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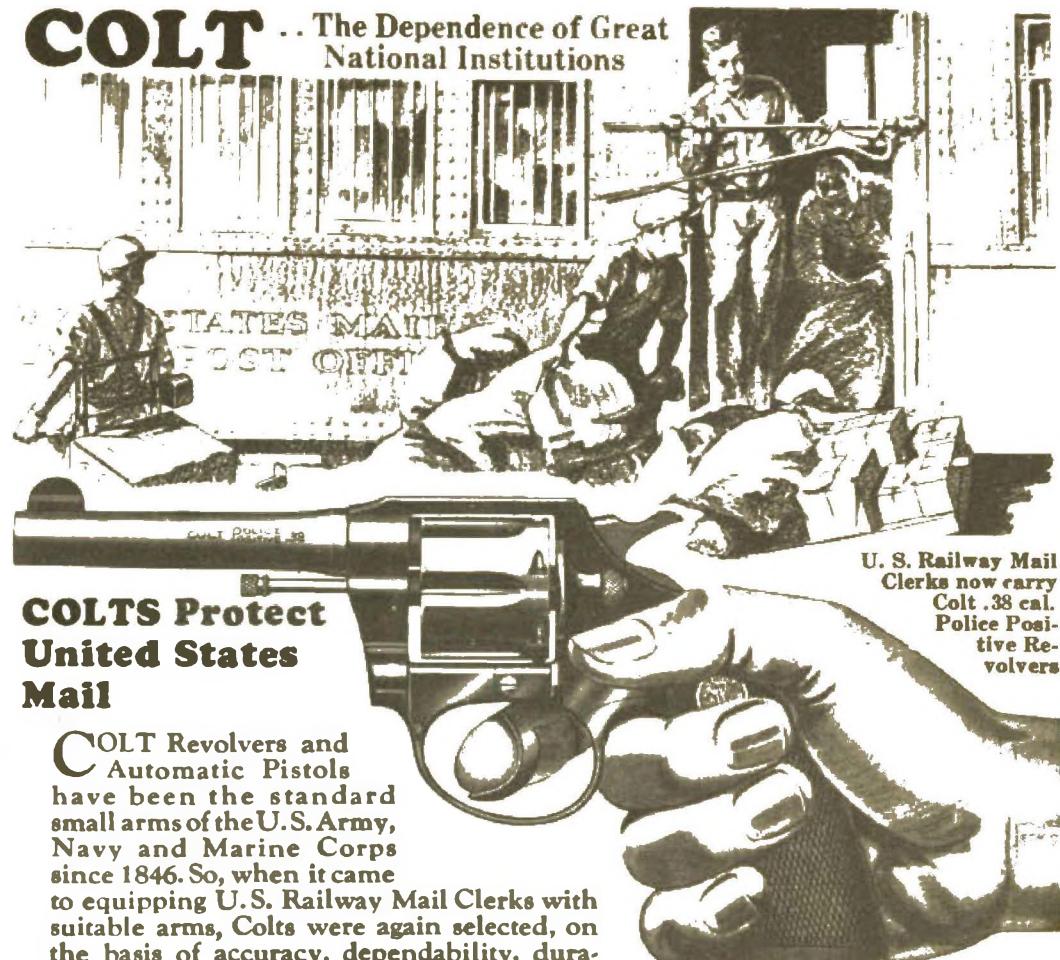
ONE HEAD, WELL DONE

— BY JOHN D. SWAIN —

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PRIZE CONTEST
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Volume LXXXIII

Number 5

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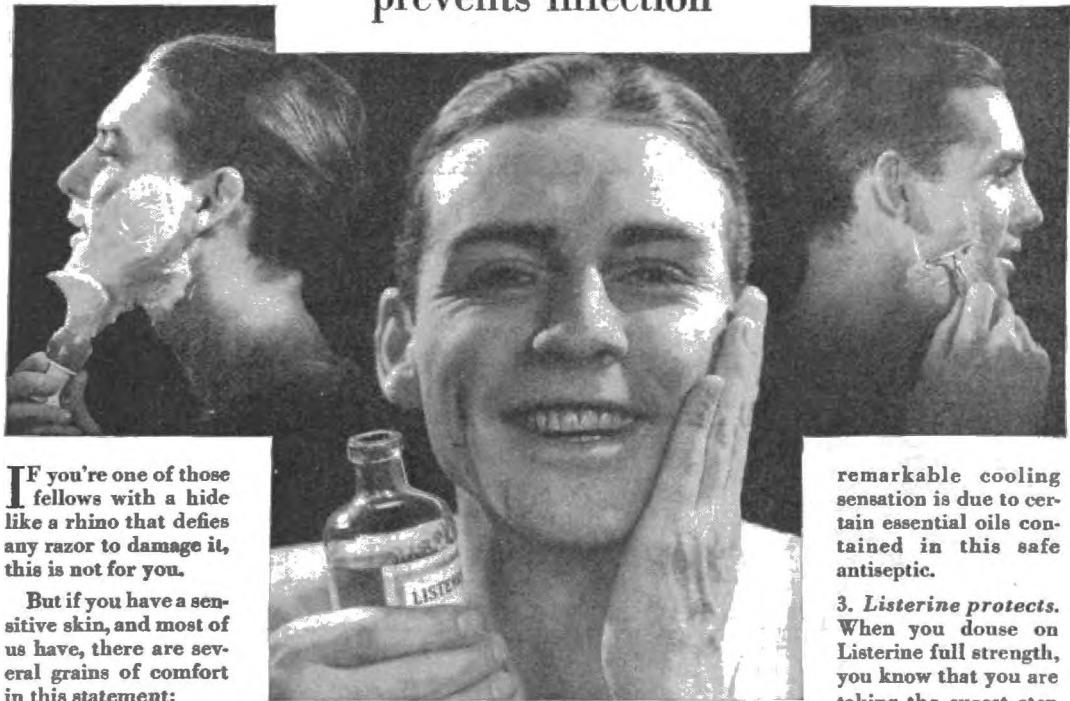
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By

Eleanor Elliott Carroll

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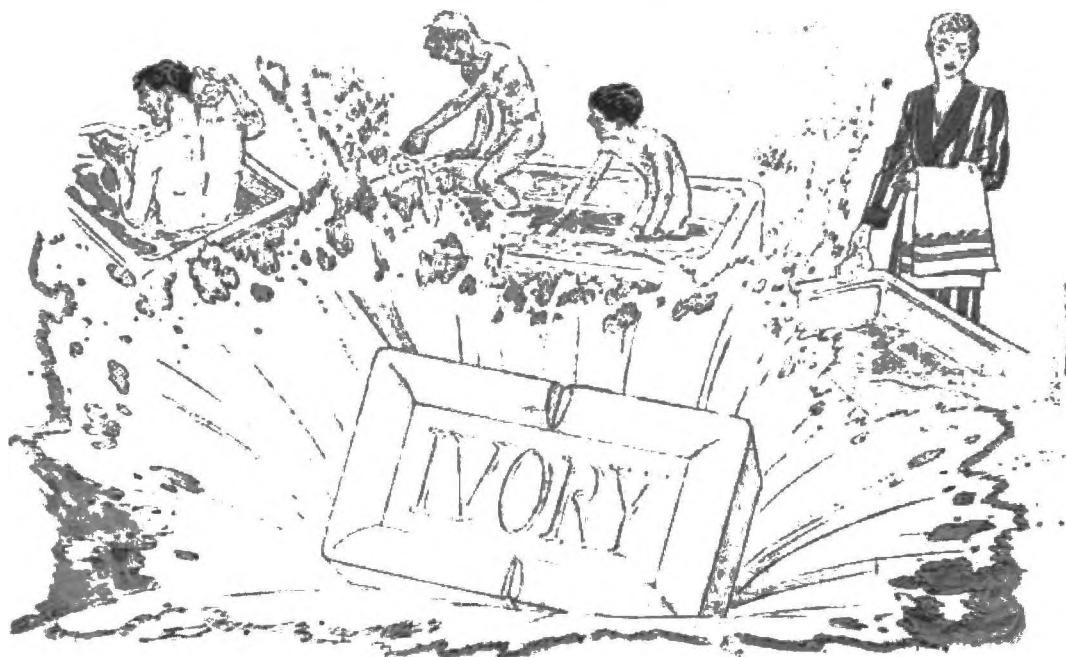
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Revelations of a famous puritan

For a whole week I'd been sitting on a grocer's shelf in an Ivory wrapper . . . dissatisfied . . . longing for a little place beside a tub that I could call my own!

When Mrs. Tompkins bought me, I may have seemed white and calm, but I knew that at last I would discover what it means to be a cake of Ivory Soap.

Well, this morning I learned *all*. When Mr. Tompkins opened the bathtub faucets, I wanted to get in the water! But I didn't expect Mr. Tompkins to *throw* me in. As I shot downwards, my short innocent life flashed before me. I thought, "This is the end!" But it wasn't, for I *floated*.

When Mr. Tompkins took his bath sponge to me I excitedly foamed. And the more I foamed the better friends Mr. Tompkins and I grew to be. My coat of bubbles was very becoming to him!

I had a rest until the children took their evening baths. Then I did fourteen high dives without once hitting bottom. And *foam*! I actually reduced my waistline cleaning up two pairs of very grubby knees. But when I got through I was proud of those children.

Mrs. Tompkins looked so tired that I was very glad to do a little overtime work for her just before she went to bed. I bubbled out my sympathy in heaps of soothing bubbles. And afterwards she did look as *rosy* and *comforted* as a sleepy baby.

I think I'm going to be so busy that I shan't have time to continue this diary. However, it does my heart good to know that the Tompkinses like me so well. So I'm going to *wear* myself down to a sliver for them!

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TN

Top-Notch Magazine

To Glass-house Dwellers

SOME weeks ago I set down on this page my indignation at persons who habitually insult dumb animals by applying their names to less worthy creatures of the human race, and now I would take a whack at persons who habitually speak of all people from foreign shores as "wops" and "kikes" and "chinks" and all that sort of thing.

Ignorant men are suspicious and intolerant of unfamiliar things, and they dispose of them with contempt and general bad manners. The intelligent man, however, welcomes the stranger for the good he hopes to find in him.

