this Thornnryn plane of yours seems to be getting an awful lot of publicity down here. And the other day a lad from California slipped into the field and he said the plane's been played up in papers all over the coast. You must have a swell press agent. Let me know when you need a good pilot.

With a grim face Paul folded up the letter and put it in his inside pocket.

"The poor old gentleman!" he muttered. "Sitting up here on a rock watching me and Kever and thinking of his home down in Florida! Exiled—hunted—because he stuck to his pals. Stripped by Kever and then gulled by Ward and Young. And I thought he was crooked—and Joyce was crooked!"

His face hardened suddenly. "I thought Kever was straight—and that I was clever! Looks like four misses out of four guesses. There's no definite proof in the letter that Kever was the Big Guy, but what's happened here comes close to proving it."

He opened the letter again and read the last paragraph carefully. It was possible, of course, that the newspapers all over the country had featured the Thornnryn seaplane simply because of his name. But it was far more possible that a publicity agency had been spreading news of the ship. The Thornnryn company had hired no press agent. Had Kever done so? Was Kever back of that startling and unjustified rise in the Thornnryn stock? "The worst mistake I made," Paul muttered, "was in thinking that I was clever!"

One thing alone he had to comfort him: He and Van held control of the company. Kever, no matter how crooked he was, could not get that away from them, however much he might play with the common stock.

"Thornnryn's got to make a go of things," Paul told himself soberly. "We've got to come through now."

His impulse was to quit work to seek out two people—to ask Joyce's pardon and to have a show-down with Keever. But he dismissed both those tempting prospects from his mind and turned back to his ship. His job was to get the plane in shape. Work! Work first—and a meeting with Keever later; that was the proper order of things.

For Paul, for Ike Smith and the other mechanics, the morning went rapidly. No less rapidly did the early afternoon pass by. Paul was in a white heat of impatience to get the plane in flying condition again. The race was a week away but they had still to convert this sea craft into a land machine.

At last Ike Smith, with the perspiration raining off his oil-smearred face, stuck his head up to Paul's cockpit.

"She's as right as we can make her, boss," he reported. "Got your chute pack on? All right! Try her!"

Paul reached for the starter. "All clear?" he called; and the tired mechanics in the work boats answered him.

The motor started. No cranking the propeller; no toil and no danger; the motor started as the motor of a car starts. He opened the throttle and the terrific blast of the propeller sent the ship surging through the water. Power—but controlled power! He taxied far out on the cove, warming up the motor. Then he let her have it.

Roaring, the ship leaped into the air like an eager bird. Deliberately he held her nose up until it seemed certain that she would stall. But the thrust of the propeller defeated the jealous grasp of gravity. The ship surged skyward, a live, free thing in her element.

Paul stuck his head out and let the cooling air play on his hot face. He glanced downward at the splendid white *Valhalla*, thinking of the ugly schemer that beautiful craft contained.

"You can beat me, Keever, and you can beat Van," he said exultantly. "But you can't beat the Thornnryn! Look up

at her, Keever! You're a worm looking up at an eagle!"

He nosed the ship over into level flight, headed toward the eastward horizon, and opened the throttle. The ship responded. Her broad wing, whistling, split the air apart, while her motor roared defiance of all earthly things.

Keever, however, was not on his yacht at the moment of that defiance. He had been waiting in contained patience at Brig Harbor for Paul to take off on this hop. It was two o'clock now, and time for him to act. He descended to the town pier and directed Jessup to run him over to the Thornnryn plant.

Van Ryn, sagging against his desk, glanced up and saw the millionaire's placid face in the doorway of his office.

"Come in!" Van said with rather abstracted cordiality. "I'm glad you've come. I'm worried. They just telephoned me from New York that Thornnryn is sagging rapidly—it's down almost to eighteen."

"Eighteen!" exclaimed Keever. "Eighteen! Are you sure?"

Van nodded unhappily. Only yesterday he had hoped that the stock would come down, but he had not expected it to drop like this.

"Too bad!" muttered Keever. He permitted Van Ryn to see that he was disturbed by this news. "It's unfortunate for a new stock to jump around like that. A steady rise is a good thing, of course, but when it drops half its advance in a single day—" He shook his head dubiously. "It doesn't help the reputation of the company much."

"I can't stop it," Van said with a gesture of helplessness. "We have no money, except company money. I haven't told Paul because he's busy enough, and I hoped that it would turn up again."

"It may be just a bear raid, based on the fire last night," Keever consoled. "The little fellows are being scared out

by heavy short selling. You really ought to support the stock, Van."

"But how?" demanded Van Ryn.

"You've still got your own twenty thousand shares at Hallock, Spencer & Goddard, haven't you?"

Van Ryn nodded. "But if I sell——"

"You don't have to sell. That firm will be glad to buy some more stock for you, holding your block as collateral. They put out the issue; they'll be wanting to stop the raid, too. Ask them to buy five thousand shares or so this afternoon to steady the market."

"I ought to ask Paul before I use his stock," Van said, but his eager hand had already moved toward the telephone.

"You should—if you can reach him at once," Keever agreed.

Van picked up the telephone. "He's out for a longish test hop, I'm afraid. I'll chance it."

Keever, looking out the window, listened attentively to Van's conversation with the brokers. Although Mr. Spencer, one of the partners, was worried about the stock he readily agreed to Van's request to buy some more on the security of the partners' private holdings.

Van Ryn turned to Keever with satisfaction. "He said he thought the pressure on Thornryn was already easing up," he said. "Buying a few thousand will put it up near where it was this morning."

Keever glanced at his watch, nodded in response to Van's report. It was about two thirty, just time for the pressure to relax. Snyder was really invaluable. This little sortie of his had shown him how vulnerable the stock was. His operation had proved that most of it was held by professional speculators who were not too certain of its worth.

"Good!" he said in response to Van. "It's most auspicious to have a stock bounce back like that. Excellent advertising. Well, I'll be getting on to the

yacht. I've a little business of my own to do to-day."

He strolled away from the office and down the beach beside the blackened piles that had supported the hangar. Jessup awaited him.

Once aboard the *Falhalla* he ordered the boatman to take the motor tender back to Brig Harbor.

"You'll be picking up Bronson and a guest," he said.

Jessup saluted, and departed. Beckoning to a quartermaster, Keever ordered him to hoist the international code signal pennant "C." Then he went below to wait.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE OPEN.

THE test hop was a success. Neither the fire nor the rough usage that Paul had given the ship had seriously damaged it. The Thornryn company still had one trump to play in the game for the Harnsworth Cup. Paul was much relieved in mind as he ended his flight with a confident circle over Brig Cove. He turned his eyes downward to study the surface of the harbor.

He started a long, straight glide toward the water. Far ahead he caught sight of a blue canoe. As the ship overtook it he saw with a leaping heart that the girl in it was Joyce Penfield. She was paddling rapidly, almost frantically, toward the mouth of the cove.

"Something's wrong!" he muttered, as he observed the speed of her movements. She was exerting every iota of power in her slender body to propel the canoe out toward the Sound. As the ship drew near she turned in her seat. She trailed her paddle in the water and waved her hand urgently to the pilot.

Paul landed the seaplane and taxied toward the canoe. He slid down onto the pontoon and steadied the fragile boat as it drew alongside. He saw that

Joyce's face had lost its delicate coloring and her eyes were apprehensive.

"My father has gone aboard the *Valhalla*!" she said tremulously. "I—I don't understand it. A boatman at the pier saw him leaving in the *Valhalla's* motor tender with Bronson."

"Voluntarily?" Paul asked.

She nodded. "That only makes it more inexplicable," she declared. "I'm worried, Paul. I was going out there to—to——"

The pilot cut his idling motor, got out his patent anchor and slung it overboard. The seaplane was not in the fairway.

"I'll go with you, in the canoe," he said. "I can't get alongside the yacht in the seaplane without help."

He stepped into the canvas craft and seized a paddle. With vigorous strokes they pushed on across the restless water toward the yacht outside Brig Point.

If their coming was observed on the yacht, they saw no indication of it. The after deck was deserted.

Paul guided the canoe alongside the ladder, scrambled out and made it fast.

"If Keever's aboard he's probably in the cabin," he said, as they reached the deck.

One of the sailors, seeing them, hurried aft, but Paul stopped him.

"To see Mr. Keever," he said shortly. "You needn't bother to announce us."

"Aye, sir," the man answered, and strolled forward again.

They hurried toward the stern. Rip Bronson, his head on one side as if he were listening, was sitting at the top of the main companionway. He jumped to his feet as he perceived them, akin to alarm. He blocked the stairs.

"Mr. Keever is busy," he said, scowling at Paul Thorne.

"He'll see us," Paul answered, moving briskly toward him.

"Keep back!" Bronson warned him. "I said the boss was busy! I'll——"

Paul Thorne grabbed the man by the waist, with both hands, and set him

aside. "Come on, Joyce," he said, and ran down the stairs. She followed closely.

Keever's deep voice, vibrant with anger, rose to them from the cabin.

"I'm not discussing that, Penfield. You'll take yourself and your daughter away from here to-day or I'll see that you go South myself. And you'll go to Atlanta, not Jamesville."

Paul Thorne stepped into the cabin.

Keever turned at the sound of his entrance. The millionaire was towering over the slight gray little figure of old Major Penfield, who stood at bay with his back to the serving table.

"Come in, Paul," he said, without a sign of annoyance. "I'm interviewing one of my would-be assass——"

Suddenly he saw Joyce Penfield, behind Paul, and his words ended as if cut off with a knife. He stared at the girl, with just a flicker of animosity.

"The lady, too—eh?" he commented. "Well, I've a word to say to her, as well as to her father. I'm afraid this may be painful, Paul. Perhaps you'd better wait on deck."

Paul did not move. "Miss Penfield was worried about her father," he said in a level voice. "I brought her aboard."

Joyce Penfield stepped swiftly past Paul and, ignoring Keever utterly, took hold of her father's shaking hand.

"Dad!" she said. "Why did you come aboard? What happened?"

"He tricked me!" Major Penfield declared. His voice was pitched in the high, uncertain key of an old man's anger. "His man came to tell me that Ward was here—that Keever was prepared to make reparation to all the unfortunate people he swindled."

"Ridiculous!" Keever declared. He laughed and leaned at ease against a chair back. "Do I appear to you to be a swindler, Paul? Examine me carefully."

Paul said nothing.

"Put it this way, if you prefer,"

Keever went on. "Does my accuser here prove his own righteousness by allying himself with escaped jailbirds and attempting to murder me? Is that the way honest men act? It is not that I am a swindler, but that I refuse to be swindled, that they resent."

It seemed to Paul then that Keever's defense was a little too readily presented.

"It is false—false!" Penfield shrilled. "We used no violence! Ward and Young, poor lads, confronted you when they could, to demand justice for themselves and for the others whose money you took. You met them with bullets; you tried to kill them!"

Keever smiled ironically. His eyes invited Paul to join in his amusement. "You saw one of those attempts to demand justice at your hangar, Paul," he said. "I don't think it necessary to defend myself further from the verbal assaults of this persistent old gentleman."

Penfield, his hands gripped tightly, shook off his daughter's gentle restraint and turned to Paul.

"You saw that meeting?" the old man exclaimed. "Then, sir, you saw Keever drive them away with pistol shots, did you not?"

"They knocked his boatman unconscious and lay in wait for him in his boat," Paul said. "They opened fire on Keever, and on me, before they were fired upon."

Julius H. K. Keever smiled brilliantly, as Penfield slumped back uncertainly against the wall. The old man's eyes were incredulous. "Lies! Lies!" he moaned. "You are his creature, too. My daughter is mistaken in believing it was those two unfortunate boys who fired your hangar. You are all against them because they have been in prison!"

Keever laughed genially. "You, too, are a rogue!" he murmured, nodding at Paul. "Every one's a rogue but Major Penfield and his two late helpmates."

"They are dead, perhaps, but I am not," retorted the Southerner with unfailing spirit. "Hear me, now! While I live I will continue to work by every means to force you to return your loot!"

"Hear me, then!" retorted Keever, in no way ruffled. "If you do not cease your ridiculous attempt to shift your own guilt onto my shoulders I will hand you over to the police."

"Do that, then!" Joyce Penfield spoke with quick intensity. "My father is suffering far more severely away from his home and all his friends, following a forlorn hope, than he would suffer even in prison. Have him arrested and tried!"

"No—not that, Joyce!" Penfield gasped. He seemed to shrink away from them all, to become a little more helpless and insignificant than before. "Think of our name! Not prison!"

"It will be prison within twenty-four hours if you don't clear out!" Keever declared. "I mean that, Penfield!"

"Make it prison now," Paul broke in. "There's been too much talk. Have him arrested for those land frauds now."

Keever glanced at him swiftly, while Penfield covered his face with his hands. "No—not now," the millionaire answered. "I'll give him a chance to go, but I've plenty of evidence against him. He was the leading figure in the swindle."

Paul Thorne laughed in sudden relief. The eyes of the other three sought his face at the sound of his incongruous mirth.

Paul shot a reassuring glance at Joyce. Then, abruptly stern, he moved a step toward Keever. "That's enough!" he said. "When you accuse a man like Major Penfield you convict yourself, Keever. Even a fool could see that Penfield is no swindler—and you, Keever, are a very clever man."

Leaning easily against the chair, Keever regarded Paul attentively. He did not speak.

"It's hard to convince me that a friend is a rascal, Keever," Paul explained soberly. "It took you, yourself, to prove it, though Miss Penfield helped a bit. Come, Joyce; we'll take your father out of here."

Keever smiled. It was a slow smile, but one in which there was amusement, sardonic, but genuine. The smile marked the abandonment of his position as friend and counselor: "Am I a suppliant for your good opinion, Thorne?" he asked, with no appearance of hostility. "I hope not, young man."

He shook his head with sudden severity. "I've been doubting your honesty for some time, Mr. Thorne."

Paul ignored the remark. It was preposterous. Keever doubted his honesty! There was irony! He took Major Penfield's arm, for the tired old man, wracked by emotion, seemed hardly able to stand.

Keever reached slowly into his pocket. Paul's eyes leaped toward him. He let go Penfield's arm and poised on his toes, alertly.

But the millionaire merely drew out a printed double leaf of paper. It was the circular that Hallock, Spencer & Goddard had issued in selling the Thornryn stock. Keever looked at it with leisurely attention. He shook his head again and pursed his lips.

"This letter, signed by Paul Thorne, president of the Thornryn company," he said, "was used in a stock-selling campaign. It seems to be unduly optimistic concerning the prospects of the company. In fact, I think there are some positive inaccuracies in it."

Paul's heart jumped. This was the letter that Keever had written and induced him to send to the brokers. He concealed his uneasiness.

"Signed by the president of the company himself," Keever murmured, turning the circular over slowly in his big fingers. "If there are misstatements in it, then the officers of the company are

liable to arrest and prosecution as fraudulent stock promoters. The stock isn't doing as well as it did at first, either."

He glanced keenly under his eyebrows at Paul. "It looks like a clear case for the attorney general. Misrepresentation, market-rigging, a peculiar fire which prevents a public demonstration of the plane! It seems quite an obvious swindle now, although I was foolish enough to buy stock in the company myself."

Paul's wrath welled up. Impulsively he moved toward Keever. But at that moment Major Penfield uttered a high, thin cry of distress.

"He's got you, Thorne! He's got you, as he got me!"

The old man tried to lunge at the unmoved millionaire, but his strength gave way and he dropped to the floor, unconscious. Weeping, Joyce knelt beside him.

Keever did not change his position. He leaned on the chair back and looked down at the small, drooping figure on the floor.

"Could it be that the old fool is right, Thorne?" he asked quietly. "Have I got you?"

"I'll carry him, Joyce," Paul said; and lifted the faded old Southerner in his arms. "We'll get out of here; you go first."

Swiftly the distressed girl moved toward the companionway and Paul, with his burden, followed. At the foot of the stairs he turned. Keever, still motionless, was watching him.

"I can deal with enemies, Keever," Paul said. "It is supposed friends that I cannot handle."

"I'll break you," Keever promised. His eyes gleamed. "It will be amusing to hurl the peerless young hero of the air from his heights. I'll break you—and make a profit on it."

"We know where we stand, then," Paul answered. Gently bearing the old man, he made his way up the steps.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LESSON IN RISKS.

ON the afternoon before the Harmsworth cup race there was a sober but not a despairing consultation around the table in the small office at the Thornryn plant.

The three who conferred so seriously were Paul, Grant van Ryn, and Joyce Penfield. Paul had just returned from New York.

"Sorry I haven't pleasant news for you," he reported. "I must admit that, thanks to my touching faith in Keever, we're in a hole—a very bad hole. I hadn't realized how deep it was until I went up against the polite but inflexible firm of Hallock, Spencer & Goddard."

"Do you think they're crooked, too?" Van asked.

Paul shook his head. "They're straight," he declared. "I checked up on them, you know, before I arranged with them to issue the Thornryn stock. No, they're straight, but hard boiled. The name of the firm is involved in this thing and to save their own name they're all ready to sink the Thornryn company."

"That—that infernal letter that Keever wrote for us," Van said uneasily. "Do they think it's misleading enough to—bring about criminal proceedings, as Keever said? I've read it a dozen times and it seems just over-optimistic to me."

"All crooked promoters are merely overoptimistic," Paul explained grimly. "Spencer, the firm member I talked to to-day, said that it wasn't the letter so much as the fact that we have a powerful enemy like Keever that makes it look serious."

"Keever, through dummies, can launch such a flood of complaints that the attorney general must investigate. And when the law steps in both the Thornryn company and Hallock,

Spencer & Goddard are ruined automatically. When Wall Street loses confidence it's all over."

"Then——"

"Spencer demanded the surrender of control, funds, everything."

Van Ryn uttered a groan.

"I know how you feel," Paul said grimly. "Spencer declared that they could save themselves only by getting hold now of all the assets. They intend to stop work on the factory. They're afraid. If we don't give them control at once he said the firm itself would start criminal proceedings against us."

"What!" exclaimed Joyce indignantly.

Paul nodded. "They intend to save their face at any cost to us."

"Did—did you—— Of course you handed over our ten shares of voting stock to them," Van said dejectedly. "It's all right, Paul; I know it was the only thing you could do."

Paul shook his head. For a young man his countenance was singularly hard and lined just then. "I gave them nothing," he said. "I told them that we'd risked our time, our money and our lives on this ship, and that merely adding our liberty to the pile we'd bet on, it wasn't going to scare us. I said that until Uncle Sam stood on our chests and wrenched control of the company away from us we'd hang on."

Van drew a deep breath. His eyes glinted suddenly. "That's the stuff, Paul! I'm with you—in jail or out! What happened?"

Paul grinned. "He roared at me like a thousand-horse motor on a block test," he said. "He called in his partners and they roared. I had to tell them that they might consider themselves hell-bending gamblers in Wall Street but that when it came down to taking a real risk any greasy-faced pilot could give them lessons."

"And then?" Joyce asked breathlessly.

"More roaring, but they didn't call a

cop. Finally they quieted down a bit. I told them what winning the Harmsworth race would mean to us. I pointed out that Keever would have to force a terrific drop in the market price of Thornryn—enough, say, to wipe out our interest in our twenty thousand shares that we mortgaged with the firm to buy more stock. You see, Keever must drive the stock down to prove it a swindle. The authorities aren't going to start anything until that happens.

"Up to the present Keever's been able to jolt the stock but there's a steady flood of small orders to buy Thornryn coming in from people who know us. Keever can't smash the stock by short selling unless he can halt that demand."

Paul smiled rather tensely. "I've been thinking hard since our ex-friend told me he was going to break me and make a profit on it. The one way he can really break me—and Thornryn—is by assuring himself that something goes wrong in a spectacular way with the plane or with me in the race to-morrow."

"You mean—a crash?" Van demanded.

Joyce leaned forward. Into her eyes leaped horror.

Paul nodded. "A good, messy crash that wrecked the ship and killed me would be a hard knock for Thornryn. And if Keever had anticipated the crash and flung into the market orders to sell short thousands of shares he'd drive Thornryn down to about nothing. Then he'd cash in."

Van Ryn looked at his partner with a white face. "Paul!"

"You've probably noticed that Ike Smith and the other old-timers haven't let the ship get out of sight since Keever revealed himself," Paul said dryly. "It isn't going to be an easy thing to tamper with that ship."

He stood up suddenly and looked down at them, hands resting on the table. "Cheer up!" he urged, with a quick, spontaneous grin. "Suppose I

win to-morrow? How many orders for ships will come in? What could Keever do then? Remember, the ship's good. It's better than anything I've seen over on Hempstead Plains yet. Give us our share of the breaks and that ship will pull us through!"

The sight of his confident, animated face revived Van, though Joyce Penfield's face remained quite white and drawn.

"I've as much faith in you as I have in the ship, Paul," the engineer said, as he stood up. "That's saying something."

"I'll be weeping for Keever as I breeze past the finish pylon," Paul declared, turning the full power of his smile on the anxious girl. She met his eyes, and suddenly smiled back at him.

"I'm sure you'll win," she said. "Only—watch the plane."

Leaving Van to his blue prints, they walked out of the office. Paul gestured up the hill. "The ship's up there on our new flying field with Ike and the other mechs nursing it," he said. "That means I can take time off to row you back to Brig Harbor."

"Do you think you should?" she asked, hesitating.

"You wouldn't refuse me that much recreation, would you, Joyce?" he asked pathetically. "Just to get finance out of my lungs? I'm in a bad way—but a row with you will just set me up."

"Come on, then," she said, stepping into a rowboat.

He took the oars and pulled slowly out across the cove. Joyce was silent. Her face had become troubled again.

"I haven't asked you how your father is getting on," he said gently, reading her thoughts.

"No better," she answered. "He is still quite ill. He is possessed by the thought that he must bring Keever to justice. It is weakening him. And sometimes he talks so longingly about Jamesville and the people there, it is rather hard to listen to him. But he

will not go back until Keever is punished, and that means——”

Quick tears flooded her eyes. “Never!” she finished.

“It may not be that bad,” Paul said. His jaw was set.

Joyce, looking up bravely, let her eyes rest upon the green sweep of the woods beside the plant. “You know, I feel as if——” She shuddered uncontrollably. “Look there! Isn’t that a man watching us? He’s gone!”

Paul turned sharply. He had a vague impression of a shadow flitting back among the tree trunks.

“It might have been,” he said to the agitated girl. “But what if it was? Let ’em watch us, if they want.”

But her face remained white. “I—I almost thought that I recognized—Ward,” she confessed, with a tremulous laugh. “That—that small head with the shining black hair—his peculiar eyes. I—though he was always friendly and I thought him innocent I never—liked Ward at all.”

Paul did not answer immediately. Ward’s body had never been found. He could imagine how Joyce had felt, compelled to associate with such a man because of her father’s belief in him.

“Ward’s dead,” he said. “But if he were alive he’d be gunning for Keever now, not the Thornryn company. He’d have his ways of finding out that we were enemies of Keever, too.”

“But—he—he would not like your having allied yourself with me after having gotten rid of him,” she murmured, flushing suddenly. “He—he’d resent that, I know.”

Paul laughed. “When there’s a lion chasing me I’m not afraid of a chipmunk,” he answered cheerily. “Within sixteen hours the lion will have bitten or we will have drawn his teeth. That’s what I’m interested in.”

“Sixteen hours!” she said. “It will be a lifetime!”

Paul smiled reassuringly. “I hope

not,” he said to himself, as he turned the boat alongside the town pier. “I’m beginning to want my lifetime to go right on after the race.”

Despite her protests, he walked with her up to the small boarding house where she and her father lodged. Then, after promising that a car would bring her over to Mineola in the morning, he left her and rowed back to the plant.

Catching up helmet and goggles, he climbed the path to the broad plateau above the shop that had become Thornryn field. The ship was out of its temporary canvas hangar and already warmed up. Thorne looked at its clear, beautiful lines with confidence.

Paul Thorne swung up into the after cockpit. “You come with me on this last trial, Ike,” he said. “We’ll land at Wilson. The others will start at once in the car and the truck.”

CHAPTER XVII.

KEEVER’S MOVE.

LATE that afternoon at Wilson field, a broad and undeveloped stretch of Hempstead Plains, pandemonium was king. Forty fast ships, with forty crews of mechanics and forty pilots stir up much action and reaction. The field was seething.

Half of the racing fleet was up for test hops while the other half was being tuned up along the line. In addition to these contesting craft scores of ships from every part of the country had come in to see the speed duel in the morning. There were, too, hundreds of cars and thousands of spectators. The beat of motors, like giant tomtoms, rose dominant above the rest of the uproar. It was a sound to stir any man’s blood.

“Huh!” said Ike Smith, gazing at the milling swarms along the line. “We certainly had the right dope getting her in shape on our own field. Nothing to do now but shove her in her hangar.”

“And watch her,” Paul added.

But getting her in her hangar was not quite so easy. It took Paul an hour to find out about that.

"Yes, I know you put in for a small hangar for this ship alone," the harassed field manager told Paul when he was finally located. "But we've been swamped with ships. I had to put you down for No. 10. Didn't I tell you that a while ago? It's all right—if you're not superstitious."

He smiled fleetingly at Paul's inquiring glance.

"We've got two or three crashes in there that the boys haven't had time to clean up," he explained. "Except for the space they take up, the hangar's all yours."

"That will do," Paul decided.

He hastened back to the ship and found Ike Smith beside it gossiping with two other mechs.

"No. 10, Ike," he said, and with the aid of the mechanics they rolled the ship into the big shed. Paul stood at the entrance to make sure that both the helping mechanics left the hangar.

Ike Smith stared with displeased eyes at the wreckage jammed together in the rear of the dark, cavernous shed. There were in it a low-powered biplane that had apparently crashed nose on into the ground; a larger biplane that had washed out its right wings and landing gear, and the fuselage of a two-motored monoplane that was denuded of its wings.

"They got us in the boneyard already, have they?" Ike Smith growled. "A sweet note this is!"

"I'd rather start in the boneyard than end in it," Paul answered cheerfully. He examined and locked the windows on the inside. While Ike Smith stood by at the door, he circled the big shed and made sure that there was no way to enter the place save through the front doors.

Together they mounted guard over the hangar doors. Ike, surveying the

ships in the air and the ships on the ground, snorted contemptuously.

"It's the same old game," he said. "Half of 'em ain't in shape yet. And the half that are in shape now will be running like prewar flivvers by the time they've tinkered with 'em all night."

He nodded his wise old head solemnly. "It may be nerve that wins races, but it's nerves that loses 'em," he declared.

When the other mechanics from Thornryn field arrived in Van Ryn's car and in a truck that also carried spare wheels and parts, Paul called the men around him in the hangar and spoke to them.

"You know about that fire last week and you know that we have more to buck than the ordinary breaks of the race," Paul said. "We've got to win. That isn't oratory; that's the truth. I'm going to turn in early and leave you to do the watching and worrying. Two men at a time, inside the hangar and armed with automatics, are going to stand four-hour watches until nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Then we warm her up and go after that cup. The race may be won or lost to-night, before the starter waves his flag. You do your part now and I'll try to do mine to-morrow."

There was a murmur of approval from the mechanics.

"Fair enough," said George Fenwood. "If anybody comes snoopin' around this job we'll make him look sicker'n them washouts." He jerked a strong but oily thumb toward the grim wreckage that loomed in the rear of the hangar.

Paul left Ike Smith in charge and walked with Van Ryn down the line. The sun had set and the uproar had lessened with the fading day.

"I'll stand by, off and on, all night," Van Ryn promised. He frowned. "It's necessary," he said. "As I was coming into the field just now I spotted Keever."

"Near our hangar?" Paul asked sharply.

"No. He was in a big touring car in the first row of parked cars. Rip Bronson wasn't with him. He saw me, too, and waved cordially. You know his cordiality. His smile gave me a chill."

Paul nodded. "He's inhuman," he said. "His moral nature is atrophied, or—something like that. Pathological. He'd do anything at all to win."

"How about you? Where are you going to sleep?" Van Ryn asked uneasily.

Paul gave him a telephone number. "Nobody knows that but you," he said. "It's three miles from here—the house of an old squadron mate of mine, who's married and out of the air now. I want an undisturbed night's sleep."

"You'll need it," muttered Van Ryn. "Some of these ships aren't bad jobs at all. One way and another we've got quite a bit against us."

Paul Thorne laughed. His eyes brightened with the light of battle. "Cheer up!" he said to his troubled partner. "We have a big advantage over the whole bunch. They just want to win; we've got to win."

He thumped Van reassuringly upon the shoulder, climbed into the driver's seat of their old car and sent it rattling briskly toward the road. Once clear of the crowds he performed a rapid series of maneuvers among the back roads that no other car could imitate without betraying itself to him. Then he headed toward his refuge for the night.

No jangling telephone broke in upon Paul Thorne's rest. He awoke early, shaved with an unshaking hand and went for a stroll in his host's small rose garden. He had no intention of rushing to the field and chivvying his mechanics around for hours before the start. Last-minute adjustments and rows lose more races than they win.

He timed himself to arrive at the

field about an hour before the race. As he drove he kept a sharp lookout for possible traps or ambushes and had his automatic ready. Nothing disturbed the calm of his ride through the sunlit, almost windless morning. Keever, he reflected, as he made for the entrance to the field reserved for contestants and officials, was never theatrical. But at the same time he was always formidable.

He parked his car and walked toward hangar No. 10. With a sudden jump of his heart he saw that the ship was already out on the line in front of the hangar. That was strange. Half a dozen agitated mechanics were clustered about it. Van Ryn was not in sight.

Paul broke into a run. Something was wrong.

One of the men, seeing him coming, jerked a thumb significantly toward the hangar. Paul ran that way. The door was closed, but not locked. He rolled it open and stepped in.

Rip Bronson, white-faced, with a purple gash across the top of his head, sat limply on a box just inside the door. Van Ryn stood on one side of him, Ike Smith on the other. Behind them, unsteady on their feet, were two mechanics. They looked both ill and shame-faced.

Van Ryn started nervously and swung around as Paul entered. His face was haggard and as white as Rip Bronson's.

"What's up?" Paul demanded.

Van Ryn made a gesture of despair. He was voiceless.

"The ship's been—this rat has been at it!" Ike Smith snarled. His eyes blazed at Rip Bronson.

Paul swung on his heel and raced out of the hangar. The mechanics drew away a bit as he rushed toward the plane.

"What's been done to it?" Paul asked. "Can we fix it?"

George Fenwood pointed silently to the forward edge of the big wing. Paul discerned a cut in the fabric that ex-

tended back to the front spar of the plane.

"That front spar's been sawed almost through with a hacksaw," George Fenwood mumbled. "We haven't ripped her down to see how bad it is, but—look how far that cut goes back!"

Paul stared at that small, significant blemish in the wing of his perfect ship. Was this the end of things?

"Take a cord or a bit of wire and see if you can get an accurate estimate of how deep the saw bit in," he ordered curtly. "Only one cut, I see. Maybe they stopped him in time."

He turned away from the ship. He felt suddenly numb. At the corner of the hangar he saw Joyce Penfield. She gazed at him in white-lipped agony. Her arms made a movement toward him—a gesture of sympathy and helplessness. Her mouth was tender with compassion. She drew back, out of his sight, as he veered toward her. He understood, and went on toward Van Ryn, who was waiting for him at the door. Ike Smith still stood beside Bronson, with his hand heavy on the pilot's shoulder.

"Just what happened?" Paul demanded hoarsely.

"These two mechs here ordered coffee brought to them at six this mornin' from one o' them stands," Ike said. "A kid brought it. They drank it—and passed out."

"When we got here and banged on the hangar door nothing happened. We busted it open in a hurry. This dirty little snake tried to sneak past us but he was too wabby on his feet to sneak good. We caught him. The mechs were just coming to. They thought they'd been asleep at the switch, but I figured they'd been drugged. We went over the ship carefully and found the cut in the wing."

Ike Smith's hand, gripped into a bony fist, swung wrathfully toward his captive's face. Paul stopped the blow as Rip cringed.

"See if you think the ship's absolutely shot, Ike," he ordered. "We've still got almost an hour. Warm her up anyhow. Send another mech to guard this fellow."

Rip Bronson snarled up at Paul as Ike left.

"You got me, but you won't win no race to-day," he declared, with an evil grin. "You can't even start. You can't get the ship off the ground."

Paul studied the malevolent face of Rip with hard, speculative eyes.

"That wing will snap the minute you get in the air," Rip asserted emphatically.

"Will it stand taxiing, Rip?" Paul asked suddenly.

"Yeh; it would stand any test but flight," he answered quickly.

Another mechanic came to guard the prisoner. Paul, hurried with Van back to the ship. He climbed up and studied the wing intently. The fairing around the spar made accurate examination impossible.

"Can't tell how deep it goes, sir," George Fenwood reported cautiously.

Paul climbed down. "That spar may not be all shot, Van," he said. "And Rip seemed damned anxious to convince me that it was."

Van did not answer. He was staring past the ship in angry astonishment. "Look!" he exclaimed.

A man with an honorary official's badge on his coat was approaching the ship. It was Keever, quite imperturbable. His eyes, running along the ship, came to rest on the wing spar. One of the mechanics reached up and touched the cut. Almost imperceptibly Keever frowned. He glanced around, smoothing his face. He saw the partners and nodded genially.

"Good morning!" he greeted. "All ready to win the race, I see." His smile became mocking. "It would be advisable, in view of that overoptimistic letter."

"Get away from here or I'll——" Van Ryn began passionately; but Paul stopped him with a pressure on his arm.

"Just a minute, Van," he said. He faced Keever's masklike grin, thinking hard. Had Keever frowned because the cut in the wing spar had been discovered? Had he planned murder? If he had, had Rip, the yellow, done his deadly work thoroughly? Questions—— Questions! And the starting minute for the race creeping nearer. He must have an answer.

"Keever," Paul said slowly. "you know we've had trouble. I'm going to test-hop this ship before the race. And I'm going to have you with me."

He turned to the mechanics. His old-timers were already clustering about Keever with fierce, hostile faces. They had heard a lot, these men, and had guessed more.

"Close in!" Paul commanded. "If he tries to yell, choke him off. If he tries to run—stop him."

Without a sign of alarm Keever leaned back against the fuselage of the ship. He glanced into the forward cockpit quite casually. "Rather high-handed, isn't this?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Paul. "But we're all Thornryn men here, Keever. Are you going to fly with me?"

Keever looked about. As all but contestants were rigidly excluded from the line, he was far from help. His face remained as immobile as cast iron. Again his eyes strayed back to the cockpit.

"I'll fly with you, Paul," he decided with a sudden twist of the lips. "Delighted! My first flight with you was most enjoyable—and"—the twisting lips opened farther—"even more profitable. Perhaps this flight will be, too."

"Perhaps," Paul answered in a level voice. "Get in!"

Keever obeyed instantly. Paul drew close to him.

"If you ordered Bronson to weaken

that spar so that it would break at high speed it will break on this hop," he said. "I'll see to that. Anything to say?"

"You seem to be suffering from nerves this morning, Paul," Keever said softly. Despite his manner his eyes were wary and alert. Plainly the man was aware of danger and faced it courageously. His attitude gave no answer to those tormenting questions.

Paul swung himself into the rear compartment of the ship. Before he could open the throttle Van Ryn and Ike Smith had leaped to either side of the cockpit, each with a foot on the step.

"You're mad, Paul!" Van exclaimed. "How do you know—— The wing may crumple up!"

Paul turned a determined face to his partner. His mouth was compressed but his eyes were level and unexcited.

"Has he more to gain than we?" he asked. "See you later."

"Listen, boss!" Ike Smith implored, on the other side. "If you're goin' to take her up slip into a chute pack. Wait a minute, for God's sake!"

"Off the step, Ike!" Paul commanded. Sullenly the mechanic obeyed. Paul gunned the ship and taxied out onto the field. His automatic rested in his lap. His eyes kept track of the courses of other ships on the ground and in the air, but most of the time they were fixed upon the back of Keever's head. The millionaire had moved this way and that in the cockpit but he had never looked behind.

Paul jazzed the ship around into the wind and then idled the motor. He bent forward, right hand alertly gripping the barrel of his automatic, and addressed the man in the forward cockpit.

"Last chance, Keever!" he warned. "Are you trying to bluff me out of this race or are you trying to murder me?"

Keever presented his face to the pilot. It was no longer quite a blank mask of stone. There were tiny, almost imperceptible lines across his forehead and at

the corners of his eyes and mouth. But, despite these signs of strain, there was amusement, too, in his face, the sardonic amusement that was peculiarly his own.

"Your company's at stake!" he taunted. "I've given my market orders. Your stock won't be worth four to-night. Are you quitting?"

"Cold nerve!" Paul muttered. He was convinced that Keever knew that the ship was doomed. There was nothing to be gained by going on to a crash—nothing to be gained for the Thorn-ryn company, anyhow.

But this man was an evil force, a malevolent devil that had ruined poor old Penfield, Van Ryn, himself, and no doubt would ruin a host of others. He had outwitted Paul and now was he outdaring him? His twisted smile was a challenge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

PAUL'S hand jumped to the throttle. "You're through, Keever!" he said.

The ship moved ahead—a sluggish, lumbering thing. Then, as the motor twirled the propeller faster and faster, its wheels rolled over the smooth greensward less unwillingly. The tail left the ground; the ship hummed on upon its wheels. Keever's head disappeared below the edge of the cockpit.

Paul darted a single glance at the threatened wing. He held the ship steadily to the ground until he had more than easy flying speed. Then, with a gentle movement of the stick, he released his restraint.

Without a hint of trouble the ship slipped away from the grass. It flew a steady course and answered the controls. Paul lifted it high over the row of hangars; over the throng of cars and people; into the free air where all man's works upon the ground appear like scattered toys lost in a vast, many-colored meadow.

Keever's head was still invisible. Paul

banked around the field and then headed toward clearer territory. With a grim face he opened the throttle. He watched the dial of the air-speed meter. The needle climbed past one hundred and twenty and moved smoothly on—one hundred and thirty—one hundred and forty—the ship was beginning to travel.

The air that beat upon the top of his unhelmeted head was as thick as rushing water. The strain upon the wing spar was severe—but there were still a few notches left upon the throttle quadrant. Paul's hand pushed the lever steadily on. The moment of greatest pressure had come. Paul clamped his jaw shut. Would the wing go now?

Suddenly, as the ship screamed faster through the air, Keever's head came up into view in the forward cockpit. His face, with a triumphant snarl upon it, turned toward Paul and rose high above the wind screen. He lifted a bundle into sight and pushed it over the side. It was a parachute pack!

Keever's shoulders came into view. Against the dark-blue cloth of his coat showed the broad white bands of webbing that make up a parachute harness. For just an instant longer he smiled in evil joy at Paul; then he flung himself over the side. He vanished instantly.

Paul's eyes leaped to the damaged wing. Still it held.

In a flash of enlightenment he recalled how Keever had glanced into that forward cockpit before he had accepted so boldly Paul's challenge. He had seen the two parachute packs lying there. The only chance he had taken was to stay with the ship till he had strapped himself into the chute harness.

"I didn't quit, Keever!" Paul muttered. "And I'm not quitting now!"

He slung the ship up on one wing tip and stared astern. He saw Keever's sprawling body, far below. Then a great white spread of silk puffed out above it.

The tail assembly cut off Paul's view.

He turned his thoughts to his ship. He kept the throttle wide open and waited. The ship blared on through the sky. Top speed now—and the wing held! A minute passed—and still he roared on.

With cars tuned for the sudden crack that meant doom, he dived the ship. It was the supreme test.

There was no sign of failure in the plunging, hard-pressed ship as the earth moved up to meet him. Paul pulled out of the dive and exuberantly sent the ship away toward the nearest pylon of the triangular course.

"Rip hadn't the nerve to do it!" he exulted. "He balked at murder—just tried to bluff me out of the race!"

A few minutes later he was back at the field. He thundered around the drome while another contestant landed his ship; then sideslipped down and taxied with a light heart to hangar No. 10.

At the line he leaped out. "Keep her warm, Ike!" he said to the excited mechanic. "Put a patch over that nick in the fairing. She's as sound as when she came off the floor."

He rushed past the shouting men of the crew. Joyce Penfield, standing by the hangar with Van Ryn, read his face. Her own became radiant. Van, though equally happy, glanced open-mouthed at the empty forward cockpit.

"I lost my passenger," Paul said cheerily. "He wriggled into a parachute pack and went over the side when I gave her full gun. Thoughtfully chucked my pack over, too. I'll see him later."

"Then—the ship's all right?" Van asked incredulously.

"It is! Come with me!" Paul led them into the hangar. "Almost starting time; but we'll straighten this out."

Rip Bronson, under guard, still sat on his box, swabbing his head with some wet cotton waste.

"We've called you, Rip!" Paul said. "You sawed the fairing—not the spar.

It will save you something to come clean."

"You be damned—you hero!" Rip retorted. "You ain't got much on me! I never let Keever down before, but this time——" He hesitated.

"All right; I'll come through," he decided. "Keever'll never take me back after this." He jerked his hand toward the mass of wreckage that cumbered the rear of the hangar. "Long before you got here he'd hid me under some o' that stuff. He knew you'd get this hangar. I waited all night till the two mechs drank the coffee and it laid 'em out."

"And then?"

"I'm no killer—I can't stand rough stuff. I sawed a little o' the wing edge. Then I started in in earnest on the axle. Don't get the idea I'm your friend. If the axle broke while you were taxiing on the field—well, you'd be out o' the race and Keever'd never know I quit on the wing spar."

"The axle's all right!" Paul declared. Rip's story sounded like truth, but he had just proved the strength of the landing gear.

Rip scowled up at him and tenderly felt his head. "It wouldn't ha' been all right if one o' your mechs hadn't come to when I started on it with the saw. He slugged me. I never had a chance to fight—he got me from behind."