If I were an Italian, I'd thank the ill-mannered man for calling me a wop, and I'd tell him about all the great and noble wops who did so much toward building our civilization: Julius Cæsar, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Dante, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Mazzini, and a few more of the thousands of illustrious heroes and artists and scientists. And if I were a Jew, I'd smile at the ill-mannered man and tell him what thousands of Jews have done to make statecraft, science, philosophy, and music what they are to-day.

I'm proud of being a Yankee, because Yankees have done such a number of great and worthy things; but I've known some mighty mean and low-down Yankees, and I find that it's always the same in every town and state and nation of the whole world—wherever you go you'll find the best and the worst.

The Editor

One Head Well Done

By John D. Swain



VISITORS to the city of Kemper usually find something pleasant to say about the estate of Beulah Land, which lies somewhat to the north of the river approach, well beyond the rolling mills and foundries whose smoke wreathes the town in a perpetual and melancholy fog. Beulah Land is the oldest holding in Kemper; its mellow, brick manse, colonial Dutch in design, with walls to which ivy two centuries old clings, stands in the midst of about ten acres of smooth lawns dotted with many picturesque trees.

It is the ancestral estate of the Vedders; and the Reverend Peter Vedder, a retired missionary, the last of his line, save for some nieces and nephews, had for the past four or five years lived here, in company with a great array of

solemn-faced, or pink and jolly, ancestral portraits, some unusual early colonial furniture and silver, a few servants, and his memories of strange adventures in many lands.

Often, in steaming jungle or entrancing isle, or on some bleak plateau of a colder clime, he had closed his eyes to rest upon the vision of this, his home until he graduated from college and then from the seminary. For long years it had heartened him in the performance of heroic or fatiguing labors.

In good time, advancing years and the missionary board reprieved him, and he turned his steps toward home and a well-earned rest. And with him he had brought many curious slips and roots to plant about the broad acres of the place he had named Beulah Land. Also, from time to time during his labors in

tropical fields, he had sent home cuttings to be planted for him, awaiting his return. Thus it was that amid many trees of native growth, one might see whole ranks of Japanese pagoda trees, looking like crippled mendicants raising twisted limbs in supplication; and not far from the house, he had caused to be erected, from designs of his own, a sort of pagoda of masonry, with open sides and many-colored tile roof culminating in a gilded bell. A lazy little brook loafed through the grounds, and in places where it widened out its surface was covered with gigantic pink water lilies, brought from Egypt.

A good place to look upon, restful, surrounded by a hawthorne hedge not too high to look over, yet almost impenetrable to trespassers. But the wide gates were never closed, and wayfarers were welcome at any time. In summer, the good man always had tea served in the pagoda, with little delicacies to which long years in far countries had accustomed his palate. There were tiny salt fish, dried in the hot sand, known as Bombay duck; queer chutneys, enticing marmalades in fat-bellied earthen pots, pungent tobacco for smokers, and always plenty of very thin slices of toast and unsalted butter. The Reverend Peter Vedder seldom lacked company at tea, some of them representatives of the older families with whom he had grown up, others frankly curious strangers whom he never repulsed, not a few bearing subscription lists to which he nearly always contributed.

More than a few of those who slowed down while passing Beulah Land, to rest their eyes on its placid and tree-shaded vistas, beheld something more startling than might have been looked for in this serene abode. Those beholding it for the first time always supposed it to be an unusually large monkey, or rather, an ape; but even when familiarity had taught them other-

wise, they never failed to pause, and smile. For, with inconceivable agility, the figure disported itself in the trees of Beulah Land, swinging by the arms, letting go and seeming to fly through the air, to grasp unerringly a stout limb fifteen or even twenty feet away. And the figure was always barefooted, ambidextrous, and unquestionably happy.

It was natural to compare this aboreal gymnast to an ape; but there was this difference, besides that of size. Even a monkey does, now and then, fall from a tree. This figure never did. Indeed, he could spot any ordinary monkey two coconuts, and beat him to the top of the tallest tulip tree in the yard. The performer had been brought home by the clergyman, and was by birthright a citizen of the mysterious island of Borneo. For many years in that country, he had served as Vedder's valet, cook, and bodyguard. So great was his affection for his master that when his master returned to America, the little brown man insisted on coming along; and glad indeed was Vedder to bring him.

The missionary was accustomed to refer to him, not without a certain noble pride, as "one of my converts." And in saying this, he was entirely honest. He supposed that his little man had embraced the doctrines which he had taught. He appeared to have done so. He attended church services and sat respectfully through long and incomprehensible sermons, and when questioned by Vedder as to his soul, always tried to answer what he thought was expected of him. He wore, usually, civilized garments; even endured a collar and necktie, and shoes: though as a rule he compromised on sandals, and when he relaxed thoroughly, went barefoot.

Despite his long association with white men, he could barely understand simple sentences, and his vocabulary did not cover more than a hundred words. His tribal name was so impossible to Western lips and ears, that he had

come to be known, even to Vedder, as "H'lo," this representing as well as could be, the Borneo gentleman's attempt to utter our national salute.

At frequent intervals, he performed his daily dozen, swinging from limb to limb of the trees. Weighing not over a hundred and ten pounds, he was prodigiously strong, as well as quick.

He could not only walk on his hands, but upon his extended finger tips. He could, from a dead stand, leap ten feet forward, backward, sideways, like a great spider. And with the blowpipe, one of which he had brought along with him, he could bring a swift-flying bird to ground, pierced by a feathered dart which, in H'lo's native island, he had known how to impregnate with a poison that meant certain death to man or beast. Also, he could use the native sword-knife of his people neatly and effectively. But these gory exploits he had long since put aside.

His position in Vedder's household was a trifle vague. He was listed as a servant, and had quarters in the upper story of the old stable, now used as a garage. He followed Vedder about like a spaniel, but his services were nominal. Usually, he served the tea things, clad in white linen, with a turban at one end, and sandals at the other. It always pleased the guests. Otherwise, the housekeeper, or maid, could have done it as well, or better.

Vedder would have been greatly surprised had he been able to look into H'lo's heart. There he would have learned that the silent, wooden-faced little man heartily pitied the venerable scholar. For H'lo had been, in his youth, apprenticed to a native priest, or medicine man, or miracle worker; had, after serving his time, become the *puri-puri* of a village of head-hunters. With a few mango seeds, a tube of bamboo, some gums and spices and

herbs, and a sharp knife, he could have stepped onto the apron of any vaudeville stage and stopped the show. There was no limit to the salary he might have demanded, and received; but it never occurred to him to capitalize the secrets he could work, but could not himself explain.

He knew, however, that his venerable master, a holy man, was unable to do so much as palm a pebble, or practice the simplest ventriloquism, or hypnotism. Even the rudiments of magic were unknown to him. And yet, while utterly unable to appease, or evoke, the spirits of the departed, Vedder gravely proclaimed his knowledge of eternity, and the future life.

Little H'lo sadly shook his head. It was beyond his poor brains to reason out! But he loved his master, and Vedder had once risked his own life to save his; had treated him with unfailing kindness, had never poked fun at him. Therefore, it behooved H'lo, as a loyal Borneo gentleman, to pretend to believe in the Reverend Peter Vedder's creed, and to be a faithful member of his church. Secretly, behind the old stable, H'lo from time to time appeased his own evil spirits, and worshiped his gods, in the traditional manner of his race for countless centuries.

It had been said that the old missionary had come home to rest; and yet, he didn't rest. Though well stricken in years, he was still erect and stalwart, and above all he had the missionary zeal. Fifty years of fighting against the devil had rendered him incapable of sitting still and uttering no protest. And the city he returned to was a far different place from the big, sleepy town he had left. It had grown incredibly richer, and it had accumulated slums. In tune with the hectic times, it had jazzed along the highway of fast cars, night clubs, road houses, and frantic pleasures. Corruption reigned secure in high places. Politics was wedded to

bootlegging, and to worse than that. Protection could be bought. Revenge could be sated, for a price.

The year that young Vedder had sailed away to his first missionary field, in Ceylon, a young girl of Kemper had won renown and favorable comment in the one city newspaper for working the most decorative worsted motto in a Sunday School competition. The very week he returned, a battered veteran, a young girl of about the same age had just broken the world's record by climbing a tall flagpole, lashed to a bos'n's chair, and remaining aloft, and in view of cheering multitudes, for twenty-six days and nights, having her food and drink and cigarettes hoisted to her on a pulley.

When Vedder left home, wine was to be had in prosperous homes, ale in all homes. On New Year's Day, every young man donned his best clothes, and called on all the girls he knew, and was served with punch or even champagne, and cakes, and sandwiches, and returned home late at night the worse for dyspepsia, or befuddlement. But when Vedder returned, wine and strong drink was officially banished; and high-school children were drinking varnish-removers and etching-fluid from expensive crystal and silver flasks. While Vedder was still a seminary student, a company of players had been chased from Kemper because two women members of the cast appeared in black tights. He returned to find that revues were popular with the best Kemperites, and that the entire wardrobe of the chorus of eighty might have been packed into a lunch basket.

THE crusading blood of Peter Vedder curdled in his ministerial veins when, after some delay in getting settled, he began to look about him and to note with a troubled, and finally with a kindling eye, the sin which seemed to be stalking by day, and especially by

night, along the highways of his native town. Most of those he had known as a boy and a young man, were dead, or had migrated to distant places. Few landmarks were left.

His own estate was the exception; the proudly exhibited historic clemesne of Kemper. Of money, he had more than enough. His forbears had been thrifty men; real-estate values had advanced enormously. Had he wished to sell his land and house, he could have retired almost a millionaire. But this was furthest from his mind.

The hours he had planned to spend in pleasant reading in the great, dark library, or beneath one of his trees on the lawn, he devoted to scanning the newspapers, or to frowning consideration of the open corruption that offended him both as a citizen of Kemper, and as a missioner of God. He was born a fighter; and he had fought in countries where life was never too easy and death was often at one's elbow.