"You lie!" snarled the pale-faced mechanic guarding him. "That coffee put me and my mate out cold until after they opened the door. If one of us had slugged you, you'd still be asleep."

Rip Bronson snapped back at him and both men flared up into a bitter wrangle. Paul's voice rose as he commanded silence. There was something queer—perhaps sinister—about this discrepancy. From behind them came an interruption.

"Drive right in!" a deep voice, strangely dragging and hesitant, ordered. "Drive in, I say!"

Paul swung around. His body tensed. He knew that voice.

A battered motor truck with a chattering engine nosed through the door into the hangar. In the driver's place sat a tall farm laborer. He was shaking with fear and his forehead was wet with sweat. Beside him, wrapped to his chest in a bloody, silken cloth was Kever.

Rip Bronson uttered a shrill, astonished cry at the sight of his master. Paul Joyce and Van stared, too, for there was something unearthly about the man.

They had last seen Kever less than half an hour ago. And now he was back again—but they disbelieved their eyes. The millionaire's face had collapsed into the seamed, hollow, dust-gray visage of a man twice his age. Only his mouth, with that sardonic, tight-lipped smile, was the same. He lay slumped against the back of the seat, motionless. The parachute was drawn about his body like a shroud. That silken wrapping, with its ominous stains, hinted of horrible injuries. One of his hands only was visible to them.

"Come back later," Kever commanded his driver. The youth slipped eagerly out of his seat and fled from the hangar. "You, too!" Kever said, eying the mechanic who had been Rip Bronson's guard. Silently without a protest, the man left them. Kever's will, a force that seemed almost physical, had cowed him. Now it dominated all the others.

Kever's eyes—only his eyes—turned toward the four who remained—Paul, Joyce, Van Ryn and Rip Bronson. On the high seat of the truck he seemed to look down upon them like a judge.

"Behold the juggernaut!" he said with somber irony, and then twisted his bleeding lips into a grin. "You did not expect me back, did you, Paul? A clever trick—leaving that slashed parachute in the cockpit. But a tree saved me from quick death, Paul."

His blue eyes dwelt piercingly upon

the astounded pilot and then a puzzled look came into them.

"But I am wrong about your cleverness," Kever muttered. "You aren't the one. No; I can see that. Who, then?"

His voice became suddenly low and almost caressing. "Rip, was it you who slashed that parachute, having failed to cut the wing spar? Was it you?"

Rip crouched on his box, shaking uncontrollably. His eyes had not once left Kever's terrible face.

"I—before God—I—I—never slashed nothing!" He blurted out. "B-before God! I c-couldn't saw that spar. I—couldn't."

"I knew your squeamishness would get you into trouble one day," Kever said, with dreadful slowness. "But who slashed that parachute?"

"I know—I know!" Joyce Penfield exclaimed. She had released herself from Kever's dominance, but her eyes held in their depths a sudden, overwhelming horror. She touched Paul's hand. "It—it must have been Ward! He must be alive! He—he hated you, Paul! He wanted to kill you because — And it was Kever that fell into his trap! Oh, he must have done it!"

"Ward!" Paul echoed. "Ward! You're right! Perhaps he got in the way that Rip did. He may—be here!"

He ran toward the back of the hangar, but he had gone only a few steps when suddenly a man flung himself down from the cockpit of one of the wrecked biplanes—a small man, with gleaming black hair and gleaming, irregular teeth.

"Yes, Ward!" he shrilled, in his strange high voice. He waved a blue-black automatic in a frenzy of bravado. "Ward! It was Ward who got you, Kever!"

He advanced upon them, with his pistol flickering always from one to the other. His eyes were bright with evil and his mouth worked spasmodically.

"I made one mistake! I should have sawed that wing myself! It was I that tapped Bronson's skull when he started on the axle—the quitter!"

Keever sat motionless. His eyes, terrible in their unchanging mildness, focused on Ward.

But Ward was quite past caring. "I've got you all!" he exulted shrilly. "All! You're first, Keever!"

Pistol leveled, he ran toward the grim figure on the seat above them. But Paul had had enough of Ward. He swung out a quick, strong arm as the murderous convict rushed frantically past him. His hand closed on Ward's throat. The force of his thrust sent the man's feet strawling ahead of him. In an instant Paul was down on top of him, and had wrenched the pistol out of his hand. Then, contemptuously, he dropped the weapon into his pocket and got up.

But Ward was not through. Trapped, desperate, venomous, he leaped to his feet with mad agility. He leaped again, to the fender of the truck and flung himself bodily at the twisted, grinning face of Keever.

There was a sudden, roaring report; an explosion that was like a heavy blow on the ears of every one within the hangar. Ward, with a cry, recoiled from Keever. He fell to the floor, writhed there an instant and then scrambled onto his legs. Clutching his chest, he fled blindly out of the hanger.

"Don't move!" Keever warned them in his hollow, weak voice. From a ragged, smoking hole in the parachute silk about him there protruded the muzzle of a pistol. "Rip! Look at me!"

The treacherous little pilot, seated, frozen by fright on his box, stared up at his master. He was like a fascinated bird.

"You quit, Rip. And you'd talk if I didn't take you with me," Keever said. His voice was no longer a voice; it was a mere whisper.

Keever, who had seemed an impotent,

pitiable thing, became a living menace, deadly in his cold determination. Paul sensed the change instantly.

"Run!" he shouted to the others, and, reaching for Ward's pistol, he charged, as Ward had done.

The muzzle of the gun in Keever's hand pivoted toward Paul Thorne. It moved out of the folds of silk toward him. The finger upon the trigger tensed, Keever's teeth set; his lips curled upward in a grimace of supreme exertion. The pistol shook under his effort to pull the trigger again. And then, all at once, the pistol shook no longer. The hand and the pistol dropped onto his lap. His tremendous effort had killed him.

On his face there remained that grin of determination. It was as if Keever, dead, still challenged Paul Thorne.

"Dead!" gasped Van Ryn. "Dead!"

Like a man awakening from a nightmare Paul pushed Ward's pistol back into his pocket. He stood there, looking about uncertainly.

From outside the hangar came all the varied sounds of the great race meeting. The drum beat of the motors fell upon his ears. His own motor was still ticking over on the line. Paul turned away from Keever to the solemn face of his partner and the frightened, yet pitying face of Joyce.

"Alive or dead, he's beaten us, unless I win this race," he said. "Maybe we're beaten even if we take the cup, Van. He said so. But we must give them a run for it, anyhow."

"I—I'll look after this," Van said, nodding from Keever to Rip Bronson. "Good luck to you, Paul."

Paul moved toward the door, drawing the girl with him.

"Aren't you going to wish me luck, too, Joyce?" he asked, halting in the shelter of the half-open door.

"I do—oh, I do!" the girl whispered. Her voice was tremulous with strain but she strove hard to make it encouraging and happy. "After all this—I wish

you the success you've fought for so hard."

She was reeling on her feet. He opened his arms and took her into them. "Don't be frightened now," he murmured. "This race means more than success."

Suddenly he kissed her quivering lips. "More than success, Joyce," he repeated. "Doesn't it mean—you?"

"With the race—or without it," she whispered with a little catch in her throat. "Good luck, Paul."

He left her there, and ran out into the bright light of the field. Ike Smith and the other mechanics stood at the line, irresolute, anxious. They had heard the shot in the hangar and the Thornryn still idled without its pilot.

Most of the contesting ships, each with its own starter, were already lined up on the down-wind side of the field. A few stragglers were still taxiing slowly to their positions.

"Trouble's over," Paul snapped. "Will you ride with me, Ike?"

"To Halifax an' back!" Ike answered joyfully. "All set. Gun her, boss!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FULL THROTTLE!

TO Paul Thorne that race of four hundred miles around a triangular course for the Harmsworth cup was to remain a blurred, distorted thing.

Fierce joy in the speed of the ship, eyes aching and bloodshot from searching ahead for pylons, head buffeted by slipstream and dizzy from pressure of blood on the turns. Ships ahead and ships behind, now barely visible and now so close that it seemed that wings must meet. The strange reeling earth that blurred at times; the never-ceasing, terrific blare of the motor; Ike Smith's grinning face ahead of him; thoughts of Keever, of Joyce, of the queer thing called finance—all this was what the race was to him. Fantasmagoria.

Nothing was real but the throttle, and that must be kept wide open. Not the best thing for the motor; not the best thing for the ship, that wide-open throttle. But this was no scientific test of motors and ships such as the donor of the cup had intended. It was a fierce, elementary battle, in which speed was the only weapon and sluggishness the only sin.

The pilots were flying wild, intoxicated by their own speed and by the speed of their fellows. Not a third of the starters reached the halfway mark in that four-hundred-mile race. Bearings burned out; connecting rods snapped; oil-pressure gauges dropped inexplicably to zero; radiators boiled; valves stuck; propellers, controls, even wings and pilots failed, but always the survivors went roaring on.

To Paul, it seemed that he was not only racing, but fleeing. Van's reputation, his own good name, Joyce Penfield's tender mouth, even poor old Major Penfield's dream of Jamesville—these things were ahead—always around the pylon ahead and fleeting faster than the wide-open throttle would hurl the ship on. And behind him, close behind, came black and horrible things—disgrace, a dismantled Thornryn plant, trusting friends despoiled by worthless stock, Van's sad face, broken promises, prison, tears in Joyce Penfield's eyes.

Ships— Ships— Ships.

His eyes lusted for more ships to pass.

There came a time when Ike Smith's weathered old face turned persistently to Paul's; when his fingers gestured emphatically downward, toward the field.

"Something wrong?" Paul framed the words with his mouth, but did not touch the throttle. Not if she wracked herself to pieces would he ease up. He loved this ship, but he was flying for more than a ship now. She must stand the gaff. They had built her for that.

"All over!" Ike replied in pantomime. "Land! Land! Over!"

Mechanically Paul cut the gun; the slowing of the motor relieved an overwhelming weight upon his brain. In a daze he shifted his aching body.

Gliding to leeward of the broad field he sideslipped away his speed and altitude and set his wheels on the ground. With a jumping heart he realized that several other contesting ships were already on the line in front of their hangars.

He taxied up to hangar No. 10. Keever and his grotesque truck were gone. Joyce, Van Ryn, and pale Rip Bronson were on the line together. Back of the hangar, hedged in by ropes and struggling policemen, a crowd was struggling and shrieking, but Paul did not notice that.

He snapped off his ignition switch and climbed stiffly to the ground. Van's eyes were upon him, shifting from him to the ship and back again. Van's face was wooden, quite expressionless.

"How did we do?" Paul asked fearfully. He did not need to ask. Did not poor old Van's stoic air tell him that those black and horrible things from which he had fled so long had caught up with him? Why else should Van be so subdued?

"How did you do?" Van repeated. His voice was wooden, too. "You didn't outrace them, Paul; you outclassed them. You lapped the field twice. You flew the whole race at full throttle and they burned up trying to keep somewhere behind you. The motor stood it because the ship was properly streamlined. But—but—there never was any race like it!"

"Look!" Van pointed to a scarlet ship that shot, screaming, through the sky and swept, wings exactly vertical, around the home pylon. "There goes the man in second place. He's still got another lap to do."

"Then—we won!" Paul muttered incredulously. An iron band around his head was relaxing slightly. "But—these

other ships down on the field ahead of me?"

"Down and out," Van explained.

"Oh, yes, you won!" said another voice. Paul looked, and saw that it was Rip Bronson who was speaking, almost bitterly. Rip's eyes dwelt reverently upon the ship, as if it were a holy thing. "I hate you blasted heroes, but I'm—I'm damn sorry I laid a hand on a ship like that. I never seen anything like her."

"Rip's going to square things as much as he can," Van told his partner. "He knows enough about Keever's affairs to give the authorities the truth about that Florida company. Looks as if Keever's estate must disgorge."

"Paul! Paul!" Joyce murmured. "It means so much! It means that Dad can go back to Jamesville—to look his own people in the face again."

"Good!" Paul mumbled. Joyce's happy eyes were changing his bewilderment to joy. "But—you're not going back there."

He saw the quick blood leaping beneath her translucent skin and her eyes fled from the eyes of the others. He had blundered. Hastily he asked:

"Van, how about Thornryn stock in Wall Street? When will we know what—what Keever's done there?"

Van Ryn shook his head. "That's the fly in the ointment," he said soberly. "I got a telegram during the race from Spencer. Keever's brokers had opened on Thornryn—selling thousands and thousands short according to his orders. No stock could stand the tremendous power of his wealth against it too long. I guess our mortgaged stock is quite wiped out. We're broke. How badly Thornryn is hit we can't hear yet."

But within half an hour, in the midst of the wild swirl of congratulating friends and spectators that soon enveloped Paul, they were all to learn the truth. Another telegram arrived—a slightly incoherent and most apologetic

telegram—from Hallock, Spencer & Goddard, Inc. They heard the details next day.

The first waves of Keever's prearranged attack had swept Thornryn down to eleven. Then, over the ticker, had come the early news of the race. Thornryn leading at one hundred miles!

A hundred orders to buy the stock in small quantities met and absorbed Keever's second wave of selling orders.

From then on bulletins hit the market: Thornryn leading by three-quarters of a lap at two hundred miles. Thornryn laps field. Thornryn increasing lead. Thornryn reaches three-quarter mark. Thornryn laps field again. Thornryn finishes, establishing new world's record.

As fast as the ship traveled, the stock traveled faster and higher. Before the end of the race it had passed thirty; at the close of the market it was selling at forty-two.

Dull figures, but they told how one man's enormous wealth and cynicism had been met and conquered by the wealth and faith of thousands; how one man's ill will had been neutralized and vanquished by the good will of many. Other air stocks Keever had sold rallied with Thornryn.

Thornryn in five hours became a gilded name in Wall Street and in the

sky. Wires hummed with orders for Thornryn planes as well as Thornryn stock. Blythewood ordered a score of ships—humbly. Paul and Van's future was finally assured.

That evening, as the pleasant daylight faded into a no less pleasant dusk, Joyce Penfield and Paul Thorne wandered down to the town pier at Brig Harbor. There were many people about—too many.

"How about this canoe of yours?" Paul suggested. "Don't you think we might get out on the water and forget about—other things?"

"The—the canoe is on the landing stage," Joyce said demurely. "I'm glad it isn't a war canoe any longer."

Paul launched it and held it while she climbed in. He remembered that he had held that gunwale before. With long, leisurely strokes he paddled out onto the dark and placid surface of the cove.

The insistent, unending drum of hard-driven motors that still rang through Paul's ears sounded less urgently in the soft darkness. And as the canoe drifted without guidance off Brig Point under a young moon the call of motors faded away, and an older, sweeter call came in its place.

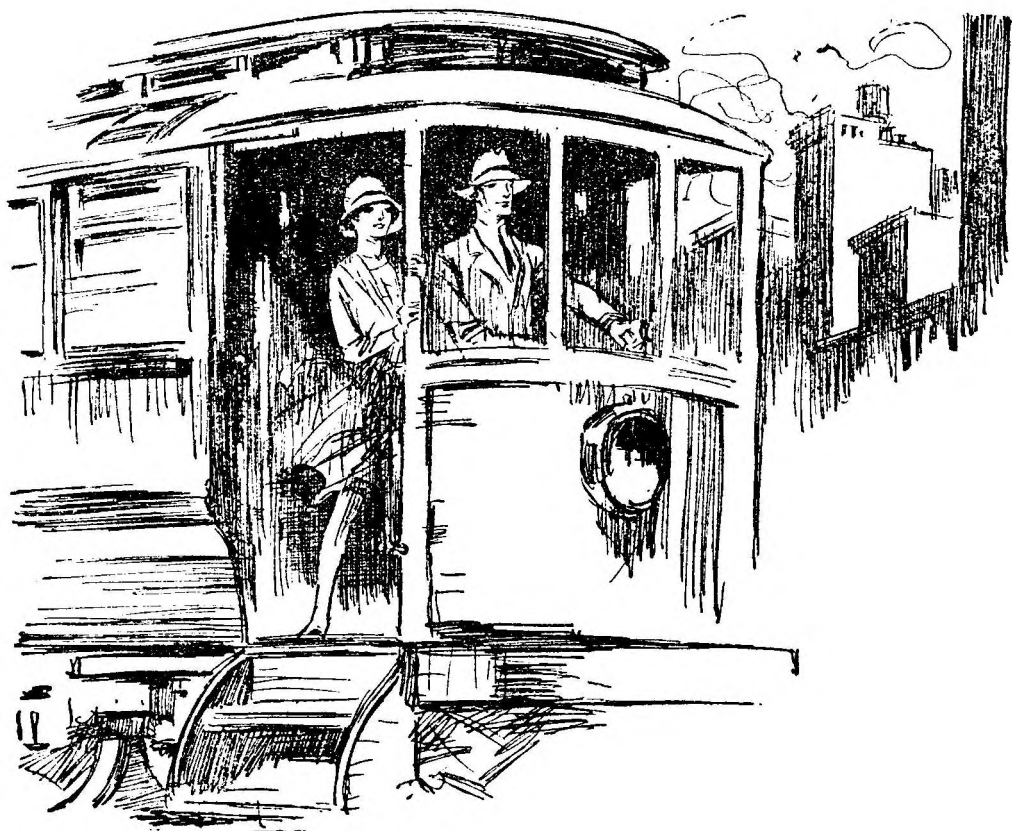
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SCOTCH

By CHARLES LENT

Who Wrote: "Give 'Em What They Want."

OUR chief clerk in the Cosmopolis Trust Company is a fat crab. I'll tell the world he is! Wouldn't you think a guy that fat would get next to himself and take some exercise?

When he gets mad he looks as if he was going to have an apoplectic fit, and

he's mad about something most of the time. I had not been in the office long before I learned to keep out of his way. I never curried favor with him the way some did.

Last week the whole office was hot and bothered. We heard that the assistant secretary was leaving to be presi-

dent of a new bank out in Plainfield, New Jersey, where he lives. Not only that, but we heard that he was taking some of the hoys from our office out there with him. That meant there would be vacancies here in the office, and vacancies meant promotion for some of us.

Lord, how I wished it would mean a chance for me! You see, I want to get married. My girl friend is Scotch. I don't need to add that she is thrifty. Just as ham goes with eggs and cabbage with corned beef, thrift goes with anything Scotch. We have been engaged for over six months. I'm crazy about her and she is about me.

But—she has ideas about what young couples starting out should do. Oh, sure, some of them do it. Get married and go to live in a three-room flat all furnished on the budget plan. You know, three rooms complete for five hundred and forty-eight dollars and fifty cents. Pay out of income. Say, the guy who thought up a swell word like "budget" to take the place of the old-fashioned "installment plan" must have got his. He's a captain of industry by now, I suppose. It's the same thing, but it sounds elegant and helps people fool themselves.

I wish you could hear Margaret snort about this here budget plan. My girl friend's name is Margaret MacGregor. She is a stenographer for a wholesale leather firm. I know for a fact that some of the guys in our office, yes, a swell office like the Cosmopolis Trust, buy their clothes on the installment plan; and half the dames in our office bought their fur coats that way.

Not any of that for Margaret. She has no fur coat—just a sensible, thick, cloth one. The money that would buy a fur coat and lots of other fancy glad rags is in her savings bank account.

I tease her about that. I accuse her of walking back from lunch every day so as to pass the bank and make sure that it and her money are still there.

Of course, she's right, at that. You will find that Margaret is one hundred per cent right about most things. I begged her to take a chance on me, swore that I would work my fingers to the bone for her after we were married.

"Naturally," she said. "Just as well for you to start in now, and then you'll be in practice."

Margaret was shocked when she found I had no savings account. You can bet I opened one in the savings department of the Cosmopolis right away.

Ain't it the truth that money grows? I don't mean just interest. But when you put in so much every week—do it regular—boy, oh, boy, you'd be surprised!

Margaret wouldn't let me spend much money on her. Sure, she likes candy and flowers and shows just as well as any one else—she's not a freak; but she liked better to see my savings grow. I liked it myself.

But when I heard all these rumors, how I did want one of those jobs that would be vacant. I figured that I was in line. The one I had my eye on, I doped out would come either to me or Bill Knox. Bill's a good scout. I like him, but he's not engaged and could wait, I thought. Anyway, I was his senior in the office by three months.

The chief clerk liked Bill, but not me. At least, so I felt. I was not at all sure, so I was worried. I tried to think of some way I could bring myself to the attention of the president and the board of directors.

I'm ashamed to tell you that I was just enough of a kid to wish that some of these bandits New York is so full of would try to stick up our place. I'd show 'em! I'd foil the attempt single handed and be rewarded. Kid stuff, but I got a thrill out of imagining it.

Thursday night of last week I had a date to take Margaret to a dance. Sure, we dance. Margaret believes in being

thrifty but we have good times like anybody else—better, I think. We just don't throw our money away on anything that comes along. This dance was something special; it was given by the Thistle Club up in the Bronx where we live. Sorta reunion of the clans, and Margaret would not think of missing it.

I am one hundred per cent American, born here, but my folks are Irish. About all that means to me is a green necktie on St. Patrick's Day. Now, Margaret takes the Scotch part of her serious.

She was born here and so was her mother. Her dad and all four of her grandparents were born in Scotland, and Margaret is more Scotch than the heather.

I hung around the office Thursday night till the last minute I dared. The chief clerk had been "in conference" with the third vice president several times that day. We all knew they were discussing promotions. We could see the chief clerk strut back to his desk each time he came out of the third vice president's office, all swelled up like a poisoned pup. How that guy does enjoy a little authority! If anything was decided, he kept it to himself, for nothing was said up to the time I left. I had hoped I could tell Margaret that night that I had a raise and she would think it big enough for us to get married on.

Say, don't get me wrong. Margaret is no gold digger, she just has a level head on her shoulders. Where you and I would take a chance, she won't. Not that she wouldn't if she had to, or saw any good reason to. She's got a queer idea that living is a fine art and that there's no use gumming up the game with our own foolishness.

I had to go without knowing what was coming off at the office. I called for Margaret, and say, she looked a dream. She had on a new green evening dress; she looked a peach in it, a knock-out. A little string of pearls was

around her neck. With her pink cheeks, brown hair, and brown eyes she looked like something for Flo Ziegfeld to glorify. I was prouder than ever of her.

What do you know? The music they had at that dance was bagpipes. The men who played them wore kilts. Can you beat that? It was not so worse to dance to either, once you got used to it. I'd rather have saxophones myself, but, you see, I'm not Scotch. We had a swell time. Say, fella, did you ever have any Scotch eats? They were sure the goods, I'll say. I'm for them.

It was after two o'clock when we were ready to go home. We found it was snowing. I started to get a taxi, but Margaret wouldn't have it. She said it would be extravagant. Being extravagant is all the seven deadly sins rolled into one for anybody with Scotch blood. She pointed out that we took the car in front of the door, and changed at the car barns for the owl car that runs out the boulevard to where Margaret's folks live. She had a sensible coat and overshoes, and a little snow would not hurt her. It was nix on any taxi for her. Now thrift is O. K., but it can be carried too far. Then it's not so good.

So we took the trolley and when we got to the car barns the owl car was standing there. It makes me laugh now to think of how we ran to catch it. We were afraid we would miss it. We need not have worried. The car was there, yes, but without a conductor or motor-man. We were the only passengers and we sat down and waited and waited and waited. Nothing happened.

We had a lot to say to each other, naturally, and did not notice at first how long the car stood there. I looked at my watch after a while and saw that we had been there twenty-five minutes. It was five after three by then.

I told Margaret that we were three quarters of the way home and that we

had better take a taxi for the rest of the way—provided we could find one. She said we had our transfers and it would be silly to waste them. The company was obligated to carry us home on them. I pointed out that, obligated or not, the company wasn't doing it, and urged her to let me find a cab. Nothing doing; Margaret was firm. It was wasteful to pay twice for the same ride, and we had paid once for being taken home.

I went up into the forward vestibule and stepped on the bell the motorman clangs to make trucks get outa his way. I thought somebody would hear it and get on the job. Nothing stirred. Then, I began to fool around with the handle and found that I could work it. I made the car go a few feet. That gave me an idea. I looked at my watch and saw that we had been waiting there forty-five minutes at least.

We were within a mile of where Margaret lived. It was long after three o'clock. I made up my mind. I was going to get my girl home. So, I walked into the front vestibule again without saying anything to Margaret and started the car toward her house. I'd waited as long as I was going to.

It was easy. The car ran along fine. You'd think I was the regular motorman. Margaret did not like what I was doing, but I told her I was going to get her home; then I would run the car back. No harm in that. I pointed out that we were entitled to ride and that it was not our fault if the company was not on the job.

As we were halfway to her house by then, Margaret did not make much of a holler. An old geezer at one corner stepped out and signaled the car. I wasn't stopping, not that night. I wish you could 'a' seen his face when we sailed by him. Well, I got her home, took her to her door and then got back in the trolley car. I couldn't figure out just at first how to reverse the car, but

after some fiddling with it, I managed it. I knew that the motorman usually changed to the other end of the car when he started back. I was not sure I could make it, so I stayed where I was. I had to go slow, for I couldn't watch the track over my shoulder very well. It gave me a crick in my neck.

It was after four by then, still snowing, and no one out, so traffic did not bother me. It was easier than I expected. No grades, no traffic, and I had the hang of the thing by now and was going fine when two cops, the motorman and the conductor jumped on board. You see, I had to go slow, so they could easy make it.

They asked me real peevisish what the hell I thought I was doing. I told them—and I told them a few things about the service on that line. The cops thought I was crazy or drunk and they ran me in.

I went along with them with no fuss. I'd got my girl home and I didn't anticipate much trouble at the station house. I wasn't drunk and anybody in his senses could see I wasn't. I couldn't see as I'd done anything terrible. I hadn't hurt their old trolley car or anything else.

There were some reporters around the station house when the cops brought me in. They thought it was a great joke. They said I'd be taking up the tracks next. I explained that the company was obligated to take me out to the boulevard and waved my transfers to prove it.

I tried to explain. I said I'd been to a Scotch party. For some reason the reporters thought that funny, too. One of them asked me if "it was just off the boat," and for the name of my bootlegger. He said that he had plenty of gin but he needed some good Scotch. One fella there said: "Yes, and after a shot of it perhaps we could go out and steal a better job. I don't fancy trolley cars myself."

I talked and talked. No use. I sim-

ply talked myself into a cell. In spite of all I could say, there is where they put me. I was let off next morning with a fine of ten dollars. The judge got off some wisecracks that made every one laugh, but he fined me the ten just the same. It was disorderly conduct. I was glad they dropped the charge that I was drunk.

I paid my fine. It didn't seem fair. It don't yet, but I got a kick out of it because it was about three times as much as the taxi fare would have amounted to. The taxi that Margaret wouldn't let me take, I mean. I wondered what she would think when I told her that. I sighed as I passed up the ten dollars. I would rather have passed it through the window of our savings department. I wondered if I was growing Scotch from being with Margaret so much.

I didn't get out of court till eleven. I phoned to the office that I was delayed. Just that—delayed. It would never do to let that chief clerk know that I'd been arrested. It might cost me my job. I went home and changed my clothes and shaved. It was nearly one when I got to the office. The chief clerk gave me a dirty look when I came in, but he was busy and said nothing. I was glad to let it go at that.

The whole office was buzzing. The promotions had been announced. Miss Smithson, one of the filing clerks, gave me the low-down on it. We had a new assistant secretary and three new assistant tellers and lots of folks were shoved up a step. Bill got the job I wanted. I got nowhere in all the changes. I was sore. I was good and sore. I'd worked hard. I'd never been late till that morning. What had all my hard work got me? Just nothing. I thought that I could stay there for years and get no further. I felt like quitting my job.

I knew without asking what Margaret would think of that. "A rolling stone," you know. I couldn't see exactly what

I could do about it. Curry favor with the chief clerk? Not if I was never promoted. I hoped he'd choke. I was glad to be sent uptown with some papers about a mortgage one of our depositors had. No, I'm no messenger boy; I'm long past that. This was important, and they sent a representative, not a boy. I was the representative.

I telephoned to Margaret before I jumped into the subway. She was O. K. except for being sleepy. I said I had something to tell her when I saw her. I did not tell her about the fine or about the promotions in the office. They could wait.

I got back to the office about two thirty. The first person I met was Bill. I was a sport; I congratulated him. I meant it, too. I like Bill; everybody does. Still and all, I did think he got the job I oughta have had. But I didn't bear him any grudge. Bill grinned and thanked me. He sure was tickled to death over it all.

The chief clerk came buzzing up to me all of a flutter, before I got my hat and coat off. He wanted to know where I'd been. He had been looking for me. I explained about being sent uptown and he had to say it was all right, much as he hated to. You could have knocked me down with a feather when he told me the president wanted to see me in his office.

I sure was puzzled. So was the chief clerk, who couldn't make out whether my being sent for was a knock or a boost. He had nothing on me—I didn't know, either—but it was very evident that he feared the worst. He wasn't saying anything till he was sure, then if it was a knock, I'd hear from him and hear aplenty. I don't mind telling you I was scared pink that I was to be fired.

You see, since I stopped being a messenger boy around here, I see the president about twice a month. When I first came I used to run errands for him and everybody else around here. He is some

big boy, that baby. To begin with, the Cosmopolis is big. Millions in capital and more millions in surplus. Besides being president he is director of this and on the board of that till it would make your head swim. He has a finger in every financial pie in the Street, provided it's a big enough pie. No small change for that baby. No, I couldn't figure out what the big boy wanted of me. We are all kinda scared of him, not because he is a crank, for he isn't, but because he is so gosh darned important.

Miss Lamson, his private secretary, said he was a lamb, democratic, easy-going, and nice. She oughta think pretty well of him for he sent her mother to Bermuda when she was slow getting over the flu this winter.

As I started for the office my knees knocked together. I saw the chief clerk looking after me with a nasty, "You'll get yours," expression on his face; so I straightened up, pulled down my vest, and walked away as if being sent for like this by the boss was a everyday occurrence.

My swagger was all a bluff. The nearer I got to his private office the more scared I was. Miss Lamson was in the outside office. She looked at me friendly enough, but amused. She told me that some one was with the president but to sit down as the visitor wouldn't be in there long. She looked at me as if I was a good joke she wasn't telling. It made me uncomfortable but not mad; it wasn't the kind of look you get mad at. I asked her how her mother was.

"Oh, she's simply splendid. She's still in Bermuda. She's to stay there till the weather is settled here. He says"—here she jerked her head in the direction of the private office—"she must not run the risk of pneumonia by coming home too soon. Mother writes that it is simply heavenly down there and that the place is overrun with brides and

grooms. From what she writes it must be an ideal place for a honeymoon."

I mumbled something about being glad. Huh, it would be a long time before I could go to Bermuda or anywhere else on a honeymoon. Then I sat and wondered what I was wanted for. I didn't think that anybody could have heard about my being arrested. I had not told a soul about that, even Margaret. Miss Lamson looked up from her work and smiled at me again as if something was funny.

I couldn't see anything funny about it. There was no rhyme nor reason to it. The president hardly knew me. After I stopped being a messenger boy, he'd seen me around, but I doubted if he knew my last name. I'd been "Milton" when I was a messenger boy and I was still "Milton" to the higher-ups.

The more I thought of it, the more it did not look so good to me, this being sent for. My conscience was clear. I hadn't done anything, but he might think I had. My knees began to shake again.

The door into his office opened and he came out with the man he was with. I took one look and nearly went through the floor. The man with him was J. P.! Yep, the big boy himself, in person.

Miss Lamson jumped up after the two had said, "Good-by," and called the chief's attention to me.

"This is Milton. You remember you wanted to see him."

"So, this is the young man we were talking about, is it?" Then to me he said: "Come in."

I went in, more scared than ever. I'd been in his office before, but never like this.

He walked over to his desk, picked up an afternoon paper, handed it to me and, pointing to something in it, asked:

"Is that account true?"

I was so frightened I could hardly see what it was. My hands shook. I managed to read it and then saw that I was sunk. Some fool reporter had written

up my borrowing that trolley car. I suppose he thought it was funny. It didn't seem so to me. I just looked at the chief. I was tongue-tied. I was right—he knew about my being arrested; it was all in the paper. Here was where I got mine. I couldn't seem to get out a word.

"Well, what about it? Substantially correct, isn't it?"

"Part of it's so," I managed to stammer. "I was arrested and the judge let me off with a fine. But there's a lot here that isn't—so—that never happened."

"There always is," he said. "Had you been drinking? That account intimates that you had."

That made me so mad I forgot to be frightened.

"Drinking? Me, drinking? When I was out with my girl friend? Say, you don't know my girl! She'd never go out with me again if I did that. I'd been to a Scotch party; that's right enough. It was a dance—the Thistle Club that my girl's folks belong to—they had swell eats but nothing to drink."

"I see. But you did take the trolley car, and you were sober when you did it?" He seemed anxious to hear that that part was not a newspaper fake.

"Yes, I borrowed it. I waited first for over three quarters of an hour. I timed them by my watch. Then I took it. I had to get my girl home, didn't I? I didn't hurt their old car. I was bringing it back when they arrested me."

He said the funniest thing then, something about a message to Garcia. We hadn't said a word about a message and hadn't mentioned this Garcia person at all.

"Why didn't you call a cab? That would seem to be the natural thing to do before proceeding to extremes. You must admit that taking a car or anything else that does not belong to you is a bad habit for a bank clerk to form."

POP—6A

Then I saw it. He thought that if I took a trolley car, I might help myself to a package of bonds from the vault when no one was looking. I had to tell him.

"My girl friend wouldn't let me call a cab. I offered. She's Scotch and hates extravagance. She said that we had transfers and the company was obligated to get us home. I know what's what when you are out with your girl. I wanted a taxi, but she wouldn't let me. You needn't be afraid. I never took anything that didn't belong to me and I never will. I only borrowed the car to get my girl home. I was bringing it back when they arrested me. The cops will tell you that. Why, I was nearly there, within four blocks of the car barns."

All he said was: "I see." The way he said it you couldn't make out what he was thinking.

I wasn't scared any more. I supposed I'd be fired. I didn't think it would be fair any more than it was fair for me to be passed over in the promotions. But, I wasn't scared. The president with all his millions was just a man, after all. If after I'd explained, he wanted to fire me, it was O. K. with me. There are other jobs and in the next one I might have a decent chief clerk.

"From what you tell me, I gather that the young lady you escorted is unusual. For a New York girl to refuse a cab on a stormy night is not only unusual—it borders on the miraculous!"

I just looked at him and said in a low voice:

"She's wonderful, just wonderful."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," he said quietly. "I assume you expect to marry the lady?"

All in a minute I began to tell him—how we were engaged and how we couldn't get married yet, and how I had been passed over in the day's promotions. I did not knock Bill. I couldn't; Bill is all right. I told him Bill was a

good, steady, accurate bank clerk. I spilled it all—how I was saving and Margaret was saving. I even told him what Margaret said one night—that if a fella wants to build a house, even a darn fool knows that he has to have a foundation, and that if you are going to be happy after you are married you have to build a foundation for that, too.

He just sat and looked at me after I had finished and then he said another funny thing:

"And I thought they were extinct, like the dodo!"

He was quiet for a few minutes and I was quiet, too, wondering what he would do. Some way or other I didn't believe that he was going to fire me. Then he asks me:

"Mr. Martin has charge of your department, hasn't he?"

I said: "Yes, sir."

He sent for Mr. Martin who is our third vice president. When Mr. Martin came in, the chief says to him right away:

"I've some bad news for you. You are going to lose one of your best men."

My heart sank. That could only mean that he was going to tie a tin can to me after all. I was silly enough to think my telling him about Margaret and all had made a difference. My heart went *plunk!* down into my boots. How was I ever going to explain to Margaret?

The chief and Mr. Martin went on talking. I did not pay any attention. I was too miserable. I wondered why they didn't fire me and have it over with. I wanted to get away. I shifted from one foot to the other and waited. Then the president turned to me and said:

"Well, Milton, that's settled. Mr. Martin does not want to lose you, but he has consented to transfer you to my office. You will report here to-morrow morning."

I was so surprised that I was dazed. Mr. Martin shook hands with me before

he went out. I just stood and stared at the chief. I couldn't believe it.

"You haven't asked what your new salary will be," he said gruffly. You will get two thousand five hundred dollars a year for the present. I consider that ample for a single man. But a married man should have at least three thousand six hundred dollars. Tell the young lady that, and if I'm any judge she won't keep you waiting long. How do you think you will like working for me?"

I'm ashamed to tell you I went all to pieces. I blubbered like a schoolboy. Imagine that—and I thought I was hard boiled. It was the reaction, one minute believing that I was to be fired, the next finding that I was promoted to the chief's office where every guy in the place hoped to land some day. 'Cause why? 'Cause the chief's assistants never stayed long. They were snapped up by some of the companies he was interested in, at big boosts in salary.

The chief pushed me into a chair and patted my shoulder. I just sobbed. Me, a grown man, twenty-two years old, crying like a kid!

After a few minutes I got hold of myself and tried to thank him. He wouldn't let me.

"Don't you know this is your own doing? You have nothing to thank me for. It's self-preservation with me. We can find any number of 'yes' men here in the Street, but men with guts to think and make decisions for themselves are scarce. You showed initiative, young man, when you borrowed that trolley car. Initiative is one of the rarest things in young men or old. I had lunch with the man you saw leaving my office a short time ago. He showed me the account in the newspaper of the act of one of my employees. He said that if I didn't want you, he did, and for me to send you over to him. So don't thank me. Now run along to that girl of yours. Get her to name the wedding

day. You get a raise the day you are married."

I shook hands and started to leave the room. Gee, but I was happy! I was in a hurry to get to Margaret and tell her all about it. I was just going when the chief called me back.

"It may interest you, Milton, to know that I married a Scotch girl. Best move of my life. Her name was Campbell. I'm very glad that the young lady is Scotch."

With a wave of his hand he dismissed me. I tore back through the office for my hat and coat. One look at my face

told the chief clerk that my being sent for was certainly not a knock. Without a word to him or anybody else, I was on my way.

Out in the street I looked around for a taxi. I wanted to get to Margaret quicker than quick. She works in an office near the Brooklyn Bridge; the taxi fare would not be much. In the very act of raising my hand to signal a cab I saw coming down the street, I thought better of it. Extravagance was a bad thing. Just suppose Margaret had let me take her home in a cab? So, I turned and ran for the subway.

More of Charles Lent's stories will appear in these pages in the future.



MR. HOOVER'S FISHING HOLE

WHEN President Hoover chose the headwaters of the Rapidan River in Virginia as his favorite fishing ground, he selected one of the most interesting and charming places in the country. In the Blue Ridge Mountains, it is nine miles from Madison, the courthouse town of Madison County, and Madison is fifteen miles from a railroad.

It was Madison's courthouse which Stanford White, when driving through the country one summer, characterized as the finest example of brick architecture in the entire South. In front of the courthouse is a brick wall which has been there for more than a hundred years. The whole village, spread along on both sides of one street for a mile, has the beauty of white-pillared brick and frame homes and the Arcadian charm that comes from innumerable yesterdays.

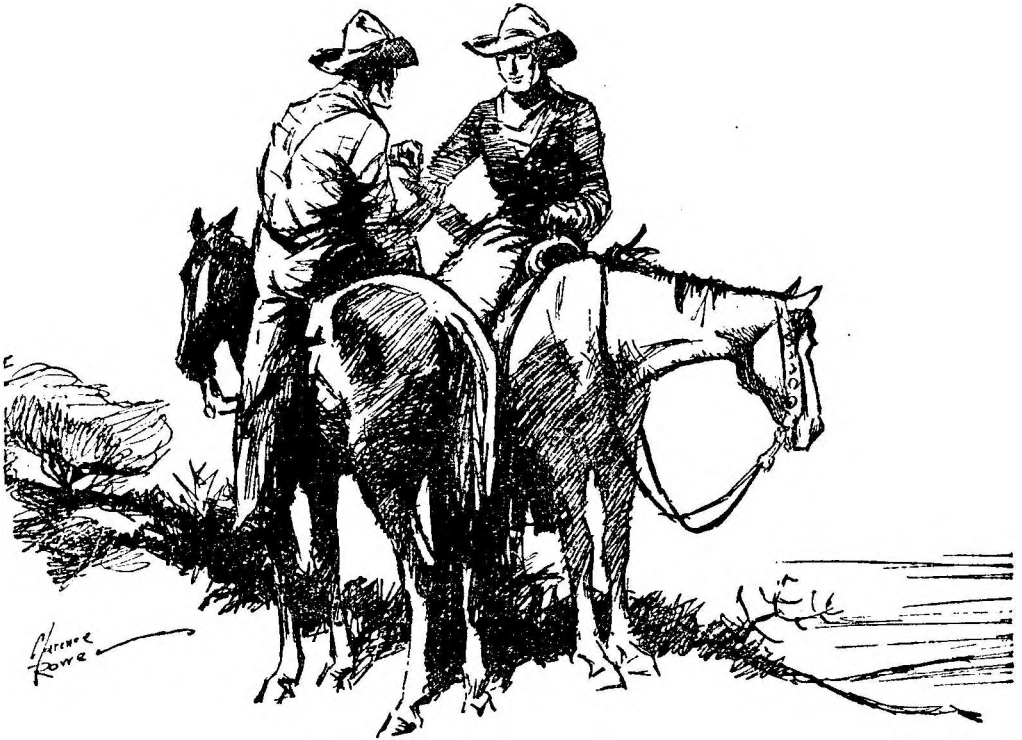
The people live in houses that were built by their great and their great-great-grandfathers. In the town are five stores, one hotel, a movie house which gives a show once, and sometimes twice, a week, one drug store, one physician, one dentist, two lawyers, one of whom is the prosecuting attorney, and the office of the weekly newspaper.

In the White Oak Run Valley, two miles from the town, is the Lutheran church, one of the oldest religious buildings in the South. It has a pewter communion service which was given to the congregation before the Revolutionary War by the merchants of London, England. Its organ was hauled on an oxcart all the way from Philadelphia. All that valley is inhabited by the descendants of the people who built the church in 1745.