He girded up his loins for battle, and presently became a thorn in the flesh of certain influential parties. He was too important to be ignored; his reputation was more than local, and great men visited him from time to time. He had what the Kemper bosses termed "pull," but which was really character, recognized by important State and national officials. He could get things done; make investigations function. When one of his fiery articles was too hot for the local press to dare use, he would have it printed at his own expense on dodgers, and circulated where it would do the most damage. He bought whole pages of newspaper advertising for his campaigns for decency. Not afraid to call names out loud, he made a great many furtive gentlemen exceedingly uncomfortable. He became, in short, a nuisance.

Which brings us to the present year, and to the season of late spring, when

the trees were putting on their smartest and thickest gowns of green, and the lawns of Beulah Land were dense velvet carpets, and little frogs sang anthems in the crooked brook that traversed the fields surrounded by the hawthorn hedge. And it brings us also to a part of town where the wonders of budding nature are not highly regarded, and where the denizens prefer stuffy rooms, the windows of which look out onto blank walls; rooms with stout chairs and sticky tables, and an atmosphere of tobacco and redistilled alcohol. Such a room as that in the back of "Gory" Hammond's near-beer parlor, which was neither a parlor, nor stocked with near-beer.

In this sanctum the topic under consideration was nothing less than the future of the Reverend Peter Vedder. His accomplishments were aired freely and fluently. It is true that much that was vital to his life history was not so much as touched upon. There was nothing, for instance, concerning his heroic efforts during an Indian famine, when he, almost unaided, saved a whole province from being wiped out. Nothing of that time when, at the risk of his life, he effected a treaty of peace between wild tribes far up in the mountain border of Tibet. Nor of his arriving at one of the sink-holes of the Far East, an island city famous for its vice and squalor and its traffic in drugs, and of his leaving it years afterward, a credit to its island neighbors.

The accomplishments of Vedder since his return to his home city were all that interested the assembled biographers in Gory Hammond's dive. The fact that he had harassed the bootlegging trust until the price of Canadian ale had been forced up by more than two dollars a case; and the other fact that a certain street down beyond the railroad tracks now contained no less than thirty empty tenements. Also, that some half dozen gunmen and dope peddlers were now

languishing in cells, instead of speeding in costly roadsters in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

It was evident that the united opinion of all present was that Peter Vedder must go. He must be given the works; taken for a ride. Blotted out, in short. So that it was a mere formality when, everybody having exercised his full rights of free speech, Gory spoke, with the half grin, half snarl that characterized him in his moments of lighter humor.

"All those in favor——" he grunted. "Cont'rey minded? It's a *vote!* Le's have another li'l' drink, boys."

A simple meeting, free from malice. If there had been no disposition to glorify the missionary's record, there was likewise none to indulge in any expression of hatred. He was in their way; a nuisance. In a strictly business proposition, he was a matter of useless overhead, and as such, the city of Kemper ought not to have to carry him any longer.

Back home, in his old-fashioned library, Peter Vedder sat reading quietly from Volume 3 of a "History of Civilization During the Middle Ages." He had no inkling that he had been the topic of a business meeting far downtown; held by men whose faces were not familiar to him, and only one or two of whom he had heard of by name.

The Reverend Peter Vedder was shot on a mild night, about half past ten o'clock, with a full moon peering redly through a slight haze. It was the sort of an evening to bewitch one into prowling about across broad stretches of lawn, on which the moon cast the umber shadows of many trees. Deep in the hollow where the brook ran, the frogs were piping; the scent of lilacs charged the air. Almost perfect solitude reigned, for the residential street on which Beulah Land fronted was not one of the automobile arteries leading into

the city, and after dark there was little traffic. The time and place were well chosen; also, it appeared that the unknown assailant had used a gun with a silencer attached. Nobody could be found who had heard, in the stillness, anything like the sound of a shot; and there were plenty near enough to have heard one.

THREE had been a sole witness. The little Borneo man, H'lo, as has been said, occupied an upper room in the stable, now used as a garage. Vedder drove his own car and employed no chauffeur, so that H'lo was alone nights.

Even more strongly than his master he had been wheedled by the splendor of the full moon, which had occupied a powerful place in the rites and ceremonies of his youth. He did not any longer bow down to and invoke the lunar goddess, but he loved to steal softly through the glades and copses. He had the faculty for seeing by night almost as well as a cat could; on this hazy night he could have read newspaper print, had he been able to read at all. Not in any way intruding upon his master's solitary ramble, nor keeping watch over him, since he had no inkling that he was in any danger, he was yet not far away when the shot was fired.

The "Croaker," as the agent of Gory Hammond and those higher up knew him, had returned to the city to report, and to build up his alibi. He had slipped away from the little back room, had seemingly been absent but a few minutes; had gone hatless and coatless from a game of stud poker. Outside, he had slipped into coat and cap, and located his automatic. It was arranged that his companions should, if necessary, swear that the Croaker had been present all the evening and until well toward morning. To that end, the patrolman on beat had been invited in twice, and given a drink. Each time, he saw the

Croaker, apparently absorbed in the game, shirt-sleeved and with a pile of chips before him, and a half-empty glass.

Slipping back into the little room, his errand accomplished and his "rod" hidden, Gory Hammond had looked up, searching his veiled eyes.

"See anybody?" he asked.

The Croaker shook his head. "Nope. Only a little black stable-boy quite a ways off. And, bo! *Y'oughta seen that bozo climb a tree!*"

Hammond looked troubled. "How near was he?"

The Croaker spat on the floor. "Too far to make me. And ya can take it from me, he's up in that tree yet!"

Hammond nodded, and rifled a fresh pack of cards. The Croaker reached for a bottle, and poured himself a stiff drink. About the table, a little sigh of relief passed. A good job, well done!

The Croaker was wrong in dismissing the little black stable-boy so easily. It is true that H'lo had climbed a tree with surprising speed. It was instinctive in him to do this in the presence of a danger he could not avert by force or stealth. And he could not avert what had happened to Peter Vedder.

He was at a considerable distance. To the Croaker, a more vague figure, which he was just able to identify as not belonging to the Nordic race. But H'lo was able to tell a great deal more about the assassin. Despite his grief and terror, he did not lose his head at all. Eyes, ears, nose, were all alert. He had caught the flicker of a shadow emerging from a tall syringa bush some paces back of the clergyman; a shadow that moved, on a windless night. Instantly thereafter, the shadow had taken form as a man: a man who, without attracting the attention of his victim, presented a black, shiny tube, from whose end poured forth a red streak, and a bad smell.

There was also a noise; but it was a

very small noise. One that would not have attracted the attention of a chance passer on the highway. H'lo knew it for one of the weapons of civilization: a weapon that killed. He himself was unarmed. Dead, he could not avenge his master. He climbed a tree at a rate that would have left a Barbary ape breathless.

With this act, he passed from the notice of the Croaker. But he was far more dangerous aloft than on the ground. He peered through thick branches, saw Vedder's reel, and swing about facing his assailant, who poured two more shots into his body ere it collapsed. Then the killer walked swiftly and, as he supposed, silently, away, keeping to the shadows cast by the trees.

His steps were perfectly audible to H'lo, who, swinging soundlessly from limb to limb, overtook him and followed him at a little distance, until he came to the hedge, over which he vaulted, to be lost to sight down the dark road.

Thus far, H'lo followed; then he hurried back to see if he could do anything for his master. But in the meantime, he had got the Croaker's spoor; filed and indexed his peculiar scent in his mind. To H'lo all men smelled as differently as they looked. And all white men smelled badly! Even the Reverend Peter Vedder smelled sickishly of soap and sometimes of bay rum. He had noted the walk of the Croaker; here again, all men differed to H'lo. No two walked alike. He observed the color of his hair as shown under his cap; the eyes he could not tell about. But the slit mouth, with the half lift at one corner, and one ear with a mangled lobe, bitten in some ancient fight and improperly treated, so that it was thickened and scarred—these, and other details, H'lo would never forget.

Hurrying back to where Vedder lay, he found him seemingly dead. He was

unconscious, and he bled badly. When he saw this, H'lo knew that he was not dead. Dead man do not bleed. Ripping off his coat and tearing aside the shirt, H'lo found all three of the bullet holes. He found Vedder's handkerchief, tore it up into wads, stuffed them into the wounds. This was highly unhygienic, but it served. After which, he picked his master up easily, though his master outweighed him two to one, slung him over a shoulder, and trotted up to the house. Shortly, a hysterical housekeeper was telephoning the police, who arrived with a surgeon. Vedder's own physician arrived shortly thereafter.

The police grilled H'lo. That is what police are for: to grill people. The results were satisfactory, as far as they went. Going out to the scene of the shooting, footprints were faintly visible. They came from a syringa bush, and they led back to the hedge, where broken twigs showed that somebody had crossed. It was H'lo who pointed out the faint tracks whenever the police with their flashlights failed. The assailant had unfortunately not dropped any of those clews that are always dropped in good fiction. There wasn't so much as a coat button, not even a shred of cloth torn off by a branch of the trees the Croaker had skirted.

It was clear to the police that H'lo was not guilty. His loyalty was attested by the servants. It wasn't believable that he had been in possession of an automatic, with a silencer. And the sergeant in charge, and, later on, his superiors, knowing of necessity something of the conditions prevailing in Kemper, and of the cramp the Reverend Peter Vedder had put in the styles of certain worthies, set forth to look the underworld over. They might be tainted with graft, to some extent, a few of their higher officials might even have secret traffic with the bootlegging barons: but the cold-blooded murder of

a famous citizen like Peter Vedder must be punished. It was with entire unanimity that the Kemper police acted. Their plain-clothes men swarmed out like bees from a hive. The hunt was on.

H'lo, handicapped though he was by having a vocabulary of a one-year-old child, might have supplied more details than he chose to. He could have drawn so good a picture of the man who had stolen upon his master as he walked under the full moon that the police would have recognized him who was known in the underworld as the Croaker. They might or might not have been able to pin it on him; they certainly would have given him the works, a three or four-day continuous session of the third degree. Anyhow, they would have made the pinch.

But they got no details from H'lo. Why should he tell them? In all fairness, by all the rights of sportsmanship, the man belonged to him, to H'lo. Let the police find out for themselves. He, H'lo, would make his own play. In his own way, he would see that the wheels of justice turned, even though they might not twirl in conventional style.