Some of them have pushed up beyond Criglersville to the edges of the president's preserve, but they will never annoy him or intrude upon his leisure moments. The people of this Arcadialike settlement are that way. They have a winning and Old World courtesy in addition to the pride that is born of solidarity and of ancient customs and possessions.

STRAIGHT SHOOTING

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR



In Two Parts—Part I

The Killing of a Ranch Girl and Her Cow-puncher
Suitor Rouses a Western County, and the Moose
Writhes and Gapes Hungrily Above a Cowboy Rival.

CHAPTER I.

AS IT HAPPENED.

TWO riders drew up on the brow of a slope that pitched sharply to a log house, a stable, a set of round corrals, a bright-green patch of garden, all surrounded by a pole fence inclosing a few acres of pasture land.

Past the lower corner of the fence Milk River flowed in its willow-bordered channel, sluggish, lukewarm, as if tired from a long journey under a blaz-

ing sun. The gray valley, gray because it was everywhere floored with sagebrush, came out of the west, bore away to the east and turned a sharp corner into the Big Bend, a twenty-mile loop to the northward.

At the first corner of that giant loop the roofs and flashing windows of Malta lifted in a huddle about a red station and a stockyard, beside a railway track that ran like two shining threads spun out to infinity across the plains.

The Half Moon round-up wagons

were rolling into camp on the river bank of Malta. The saddle bunch spread behind the wagons—a dark, fan-shaped blob formed by two hundred sleek-bodied horses—sorrels, grays, blacks, bays, and browns. From the north bank out of low gullies, here and there along the valley floor, riders trotted behind scuttling bunches of wild cattle, all bearing to a common center. When the Half Moon bunched and worked that herd the round-up would be over. And they would be glad, horses and men alike, one being footsore and the other saddle weary.

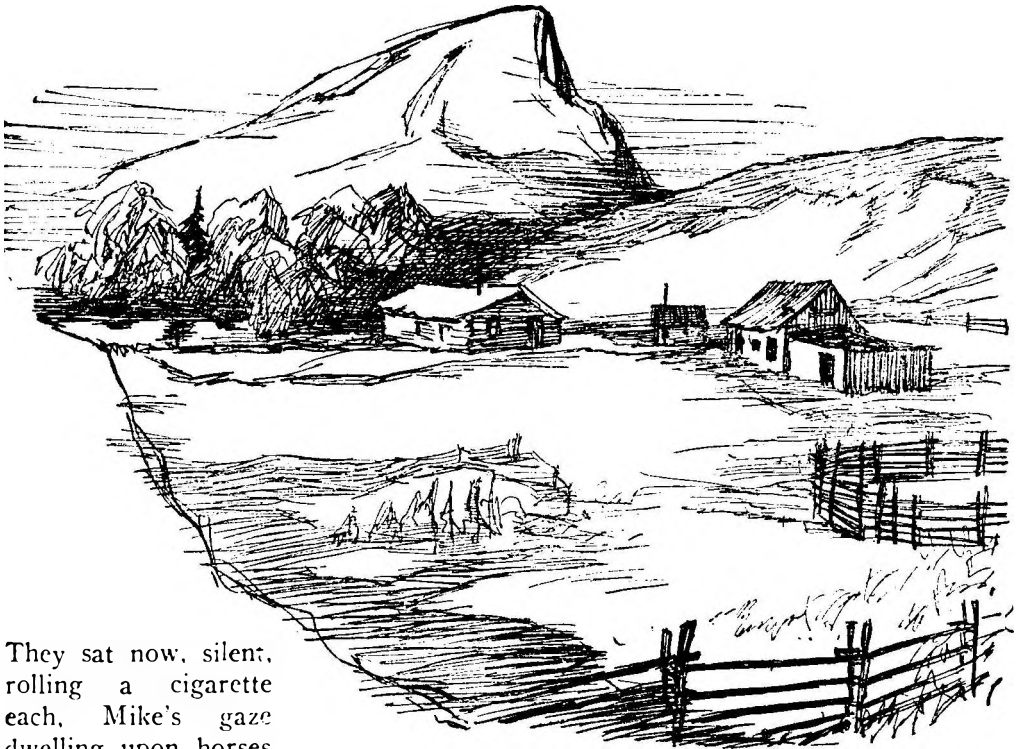
Mike Cooper and George Shain had jumped no cattle in their short circle.

"Be all right if I stop in at Demars' a while, Mike?" Shain said presently. "I'll catch up."

"Sure," Mike replied. "Won't be much in that round-up anyway."

Mike looked at his watch as Shain's horse ambled down the hill. Eight o'clock. Range riders move early. They had been on circle since sunrise. He was in no hurry. The work would be done whether he was early or late to the branding fire. The luxury of sitting still in that fresh hour before the sun waxed to blistering midday heat appealed to Mike. He could see everything below, up and down the valley, as he blew smoke out over his horse's ears.

Thus he saw a rider detach himself from one drive and gallop straight for



They sat now, silent, rolling a cigarette each, Mike's gaze dwelling upon horses and men and cattle, all that lay under his command. Mike knew why Shain looked so longingly. There was a girl down there. Two of them, as Mike knew by hearsay. But only one meant anything to George Shain.

the Demars ranch, so that he would arrive there before or about the same time as George Shain. Mike had keen eyes. He knew all his men, their gear and their mounts. Moreover, if he had been unable to distinguish clearly he would

still have guessed the identity of that horseman.

"They don't love each other much, them two," Mike soliloquized. "And I expect Avis Demars is the reason. You're a flashy vaquero, Fisher, but I'll gamble on George Shain."

Mike's mind dwelt idly on that ranch and those who lived there. The Demars were a cut above their neighbors, he had heard. They had come into that region three years earlier—a middle-aged man, his wife, two daughters almost grown, and two very small sons. They had horses, three or four hundred head. Nothing to make them rich, except in time, but a living. And about the time Demars got his ranch built, his house in order, he set out for Malta one day with his wife in a buggy. As they crossed the track a mile from town a freight train hit them. Thus chance or destiny eliminated the heads of that family.

The two girls, Avis and Jess, elected to hold their ranch, handle their stock with the occasional assistance of a hired rider, and send their small brothers to school in town. The townspeople, the cattlemen, admired them for their grit. Cow-punchers who knew them admired them greatly for themselves.

And there they were, two young women, quite successfully getting away with men's affairs—so the range considered—keeping their home together. Mike knew Avis Demars slightly. He had met her at a dance in Malta. Jess he had never seen. But he had heard a good deal about both from George Shain in the last few months.

"Good, game kids," Mike finally summed up his thoughts. "Funny, Shain hates Dave Fisher to fool around there when he's got the inside track with Avis himself. Well, Bones, I better ride, eh?"

In half an hour he was working in the dust kicked up by three hundred cattle milling under the eyes of fifteen riders,

on the very fringe of Malta. Out of that bunch they cut a few calves, heated irons and branded them. Then to finish and be free, Mike's crew changed horses and descended upon the day herd, worked out the strays belonging to various reps from distant outfits. By noon it was all finished. The reps took their horses and cattle and departed.

Mike Cooper drew a breath of relief as he sat on the shady side of the chuck wagon, taking a leisurely smoke after his coffee. His riders loafed, sprawling on the grass—all but Dave Fisher and George Shain.

Mike, for the first time, wondered why they hadn't turned up at the roundup, why they were not there for the noon meal. He hadn't troubled about their absence before, although it wasn't the habit of Half Moon riders to go visiting when there was work in hand. Now he wondered a little. They could ride from the Demars ranch into Malta in twenty minutes. There were no cast-iron rules to govern a cow-puncher. Still, it was hardly according to Hoyle for two of his top hands to spend half a day calling on young women when the outfit was cleaning up the last tag ends of the spring work.

Mike was still wondering, even a little annoyed, almost uneasy, when the Half Moon, individually and collectively, washed, shaved, put on its best shirt, saddled its pet horse and rode into Malta to seek a little diversion. They scattered there, into various saloons, into Malta's one sizable general store, each according to his own bent. Most drank, some played poker, some billiards. An odd one was content to sit still in a shady place and relax his tired limbs.

A little after one o'clock Mike Cooper, "Shorty" MacLean and Johnny Summers emerged from the Red Loco Saloon. Shorty was Mike's *segundo*, his right-hand man in the Half Moon. Johnny Summers had been a Half Moon rider himself once. Ex-cow-puncher,

ex-bartender, ex various other activities, Johnny functioned now as a deputy sheriff, his job being to keep order in Malta. Johnny's interpretation of order in a cow town was a very liberal one. He had been bred to the range and become very wise for his years, which did not exceed thirty.

He liked Mike Cooper. He had a keen appreciation of the Half Moon's influence in that region. He had known Shorty MacLean for years. The three sat down now on the plank sidewalk that lined Malta's single business street, yarning about things and men. A row of young poplars gave them shade. Half Moon saddle horses dozed back on three legs in the street. A drone of voices came through an open door behind them. Night would bring coolness in the air and quicken the tempo of hilarity. But in that heat it was pleasant to sit in a shady spot and talk in a drawling tone of inconsequential things.

"Here's somebody foggin' it down the trail in a hurry," Shorty MacLean drew their attention.

Mike and Johnny turned their heads. A horse and buggy rolled up from the west, trailing a banner of dust like gray smoke flung out by hoof and wheel. The horse was at a gallop.

"That there is Jess Demars," Johnny observed. "I see her pull out for home not so long ago. I wonder if somethin's happened."

Malta's general store fronted four doors west of where they sat. The buggy stopped there. They saw a man come out. The girl in the vehicle bent toward him, talking rapidly, making quick, nervous gestures with her hands. The man glanced up and down the street, nodding assent to something. He turned his head this way and that until his eye rested on Johnny Summers. He beckoned imperatively. Johnny rose.

He, too, leaned over the wheel, talking to the girl in the buggy. The man who had beckoned him ran into the store,

came out with his hat on, went past Mike and Shorty with quick strides toward the Malta House.

The two gazed after him speculatively. Burney Morris of Morris & Shore never hurried if he could dawdle. He was hurrying now. Apparently he communicated his haste, for in less than two minutes he emerged from the hotel with a young, slender man in a gray suit, who carried in one hand a small leather bag.

"Somebody musta got hurt," Shorty murmured. "Burney's dug out Doc Lowe."

Morris and the doctor stopped at the buggy. The doctor climbed into the seat. Johnny Summers came back to Mike and Shorty. He was frowning, as if in some perplexity.

"Say," he growled, "this here's a dickens of a note. It hits you, Mike, because one of your men's in it. There's been hell to pay up at Demars'. That flashy Fisher kid 'n' Avis Demars have both been shot. Fisher's dead, but the girl ain't. I got to hike right up there. Come along with me, will you, Mike?"

CHAPTER II.

THE EVIDENCE IN THE CASE.

IN infancy Mike Cooper had been a silent baby, given to slow smiles and little outcry. He had grown to manhood in an environment where a loose tongue was a dubious asset. So now, loping with Johnny Summers in the wake of that buggy he didn't ask questions or venture comment. But his mind was busy with interrogations and George Shain loomed big in his mind's eye.

Nor did Johnny Summers talk much. They caught up to the buggy, passed, dismounted at the ranch-house door, waited a minute. Doctor Lowe, kit in hand, followed Jess Demars in. They had glanced in the stable. Dave Fisher's sorrel horse stood in a stall. He

had been standing there since early that morning, Mike knew. He wondered again about George Shain as he followed the deputy inside.

Fisher was sprawled on the floor, face down, near the middle of the room. Johnny bent over him, half turning the body so that he could examine the face and breast.

"Why, gosh darn it!" he muttered. "He's been dead for hours. Just about stiff. He was shot in the back. Huh!"

The blood around him was congealed. Just inside the front door, close by the threshold, another bloody patch covered an irregular space on the bare boards, and had seeped in a dark stain over a hooked rug.

Johnny straightened up with a frown.

"Now, I wonder——" he began. "I expect I got to——"

He stared through the doorway into a room where Mike could see Doc Lowe bending over a bed, see the older Demars girl stooping on the other side. Johnny made a quick, impatient gesture and walked into that room, beckoning Mike to follow.

"How is she?" he asked.

Lowe shook his head. Over Johnny's shoulder Mike saw Avis Demars' eyes open slowly—wide, gray eyes like her sister's, cloudy with pain. She looked straight at Johnny Summers.

"I saw him," she said quite distinctly, almost loudly. "He was shooting from the hill. He had a black horse. He had on white Angora chaps. He—why did he shoot us, Jess? Why——" She stopped on that word. Her eyes closed. Weakly one hand wavered up to her throat and with a shudder and a twist of her head, life slipped away from her.

The doctor put his hand over her heart.

"Loss of blood. Shock. Fatal wound in any case," he murmured—made a gesture of finality.

White Angora chaps and a black horse! That was Shain's gear and the

color of his mount. Mike stood hat in hand, his eyes on the dead girl's sister, his mind on this tragedy which so far had neither rhyme nor reason. Not to him. He couldn't see George Shain in the rôle of an assassin, shooting from a hilltop.

He kept staring at Jess Demars. He had never seen her before, that he could recall. And curiously, even in that place of pain and death, his first conscious emotion about her was admiration and tenderness. He wondered, too, why he should feel like that about her, instead of feeling sorry for the dead girl stretched on the bed. Mike had known women and girls more or less over a lot of territory between the Brazos and Milk River. But there was nothing in his experience nor anything about Jess Demars that gave him the key to this strange, spontaneous outpouring of sympathy.

"Beautiful," wasn't exactly the word to describe Jess Demars. "Charm" might do, but even that was rather intangible. She was small, her face a tanned oval with a fine, straight nose and a scarlet, curving mouth twisted into a sort of horror as she stared at her dead sister, striving silently, Mike could see, to keep her self-control.

"There just ain't nothin' we can do, is there, doc?" Johnny Summers asked.

The doctor shook his head. He folded Avis' colorless hands across her breast.

"You had better come back to town, Miss Demars," he said in a kindly tone. "And the little boys must not come here until——"

"Nobody better be around here till after they hold a inquest," Johnny put in. "Everythin's got to be left as it is. I'll have to put a man on guard here till the coroner gets here from Glasgow. Say, you got any idea who'd do this an' why, Miss Demars? I hate to bother you with questions right now, but this here's not an ordinary killin'. It's just plain murder."

The girl shivered.

"I told you," she replied slowly. "I took the boys to school at breakfast time. I came home right after noon and found them—like this. I drove right back for you and Doctor Lowe."

"Did she talk any," Johnny persisted, "when you first come in? When you helped her in on the bed? You said she was still layin' on the floor."

"Have a heart, Johnny," Lowe interrupted. "Can't you see the girl's sick about this? Give her a chance to collect herself."

"Sure," Johnny agreed. "Sorry. But I would like to get hold of whoever did this shootin'. Doc's right, Miss Demars. You better stay in town for a spell an' keep the kids with you."

"I don't want to leave Avis. Oh, it's ghastly! Why should——"

She put her face in her hands for a second.

"I mustn't be silly," she whispered, and straightened her shoulders. Her gaze turned to Mike with a momentary look of inquiry, as if she had not before marked his presence. Johnny Summers interpreted that glance.

"This here's Mike Cooper, range boss of the Half Moon," he said. "Fisher was one of his riders."

"Oh, yes," she murmured. "He was."

And for another second or two she looked at Mike as if there were something else she wanted to say. But she didn't speak. Instead she went with Doc Lowe out to the buggy, got in and drove away toward Malta.

Johnny Summers put his hands in his pockets as he always did when perplexed. He stared a long time at Dave Fisher's body. He walked into the bedroom to gaze at Avis Demars stretched on the bed.

"Well," he said at last, "there ain't no head or tail to this—but there will be. Will you stay here, Mike, while I sashay into Malta and send somebody out here to keep watch?"

Mike nodded assent. He didn't like it but he couldn't in common decency refuse. Johnny went galloping in the wake of the buggy. Mike withdrew from that chamber of death to sit on a chopping block in the yard, to think in a useless circle that somehow always brought him back to George Shain. White Angora chaps and a black horse! Mike shook himself at that. It fitted too well. Shain was there early in the morning. Where had he spent the rest of the day? Where was he now? Would Avis Demars' dying words definitely link Shain with this killing?

Mike got a partial answer to the last before long. From Malta an idle horse wrangler came out to stand guard. Mike rode back in. Johnny Summers was waiting for him on the sidewalk, and beckoned him aside.

"Say," he asked, "you know where George Shain is?"

Mike shook his head.

"'S he been with the round-up to-day at all?"

"This morning," Mike stated briefly. "He went on circle with the rest of us."

"You ain't seen him since—since when? What time?"

"About eight this morning," Mike answered truthfully—if not as explicitly as he might. He felt what was coming.

"Shain killed them two," Johnny said abruptly. "It's dead open an' shut. I have talked to Jess Demars an' her kid brothers. Fisher and Shain both come to the Demars place about breakfast time. They were all there together—Avis, Jess, the two kids, Shain an' Fisher. The two of 'em had some words about Fisher comin' to see Avis. Shain invited Dave to step into the yard an' shoot it out. Fisher just laughed at him. Avis told him he was makin' a fool of himself. Finally, about the time Jess hitched up the buggy to bring the kids to school, George got on his horse an' rode off. He was sittin' on his horse lookin' down the hill when Jess started

for Malta. She saw him. The two kids saw him. He was ridin' a black Half Moon horse, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Mike admitted.

"'N' he wore white Angora chaps, the boys say," Johnny concluded. "You heard what Avis said when she was dyin'. I got to gather Shain in. It's a rotten thing, Mike. I never had no use for Fisher—he was too flashy an' smooth. An' I liked Shain. He must 'a' gone plumb crazy. I got to get him, just the same—if he ain't skipped the country. Chances are he has."

That was Mike's private conclusion. If George Shain shot those two in a jealous fury he would scarcely be human if he didn't ride fast and far, once he realized what he had done.

But Shain hadn't skipped. Mike and some of his men rode out of the Half Moon camp to eat supper and change horses. When they came back to town a little before sunset George Shain's black horse stood by a hitching rack. Shain himself sat on the station platform staring dully at the track. Johnny Summers stood guard over him. A passenger train eastbound to the county seat was due in ten minutes.

Mike looked with pitying interest at his captured rider. Shain glanced at him once and resumed his apathetic contemplation of the ground. Summers stood ten feet away, leaning against the station wall.

"He got anything to say?" Mike murmured his query in Johnny's ear. "Where'd you get him?"

"Why, he just rode right into town 'n' I arrested him on sight," Johnny replied. "He says, 'I didn't do it,' an' he ain't opened his mouth since. I'm takin' him to Glasgow, to get him off *my* hands, pronto. I'm scared to hold him here till the inquest to-morrow. Some of these folks are murmurin' about a rope an' a telegraph pole."

Yes, they might talk about that, and act upon their impulse. Mike Cooper,

sauntering uneasily about Malta that evening, heard such suggestions. Mike could understand that attitude. Everybody liked Avis Demars. Every one was full of sympathy for Jess. A fight between two men they could understand and condone, no matter how deadly the outcome. But wanton murder was different. To shoot a man in the back. To kill a mere slip of a girl. No, Mike didn't wonder they talked lynching. Johnny Summers was right. George Shain was safer in the county jail.

But Shain was present at the inquest which was held on the spot the following day. He sat between two deputies from Glasgow. The sheriff of Vale County loomed over both.

Mike listened to the droning voices. Doctor Lowe, Jess Demars, the two small brothers, Johnny Summers, Mike himself, were all called to give evidence. The endless repetitions built up a terrible picture in Mike Cooper's mind. The sequence was deadly. Shain *had* clashed with Fisher before them all. He had raved at Avis. He had flung out of the house in a passion. Jess and the boys were witness to that. There was Avis Demars' dying statement: "I saw him. He had a black horse and he wore white Angora chaps."

Circumstantial? Yes. But utterly convincing, motive and action alike. The coroner called Shain, at last, and warned him that he did not need to testify, that he did not have to incriminate himself. And Shain's apathetic denial was as if he had admitted guilt. He didn't seem to care. The life and fire that Mike and his fellows knew in Shain seemed to have gone out of him. Mike, standing by, surprised on Jess Demars' face a look of profound pity as she stared at the accused man.

Shain's testimony amounted to little. He admitted quarreling with Fisher, but denied any shooting.

"At what hour did you leave the Demars ranch?" the coroner asked.

"Toward nine o'clock, I guess. I couldn't say for sure," Shain answered.

"Why didn't you come straight to the Malf Moon round-up?"

"I didn't feel like it."

"Where did you go after leaving the Demars ranch?"

"Rode off up the river."

That was all. Denial and vagueness as to his movements until he rode into Malta.

The six good men and true put their heads together and returned the verdict that all within hearing—and half of Malta was there to see and hear—expected: that Avis Demars and David Fisher came to their deaths by gunshot wounds inflicted by George Shain. It was perhaps exceeding their authority, since a coroner's jury is not a court of trial. But that was their verdict. They said what they thought and believed.

"They'll hang him, I reckon," a man muttered at Mike's elbow.

"They darned well ought to," another growled.

Mike's eyes were still on Jessie Demars. He knew that comment reached her ear. He would have expected her, being a woman and sister to the murdered girl, to look at Shain with horror. And there was neither horror nor even resentment in her eyes—only pity and a hint of tears.

And while Mike stared her gaze turned to him. She beckoned with an imperceptible gesture. Mike moved over beside her.

"What will the procedure be—with him?" she whispered.

"Take him before a J. P. Give him a preliminary hearing. Then keep him in the county jail till he's tried."

"When would that be?" Jess asked.

"Court sits in about three weeks," Mike told her what Johnny Summers had just told him.

"Three weeks?" she echoed. "Do you think they'll do what that man said, a minute ago?"

"Hang him, or maybe give him life, I guess." Mike shifted uneasily on his boot heels. "It looks pretty bad for George. This country is used to gun play, but not to cold-blooded murder."

"Nothing," Jess Demars said with utter conviction, "will ever make me believe George Shain killed Avis."

"Who did, then?" Mike breathed. "Who'd even want to?"

But Jess had said her say. She stood beside Mike, her gaze fixed on her sister's body, and tears at last welled out and trickled down her cheeks. And again Mike had that strange, almost irresistible impulse to put his arms about her and comfort her. But he couldn't do that, he knew. Strangely, powerfully as she attracted him, moved him in a way he could not fathom, he scarcely knew her. And so Mike lifted his hat and went out to his horse.

So far as he could see, it was all but a closed chapter. The whole tragic sequence seemed incredible, unreal, to Mike. He was glad to get away from that atmosphere. He was sorry for George Shain, sorry for Jess Demars. But there was nothing he could do for either. That sense of the inevitable oppressed him. Mike rode back to his camp at Malta with gloom for company, carrying with him a disturbing picture of a girl's tear-stained face.

"It's queer." That was the last thing Mike Cooper said to himself, peering up at a star-bright sky as he lay in his blankets with the noises of Malta a distant mutter in the dark. "Shain was crazy about Avis. And Jess is crazy about him. She *wants* to believe he didn't."

CHAPTER III.

"SOMEHOW—IF WE CAN."

IN those days, when Mike Cooper jogged behind his round-up outfit with a picture in his mind that moved him to pity and a question on his lips for which he found no answer, all that

unfenced pasture where range cattle drifted was much as it spread when Columbus stared vainly for land from the deck of his caravel.

No successive waves of barbed wire, agriculture, what is carelessly termed "civilization," had as yet swept over the plains to sadden men who loved space and freedom without quite knowing why. It was still the day when the owner of a big cow outfit anywhere between Texas and Montana was like the kings of old—he could do no wrong.

When a learned sociologist once defined a "right" as "the unhindered exercise of acquired power," he must have had the cattle barons in mind. If they did not in their own domain exercise the high justice, the middle, and the low, they could and frequently did profoundly influence the administration of all three.

Some such idea pervaded Mike Cooper's mind as he saw the body of his riders, his saddle bunch and his round-up wagons roll east from Malta. He knew the Half Moon power in Vale County. He had seen it used. Mike's head was an old one, as the saying is, on young shoulders. Mike had a free hand and full responsibility for the conduct of Half Moon range affairs. It is not necessary to dwell on his qualifications for the job. He had plenty. Not otherwise does a man at twenty-six become range boss of an outfit that musters forty thousand cattle under one brand.

Old Ches Williams had not become owner of such an estate by being lily fingered, Mike knew. There were men in the penitentiary, others beyond either law or vengeance, and several who had hurriedly shaken the dust of Montana from their horses' feet, as the penalty of matching themselves against the Half Moon. They had broken their teeth on protective armor built up by old Ches Williams over two decades.

Mike had seen the working out of

something like this during his first contact with the Half Moon. Many a feudal barn wielded less power, commanded fewer privileges, than that small, gray man sitting now—Mike could imagine him—in a deep chair in a shady corner of the porch at home, forty miles south, where the Half Moon had laid its first foundation logs under the jagged peaks of the Little Rockies.

Old Ches had two sons. Both had gone forth like fledglings from the nest. Being wise he did not stay them, knowing that young wings must be tried. Mike Cooper was like a third son to him—for reasons which do not require telling. Old Ches leaned pretty hard on Mike. Yet Mike's sturdy young shoulders were never conscious of any strain.

And Mike wondered, recalling the agony in Jess Demars' eyes, if old Ches would use the Half Moon influence to help George Shain. Probably. There were reasons for that, too. Not weighty ones, but such as are common to kindly men.

Perhaps things run from one man's mind to another upon certain times and occasions. Shorty MacLean, riding beside Mike to the Saco flats, said abruptly:

"You know, it looks like a cinch Shain shot them two, and still I just can't quite swallow it. It looks bad for him, and still——"

Mike nodded.

"I kinda feel that way myself," he admitted regretfully. "But I don't know what anybody can do about it—unless the Old Man gets busy."

"George must 'a' went plumb crazy," Shorty unconsciously quoted Johnny Summers. "Old Ches won't like it. You know that the Half Moon pretty near raised George Shain."

Old Chester Williams didn't like it. Saco, lying in a triangle between the Great Northern and a small creek, with Milk River sweeping in a slow curve just beyond, was the Half Moon town.

Old Ches was sitting in the lobby of the Harper House when his riders staked camp in the edge of town, and when later their horses came mincing into the street. He saw the chuck wagon back up to the store to load supplies. Then he sent word to Mike Cooper that he was in town. Mike left the loading to his men and walked into the hotel.

"Through spring work, eh?"

"Yeah. Run the last iron day before yesterday," Mike said.

"I ambled about a little on the way into town," old Ches observed. "Over to the Sun Prairie ranch and around. Never saw the range in better shape. Stock looks good."

"Yes," Mike agreed. "It's been a good year."

"For us, yes," old Ches growled. "Not so good for some folks, accordin' to what I heard when I hit Saco. What's this about George Shain?"

Mike told him succinctly.

"About what I was told," the old man said thoughtfully. "It looks pretty bad for George."

Mike agreed that it did.

"I want you to look into this from every angle." Old Williams scowled as he spoke. "I don't like it. I can't see that boy killin' people cold-blooded that way. No more'n I could figure you doin' a nice job of bushwhackin' your enemies. He just about growed up around the Half Moon. If they prove it on him——"

He stopped and regarded his cigar reflectively.

"Dudley has announced himself about gun play in Vale County," he continued. "He declares he will give any man convicted before him the limit for homicide. That means hangin' for George."

Dudley was judge of the superior court for a tier of sparsely settled north Montana counties. There was an increasing number of people, merchants and such, townspeople generally, bring-

ing pressure to bear on courts and law officers to punish the man who took the law into his own hands by making Colonel Colt the arbitrator in any dispute.

"He wants to be reelected," old Ches said sourly. "So he's goin' to slur over the fact that he was once right handy with a gun himself. I recollect him an' his friends winnin' an election not so many years ago, with their six-shooters. Yes, Dudley from now on will give a gun fighter all the law allows."

They considered this in silence. Mike knew what the old man was pondering—that in a pinch Judge Dudley could be induced to temper his judgment with mercy, if the Half Moon loomed in the background.

"I might be able to help him," old Williams mused. "if there's anythin' in his favor. You look into this for me, Mike. We got to see George through, somehow, if we can. You can send Shorty MacLean out home with the round-up. I'll have Art Hubbel come down from Benton and see if he can fix up a defense. What's Shain got to say?"

"Nothin' much," Mike replied.

"You see him and get him to talk," old Ches instructed. "If George Shain was mixed up in a killin', he had a reason. He's been a good hand. He stood by the Half Moon all through that Three Link trouble. I knowed his people in Kansas, too. I'm goin' up to Helena for a day or two. You can wire me at the Stockmen's Club."

Mike saw his outfit loaded and trailing south for a well-earned rest. His riders would stretch their bodies under rustling poplars, and swap lies in a roomy bunk house for days on end. Mike himself was as saddle weary as they. He carried details in his head that were sometimes a burden to his brain. And now he had to go gyrating up and down the Milk River valley trying to find out how to save a man's neck from the noose.

Probably, in the end, unless a miracle happened, Shain would come under the new dispensation which the learned judge would stress in his charge to the twelve men in a jury box. On the evidence there could be only one verdict. Then old Ches Williams would pull a lot of invisible wires up State and George Shain's sentence would be cut to life, or perhaps twenty years. And to Mike that was as bad as being hanged forthwith.

Still, he had to do what he could. He found himself almost eager to delve into this double killing, because the mystery of it nagged at him. There was a mystery—or else George Shain was just common cowardly clay, stubbornly denying his own act. Mike couldn't quite credit that. So he took the first train to the county seat, determined to make Shain talk if he had anything whatever to say.

But Shain hadn't. A qualm of pity went through Mike when he saw him. Outside, the world sweltered in the bright heat. Men went about their business in shirt sleeves, intent upon their own affairs. Shain lay in a backwater, forgotten except to be damned.

The county jail loomed forbiddingly, a brick box in a treeless square. The courthouse overtopped it one story, likewise of brick—square, many-windowed, hushed except for offices where men worked at ledgers and records in placid routine.

Mike found a lone deputy sheriff chair-tilted against a wall in the shade, a black-handled gun stuck carelessly in his hip pocket. He led Mike down a short corridor to a dismal, iron-barred quadrangle at the rear.

"Give a shout when you want to be turned loose," he said genially, and locked Mike in.

Shain sat on an iron cot, in one of a row of steel-latticed cells. By day he had the run of an alleyway about these tanks. At night he was locked in a

space six feet high, as wide and as long, open-barred in front, like an animal in a circus cage. A drunken sheep-herder who had run amuck in the streets of Glasgow lay in a stupor. A hobo charged with burglary paced up and down. Shain looked at Mike apathetically. And Mike found himself at a loss where to begin.

"George," he finally put it bluntly, "come through like a white man. We're all set to see you through this the best way we can. Did you shoot them two?"

Shain looked at him with scarcely a flicker in his blue eyes.

"No," he said at last, "I didn't, Mike. I was crazy enough to have shot it out with Fisher that mornin'. But I wouldn't have hurt a hair of Avis Demars' head nohow, no time."

"If you didn't, then who did?" Mike continued. "You got any idea at all?"

But Shain only shook his head.

"Old Ches says he'll do what he can," Mike went on. "So will I. But you got to do somethin' for yourself besides sit an' brood."

"There ain't much else I can do," Shain muttered. "Avis is dead. I'd just as soon be."

"There's another Demars girl that's a heap interested in this," Mike said. "Now, you tell me somethin'. You said you left that ranch just about the time Jess started for town. Fisher an' Avis must 'a' been shot around ten o'clock, accordin' to Doc Lowe. Why didn't you ride on an' join the round-up? Where did you go?"

"I rode off up the river," Shain repeated what he had said at the inquest. "I felt kinda sick inside. Avis just the same as told me I could go to hell."

"All right. You rode up the river," Mike continued. "How far? What did you do all the rest of the day?"

"I was kinda upset, I tell you," Shain mumbled. "I went about a coupla miles. I was feelin' bad, an' I was pretty tired besides. None of us got much sleep the

last ten days. I got in the shade of some brush an' went to sleep. I didn't wake up till about five o'clock that evenin'."

"Then what did you do? You didn't ride into Malta till near sundown."

"I was hungry. It was about a quarter of a mile below old Baggs' sheep camp. I went in there. Nobody around. So I cooked some grub for myself. Then I rode into town."

That was all Mike could get out of him. Shain seemed sunk in the same pit of despair that made him next to dumb at the inquest. Mike left him at last, glad to get out into the open air, the untrammelled sunshine.

It seemed a flat and very lame account of where and how Shain had spent the day. It promised nothing one way or another, even if true. And it might or might not be true. Mike began to wonder. In the end he felt that he had to lay hold of something beyond mere assertion. He went back to the jail to insist that Shain describe clearly the exact spot where he tied his horse and slept through most of the day.

With that as a starting point Mike took the midnight westbound to Malta. The citizens of that village frequently turned night into day, especially during hot weather. It did not surprise Mike to find Johnny Summers and three other nighthawks playing billiards in a quiet saloon where he halted for a drink on his way to the hotel.

"Say," Johnny told Mike in an undertone, "Jess Demars was wishin' she could see you. Asked me this afternoon when you was likely to be back in Malta."

"She stayin' up at the ranch now?" Mike inquired.

"Uh-uh, still in town—at Burney Morris'," Johnny said.

"I'll see her in the mornin', I guess," Mike answered.

"She'll be in the store all forenoon," Johnny explained. "She spends the

mornin' hours straightenin' up Burney's sloppy bookkeepin'."

Mike went off to bed wondering what Jess Demars could want of him.

CHAPTER IV.

SIGNS OF BATTLE.

MIKE COOPER talked to Johnny Summers again before he went to see Jess Demars next morning.

"It's a cinch George done it," Johnny declared. "Most of the boys pack .45s. They were shot with .44-caliber bullets. Shain's gun is a .44. He was on the warpath. His girl had turned him down. You heard Jess an' the kids tell what took place between him an' Fisher. He admitted it himself. Shain was like a crazy man when he rode away from there. You can easy figure it out. You've seen hot-headed men get on the prod. He just let go all holts an' come back an' plugged 'em both. They'll hang him sure as blazes."

Mike was privately inclined to agree with Johnny—except as to the hanging part. The Half Moon could head off that ultimate disposition. Only, as Mike stood there talking to Summers, he couldn't see that there was much else that even old Ches Williams could do for Shain beyond merely saving his neck. Conviction would almost certainly be the outcome of that trial. Any jury, Mike conceded, would convict on that evidence. They couldn't do anything else.

While he stood with this running in his mind, a clatter of hoofs came out of a space between two buildings. A lanky boy spurred a stove-up cow pony across the sidewalk, thumbed him with a shrill whoop and rocked in the saddle as the old horse bucked with stiff, low crow-hoppings in the dusty street.

"There's a public nuisance that sure ought to be abated," Johnny growled. "Look at the Simple Simon makin' that poor old crowbait pitch. Showin' off.

Ought to have the seat of his pants warmed."

"He's tackled me both times the outfit hit Malta this spring for a job on round-up," Mike commented. "Can't be more'n fifteen. Who is he?"

"Oh, a darned whelp that belongs to Mrs. Peters that opened up this restaurant by Burney's last year," Johnny told him. "Mother's a decent, hard-workin' soul. Kid's plumb worthless. You'd ought to take him out as an act of charity an' let the boys knock some sense into him."

"The Half Moon round-up is no kindergarten," Mike grinned. "I told him that. Well, I guess I'll go see Miss Demars."

As he walked along the planks the Peters boy was joined by another youth a little smaller and younger. They galloped away with juvenile yells, vanishing behind the stockyards toward the Big Bend. Mike smiled tolerantly after them. He had been a wild kid himself once—and not so long ago—wishful to be a cowboy, given to exhibiting his horsemanship in the streets of a little Texas town. He had more charity for young Peters than Johnny Summers had.

He forgot the Peters kid, however, the moment his eyes met the expectant gaze of Jess Demars over a high desk in the rear of the Morris & Shore emporium.

"Johnny Summers said you wanted to see me," he began.

"Yes." She drew invisible lines on a blotter with the eraser end of a pencil. Then she looked directly at Mike and asked: "Do you believe George Shain shot my sister and Dave Fisher?"

Fundamentally honest, likewise very acute in his perceptions, Mike couldn't and wouldn't lie even to give her comfort.

"Well, if you take it as it stands, you can't come to no other conclusion," he said frankly. "I don't like to believe

he did. So I give him the benefit of the doubt. If I didn't like George I'd say it was a cinch he did. As it is I don't know what to believe."

"Everybody is so sure he did," she murmured. "I just can't imagine him doing that."

"I couldn't either; but unless some-thin' new turns up," Mike declared, "he'll never be able to convince twelve hard-headed citizens he didn't."

He saw her lips quiver.

"I know. I hear them talk," she whispered. "That's why I wanted to see you. I wondered if his own outfit could do anything for him. The Half Moon can do nearly anything it wants to in this country. Couldn't Mr. Williams do something for George? Would he?"

"The Half Moon has always stood behind its men to the last ditch when they got in trouble," Mike said. "The Old Man will do what he can for George. He has told me to do what I can. But you can't make black into white. Shain has got nothin' like an alibi, no defense whatever, except his own word that he didn't do that shootin'. And if he didn't who would, and why would they?"

"I *know* he didn't," Jess Demars repeated stubbornly. "He wouldn't. No matter what Avis did or said, he would never have hurt her. If he did he wouldn't deny it. He was angry at Fisher—and I don't blame him. I could blame Avis for some of that. Remember I was there and heard all that was said. George did offer to have it out with Fisher. He didn't even seem angry at Avis, only terribly hurt. I know how he felt. No, if they convict George Shain they're making a big mistake."

"You sure stand by anybody you believe in," Mike said impulsively. "George is lucky you're pullin' for him instead of hollerin' for his blood. Well, I can tell you that old Ches Williams has got his shoulder to Shain's wheel. If the Half Moon can do anything it'll be done—without any public palaver."

"Oh, I'm glad to know that." The relief and thankfulness in her voice was apparent. "It seemed to me perfectly terrible that he didn't have a friend to do anything or say a good word for him."

"We won't be sayin' much," Mike assured her. "But Shain'll get as much the best of it as the Half Moon can get for him. Old Ches Williams carries lots of weight if he wants to use it."

Twenty minutes later Mike was riding up the river.

"Gosh darn it!" he grumbled to himself. "If George Shain had had sense enough to play around with Jess Demars instead of her sister he wouldn't be in this jack pot. I guess Avis was kinda flirty, from what they say. This girl stands by like a rock. She's plumb taken up with Shain."

And that, somehow, try as he would to thrust it aside, didn't sit well on Mike Cooper's mind. Every time he came near Jess Demars something began to trouble him. She was game and loyal—like a rock, in his own phrase.

"Aw, I'm loony!" He shook himself angrily. "Lettin' her get my Angora that way. Hell, there's other girls!"

But that didn't help Mike where he lived, and he knew that it didn't. He hated a weakness, and he felt one growing on him, filling his mind, troubling his breast.

He spurred his horse to a lope, and put his wits to work on what he had set out to do.

Half a mile below the Baggs sheep camp he cast about for the spot described by Shain. Presently, much to his surprise, he found it. There were the hoof marks where Shain's horse had stamped impatiently through a seven-hour wait under a lone cottonwood. Near by, in a thicket of choke cherry, Shain had pawed together an armful of leaves and dead grass and laid down to sleep. The hollow made by his body

was still plain in that rude mattress. Beside it lay the stubs of two half-smoked cigarettes.

"I don't see where it helps much, but he certainly told the truth about *that*," Mike reflected.

And if Shain's lame account of how he spent the day of the tragedy was the simple, stark truth, there might be truth also in his denial.

"It don't seem possible," Mike reasoned, "that a fellow could get worked up to such a pitch he'd bump off two people and then ride off a couple of miles an' lay down an' sleep all day. A man ain't human that could do that. He'd sleep, maybe, if he hadn't much on his mind, if he was just worried or tired. George was tired enough. We were all dead for sleep that day. Darn it, if this led anywhere!—but it don't."

It led him to stop at the Demars ranch on his way back to town. Checking up afterward, Mike perceived a sort of sequence in his acts that day. He didn't think of it at the moment. He didn't quite know, nor stop to analyze, what impulse made him turn aside, go through the pasture bars, jog up to the front of that deserted ranch house and sit staring at the closed door.

In his mind he was recreating that vanished morning, when his two riders came together. And while his mind concentrated on that picture his eyes roved. It becomes a subconscious process with the average range rider, this noting of details. And Mike was considerably above the average. His eye came upon something now.

He stared a while at the tier of logs above the window and door. The roof of the Demars house was shingled. Over that also Mike's gaze went searching, narrowed and eager and puzzled, no longer casual but definitely questing.

He stepped his horse close against the wall, felt the wood with an exploring forefinger. Then he dismounted and entered the front room. He examined

the walls and ceiling with great care, even climbed on a table and heaved himself into a dusky attic through a trapdoor. By lighted matches in the semigloom he examined something that stirred his curiosity to a burning pitch.

When he did at last return to Malta he went straight to Morris & Shore's store. Jess Demars was still at work behind the high desk.

"Say," he said abruptly, "I was up the river. Comin' back I stopped in an' took a look over that ranch house of yours. When did somebody do a lot of target practice on the front of that house?"

"Target practice on the front of the house?" she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"There's a lot of bullet holes in the front of your house over the window and the door," he explained. "Judgin' from the wood they aren't more'n a few days old. Some through the roof. Don't you know when and how this shootin' was done? It isn't common for a ranch house to be shot up in that crazy way."

"I don't know anything about any shooting around there at all," Jess said in a puzzled, slightly incredulous tone. "A lot of bullet holes through the front of my house?"

"Yes. It looks like somebody had bombarded that place. And you don't know anything about it? That's queer."

"It is queer," she replied. "It must have been done since—since I've been in town."

"I thought of that," Mike said. "But it happens that I went back there after the inquest with Johnny Summers and a couple of fellows to bring Fisher's body away. After we picked him up we cleaned the floor of that front room, so it wouldn't look so bad when you come back home. It hasn't been done since then—because no splinters come off that wall since. I know. I took notice."

"Funny," Jess murmured. "The

house couldn't have been shot up before without my knowing it."

She nibbled on her pencil for a second.

"I'll have to see that for myself," she said reflectively.

"I want to see it again, too," Mike frowned. "I thought of several things after I left."

"I work here through the forenoon," she said. "Then I help Mrs. Morris get some lunch. After that——"

"We could ride up this afternoon," Mike suggested.

Jess nodded assent.

"I'll get Johnny Summers to go along," Mike volunteered. "It's part of his business to figure out things like that."

But Johnny wasn't available. He had gone out across the great plateau to the north to look into the casualties attendant upon a fracas between two sheep outfits over a water hole. So a little after one o'clock Mike and Jess Demars set out unfortified by the law.

Jess looked at the scattered bullet holes in the walls and roof of her house. As Mike pointed out, if they had been fired since the day of the inquest certain small splinters would have been in evidence. And there was no speck of anything on the floor save the thin film of dust which had gathered since the morning Mike and his helpers had cleaned and swept that floor.

"You'd think there had been a battle," Mike declared. "Somebody shot this house up to a fare you well, I'm here to tell you."

And Jess knew no more about it than he. She could only stare at those bullet holes and wonder. Mike stood in the middle of the room, wrinkling his brows. Finally he went into the kitchen and got three or four long straws out of a broom. These he stuck in the bullet holes—which were scarcely noticeable when he stood on the floor inside. They didn't show much and they were high

on the wall—in fact, Mike had to step on a chair to place his straws. The girl watched silently.

Mike squinted along the angle of the straws.

"If Fisher was sittin' or standin' about there," he pointed, "it might have been one of these bullets that killed him. I don't savvy, but——" He went outside, and took a line from a bullet hole in the logs. "I'm goin' to take a walk up that hill," he said to Jess. "You wait."

He followed the indicated line. It brought him to a point where one corner of the pole fence came just under the rim where the valley wall began to pitch down from the plains above. And at the place where he halted beside the fence, looking back, feeling sure that from just about this point those shots must have been fired, and puzzling over what it might mean if it meant anything, Mike suddenly stooped with an exclamation. His fingers laid hold of an empty brass cartridge.

He didn't rise immediately. In the short grass the dull glint of other spent cartridges arrested his gaze. Here and there they lay sprinkled as they had been ejected from the chamber of a gun, a score of them. Mike examined them, all that he could find. But he laid them down again, left them as they were, all but one which he put in his pocket. Then he went back to the house.

"By gosh, when you're worried or excited, you don't notice little things so much!" he muttered. "I recollect now

that when I was cleanin' up I swept out a coupla bullets. I should 'a' thought about that—at the time."

He went through the kitchen again, hunted on the ground by the back porch and, after a minute of pawing in the litter of that morning's sweeping, pounced with a grimace of triumph on a somewhat distorted piece of lead. He fitted it to the neck of the cartridge he had picked up on the hill. Jess had followed him to the back of the house.

"What is it?" she asked. "What have you found out now?"

"Tell you later," Mike said. "Don't know as it amounts to much. By gosh, I wish Johnny Summers was here, though!"

Under insistence Mike did finally tell her what he had found. But he did not pass on to her certain conclusions which had leaped at once into his agile brain. He had to see Doc Lowe first, perhaps even the coroner, before he could verify what might easily be just a wild guess.

But he felt a thrill of excitement. If he were right in his conjectures, there was some skillful ferreting to be done. And Mike was a cow-puncher, not a detective. That was why he wished Johnny Summers was at his elbow instead of investigating belligerent sheepherders. But there were one or two things Mike *could* do without loss of time.

"Let's get back to Malta," he said so abruptly that Jess Demars looked surprised and then a little offended. But Mike didn't notice that.

To be concluded in the next number.



FOR STORAGE PURPOSES

"THE Hollywood movie stars," says a theatrical journal, "all have unusually large and sunny bathrooms." Probably because they have to have a place to hang all those bathing suits they wear in the pictures.

...on the floor it's
TIME!



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FINE TURKISH and DOMESTIC tobaccos,

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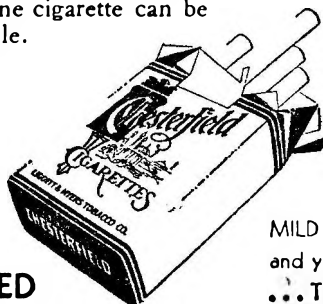
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not only BLENDED but CROSS-BLENDED



MILD . . .
and yet
... THEY SATISFY

NOTHING ELSE BUT

By BARRY PEROWNE



It's Viscount Fenley—the
Richest Peer in England.

THE first time I sets eyes on the Deacon kid he's standing outside the stage door with a bunch of carnations in his hand and a "pardon-me-if-I-intrude" sort of grin on his face.

"I—er—excuse me," he says, "but are you connected with the theater?"

"Connected with the theater?" says I, in that cheery way I got. "Why, son, I'm the man who invented Bernard Shaw!"

The kid grins nervously.

"But I mean are you connected with *this* theater?" he says. "You see, I—I—" He hesitates, blushing—yes, boys, blushing like a man what finds himself at the end of dinner one fork down and three to play. "The fact is," he says, "I—er—I've come to see Miss Norman."

"Oh!" says I, and I ain't so cheery, now. "Is that so?"

"Yes. You see," he says, "she asked

me to call and see her, and so I thought that perhaps she would—er—have a little supper with me, after the theater was over. Only, you see, I—well, I didn't exactly know whether I ought to wait for her outside, or whether I ought to ask the porter to tell her I was here. So, when I saw you going in, I thought I would ask you about it."

"I see," says I. "Well, son, you've stumbled on the right man. D'you know who I am?" I says. "I'm Albert ('Snips') Montagu, Lois Norman's press agent, and the smartest man in the game to-day."

Well, boys, that's an eye opener for him, all right.

"Oh!" he says, in an awed voice. "How d'you do, Mr. Montagu? Pleased to meet you. I'm Graham Deacon."

He holds out his hand, and, being the soft-hearted bloke I am, I shakes it—but not very affable. As you can guess, boys, I don't want no personable young men calling on Lois; they ain't healthy for my plans. And, mind you, this lad *is* personable. Nervous he certainly is; but he's got them clear, gray eyes women dream about, and the sort of hair they love to stroke.

"But, listen, now, son," I says—for Lois ain't told me nothing about meeting no young man and I wants to get to the bottom of this—"where did you meet Miss Norman?"

At that, a far-away smile appears on his face—the sort of smile a man registers when he's in the act of paying somebody else's check into his bank account.

"In Hyde Park," he says dreamily—"in the Row. Her horse had bolted with her, and——" He comes to himself abruptly. "I met her in Hyde Park," he says. "Last Sunday, it was. And, now—may I see her, d'you think?"

I hesitates for a minute, reflecting—and then, all of a sudden, an idea comes to me. It comes in a flash, boys, with-

out no warning, so to speak. But, then, you know, I'm funny that way. One minute my mind's as blank as a monkey-gland expert's hat when he's takin' up a collection in aid of his funds at an undertakers' reunion, and the next—*biff!*—there's a red-hot idea come to life.

"Son," I says, "you leave this to me. I'll go straight up, now, and tell Lois you're here."

"I say, will you, really?" he says eagerly. "It's awfully good of you. I——"

I waves him quiet in my graceful way.

"Now, you wait here," I says. "I won't be long."

With that, I leaves him, and nips in through the stage door.

"Jimmy," I says to the porter, who's sitting on his stool trying to work out a system what'll win him back his losses on the system he tried on the three-thirty, "listen. If the bright lad outside ever comes in asking to see Miss Norman, she's out. See? Out to *him!* Savvy?"

"Trust me, Snips," says Jimmy.

"Good!" says I, and legs it along the dressing-room corridor.

The drop's been down twenty minutes and more, and I can hear Lois in her room, talking to Lottie, her dresser. I hangs about for a minute or two, and then I switches on that sympathetic expression I does so well, and goes back to the stage door.

The Deacon kid's waiting, but when he sees that expression of mine, his smile disappears like strawberry ice cream in a girls' school.

"She—she won't see me?" he says.

I shakes my head mournfully.

"Sorry, son," I says. "Miss Norman says she's—er—engaged."

Notice that hesitation, boys? That's a typical bit of Montagu cleverness, that is. It makes him think—see?—that probably she said something very differ-

ent to "engaged"—more like: "Tell him to go to Jericho." See? And he bites it like a baby. Why, boys, that lad's so green you'd think he dined off grass seed!

"Oh! I—see," he says, and he looks at them carnations of his in such a juiced pathetic sort of way that he makes me feel, somehow, as though I ought to soften the blow a bit.

"Now, listen, son," I says kindly, "you don't want to go takin' this to heart. Remember," I says, "that an actress ought never to be taken too seriously. They ain't like other people, on account of their Art. All their sincerity goes into their Art," I says; "particularly in the case of an actress who's got such a responsibility as the lead in 'Knaughty Knees,' like Lois has. She meant what she said, when she asked you to come here, I don't doubt," I says; "but she'd probably forgotten all about you, two minutes after she'd said goodbye. So——"

I gets no further.

"That's *your* mistake, Snips," says a voice behind me.

I swings round like a beater what's been shot in the calves by one of the sportsmen.

There, looking at us from the doorway, stands Lois!

She gives me a twenty-below look from them blue eyes of hers; and then she goes forward to the Deacon kid, and holds out her hand, smiling at him.

"How d'you do, Mr. Deacon?" she coos. "I'm so glad you've come to see me."

The Deacon kid's blushing and smiling all over his face.

"I'm awfully glad your engagement didn't keep you long," he says. "You see, I—well, I hope you won't think it awful checky of me, but I—I was wondering if you'd have supper with me?"

"I'd *love* to," says Lois—and, believe me, boys, she's blushing pretty near as much as he is.

At that, I breaks out in a light perspiration. I can see she's as smitten with him as he is with her—and it scares me, boys; it frightens me rigid. I has a horrible vision of all of my plans, all my years of work on her, coming to nothing.

"But, Lois," I barks, "you can't do that." In my agitation, I catches her by the arm. "Manvis is coming; you're going to have supper with *him*."

She shakes off my arm angrily.

"Oh, no," she says; "I am going with Mr. Deacon." She turns to him with a smile. "Shall we go, Mr. Deacon?"

"Splendid," says the kid, all flustered with happiness, and he hails a taxi.

And, even as the kid's taxi pulls into the curb, another one draws up, too. Out hops Manvis himself! He's in his soup-and-fish outfit, and he's got a great bunch of orchids in his hand.

"Lois——" he begins.

"Good evening, Lord Manvis," says Lois, cold as a vanilla-and-raspberry. She turns pointedly to young Deacon, and looks at the carnations in his hand. "*Oh!*" she exclaims. "Are those lovely flowers for—for *me*?"

"Why—yes," says the kid, blushing.

"How *'nice!'*" coos Lois. She takes them from him, and fondles them for an instant against her cheek. "Oh, aren't they *sweet!*"

The kid's holding the taxi door for her.

She looks back at Manvis, who's glaring at her like one of these here depressions moving slowly eastward that you hear about when there's going to be dirty weather.

"Good night, Lord Manvis," she says sweetly, and she smiles at young Deacon and steps into the taxi.

The kid says a word to the driver, hops in himself, and slams the door. In thirty seconds they ain't no more than a red taillight down the street!

I draws one deep, deep breath, and lets it out again in a long, hollow groan.

Here, for close on two years, I've concentrated all my influence and genius—I say that, boys, mind you, with all modesty, for, after all, it's nothing but the truth—on the job of lifting that girl from the chorus of a third-rate revue to the lead in a high-class musical comedy like "Knaughty Knees," and then, on the very eve, so to speak, of the equinox of all my work, she turns round and leaves me flatter than an actor on tour leaves his landlady.

Boys, when I thinks of the way I'd got Manvis interested in her; when I remembers how near I'd been to getting her married to a member of the nobility: when I reflects on all the good such a scoop—"From Chorus Girl to Peer's Wife"—would do my reputation and remuneration as a press agent—why, boys, I could lay down and weep. And all, mind you, because of a nobody—a mere *nobody*—like the Deacon kid!

I steals a look at Manvis, to see how he's taking it. He ain't taking it at all well. His face is blacker than a maiden aunt's Sunday best, and his lips is moving in a way that makes me glad he ain't talking aloud.

"Lord Manvis——" I begins, thinking to pitch some excuse or other.

But I don't get the chance.

"*Bah!*" he snarls suddenly. "*Bah!*" He glares at the orchids in his hand. "Oh, aren't they *sweet!*" he mimics bitterly. "'How nice!' *Bah!*"

And, all of a sudden, he flings them orchids down on the pavement, and jumps on 'em! And then, without another word to me, he strides off to his taxi and jumps in, and I says to myself sadly, as the taxi rattles off:

"There, Snips, my old," I says, "goes the biggest scoop of your career!"

But you know me, boys; you know that I'm funny that way. The more banana skins people puts in my paths 'he cleverer I am at dodgin' 'em.

Next morning, about eleven, I'm up at the theater, lookin' for Lois. There's

a call at ten, to rehearse new numbers for the show's second edition, and by eleven fifteen Lois is finished. I tackles her as she's on her way back stage.

"Lois," I says, "listen. What about Manvis?"

"Well?" she says haughtily. "What about him?"

"You know my plans, don't you?"

"Certainly I do," she says. "And, as I've told you before, I could never, *never* marry Lord Manvis. I detest him."

Well, I got to admit that's true. She's certainly N. G.'d my plans every time I've mentioned 'em. But I've always felt pretty sure that a handsome, knowledgeable man-of-the-world would be able to make her change her mind, in time. Now young Deacon's come along, though, I ain't so sure. But I sticks at it.

"Listen, now, Lois," I says. "Be calm about this. Look at it in a proper light. Manvis'd bring you money, a title—why, Lois," I says, "the title alone would fill any theater you was billed at. And, what's more," I says, "he's openly hinted that he wouldn't want you to give up your career, if you'd rather not. Think of all that, Lois," I urges, "and then compare it with what this Deacon kid could give you. Why, Lois, there ain't a thing he could give you that's worth having—not a *thing!*"

"That's all *you* know, Snips," she says, and she smiles in a queer sort of way. I don't fathom that smile of hers, but, before I can get a word in, she goes on: "Besides, he saved my life. If he hadn't stopped my horse, when it bolted in the Row last Sunday, I'd certainly have been thrown, and probably killed. And here's a tip for you, too, Snips," she says. "In a matter like this, you can always trust a girl to know what's best for her."

"Don't you believe it," says I. "Now, you take a tip from old Albert ('Snips') Montagu, and ring up Manvis and ask

him if he'd like to take you to lunch at the Savoy."

"I can't do that, Snips," she says, and darn me if she ain't blushing. "You see, I—I'm lunching with Mr. Deacon."

And lunch with him she does!

She lunches with him the day after, too—and, so far as I know, dines with him as well. And there ain't a word from Manvis. I'm gettin' pretty desperate, so, on the third day, I tries a new tack.

I catches Lois just as she's going out at lunch time.

"Lois," I says, "I'd like a word with you."

"Well?" she says.

"Well," says I, "it's just struck me that you must be costing young Deacon a lot of money, eating with him every day. If the kid ain't got much, do you think it's quite fair to him?"

Lois just laughs.

"Oh, if that's what's worrying you, Snips," she says, "you can forget it. I've come to an arrangement with Mr. Deacon."

"An arrangement?" I queries.

"Certainly. The first night I had supper with him," she explains, "he asked me to lunch next day. I said I'd come, on condition he promised to go where he always goes. And he promised, and—and then"—she's blushing, now—"he went ahead and, for some reason or other, told me his whole financial position. And—and, do you know, Snips, he'll be earning *seven pounds* a week in June, when he gets his rise! Isn't it *marvelous*?" You'd think, from the way she talks, that she's never heard of so much money in her life—and she herself drawing down a hundred and twenty pounds a week! "And, Snips," she goes on, still blushing, "Graham thinks that, when a girl marries, she ought give up everything for her home. And—and I agree with him, Snips!"

And, with that, she turns and hurries away, leaving me, boys, standing there

with my hair sticking up on end like the springs of a horsehair sofa.

I can see it all! Not only is she planning to marry the Deacon kid, but she's planning to leave the show game, as well! And never a thought for me, mind—for all I've done for her, and for what'll *happen* to me, if she walks out!

It's hard on a man, boys—juiced hard!

That afternoon I'm sitting in my office, wondering what'll happen to me, if Lois goes gettin' tied up to this Deacon kid, when the door opens and in comes Manvis. It's the first time I've seen him for three days, but I ain't even got the heart to get out of my chair to greet him.

"Hello," he says.

"Hello," says I sadly.

He sits down and pulls at his cigar for a bit, in silence. Then he says abruptly:

"I ain't heard a word from Lois."

"No," says I; "and you ain't likely to, neither."

And I tells him what Lois has just said.

"Oh!" says he. "H'm!" All of a sudden, he leans across the desk at me, and there's a gleam in them dark eyes of his. "Listen, Snips," he says. "When I went off, the other night, I intended to *keep* off—to forget Lois, see? But the last few days have taught me that I *can't* forget her. I want that girl—and I'm a man who *gets* what he wants—see? Now, listen. Get rid of that kid. Understand? *Get rid of him!* I don't care how you do it, nor how much it costs. The day he's out of my way, there's a thousand pounds for you, and expenses. Well?"

"None so well," says I mournfully. "I doubt whether it can be done."

"Anyway," says he, rising, "try it. Remember, it's worth a thousand to you!"

And he goes out, leaving me to wrestle with the problem alone.

And that evening, while I'm round at the box office giving the manager a few kindly hints on how to run a theater, I has an inspiration.

Right away, I nips round to the stage door.

"Listen, Jimmy," I says to the porter. "That youngster who's been calling lately for Miss Norman ain't been round yet, has he?"

"No," says Jimmy.

"Good! Then he'll be along any minute," says I. "Now, listen. If Miss Norman asks if he called, say 'No.' See? 'No.'"

"Yeh—but, look here," says Jimmy. "Three days ago, you told me to tell him, if he called, that Miss Norman warn't in. And, the day after, she herself give me strict orders to the contrary."

"You'll take your orders from me, this time, Jimmy," says I, in that stern way I can put on, when I chooses. "Understand?"

"All right," grumbles Jimmy, and goes on trying to work out a system for finding out what's wrong with the systems he's worked out before.

I nips outside, and, in a minute or two, just as I guessed he would, along comes the Deacon kid.

"Good evening, Mr. Deacon," says I.

"Good evening," he says coldly.

"Lois'll be out in half an hour or so," I says. "Won't you come and have a drink? There's just time for a quick one, and I'd like a word with you."

"A word with *me*?" he says, surprised—but he comes along, all the same.

"Now, Mr. Deacon," I says; when we're nice and cozy in a little pub down the street from the theater, "I want to put a proposition to you. No doubt you can do with five hundred pounds as well as the next man?"

He looks at me suspiciously.

"What are you driving at?" he says.

"This," says I, abandoning finesse:

"I'll give you five hundred pounds to keep away from Lois Norman."

He sets down his glass and turns on me slowly.

"You will, will you?" he says. "Why, you little rat, for two pins I'd——"

"All right, all right," I says hastily, seeing I'm on the wrong track. "Don't misunderstand me. I—I just said that to test you."

"To test me?" he says blankly.

"Yes," I lies. "You see, I—well, now," I says, "I expect you wonder why I told you the other night that Lois said she wouldn't see you?"

"I do—rather," he admits, hard-eyed.

I takes a pull at my whisky-and-soda. The kid's green, all right, but he certainly ain't soft. If once he knocks you down, I can see easy enough that you'll stay put.

"Well," I says, "I'll explain. I'll tell you exactly why I did it," I says. "You see," I says, with that ready invention that's put me where I am to-day, "I did it for what I knew to be her own good."

"Her own good?" says the kid. "But she——"

I silences him with a wave of my glass.

"Listen, son," I says, "has it ever struck you that, by going around with you, Lois may be putting a spoke in the wheel of her life's happiness?"

"Eh?" says the kid. "Why—what d'you mean?"

"I'll tell you," says I. "I'll be very frank with you. Now, look here, son," I says, "you saved Lois' life, and, as a consequence, she feels a—well, a sort of romantic attachment toward you. But son," I says, "romantic attachments of that sort don't last—particularly in the case of an actress. And I tell you frankly that I'm afraid that, if you and she gets hitched up, she's goin' to find herself at the end of a year longing to get back to the boards. And, at the end of a year," I says gravely, "she'll find

it *mighty hard* to get back. She's got a reputation, now, that it's taken her years of hard work to build up. If she don't keep hard at it, consolidating that reputation, she's going to find herself, at the end of a year, when she tries to come back, with all that hard work and disappointment and heartache to be gone through again."

"Oh, but that's rot," says the kid, flushed and angry. "Lois says that she hates the stage."

"That's what they all say. But," I reminds him, "they all tries to come back, sooner or later. No, son—once a pro, always a pro. Believe me, I know Lois better than she knows herself. And, what's more," I adds, with a little break in my voice, "I loves her like I'd love my own daughter, if I had one. It'd break my heart," I says, "to see her ruin her life like she will if she goes through with this."

"Oh, but——" says the kid, and stops abruptly.

I can see I've got him started, so I goes on quickly:

"Besides, there's another thing. I don't know how you're off for money, son——"

"With any luck, I shall be making seven a week by June," he murmurs.

"Seven a week?" I says. "Well, now, son, that's just my point. That girl," I says, "is livin', now, at the rate of close on a hundred a week. I put it to you, son, as man to man: Do you think she can ever be happy, living on seven pound a week, now that she knows what it's like to live on a *hundred* a week?"

"I—I don't know," he mutters. "It'd never struck me like that before."

"No," I says; "I guessed it hadn't. That's why I wanted to talk to you," I says. "I'm older than the pair of you put together, but I'm not too old to remember how hard it is to get a clear idea of your duty when you're young."

At that, I sees him stiffen.

"Duty!" he says. "You—you really think it's my duty to—to——"

"To get away from Lois," says I, "and to keep away. To forget her, and so to help her to forget you. I *do* think so," says I. "It'll be hard, son, I know, but duty's always hard, and, remember—it's for *her* sake."

He catches hold of my arm.

"You honestly think it'd be best for her?" he says, his voice quivering.

"Would I say it, if I didn't?" says I.

"No," he says; "I—I suppose not."

Just then the barman starts to turn down the lights.

"Time, gentlemen, please," he hollers.

"Come on, kid," I says, and we goes out together.

I'm fair quivering with suspense. What, I wonders, is he going to do? Have I played my hand right?

When we gets out on the pavement he pauses, looking down the street toward the theater. Suddenly he turns to me.

"Ought I, d'you think, to see her again?" he says. "Just once?"

I sighs.

"No, son," I says; "it'd only make it harder—for both of you. Make a clean break," I says; "and the sooner you do it, the better—for her."

"Yes," he says. "I—I suppose so."

For a full minute he stands there looking down the street at the theater. Then, abruptly, he sort of stiffens, and I sees that he's smiling queerly.

"Good-by, Lois," he mutters; "good-by."

And, without another word to me, he turns round and goes off down the street.

Smart, boys, eh? Well, what would you expect from old Albert ("Snips") Montagu? Ain't I the smartest man in London to-day? You bet!

I lets out one long sigh of relief, and then, with a song in my heart and Manvis' thousand as good as in my pocket, I goes off back to the theater.

I meets Lois in the act of coming out of the stage door.

"Hello, Lois," I says cheerily.

She gives me a queer look.

"Hello," she says, and glances impatiently up and down the street.

I chuckles to myself, and goes round the front to ring up Manvis.

I don't see no more of Lois that night; but, next day, she lunches with Manvis at the Piccadilly—and she wouldn't do that, I argues, unless she's peeved with young Deacon for deserting her. What's more, she dines with Manvis, too—and, if I'd been built so that I could reach my back comfortably with my hands, I'd have put in an hour or two patting it. I resolves to catch Manvis alone, first chance I gets, and collect my thousand.

But the chance don't come that day, and, the day after that, I'm sitting in my office, wondering which church to favor with the Manvis-Norman wedding, when in comes Lois herself.

It's getting on for two o'clock, and, as I knows she has a matinée at two forty-five, I'm surprised to see her.

"Hello, Lois," I says. "What——"

"Listen, Snips!" she says, and there's something in her voice and in them blue eyes of hers that makes me feel as though she's brought a north wind in with her. "Listen, now! I want the truth out of you!"

"The—the truth, Lois?" I stammers.

"That's what I said," says Lois, and she looks at me in such a way that I goes hot and cold all over. "What did you tell Mr. Deacon the other night?"

At that, boys, being the sensitive sort of bloke I am, I has a premonition that something's gone wrong somewhere.

"Tell Mr. Deacon?" says I, acting as though I'd never so much as heard the name before.

"Don't trouble to bluff," says Lois. "I know you saw him. I *felt* that you were behind this, somehow, and I've been talking to Jimmy. I had to bully

him to get him to admit it, but, in the end, he told me you'd gone off with Mr. Deacon, after telling him to tell me he hadn't called. Now, then—I want the truth out of you, Snips, and I'm going to get it. What did you tell Mr. Deacon?"

"My dear girl," I says, "I——"

She stamps her foot furiously.

"Snips," she says, "I'm going to have the truth. *What did you tell him?*"

At that, boys, I sees the game's up.

"All right, then, Lois," I says, with a sigh, "I'll tell you." I tells her. "But, remember," I says, "that I was acting for your own good. Remember——"

"Oh, you—you *fool!*" she breaks in. "You—you *semixwit!* Didn't I tell you that——"

She breaks off abruptly and snatches up my telephone receiver.

"Central double o, double o," she says and waits, glaring at me.

I just shrugs. Yes, boys, with a level thousand and my whole future foundering before my eyes, I manages to shrug. I'm like Napoleon in that way—philosophical at all times.

"Hello?" says Lois. "Central double o, double o? Is Mr. Deacon there, please? Mr. Deacon. . . . Yes. *What?* . . . But when—*when?*" She's quivering all over, and her cheeks is flushed. "To-day? What time does he sail? . . . Oh! On the *Minorca*? Oh! Yes. Yes, thank you. Good-by."

She slams down the receiver and looks at me.

"He's sailing for Capetown at three thirty this afternoon on the *Minorca!*"

"Is that so?" says I, and I brightens up considerable, thinking there might still be a chance, after all.

"Yes," she says breathlessly. "You've driven him away. But there's still time to catch him—and you're going to do it, Snips!"

"Oh!" says I, with a touch of that biting sarcasm of mine. "I am, am I?"

"Yes," says Lois, "you are." And

she goes on impatiently: "Oh, I suppose there's nothing for it, now, but to tell you the truth. Do you know who it is you've sent away?"

"Why, of course," says I gently, thinking the emotion must have unsettled her a bit. "It's——"

"It's Viscount Fenley," she catches me up—"Viscount Fenley, the man who one day'll be the Earl of Southshire—the richest peer in England!"

Boys, have you ever known what it's like to have all the wind knocked out of you at one blow? Well, that's how I feels now—like as though somebody's kicked me right in the waistcoat.

"Viscount Fenley?" I gasps. "But you——"

"Oh, don't you understand?" says Lois. "He told me all that stuff about his name being Deacon because, I suppose, he was sick of girls who were always after his money and title. But I recognized him, the minute I saw him, in the Row, that Sunday. His photo's in all the society papers. So I led him on, pretending I believed that about his being nothing else but a seven-a-week clerk. And I had him just where I wanted him, when you—— Oh, you fool, Snips! Didn't I tell you that a girl always knows what's best for her?"

Well, that's true enough—she *had*. And then I remembers the way young Deacon turns me down when I offers him that five hundred to keep away from Lois—and, at that, I sees it all!

"But—but, Lois," I stammers, "why didn't you tell me your name?"

"Because you'd have been all over him," she says contemptuously; "because you'd have fawned on him like you do on Manvis. Why, the boy would have guessed right away we knew who he was; you'd have scared him off almost before he'd set foot in the theater."

I'm too shook up to point out what an unjust thing that is to say, and I just croaks weakly:

"But—but what's he going to Africa for?"

"How do I know?" says Lois impatiently. "Big-game shooting, probably, like all these rich folk do when they gets the bird. Don't you *see*?" she exclaims. "When you went talking to him like you did, he probably thought I'd got tired of going about with a seven-pound-a-week clerk, and had sent you to break the news gently. And now he's going off to Africa, thinking I'm like the rest of 'em, to try to forget me. That's his town house I've just rung up. He gave me the number, in case I wanted to get in touch with him any time. He pretended he just worked there as assistant secretary, not knowing that I knew who he was, and that I guessed he'd given his valet the office about calls for 'Mr. Deacon.' And I'd just got him hooked nicely!" she wails. "And now—*now*—he's going to Africa!"

"Going to Africa!" I moans, thinking of what small fry Manvis was, compared with the will-be Earl of Southshire.

"But he's got to be stopped!" says Lois. "The *Minorca* sails at three thirty from Tilbury." She glances at her watch. "It's two o'clock exactly, now. There's just time to do it. I've got to go on at two forty-five, and I don't dare let the management down. It's up to you, Snips—you've got to do it!"

"Nothin'd please me better," says I—and, believe me, boys, I speaks from the bottom of my heart. "But, even if I can get there in time, what shall I tell him?"

"Tell him—tell him——" Lois fingers her lip for a moment, thinking. "Tell him," she says, "that I—that I need him. And, remember—he's still Graham Deacon to you. For Heaven's sake, don't let him suspect that you know the truth, or he won't come. And move, Snips," she pants—"move!"

I moves.

Yes, boys, believe me, I certainly moves. In less than ten minutes I got my car round, and I've put dynamite under my chauffeur, and I'm speeding down through the City alongside of him. But, even at that, what with the traffic snarling at us from all sides and deliberately getting in the way, we don't move near fast enough.

"Tread on it, Joe!" I pants. "*Move*, can't you?"

"Could *you*?" snarls the chauffeur, as the ugliest bobby in the world holds up his ugly great fist right in our road.

I mops my brow with my handkerchief—but what I really needs is a blanket.

It's just on three fifteen when we gets to the docks.

I hops out of the car pretty near before Joe's done pulling up, and legs it for the first porter I spots.

"The *Minorca*?" I gasps.

"Eh?" says he.

"The *Minorca*?" I hollers.

"Oh!" says he. "You mean the *Minorca*? H'm, now! Lemme see." He pushes back his hat, and gives his head a good, long, leisurely scratch. I'm within an inch of committing death on him, when at last he puts back his hat and says: "Ah, yes. The *Minorca*. Yonder."

Yonder it is. Bells is ringing all over the ship, and visitors is streaming ashore down the gangway.

An officer cove stops me as I tries to shove past him.

"Passenger?" he snaps.

"Anything to oblige," says I, and, before he can stop me, I pelts up the gangway.

There's a whole crowd on deck, waving good-by, and I plunges about among 'em like a curate trying to find his hat at a Sunday-school treat.

"Mr. Deacon!" I bellows. "Mr. Deacon!"

Bells is ringing all round me, and sirens and noses is being blowed whole-

sale. I'm half dead, but I manages to keep on hollering.

"Mr. Deacon!" I bawls, as I accidentally crushes an old gent's hat down over his eyes. "Mr. Deacon!"

A hand grips my arm.

"What is it?" says a voice.

I swings round, panting.

It's the kid.

"Lois!" I gasps. "Lois—wants you —needs you! Come on!"

I grabs him with both hands and drags him toward the gangway—but, by the time we reaches it, it's *me* that's being dragged.

"Lois?" he says. "Lois *needs* me?"

He pelts down the gangway, me at his heels; and we ain't no sooner reached the dock than they starts to pull the gangway clear.

"This way," I gasps—"this way!"

Somehow, I manages to get him to the car, and then—well, boys, I just collapses.

When I comes to we're heading back into the town, and the kid's shaking me and saying:

"Why don't you answer? Hey? What's the matter with Lois?"

I pulls myself together with an effort.

"Nothing ain't the *matter* with her, exactly," I says carefully. "But—well, the truth is, Mr. Deacon, I—er—come to the conclusion that I made a mistake the other night. Lois needs you, and you need her, and nothing," I says—"nothing at all—should be allowed to interfere with—er—true love," says I.

He's silent for a bit, nodding to himself, and then:

"How did you know I was going away?" he asks.

"Why—er—I—I got the office," I says cautiously.

Thanks be, he's satisfied with that, and he don't say another word all the way to the theater.

The drop's down when we gets there, so I takes the viscount along to Lois'

dressing room. I knocks on her door and Lois herself opens it. She's very pale, but, when she sees the kid, she flushes and her eyes gets all bright.

They takes just one look at each other, and then:

"Lois!" he breathes.

"Graham!" says she.

Then he steps right forward and takes her in his arms.

I closes the door on 'em gently and chuckles to myself. I've done it again! Old Albert (Snips) Montagu's done it again! Clever? Why, boys, I'm so clever it fair takes my breath away.

I'm just wondering about a nice little whisky and soda to toast myself in, when the door opens again and there's Lois and the viscount, hand in hand, smiling all over their faces.

"Snips," says Lois, "we're—we're going to be married. We wanted you to be the first to know."

"Great!" says I. "Fine! Now——"

"Wait a minute, Snips," says Lois. "There's something I ought to tell you first. Have you looked up Central double o, double o, in the telephone book, by any chance?"

"Why—no," says I blankly, not seeing what she's getting at.

"No?" says Lois. "Well, if you look it up, you'll see that it's the number of the International Mining Engineering Corporation."

"The—the *what*?" I gasps. "But you said——"

"I said," says Lois, "that it was the number of the town house of Viscount Fenley. But there's no such house, Snips, because, you see, there's no such viscount! Mr. Deacon, here, is just plain Mr. Deacon!"

Boys, have you ever felt the sensation of falling from a great height—of falling, falling, *falling*? Well, that's how I feels, now—only more so.

"Do you mean," I croaks, "that he's nothing else but a seven-a-week clerk?"

"Yes, Snips," she says, and she

squeezes his hand and looks up at him proudly—"nothing else but! You see, Snips," she goes on, "Mr. Deacon was so unhappy, when you sent him away, that he offered to take the place of a man who was sailing for Africa to-day, for his firm, and didn't want to go. And Graham's boss accepted the offer. And, when I rang up Graham's office, this afternoon, and they told me that, I had to stop him, somehow, and as it wouldn't have been playing the game to let the management down at the matinee I had to send you. And the only way I could make sure that you'd really *try* to stop him and bring him back was to tell you all that about his being a viscount—so—so I told you, Snips. There wasn't time for me to get anybody else to stop him; but it didn't matter, Snips—you brought it off!"

"Yes," I groans bitterly; "*I* brought it off!"

She laughs happily.

"Graham's going to explain everything to his boss," she says, "and—and we're going to be married in June, and I shall leave the stage then, and we're going to find the *sweetest* little house, all covered with ivy, just outside London, and—and, oh, Snips, I'm *so* sorry, but it *had* to be done. Aren't you going to congratulate us?"

Congratulate her! Yes, boys, on top of it all, she asks me to congratulate her! That's a *woman* for you, that is!

Well, now, boys, you know me; you know that, up to a certain point, folks can do what they like with me. But, if once they go *beyond* that point——"

I draws a deep, deep breath.

"Miss Norman," I says gravely, "I've got just this to say: So far as *I'm* concerned, you've *ruined* yourself. *I quit!*"

And, with that, I turns round and walks straight out of the theater.

And, now, what I want to ask you boys it this: Do you know any one who can afford to hire the services of a really talented, first-class press agent?



TRAIL WEARY

By Willard E. Solenberger

PACKING fifty pounds of duffel,
Gun and ammunition, too—
It's hard work and man's work,
With traveling to do!

Groping down a virgin valley,
Breaking trail on rocky slopes;
And the word "Gold!" calling,
To bolster up your hopes—

Always singing in your eardrums
When your muscles want to lag;
Fair horizons wait you,
But the weary miles drag.

Now, this mountain glen looks likely—
Think! Your cabin's three days back
And that stream has promise.
Lord! give you strength to pack!

Then, at last, you've found a "placer,"
Staked it out to make your claim;
It's small, but you found it—
Saw the free gold aflame.

God! what glow of satisfaction
In his aching body burns,
As, trail weary, trail sick,
The wanderer returns!

The DEVIL'S WIDOW

By SEAN O'LARKIN



The Story So Far:

Paul Ravenel, adventurer son of a Chicago banker, saves an attractive young stranger, Diane Coulard, from a pickpocket on a Parisian boulevard and escorts her home. Later he is slugged and robbed of everything on his person. Recovering consciousness and going his way, he rescues one Mathieu Dubac, a thief, from the police, and is in turn saved by Mathieu, who takes him to the Café of the Dancing Duck and introduces his partner, Hugo Maranneau. The police raid the café and, finding evidence some one has planted at our friends' table, accuse them of murdering a jeweler named Carrol. Fearing for his ill mother's life in the event of publicity, Ravenel keeps his identity secret. He speaks perfect French. The three are found guilty and sentenced to twenty years' labor at the Guiana Penal Colony and exile from France for life. On the transport *Driant*, convicted assassin, tries to kill Paul. Landing in Guiana, Paul is amazed to catch a glimpse of Diane, who, he discovers, lives there with her mother since the death of her father, a colony official. Paul fights Mansart, villainous prison official in love with Diane, and serves a sentence in solitary. Coming out, he is quartered with his two friends, and made foreman of the colony electric-light plant. *Driant*, working under Paul, tries to get him into trouble, and in return Paul saves him from death by electrocution. As he is walking along in the open Diane steps from behind a tree and touches Paul on the shoulder.



In Four Parts—Part III

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER PRISONER.

MAY I talk with you for a moment?" the girl asked tremulously. She seemed to be very nervous and ill at ease, as though she had misgivings about what she was doing.

"Convicts are not supposed to talk with the townspeople," Ravenel said quietly.

"If you are spoken to you can answer, can't you?"

Ravenel nodded slowly; each one's eyes peered into the other's as though seeking some indefinable response.

"What is your name, m'sieu'?"

"Paul Marat—No. 47934."

"That is not your real name?"

Ravenel made no answer but smiled secretly.

"You're the man I met in Paris, aren't you—who took me to my hotel?"

Ravenel nodded. He was surprised to see the girl breathe with relief.

"I thought that you were," she said, "but I couldn't be certain until I had spoken to you. I doubted my own eyes when I saw you that day—the day the convict ship arrived. Why are you here?"

"For murder," Ravenel said tersely.

The girl recoiled from him; horror lighted her eyes.

"I don't believe it," she said impulsively. "You're jesting, m'sieu'."

"I've never been more serious," Ravenel said; "but you'll think I am jesting when I say that I'm innocent!"

"Innocent?" Horror was again in Diane's eyes. "But surely, m'sieu', they would not condemn an innocent man to im——"

"They sent Dreyfus out here to roast and rot."

"It seems incredible!"

"Circumstantial evidence often com-

mits incredible crimes." Ravenel began to move away; it would not do to be seen talking with the girl.

"M'sieu'!" Diane hesitated a moment, her eyes dropping from the red-headed one's. "Somehow, I believe you."

"That I'm innocent?" Ravenel said eagerly, gladly.

Diane nodded. When he looked into her eyes again, he saw that they were tear-stained.

"I believe you when you say you are innocent," she said. "Why I do so I don't know. It was a great shock to me when I saw you marching with the condemned the day the *Duala* got in. Somehow, I associated you with Paris, as——" Here Diane stopped abruptly and Ravenel noticed that her face, white and clear, was flushed. Was she telling him a secret? He wondered if she really were interested in him or merely sympathetic.

"I'm very sorry for what has happened," she said, turning away from him. "You've been unjustly treated—cruelly treated."

"You only have my word for it."

"Isn't that enough?"

"But I don't want you to feel sorry for me," he said, convinced that hers was merely a sympathetic curiosity. "We've got to take things as they come. I'll bounce out on top yet."

"You mean escape."

"Why not?"

"It's so dangerous." But her voice held admiration and not the horror associated with the punishment for escape failures. "The penalties are so inhuman."

"You live among them and yet you think they're inhuman?"

"I do, m'sieu'. I never felt anything but horror for this living graveyard. My father thought the same."

"Then why do you stay, Mademoiselle Coulard?"

"You know my name!" she exclaimed.

"Have you forgotten that you told it

to me in Paris—that night I left you at the Hotel Voltaire?"

"Of course. You were to come back and show me a little of the magic city."

"Mesdames the Fates decided otherwise. But you haven't answered my question: Why do you stay here?"

"I am unfortunate—too," she said. This was a topic she wanted to avoid. "Now I must be going. Thank you for risking a few words with me; I know it is punishable, even if you are addressed first. The condemned are not supposed to chat with the women here. But I had to find out who you are, why you are here in the Guianas."

Diane's sweet tenderness touched Ravenel. He wanted to thank her for her kind faith in him, for her belief in his innocence. Strange emotions, stronger than gratitude, swept through him. She was the first woman he had spoken with, except Jamard's woman, in nearly a year; and she was radiantly beautiful.

"Adieu, m'sieu'," she said, extending her hand.

"Let it be au revoir and not adieu," Ravenel said huskily, grasping her delicate hand in his calloused fist.

"Then—maybe—au revoir."

What happened next Ravenel could not explain to himself for days; nor could he forgive himself. She was in his arms in a flash and he kissed her. For a moment her lips responded to his; then she tore them away and fought him from her, pummeling him with her tiny fists.

"You beast!" she cried. "I might have known it. You're all of a pattern, you convicts!"