MEANWHILE, Peter Vedder, still unconscious, lay in his bed, as good as dead. His chest had been X-rayed. Two eminent surgeons had joined his physician, and the police surgeon, in conference. A trained nurse hovered about. In the hall outside, a policeman sat, waiting to take any dying statement that might be forthcoming. And, his grilling by the police at an end, H'lo was back in his garage chamber, kneeling down on the floor, where in a small earthen dish smoldered a strange collection of objects he had kept by him for just such emergencies.

There were the whiskers of a black tomcat, some parings of Vedder's finger nails, a sticky gum he had brought

back from the Borneo jungle, onto which he had squeezed one or two drops of his own blood, from a pricked finger. The whole was mixed with sundry scraps of rag and paper, and smelled very badly, but was, or so H'lo believed, grateful to the nostrils of sundry, bloody-minded spirits he was accustomed to invoke in hours of need.

And what greater need could there be, thought the little brown man as he swayed on his knees and muttered queer incantations, than to repay to the full the evil man who had crept upon his master unawares, and shot him first in the back, and then twice more in the chest? Later on, H'lo would pray for his recovery. But that demanded an entirely different procedure, directed to different spirits. The first thing to do, as he saw it, was to make sure that his master were avenged. Recovery, desirable as it was, much as he loved him, was secondary to this.

Beside him, as he knelt alone in the dark room, lay his *kris*, a heavy sword-knife whose beautifully polished steel glimmered where it caught the faint rays that filtered in through drawn shutters in his one window. Its blade was patterned in a wave, not dissimilar to the humbler bread cutter of our households. Thus, its cutting surface was tripled in effectiveness; and so razorkeen was it that H'lo could toss a straw into the air, and sever it as it was drifting downward. And so lightning quick was it wielder, that he could cut the straw twice before it fell. This weapon was indeed a part of his religion and was ordinarily kept in a lacquer scabbard bearing mystic symbols.

H'lo's time was his own. His services to his master were perfunctory. He received no actual wages, having little or no use for money; but in a leather bag he had quite a sum tucked away, and he could have had much more by simply asking for it.

He was not a familiar figure on the

Kemper streets, although he often accompanied Peter Vedder when the latter drove his car. Inasmuch as Vedder had never learned to speak more than a few short phrases in any Borinese dialect, conversation between master and man was negligible. Their sole tie was a queer sort of affection largely based on misunderstanding. To Vedder, his little man was a converted heathen of slender mentality. To H'lo, Vedder was a noble gentleman of feeble intellect, and a priest without power. They got along admirably.

From this hour, H'lo began to appear more often on the streets of Kemper. He went out mostly after dark, and frequented the less savory quarters of the town. His knowledge bridged nothing of the local political condition, the organized vice that prevailed in certain places. But his instinct told him where he would be most likely to encounter the man who had shot Vedder; and it was not very long before his patience was rewarded.

He met up with the Croaker lounging in front of a billiard parlor; and, keeping unobtrusively in the shadows, and biding his time with the patience of the savage hunter, he trailed him to Gory Hammond's place. Thereafter, he established the fact that this was the Croaker's regular hangout; and henceforth H'lo made this neighborhood his own ambush.

He found a dark doorway across the street, the doorway of one of the houses Peter Vedder had caused to be vacated; and here he watched night after night, since he could not deal with the Croaker while he was surrounded by his cronies, most or all of whom were armed.

It was not that H'lo feared these, or hesitated to give his own life in order to take that of his enemy; but he feared failure. He had a deep respect for the weapons of the white man. Furthermore, in order to make his revenge com-

plete, it was desirable that the Croaker should die, while H'lo went unscathed.

Meanwhile, in his upper chamber, Peter Vedder was really getting better. A rugged constitution, coupled with a powerful will to live, formed just the partnership his skillful physicians needed. They ventured to issue a bulletin stating that the crisis had been passed, and that barring a relapse or a complication, Vedder would, in time, be as good as new. But meanwhile, he could not be moved.

It was a matter of many nights of fruitless watching ere H'lo got his chance. Nights when he blended with the dark shadows of the empty doorway, his *kris* thrust through his belt and extending down on the inside of his trouser leg, sheathed in its lacquered scabbard.

There came a night when a dark car drew up in the alley beside Gory's place; and toward midnight, the Croaker and two companions emerged and took their places within. The powerful car moved noiselessly up the alley and onto the street. Its driver piloted, as he believed, three paying fares. Actually, he had an extra fare; for H'lo, slipping like a shadow from his ambush, leaped forward, and curled up within the great spare tire lashed to the end of the car. Once there, he was as unobtrusive as a worm curled up in a walnut.

The ride he took was long, fast, and uncomfortable. At first he could identify the streets, because his hunter's sense of any path once taken did not desert him. But presently they swung off into avenues not familiar to him; and in time they came to great stretches of vacant land, dotted here and there with the homes of Kemper's wealthiest citizens.

Just before reaching one of the largest and most imposing of these estates, the car turned aside into a service entrance, where beneath a high brick wall

it was practically invisible. The chauffeur sat at his wheel. The three fares stepped out, one of them bearing a small, worn leather bag. Passing farther down the service entrance, and coming to a locked wooden gate, one of them set up a little folding ladder, up which all three climbed, to drop over the other side of the wall, drawing up their ladder behind them.

H'lo, having no ladder, was obliged to use other means. He climbed a tree, swung from it to another, from a limb of this onto the top of the wall. The top was garnished with broken glass; but H'lo wore shoes, and was not scratched. Once over the wall, on the smooth lawn, he removed his shoes, leaving them at the foot of the wall. Ahead of him, he could dimly see the three men making their way toward the outlines of the great house, which was closed in the absence of its owner who was abroad. Only a caretaker remained within. It was in order to loot this place that the Croaker and his pals had come.

Following slowly, and noiselessly, his flat nostrils twitching as he quested for the familiar scent of the Croaker, H'lo noted presently that at a great clump of rhododendrons, the three paused. There followed a whispered conference; and then, leaving the Croaker behind with the leather bag, his two companions dropped to the ground and began to crawl toward the darkened mansion. It was their duty to explore, to learn if possible just where the caretaker was, and if he had gone to bed, to select the right window to force. And then, to return to inform their chief.

Had H'lo arranged matters himself, he could not have improved on them. Everything was exactly to his liking. He was left alone with the man he wanted. Softly, he drew forth his *kris*, removing it from its scabbard. Flat on his belly, he began to crawl toward the clump of rhododendrons.

So utterly quiet was his advance, that the watchful Croaker had no inkling that any living being was near him. All his senses were focused ahead, his eyes and ears straining to follow the slow progress of his two pioneers. It was not, indeed, until H'lo reached out a skinny brown hand, and touched him on the shoulder with the finger of fate, that he uttered a startled oath, and rolled over, his eyes staring backward and upward into the gloom.

Whether he knew even then what it was that stood over him, or why, will never be known. There followed a sharp grunt as H'lo whirled his living shaft of wavering steel, estimated to the minute fraction of an inch the precise cervical vertebrae he proposed to sever, and struck. The surprised head of the Croaker rolled to one side; his body for a moment threshed in the dew-heavy grass.

WITHOUT touching the body, and scarcely looking at it, H'lo raised the head by its sleek black hair. He held it outright until the blood had drained from it. Then he thrust it into a crude bag he had contrived from an old rubber raincoat, and with only a glance toward where the other two men were still creeping forward toward the house, H'lo retraced his footsteps, put on his shoes, scaled the wall in the same way he had before, but a little more awkwardly because of his burden. He arrived home before dawn, and without being seen by anybody. And as he was a trifle tired, he fell instantly into a sound sleep.

It was some five minutes after H'lo had dropped over the wall that "Hot-foot" Bill Garry returned to report that all was well: that the snores of the faithful caretaker made music on the midnight air, and that the third man waited under a certain window for the Croaker to fetch the leather satchel with its tools.

Arrived at the rhododendron bush, Hotfoot paused, and made a slight hissing sound to warn the Croaker, who was a nervous man, likely to shoot first and investigate afterward. Somewhat to his surprise, the Croaker did not reply. Hotfoot hissed again, then crept forward. He could see the other's figure outstretched on the grass, motionless, apparently vigilant. Hotfoot whispered to him.

"'Sall jake, Croaker! C'mon."

The Croaker did not move. Surprised, Hotfoot next ventured to poke his chief with a foot; but though the body gave, no reassuring voice came to him in the dark. Then Hotfoot turned on his electric torch, and what he saw—or rather what he failed to see—drew from him a lamentable cry upon his Maker. He dropped the flashlight, and his knees buckled. Frantically, he searched for the light, assuring himself that he had been the victim of some trick of light and shade, or of an over-stimulated imagination. Finding his torch, he again bathed the figure of the Croaker in its cold beam. And then he saw that he had not been mistaken.

The Croaker had no head! And no spare head lay anywhere about. It had gone! Vanished utterly. As clean as if removed at leisure by a coroner's physician, the Croaker's headpiece had been sliced from its supporting neck. Nor was there the slightest evidence of any struggle: no torn turf, trodden grass. Aside from his headless condition, the Croaker was resting as easily as if asleep in his bed.

Hotfoot collapsed to the ground, unable to speak aloud. He trembled as if in a fit of St. Vitus's dance. Only after a long, long time were his clumsy fingers able to dig out a card of white powder from his vest pocket; and even then, he lost most of the first dose. He tried again, snuffed up a tremendous jolt, and presently recovered enough nerve and strength to scramble to his

feet and fly across the grass, making little effort this time to keep to the shadows. And so he presently rejoined his waiting companion, under the library window. He dropped to his knees, placed his mouth to one of "Heeby-Jeby's" ears.

"Gawd, Heeby! He's dead!"

"Shut up! Who's dead?" snarled the other, in a near whisper.

"The Croaker! Somebody's cut off his block. It ain't nowheres around, neither. I looked for it!"

Heeby-Jeby turned and looked venomously into his terrified pal's staring eyes. He knew that he was a hop-head, although he had promised to take only one jolt to-night, and that an hour before they started. *If Hotfoot had gummed up the works—*

His insistence and evident terror forced Heeby to follow him back, to see for himself. What he saw sent him nearly as limp as it had Hotfoot. Only, not being a hophead, his nerves were under better control. Not too good, however! But it was he who insisted upon making a more thorough search. Guardedly using their torch, they covered every inch of ground within many yards of the body; but without effect. Nor could they make out the slightest trace of footsteps other than their own. The bare feet of H'lo had left no marks on the dark grass.