"I'm very, very sorry," Ravenel said contritely, and with convincing sincerity. "Please go back to the town." He could not bear to look at her.

But Diane, now in command of the situation and her own emotions, regarded him tenderly; her eyes were forgiving.

"I could have you flogged for that!" she said.

That he did not believe. His eyes met hers unflinchingly. Some brute force had overpowered him for the moment: never before had he forced his lips to a woman's. But Diane attracted him; for months she had been a creature of his fevered dreams; now she stood before him in the flesh.

"You won't do that," he said calmly, with a note of command in his voice.

"No, I won't, m'sieu'. I—I think I understand."

He turned to leave her; the siesta drums rattled across the parched sands and reverberated dully in the jungles beyond. Her hand reached out to his again.

"Au revoir," she said.

"Then I'm forgiven, mademoiselle?"

"I said au revoir," she smiled; and in a flash, she disappeared from the glade. Ravenel watched her disappear into the town before he set his face toward the broiling sun and his prison.

"M'sieu' is late," the guard at the gate remarked leniently. "Be careful."

"Sorry," Ravenel said as he was searched. He often wondered what the authorities thought he could smuggle into the prison camp in his voluminous apparel—a pair of thin cotton pants and a straw hat.

"M'sieu' is late!" a harsh voice echoed from behind the guard. It was Mansart—the Spanish Inquisitor—his Nemesis. The man was leering apprehensively. "One usually is late when one tarries to talk with a lady!"

"That's not true!" Ravenel lied.

Mansart drew close to him, his lips almost touching Ravenel's ears; the man's breath was hot and fetid.

"I saw all that happened—all!" he snapped. "I could send you to Charvein for that!"

"Your eyes are——"

"They're in the best of health, m'sieu'. This time it will mean a flogging. To

send you to Charvein would mean a trial—and that would involve the name of my fiancée."

"Fiancée! Diane your fiancée?" Ravenel blurted out, losing all control of himself. As though lightning had pierced the mystery surrounding Diane, he knew now what tied her to the land of the Devil's Widow; it was the Inquisitor.

"You speak familiarly of her." Mansart hissed, mastering his wrath. "I warn you not to so much as breathe that name, you filthy gutter rat. You'll be flogged for your insolence—and this little romantic venture."

"But you're not Diane's fiancée!" Ravenel cried, refusing to believe the word and the relationship.

"I've forbidden you to mention her name!" the Inquisitor said. "Nor do I argue with a convict about my personal affairs. Guard, take this man to the whipping post and bring two whippers—two of your strongest men. He gets fifty lashes from each."

Ravenel was led to the little square in front of the prison offices. Three tall red posts, from the tops of which hung thick leather straps, stood on the shadeless side. Across them fell the shadow of the bell tower from which was sounded the alarm when a prisoner escaped, or in the event of that rare occurrence, a fire.

A guard made his hands fast to a post. The thongs were hot as they were coiled about his wrists, now drawn high above his head. He closed his eyes to the burning orb that tried to blind as well as cook him. Feet shuffled over the sands toward him. Some one snapped the rawhide lash.

"Take the lash," Mansart said to an invisible newcomer. "This scum gets fifty strokes from you and fifty from your friend there."

There was a pause.

"Go on—strike!" Mansart commanded the unseen convict.

"I don't lash men, m'sieu'," said Mathieu's voice. "I'm here to pay a penalty for a crime I didn't commit; I'm not here to inflict punishment."

"Filth!" Mansart roared, "you shall be lashed for disobedience—a hundred lashes for you. Now, you there, take up the lash. You'll fan both of them."

"I'm Mathieu's apprentice," Hugo's voice said with humor. "I cannot do what he wouldn't do. Nor would I if he would! No, by St. Anthony's blessed ears!"

Mansart's fumings made Ravenel forget his plight. His friends had outwitted his Nemesis; yet he must suffer the lash, for Mansart was undefeatable. He heard another prisoner summoned for the task.

"Will you lash these three lice?" Mansart commanded.

A face peered into Ravenel's. It was Driant's.

"Gladly," the cutthroat said.

And Ravenel took a hundred inspired strokes of the rawhide without crying out; without collapsing. The lash cut and slashed like a razor blade. He knew that Driant was trying to kill him but he would not give him the satisfaction of an outcry. The harder Driant lashed, the weaker grew his blows; he was spending his strength in his rage.

When Ravenel's hands were untied, Mansart sneered:

"Now, my love bird, walk to your cabin, unattended."

Mathieu sprang involuntarily to the American's side. The evil one prevented Mathieu from giving the beaten man a hand. Ravenel, with Driant's chuckles ringing in his ears, staggered behind the prison office. A plan was forming in his mind.

"Now, M'sieu' Driant," he heard Mansart say, "devote your strength to the convict Dubac."

"Gladly!" the cutthroat's voice shouted across the intervening space to Ravenel, who lurched forward, tortured

by every step. His back was raw and bleeding, but his pain was submerged beneath his desire—his little plan.

While Mathieu's hands were being tied, a loud peal crashed through the stillness. It grew louder and louder. It was the alarm bell. Mansart forgot his tortures and bolted for the prison office to ascertain the trouble.

Hugo freed Mathieu, and the two of them, before racing to their cabin, took pot shots at Driant. The Gascon's fist connected with his nose; the Picard's with his jaw. The cutthroat rolled into the hot sand.

"By St. Peter's key ring!" Hugo gasped, as he ran beside his friend, "I think I broke the devil's nose!"

"No such luck," Mathieu replied. "If you hit his nose you probably cut your hand."

"So I did," Hugo cried.

Their keeper admitted them to the cabin and bolted the door behind them. The other inmates clamored about them, excited and eager for news.

"What's the bell for?"

"Who got away?"

"Some one's escaped."

"I don't know what happened," Mathieu said, "but that hell saved my tender skin from being cut into a wash-board."

A funny, choked chuckle reached him. It came from Ravenel's pallet. Mathieu rushed to his red-headed friend's side.

"Water!" Mathieu bellowed. "Get water!"

Hugo raided the water jug and the Picard doused the American. As he continued to bathe Ravenel's horribly streaked back, the red-headed one chuckled and laughed.

"By St. Gregory," Hugo sighed. "I never saw pain affect a fellow like that!"

"It's driven him temporarily insane," Mathieu said fearfully. "Do you feel better, Marat?"

"Yes, much better," Ravenel said, lying prone. "And you?"

"We're all right! The bell saved us."

"Thank God for that!" Ravenel whispered.

There was something in his voice that startled Mathieu. Then he burst into wild laughter. Hugo thought his ex-boss in the burglary trade had gone mad from the sun.

"Magnificent, m'sieu'!" the Picard roared. "It was a stroke of genius."

"Spit it out, Dubac," one of the other men snapped.

"Our friend Marat has become a bell ringer. Next week maybe, we'll get him to imitate the Swiss bell ringers. When we are free, we'll tour him in America as a bell ringer in vaudeville."

And Ravenel did not deny the accusation. In fact, he paid no heed to the merriment his exploit was causing.

Whenever he closed his eyes to master the pain of his ravaged back, a vision of pure beauty appeared before him. It was Diane.

"She's a prisoner here, too," he said to himself. "We, the condemned, are not the only prisoners in the grip of the Widow. She's a prisoner, too. Oh, God, let me help her."

Praying thus, he fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADIES' NIGHT.

JUNE came with its torrential rains; its dry heat kept the mercury in front of the administration building hovering between eighty and eighty-six. Ravenel went about his duties like a man in an eternal nightmare to which he had become accustomed as though it were a pleasant dream. His welted back was healing slowly; it had not, in a month of agony, kept him from his work at the power house. Wounds are of no consequence in the Guianas; only death brings respite.

One burning night found Ravenel tossing on his pallet; outside a jaguar was crying in the jungle and hungry

monkeys were chattering near the garbage dump. Above the prison camp a placid, star-dotted sky floated behind a luminous tropical moon, white and cool.

Mathieu and Hugo were snoring like a boiler factory; Ravenel wondered if they were competing for the loudest and longest snore. The other inmates of the cabin were comparatively silent.

In the month that had passed, Ravenel had seen Diane a dozen times or more; they had met secretly in that little glade of mahogany and mora trees on the road to the prison. Diane had made certain of Mansart's whereabouts before risking the red-headed one's back before the lash; she had heard of the affair and the cause from that underground channel of news that seeped from the camp of the condemned.

These meetings, Ravenel reflected, had done much to preserve his integrity and his will to live; it would have been easier to lapse into the primitive, atavistic life of the convicts and to become more comfortably beastlike as the days went by. Only his hold on civilization made some things hard for him. It was the fire of civilization in him that kept him clean in the heart of filth, washing daily despite gibes and jests. He refused to be bitter over his fate; he still spoke optimistically of escape, though there were days when it seemed impossible. He avoided brawls over petty trifles and administered his duties as power-house foreman with a kindness that was appreciated by the blackest hearts.

Escape, he thought this night as he lay on his back watching the stars through the grilled window, invited one to the reward of freedom or death. Anyway, it was better than rotting in the sunlight. Since his arrival at St. Laurent, eight months earlier, a hundred of the *Duala's* human freight had been buried in the Bamboos. Fever, dysentery and impassioned knives had claimed most of them. Three—Mar-

chal, Placer and Guyot—had tried to escape. The fugitives sailed down the Maroni one February night on a native skiff, impelled in the faint breeze toward the free seas. But it was not written in the Book of Fate that they should know freedom again; off Les Hattes a foul current swamped them and the Maroni smothered the life out of them as it had many another *deporté*. No wonder, Ravenel frowned, they called Les Hattes the "Devil's Trap."

He had heard of attempted escapes from Cayenne. Six men beat their way down the coast toward Brazil in a stolen fishing smack, only to run aground when a storm drove them to hugging the reef-strewn shores. For a week the sextette starved in the jungles, all the time crawling southward. They were within a mile of the Oyapok, the river that divided French Guiana and Brazil, when a squad of border guards came upon them as they slept in fatigue. Two were shot to death in the fight they put up and the other four were now rotting in the solitary cells on the Ile du Diable. One was said to be mad.

"I must be careful," Ravenel said half aloud, "and I must feel mighty lucky before I step off on a break. I'll need more luck than I've been having."

This time a year ago, he recalled, he was en route from Monte Carlo to Paris on the Blue Train. He had been wiped out at roulette but it had been great sport; once he was ahead by one hundred thousand francs and then he lost that and fifty thousand more to boot. The fat of the land had been his up to then; he had the best beds Europe had to offer, the finest food money could buy, the finest clothes, and the freedom to roam wherever fancy dictated. Now his world was a wire pen about two miles square, hemmed in by jungle and river; his bed was board planking; his food was scooped from hot tins, often rancid and always sour; his clothes consisted of the perennial cotton pants and

a floppy straw hat. Occasionally he was granted the sparse freedom to be gleaned from an errand that carried him into St. Laurent.

A year ago he had writers, artists, ambassadors, statesmen and prime ministers for friends; now he broke bread with murderers, burglars, political prisoners and petty thieves. There was the solace of Mathieu's profoundly subtle friendship and Hugo's jolly companionship.

And there was Diane.

In his meetings with the girl he came to know her and her background. Born in Cayenne, she had lived her youth among colonials who lived by watching convicts, by guarding them and supervising their affairs. It was her mother who was responsible for her cool, fresh beauty. Madame Coulard, having lost her own beauty in the withering climate, found great joy in preserving Diane's by protecting her in every conceivable way from the merciless sun. Her wardrobe overflowed with parasols, heavy veils and sun masks. Diane, Ravenel believed, was the one white-skinned girl among all the Frenchwomen of St. Laurent; the others were browned and blacked—and old at twenty, if one judged by their faces.

Ravenel had told her nothing of himself, of his true identity. This shamed him sometimes, since the honesty in him prompted repaying confidence with confidence. But he had his family to consider; they must be protected at any cost—even the cost of reposing confidence in a girl he liked to the point of — Did he love her? He asked himself that question time and time again and dared not answer it. He was really afraid she might not love him, though he was certain of a strong bond between them.

The episode of their first meeting—his kissing her—had never been repeated; nor had it been referred to.

It was odd, he thought, that at their

last two or three meetings she had questioned him so eagerly about escape. He did not think her a spy but her curiosity was most obvious and it disturbed him. Escape was a matter to be shared only by himself, Mathieu and Hugo. Nothing must be said or done that would jeopardize their chances. Of course, he told himself, he trusted Diane implicitly, but after all, escape was akin to the sacredness of his identity; nothing must interfere with it.

As he became conscious of the ticking of an alarm clock, he dozed off to sleep. Diane was waiting for him in the glade, half hidden in the purple shadows, half revealed by huge patches of moonlight. He made his way down the moonlit road, dodging behind rocks and wallaba stumps, lest he be seen from the gates.

Nearing the glade, he whistled softly; Diane replied with a signal that the coast was clear. He could see her better now; in a moment he was in her arms, his fevered lips pressed close to her cool cheek, the soft scent of her yellow hair filling him like a swig of rare brandy.

A yell snatched Ravenel's dream from him. Mathieu, wild-eyed and disheveled, was sitting upright on his pallet.

"What's up?" Ravenel asked. "Are you sick?"

"No, I'm all right, Marat. But maybe I'm not. I had such a good dream—but it makes me feel so bad!" Mathieu sighed.

"You dreamed of Mimi?"

"How did you know, Marat?"

"You held her in your arms and kissed her?"

"Was I talking in my sleep?" Mathieu demanded, horrified lest it be true.

"No, I just know. This is Ladies' Night at St. Laurent!"

"You're a mind reader."

"I wish I was one," Ravenel laughed. "I'd find out who sidetracks our good food and switches in the bad."

A groan from Hugo attracted their attention.

"Look," Mathieu whispered, "he's hugging Chou Chou."

The fat fellow was embracing some one in his dreams, his arms were locked about empty space. He sighed and struggled and suddenly, as if fighting an imaginary adversary, rolled from his pallet, crashing on the stone floor.

"*Sacrebleu!*" he muttered. "He got away."

"Who?" Ravenel asked.

Hugo, surprised to find his friends watching him and laughing, hauled himself back onto his bed and rubbed his eyes.

"Who was the fellow who tried to take Chou Chou away from you?" the red-headed one chuckled.

"How did you know?" Hugo gasped. "By St. Michael's sword, I don't talk in my dreams."

"No, you act like a movie actor," the Picard roared, waking the rest of the cabin. "Now go back to sleep and find that fellow and whale hell out of him. If you see Mimi with any man, just let me know and I'll——"

"I thought you'd sworn off women," Ravenel said.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" Mathieu cried, "can't a man dream about them without breaking his oath? I can't keep them out of my sleep."

"You must be very popular with the ladies," the red-headed one laughed. "They pursue you even in your dreams."

"*Parbleu,*" the Gascon groaned dismally, "we can't escape women, no matter how we try, can we?"

Ravenel rolled over and closed his eyes, hoping that sleep would come. Mathieu continued to josh Hugo about his fight with Chou Chou's new boy friend and wanted to know if he had gotten the better of the dream rival or the worse. Not thinking of himself, the American felt sorry for the Picard and the Gascon; they might never have another woman's love—unless they escaped. He wondered how many of

the condemned dreamed as they did—dreamed of sweethearts, wives, their children—the world from which they were exiled for life.

Sleep refused to come for him and he began to wonder if he'd miss Diane very much when he escaped. Somehow, she had grown on him; he liked to think of her—of meeting her in a day or two; of what they had said at their last encounter in the glade. Escape would end all of that; it would take him back to his old world, where there were no Diances.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLOOD STAINS HIS HANDS.

A WEEK later, shortly after the morning roll call, Jamard sent for Ravenel. The power-house keeper was in tears.

"M'sieu', I am unhappy," he said. "I must trust your discretion once more."

"Certainly, m'sieu'." Ravenel was always amused by the title of, "mon-sieur." A symbol of the fraternity and equality fought for in the French Revolution, it was bestowed on statesmen and thieves alike, by force of habit.

"I quarreled with—with her—last night. You understand, m'sieu'?"

"I think so."

"You are so very intelligent, Marat. Go and see her. Tell her that I was wrong—though it isn't true—and say that I'm sorry."

Jamard's affairs of the heart spelled freedom, such as it was, for the red-headed one; it meant respite from the monotony of prison life for an hour or more. Ravenel quickly consented to act as mediator.

"Take the morning off and convince her," Jamard said generously. "All I ask of you is the right result, m'sieu'. If you win her back for me, I'll give you ten francs."

Ten francs represented a small fortune; but Ravenel was only thinking of a morning to himself; possibly a morn-

ing with Durand—or, if the Fates were kind, Diane. He was eager to be off but Jamard held him, explaining the delicate points on which the quarrel had turned.

Armed with a pass, specifying that he was to buy tobacco for Jamard, he sallied forth from the prison gate. The July sun wrapped its heat about him and he took pleasure in feeling the dry warmth it sent through his body. One could get used to anything, he thought.

As he neared the glade of mahoganies, his heart began to beat a little faster. Was it possible that Diane would be there? His heart always gave a little jump whenever he passed this spot that marked so much happiness in his new life. But it was too early.

He entered the shady patch of verdure and slowed his pace. No one was in sight; he had the morning to himself, four hours of comparative freedom.

A faint whistle broke the stillness. **It** was not Diane's. Turning, Ravenel saw Hugo lumber from behind a mora tree, his finger pressed to his lips.

"I thought you'd be passing this way, Marat," Hugo said mysteriously. "I had to take a chance to talk with you."

"How did you get out, fat boy?"

"I'm on my way to St. Laurent to buy snuff for a guard in the mill. I don't often get a vacation like this, but I'm in luck to-day."

"But why all the mystery? You popped out of the glade like a sloth in the brush."

"Listen, Marat; the men in Belet's cabin are going to break. Belet's in your shop. He likes you and he wants you—us—to come with his crowd. He asked me to sound you out."

"What's his plan?"

"Just before roll call to-night we're to meet near the river. There's a provision skiff there and only one guard—no match for ten of us. We muzzle the guard and take to the boat."

"And then?" Ravenel's tone was contemptuous.

"Why, by St. Cuthbert, we beat our way down the Maroni for the sea."

"You're mad. Ten men in a boat wouldn't have a ghost of a show, Hugo. Belet's plan is suicide. When you and I and Mathieu step out, we do it in a thresome—and only when the right opportunity presents itself. The time is not yet!"

"But when?" Hugo said, disappointed that his news was not good. "We've been here nine or ten months already."

"Soon. You're lucky to-day, Mathieu was lucky last night at dominoes, and this morning I'm lucky. Maybe the Fates are beginning to smile on us, Hugo, and soon they'll drop the opportunity we seek right under our noses."

"I'm with you—but I do hate to wait," Hugo mumbled, dejected. "Come, let's hurry."

Ravenel had no desire to hurry. The morning was his to waste. He decided to loaf a while in the glade, hoping against hope that Diane might turn up.

"I'm going to enjoy nature with a snooze amid her greenery," he told Hugo. "I've got four hours off. Let me have one of those cigarettes I see under your belt. Now be off."

Hugo gave up the cigarette, cursed the luck of red-headed men with four hours to waste, and started trudging down the road to St. Laurent. Ravenel settled behind a protecting mahogany tree, smoking contentedly as he listened to an invisible greenlet clucking in the trees somewhere.

"I thought your fat friend would never go," Diane said at his elbow. He turned to find her creeping toward him through the tall maize. "I'm all cramps and aches. I've been waiting two hours to catch you when you went by."

The girl tried to smile but Ravenel sensed that she was troubled. Her face was drawn and he could have sworn that she had been crying.

"You look like a funeral, Diane," he said. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know how to begin," she said, confused. "It's Mansart. You know him and what he is. My father owed him a great sum of money when he died. Now Mansart demands the return of that money or"—words choked in her throat—"or my marrying him. And I loathe Mansart."

"Surely people understand the situation," Ravenel remarked. "They won't let Mansart force you to marry him. You don't have to marry him."

"But—but I'm engaged to him."

"Even so," Ravenel said, not indicating that he knew this already, "you have a will of your own."

"You don't know Mansart, Paul. I told him last night that I wouldn't marry him and he said that if I disgraced him now, he would have our pension cut off. He said he would tell the town that I associated with the convicts. And that can be done here in the Guianas. It would make life here more unbearable than it is."

"Isn't there any one you can turn to—here or in France or anywhere in the wide, wide world?"

Diane dropped her eyes from his and shook her head. Suddenly she sprang to her feet, and Ravenel, tossing his cigarette away, got up, too. The girl bit her lip and then, looking full into his eyes, said:

"There's no one but you to help me."

Ravenel recoiled a step, surprised, bewildered.

"I think I understand you, Paul," she said. "I believe that you love me and I do love you."

She fell into his arms, sobbing, half with joy, half with despair. Now he knew a great truth—he did love her. He kissed her lips tenderly as she drew away from him. Then he dropped his eyes and his heart felt like lead.

"But how can I, a condemned man, help you?" he cried.

"You must take me with you!"

Ravenel didn't understand her for a moment.

"I know you're planning to escape—all you men try it once. Some succeed; maybe you will—and I want to be with you, Paul."

"But the risks—the jungles—you're a girl!"

"I've considered all that. I'm not afraid, Paul. I must take that risk or remain here to be burned up by that awful sun—like my beautiful mother was. I don't want to die here, dry and rotted like the others. I want to live a little; to live like other women—those that I saw in Paris."

The hopelessness of the girl's plight stunned the red-headed one; it was appalling. He couldn't help her the one way she needed help the most.

"I must escape, Paul. You must help me." Diane's cry came from the depths of her soul, Ravenel thought.

"I'll try," he murmured. How, he wondered?

"Promise me!" she cried. "Promise me that when you attempt it you'll take me."

He nodded slowly, deliberately—almost determinedly. Here was a new incentive for winning freedom; the girl he loved had to be spared the very hell he wanted to be rid of. He must hurry and find a way out.

"I've got to go into town now, Diane," he said. "I'll be thinking this over. I'll hurry matters and change my plans. We'll escape together, dear."

She took his hand and kissed it.

"I've often dreamed of this moment, Paul," she said. "I knew, somehow, that I could count on you to help me. I knew it just as I knew that you were innocent of the crime that brought you here. This escape I've dreamed of for years and now that I've heard your assurances, I feel that it's within my grasp."

"It may cost our lives."

"Rather that, Paul, than Mansart—with you still here, one of the condemned."

The girl's determination and quality of purpose stirred him; she was unafraid and would rather die with him than submit to life's present pattern, which included Mansart in the design of her Fate. She would fight beside Paul and conquer or go down to defeat with him; he was seeing in her a new quality, one that he had sensed but never defined.

"Wait for me here, if you can," he said. "I'll be back in a little while—perhaps with a plan in my head."

"I'll wait—now and until you say the word."

He kissed her fervently and strode off, conscious that her eyes were following him hopefully as he went toward St. Laurent. Jamard's woman was found at her house, jubilant over an ancient phonograph record and none the worse for her quarrel with the keeper. The red-headed one stated his mission and the woman, after giving him a drink of wine, drew forth his arguments and finally consented to forgive the impulsive Jamard.

Ravenel took leave of her, his mission accomplished in less than half an hour; he still had two hours to himself. His first thought was to rush back to Diane but practicality sent him into Queen Charlotte's Square. A group of *libérés* were on the quai staring in wonderment at something on the river.

Making his way to the river's edge, he beheld the object of their interest. It was a high-powered speed boat, cleaving its way up the Maroni with the velocity of an arrow. Circling off the town, it swung into the quay. Its occupants were officials, probably from Les Hattes or Cayenne, with a convict at the engine.

Ravenel's eyes feasted on the boat. What a medium for flight! Pursuit would be impossible. And it could

weather a fairly heavy sea, possibly as far as Brazil or Venezuela, the coasts of freedom. But a sigh stole out of him when he realized that for all his knowledge of matters mechanical, he knew little about such engines. And Mathieu and Hugo were equally helpless in that department.

Suddenly his eyes flew to the face of the convict in the boat. Could he be bribed? Would he be willing to venture to sea with them? The man's face was sun-blackened. For a moment the red-headed one thought it familiar; but then, he remembered, most convicts look alike after a while—when dry rot sets in.

He tore himself away from the speed boat and walked quickly up the Boulevard Malouet toward the road to the prison. He passed Hugo chatting with some *libérés* and hurried on without a word to his friends. The Gascon saw him and started after him, wondering why he didn't stop in response to repeated hailings. The American's mind was too full of half plans and wild hopes to hear the Gascon.

As he neared the glade, Ravenel thought he heard a faint cry. He pressed on, steaming in the broiling sun, until a bend in the road revealed the center of the green spot. There he saw Diane struggling with a man, a convict, who was trying to take her in his arms.

He rushed at the man, who in wheeling about on hearing him, proved to be Driant. The tattooing about his throat—a glistening purple necklace in the sun—were torn by the girl's finger nails.

"Are you hurt, Diane?" Ravenel cried, as Driant drew back a step from the girl. Badly frightened, she shook her head, moving away from the assassin.

"I'll whip you within an inch of your life, Driant!" the red-headed one said, advancing toward him. "I've been aching for a good fight for months. And you and I have lots to settle."

"Let's make a wager, Marat," Driant sneered, his half-closed eyes studying Diane. "Let the best man take the girl for a prize. She evidently knows you rather well and with the proper introduction, she'll know me, too."

"You rat!" Ravenel cried, rushing Driant. A knife flashed from the assassin's waistband and the red-headed one sprang aside in time to avoid its lightning course.

"But, yes, m'sieu'," Driant laughed. "We've lots to settle and you haven't got your friends to help you now."

He sprang forward. Ravenel ducked the glistening blade again and planted an uppercut on the man's chin, sending him reeling. Twice again, he held Driant clear of him with well-placed blows. Baffled, the assassin darted to the right side of Ravenel, feinted with his left hand, and managed to come to grips. The American's right hand caught the man's knife hand and held it above his head. Suddenly his feet were tripped from under him, and he fell heavily on his back, the weight of Driant's body knocking the wind out of him. Still, he managed to hold the menacing knife from him.

"This is a pleasure," Driant sneered, digging his knees into Ravenel's stomach. The pain became unbearable. Paul's grip on the knife hand slipped. Diane uttered a cry of horror. Ravenel saw the knife break from his grasp and poise itself above him. He closed his eyes.

The great, suffocating weight was suddenly lifted from his aching body. On opening his eyes, he saw Hugo struggling with Driant; his friend, following him and forgotten by him, had come upon them in the nick of time. He got to his feet dizzily as he found his breath and leaped to Hugo's assistance. The fat fellow was grappling with the assassin. But he was too late. The knife, impelled by a ferocious thrust, shot into Hugo's chest just above the

heart, and as Hugo crumpled up, Driant sprang at Ravenel.

"You've killed my friend!" the red-headed one cried, aghast.

"What's a knife for, you idiot?" Driant hissed. "Now, as the barber said, you're next."

The two men clinched. Ravenel was sobbing: "You've killed my friend—you've killed my friend." Over Driant's shoulders, he saw the Gascon's round, still face; the eyes were staring at the burning heavens, untroubled by life.

Again Driant tried to trip the red-headed one; but he was blocked. Superhuman strength seemed to grow out of Ravenel's rage. Driant felt a new resistance from a man he had already weakened; terror mounted in him. He broke away and lunged with the knife. Ravenel caught his wrist and knocked the knife from his fist with a sharp blow. As it dropped to the roadway, both men stood staring at it for a moment; then, with a cry, both pounced upon it. Ravenel felt the handle in his grasp. Driant's fingers clutched fiercely at his throat. Death had marked one of them for its own, Diane saw.

But with Driant's back open to the knife, Ravenel knew that he could not kill a man that way. He threw the blade aside and sought to break Driant's strangle hold. He succeeded and his fingers slipped to the assassin's throat.

"You're beaten!" he cried. "You're beaten, Driant!"

His opponent tried again to kick him in the stomach. The red-headed one outwitted him; and the words continued to pound through his brain: "You've killed my friend." He must master his rage or he, too, would—

Driant's body was limp against his own. He only felt the knocking of his own, sorely taxed heart. Releasing his fingers from the man's throat, he was surprised to see Driant sink to the dust; his face was blue and the tongue protruded slightly. Ravenel dropped

beside the man and put his ear to Driant's heart.

Diane turned away at the sight of Ravenel's face.

"I've killed him, Diane." Then rage got the better of him. "*Mon Dieu!* He made a murderer of me. Damn him! He unleashed the beast in me with his devilish fiendishness. Now I'm no better than he was—a murderer!"

"It had to be," Diane was saying gently. Her fingers caressed his head. "It had to be one of you. Paul, dear, you've spared me a more horrible fate! And you've been spared to me."

Ravenel seemed not to hear. Kneeling beside the man he had strangled, he stared at his hands, whispering:

"These hands! They've killed—they've murdered. I'll cut them off."

Diane sank down beside him. She took his hands in hers and pressed her lips to them.

"No—no!" she whispered to him. "They're brave, strong hands. We'll need them. We'll need them, Paul."

Then the meaning of her last words dawned upon him, dispelling his wrath. She was counting on him to help her; she needed him—his hands. He had not killed deliberately; the blood on his hands was but part of Driant's ultimate fate.

"Pull yourself together, Paul," Diane whispered. "Get back to camp as quickly as possible. The noonday drums will be sounding shortly."

"But, Hugo. I can't leave him."

"You must. He'll be found later. You must save yourself. He's dead and you can't help him now. You must think of yourself—of us, Paul."

He staggered to his feet and went to Hugo. The fat fellow was truly dead, he ascertained. Driant's knife had dealt instant death. For a moment Paul knelt at Hugo's side and took his friend's hand in his, clasping it fervently as though bidding him a fond farewell. Tears welled in Paul's eyes.

Diane drew him to his feet again.

"Hurry, Paul. We must not be found near here."

"You're a good soldier, Diane," he said, taking her hand. "You've got a head on you! We'll make a go of it—our fate."

They kissed and left each other—she for St. Laurent with a heart filled with horror and hope; he for the prison, laden with the loss of a dear friend and the thought of murder.

CHAPTER XV.

A BID FOR FATE.

THE noon roll call revealed the absence of Driant and Hugo from the assembled ranks of haggard, sweltering convicts. Ravenel held his breath with excitement as the alarm bell was sounded. The thought that he might be accused because of his known enmity with the cutthroat entered his mind but he quickly dispelled it; no one knew but Diane and the dead—and dead men tell no tales. His secret was doubly safe with the woman he loved and whose love he had.

But the torment of his secret required confession. When he and Mathieu were locked in their cabin for the midday siesta, the red-headed one unburdened himself in a hoarse whisper.

"Mathieu, I must tell you!" he began. "I've killed a man."

"*Morbleu!* You mean Father Time. We all kill him by the hour."

"Mathieu, I've killed Driant!"

"Driant? They're looking for him as an escaped prisoner!"

"I know, Mathieu. They'll find him in that little glade on the St. Laurent road. Driant killed Hugo——"

"Hugo?" There was a break in the big Picard's voice. "Our Hugo—dead—killed? Come now, Marat, you must be——"

"I was there, Mathieu. The devil knifed Hugo when he came to my res-

cue—to save me from Driant's knife. Driant wanted blood to-day and he lost his own."

"You knifed the rat?" Mathieu said dubiously. He did not believe his friend, Marat, was handy with a blade.

"No," Ravenel whispered, shaking his head. Slowly, he raised his two hands before the Picard's eyes. "I did it with these—these hands. He made me kill, Mathieu—kill."

"Quiet, my friend," Mathieu hissed, grasping his friend's wrists and lowering his hands lest the attention of the other inmates be attracted. "Killing a snake is not killing. *Parbleu*, you've done the world a great favor. We're well rid of Driant!"

"But killing him, even in self-defense, reduces me to his own level—a murderer."

"*Tiens, tiens!* What a lad you are. It's easy to see, Marat, that you're not one of us—but of finer stuff. If I'd killed a man this morning I'd probably have forgotten it by this time. But, of course, never having killed, I can't speak with too much authority on the matter."

"They'll find out!" Ravenel said suddenly. He was unnerved by the violence of death. Both men's eyes met suddenly with a single thought—the guillotine. "They're uncanny, Mathieu, the way they find out things down here. There's Mansart. It means the Bloody Widow."

"No one saw it happen, Marat?" Mathieu asked. Ravenel, not wishing to reveal Diane's part in his life, shook his head. "Then you're safe, I'm sure, unless your own tongue betrays you. *Sacrebleu*, it's easy to see that you're not a genuine blackguard like—like myself, for instance!"

"I thought I was in luck to-day," the American murmured, remembering his chat with Hugo. "And poor Hugo said it was his lucky day, too."

"Ah, Hugo!" Mathieu dropped his

eyes. "We three friends are only two now. The poor devil! Didn't he say that half of the *Duala's* load would be in the Bamboos before the year was out?"

"We've got to get into action, Mathieu," Ravenel said with sudden determination. "We've bided our time too long. We'll meet with Hugo's fate or worse if we tarry any longer."

"Ah, yes—and you have a plan?" There was doubt and hopelessness in the Picard's words.

The American pondered. There was a half-formulated plan lurking at the back of his head. The speed boat moored at the Grand Quay! How could it be fitted into their scheme of escape? And there was his pledge to Diane. What would Mathieu say to that?"

"There's a speed boat—a government boat—down at the St. Laurent Quay," he began. Mathieu was surprised. "If one of us could only run the damn thing!"

"Don't let's consider the impossible. A government boat!" Mathieu growled, unimpressed. "Besides, we can't jump off now—with Driant and Hugo dead and you the enemy of one and friend of the other. It would look suspicious. I've no use for a boat. I believe in the jungle trails through Dutch territory to Paramaribo or Vredenburg, then stowing away on some American or Brazilian ship. I've bought a map of jungle trails from Serres."

"It's too dangerous, escape on foot is," Ravenel replied. "We need a boat. A fast one is ready for the taking. We might impress the mechanic or bribe him——"

"The sun's hit your red head, Marat. Take a nap——"

A clamor at the door silenced them. Three guards and Mansart entered. The latter's beady eyes singled out Ravenel in the gloom.

"M'sieu' Marat," he snapped. "Please follow us."

Ravenel was conscious that the man's eyes were noting every move he made; Mansart would hold the slightest hesitancy against him, he knew; they were seeking a murderer!

At the prison offices, a group of officials were buzzing with animated interest; something had stirred the monotony of their lives. Ravenel was ushered through this scrutinizing gathering and literally shoved into a smaller chamber. Mansart stood to one side, watching him. On the floor were the naked bodies of Hugo and Driant. The former's breast was stained with dried blood around an ugly wound; the latter's throat was as purple as the cruel face, the tattooed words, "Driant begs Madame Guillotine to cut on the dotted line," illegible—a true fate gone astray. The sight was no shock to Ravenel; but Hugo, still in death, moved him.

"Hugo!" he cried, sinking to his knees beside his friend. From the corner of his eye, he saw that Mansart was thrown off his scent. Yet his impulse to kneel beside the Gascon was genuine.

"M'sieu' Marat is surprised, *hein?*" Mansart smiled.

"What happened?" the red-headed one cried. "My friend is dead."

"I thought you might tell us, m'sieu'. You were the last to pass through the glade of mahoganies on the St. Laurent road."

"I saw nothing," Ravenel lied. "The glade was empty."

Mansart seemed half satisfied. He ordered Ravenel brought before the administrator of the prison; the latter cross-examined him for an hour. The American simulated perfect innocence; he was not thinking of his own neck but Diane's fate and his promise to help her. Jamard spoke a good word for him.

"But," Mansart said suddenly, like a cat pouncing, "I believe M'sieu' Marat and the late M'sieu' Driant were bitter enemies. Such is prison gossip."

"That isn't true," Jamard burst out.

"Didn't M'sieu' Marat save Driant's life when he was close to death in the conduit room?"

The administrator thought well of this suggestion. Mansart accepted it without comment. It was obvious he would take his time in this matter—a point which brought home to Ravenel the fact that he, himself, had no time to lose now.

"We'll adjourn the inquest for the present," the administrator said. Turning to Ravenel, he added, "I shall arrange to have you attend the funeral of your friend if you like."

The American said that he would and thanked him.

That evening, toward sunset, Ravenel and Mathieu were members of a work gang that followed two water carts up the road to the Bamboos—the prison cemetery, a large burial ground surrounded by a wall of bamboo. The graves were marked with upright planks bearing the numbers of the deceased. On each water cart was a coffin—the two community coffins; the shrouded bodies would be dumped into the open graves. To-night they served Hugo and Driant, to-morrow they might hold Ravenel and Mathieu, the American reflected. They put their friend to rest—forever.

Half an hour later they were locked in their cabin. Mathieu dolefully recounted the events of the burials to the others. Ravenel tried to go to sleep despite the heat and the troubled thoughts of the past twelve hours but his eyes refused to close.

The locks jangled again and the door opened; commands were heard and a man was thrust into the cabin. The door clanged quickly with the shooting of the bolts outside.

"Who's this?" a convict asked. "Must be a newcomer from another hell hole."

"Who're you?" Mathieu asked.

"Careful; maybe he's a spy," some one else said.

The newcomer sank on the edge of a

pallet, his shadowy form silhouetted in the darkness of the room against the grilled window. A candle was lighted and held to his face; its light revealed Mathieu searching the man's eyes. Suddenly the man looked at the Picard and, screaming, collapsed to the door.

Ravenel rose slowly to his feet and, snatching the candle from Mathieu, knelt beside the prostrate form. Jerking the man's head back, he looked into the face. It was the man he had seen in the speed boat; moreover, it was the man who had attacked Diane on the Quay des Tuileries—the man he had thrashed in Paris.

"What's your name?" Ravenel demanded. "We've met before under stranger circumstances, m'sieu'."

"Goureau," the man said and, seeing the American's eyes on him, he began to whimper.

"You run the speed boat?"

"Yes. I'm from Krourou."

"I've seen him before," Mathieu cried suddenly. "He was at the Dancing Duck that night."

Ravenel nodded and addressed Goureau further:

"Do you want to help us?"

"To escape?" Goureau divined. "No—no—I dare not. I've tried it and I've been to solitary on St. Joseph's for a month. They go mad over there on the Ile St. Joseph. I almost lost my mind with the quiet, the pacing of the guards—the awful stillness—alone with my thoughts."

"What a rotten conscience you must have," Mathieu sneered. "*Morbleu*, you'll help us if Marat says the word."

"How long have you been out here?" Ravenel demanded.

"Five months," Goureau said sullenly. "I thought I could get away but they got me. We cut through the jungle, got lost—oh, it's an old, old story. We'd have starved if they hadn't found us—and they took their time about it, too. You can't get away from here."

"What's on your mind, Marat?" one of his housemates asked. "What can this fellow do for you?"

"Take us off in the government boat!" Ravenel said decisively.

A whistle went up at this audacity; it was daring beyond their imaginations. Marat must be mad, they thought.

"I'm no fool," Goureau said. "I've got a soft berth now and I'm not going to chuck it."

"How much gas is in the boat?" the red-headed one demanded.

"Not enough to get to Cayenne."

"Then we could head for the open sea and trust to being picked up by a Brazilian or Spanish ship," Ravenel said thoughtfully. "They wouldn't turn us back. If we failed, we'd——"

"You're mad, Marat!" several men cried. "Better to rot here than feed the fishes."

"I'm beginning to feel lucky again," the red-headed one laughed lightly. "I've never had such a strong hunch before; and my hunches are seldom wrong. I'm going to use you, Goureau!"

"*Nom de Dieu!* Not if I can help it."

"He'll squeal," some one said.

"I think not," Mathieu growled. "*Sacrebleu*, he's been in the Guianas long enough to know the fate of a squealer."

"I'll say nothing," Goureau promised, "nor will I help you."

"We'll see," Ravenel laughed. "Now let's sleep on it."

The next morning, while at his post in the power house, Ravenel kept turning a new and daring plan over and over in his mind. He realized that he must tell Mathieu of his promise to Diane; the noonday siesta provided the opportunity. He told the Picard of his promise to the girl.

"The sun's touched you, Marat," Mathieu grumbled, when Ravenel had

completed his tale. "A woman on the party! *Morbleu!* It's impossible—madness."

"But I've pledged her my word, Mathieu."

"We promised to have nothing to do with women."

"But I wasn't concerned in that, Mathieu."

The Picard pondered over this new turn of events for some time. What would they do with a woman in the jungles—a woman terrified of her own shadow and weak in strength? It was sheer folly. At length he said:

"What would you do, Marat, if I insisted that you choose between her and me?"

"I'm in love with her, Mathieu!" Ravenel said evasively.

"I'm against it—but if that's the sauce, my friend, you can have your own way about it."

Ravenel clapped the Picard on the back. Next came the unfolding of his bold plan, now that Diane was to be one of them.

"Listen closely," he said. "From now on keep your eyes peeled on the river, Mathieu. You work in the lumber yard a dozen meters from the prison landing. Old Guffanti guards that quay. When you hear the loud roar of a speed boat——"

"A speed boat!" Mathieu exclaimed, staring wildly at Ravenel.

"—saunter over to Guffanti and tumble him into the drink; he'll be looking at the speed boat and it'll be easy. He can swim and the river isn't deep at the quay anyway. Then you hop in, too, and swim out to us."

"*Sacrebleu!* I think you've been sneaking opium from the Chinaman, Marat!" Mathieu said, still incredulous. "But if that's the plan—you in the government speed boat—I'll go along—even if my only reward is a bath."

"It sounds wild, Mathieu, but it's our bid for Fate!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAND IS PLAYED.

SUPPOSE," Mathieu continued, "I hear a speed boat's roar, spill Guffanti into the drink, swim out and find it full of government officials instead of you and your love bird?"

"In that event," Ravenel smiled, "I'd suggest that you bow—from the hips down—pay your compliments to the highest official, and swim back to the quay. You might even help Guffanti to the shore. Or you might look before you leap."