Heeby was almost as unnerved as the other; but he did have sense enough to frisk the headless torso of their late leader, and to remove therefrom all the money, his rod, and one or two papers. Then both men, all appetite for their evening's exploit gone, hastened to the wall where they had parked the ladder, and rejoined the waiting chauffeur, whose hair rose as he listened to what had taken place back there. In two minutes more, the great car was speeding back to Kemper with its amazing news.

It was not until past noon the next day that the caretaker came in for his

own private shock. Upon discovering the headless intruder, he made only a very cursory examination before hurrying to the telephone. The police arrived in less than twenty minutes. The reporters were not much behind them. Never before had Kemper had such a magnificent front-page story!

The underworld reeks with superstition. Generally speaking, the less religion a man has, the more he believes in hunches and mascots, in evil spirits and jinxes. The news of the Croaker's horrible end flashed through the underworld long before the first newspaper extra was on the streets. And the identity of the slain man was not fully determined until next morning's edition appeared.

In any ordinary circumstance, the Croaker would have been given a swell funeral. The underworld delights in such; in the displaying of huge and tasteless and very expensive floral wreaths and emblems, a band, all the taxicabs in town, and if possible, stores closed, schools dismissed, and flags at half mast. In the case of a man as useful and as prominent as the Croaker, the body would lie in state for a day at least. But it was awkward to be saddled with a body lacking any head! And so, the lying in state was omitted. Also, a sort of chill seizing the underworld in its grip, the floral gifts were rather meager, the attendance decidedly light. The Croaker's funeral was the drabbest Kemper had seen in years, save when an inmate of the Town Farm died.

THE police made diligent search for the missing head. They didn't especially care because the Croaker had been beheaded, but they did dislike to have anybody make away with the remains, or any part thereof. It was necessary to accuse somebody, make an arrest, and have another grilling of the suspect. And without the head, and in the absence of any witness who would

admit knowing anything about the movements of the Croaker on the fatal night, there could be no suspect.

In many furtive backrooms and cellars, whispered speculation went on as to who had bisected their famous gunman, and what had happened to his head? Many a bold killer refused to emerge alone after nightfall. There was a marked decrease in stick-ups and banditry of all sorts. Even the police preferred to patrol the night routes in pairs! And no boy in all Kemper could have been hired to pass the cemetery after dark, wherein reposed the Croaker; or all of him that had been found.

Unaware and uninterested in the tremors that throbbed in the less savory parts of the town, H'lo worked happily in his room over the old stable. He had all the time there was, and nobody ever visited him. And how good it seemed to him, an ex-head-hunter of parts, to be engaged once more at his artistic tasks!

The proper curing of the severed head of an enemy need not be described, for two good reasons. The details are not, by Caucasian standards, pleasant ones; and everything except the more secret parts of the complicated process may be learned from books of travel in any public library. H'lo had first of all to remove the brains of the Croaker: not too difficult this, because there were so few of them. He had to gather the proper roots and barks to tan the flesh with. Some of these he had brought from Borneo, others he gathered from the trees of Beula Land. It is a long process, and was made longer because of the little man's desire to make of this his masterpiece. No telling when he'd have another head to operate on!

When the cruder portions of his labors had been accomplished thoroughly, the workman gave place to the artist. For it is in recreating from the tanned, leathery features the precise look of the

original, as he was in life, that the true head-hunter excels. And H'lo was a true artist. He overlooked nothing. The black hair he slicked back with oil. He gave to the lips that sinister lift at one corner, characteristic of the Croaker. The lines in his face were correctly incised.

His hardest task concerned itself with the eyes. But here, luck helped him out. Happening to glance within the windows of an optician, on one of the rare days when he walked on Main Street, he beheld a tray of artificial eyes, beautifully and realistically made. They were of all colors, and assorted sizes. One set were nearly the duplicate of the sullen "lamps" of the late Croaker. H'lo went within, and largely by making signs, bargained for them.

The price surprised him, but did not deter him. And to the young clerk, a newcomer who knew not who H'lo was, the incident of selling a pair of artificial eyes to a "funny little darkey" who had perfectly good ones of his own, was all in the day's work, and swelled his sales' commission.

There arrived a day when H'lo was permitted to make his first visit to the sick room, and to feast his eyes on his beloved master. He bore with him a gift, incased in a pillow case. And when, after sinking to one knee beside the bed, and kissing his master's hand, he rose and snatched off the pillow case, there was revealed the miraculously lifelike head of the Croaker!

An ordinary invalid would have received a severe shock: but the Reverend Peter Vedder was not an ordinary man. Most of his life had been spent among primitive peoples, and he had become hardened to strange and even revolting customs. Thus, he suspected that his faithful H'lo had been, ere becoming Christianized, a head-hunter. And he himself had brought home, among a truckload of souvenirs of all climes two or three dried heads he had purchased

in bazaars. But not one of them could compare with the one H'lo had brought him to-day!

He didn't relish the gift; but to him, it was clear that H'lo had given him what must have been his very choicest possession. It was probable that the little brown man had taken this head, himself; Vedder did not care to inquire into that. He was anxious to show that he appreciated the spirit that actuated him; and he managed a faint smile, as he patted H'lo's brow and thanked him.

H'lo himself did not doubt that his master understood that he was gazing upon the head of his would-be assassin. And never before had he admired him more! He was dignified, and restrained; did not gloat, neither did he shudder. His poise, the murmured thanks, and the pat on the head indicated to H'lo that his gift was understood and appreciated. He retired with joy singing in his heart.

SOME weeks elapsed before Vedder could be taken outdoors for a walk of a few steps. Other weeks passed before he was able to drive his own car as formerly. To celebrate the occasion, he put into execution a design he had long formed. He was dissatisfied with the gift of H'lo. To be sure, he had other heads in his trophy room, but these did not seem like anything that ever had been human; they were impersonal as well as moth-eaten. But the head H'lo had given him was different. It always seemed to be sneering at him; and there was a sinister gleam in its too lifelike eyes that followed him wherever he went. Even when he had locked it up in a closet, he couldn't help thinking about it, smirking away alone in the dark!

Kemper had a very good, though incomplete, Museum of Fine Arts. There were some excellent paintings and sculpture, antiques of all sorts, tapestries, pottery and bronzes, and an

Anthropological Department with a miscellaneous assortment of stuff, mostly donated by traveling citizens. To this museum, the Reverend Vedder determined to present his best and most gruesome head. And the day he first drove his own car, he placed the head, carefully packed in an old hat box, in H'lo's hands.

To H'lo a museum meant nothing whatever. The important-looking building before which Vedder stopped his car, with its white marble front, and rank of austere Doric columns, was in H'lo's belief, a temple of one of the white men's gods. It could be nothing else.

Within, Vedder was granted an interview with the head curator, and to him he presented his strange gift. The curator called in the head of the department of anthropology, and his assistant; and all three rhapsodized over the splendid addition to their collection. When all had admired it to their fill, silently observed by the small gentleman from Borneo, they filed out into the hall, and wended their way through many passages, and the Egyptian Room, the Chamber of Coins and Medals, the Chinese Room, and finally into an imposing chamber in which H'lo instantly recognized two or three ugly little stone gods, deities of his own country! And there were spears, and blowpipes, and a few good examples of the *kris*. But, until now, no embalmed head had adorned the place.

This, thought H'lo, his beady eyes missing nothing, was that holy inner chamber of the temple, devoted to his own gods. And it delighted him to believe that his master himself reverenced these! If not, why was such a splendid room provided for them?

With due ceremony, the head of the late Croaker was placed in a conspicuous position, displacing a former basket. And then the party broke up, and Vedder drove home. Neither he nor H'lo

uttered any comment on the memorable ceremony of this morning.

In its next bulletin, the Museum of Fine Arts mentioned Vedder's gift. But the circulation of these bulletins was limited. There were a great many citizens of Kemper who not only never read them, but who did not even know they were printed; who, indeed, never set foot within their museum. It was chance that brought to the attention of the underworld, the latest addition to the civic collection.

Rumors gleaned from newspaper columns had informed the group, of which the Croaker had once been a shining light, that the Museum sheltered some priceless antiques, of a portable nature. Sundry jade rings and figurines, a certain ancient tapestry presented by the widow of a manufacturer of speedometers, some Phoenician glasses, were mentioned. Loot that would go easily into a handbag, or even an overcoat pocket. And the weather was getting cool enough for overcoats, now. Presently, one "Three-finger" Peters was instructed to visit the museum, which was free to the public every week day from ten until four. He was to get the lay of the land, and to spot the most portable and accessible valuables, observe the number and the disposition of the attendants, and so forth.

It was while making this preliminary inspection, that Three-finger was stricken to come face to face with the missing head of the man he had known well in life! He barely restrained himself from crying aloud in his surprise and terror, as he looked into the mocking eyes; and it seemed as if the snarling lips must have whispered to him something his ears had just failed to catch.

Without pursuing his investigations, he fled back to Gory Hammond's, there to tell his incredible tale. He was jeered at, insulted; but he stuck to his tale. Finally, two others went to see for

themselves. They, too, returned badly shaken, tremulous, and needing, the one a drink, the other a shot in the arm.

The news spread. All the men, and many of the women who had known the Croaker, took a long or a short look, according to their nerves. There could be no doubt whatever; the same list of the mouth, the same look in the eyes, the scarred lobe of one ear; to be sure, the head was much darker than the Croaker had been, and looked as if it had been varnished. Probably it had been, to preserve it! The underworld shuddered. But because it is secretive, and hates to ask questions, let alone answer them, it was a long time before any one of them ventured to make the slightest inquiry.

One day Gory Hammond, a man far more intelligent than most of the others, but almost equally disturbed by the mystery, spoke to the attendant who was in charge of this room and the Chinese one.

"What's that?" he asked abruptly.

The attendant, a doddering old man, shuffled forward.

"That! It's a head. Yeah, a real one."

"Where'd ya get it?" pursued Mr. Hammond, determined to make an end of the mystery that was upsetting the morale of his followers.

"Eh? Oh, the Reverend Vedder, he give it to the museum. He's got a fine collection of heads, to his home. Lived

in strange parts, the missionary has, and learned strange doings."

Hammond blinked, swallowed hard, and remarked: "I'll say he has!"

His report, if it solved the mystery, did not stop the talk. It seemed incredible, yet it must be true! That a missionary, a man of God, and active in all righteous causes, should coldly steal upon his enemy, behead him, and then embalm the head and present it to the museum, to be publicly displayed as a trophy of his bloody revenge! And the attendant had admitted that this was not the only head; there were more! A "fine collection" of them; those were the very words. No telling how many would-be killers of the good clergyman had been tracked down by him, beheaded, and desecrated! A good man to let alone, for all his pious pretenses, was the Reverend Peter Vedder.

In the midst of the underworld arguments, another bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts appeared. It stated, among other things:

An encouraging fact has been the increased attendance during the past month. Our turnstile has registered more than two hundred above the average at this time of year. The officials and attendants state that the principal increase has been among what might be termed those in the humbler walks of life. Also, that their interests have seemed to be largely drawn by the more serious exhibits. Kemper may congratulate itself that at last the common people are beginning to take more advantage of our splendid municipal opportunities.

In the Next Issue of TOP-NOTCH!

A Breezy, Whimsical Western Novelette of
Windy De Long and Lonesome McQuirk

MOTOR MAVERICKS

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Guardian of the Flock

By Charles V. Brereton



IT was hot. The August sun, a disk of polished brass, was straight above Noxco's single, dusty street. In front of the livery stable, a dispirited hen, too hungry to seek the shade, scratched listlessly in the scattered straw. Even the cottonwoods that made a feeble pretense of shading the wind and sand-weathered buildings bordering one side of the street, drooped dismally in the fiery air. And by the great horse trough, that brimmed with bitter, tepid water, there huddled a dozen panting merino rams, their vacant, yellow eyes unseeing in their misery.

Seated in the dust, just out of the way of casual travel, a sharp-eared, sleek little dog jealously watched his charges. He was as black as midnight, that dog, save only for a narrow band

of white hair that encircled his neck like a starched collar.

He was as hot, too, as the sheep; his red tongue lolled, dripping. The dog was uneasy. His pointed ears were pricked toward the near-by saloon whence came the sound of voices up-raised in anger. And whenever one voice rose above the others, the dog's nervousness increased. Perhaps with that weird canine ability to foresee impending danger which no man can fathom, the dog gazed now down the long vista of days fraught with peril and privation that were to be his portion because of this quarrel among the humans.

Now the warped boards, which did double duty as sidewalk and porch floor to the row of decrepit shacks, creaked under the jingling impact of spurred

boots. Two men had emerged from a door up the street, and were strolling toward the saloon. At sight of the sheep they stopped and stared.

"That's a funny sight, sheriff." The speaker was a long-legged fellow whose worn chaps and leather cuffs proclaimed his calling. "Sheep in Noxco! I've seen the time not so long ago when them woolties would have been dragged to death at the ends of ropes ten minutes after they hit town."

The tall man laughed aloud at the memory, but the one he had addressed as sheriff had no smile in his eyes as he answered:

"Might see the same thing again, Slim. That's Bill Quest's dog watching the sheep. Quest's taking the sheep to the summer range up on that new forest reserve the government has made out of Tantrum Mountain. The rangers gave Quest a sizable piece of the range that old Nate Rose has been usin' for thirty years."

"Slim's" gaze held suddenly awakened interest.

"Nate Rose!" he exclaimed. "Gosh! I didn't think old Nate'd ever let go of anything he once got hold of. Sounds to me like dangerous business to monkey with anything that old grass-hog claims. He's had his own sweet way around here ever since I been in the country."

"It is dangerous business," the sheriff returned, "but it's so just the same. The ranger fellers claim Nate's got too much range and that Quest, bein' a small owner an' having a homestead down the valley, is entitled to a share of the government range. Old Nate's been champin' the bit for a month. He's written to senators and everybody else who might have influence. Quest's a fool to be monkeyin' round this town while things are so hot. Anything might happen. I wonder—"

He hushed abruptly as, for the first time, he heard the angry voices.

"By grab! They're at it right now, an' maybe—"

Both men broke into a lumbering run toward the saloon, but before they could reach it, the faded-green doors crashed outward and two men, apparently in a rough-and-tumble fight, reeled across the sidewalk to the street. One was the sheepman, a ruddy, middle-aged man of powerful physique. Quest was obviously loath to fight, though as obviously holding his temper more from policy than from fear. Now he was merely defending himself from the furious attack of a slightly older man, whose sun-seamed face was distorted with rage.

"Drop it, Rose!" Quest snapped as he parried the other's fists. "Stop it or I'll have to hurt you. I've leased the Tantrum range according to government law, and the right or wrong of it can't be settled this way. Stop it, I tell you!"

But the other was unheeding. Enraged beyond caution and backed, he knew, by a half dozen of his own men who watched, grinning, he rushed at Quest, his arms flailing.

As the door had opened, the dog had taken a quick step or two away from the sheep and now, as he saw his master threatened, he also, entered the fray. He made no sound as he lunged, his jaws snapping in the chopping slash that is characteristic of his breed. And as he dodged a vicious kick, the watchers saw a triangular rent in one leg of the cattleman's trousers, and an oozing red welt marked the white of his skin.

Rose cursed savagely as he turned toward his new assailant, his hand slipping beneath his coat. But before he could draw the gun, Quest struck—a smash that sent Rose back on his heels. Left, right, left again—the sheepman's hard fists thudded against the cowman's jaw in a scientific one-two that was astonishing in this region of hoisted weapons.

Rose went backward like a tossed sack, the pistol spinning from his hand. His shoulder glanced from the pole hitch rack and he fell inertly, his head striking the edge of the porch. A thin trickle of blood oozed down the cowman's face. For a moment there was silence. Then Quest's voice was raised in sharp command:

"Get back there, Ring! You didn't mean to do it, but you've started plenty of trouble now."

The sheepman's words broke the tension. Men rushed to help Rose, who moved now, dizzily. The sheriff stepped forward as one who acts under pressure, hating his job, but knowing he must obey the master. To him Rose said as he pointed an unsteady hand at Quest:

"Arrest him. Lock him up. You saw him assault me. He tried to kill me. I'll make him pay for this."

Heads sagely nodded agreement: sycophantic voices murmured acquiescence. They knew, those toadies, on which side their bread was buttered. The sheriff took Quest by the arm.

"Sorry, Bill," he muttered. "My duty—"

His voice trailed into silence and his eyes dropped, ashamed, before the gaze which Quest turned on him.

"Wait a minute," Quest said. He turned to the dog.

"Get going with the sheep, Ring." He motioned up the street. "Take 'em, boy. Get going. I'm here for keeps, I suppose, but I'm not going to lose a thousand dollars' worth of rams if you can help me save them. Take 'em home."

Of course, Ring did not understand all that was said to him. There were too many unfamiliar words, too many tones with which he was unacquainted. But he did know that his master had told him to take those sheep home. Home, as used now, meant the

sheep camp on the summer range, miles away, and deep amid the huddled mountains which frowned upon the town.

Quest's word was Ring's law. He broke the sheep out of their panting apathy and started them up the street, too intent on guarding them from onslaught by the snarling town curs to give but one glance behind him. And in that one glance, he saw, even though he might not have known its significance, that men servilely aided the cowman into the saloon while another group, in the center of which his master walked sullenly, made their way toward a squat structure out in the gravelly flat across the road.

Ring was troubled greatly as he herded the unwilling, stubborn rams across the parched sand of the valley and into the deep cut trough in the hills that was the Tantrum trail. Often he had driven sheep alone when his master had been on other business, but then he had not been overwhelmed by the feeling of uneasiness that now possessed him.

Always, Ring had hated that town. He had sensed the antipathy of the booted-and-spurred men who lounged under its shabby wooden awnings. At times, when his master had been in town on business, Ring had spent miserable hours waiting under those same awnings, so different from the cool shadows of the pines on the summer range. And in that town, too, his sensitive nostrils were always stung by the rank smell of cows and sweat-soaked trappings from reeking horses. Ring could not know of the never-ending enmity between cowman and shepherd which had all too often flared into red tragedy, but he had learned that one who had about him the odor of cows was no friend to his master. He chose his own path accordingly. Just now, Ring was glad he was out of Noxco, but he wished that his master would hurry to overtake him.

It was hotter, too, on that mountain-

side than it had been in town. The greedy brush that rimmed the trail only served to keep from the panting travelers any breath of air that might be stirring. Not a bird, nor even a lizard, moved at this time of day. Ring was hungry. He had not eaten since early morning. Also, thirst began to annoy him. Once, letting the sheep rest, Ring searched out a miserable mud seep he knew of and wallowed there, grateful for the respite.

Sullen, individualistic, the grumbling rams refused to herd as a unit. The dog was obliged to stay behind the flock and herd each ram every rod of the way. He could not run ahead out of the dust, where he could watch for an occasional straggler, as was his custom when his master drove the flock. And because of that, half blinded by the dust from shuffling feet, he could not guard against the unexpected meeting of horsemen on that narrow path.

And so two horsemen rode the flock down before Ring was aware that any one approached. The fellows were cowmen: Ring knew that by the odor that clung to them. He hated them instantly. The riders spurred their horses into the midst of the tired flock, scattering sheep in all directions. Worse, one of them swung a vicious blow with his quirt at the dog and jeered when Ring dodged, snarling.

Ring was furious. The incident added fourfold to his hatred, and imprinted deeper on his understanding the enmity of horsemen about whom clung the odor of cattle. But with the persistence which was his by heritage, he worked ceaselessly to get the weary rams back into the trail. It seemed at times as though many of the lumbering sheep would give out entirely, but at last he had them again in the trail and moving toward the summer range. The declivity became less steep, the trail wound now through the parked timber of the upper hills. In the cooler at-

mosphere, the little flock moved along more willingly.

But there came from up the trail the click of iron-shod hoofs on stone, and Ring darted forward to clear the way.