"I think the last is your best suggestion," Mathieu grinned. "I'm afraid I'd be self-conscious before a bevy of officials."

At the end of the siesta, the men returned to their respective labors. Luck was with the red-headed one that day. Jamard had a *billet-doux* for his woman in town and Ravenel was elected messenger again. He made his way over the burning sands to St. Laurent on winged feet. After delivering the note and declining a glass of wine, he strolled into the shadow of robust Queen Charlotte opposite the Grand Quay.

A group of *libérés* hovered in the sunlight on the river's edge, watching something in the water below. Ravenel strolled closer. His heart jumped to his throat. There was Goureau in the cockpit of the speed boat, tinkering with the engine. The quay guards were shading themselves a block away under a clump of mora trees.

"Now!" Ravenel whispered to himself. "Now is the time!"

Fate had dealt him a hand. The cards looked great to him. But Diane! He had given his word to take her with him. Yet that pledge was of no consequence. He couldn't think of leaving without her. They belonged to each other.

Impulsively, he turned on his heel and headed for the house of the Cou-

lards. Many a time he had walked past it with the light heart of a lover. Now his steps were heavy with trepidation. He went to enlist her in adventure that might have death for its final reward. Diane was reading in the shaded garden. Without looking at her, he walked by and took the road to their secret glade. The girl understood and, presently, she laid her book aside, slapped a broad-brimmed hat over her locks and followed him at a safe distance.

It was a blazing afternoon and all of St. Laurent was dozing behind rattan shutters; no eyes were open to spy on them. They reached the glade unseen. Ravenel was waiting for her, watching the road fearfully.

She slipped into his arms without a word. Their lips met ecstatically.

"I think I understand," Diane said a few moments later intuitively.

"It's now or never, dear," he whispered. "It's the risk of risks."

"Escape?" Her voice was vibrant and brave. He nodded.

"I'm still willing, Paul," she said. "I'm something of a fatalist, too. You say the hour has come. I'm not afraid, Paul—with you."

"We haven't a minute to lose."

"You have food?" She guessed that he had none. His head moved slowly from side to side. There was no time for food; they were gambling on the cards Fate had dealt him.

"I'll provide a little," Diane said. "We don't know how long we'll be wandering in the jungles."

"You're wonderful, Diane," the red-headed American smiled. "I think you'll wind up as captain of this expedition."

"Is it to be to-day?"

"At once!" His voice was steady and even. She nodded acquiescence.

"Where shall I meet you, Paul?" She was the private awaiting the commanding officer's orders.

"At the Grand Quay in twenty minutes."

He swept her into his arms as these words were uttered. Their lips drank deeply of each other's. It might well be their last embrace. They might never leave the shores of St. Laurent alive. A hail of bullets would undoubtedly punctuate their attempt. As she left him, her eyes alight with the spirit of adventure, no words were spoken. Ravenel watched her disappear into the town; then he followed slowly.

If he could only warn Mathieu. But to return to the prison meant that he must stay within the walls until another pass was issued. And Goureau! Suppose he was gone when they reached the quay? Suppose the boat was locked up? He took a deep breath and told himself that he must hold that necessary card of luck. A hunch was impelling him and the woman he loved toward the unknown. It must hold good now!

Twenty minutes later, as the red-headed one entered Queen Charlotte's Square, he saw two *libérés* on the brink of the quay. The stillness was broken from time to time by the chugging of a motor. Goureau was still in the boat! Cautiously, Ravenel made his way toward the boat, hiding from Goureau's view by keeping the *libérés* between himself and the mechanic. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a white-clad figure strolling toward him. It was Diane in waist, riding breeches, black boots and her straw headgear. On one arm was slung a good-sized wicker basket; it reminded him of picnic days back home. And what a picnic this was to be!

A thought startled Ravenel. He was lucky enough to find Goureau still in the boat, but could he force the man to get it under way? Intimidation might fail or Goureau might object just long enough to permit the guards to nip the plot.

With Diane a few yards from him, he moved closer to the *libérés* who shielded him. Now Diane was at his side, star-

ing at the speed boat and pretending to be unaware of his presence. He saw her tap the top of the basket and lift the lid slightly. A black automatic against the background of lily-white napery caught his eye.

Further debate was unnecessary. The girl had again met the situation with intuition; she knew they must have arms. The American seized the revolver from the basket, clutched the girl's arm and leaped with her into the cockpit of the boat, at the same time sending the *libérés* sprawling with a mighty shove.

Goureau, pale and trembling, blinked at the sudden manifestation of his Nemesis. Ravenel's gun was boring his stomach indelicately.

"Start that engine or I'll blow you to hell!" The American's clipped words brooked no argument. The flash in his eyes offered no opportunity to demur.

His hands trembling with fright, Goureau obeyed instinctively, like an automaton. The roar of the motor shattered the peaceful, hot stillness; it reverberated over the Maroni, echoing through the jungles—the prelude to a symphony of freedom. Greenlets and tanagers, crying shrilly, were frightened into flight.

"Head her into midstream!" The American snapped.

Goureau opened the throttle, and the speed boat, with the grace of a gull, swooped out and downstream. The surprised guards ran along the quay, shouting futilely to the fugitives; they fired several shots that fell far short of their mark.

"We can thank their marksmanship and not the rifles for this bit of luck," Ravenel grinned to Diane. She sat in the forward seat, watching him eagerly. His eyes only met hers for an instant; then they reverted to Goureau, who trembled under the Cyclopean gaze of the black-eyed automatic that never left him.

The Grand Quay receded rapidly. No words were spoken for the next few minutes. The American was too intent on the next step in the program. Mathieu had to be picked up—or the escape would be a failure. Paul was still confident of the cards that he held—that he was playing now in the greatest game in his life.

Presently they saw the outline of the prison quay. It grew quickly clearer. A man—it looked like Mathieu's bulk—was strolling out on the stringpiece. The guard, at the quay's end, was watching the roaring speed boat curiously. The red-headed one took the wheel from Goureau and brought the boat closer to shore.

"Slow down a bit," he barked to the mechanic. "We're picking up a distinguished guest."

It was Mathieu on the dock. Ravenel saw him approach the old guard. He saw the Picard's arms reach out; there was a faint cry and a splash—and no more guard. Mathieu dove neatly into the Maroni and swam with lusty strokes into the path of the oncoming boat. The water was not deep and old Guffanti, the guard, struggled to his feet, shouting frantically, his rifle gone.

"I'll be responsible for M'sieu' Dubac," Ravenel shouted to the guard. "Sorry I haven't time to give you a receipt for him."

The Picard's head bobbed just beyond the flying bow. For a moment it seemed as though the boat would cut him in two.

"Bring her up when we get to him," Ravenel ordered. The speedy craft quivered on the water for a moment; it was enough time to enable Ravenel to grab Mathieu's bandeau, helping him to clamber aboard.

"Now let her go, Goureau!" Ravenel cried.

The dripping, breathless fellow sank down beside Diane, grinning happily as he gasped for breath.

"*Parbleu*, I'm ready for a joy ride now," he said. "I thought I was dreaming when I saw you."

"This is no dream, Mathieu," the American said, his eyes never leaving the cowering Goureau. "We're headed for the open sea—and freedom."

Half a dozen guards appeared on the quay, swinging their rifles toward the bobbing craft. Goureau let the speed gauge lever slip from his hands. The boat slowed down; he didn't want to go through with this wild plan. Several shots peppered the water close by the drifting boat. Ravenel sprang forward, his revolver raised menacingly.

"We mean to be free, Goureau!" he cried. "I'll plug you full of lead if you disobey me. Now, full speed ahead."

The cocking of the dead-black gun smote Goureau's ears sharply. His eyes dropped from the red-headed one's into the solitary black eye of death that the American leveled at him. His hand grasped the lever again, and with a deep snarl, the speed boat leaped down the Maroni. Ravenel was desperate and Goureau decided it was not a proper time to defy him.

Behind them echoed the alarm bell, pealing like a baffled animal caught in a trap in the jungles that lined the river. In a few moments, all of French Guiana would know of their daring escape. Eyes and guns would be watching them. The telegraph would carry word to the Dutch and British colonies as well. There was a price on their heads now. But Ravenel exulted; he was breathing the air of freedom and despite its fetid, jungle warmth it was sweet to convict lungs.

"Some game!" he called to Diane and Mathieu. "The cards fell right and we played them for all they're worth. It was like playing a straight royal flush."

"You still hold a card I don't like, Mathieu winked. He nodded to Goureau. "Be careful how you play that one, my friend."

"That particular trick," the American said, reverting to bridge terminology, "is protected by this card." He patted his automatic—the black eye of which seemed riveted on Goureau.

St. Laurent and Albina quickly dropped from view as they raced downstream toward the sea. Mathieu drew a water-soaked piece of paper from his waistband and began to study it. It was the map of the Guianas which he had bought—a cleverly designed bit of topography showing trails and inland watercourses.

"It's about twenty-five miles to the sea," Ravenel said. "We ought to be at the coast in two hours—before sundown, anyway."

"They'll fire at us from Les Hattes," Goureau growled sourly. "The mouth of the river is well guarded."

"*Tiens!*" Mathieu laughed. "It'll break the ennui of our prospective sea voyage—a salute from the gendarmerie of Les Hattes."

"They're only rifles there," Diane remarked with some authority. "The only machine guns are at St. Laurent and Cayenne; they're for mutinies."

"That's good news," the red-headed one laughed. "I'll bet if old Guffanti could lay hands on Friend Mathieu at this minute, he'd spray him with one. He probably got his first bath this year with that ducking."

"I don't think we ought to go clear to the coast in this boat," Mathieu said after some deliberation. "We've got to pass the 'Devil's Trap' and a gantlet of rifle fire. The guards at Les Hattes may be good shots, too."

"Do you mean we ought to take to the bush?" Ravenel asked. He had not planned on this unless it was absolutely necessary.

"Now that we're on our way somewhere and not just talking about going," Mathieu grinned, "I think we ought to be extra-practical. *Morbleu*, a false step now would cost us everything we've

gotten so far—and we have gotten out of St. Laurent. It might mean the Widow—if not death. Remember, we'll be charged with every kind of mutinous assault, stealing firearms and boats—and abduction. The latter means —" He stroked his throat to indicate the knifelike motion of the guillotine.

"But you haven't abducted me," Diane cried. "I've come of my own free will. I absolutely begged to be taken along."

"I know," Mathieu said grimly, "but we're convicts and we won't be able to convince a tribunal which has already made up its mind."

"Don't you worry, m'sieu'." Diane said. "I'll convince them of the truth—if we—— But we shan't fail. We mustn't!"

"Just the same," Mathieu continued quietly, "I think it better that we abandon ship. We can't possibly reach Brazil or Venezuela—a matter of two hundred miles, either direction—with the fuel we've got. We can't steal fuel. We have no sail, I see. We mustn't throw our lives too far into the grip of a Fate that has been none too kind to us these past nine months."

"Then we can cut through Dutch territory," Ravenel said, thinking rapidly, "toward Paramaribo or Vredenburg which is even nearer. A kindly sea captain will turn the trick there."

"*Morbleu*, but you trust in luck, Marat," Mathieu growled. "Haven't you learned your lesson yet?"

Diane, fear lighting her eyes, suddenly made a gesture for silence. The men saw her listening intently, straining to hear something.

"I heard voices—ahead," she said.

The others listened. There were sounds on the river. Then they became clearer. Voices were singing.

"Natives," Ravenel remarked. "We'll fly past them and scare the coloring out of them."

"Careful, m'sieu'," Mathieu cautioned. "We're worth ten francs apiece to them at St. Laurent."

"But in this boat——"

A bend in the river disclosed two native dugouts filled with Galibis. In a flash, Ravenel estimated some twenty blacks paddling their crafts upstream. The speed boat flew at them with a roar and the Galibis uttered cries of terror, hurriedly making for the Dutch shore, which they were hugging.

"Look out for that débris," Diane called to the red-headed helmsman. "It's jungle growth and water-logged branches. There's a mess of it dead ahead."

Ravenel, heeding Diane's advice, turned the boat toward the Dutch shore. The Galibi canoes were close now and the fugitives watched them steadily and silently.

"*Deportés!*" a Galibi cried. "*Deportés!*" Presently, the cry was echoed from every native mouth. The blacks watched the convicts race into their midst.

"They're wise to us," Ravenel smiled.

"But we're safe," Mathieu sighed. "*Morbleu*, they'll get sick, watching

thirty francs whiz through their fingers."

Goureau, the sneak thief, was thinking fast. He might win a pardon yet. Mathieu, Ravenel and Diane meant nothing to him except a means for effecting his release from the Guiana colony—if he could deliver them to the authorities. Witnesses were necessary to prove his intention. Twenty Galibis were watching him now—witnesses provided by a kind fortune.

The red-headed American was dividing his attention between the Galibis and the driftwood. His automatic rested lightly on the gunwale; the symbol of mastery and power, its jetness fascinated Goureau. If it was his, he could turn the boat back to St. Laurent. The beating sun scalded the metal of the weapon, and frequently Ravenel shifted it in his hand to ease the burn.

Goureau watched eagerly; he saw the American prepare to shift his grasp on the butt. He sprang. The weapon, slipping from Ravenel's hand, clattered to the cockpit floor. The two men locked arms in the struggle for its possession, their straining, clawing fingers reaching for it.

To be concluded in the next issue.



THE CONQUERING "IT"

HERE is the secret of Benny Leonard's greatness as a pugilist. A few hours before what turned out to be one of his toughest battles, he was discussing his chances to win with a physician who was a close friend of his.

"But," said the doctor, "that fellow's heavier than you are, and he's got more reach."

"Oh, yes," Leonard retorted; "he's heavier than I am, and his arms are longer. But I've got it here," and he tapped himself over his heart.

He was certain that he could stand up until the other man's courage—or spirit—would break. He knew that his own courage would never break. That attitude of mind may not win every fight into which it is carried, but it will do it nine times out of ten. In the prize ring, and in any other sort of battle for supremacy, the kind of "it" that Benny sported is conquering stuff.

An Elemental Drama of Early Newfoundland, Concerning a
Bos'n's Craving for 'Baccy.



The BOATSWAIN'S PIPES

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

BOATSWAIN HARKESS, being a humane man, was not popular with the master and mates of the brig *Pelican*. He had been ordered into the *Pelican*, from the little *Lapwing*, by the owner; and he had made the move from brigantine to brig sorely against his will.

And now, because he had a kind heart in his big chest, he was in a desperate position. He had refused to flog poor

Tom Wicket; and the master had cried: "I'll break 'e, Jud Harkess! Six o' ye there, lash up Seaman Harkess alongside Seaman Wicket an' lay onto the both of them till I say stop!"

That was the end of Jud Harkess as a seafaring man and a lawful citizen. That was the beginning of his career as a notorious outcast and outlaw, with a price on his head. That was the commencement of life and liberty for him.

He flung the cat-o'-nine-tails over the rail, snatched up a belaying pin, knocked down the master and the first mate, jumped overboard into Bully Bay and swam ashore and escaped into the wilderness.

Those were the days of the Fishing Admirals, and the Honourable Company of Traders and Adventurers to the Newfounde Land. The big island was nothing more than a summer fishing station, in England's scheme of things; and England's policy, in this connection, was dictated by certain West Country landowners and merchants, with interest at court, who had invested their money in ships and gear for the Newfoundland fisheries.

For their purposes, the island was better uninhabited. So it was ordained that no man or boy should be left behind upon the departure of the fleet at the end of the season's operations. Every shipmaster was required to fetch home every man and boy of his ship's company; or prove the deaths of those he failed to bring home; or pay for shortages at the rate of thirty guineas a head.

Jud Harkess was courageous and hardy and resourceful, as well as merciful. He was lucky, too. He got clean away from his pursuers.

He had not wandered far before he was discovered and surrounded by a strong party of native Beothuks, who were the aborigines of the island. Here was another desperate situation; but he put a brave face on it and contrived, in sign language, to win their sympathy and understanding and thus preserve his life.

He joined that band of Beothuks.

Later, he led small parties of the most daring of them in raids on English fishing stations. Fair enough! for the fishermen had been long in the habit of shooting aborigines on sight. Under the ex-boatswain's leadership, the natives got some of their own back, and some

useful goods and gear into the bargain.

The admiral of the fishing fleet, in the name of the Honourable Company of Traders and Adventurers, offered a reward of one hundred guineas for Jud Harkess, alive or dead.

On the other hand, the head chief of the dwindling Beothuks—Tall Stag was his name—invited Harkess to choose a wife from among his four daughters. Harkess chose Willow-in-Spring, an engaging young woman whose braided tresses showed gleams of a copperish hue, and whose round eyes were sea gray.

She was not the only Beothuk with reddish or yellowish hair and gray or blue eyes; and legends were told around the cooking fires of gods in winged canoes from behind the rising sun who lived with, and were a part of, the Beothuk nation in ancient days, long and long before the arrival of the devastating English.

Jud Harkess and his wife were a happy and loving couple. Harkess was a freeman now in fact as well as in name. He was a person of importance—the big man of the tribe, next to his father-in-law, Tall Stag. He had enough of freedom, fellowship, food and healthy employment at hunting and fishing—enough of everything he wanted except tobacco. He had his own house on the long lake, built of rocks and timber, with a hole in the roof to let out the smoke, and an iron pot above the fire and a long, iron spoon with which to stir the contents of the pot. He had carried off that pot from a fish room in Bluster Cove at risk of his life. There was not its match in pots in the whole nation; and Willow-in-Spring was the proud possessor of the best-furnished kitchen in the village.

Harkess was the only member of the tribe who owned two muskets, two hatchets and a broadax, for he was the most daring and most successful

raider of the English fishing stations. He was free, important and happily married; and he would have been a contented man if tobacco had been as easy to come by in that wilderness as fish and flesh and fur.

It was his craving for tobacco that kept his name and case alive and bitter in the memories of the Honourable Company of Traders and Adventurers to the Newfounde Land. But for that craving, the fact that a poor boatswain had cracked the skull of a common ship-master and escaped to the wilderness, would soon have been forgotten, and the offer of a reward of one hundred guineas for his capture would have been withdrawn in a year or two.

Because of that craving, rich men in the West Country concerned themselves with the case of Jud Harkess for a quarter of a century, and the price on the head of that terrible ex-boatswain was increased from one hundred to two hundred guineas.

Given half a dozen "fills" a day for his black-clay pipe, Harkess would have left the white toilers of the coast to their own and their masters' devices—but as it was, he raided their little store-rooms ashore, and haunted their drying stages, with such energy and persistence and cunning that hundreds of simple fishermen believed him in league with the devil.

But never in all his raids did he obtain more than a few ounces of the precious weed at a time. Tobacco was seldom taken ashore from the ships in quantity.

The price on his head made it impossible for Jud Harkess to keep his pipe alight by means of honest, though secret, trade with stage tenders and the like. What had he to offer in trade of sufficient value to make it worth the other party's while to refrain from jabbing a knife into him and collecting two hundred yellow guineas from the admiral? Nothing.

On the chance of finding a twist of tobacco in a seaman's pocket, Harkess would lie hidden for hours on the cliff above an anchored ship, or among the rocks on the landwash, watching and waiting. In this way he jumped, overpowered and robbed scores of solitary fishermen; but he never took their shillings or sixpenny pieces and never inflicted serious physical injury.

A daughter was born to Jud Harkess and his wife Willow-in-Spring. Harkess named her Polly, after his mother.

Polly Harkess was a fine baby, and the pride of her parents' hearts; and when the ex-boatswain was busy with admiring her and helping to care for her, he sometimes forgot his lack of tobacco for weeks on end. She grew to be a fine girl, with roses in her cheeks and all the changing tints of summer seas in her eyes. All the people of that dwindling nation were proud of her.

Harkess taught her English, and to sing the old West Country songs his mother used to sing. He taught her to blow on his big, silver whistle, his boatswain's pipe, and finally gave it to her for a plaything and ornament. He clothed her in the very best of furs and feathers and leather.

By the time Polly Harkess was in her nineteenth year, every able-bodied, unattached brave of the Beothuk nation had sought her heart and hand. All had sought in vain, though all had come with offerings of sea-otter robes and sea ivory. She was not interested in the subject of marriage; and Harkess was glad that she was not, for, in spite of his liking for his adopted people, he could not help wishing for a white husband for his beloved Polly. He spoke of it to Willow-in-Spring.

"You married a white man, and so did my mother; and an English gentleman wouldn't be good enough for our Polly—but I'd be content to see her married to an honest West Country sailorman."

"But my people are white," protested Willow-in-Spring; and she repeated the ancient legend of the descent of the Beothuks from yellow-haired sun gods out of the east.

But Harkess, having no book learning, and so no knowledge of Eric the Red and his vikings, laughed at the legend for a pretty fairy tale.

When one of his daughter's suitors offered him gifts, he said:

"I have gear enough and fur enough—and of what use is ivory to any of us when we dare not go down to salt water and trade with the seafarers, for fear of being shot like wolves? Ivory is of no use to me, my friend. Tobacco for my cold pipe here is what I want."

"Will she marry the man who brings you a noble gift of tobacco?" asked the young man.

"I can't promise you that," answered Harkess. "The man who makes promises for a woman lacks wisdom. Ask herself."

The young brave put the question to Polly, who told him kindly that she would not marry him even if he gave her father all the tobacco he could carry on his back, though nothing amused her more than to see him blow smoke out of himself like a wet fire.

In the course of those twenty or twenty-one years, many other poor, liberty-loving seamen attempted the thing which Jud Harkess had accomplished. Among those others was a harmless lad named Benn, who made a dash for freedom from a drying stage in Rum Cove and was shot dead in the act. Thirty pounds saved to the skipper's pocket! The fellow who fired the shot was given an extra ration of grog.

And there was the Taunton man named Hedge who tried to swim ashore in Brig Pool. He was wounded with a pistol bullet while swimming, was then overhauled in the longboat and fetched back aboard and given forty lashes with

the cat-o'-nine-tails. He died before sunset—but whether of the wound or the flogging, who shall say?

And there was the fellow from the *Sea Lion* with the cast in his left eye. Cronk was his name.

Cronk got clean away, with a bag of victuals on his shoulder; but he had not traveled more than ten miles before he met Jud Harkess, who was out by himself and a long way from home. Harkess was armed with a musket, but such clothing as he wore was of hair and hide. He was a formidable figure; and, beholding him, Cronk halted, staring hard with his straight eye, and told his sad story:

"I be a poor, harmless, tormented seaman out o' the croolest ship in the fleet, lookin' for a hidin' place from the tyrunt wot commands the *Sea Lion* an' a chance to call me soul me own," he whined. "Ye be a white man yerself, mate, and a seaman by the cut o' jib behind them whiskers—and I wouldn't wonder but ye be the brave Bos'n Harkess wot come ashore many summers ago."

"That's as may be," returned Harkess. "If ye got a hand gun in yer pocket, shake out the primin'; and if ye got a few fills o' 'baccy—leaf, twist or plug—I be yer friend forever."

Cronk grinned, lowered the canvas bag to the ground, then drew a short pistol from a pocket and threw it on the moss half a dozen paces away.

"I got 'baccy and to spare in this 'ere bag!" he exclaimed heartily. "And I got a flask o' the right French brandy; and the seaman don't live wot be more welcome to his fair whack at the both commodities nor yerself, bos'n."

His voice had the right ring to it, and his grin was as guileless as any Harkess had ever seen on a human face. But voice and grin were both as false as Judas; for the fellow was thinking, even as he spoke, and as he stooped and untied the mouth of the bag: "This be

Harkess, the bloody outlaw, past a doubt—and even if it costs me ten Georges to square me with the skipper for steppin' ashore, and maybe ten shillin' to Dick Cull for wot I lifted from his pockets, there'll be a fortune left o' the two hundred blessed guineas."

He had a knife slung on a lanyard inside his shirt—but he did not put his hand to it until Harkess stooped over the bag and thrust both hands deep in search of the promised tobacco. Then Cronk drew the knife and struck.

But Jud Harkess was not the careless fool for which the other had mistaken him. The bos'n did not have to look at everything to see it. His sixth sense was as sharp as any of the other five.

He sensed what was coming, and twisted aside in the nick of time, with nothing to spare; and the lethal, upward jab intended for his stomach did no worse than scratch his girdle of deer-skin. Quick, strong and agile was Harkess, and never at a loss for the next move. So it happened that the last thing of which the treacherous Cronk was fully aware in this life was the fact that his knife had missed an apparently easy mark.

Harkness lashed a slab of rock to the corpse.

"And I took ye for an honest run-away seaman like meself," he said sadly. "I was ready to befriend ye—an' now look at yerself!—and yer infernal mortal soul crowdin' for hell, on a fair wind, this very minute."

Then he heaved the corpse into the nearest pond, rock and all. He found tobacco and victuals and a flask in the bag. After filling and lighting his pipe, he felt more cheerful.

"But it bain't likely I'd ever ag'in trust another rovin' English seaman," he told himself. "I be too trustin'; and two hundred guineas be more money nor any poor sailorman can resist, I reckon."

It was twenty-one years after the flight of Harkess into the wilderness, and ten summers after his encounter with the treacherous Cronk, that a lad named Peter Tolly made a dash for freedom.

Young Tolly was a Devon man and a freeman—but a freeman in name only. At home, toiling without hope or wage in Alderman Huddle's warehouse; afloat in the alderman's brigantine, reefing and fishing at risk of life and limb, hazed and hungry, housed with vermin and fed on spoiled victuals; ashore and toiling on the drying stages in Gaff-topsail Bay to the tune of kicks and curses—he was a slave everywhere and always.

His soul yearned for freedom—for the mastery of his own life. He knew that he would always be a slave at sea, and that if he ever ceased to be Alderman Huddle's "man" in England the law would make a vagabond of him.

It was only in that mysterious wilderness, the edges and distant ridges of which he had viewed so often from decks and open boats and the policed landwash, that he could hope for freedom.

Better die there, after a day or a week of liberty, by the hands of savages or the fangs of wild beasts, or of starvation, than live forever a slave in everything but the name. But, being young and hopeful, he did not really expect to die.

The season was August and the time of day midafternoon when the mate of the *Brotherly Love*, who was ashore on duty, ordered Peter Tolly to fetch him a coil of Virginia twist from the tilt behind the drying stage. He emphasized the order with oaths and a gesture of a large sea boot. As Tolly stowed the tobacco in his pocket, he saw his way clear to the base of the broken cliff. He saw it clear and open, suddenly, and realized it in a flash. Here was his chance and now was the moment to grasp it!

He was within a yard of the top of the cliff when a musket belched on the landwash below and a slug of lead knocked and flattened itself against the rock at his elbow. He was over the edge the next instant, as if by magic, and rolling on the wild turf. He leaped to his feet and ran straight away into the wilderness. He was a good runner—and the fear of sudden death raced at his heels and fanned the nape of his neck with its icy breath.

He wore no boots and felt no need of any, for the soles of his feet were like shoe leather, touching and spurning moss and peat and rock without a twinge. He dashed, knee-deep, through expanses of whortleberries blue with ripe fruit. Grouse and snipe flew up and away before him, and brown hares went hopping. A big, black bear, comfortably stuffed with berries, rose ponderously to its hind legs at his passing and stared after him.

Peter crashed his straight line through breast-high thickets of stiff spruce tuck. He ran until he fell. He jumped up and ran again, stumbled and fell again, lay gulping for his second wind, caught it, got his feet under him and ran yet again.

He held to his original course, south by west, until sunset; and then, after an hour's rest, he went forward again on his course until the clear twilight dimmed to ash around the desolate horizon and white stars glistened.

He lay down and slept in the lee of a granite knoll, beside a pond. Hunger awoke him at midnight, and he supped on a few bits of salt beef and ship's biscuit from his pocket, and gave the victuals economical bulk with water from the pond.

Wide awake by then, and still fearful of pursuit, he made a half circuit of the pond and resumed his flight on the old course, south by west. He kept on until the sun was well up, then crawled into a shallow cave in the flank of a knoll and slept until noon.

After gazing abroad from the top of the knoll without detecting any sign or sound of pursuit, young Peter Tolly came to the heartening conclusion that he was free. Free! He was master of his fate, and of all that sunlit world of moss and berries and still, shining waters. To celebrate the glorious change in his condition and prospects, he breakfasted on the remainder of his scanty store of beef and biscuit.

His plans for the future were general to the verge of vagueness. He would put and keep a safe distance between himself and the tyrant-bound coast and tyrant-ridden sea. He would build him a house on a site of his own free choice, without question or concern for any man, and gather a store of fish and flesh and dried berries to keep him fat and hearty through the winter.

His pockets contained a tinder box, a hank of twine, two fishhooks and Mr. Anderson's pound of twisted black tobacco. The tobacco was of no use to him, for he had never learned to use the weed in any form. Now he held it in his hand, considering it. It weighed only a pound, but it was useless weight. But he had heard somewhere, from some old sailor, that to throw away good tobacco brought a year of bad luck to the thrower; so he returned it to his pocket.

He held to his course, south by west, all day; and as he did not make a fire, for fear that possible pursuers might spot the smoke, he dined and supped on blueberries. He had a pain in his stomach that night and no appetite for berries next morning, so he decided to breakfast on fresh, baked fish.

He cut a rod of alder, baited his hook with a fat grub which he found under a stone and angled in the nearest pond. A big fish struck, overanxious Peter yanked, and the fish went away with the hook.

Peter tied his second and last hook with infinite care. He was busy over-

turning mossy stones, in search of another grub for bait, when something prompted him to straighten his back and glance over his shoulder. What he saw caused him to drop the rod and jump like a spurred horse.

He jumped and ran; and the six wolves jumped, too, and vanished among rocks and brush. At that, Peter took heart as suddenly as he had lost it, halted and turned and armed himself with a chunk of rock in each hand. Not a hair of the wolves was to be seen. He wondered if his eyes had played him a trick. He recovered the discarded rod, baited the hook and returned to the edge of the pond. If he had imagined the wolves, he had nothing to fear. If he had actually seen six wolves, what of it? They were afraid of him. He had nothing to fear, in either case. He was the master of the wilderness.

He made a second cast into the still, cold water, keeping a lookout to his rear the while from a corner of one eye. No wolf was in sight. A fish struck hard. Peter forgot the wolves and concentrated on the taut line at the end of his clumsy rod of alder. If it was a trout he had on, it must be a two-pounder, and if any other kind of fish, a five-pounder at least.

He had tied the hook securely—but would the line hold? And if the line held, would the rod hold? He pulled steadily, backing slowly at the same time, with the intention of beaching the fish high and dry. Then, as he glanced over a shoulder, for level footing—he forgot the fish.

He made a twisty jump aside and forward; and the snapping jaws of the leaping wolf missed him by a hand's breadth. Peter stumbled and fell in a few inches of water, came to his feet again as if on springs and charged the beast that had slashed at him. It fled and vanished. He charged the other wolves, and they all vanished like smoke on a high wind.

He was beside himself with anger and despair, for off with his second fish had gone his second and last fishhook. He hunted the wolves furiously, hurling stones and shouting threats and defiance. He might as well have hurled stones and curses at shadows of drifting clouds.

When his rage subsided, hunger nipped him. If he could not have fish, he would have meat. A few cowardly wolves could not master him. But hunger was not his only trouble. He felt miserably alone in the big world, and a regret for the crowded forecabin of the *Brotherly Love* possessed him—but he cold-shouldered that regret, like a man and a freeman, and went in search of fresh meat.

After an hour of crafty stalking and the vigorous hurling of chunks of rock, he knocked over a big, brown hare. After skinning and drawing the hare, he took up a strong position on the flank of a rocky knoll, gathered dry moss and dead wood and made a little fire and set about the broiling of the hare on the point of a sharpened stick.

He thought of the wolves with scorn. They were cowards, afraid to face a man. The scorching flesh of the hare smelled good. It would soon be done to a turn. Wolves were not worth considering; and he would make new fishhooks of bone to-morrow. He would be master of the world—if only he had somebody to share his dinner with him and spin a yarn or sing a West Country song.

A sudden, shrill whistle gave Peter Tolly such a start that the scorching hare was jiggled from the point of the toaster into the fire. It was a blast on a boatswain's pipe, piping "All hands!" It sounded from only a few hundred yards away, beyond boulders and bushes.

Poor Peter's heart flopped and contracted, and his blood chilled. His high dreams of liberty and mastery fell in ruins. He was overhauled! He would

be'dragged back to Gaff-topsail Bay, and aboard the *Brotherly Love*, lashed up to a grating at the foot of the mainmast and flogged red and raw. He stood motionless, staring and helpless, stricken.

The whistle sounded again—but this time it was followed instantly by a shrill and frantic cry for help. It was the cry of a woman or a child. At that, Peter Tolly came to life again; and his brain filled with wild suspicions. Had his pursuers, led by that beast Anderson, discovered some helpless being and fallen to torturing it? He drew and opened his big clasp knife.

"I defies 'em, though they flog me to death!" he cried, and dashed for the place of action at top speed.

But he did not find a search party from the *Brotherly Love*. He found only one small human being, garbed in fur and leather, doing battle with a short spear against four wolves. Two wolves lay disabled on the outskirts of the fight.

Peter checked for a moment, astonished and bewildered, then hurtled into action, sank his knife into the neck of the leader of the pack, tripped and overbalanced, but wrenched his knife free as he fell.

Peter rolled on the ground, kicking wolves and shouting encouragement as he rolled. When he got to his feet he was ready and eager to engage all the wild beasts of the wilderness in behalf of this chance-found comrade. But the fight was finished. Three of the wolves were past fighting or hunting, and the rest were gone.

Peter stood and stared at the small person with the spear. It was a girl, and, though her torn garments were of wild fur and hide, she was a white girl. Despite the trickle of blood on one of her bare arms, the sweat on her face and the bloody spear in her hands, she was the prettiest girl he had ever set eyes on. From her neck dangled a boatswain's pipe on a rawhide lanyard.

"You come in the nick o' time," she said.

"Aye—praise be to God!" he returned.

Her glance wavered.

"Be ye a West Country sailorman?"

"I was, but I jumped me ship in Gaff-tops'il Bay an' run away in search o' freedom and peace; an' I was roastin' me a rabbit for my dinner when I heared ye pipe 'All-hands.'"

"Be ye a-huntin' Jud Harkess?"

"Jud Harkess? Not me. But I 'as heared tell o' that desperate, brave bos'n many's the time; and he be a man after me own fancy. The summer he jumped his ship was the summer I was born."

"I be his own daughter," said the girl.

"D'ye tell me so!" exclaimed Peter. "Bos'n Harkess' own daughter—an' wanderin' alone in the wilderness like a wild Injun? But maybe yer father's dead?"

"He be alive enough—and a dangerous man to spyin', treacherous seamen, because o' the price on his head."

"Alive, d'ye say, lass? An' leavin' yerself to wander at risk o' yer life from wild wolves? He hadn't ought to do so! An' I'd tell 'im so to his face if he was here."

"Here I be," said a harsh voice; and a big man in leather and hair, with a musket in his right hand, rounded a clump of bushes. He was breathing heavily, as if he had been running hard. He glanced from the girl to Peter, then around at the dead wolves.

"Didn't I tell 'e to keep tight to me?" he scolded.

"They'd et me up but for this sailor lad," she countered.

"And that be the livin' truth!" exclaimed Peter warmly. "She killed two o' the beasts, but she couldn't keep 'em all off. An' how could she?—one little lass agin' six gert wolves! Ye'd ought to think shame o' yerself, bos'n—an' you her own father!"

"Aye, her own father," returned

Harkess dryly. "Ye talks like a chaplain, lad. But ye got a honest mug on ye, I'll say that for 'e—an' maybe ye got a pinch o' honest 'baccy on ye, too?"

Peter thrust a hand into a pocket for Mr. Anderson's coil of black twist; and as he did so, Harkess presented the musket full and fair at his head.

"I got to be keerful," explained the ex-boatswain. "I be wort' two hundred guineas, dead or alive. So don't pull no hand gun on me, lad—or ye be a dead seaman wid yer brains blowed all abroad, I warns ye."

"Ye got naught to fear from me, bos'n," returned Peter loftily. "I got no need o' two hundred guineas. Here be yer 'baccy, an' welcome." He tossed the coil of black twist to the other's feet, and the open clasp knife after it, then turned his back squarely on man and musket, with the intention of addressing himself to the daughter again. But she had turned, too, and was moving swiftly away. So he faced Harkess again. That worthy had lowered his musket and was busily engaged in crumbling tobacco for his pipe.

"There she goes, bos'n!" exclaimed Peter excitedly. "Give her a hail to lay

to—or maybe the wolves will be tearin' at her ag'in—for the love o' God!"

"I be naught but her father," replied Harkess, without lifting his gaze from pipe and tobacco. "Give her a hail yerself, lad—an' see if aught comes of it."

"But I don't know her name."

"Polly. Polly Harkess."

"Hey, Polly! Pollee! Polly ahoy!"

The girl did not halt, nor pause, nor so much as turn her head. Harkess chuckled dryly, thumbing flakes of tobacco into his pipe.

"Maybe I'd best go fetch her back," suggested Peter; and as her father said neither "Yes" nor "No" to that, he went.

Harkess struck sparks, blew on the tinder, and puffed at his pipe. He puffed a white cloud and sighed contentedly.

"White an' West Country," he murmured. "An' honest, by the cut o' his jib. And she's took a fancy to him already, wot with the wolves an' all. A blind man could see that. A Christian husband for Polly, and a pound o' prime 'baccy for the bos'n. If that bain't the best day's work in a blue moon, call me a sea cook!"

There will be another story by Theodore Goodridge Roberts in a future issue.



UNCLE SAM'S POSTAGE BILL

IT costs the post-office department seven million dollars a year to haul and handle the official mail of the United States government, including all that members of Congress send out free under their franking privilege.

At frequent intervals somebody comes forward with a kick and the complaint that the congressional frank is abused. As far back as 1790 the first postmaster general emitted a wail on the subject. Every now and then a congressman franks a lot of stuff ranging from a teaspoon to a kitchen stove, and the roar of disapproval is heard all over again. But a roar unsupported by action works no reforms, the franking keeps up, and Uncle Sam pays his seven-million-dollar postage bill.

HORSE-KETCHUM

By DANE COOLIDGE



The Story So Far:

Horse-Ketchum seeks a lost mine which Bodie, buyer of stolen stock, also covets. Horse-Ketchum, hearing about wild "ghost" horses, plans to catch them. He gets a stallion, but Bodie steals it. A girl, riding a "ghost" mare, frees the horse, and is roped by Bodie's men. Horse-Ketchum rescues her. Wounded, he passes out and finds himself in a mountain cave. The girl tends him. She was raised there by her father, who has a mine and hates intruders. Horse-Ketchum and the girl fall in love, and are discovered by her father. The lad escapes, and the old fanatic blasts rocks to shut off the canyon entrance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHATFIELD.

THERE was a low rumble in the air, the jostling of falling rocks as they came tumbling down from the shattered heights; and then with a last thump each found its lowest level and the desert stillness returned.

POP—10A

Solemn mountains, rising high, made a black wall in the moonlight; and out across the flats Horse-Ketchum could hear the wild burros, stampeding before the noise of the blasts. Enúpi Kai had claimed its own. The devil man had struck and the canyon's mouth had closed like a trap.

Horse-Ketchum mounted and rode,

his mind in a turmoil, hardly knowing which way he went; but at the entrance to the wash that led up to Daylight Spring, Paynim snorted and set his feet. Up that canyon, by Hole-in-the-Rock, as they rode out into the moonlight, twenty Night Riders had once swept down on them and led him back to Toó-gahboth, to be tied to a stake and starved. There was a menace in its dark shadows and Paynim drew back, turning his head down the Furnace Creek trail.

"What's the matter?" inquired Johnny, patting his neck solicitously. "Well, have your own way—that's a Jonah trail for both of us." And he reined away to the south.

The line of clay hills drew farther away and giant sand dunes loomed before them. Lost Valley fell behind, and as dawn painted the east they came to Esahbwoó, the Place of Death.

Paynim snorted and shied at the wreck of a huge wagon, rising up out of its covering of sand; and in the pale light of morning Lightfoot could see the marks of shovels, where others had been half unearthed. The treasure hunters had been there, digging once more for the box of gold which legend said the emigrants had carried.

At the creek where Paynim's father, Selim, had given his master warning, Paynim snuffed the poison water and turned away. Then, with his nose to the wind, he followed the trail of the treasure hunters, and Horse-Ketchum gave him his head.

There was fresh blood on Johnny's shirt where the jumping and riding had opened his half-healed wounds, and his throat was parched with thirst. But Captain Jack had warned him of the poisonous qualities of the water, and he spurred Paynim on toward the south.

Twenty miles down the valley, so Captain Jack had told him, there was a place called Enúpi Psoógöbie, where a great stream of water gushed out. But

they had avoided the spot, for the Shoshones often camped there, and Jack was a hunted man. He had stolen the daughter of Eatum-up Jack, the fiercest warrior of the tribe, and the penalty for his crime was death. But Captain Jack was waiting for his master at Pahrump, and Horse-Ketchum took the trail at a lope.

The sun rose, glaring, over the peaks of the Funeral Range and smote him with its torrid heat. Lightfoot found himself reeling as if from a blow and the wound on his head beat and throbbed. Then he caught at the saddle horn, for he felt himself falling, but Paynim jogged steadily on. The spell passed and Johnny looked up to see strange mountains at his left; and at the base of a far hillside he spied a spot of green, with the white of a spring at its base.

Paynim raised his head as if he smelled the distant water and lengthened his jog to a lope. He was tireless as an antelope and before an hour had passed he was drinking at the drop of Cow Springs. Johnny dropped out of his saddle and buried his face in the mud-died pool. Then he drank and wet his head, and while Paynim cropped the grass, he lay in the horse's shadow, to escape the burning sun.