HE need not have troubled. This rider had pulled his horse to one side of the trail and sat there, impersonally eying the oncoming sheep. The light of recognition was in his gaze as Ring came abreast of him.

"Hello, Ring," the horseman said. "Where's your boss? Coming behind, I suppose."

Ring wagged his greeting. He knew this man. Often this fellow, in the trim uniform of forest green, had come to the sheep camp—had eaten many meals there. By that token he was a friend of the master, of course. Ring wished he could impart some of his own uneasiness to this man, but he did not know how. Humans were so stupid at times—a dog could not make them understand. He put his paws up on the rider's legs and whined, retaining his position despite the gray horse's snort of disdain. The man sensed that the dog was gravely troubled, though he, as yet, had no knowledge of its cause. He dismounted and patted Ring's head, gazing down the trail until he was sure that Quest was not in the rear of the flock.

"What's the matter, old-timer?" the ranger asked as he stroked Ring's ears. "Something must be wrong, or you wouldn't be alone and so uneasy. There's no way you can tell me, though. I'll have to find out myself what the trouble is. That much, at least, is my business."

Ring trotted on up the trail after the slow-moving sheep, and as he went around a bend he saw that the ranger still stood beside his horse, staring speculatively after the flock.

There were many miles more of weary herding before Ring's ears caught the murmur of the flock that he

and his master had left peacefully grazing so early this morning. Led by the wiser old ewes, they were now composing themselves for the night. Worn out and footsore, the rams stumbled to the bedding ground and lay down among the rest. As for Ring, he went to the silent camp, although he knew there would be none to welcome him. Ravenous, he nosed in the leaves that carpeted the ground, gulping down the few once-disdained morsels he found there.

He could easily have leaped on the rough table that was nailed to the trunk of a tree and dragged down the side of bacon hanging within reach, but no such thought entered his head. That was his master's property, and it was his business to guard it, not to steal. When Quest came, there would be plenty of food, Ring knew. There was nothing to do but wait. He curled up in a nest of pine needles beside the cold ash pit, and slept fitfully, an ear cocked for any change in the contented murmur of the flock.

During the days that followed, the sheep gave little trouble. Just before going to the valley after the rams, Quest had moved his flock to this new area the rangers had assigned him. There was feed there, he knew, for a month's grazing. So, now, since there was grass and browse in plenty, the sheep required but little herding. Out on the range at daybreak, a long siesta when the heat was the greatest, then at sunset back to the bedding ground. That was the routine except on the alternate days when the sheep, led by the range-broke oldsters, rambled over the ridge east of camp and down to the river for water.

With Ring, the urge for food became more and more insistent. He dreamed, perhaps, of meaty bones and brimming pans of milk—who can say? But his master had sent him here; no other thought than to remain until his master came entered the dog's head. Almost starving, he foraged for bones he had

discarded in more prosperous times, crunching them in the vain hope of sustenance. Once he found part of an old, sun-dried deer hide and made a scanty meal from that. A sheep fell from a cliff, breaking its neck, and the famished dog sat a long time by the carcass that was all sufficient for his needs. But his breeding and early training prevailed. He would die before he would touch the uncooked flesh of the animals he was set to guard.

And then, one evening, as Ring, gaunt and unkempt as the little wolves of the plains, wandered listlessly into the deserted, leaf-strewn camp, he heard the approach of a horse. Ring's ears pricked forward and his lambent eyes were as the headlights of a soul: He was sure that, at last, his master had come. But the lonely waif's spirits fell as he saw it was not Quest astride the approaching horse. It was the ranger, he whom Ring knew to be a friend. After an appraising look at the dog, the man dismounted and untied a package from his saddle.

"You loyal old fellow!" he exclaimed. "Here's a feed for you. I was afraid I'd be too late, but I couldn't get here sooner."

The man unrolled the bundle, placing the stale bread and scraps of cooked meat before the dog. But for all his ravenous hunger, Ring ate carefully. Instinct warned him not to gorge, experience of humans told him that this man would not let him starve.

While Ring ate, the ranger talked, as though in an effort to make the dog understand what had befallen.

"That cow outfit has sure fixed things so as to make you and your master a lot of trouble," he said. "Now that Nate Rose has Quest locked up in jail with bail so high that he can't get out, I suppose Rose thinks all the sheep will die. He may try some dirty work up here. I wish I could stay and help you, dog, but I've got to try some scheme

to get that boss of yours out of jail. It's a good thing I went to see him and he told me that you must be up here and mighty hungry. I'd never have thought of that. But you'll be all right now for a couple of days."

When the friendly ranger rode away, Ring wagged his farewell. There was no doubt about this man's understanding of canine troubles, but after he was gone, Ring was intolerably lonesome. More than ever, he wanted his master. At any rate, his hunger had been appeased and, strengthened by that, Ring took up the routine of his work with a matter-of-factness which might well have passed for philosophy.

The next day as the dog leisurely followed the stragglers up from the water hole at the river, he knew there was another horseman on the upper range. His nostrils told him that it was neither his master nor the ranger, though as yet he could not identify the scent. Experience advised caution, and Ring, with canine wisdom inherited from far-distant, wolflike forbears, slipped into a fit thicket where he might see without being seen. There was the pound of hoofs and Rose, astride a half-broken bay colt, rode into view. At sight of the peacefully grazing sheep, it seemed that the man went mad with rage. He checked the lathered colt cruelly and sat there, shaking his fist at the unheeding animals as he shouted:

"You woolly-headed blatters! You've got the best piece of Browse range on the mountain ruined for any use by my beef cattle and I was saving it for that. Who was brazen enough to defy me—to be herding you after I had that damn sheepman locked up in jail? I thought every sheep he owned would be dead by this time."

Still raving, the enraged cowman spurred his eringing horse down the mountain toward the camp. Ring, wise now in his own behalf, swiftly but stealthily followed. Straight to the de-

serted camp the cowman rode, obviously puzzled at the lack of human occupancy. For a moment he hesitated as though suspicious of a trap and then, dismounting, grimly proceeded to demolish every breakable thing. Ring watched, and though anger surged, caution compelled him to remain hidden. This man was dangerous. With the destruction complete, the cowman surveyed his evil work.

"That'll help," he said aloud. "I'll do that to every sheep camp the infernal rangers allow on this mountain. They have no right to tell me where my cattle shall graze. I was here before any reserve."

He looked around him, smirking evilly and it seemed that, for the first time, a new thought came.

"Why—why," he muttered. "This camp is deserted. There can't be any one on the range—the sheep are alone. I wonder—Why didn't I think of that? That's the way to finish the job."

ROSE hastily mounted, having much trouble with the nervous colt, and as he rode away there was a fiendish expression of satisfaction upon his face. Ring could see no reason for following farther, so, puzzling much at the curious ways of humans, he returned to the flock, understanding nothing except that the cowman was an enemy.

But a half hour later, as the dog prepared to turn the flock toward the bedding ground, a hot blast of smoke-laden air stung his nostrils. At first, Ring paid this no attention; but later, as he saw a few of his charges shamble lazily out of the way of advancing flames, he loped swiftly to them, herding them up the draw and away from the fire that suddenly licked at the chaparral everywhere below him.

This was not a new thing to Ring. Before now, at his master's directions, he had driven the sheep from fire-threatened areas. But now the flock

was cut off from the bedding ground—at the first general alarm, the silly animals would stampede in that direction. Ring only knew that he must not allow the sheep to go down that hill as they had been trained to do every evening. He could not know that Rose, aware of that habit of sheep and chuckling villainously at the sure success of his plan, had fired the mountainside in a wide crescent which, converging, would wipe out everything in that brush-covered draw.

The roar of the blaze now drowned the bleating of the bewildered sheep. A rush of black-tipped orange flame caught a young ewe that had dodged the dog in her persistence to go to camp, and her agonized wails added to the panic of the others. Ring fought them savagely, barking until it seemed he could no longer make a sound, nipping at heels and woolly sides in a last attempt to stem the wave of panic-stricken animals that rolled downhill, straight toward a flaming death. A ram, his wrinkled head lowered in berserk rage, charged the dog. Ring sprang aside and gripped one foreleg, throwing the furious sheep on his back. Afterward, he administered punishment which sent the chastened champion limping back into the milling flock. But, at last, some of the old ewes sensed what it was that the more intelligent animal desired of them.

Two or three scrambled out of the draw, a dozen followed, and then the entire flock rose toward the temporary safety of the rocky ridge as a flood tide rises against the shore. It cannot be that Ring had thought of where he would take the flock, except that he must get it out of the path of that red demon racing up the draw. Below him, the whole mountain was afire, but across a barren spur that slanted down from the summit, the river glinted like a silver thread at the base of hundred-foot cliffs. That was the watering place;

the sheep had come from there by a far easier path but a few hours ago.

What unknown directing force put it into the dog's brain to turn the flock down that declivity toward safety? No one can tell how he knew it was the only possible route away from the flames that licked up the forest behind him—only can it be set down what he did. As the flock leaders, yet bewildered by the savage punishment Ring had given them, began to understand the aim toward which the dog was working, they led the frantic, yammering horde toward the granite palisade which flanked the river. And as Ring paused for a moment on the ridge, impatiently waiting for stragglers to close up, a bullet whipped up the dirt beside him. Startled, he sprang aside as another missile spat into the ground where he had been standing.

Ring was under no illusions as to what those missiles were. He was familiar with the use that men made of firearms, and the reports had reached his ears a moment after the bullets struck. And now, as he located the whereabouts of the gun, he saw Rose, a smoking weapon in one hand, trying to calm his plunging Colt long enough to aim again.

Ring felt anew that red surge of hate which had led him to attack the man down in Noxco, but now he was too busy to fight. The sheep claimed his first attention; they must be driven farther away from the oncoming fire. Ring hazed the stragglers savagely, and the flock tumbled over the ridge, out of Rose's sight as well as out of pistol range.