The first hot day of summer had come and the valley lay quivering in the heat. Mesquite trees danced ghostlike in the close-up mirage; and below him, like a vision of some distant, desert scene, Lightfoot saw the green tips of three palms. He rose up and watched them closely, and at their feet he saw a house—a white house, with trees behind. And along a picket fence a horse was plodding—an old horse with long, stilt-like legs. It was the mirage, of course, turning the desert into a lake and lengthening the trunks of the trees. But the horse was real—he moved!

Horse-Ketchum laid hold of his saddle horn and heaved himself up on his

mount, and as they jogged down the trail he could see a group of Indians watching his progress from the top of a hill. Then at a turn of the path the house rose up before him, and a man was standing at the gate. Half-concealed behind a post, he held a rifle across his arm, and Johnny reined in to a walk.

"Hello!" he hailed, raising his hand in the peace sign. But the stranger, watching him intently, did not respond.

As Lightfoot rode nearer he saw a woman looking out through the door—a pretty woman, with black hair combed smoothly back; and she bore a baby in her arms.

"Who are you and what's your business?" demanded the man peremptorily.

Johnny came to a halt. Many times before in that wild, desert country where both fugitives and outlaws sought shelter, he had been met by men waiting at the gate. This man was tall and stooping, with high cheek bones and level, piercing eyes—and Lightfoot knew he was on the dodge.

"My name's Lightfoot," he announced. "Johnny Lightfoot, from Virginia City. I've had trouble, and I'm out of grub."

"Trouble with who?" inquired the stranger, after a pause. "We have to be careful, out here."

"With Val Bodie," responded Johnny. "He shot me in the back. We got tangled up over this horse."

"I've heard about you," nodded the man, beckoning him closer. "Is that one of those Night Water wild horses?"

"Sure is," answered Lightfoot. "But he's no more wild than I am. Look at that! He's gentle as a dog."

He dropped down and laid a hand on Paynim's nose, but the stallion did not flinch.

"Stranger, my name is Chatfield," spoke up the man behind the post. "Are you looking for anybody of that name?"

"Not me!" returned Horse-Ketchum.

"All I want is a little grub. And I've got the money to pay for it."

"Well, come in, then!" invited Chatfield, throwing open the gate. "And I'm sure glad to see that horse. If you don't know it already I'll tell you right now—that's a thoroughbred Kentucky racer."

"I reckon you're right," agreed Johnny. "But that makes no difference. The horse is mine. I caught him."

"So I hear," responded Chatfield. "So the Indians tell me. But I had an uncle, Randolph Morgan, who perished up at Salt Creek, and I'll wager those horses were his."

"That was a long time ago," retorted Lightfoot. "Do you make any claim to this horse?"

"Oh, no," denied Chatfield. "But I knew Uncle Randolph's racers. Do you see those three black marks on the rump of this horse? Those are the direct, hereditary markings, come down from Eclipse, the greatest thoroughbred stallion in England."

Horse-Ketchum stopped short and brushed the hair out of his eyes, swollen half shut from riding bareheaded through the heat.

"Mr. Chatfield," he said slowly, "I don't give a damn for those markings or your Uncle Randolph. If you want one of his horses, go and ketch him the way I did. I'll fight for this horse."

"You don't need to," answered Chatfield shortly. "I don't claim him, and never did. But it certainly is remarkable to find those black marks on a horse that's been foaled in Death Valley."

"Now, listen," flared up Lightfoot; "and get this through your head, right now. It's the law in this country that you can't claim a horse unless he bears your brand. If a horse is running wild on the open range he belongs to the first man that ropes him. I roped this horse and I claim him, understand? It makes no difference where he came from!"

Chatfield gazed at him, glowering, his rifle in his hand; but before he could speak a woman's voice came to them—a gentle voice, but very firm.

"Jim," she said, "can't you see the man is sick? Don't keep him standing out in the sun!"

"No! Come in!" spoke up Chatfield. "And bring your horse in with you. Did you say Val Bodie shot you?"

"Four buckshot in my back. And bumped my head ketching this horse. He dragged me off in the rocks."

"Well, come in, come in!" invited Chatfield. "I'm sure glad Bodie didn't get your horse. He's a man I've got no use for, because I know he's a crook—and a cowardly, murdering crook at that!"

"Now, Jim!" warned the woman reprovingly. "Mr. Bodie never did us any harm."

"No, but he will," retorted Chatfield, "the first chance he gets. Well, all right!" And he led the way to the door. "Damaris," he said formally, "this is Mr.—er—Lightfoot. Mrs. Chatfield—Mr. Lightfoot."

"Glad to meet you," mumbled Johnny, as she came down the steps and smilingly offered her hand. "I'm a hard-looking case, but——"

"We'll take care of you," she said. And he felt her arm about him as he stumbled in through the doorway. Then in the coolness of the dark house his strength suddenly failed him and he sank down on a cot. He had traveled as far as his nerve could take him—far enough, for the woman was bending over him.

He awoke from a long sleep to hear a baby's thin wail and swift feet hurrying through the house. Then the voice of the woman as she took up her child, every word a cooing caress. It was strange, in this wild country—and with a husband like hers; but as Horse-Ketchum listened he smiled. But for her he would have stood bareheaded in

the sun, until he fainted from weakness and pain. Now his bruised head was bandaged, a wet cloth lay over his eyes and he felt his strength coming back.

But Chatfield was a fighter. He was hard.

Lightfoot took off the cloth and gazed about the room, and as he stirred Damaris' head appeared in the doorway and she tiptoed over to his side.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, running her hand over his brow. "Would you like a glass of cool milk?"

"You bet ye—gimme two of them!" responded Johnny. "I'm mighty nigh starved to death."

"Not too much at once," she advised him, smiling, as she brought in a pitcher and a glass. "How did you happen to lose your hat?"

"I forget," he grinned, "whether Bodie shot it off or I lost it when my horse bumped my head. Sure needed it, too, this morning."

"It's getting hot," she said. "Nothing, though, to what it will be. It was a hundred and twenty-nine, last August."

"Lord A'mighty!" he exclaimed. "Were you here?"

"All summer," she sighed. "But the winters are wonderful. My husband has charge of the ranch."

"Ranch, eh?" he repeated. "What do you raise?"

"Oh, alfalfa—there's forty acres. And besides, he guards the water rights. The borax company claims the creek. But we're really here to hide—like all the rest of them, I guess. That's why Jim was a little sharp, at first."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Johnny. "You've more than made up for it. And my head was spinning like a top."

"I could see," she said, "your face going white. That's the way it affects them, before a stroke. So I just let you have a good sleep. But now, if you like, I'll get Jim and we'll doctor your back."

"Mighty kind of you," assented Horse-Ketchum. "Is my horse all right? Keep him tied, or he'll start back home."

"Yes, Jim has taken care of him," she answered and went out to call her husband in.

A blast of hot air, like the breath of a furnace, swept in as she opened the door; and Johnny could feel his head begin to spin. He had had a touch of heat. But as the door was closed a moist coolness rose up from the sprinkled earth of the floor. Despite the hot wind they kept their house comfortable—but what a place for a woman to live!

She came back, still smiling, and above her in saturnine calm her husband gazed down on their guest. He was over six feet tall, with the stoop of hard work in his powerful shoulders, but still a young man in his prime.

"Let me see your back," he said. And then with practiced hand he followed the course of each bucket. "You're all right," he grunted. "No lead in you now. How many days ago were you shot?"

"Oh, four or five," ventured Johnny. "I've been hiding out in a cave."

"Mighty lucky," observed Chatfield, "to have that arnica with you. Damaris, fetch me out the balsam."

He cleaned up the wounds and poured on a fragrant balsam, that smelled of myrrh and aromatic herbs; but Horse-Ketchum knew from the grim silence he kept that his mind was still on the horse. Had he come here from Kentucky to seek the priceless thoroughbreds that his uncle had brought so far? Or was he too a fugitive from that terrible feud which had driven Randolph Morgan from his home?

Johnny meditated as he lay there, accepting favors from his hand, whether Chatfield had a claim on Paynim. For the horse was not a broom-tail but a pedigreed stallion. And Lightfoot had taken him—nay, stolen him—from Mor-

gan. But Randolph Morgan was buried from the world as surely as if he were dead. And for twenty years he had been counted dead, disguised as Fryingpan George. The horse was not Chatfield's, in any case, as long as his uncle still lived. He was Johnny's, to have and to hold until Devil Canyon gave up its living dead. And even then he would not be Chatfield's, for Diana was Morgan's daughter.

"Mr. Chatfield," he began at last, "what's this about your uncle? Did you come out here to look for his horses?"

"I came out here," replied Chatfield, "to get away from a feud. You might have heard of the Chatfield-Tolliver war. But the reason I came here, instead of somewhere else, was to find out the truth about my uncle. He was a man of wealth, and when he left the Bluegrass country he took with him a box of money and jewels. These jewels, according to what I can learn from the Indians, have never been recovered from the wagons, which meantime have been buried by the sand. So at intervals I've been digging in the sand dunes at Salt Creek—you might have noticed it when you came past."

"Yes, I did," admitted Lightfoot. "And I've noticed something else. These Shoshones won't talk about that fight. They've got something on their conscience, because they looted those wagons. Maybe they've got the jewels hidden out."

"More than likely," grumbled Chatfield. "But seeing that wild stallion has settled my mind on one point. My uncle Randolph died here. How many more horses are there up there?"

"Well — ten," answered Horse-Ketchum. "But there's no use of you hunting them. There ain't a horse in this country can ketch 'em."

"Then how did you ketch yours?" demanded Chatfield. And Lightfoot saw Damaris in the door.

"Well," he began, "it's quite a long

story. But I roped him at the water hole, by moonlight."

"Oh, Jim," spoke up his wife, "there's somebody coming. 'Panamint Tom' is signaling from the hill."

For a moment Chatfield hesitated, eager to go on with his questioning. Then he rose up and grabbed his gun.

"It's Bodie," he said, after a long look out the door; and Johnny leaped up like a flash.

"Lend me a rifle!" he clamored as he ran out on the porch. "He's after me—and my horse!"

"You don't need a rifle," answered Chatfield quietly. "You're our guest, Mr. Lightfoot—I'll attend to Val Bodie, myself."

He strode out to the gate and without a word of warning raised his gun to his shoulder and fired. The bullet struck up the dust in front of a galloping horseman, and Horse-Ketchum recognized Bodie. He was mounted on Fly, and far down the road Johnny could see six other Night Riders. They had followed on his trail after their defeat at the gateway, wild with anger and the lust to kill. For once more, from under their noses, he had carried off the golden stallion, and Bodie was out for revenge.

At the puff of dust Bodie threw up one hand, but came on, making the peace sign. Once more, and with the same unhurried precision, Jim Chatfield raised his rifle, and the bullet struck almost at the horseman's feet. Bodie reined in abruptly, holding his hand up for a talk, turning to look back impatiently for his men; and as they spurred up behind him he jumped his horse into a gallop. But the big gun spoke again.

Bodie ducked as if he were shot and the men who rode behind him swung down along their horses' necks. Then they stopped and Bodie began to shout. But Chatfield, without listening, stepped out from behind his post and motioned them imperiously away. Bodie looked

about wildly—at the Indians upon the hill and the lone man with a rifle on his arm. Then he reined away abruptly and galloped off down the road, while Chatfield paced back to the house.

"I know jest how to handle that kind of folks," he said. "Learned it early, back home in Kaintuck."

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR LITTLE JIM.

JIM CHATFIELD!" cried his wife. "What in the world do you mean, shooting at Bodie without making a sign? Haven't we had troubles enough without your beginning all over again and starting another feud?"

"Oh, sho, sho, now, Damaris," he replied good-naturedly as he shoved three more cartridges into his magazine. "It's all right—there's no harm done. If I'd let 'em come closer they'd've started a fight and then I'd had to kill some one. And if they had come to the gate they'd've demanded Mr. Lightfoot; and I wouldn't give him up, nohow."

"I sure want to thank you, Mr. Chatfield," spoke up Horse-Ketchum. "Because there's no doubt they had come to get me. But I certainly hope," he added, with a glance at Damaris, "that I haven't brought down trouble on your home."

"None in the world!" declared Chatfield, with an easy smile. "This man Bodie has been pestering me and I'm right glad we had a show-down. Now he'll know right where to find me."

"Now, Jim," reproached his wife, "you know very well you just did that to start another war. I declare, it's in the blood. I never knew a Chatfield that wouldn't pick a fight, if he could!"

"The same to you," grinned Chatfield. "Ain't you a fighting Tolliver? I was sure a lucky man to win you for my wife, with that tribe of warriors on my trail."

He put his arm about her waist and

drew her down beside him, and now his hard face was suddenly illuminated by a kind and rugged smile.

"That's why I loved you so," he went on soothingly. "There's no coward blood in your veins. The Tollivers are all fighters, and I'm a fighter myself. When I tell a man to stop, he wants to stop."

"Yes, but Jim!" she sobbed. "You never made a sign. You never even lifted a hand. Think of our baby in there! And what would become of us if these ruffians of Bodie's should kill you?"

"They won't kill me," he answered confidently. "I never felt so safe in my life. Those Indians are better than watchdogs, and no man can pass that gate without asking for my consent. And another thing, sweetheart—I looked that gang over, and the man behind Bodie was Riley Sloper!"

"Riley Sloper!" she cried. "Oh, Jim, they've found us! They'll all come here now—the whole clan!"

"No, they won't," he comforted. "It's too far away. I could have killed Riley, but, just for your sake, I sent the bullet past his ear."

"Oh, Jim!" she burst out, laying her head against his breast. "I'm afraid. Don't you go outside the fence!"

"No, I won't, darling," he promised, "until the hot weather comes on. Then they'll all go away. The whole gang!"

"Oh, I wish it would get hot, then," she sighed.

Horse-Ketchum cleared his throat.

"Seems to me," he suggested, "not to contradict anybody it's pretty near hot, already."

"You're not used to it," returned Chatfield, giving his wife a kiss and sending her into the house. "It's only jest beginning to get warm. Wait till the south wind blows up and the sand storms come in and the water in the salt marshes boils. Yes, suh, boils! I've seen it myself. And why shouldn't

it, I'd like to ask, when it's a hundred and thirty in the shade and water boils at two hundred and twelve? There's only a few degrees difference—and the more salt you put into your water the quicker the pot will sing."

"Yes, but how do you live?" demanded Lightfoot.

"Oh, we live," shrugged Chatfield. "Lots of water, running right past. Come over here and I'll show you my fan. The old flywheel off of an engine—I run it by water power. That's really what keeps us alive."

He led the way to a long corridor, between the two mud houses which were ensconced beneath a double roof. As he lifted a gate the rushing ditch was turned aside, sending its waters over a miniature mill wheel. The flume filled, the paddles turned, and with a thrashing beat the flywheel started its fan. Splashing water wet the wings as they went whistling past, and down the narrow hallway a cool wind stirred the dust, until Chatfield sprinkled water on the floor.

"In front of that," he said, "with a wet sheet for a cover, you could outlive a blast from hell. And when people are hunted as Damaris and I have been, we're glad when the hot weather comes. Even the Shooshonnies quit us and go up on the peaks. We're alone, for months at a time. That's why we stay here. We're safe."

Horse-Ketchum nodded silently, taking his stand in the cool draft that sucked down the dampened corridor, and Damaris came out of her room.

"Here's why we stay!" she smiled, holding up a cooing baby. "This is young Jim—otherwise, James Tolliver Chatfield."

"I see," responded Johnny. "You've done called the feud off, eh?"

"Yes," nodded Jim. "But the Tollivers haven't. You see, we couldn't be married, on account of the feud, so——"

"So he rode over and stole me," ended

Damaris. And she cast a proud glance at her husband.

"Yes, I'll have to admit it," confessed Chatfield. "But I just had to have her, that's all."

"I've never regretted it," said Damaris. "How could I, with little Jim and all? But if Bodie should come back and——"

"You can count on me!" spoke up Horse-Ketchum impulsively. "I'm only one man, but if the kid here needs my services——"

He held out one finger and little Jim laid hold of it, while his parents exchanged glances and smiled.

"I'll shake on that, too," announced Chatfield.

"You took me in," said Johnny; "and I stay by my friends. But say, I've got something to tell you."

He sat down in the cool corridor and told them briefly of Randolph Morgan. And last of all he mentioned Diana.

"Oho!" exclaimed Chatfield. "So that's who took care of you while you were hiding out in that cave."

"Yes," admitted Lightfoot, "it was Diana who took care of me. And to tell you the truth, it was Diana who found me and smuggled me up the canyon. But when her old man discovered us there——"

"You fell in love with her!" charged Damaris impulsively.

"Yes—and her father tried to kill me," responded Johnny. "I might as well tell you the whole of it."

"Oh, Jim!" she breathed, leaning her head against her husband and gazing up into his eyes. "Isn't it wonderful? Shut up all her life in that canyon, and then to have *him* come by! Was she afraid?" she demanded eagerly. "Why, she'd never even *seen* a young man!"

"Now, darling," protested her husband, "isn't this getting kinder personal?"

"No, that's all right," smiled Horse-Ketchum. "You folks are her cousins

and you're entitled to know the truth. Diana was afraid—at first. But after we became acquainted—well, of course, she'd been very lonely, especially since her mother's death. Her father undoubtedly is insane."

"Yes, but why did he try to kill you?" persisted Damaris.

"Well, he found us together," answered Lightfoot, shortly, "sitting out in the moonlight, watching the horses. We were up on the stile, and I'd just saddled Paynim—when I saw his rifle shoved out toward me. I ducked and it went off, right over my head, so there's no doubt about his intentions. But Diana grabbed the gun and I jumped Paynim over the bars——"

"So that's the way you got him!" spoke up Chatfield.

"That's the way," agreed Johnny. "And if you want to call it stealing or——"

"No, no—the horse is yours! But I thought you said at first——"

"I said I roped him," nodded Lightfoot. "And I did. I'm the first man to catch one of those Night Water horses, but Val Bodie took him away from me. Then when I went down to steal him back, Diana rode in on us and Bodie caught her horse, too. It would take all day to explain the rest of the mix-up. But when we got through I'd turned both horses loose and stopped a load of buckshot to boot."

"And Diana escaped!" thrilled Damaris. "Then she found you and carried you home!"

"But unfortunately," continued Johnny, "her father had sworn that he'd kill the first man he caught there. He's got a rich mine and he's afraid somebody will steal it——"

"Oh! So *that's* why he tried to kill you?"

"Reckon so," grunted Horse-Ketchum. "Didn't stop to ask no questions. So here I am—horse and all."

"And are you planning," she asked

roguishly, "to go back and rescue Diana? Uncle Randolph will be watching for you, now!"

"I didn't tell you," replied Lightfoot, "but right after I left he blew up the entrance to the canyon. Shot the walls down and closed the gateway—you could feel the blast for miles. So I'm afraid I can't get back."

"Why, Jim!" she cried. "Uncle Randolph *must* be crazy. "Can't you go up and help her, honey?"

"You don't need to," interposed Johnny. "while I'm on the job! And if any one can get her out, I can. But in case I do get in there and rescue Diana, can I count on you folks to take care of her? Because, to tell you the truth, she wanted to come out with me. Only, of course, there was no place to go."

"Why, certainly!" exclaimed Damaris. "Just think of the poor child, and no one but him to turn to! Is she pretty, Mr. Lightfoot? Is she? Honest?"

"She's too pretty," responded Johnny. "That's what I'm afraid of." And Damaris exchanged glances with her husband.

"Well, you bring her right here," she answered demurely. "And Mr. Lightfoot, you're a very nice man."

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN JACK.

HORSE-KETCHUM awoke at daylight to hear a woman singing. It was Damaris, humming while she worked. The heat of the day had passed, and the long, sweltering night, and she was up about her tasks at dawn. What was it, he wondered, that made her heart so glad at the bottom of this sink hole of hell? With death so near at hand, what had she to sing for? And yet as he listened she sang on.

Not for many a year had he heard a woman singing. There was some-

thing about her voice that reminded him of Diana, when she, too, had awakened to love. He had not forgotten the clinging touch of her arms, the childlike kisses on his cheeks, the raptures of delight with which she greeted him in the dusk. But it was her secret—he would guard it well. No one in the days to come, if he saved her from her imprisonment, should mention it to her shame. She was his, to take care of and protect.

He tiptoed out on the porch and looked back up the long road. But Val Bodie would be watching for him, now. Past the door, in a wide ditch, a brawling stream of water flowed down from the canyon above, and along its banks he could see the *rancherías* where the Shoshones made their camps. These were Captain Jack's people, but they seemed to know Horse-Ketchum, for they avoided him, with sullen looks. Yet little that happened escaped their eyes; they were watching him now, from the distance.

Johnny felt of his lame back to see if he could ride, and went out to Paynim's corral. Here at least the stallion was safe, for Chatfield had built a stockade of mesquite posts with no entrance but the gate in front. It surrounded his house like the outworks of a fort—and Jim too was up with the dawn. A forkful of hay came over the fence from the stack on the other side, but Paynim raised his head after he had seized the first mouthful and gazed at his master anxiously.

"No, Paynim," said Lightfoot, "we're not going home to-day. I've got to go to Pahrump and find my pet Indian; and you're too danged good looking, old horse. You're like a pretty woman—you'd just get me into trouble." And he patted him on the neck.

"I'll stake you to a horse!" shouted Chatfield over the fence. "And a good horse, too, Mr. Lightfoot. You just leave Paynim here, and when you go to

Pahrump bring me back a box of cartridges."

"I'll bring you back ten boxes," promised Johnny, "if you'll keep Bodie from stealing Paynim." And that evening after dark he rode up Furnace Creek on Chatfield's rangy roan.

Hour after hour he kept on up the gravelly wash until, crossing the summit, he saw the pale quarter moon, rising belatedly over the desert. He was up out of the sink, on the broad reaches of the Amargosa, whose bitter waters in time of flood swept south of the Funeral Range and back into Death Valley itself. It was a country that Lightfoot knew, for Captain Jack had led him through it when they were hiding their trail from the Night Riders.

As daylight approached he rode in toward Shoshone, to take shelter in its thickets of mesquite. But as he circled the point and headed up toward the spring he came upon his own mule, feeding.

For a moment, despite its brand, Johnny doubted his own eyes. Yet here was his pack mule, hobbled, and in the distance he could see Captain Jack's horse. He even recognized, among the mesquite trees, the top of his own tent. But he had told Jack to await him at Pahrump.

Horse-Ketchum quit the trail and took cover among the screw beans, and as he spurred on his anger grew. While he had been fighting lone handed against Bodie, Captain Jack, his Man Friday, had seized the occasion to decamp with his mules and supplies.

The tent was set back in the midst of the thicket at the end of a narrow path, and when Lightfoot saw his coffee-pot on the stones of an Indian fire he reined in and drew his gun.

"Hello!" he hailed.

From the door of the tent a woman stared out at him, wondering. She was a Piute, and not uncomely, with a clean dress and her hair neatly banged.

For an instant she stood at gaze. Then, seeing a white man, she dived under the tent and fled through the brush like a rabbit. Horse-Ketchum looked around at the old, familiar things—his butcher knife, his hatchet, his rawhide kyacks—and at sight of his own bed spread out in the tent he let out a louder yell.

"Jack!" he shouted. "Where are you—you damned rascal? Come out of that brush! This is Horse-Ketchum!"

"Ho! H'lo!" responded a voice from the depths of the thicket, and Captain Jack gazed out at him, furtively.

"What the devil do you mean," demanded Lightfoot indignantly. "running off with my outfit and mules? Come out of there, dog-gone it, or I'll shoot you!"

"No! No shootum!" protested Jack, stepping out into the open. "Wha's matter? Me thinkum you dead!"

Captain Jack was nattily attired in Horse-Ketchum's own cartridge belt, tailored town pants, blue shirt, and silk handkerchief. Only the wire-haired head and the startled, beady eyes kept the disguise from being complete. But Captain Jack was frightened—he was trembling.

"Ho! H'lo!" he greeted again, advancing with a doubtful smile. "You Horse-Ketchum? Where you been?"

"None of your danged business!" burst out Lightfoot angrily. "Why the hell didn't you go to Pahrump, like I told you? And you've sure got a nerve, putting on my best clothes. Dog-gone you, Jack, I ought to kill you!"

"No! No killum!" entreated the Indian apologetically. "Everybody say: 'Horse-Ketchum she dead.' Me see Bodie, ride your horse. Me see Pete Boots, wear your hat. No come back—me thinkum dead."

"Like--hell!" railed Johnny. "Who's that woman that run away?"

"My wife," announced Captain Jack. "Me ketchum 'nother woman. Piute woman—good squaw."

"Yes, but that don't give you license to give her my blankets and set her up in housekeeping in my tent. You can keep the outfit now and I'll buy me another one. How much of that money have you got left?"

"All gone!" answered Captain Jack dolefully.

"What? The whole five hundred? What'd you do with it, Jack? You owe me for this outfit, savvy?"

"Money gone!" repeated Jack. "Me buyum squaw—Ash Meadows. Good woman—he costum four horses. Then—well, buyum grub, givum feast. Everybody git drunk. Pretty soon money all gone."

"Hell's—bells!" grumbled Horse-Ketchum, surveying his purloined outfit. "Well, Jack, you can work it out."

"No!" objected the Indian. "Me ketchum woman, now."

"No difference!" responded Johnny. "You stole my outfit—savvy? You know what the Hiko man does when he ketches an Indian stealing!"

He wrapped his finger around his neck and made a motion up and Captain Jack saw a new light.

"You go back—ketchum horse?" he inquired. "My wife, he go, too. Good cook!"

"You send your wife home to her people," ordered Lightfoot. "Give her grub, give her blankets, give her everything you stole. But I don't want a woman along."

"Where you go?" repeated Captain Jack. "Too hot Death Valley now."

"Too hot for woman," answered Johnny grimly. "You send her back to Ash Meadows."

"Me 'fraid!" came out Jack. "Maybeso Shooshonnies kill me. Eatum-up Jake—she mad. Me buyum Piute woman. Shooshonnies all mad—maybe killum."

"Now here," said Horse-Ketchum, "I'll take care of the Shooshonnies. You're my Injun, savvy, and I need you

in my business. I won't let anybody kill you."

"All right—me go," agreed Captain Jack. And then he glanced up at Horse-Ketchum slyly. "You go back—ketchum horse?" he asked.

"No, Jack," grinned Johnny; "I'm going to steal me a woman. You come along and help, and when we get through——"

"What woman?" Jack demanded eagerly.

"Never mind," said Lightfoot. "You know the devil man, at Night Water? Maybeso we steal his girl."

"No *wano*!" grunted Captain Jack.

But Johnny regarded him sternly.

"I know what I want," Lightfoot said. "You ain't called in on this at all, you old rascal. You know the ghost maiden that used to ride the moon's horses? All right, we're going to steal her."

"No good!" repeated Captain Jack stubbornly; and then his sly grin returned. "How much you pay me?" he asked.

"I'll pay you one hundred dollars—and all this stuff you stole."

"All right," answered Jack. "Me go."

CHAPTER XXI.

HORSE-KETCHUM PAYS RANSOM.

THE trail to Mormon Lake was crowded with prospectors as Horse-Ketchum rode out of Pahrump. And the name on every lip, the magic word that lured them on, was "Breyfogle." The lost Breyfogle Mine had been found! Lightfoot listened curiously, hardly believing his ears, to the rumors of the strike; and then it came over him that he himself had seen the treasure. The rush was to Devil Mountain!

As they neared Daylight Pass the stampede reached its height. Men threw away their blankets, their provisions, even their water kegs, in order to be the first on the grounds. They traveled day and night, flailing their reluctant

animals on until, at Hole-in-the-Rock, they met the tide setting back, and all the rumors fell flat.

"It's a fake!" yelled the boomers as they came dragging into camp. "Go back, you damned fools, before you perish with the heat. It's another one of Bodie's tricks."

But the stampedeers never wavered. They poured on down the canyon until they came to Night Water, where a hundred men were camped under the trees. And with them, leading the van, went Horse-Ketchum and his Indian, for Val Bodie had disappeared. He it was who had spread the rumors of treasure-trove, showing the sacks of rich ore he had bought from Frying-pan George, exhibiting Johnny's Breyfogle rock. But when the leaders of the rush fought their way to Devil Mountain, they found the entrance to the canyon blocked.

A wall of loose rock a hundred feet high dammed the way to the fabled bonanza, and upon the cliffs Frying-pan George was standing guard, ready to shoot any man who approached. It was then the rumor spread that Val Bodie had started the rush in order to bring trade to his store. Coming and going through Mormon Lake the stampedeers had spent their money, with whisky at two bits a drink; but when the first rumors of a fake sprang up Bodie had ridden off, no one knew where. All they knew was that with him he had taken the Breyfogle gold—and their gold, that had been spent over the bar.

Horse-Ketchum camped at Night Water, where not a month before he had rescued Diana from the clutches of Bodie. Now she and her horses were shut up in the canyon, and across the entrance there was a wall of crumbling rock. Through his glasses he could see the raw scar along the cliff where the towering mass of stone had come down. But, though he scanned the bench above,

nothing stirred on the lookout point, and at sundown he rode up closer.

At the mouth of the canyon, blocks of rock had come tumbling down; but below them, where once the waterfall had been, there was a wall of solid stone. Randolph Morgan's first blast had shot out the inclined slope, and the second blast had brought down the cliff. There was no way up to the mass of shattered rock which hung at a balance above. How could one hope to surmount that dizzy pile, where every piece seemed tottering to its fall?

Lightfoot stood in the gathering dusk and gazed up at it grimly. Morgan was crazy, of course, but there was a method in his madness; for with two shots of powder he had shut his enemies out, and his horses and gold mine in. His cave was stored with provisions, the mountain sheep would supply his meat; and whenever he became weary of his complete isolation he could blast the canyon mouth clear.

Johnny called, but no one answered; and he went back to Night Water, where the stampedeers had plans of their own.

Others had tried and failed, but in the morning they rode up to essay the solid barricade. Behind it lay the Breyfogle, greatest of all the storied mines which had made Death Valley famous; and as they lined up before it they discussed their scheme for blasting the obstruction away. Given the time and the powder, the canyon entrance could be cleared.

While they scanned the gateway, Horse-Ketchum watched the heights, where Frying-pan George stood guard. A head appeared over the rampart and a gun barrel flashed. Then, balanced fearlessly on the brow of the cliff, the old man waved his rifle.

"Get away from there, you scoundrels!" he bellowed. And like one man the stampedeers obeyed. But as they spurred back out of range Johnny turned

and watched the crags, waving his hand as a signal for Diana. Had he murdered her in his rage, this crack-brained old reprobate who stood menacing them still with his gun?

Lightfoot reined in and shouted her name, while the rest whipped away; but his only answer was a shot from the cliff. Morgan had recognized his enemy and sensed the errand that brought him there, for the bullets came thick and fast. But as the shooting began Johnny spied a silvery fox running away over a pile of rocks. And beneath, peeping out from among the boulders, he saw Diana's golden head.

Then a bullet came too close and his horse snorted and whirled. He waved his hat and fled, but his heart was glad. Diana lived, and she knew that her lover had come back for her. But he could not save her now; for to fetch her from that canyon, even if he could enter it, he would have to kill her father. It was better to wait, and come back.

All day the terrific heat beat down on their camp, while a wind out of the sink snatched up gravel and silt and buried them deep in sand. It came laden with the stench of steaming marshes and of acrid, sun-smitten greasewood, a smell such as Horse-Ketchum had never sensed before—the rank breath of Death Valley in the heat. Wailing and grumbling while they waited for the sand storm to lull, for the sun to sink at last behind the mountains, the prospectors at Night Water called down a thousand curses upon the author of their plight.

Val Bodie it was who, to gain a few dirty dollars, had brought them to this sink hole of hell; but they swore, one and all, to raze his store to the ground if they ever escaped alive. So they lay, panting like lizards in the thin shade of the mesquite trees, until the long day came to a close; and as a cool, night wind sucked in from the high ground, Horse-Ketchum rode off with the rest.

But where the others turned off toward Daylight Pass, Lightfoot kept on south toward Furnace Creek Ranch, where Jim Chatfield would be awaiting his aid.

Val Bodie was desperate now, and, to avenge a fancied wrong, he was capable of any mischief. He held to the outlaws' code, and Jim Chatfield had humiliated him, turning him back before all his followers, whom so often he had rebuked for their faintheartedness. Chatfield had deprived him of his revenge when he had followed on Lightfoot's trail; and, more than that, Jim had deprived him of Paynim. It was that loss, most of all, which had roused Bodie's rancor, and Horse-Ketchum knew he would come back.

The Stygian gloom of a desert night had settled down over Death Valley, as if the darkness, like a river, had drained down into its black depths, making the trail invisible to a horse. Captain Jack rode in the lead, driving the pack mules before him. Horse-Ketchum was deep in his thought. And when they were on the salt meadows by Esahbwoó, where the emigrants had perished, a horse neighed, loud and clear. Captain Jack's pony answered, the mules added their brays; and then out of the darkness, leaping and fighting against his hobbles, High Behind came crow-hopping up.

Horse-Ketchum knew him first, recognizing his neigh, and swung down to cut the animal loose.

"Somebody come!" warned Jack as sudden voices were heard; and Lightfoot grabbed High Behind by the mane. Then, feeling his way down his forelegs, he slashed off the heavy hobbles and leaped up on Chatfield's horse.

"Who is that?" challenged a voice; and Jack turned the horses away. It was Val Bodie—he was digging out the wagons.

"Go to the devil!" taunted Johnny, throwing High Behind into the bunch. And as Bodie began to shout they took the back trail at a gallop, then turned

off and made for the hills. The black night swallowed them up and they halted in a swale as a band of horsemen loped north. Then, quietly, they headed south, with High Behind trotting free, and never stopped till they came to the ranch.

From the top of the lookout hill a high yell roused the house and brought Chatfield to the gate with his gun. But Lightfoot rode up laughing, reaching over to slap old High Behind, who responded with a playful kick. He had turned another trick on the unlucky Val Bodie and stolen back his captured horse. No small prize in itself, for High Behind was a racer and a range-toughened mustang, to hoot.

"Look what I've got!" he called. "My old mustang chaser, High Behind—the horse that Bodie stole! And this is my Indian, Captain Jack."

"Drive 'em in," responded Chatfield. "And send your Injun up the ditch. I don't allow 'em inside the fence."

"Not any of 'em?" pleaded Lightfoot. "Jack's a mighty good Indian and——"

"No Injuns!" answered Chatfield shortly.

Captain Jack rolled his frightened eyes.

"No, but listen," began Johnny, as he saw the Shoshones advancing in a body down the ditch. "My Indian has had trouble with Eatum-up Jake——"

"I don't give a damn" broke in Chatfield harshly. "No Injun passes that gate. Understand?"

His face, which had been so friendly, was drawn down in angry lines and his jaw was set like a steel trap.

"Yes! Sure I understand!" answered back Horse-Ketchum angrily. He turned the horses back from the entrance.

"What's the matter?" cried Damaris, running down to the gate with little Jim still in her arms. "Oh, Jim, Mr. Lightfoot is our friend!"

"I don't care!" flared back Chatfield. "He can't dictate to me. That's my rule. No Injuns inside the gate."

"Then I'll just camp outside!" answered Johnny. "Come on, Jack. And don't you be scared."

He rode around the pack mules and drove them over to a mesquite tree that stood on the bank of the ditch, and Captain Jack followed in a daze. First he glanced at his master, then at the crowd of jabbering Shoshones. But at sight of Panamint Tom, the war chief, he dropped off and fell flat on the ground, with his hands up over his head. For he had stolen a Shoshone woman, and the punishment for his crime was death.

Panamint Tom strode over toward him, leaving the rabble behind, and gave him a kick in the ribs.

"This Shooshonnie country!" he said in English, for the benefit of Horse-Ketchum. "All this side of them mountains"—he pointed to the Funeral Range—"Shooshonnie country! This Injun *Piute!*"

He grunted contemptuously and gave Jack another kick, but the latter only groveled down at his feet. Then, in a long and impassioned speech, pointing often to the mountains and thrusting out his lips at Jack, the war chief harangued his people. By the pantomime alone, and the few words he understood, Horse-Ketchum could follow the tale of Captain Jack's treachery to the tribe. He acted out the theft of the pretty Shoshone girl and as he went on to describe her distress and ultimate death shouts of anger went up from the crowd.

They were swart men, with high cheek bones and the bold eyes of their forefathers, the warlike Shoshones of the north; but Panamint Tom himself stood head and shoulders above them all, and he advanced upon Captain Jack threateningly.

"*No wano!*" he declaimed, giving the culprit another buffet while he glanced

first at Lightfoot and then at Chatfield. "Bad Injun—stealum woman. Shooshonnie people killum. *Me* killum!" And he reached for his knife.

But Horse-Ketchum stepped to the front.

"This my Injun," he stated. "You leave him alone. I hired him to help me ketch horses."

He faced the Indians calmly, and once more Panamint Tom glanced over at the face of his boss. But Jim Chatfield stood grimly silent, though his wife was clinging to his arm, and the war chief turned back arrogantly.

"This Shooshonnie country!" he said again, pointing his hand toward the eastern mountains. "Piute Injun come over—we killum. Shooshonnie go over—Piute killum." He nodded, and reached for his knife.

"Here! Now listen!" spoke up Horse-Ketchum, with a good-natured smile. "This man is my Injun. understand? Maybeso him Piute—maybeso him Shooshonnie. No difference. He works for me."

"*No wano!*" shouted the war chief. "This man stealum woman. Good woman—b'long Eatum-up Jake!"

He waved his hand toward a gaunt and evil-eyed savage who had been yapping on the edge of the crowd, and with a yell of defiance Eatum-up Jake leaped forward, a long knife clutched in his hand. His drawn face was working fiercely and there was murder in his eye; but when Horse-Ketchum stepped toward him he stopped.

"Now here!" warned Lightfoot, and one hand touched his gun. "You put up that knife before my pistol goes off and another bad Injun bites the dust. You leave this man alone, understand?"

"*No wano!*" shrilled Eatum-up Jake, making a futile kick at Jack. "She steal my girl. *Me* killum!"

"No, you won't," contradicted Johnny, "do anything of the kind. How much you want for your girl?"

A subtle change came over the countenance of the outraged father, and he turned exultantly to the crowd. They shouted in great excitement and Eatum-up Jake shouted back. Then he turned and spoke to Lightfoot.

"Four horses!" he said succinctly.

"Two!" offered Johnny, suddenly flashing up two fingers. And the whole crowd joined in on the haggling. Hands went up and fingers were raised—some clamoring for four, some for three—and Horse-Ketchum unlashd a pack. From its kyack he lifted out a big sack of flour, a can of coffee, a bag of sugar and two plugs of trade tobacco. He laid them on the ground and pointed to his man, then held up two fingers again.

Once more in a clamor of shouting the clansmen argued and gesticulated, but Panamint Tom stood unmoved. He was their chief and he withheld his voice.

"Here!" spoke up Johnny, offering a sack of tobacco and a block of matches for *pilon*; and the chief of the Shoshones unbent. He rolled a cigarette, while Lightfoot rolled another and passed a sack of "makings" through the crowd. Then as the smoke drifted up and Horse-Ketchum flashed two fingers the people shouted acclaim. Panamint Tom nodded gravely, Eatum-up Jake accepted the presents—and Captain Jack rose up, ransomed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DEATH WATCH.

A BIG feast was on in the camp of the Shoshones when a yell rose up from the lookout on the hill and Jim Chatfield came out to the gate. Since the quarrel over Captain Jack he had not spoken to Horse-Ketchum, who was camped out under the trees; but after a brief glance up the road Jim strode out, and Johnny saw that his anger had passed.

"You'd better come inside the fence,"

Chatfield said. "That's Bodie again, on your trail."

"Much obliged," answered Lightfoot, "but I'm not scared of him a bit."

"Well, bring your Injun with you," broke in Chatfield gruffly.

Captain Jack threw the packs on the mules. Up went the kyacks, and the lash ropes were tied anyway. Then horses and mules alike were rushed through the gateway, while Jack looked back and laughed. His life had been spared at the intercession of his master; but the Shoshones had bristled like angry dogs when he passed, and Eatum-up Jake had snarled balefully. But now, inside the gate, he was safe from them all—and Bodie had halted up the road.

"Reckon he's looking for High Behind," suggested Johnny exultantly. "Every time that whelp steals anything I steal it right back from him. He was digging around your wagons when I passed."

"Oh, he was, eh?" exclaimed Chatfield, and then he nodded grimly. "I know what's biting him," he said. "One of my Indians, when we were digging there, found a fine gold watch. They're trying to locate that treasure box."

"He's afraid," jeered Lightfoot, stepping out into the open where Bodie and his men could see him. "He's on the dodge himself, and if those stampeders ever catch him they'll hang him for a certainty. So I suppose he's come down to lift my scalp."

"No, he's after mine," stated Chatfield. "Did you bring back those cartridges? Well, you saved my bacon that time, because there's Riley Sloper. And Riley is a clean-strain killer."

He pronounced the words calmly, almost as if they were words of praise; and Horse-Ketchum saw in the level glance of Chatfield's eyes that he, too, was a killer, and proud of it.

"No, Riley is after me," Chatfield continued impersonally. "He's Dad Tolliver's right-hand man, sent out to

track me down. And according to the code he can't go back until he kills me, or I get him. But Mr. Lightfoot, I hate to kill him—because Damaris, my wife, is a Tolliver. So I'm going to wait for the heat."

"Wait!" echoed Lightfoot. "My Lord, ain't this hot enough?"

"You wait till July," returned Chatfield, "and every fly on this ranch will drop dead. They gather under the leaves on the north side of the house and fall to the ground in windrows. That's heat—the kind that kills people. And I don't reckon Riley can stand it."

"Well, I can," asserted Johnny. "I've got to stay, Jim, because, Bodie or no Bodie, I'm going back to get Diana."

"You won't leave this ranch for a month," predicted Chatfield, as the Night Riders rode back up the road. "Those rascals have gone back to camp at Cow Springs—they'll be watching us night and day."

"Let 'em watch," answered Horse-Ketchum. "I'll sneak off after dark. I reckon your Shooshonnies are going."

He pointed to the hilltop where the Indians in a compact body were watching the retreat of the Night Riders. But, despite their warlike front, the women along the ditch bank were packing their bundles to go. The great heat had come but, much as they feared it, they feared Val Bodie more. For, though Bodie was married to a squaw, his kinsmen were Piutes, with whom the Shoshones were continually at war. And he had a ruthless way, with Indians, of shooting first and talking afterward which had intimidated even Panamint Tom.

"Me stay!" spoke up Captain Jack at his elbow; and Chatfield looked him over appraisingly. With his scouts and retainers gone he would need the Indian's services, but he only glanced dourly at Lightfoot.

"All right, Jack," responded Johnny. "You stay inside this fence and Eatum-

up Jake won't get you. I'll take care of you—savvy? Any time!"

"By grab!" laughed Chatfield, "you shore think a lot of that Injun, standing up against that bunch the way you did. I don't trust 'em very far, myself."

"Me good Injun!" stated Jack. "Horse-Ketchum good Hiko man. We friends, eh?" And he held out his hand.

"You bet ye!" returned Johnny, shaking hands with him indulgently. "And we'll stick together, Jack. Then bimeby, when it gets hot, if you help me steal my woman I'll let you go back to your wife."

"Ho! Good!" assented Jack, striding off to unpack the mules.

The white men sought the shelter of the house.

Already in the south a solid wall of dust announced the approach of another sand storm. The trees were whipping in the wind, and about them, finer than sand, the storm-borne silt was dropping. It touched the sweaty hands of the people and set in tiny cakes that formed gray spots of cement; and all the time as the wind howled louder the size of the gravel grew. But behind their stout stockade they escaped its full force, and the corridor between the houses was cool.

All that night, watch and watch, the two white men stood guard; but Val Bodie and his men did not come. Horse-Ketchum rose at dawn and looked out over a sand-strewn world, so desolate and empty that they seemed like human atoms, set down in a bottomless void. Yet up on the sharp-topped butte where the Shoshones had kept their watch a man sat, sphinxlike, his gun across his knees, his back humped against the wind.

"It's Riley Sloper!" pronounced Chatfield. "The death watch is set. But I don't want to kill him. He's a Tolliver."

"Well, maybe," hinted Lightfoot, "I

can take him off your hands. You know what I said—to little Jim."

"Little Jim is a Tolliver, too," responded Chatfield slowly. "No, Johnny, let's wait for the heat."

The blazing sun topped the Funeral Range and no wind came sweeping in, to mitigate its sullen intensity. By ten in the morning, the salt marshes had begun to steam, and the death watch left his butte. A black haze rose up from the miles of slimy sink, where the poisonous brine stewed and smoked, and there came to their nostrils the rank odor of that hell's brew which had snuffed out so many lives.

The cattle gathered along the ditches, half immersed in the running water; the chickens sneaked into the house; and there, before the fan, dogs and humans alike stretched out to endure the heat. It came up from the marshes in panting waves, like the breath of some monster of the deep, as if the crater which once yawned there had opened its vents again, giving off its poison vapors in gasps. All the world seemed a furnace, an oven where men were baked.

Little Jim fretted and wailed.

"Poor little boy!" sighed his mother again and again as she held him before the whirling wheel; and as the cool water splashed over him a wry smile twisted his face, which was mottled with the blistering heat. The hot weather had come, and a huge hand seemed to cover them, crushing them down with malignant hate. As the men paced about, keeping watch for their enemies, they wore towels about their necks to wipe off the blinding sweat which ran down into their eyes. Yet when the sun, like a ball of fire, set behind the towering Panamints, a gaunt form again showed itself on the butte. It was Riley Sloper, and in the madness of the heat Jim Chatfield reached for his gun.

"No!" he cursed, as his wife clutched his hand. "It's him or me—that's the code."

"Oh, but wait, Jim, wait!" she pleaded. "Think of little Jim—and me. Don't shoot. God will strike him with His heat."

"But it's hell," complained Chatfield, "in the bottom of this sink. God never intended a white man to live here. If I kill Sloper we can go up on the peaks!"

He waved one hand petulantly toward the high summits of the Panamints, where the pine trees stood out against the sky. But she dissuaded him from his purpose. If there was one thing she knew, it was that she didn't want any killing.

As the night came on they chained the high door of the gate. In the blank darkness of the desert night Jim took up his weary march, ready to fight in defense of his life; but each morning with the dawn the haunting figure came back, to look down from the butte.

"I'll kill him!" swore Chatfield; but each time he held his hand and God sent a greater heat. Puffy clouds rose up like burnished cones of fire and hung motionless above the high peaks. They rode up against the wind and turned black at the base. Then a long spout reached down and the cloud-burst broke with a thunder that shattered the air. The water poured out in long black feelers that spread to a solid column. It rained, and down some canyon a wall of brushwood came, spewed out by the glut behind. Then trees and yellow water, and boulders that ground and tumbled, until they rolled far out on the flat. The flood spent its force with magical quickness, and as the last rush cleared the canyon its front swept down into the sink.

Before a pageantry like this the people lived on day by day as the rainy sea-

son reached its height; but not a drop came to cool their fevered lips, for the bottom of the valley was dry. Nor did the thirsty mountains feel the wash of driving rains. Some canyon, parched before, was inundated by a flood—the rest of the desert remained dry. They endured, since they must, and every day at dawn Riley Sloper stood out on his butte.

Never once in a month of waiting had he ventured near the ranch, though they knew what his errand was. He seemed in his crack-brained way to be courting the very death which Dad Tolliver had sent him to deal. An ambush at dawn, a bullet from the brush as he stepped out against the sky, and this clean-strain killer of the Tolliver clan would be wiped out by a shot. Yet, crazed as Chatfield was, his wife overpersuaded him, and the watch of death went on. But Val Bodie and his men had long since left, and one evening Horse-Ketchum saddled Paynim.

By the banks of the rushing ditch, tied, as it were, to a haystack, the golden stallion had fretted impatiently—and always he looked to the north. Now, as he felt his master's hand and champed the familiar bit, he snuffed the heated wind and whickered. He knew without words that their ride would take him home, to the canyon where his mates frisked and played.

"Be quiet!" admonished Lightfoot, laying a hand on his nose as he passed him out the tall gate; and Paynim snorted softly. Then, as Horse-Ketchum swung up, he ambled off through the night, at last breaking into a lope.

Cow Springs lay behind them, his feet were in the trail, and ahead were Moonbeam—and Diana.

To be continued in the next issue.



Sometimes a Good Lie Beats a Bad Truth.



Romney Passes Judgment

By John Randolph Phillips

AT sunrise the road gang went to work; there followed the loud, coarse talk of the men, the creaking of harness, the clang of scrapers, the grunts of the mules, and the low yet dominant voice of Romney, the foreman, giving orders.

Men bestirred themselves in that camp when Romney spoke. Even the young engineer in charge of this road being built through the Black River swamp was all attention when the foreman had a word to say.

Only Larry Kane, the young time-keeper and commissary clerk, disliked

Romney—and Larry had a reason. The reason was blue eyed and golden haired and stood five feet four—Romney's daughter, May. Larry could very well have been in love with her had it not been for Romney.

As it was, after a number of rebukes, Larry folded his tent, so to speak, and faded away from the vicinity of the tent where May and her mother were spending a few weeks living on the job with Romney.

May was kind to Larry and at times there was a certain light in her eyes that made his heart tremble, but court-

ing a young woman in the presence of a father, who never lost a chance to show how little he thought of you, was not Larry's idea of the road to romance. He was not particularly enamored of the old theory that opposition makes the heart beat faster.

He thought that he would be glad when the work progressed far enough into the swamp to necessitate the moving of headquarters; then, no doubt, May and her mother would go back to their home in Sumter. That, by the way, was before Larry conceived the plan of leaving the camp himself.

On that particular morning Romney, after seeing the men off to work, entered the little commissary shack and noted that as usual the timekeeper's eyes did not meet his squarely. Instead they fastened on an old, battered, felt hat lying on the end of the counter—a hat which Romney himself had discarded one day and left in the commissary, and which the timekeeper had been too shiftless to remove.

Romney asked one or two questions about the supply of provisions, received terse answers, and then stood looking silently at Larry, who was pretending to busy himself with something on the shelf behind him. Romney's eyes flashed to the safe in one corner and narrowed. He didn't like the idea of that shift-eyed fellow being so close to that money.

Every other Saturday Larry wrote out the company's checks for the men and they departed to near-by towns to spend their wealth. On Sunday they came back, gave Larry whatever remained of their cashed checks and asked him to keep it in the safe for them. Romney knew that sometimes the safe held well over a thousand dollars.

Turning from the safe, he faced the timekeeper squarely.

"I've asked the big boss to send me another man in your place, Kane." He spoke straight from the shoulder, as was his way.

For once Larry's eyes came up fairly. "All right," he said. "See if I give a damn!"

"I hope you don't feel too hard about it—but if you do, I can't help it. A foreman's got to trust the men he's working with, and I don't trust you." That was Romney for you—straight, even brutal, but always fair and above-board.

"I know," said Larry wearily. "It's because of May."

"It ain't," Romney answered flatly. "If you want to know, I don't like the look in your eyes, young fellow. You look like a sharper to me, and you're not the kind of fellow I like to have on a job with me. I'm sorry; but I wouldn't be doing my duty if I kept you on, feeling the way I do. Let's don't have a racket about it."

Young Mr. Kane had turned to his books. From his look, you would never have guessed that such a person as Dan Romney existed. The foreman started for the door, hesitated a moment by the old hat, as if about to take it with him, then, letting it lie, continued on out of the door.

Larry Kane instantly raised his head. From the one window of the shack he watched Romney going up to where the scrapers were at work. Just now that was the nearest part of the work, and that was three hundred yards away. The shifty look faded out of Larry Kane's eyes; in its place came one of cunning and caution. He walked to the door and looked off down the road they had built. Not a soul was in sight. The sounds of the scrapers on the other side of the shack came faintly to him, clanging almost musically on the still swamp air.

Then he saw May up at the foreman's tent. It made his heart quiver to see her wave to him. She was the nicest thing he had ever known, but it wouldn't do to think of her now. Like a great many other things in his life—

like most of them, indeed—she was out of reach. The safe in the corner wasn't.

He turned into the shack, his breath coming a little more sharply now, his eyes flitting from side to side as if he expected to ferret out some hidden watcher. In the middle of the room he paused.

"Do I want to do this thing?" he said aloud. "I've never done anything like this before. Won't I be sorry afterward? Am I sure I want to do it?"

And his whole life's experience answered: "Of course, you do, you fool! You'll never get anything except by taking it. You never have."

Larry Kane went down on the floor by the safe. His fingers flew. A little dot of perspiration popped out on his forehead and dripped off on his hand. Damn it! in his hurry he had messed up the combination. Better go slow. But how could he go slow when there was only a limited amount of time? He wasn't familiar with this kind of thing; he didn't have the cool brain of a crook, nor the steady fingers.

At last the combination clicked. The door swung open. Larry's hand shot inside, clasped a packet and shot out again. No need to count the money. He knew how much was in there—fourteen hundred dollars. For the last two weeks the men had given him more than usual to keep; knowledge of that had helped him decide the time for his strike.

How he shook! What was the matter with him? Hadn't he planned this thing for over a week? Didn't he know the very place in the swamp where he was going to hide until the hue and cry were over? Hadn't he explored the swamp every Sunday for weeks past, and hadn't he sneaked provisions out to the place he had in mind?

He lashed himself with scorn. A fine time to lose his nerve! Just when he was about to make up for the line of hard knocks life had handed him all

the way from the water front in New Orleans to the logging camps in Maine!

Into his coat pocket went the packet of bills. His hands flew with feverish hate. His eyes were no longer shifty; they were wild. Where was his hat? In the back room. Hell! he had no time to go after it. That old thing on the end of the counter would do. It wouldn't be long before he could afford a new hat.

Though his nerves jumped and his mind whirled, he forced himself to be cool as he approached the door. A careful look told him there was no one in sight—not even May. He wished he might get one more glimpse of her; but he had to hurry. The swamp was near at hand; it beckoned.

Larry kept the commissary shack between him and the men at work; and at last he reached the border of the swamp, straightened and plunged into the thick growth. A brier bit his leg through the thin trousers he wore. A vine almost tripped him. Then he began to run, carefully at first, faster as he went farther into the swamp. He knew that nothing pursued him, yet he must run.

He ran half a mile. The swamp was dark about him for, in addition to the rank vegetation, the day was cloudy. Several times he threw glances over his shoulder, and once he crashed head-on into a cypress. With one hand he wiped the trickle of blood from his face, wondering how much of a bruise he had sustained. But there was no time to stop and feel it. The hiding place was yet a couple of miles deeper into the swamp. He must keep running; mustn't think himself secure.

Suddenly he tripped over a log and fell headlong. Even after he scrambled to his feet and began to run again, he thought he could hear the echo of his crash.

Ever afterward Larry Kane was to remember that flight through the swamp—how he ran and ran, and how the

farther he got the faster he felt that he must go. It was as if something rode behind him—something that in a moment would be at his heels; something that with a great, clawing hand would reach out and snatch him back to the wrath of Romney and the men.

Once, plunging blindly through a thicket, he came out on the other side only to feel a long, sinuous wreath of Spanish moss fasten its tendrils about his neck. He went down, gurgling and gasping, arms flailing wildly, face lacerated by briars. Up again, he clawed wildly at the moss, tore it from his neck where it had caught in his collar, and plunged on.

Breath was something that was sucked in in great gasps, held as long as possible and expelled with a whistling sound that broke the stillness of the swamp in a way that only added terror to his flight. No longer were his feet controlled by his mind or by anything else. It was as if they had taken themselves in hand and intended never to stop.

His hands were clawing things that sought futilely to clear a path and then dropped limply to his sides, only to lash out again as fear penetrated his mind. He felt that his eyes would be horrible to see. In them must be reflected all the terror that rioted in his soul.

How long he ran he never knew. When suddenly, without intending to, he sank limply to the warm, soft floor of the swamp, it seemed only a minute since he had knelt by the safe back there in the commissary shack. Yet, when he remembered that wild course through the swamp, it seemed an eternity. There were enough bruises and scratches on his aching body to warrant that latter belief. He had no idea where he was. The hiding place was somewhere in the depths of the swamp—it might be over the next rise—but just where it was he could not for the life of him tell.

Arms outstretched, face pressed to the ground, he lay and tried to rest.

After a while his torture breathing grew quieter; some of the ache died out of his legs; he moved his muscles tentatively. The ground was a little wet, and he shivered. His eyes, as he raised his head, flitted around him, taking note of everything in sight—the gloomy cypresses rising on all sides, the occasional pines, the gums, the thick tangle of vines and brambles, and, above all else, the trailing, ghostly arms of the Spanish moss, stretching gray fingers from the branches of the swamp trees.

Somehow he knew that it was afternoon and that soon darkness would descend, pall-like, as it always did in the swamp, and envelop everything in a mantle that shut out the rest of the world. And it came to him suddenly that that was just what he had done—dropped a mantle, drawn a curtain over his life and shut out the rest of mankind. That was what happened to the swamp when night came. But the swamp was sufficient to itself—and Larry wasn't.

The thought made him start to his feet. For a second he rocked on his heels and toes, eyes shooting from side to side uncertainly; then fear came back, a fear that told him a hundred eyes might be staring at him from the ring of underbrush that encircled him. He stumbled, caught himself and once more began to run, the packet of bills hugged to his bosom. Again the Something rode behind him, urging, driving him to greater and greater speed, until his breath recommenced its whistling when he let it out of his lungs—until his feet again moved of their own will and his hands clawed and fought the underbrush that barred his way.

Of a sudden the swamp grew lighter, and he saw the sun shining through a rift in the trees a few paces ahead—and he realized that it was still morning after all, for the sun was not yet overhead. That made him stop. He stood in the center of a tangle of brush and

looked about him. His chest heaved slower as his breathing returned to normal; mechanically he began to pick out some of the briars embedded in the legs of his trousers.

Still he was horribly afraid, but he was too tired to run any farther; too tired even to protest to himself when his knees sagged and his body slumped to the ground. He felt as if he were going to swoon, but he could not bring his jaded muscles into action quick enough to send him again to his feet.

It was hours later that he awoke; awoke with a start that drove ripples of terror up his spine. Somewhere near at hand a voice had spoken. He did not know whose voice it was—had no way of telling whether or not it belonged to one of the men from the camp—but he did know that any voice held danger for him now.

Slinking like a fox, he crept out of the thicket and into another, then straightened and began to run. The voice he heard no more, but he could not tell how many feet were pounding along through the swamp behind him—relentless, pursuing feet. The only thing was to run and run and run until he dropped. All the rest of his life he would have to do that.

When it became so dark that he could not see his way, he fell over a log, lay for a moment breathing frantically, then snuggled close to the log and waited for whatever would come out of the swamp after him.

But nothing came. He lay for hours, it seemed, and the only sounds were the noises that the swamp made as it began to awake from the long afternoon and stir itself. There were faint rustles in the near-by thickets, the whisper of wings above him as a bird went by, now and then the croak of a frog, and once the gloomy cry of an owl hunting on the little rise that lay to the right of him.

After a while Larry Kane rolled away from the log and sat up. He mopped the sweat from his forehead and stared about him. He hugged the packet of stolen money to his bosom. In all the unreal gloom of the swamp, here was something real, tangible, something from the outside world. He hugged it to him again.

To him there came the memory of Romney, the foreman; Romney, whose eyes were cold but straight, whose manner was gruff yet hid, so other men said, a heart of gold. Well, he would not have to worry about Romney any more. But there was May; Larry knew that he would always worry about her, would always wonder what might have happened had he been a different kind of man.

But he mustn't think about May. There was other business to consider. To-night he would stay just where he was, but to-morrow he had to find that hiding place. He couldn't live on nothing. There was food at the little thicket he had chosen for his retreat; food enough to last him until the chase was over and the chasers decided that he had got out of the swamp. After that he must follow the swamp for many miles, then steal out and make his way to Charleston. Once there, he could get on a ship plying up and down the coast. But where then?

That thought brought him up with a turn. Where then? Well, he wouldn't worry about that now. He was glad that the unreasoning fear which had pursued him from the camp had abated sufficiently for him to sit here by the log, lost, as he was, in the midst of the swamp.

For a while he tried to think concentratedly of what lay before him, of the life that awaited him now that he had taken the step he had often contemplated. Memories of the days along the water front in New Orleans flashed across his mind; the days when he had

been a kid roustabout, the target for every bully's fist.

He tried to recall when he had first thought of stealing. Maybe it was the time when he had lugged "Big Mike" home after the fight in the old White Rock gambling house and had found a large roll on Mike. He wondered why he had not taken that money. What was it that had kept him from it?

Larry rubbed his head. Perhaps he hadn't taken the money because he had thought that there were other ways—honest ways—by which a man might forge ahead. Well, he'd got over that now. But, thinking back, he knew that his happiest days had been when he had still retained a vestige, however small, of faith in the world, when he had still believed that some time he would rise to the top.

Life had battered him since those days along the water front. He was no longer a kid with ideals; he was a man who knew his way about, a man out to get all that was coming to him. But even now, at times, the old ideas came back; they had been present when he had first seen May Romney. They were always clashing with what experience had taught him. Perhaps that was what made him hate to look other men in the eye—the fact that for the life of him he could not achieve brazenness.

He remembered what Romney had said to him the third day he, Larry, had been on the job: "Young fellow, don't you ever look straight at a man?" Larry recalled that, even then, when he had replied, he had kept his eyes on Romney's boots.

That Romney! Say, he was a hard one! His eyes never faltered. He had looked squarely at Larry back there when he said that he had asked the big boss for a new man. Larry thought that if he were an honest man he would like to be like Romney. This morning he had been an honest man—

Well, that was over. He had taken

the big step. No use thinking about men like Romney, lucky guys who got the breaks. He was one whom fate had wanted to make a dummy.

Thus reasoned Larry Kane as he lay down once more, huddling close to the log. Sleep was what he needed. Before daylight to-morrow he would be up and looking for that hiding place; he'd be plenty hungry by then.

Out of the darkness around him came the voices of the swamp. They got on his nerves a little, but he told himself that little things like that did not matter; he would soon be asleep, and in the morning would awake refreshed, ready to enter his new life.

But somehow he could not forget Romney. He knew that he could not in a thousand years talk to a man as Romney had talked to him that morning, without ever lowering his eyes, without ever flinching. What a crook Romney would make! What a fool he was not to be one! Or was he? Romney had the breaks; it paid him to be an honest man.

Larry sat up suddenly. Maybe that was why Romney could look you in the eyes—because he never thought of being anything but an honest man.

Larry shivered. It had been a long time since he had thought of himself as anything but a crook, even though this morning had witnessed his first theft. He had tried to pretend he was an honest man when he had first seen May, but Romney had known better. That Romney! Romney hadn't trusted him. Larry hadn't minded that so much; there had been plenty of men who didn't trust him.

It was then that he realized the change that had been wrought. Heretofore men hadn't trusted him. Now he couldn't trust any man. Always he would have to be on the watch, lest some one rise up who knew what he had done. On any construction job in the world a man might suddenly appear who

had worked on this job in the Black River swamp. Then again he would have to flee, flee as he had done this morning, with devils of fear at his heels, making him run until his lungs seemed bursting and his legs ached and his brain lost control.

Imagine Romney in such a situation! Romney who was independent and loved it. How would he react? Maybe that would take the steadiness out of his gaze and make his eyes furtive.

Somewhere out in the swamp a stick cracked, as if a foot had been placed incautiously. In the awful stillness that followed, Larry Kane could hear his heart pumping. Behind his log he waited, waited for the sound to come again, knowing that soon other sticks would crack. In advance he imagined all the little sounds that would come. Another stick would snap, then a rustle, a breathless moment when all the swamp would lie as if dead; then it would begin again, still another stick, closer now, another rustle, and then a pause—and, perhaps, a form shooting out of the gloom to pounce upon him.

He shrank close to the log. He knew that fear had him. Reason said the faint noise out there was perhaps only a fox, or a wild cat, or even a rabbit. Fear said that a man was creeping toward him, a man who came slowly, bidding his time, creeping like a snake.

There it was again—the cracking of a stick—and, yes, it was closer. Larry peered along the length of the log. His very soul chilled as he saw, out there on the edge of the thicket, the long, gray fingers of the Spanish moss; they were like claws now, claws that waved in the breeze, searching, probing the air about them.

Directly under them something moved, and Larry heard a faint, sliding noise as of a body being slithered over the leaves. Off to his right a twig popped. There was a little scream, a scurrying of feet, the plunge of a heavy

body, a gurgle, then the sound of something being dragged through the brush. Reason said a wild cat had pounced upon a rabbit. But in Larry Kane's mind reason no longer ruled.

He cowered against the log, shut his eyes, stuffed his fingers in his ears, then withdrew them abruptly. A tremor went through the log, and Larry's eyes flew wide open. At the end of the log a dim shape went darting into the brush, and again he heard a gurgle and the dragging sound. Something scurried by just beyond his range of vision.

Then the swamp fell silent again. It was as if all the things that hunted out there in the brush paused, and all the things that were hunted lay terror stricken, afraid to breathe. The silence was more awful than the sounds; it was closer, more ominous. It gave the hunted time in which to think what was coming next. Their little bodies quivered.

Larry Kane came suddenly upright behind his log. He felt then a powerful kinship with those hunted things out there in the dim fastnesses of the swamp; those little things that never knew what moment something would pounce upon them. They were pitiful because they could not help themselves; man had the advantage there. They could only wait, trying in the meantime to live a little of their life; a man could stand up and try a fight with fate. A man could even go back—

All of what he knew about life cried out at that thought! Go back and let the law take its course! The law that was grim, unyielding; that said only justice must be done! The law that demanded requital even when the victim had already paid in suffering!

And again he thought of Romney. What would *he* do? Suppose *he* were sitting out here in the swamp, reading the symbols of what lay ahead. Suppose he knew that all his life he would be listening with terror to vague, un-

identified sounds which might be retribution stalking on his trail. Yes, what would Romney do? Would he go back and say: "Here I am. Do what you want with me"?

Why did he have to keep thinking of Romney? What difference did it make what Romney would do? Larry wasn't Romney—but he knew suddenly that he wished he were, or at least a man like Romney. And he knew suddenly, too, just why all his life he had never tried to be the kind of man the foreman was. He was afraid—that was it. Romney had courage. If he had taken a wrong course, then decided that it was not the thing and that he would be happier if he righted the wrong, he would have the courage to go back, the courage to face those he had wronged and pay the penalty which would insure him future happiness. Those steady eyes of Romney's would never falter, nor his lips ever murmur a protest.

At sunrise the road gang went to work; there were the shouts of the men, the creak of harness, the clang of scrapers, the grunts of the mules, the low voice of Romney giving orders. Only half the force answered the call this morning; the rest were yet in the swamp searching for Larry Kane.

Romney wore a troubled look as, after seeing to it that the men started their work, he went down to the commissary shack and opened it. He was attending to the commissary duties until the big boss sent him the new man. The troubled look persisted as he went behind the counter.

Well, he had known that Larry Kane was a slippery customer—that shifty look in his eyes was proof of that; but he had never thought the boy would make the daring play of yesterday. And last night May had cried. Romney didn't like that. Larry Kane, deep down under that hardened exterior of his, must have possessed something funda-

mentally decent to stir the heart of a girl like May.

Romney scowled to himself. If only the fellow hadn't had that shifty look, that trick of not meeting your eyes.

A shadow fell across the doorway and Romney looked up—to see Larry Kane on the threshold. A man less schooled than Romney in human experience might have done any number of things, from drawing a gun to yelling for the men. Romney, however, moved not a muscle of his body as he looked straight into Larry's eyes—eyes that did not now falter.

Not a thing pictured on that face did Romney miss; he saw its whiteness, the lines of fatigue around the eyes and mouth, the set of the jaw. But most of all he saw the straight look in those eyes, and deep in their depths the agony that had not yet changed to serenity.

"I came back," said Larry Kane.

"I see you did," said Romney.

And then Larry told his story, told it straightforwardly in a low voice, omitting nothing, if anything painting himself blacker than he was. Romney still stood behind the counter, perfectly motionless; but his eyes ran repeatedly over Larry, noting his battered and torn condition. He noted, too, that as Larry talked the agony in his eyes receded, and a calm light followed—and not once did those eyes shift from Romney's face.

"And so I came back," Larry finished. He reached into his shirt and drew forth the money package and handed it to the foreman. Romney took it, counted the money mechanically. When he had finished he could not have told whether the packet contained fourteen dollars or fourteen hundred. He was thinking that at last Larry had lost that shifty look from his eyes.

"You can send for the sheriff—or do anything else you want," Larry said. "And it won't be necessary to tie me until he comes."

"No, I guess it won't," Romney said.

He looked up sharply, fiercely, from under his brows; but Larry met his gaze squarely. There was no shrinking in his eyes.

Finally Romney spoke: "I've never taken much stock in double penalties. A fellow who surrenders—especially one who rights his wrong—goes through enough hell and suffering whipping himself to the point where he will surrender. You look like a man who has been through the mill of his own mind—which is the roughest in the world." He paused as if not sure of himself for a moment, bent his eyes once more with fierce intensity upon Larry's.

"Young fellow," he said, "when did you get so you could look a man in the eyes and not flinch?"

"I learned that out in the swamp," Larry said.

"Then you learned a heap. I reckon we'll tell the boys a story. You were robbed yesterday by a fellow that run into the swamp. You followed him, sneaked up when he wasn't looking and pitched into him. In the scuffle you got the money and run—before he could shoot you. You hid in the swamp last night so he couldn't find you." Inspiration visited Romney. "I'll even send a bunch of the boys into the swamp to look for that fellow."

Irony edged Larry's voice and the laugh that went with it: "Of course, they'll believe that bright story—no doubt about it!"

Romney straightened up, squared his shoulders.

"Young fellow, they'll believe anything I tell 'em!"

Larry knew that was true, for in that camp Romney was king.

"Sometimes," Romney said, "a good lie beats a bad truth. Specially when a man has already paid—and when the man himself don't tell the lie—when somebody else takes the responsibility. I'm taking it."

"I—I'll be—going then," Larry said.

"I'm sending a man," Romney cut in, "down to tell the boss that I won't need that new fellow."

Larry, unable to speak, could only stare at the foreman. In his heart there was a great pounding and also a great joy.

"And now," said Romney, "I expect if you went up to the tent, May would rustle you some breakfast. I expect she'd be glad to."

He saw the sudden light that flamed in Larry's eyes, and he knew that it was not hunger altogether that prompted Larry's immediate exit. When Larry was gone, Romney talked to himself.

"I ain't the one to make a man pay twice—specially when he's apt to be my son-in-law. I judged him right when I knew he was crooked—and I'll take the responsibility of judging him when I know he's straight."

Halfway to the tent, Larry Kane said good-by forever to any doubts, however faint, that had lingered in his mind. It was as if life itself had been handed to him, fresh, untouched, holding out promise. What a man! That Romney!

Another story by John Randolph Phillips will appear in a future issue.



ANOTHER HOUSEWIFE'S CARE

SINCE the Gann-Longworth social precedence war started, Washington hostesses have quit worrying about whether the guests will enjoy the food. They're too busy wondering if anybody will come.

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.

A GOOD many letters from our readers come into this office, it's true; but not nearly as many as we would like. It seems to us that most magazine readers have no idea how glad an editor is to hear from them. One reason for his pleasure is very practical—the more he knows about his readers' personalities and their likes and dislikes, the more successful his magazine is likely to be. That's plain enough, and very important. But there's another reason an editor likes to get letters from his readers—a reason rather less practical and decidedly more human. An editor is a human being, and he likes to have it impressed on him that the people who read the magazine that is so large a part of his life, the magazine he works so hard to make a good one—he likes to have it brought right home to him that these people are human beings, too. It makes him feel mighty good to get a little bit acquainted with his readers personally, get some idea of the kind of people they are, the lives they live, what they are interested in—and what they think of the magazine; what they like about it, if anything, and what they don't like.

And so, reader, how about sitting down right now, or some time very soon, and writing us a letter, long or short,



telling us something about yourself and THE POPULAR? We are always glad to have the preference coupon that we sometimes print filled in and returned to us. But what we want is a letter.

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS.

IF I didn't have to write this sketch in the first person I could really cut loose and tell you what a wonderful person I am. As it is, I suppose I'll have to be modest. But I *am* a wonder.

Yes, at the age of seventeen—a few scant years from the cradle—I became an author. The thing I was author of was a joke which I sold to the *Youth's Companion* for two dollars. I haven't got the two dollars to prove it, but somewhere in the archives I have the joke.

The reason I didn't become an author even sooner than I did was that I didn't have a typewriter. I believed then that the major portion of the equipment of an author was a typewriter. I still believe it, and so do my friends.

After selling the joke I snatched up a pencil and figured out that by writing twenty jokes a day, with Sundays off, I could laugh at the office boy's job that was looming just beyond graduation day at high school. Twelve thousand five hundred and twenty dollars a year, I decided, would be ample.

Unfortunately, although I wrote twenty jokes a day on my weary typewriter for some time, I never sold another gosh-dinged joke. I was a one-joke man.

So I embarked upon commercial pursuits, such as filling inkwells in Wall Street, ditched that after two and three quarter months, and got a copy boy's job on the morning *Sun*. Later I became a reporter and finally insinuated myself into the position of aviation editor. This job was generally known as "covering flying," but I always stuck out for the title. I was flown approximately ten thousand miles in the course of my career as aviation editor and press agent—I mean director in chief of public relations—for a plane-manufacturing company. In those years I certainly learned lots about flying, including some good. Flying was interesting just after the war—quite interesting.

I have traveled a bit, been a magazine editor, was in the navy during the war, am married and have had lots of other things happen to me; but the climax of my career was in those days when I got paid for riding around in airplanes. As long as the landings were soft so was the job.



GRANDFATHER'S STOCK.

AS it happened, we hadn't had a letter from any Chicago reader for some several days. And then along came one from Member Ellis U. Branson, who lives in the great Midwestern metropolis, and whose letter was worth waiting for:

Have just finished reading "Grandfather's Stock," by Goldman, and it's the funniest

thing I've read in many a moon. Will be looking for more of those stories.

The novel, "Diversey 4932," is no second-rater, either. "Beyond Suez" was excellent. And a story of MacIsaac's, "The Isle of the Fates," was a bell ringer. All of MacIsaac's stories are great.

Silas Tipping does very interesting things, and if he dislikes the term "chip" as applied to small diamonds, he probably will reprove Goldman for using it in "Grandfather's Stock."

THE POPULAR is right there, all right. More power to you.



THEN AG'IN.

Jim Bowker, he said, ef he'd had a fair show,
And a big enough town for his talents to
grow,

And the least bit assistance in hoein' his row,

Jim Bowker, he said,
He'd filled the world full of the sound of his
name,

An' clumb the top round of the ladder of
fame;

It may have been so;

I dunno;

Jest so it might been,

Then ag'in—

But he had 'tarnal luck—everythin' went agin'
him;

The arrers er fortune they allus 'u'd pin him;
So he didn't get no chance to show off *what*
was in him.

Jim Bowker, he said,
Ef he'd had a fair show, you couldn't tell
where he'd come,
And the feats he'd 'a' done, an' the heights
he'd 'a' clumb—

It may have been so;

I dunno;

Jest so it might been,

Then ag'in—

But we're all like Jim Bowker, thinks I,
more or less—

Charge fate for our bad luck, ourselves for
success,

An' give fortune the blame for all our dis-
tress,

As Jim Bowker, he said.

Ef it hadn' been for luck an' misfortune an'
sich,

We might 'a' been famous an' might 'a' been
rich.

It might be jest so;

I dunno;

Jest so it might been,

Then ag'in—

SAM WALTER FOSS (1858-1911).

LET'S HAVE HUMAN HEROES.

MOST of you will probably agree with Member H. B. Lockwood, of Elizabeth, New Jersey, when he asks for heroes in fiction with some of the limitations of living men. We hope that our POPULAR heroes are human beings. Here's Member Lockwood's letter:

Please don't think I'm trying to pat you on the back from any ulterior motive, but as Long John Silver might have said: "When I first seen you I said that there magazine is smart as paint."

Funny, isn't it, how one can wander all over the country—and sometimes a bit over the line and a bit out to sea—and never have any excitement or adventure worth telling about? Of course, there have been several trifling things—got to be a few—but, somehow, none of the bullets ever fired at me hit me in the *shoulder*, as so many seem to hit the heroes in the wild and woolly tales. I know, however, that a burn caused by a bullet feels sore for quite a while, and I imagine a bullet smacked into that convenient shoulder would make me disinclined to punch the stuffing out of five or six desperadoes, as so many heroes seem to do.

I've had my share of train wrecks, shipwrecks, et cetera, and have been unloaded from horses. Possibly I'm entitled to file some notches on my gun, too, but nothing to go raving about.

In my wanderings I've learned to do with

very little sleep—hence my habit of reading. I'll have to vote with that big bunch of readers who prefer accuracy of local color and accuracy of mechanical detail. I recall my disgust when starting an alleged story, by a lady author who has since gained not a little success, wherein the hero, kneeling beside his stateroom door aboard a vessel, felt one of the deck planks move as some unknown person outside shifted position. Some rotten ship! Then, in his pajamas, said hero wanders out in the dark cabin, bumps into several lady passengers and hands out no less than four revolvers for their self-defense. Some arsenal! I don't know how the story ended.

But even as critical as I have become I thoroughly enjoyed "The Genial Mr. Palmer." I've met him—many of him. And I'd like to meet him again. So if friend Chisholm has a good supply of ink, tell him to sling it.

By the way, the current news carries an item stating that the United States navy seems to get indignant because the movies show the gobs in an unfavorable light. Why the devil don't they have the nurse put the bloomin' gobs to bed at sundown then, instead of permitting them to cruise around town after dark and start something? I guess if there were no illuminated sailors the movies wouldn't have thought about it at all, because they seem to put into their films only the subjects the public knows something about.

Pardon all this rambling. The main thing I want you to know is that I like THE POPULAR and its good, clean stories that entertain but do not offend.

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

SPEED! This is the age of speed.

Everything, everybody, is infected with the speed fever. We look at horses nowadays with curiosity and a kind of pity, and as for oxen—we break into laughter when we think that they were once used for transportation. Our ideas of speed change quickly. The stories of other days told vividly of stagecoaches hurtling savagely down mountain roads, lurching madly around deathly curves on two wheels. Was that speed? Other thrilling yarns described the thunderous pounding of snorting fire-engine horses, their metal shoes striking sparks off the cobblestones at night. Was that speed? Later there came the automobile, and goggled racers, covered with dust, clung feverishly to their steering wheels and burned up the ground, while the thousands in the grand stands howled.

* * * *

BUT even then we weren't satisfied.

We wanted speed! We felt that we were still pygmies, and that our speed was paltry compared to the dashing and swooping of the comets we saw in the black night sky. We wanted speed! Lo, we made wings for ourselves, and forged mighty engines to help us vie with the comets. In every direction, in every way, we strove gallantly in the bitter war with the limitations nature imposed on us. We battled against the ceiling of the earth, found that we could not breathe up there, and so put on oxygen masks and pressed on into still higher strata. Five, almost ten miles—and still we were not satisfied. We learned to sneer at the breadth of oceans.

* * * *

AND now, what next? What can we do now? The whole world is trembling with a fierce longing for more speed, more powerful engines. We look

at the moon and picture vast contraptions that will carry us, meteorlike, thither. Like new Columbuses, we want to stand at last on that silvery, treeless, volcano-gutted planet and shove our standards in the hard, white soil. We gaze at Mars, straining our eyes at what seem to be canals—the products of intelligence. Can it be, we wonder, that other intelligent people live there in great, white cities and peer at us through strange telescopes? And our hearts strain toward Mars, but without hope.

* * * *

AND so we turn from personal, physical speed and glory in our electric waves, in television and radio. Our eager voices flit in a twinkling from San Francisco to London. We go like mad through the air in great planes to speed up business in another city, and our voices are carried back to our offices, carrying on and urging on the business we have left temporarily behind. Before and behind us the great wheels of commerce whirl on like vast gyroscopes.

Speed has affected writing. No longer do the first-class stories of to-day plod sleepily and gently along. To-day's ideal story does not allow its reader to recline in a hammock and munch chocolates; instead he or she perches excitedly on the edge of a straight chair and follows the tale with popping eyes.

* * * *

THE measured ponderous sentences of Macaulay are unheard-of to-day, even in the best writing. Now we have short sentences, sentences whose meanings are instantly clear. A character is drawn with a single swift, graphic word. A dramatic situation or a woodland scene is daubed in suggestively with one master stroke of a brush, as it were. Writers realize nowadays that their

readers have vivid imaginations. A forest may be described without picturing each individual tree. O. Henry reached the ideal of swift characterization when he described a person as "the man with the nose."

* * * *

AND why has all this come about?

Why do we want clear, gripping stories? Why are we out of patience with sleepy, sweet tales about benign, soft people? Why? Because we are alert and alive! We are all doing something, working, traveling. We travel more than the people of any other civilization. Our toes itch for the accelerator. We realize that time is precious, valuable. It means money and security. And in the stories we read we want to get the best value in the shortest space of time. We read stories between railway stations, or while waiting for trains.

THE POPULAR reflects the snap and pep of the present day. Our authors know their stuff, and never hem nor haw before getting into the meat of their stories. Their characters speak up naturally and colloquially like men and women, not like clothes models or stilted grammarians. In the next issue you will have a wonderful chance to see exactly what we mean. Read Thomas and Woodward Boyd's speedy, up-to-date novel about two gay and fearless Americans who rush into the blazing heart of the Arabian desert in search of a kidnaped girl. And do they ride on ambling, lazy-eyed camels? No, sir! Their steed is a great, throbbing, shiny car that eats up the desert miles, spurns the mountains and carries them to a wild, hidden city that seethes with such rapid, bloodcurdling adventure that you will be left gasping.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

In the Second September Number

A Minute With—

Seen in the Wilderness

GEORGE MARSH

The Veiled Ruler of Ghazale A Complete Novel

THOMAS and WOODWARD BOYD

The Beautiful Ballyhoo

LEONARD LUPTON

Straight Shooting

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

A Two-part Story—Part II

Silver Weds Among the Goldbergs

RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

The Devil's Widow

SEAN O'LARKIN

A Four-part Story—Part IV

A Flyer in Bandit Stock

HOLMAN DAY

Horse-Ketchum

DANE COOLIDGE

A Six-part Story—Part V

The Popular Club

A Chat With You

THE EDITORS

And Other Striking Features.

POP—11A



Outdoors adored...indoors ignored

OUTDOORS they adored this gay Philadelphia girl. She was continually surrounded with admirers. But indoors it was another story. She was hopelessly out of things.

The truth is that her trouble which went unnoticed in the open, became instantly apparent in the drawing room.

No intelligent person dares to assume complete freedom from halitosis (unpleasant breath).

Surveys show one person out of three is an occasional or habitual offender. This is due to the fact that odor-producing conditions (often caused by germs) arise constantly in even normal mouths.

The one way of keeping your breath always beyond suspicion is to rinse the mouth with full strength Listerine every morning and night and before meeting others.

Being a germicide capable of killing even the *Staphylococcus Aureus* (pus) germ in 15 seconds, full strength Listerine first strikes at the cause of odors, and then, being a powerful deodorant, destroys the odors themselves. Yet it is entirely safe to use. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

THE SAFE ANTISEPTIC
LISTERINE

*It's all the same to
me—just so I get a*

CAMEL