The flock poured down over the cliff like a cascade of gray lava. The majority filed easily down the age-old game trails to the welcome stream, but occasionally a particularly foolish member of the horde mistook the way and scrambled too far out on the bastions of stone. The ram that Ring had fought was one of these. He limped out on a

jutting point of rock and essayed to go directly down the cliff. A step or two and a loosely anchored boulder gave way beneath his weight. He fell end over end in an avalanche of dirt and small stones. Others fell also, but at last the leaders stepped gingerly into the water and the flock began to flow smoothly across the river to safety.

As Ring stood on the crown of the cliff, watching the stragglers pick their timorous way along the trails their more agile fellows had marked, a scent began to beat against his consciousness; the scent of a lathering horse, of reeking saddle leather. Somewhere near, one of those men he had come to regard as an enemy approached. But there was brush now on every side except on the face of the cliff. He could not see back up that slope whence the sheep had come.

And then, as the dog lifted his head and tested the air currents, sifting this scent from the acrid tang of blazing pitch and scorching leaves, there came plainly the man smell, the odor of Rose, his master's enemy and, equally so his own.

The odor intensified. Rose was pushing his horse down the brush-covered slope in a furious endeavor to complete his destruction of the flock and its guardian. And with his own angry baste, the aura of hateful enmity which surrounded him was magnified four-fold, its revealing odor plain to the dog's keen nostrils. Ring heard the crash of breaking boughs as the horse lunged through the tough-stemmed chaparral. The dog had no fear now for himself. This man must not be allowed to approach the flock.

SWIFT as a striking rattler, red anger overriding all caution, Ring charged the instant the horse emerged from the brush. In answer there came the staccato reports of the cowman's pistol. He meant murder. But the untrained

colt would have no more of a rider who attempted to shoot from the saddle. He pitched wickedly and Rose was hard put to retain his seat. His outflung hand struck against a pendant limb, and the pistol went whirling, hidden in the sprawling cherry thicket.

Ring fought with wolfish fury. He was in a killing rage, his attack driving the already frightened horse loco with terror. Cursing savagely, Rose managed to dismount, the long lead rope of twisted hair in one hand and a shot-loaded quirt, butt downward, in the other.

"Damn you, you mongrel!" he gritted. "I don't need to shoot you. I'll beat you to death. Before I'm through I'll wipe out every sign of sheep or sheep dogs on this range. If it hadn't been for you, Quest would have lost every dollar he owned."

Rose aimed a blow that whizzed past Ring's snapping jaws and forced the dog to the safety of a wide-branched buckthorn. Again Rose struck, but the colt yanked backward, nearly throwing the man from his balance. Rose's anger turned to the horse and he cut at the brute's head with the quirt. Ring seized this opportunity for a successful slash at his enemy, and as Rose whirled with an oath the towel of his spur caught in the hard, twisted hair rope. The colt still strove to back and Rose dared not stoop to extricate the spur—those snapping jaws were too near his face. And then Rose fell. The terrified colt, rearing, dragged his master jerkingly.

As the colt's hind feet slipped from the brush-hidden cliff edge, the animal screamed—a weird, unearthly sound that is seldom heard. Now the horse's scream was echoed by the man. His cursing gave place to sobbing cries for aid. But the heavy spur was fast; the rope was as taut as piano wire and there was not time for Rose to reach his knife. The colt's forefeet clawed vainly at the crumbling edge of the cliff.

He disappeared from sight and with the speed of a falling stone, Rose followed, feet first.

Ring crept to the broken edge of the cliff, his own voice hushed as he realized that his enemy was out of his reach. Then, behind him he heard a welcome voice—a voice he knew and would obey.

"Ring! Stop it. Back here, boy. Back!"

Ring leaped joyously toward the master who pushed his hurrying way through the entangling foliage a step ahead of the forest ranger. But Quest brushed past the dog and gazed into the chasm whence drifted lazily a cloud of gritty dust. And as the ranger stood beside him, the green-clad fellow said:

"We didn't get here in time to save Rose for punishment in this world, but perhaps it's just as well. When he learned that I was about to get that ridiculous charge of murderous assault dismissed, he must have ridden directly out here. He couldn't seem to understand that the old days have gone. There was murder in his heart and he was all the more dangerous as he insisted on playing a lone hand after all those who had formerly aided him had scurried away from the clutches of the law."

Quest was silent. He softly patted the dog's upraised head. As for Ring, he wriggled with happiness. His master had come. Nothing else was of importance now.



CELEBRATED HIKERS

IN this motor era, when every man owns a car—and every woman, too, it seems—there is scarcely room for the humble pedestrian; but in the good old days, when the term "hitch-hiking" was unknown, men knew how to use feet and legs, and sole leather had to be stout and durable.

Many men of fame found their chief recreation and preparation for work in the regular habit of taking long walks. Walking was nothing less than a passion with Charles Dickens, whose pedestrian match with James R. Osgood, the publisher, at Boston, will be remembered by Dickens' own humorous description of it. Dickens' rival, Thackeray, was also fond of walking, though, like Dickens, Thackeray's tastes were in a high degree social and convivial. Both loved to sit at a good dinner with a choice of familiar friends. All the "Lake poets," especially Wordsworth, habitually took long walks about the lovely water expanse of Cumberland; and their contemporary, the genial Christopher North, was as famous for his long jaunts afoot as he was for the burly humor of the "Noctes Ambrosianæ." He boasted that he once walked seventy miles to attend a meeting in honor of Burns; whereat "he electrified the assembly with a new fervor of eloquence which had never been heard before." North's daughter declared that her father once walked forty miles in eight hours.

The Ace Of Buccaneers

By Albert Dorrington



COLONEL BOOM watched the incoming brig through his gold-plated binoculars, and his mouth twitched nervously. "Our friend Hayes takes no trouble to conceal his fighting irons," he said to Koltz. "In the teeth of a man-of-war guard boat, too."

"Id vas merely his cheerful impudence," Koltz declared. "A buccaneer haf to polish his guns dese days to keep his name in de papers. Yah! He haf der cheek of a blame rhinoceros."

The brig *Leonora* warped to her moorings at the mouth of Hurricane Inlet, where the Sourabaya Hotel reared

its verandaed front to the bay. Lines of close-planted palms screened the flat-roofed town from the reefs and breakers of the Pacific Ocean. A small fleet of trading craft and *bêche-de-mer* luggers lay three deep at the end of the jetty. Gangs of Manila boys and Rotuman men loafed under the rail, watching the movements of the notorious brig *Leonora*.

It was known that "Bully" Hayes, her skipper, had completed a successful cruise among the pearl banks of Torres Straits. News had gone abroad concerning his recent raid on the shell hatcheries of the Dutch-Arab Pearling

Co., wherefrom he had extracted thirty tons of the finest golden-edged shell, after firing on the Arab luggers and quite efficiently destroying their store-ship, *Mecca*.

His entry into Sourabaya caused a throb of expectation among the local storekeepers and Chinese banks. For the last three months Colonel Boom had followed Hayes's sailing movements with interest. Boom desired, above all things, to meet and pay homage to this nineteenth-century desperado. And after the homage and the handshaking, he felt that the buccaneer might be induced to join him in a little game of cards.

Other men had bowed to Hayes, had feted and worshiped him as the lion of the South Pacific. Governments had sent gunboats and warships to effect his extradition. But the business of robbing him at cards had been left to a pouchy-eyed little warrior named Boom.

Boom estimated the value of the buccaneer's plunderings at ten thousand dollars. To strip him at poker or Van John would be better than hitting him on the water line with four-inch shells. The thought had brightened Boom's days and tuned him for the supreme effort. So he had come to Sourabaya by way of Port Darwin and Thursday Island.

Koltz was the proprietor of the Moana Hotel. He was a big blond Prussian with beer in his veins and the portrait of Von Moltke in the lining of his hat. He held a watching brief for Colonel Boom.

Boom's *métier* was cards; his play faultless as a swallow's flight. And when it came to the delicate task of substituting an ace of diamonds for a trey of spades, he was an artist and a craftsman.

Everywhere Boom was hailed as a gentleman wanderer, spending freely, spreading sugar for the flies until the moment arrived when he could slay his

victims with a flush of hearts or a pair of queens.

Boom's camp followers consisted of his daughters, Nancy and Endymion. Endymion proved a past mistress in the art of snaring a pigeon on the wing. She had studied under her father's unerring hand until perfection and brilliancy of execution had been attained.

Koltz prowled near Boom's chair, expectant and alert, as the *Leonora* settled at her moorings. "You go easy mit Hayes," he breathed. "I vood sooner handle a live wolf than play heem a wrong ace."

"Stop bleating and bring him here." Boom snapped under his breath. "Tell him I'm a Hatton Garden expert. Say I'm keen on buying pearls and that I desire the pleasure of his acquaintance. Say that all Europe and America is talking about his ten-hour scrap with the German gunboat, *Seydlitz*, outside Samoa Harbor. Tell him that Count Bismarck has sworn to efface him!"

Koltz winced, but was gone in a flash. The hotel launch, a brass-railed, gayly flagged affair, scampered from the pier toward the *Leonora* at the mouth of Hurricane Inlet.

Boom watched from the hotel window until the launch swung under the *Leonora*'s lowered gangway. The white-coated figure of the buccaneer showed instantly as he descended from the brig's poop as though in response to Koltz's invitation.

Boom moved to the veranda as the flutter of Endymion's skirts came from the open French windows.

"He is coming, my dear. A lion to the slaughter; his paws full of dollars. We must get ready. Where is Nancy?"

"Sulking about this sea lion you're after. She says he carried medicines and comforts to the starving, disease-ridden islands of Erromango, only last year. She vows that the only men he ever robbed were slave agents and mercury miners."

Boom stifled a threatening word. "Tell Nancy to prepare to meet this cut-and-run pirate," he ordered. "We need money. His brig is loaded with golden goblets for us to drain. Rouse Nance from her silly reveries. The bird of the century is here!"

"But Hayes plays well," Endymion ventured uneasily.

"He'll need to," the colonel grinned. "I'll get him while he's warm; I'll clean him out before he has time to get drunk. And if he becomes offensive I'll simply ring up that man-of-war across the bay!"

FROM the hotel veranda they watched the coming of Hayes. Koltz walked beside him, up the limestone path, warding off the riffraff natives and *bêche-de-mer* fishers who had gathered to greet the man whose name had become a terror in the South Seas.

Colonel Boom met him on the veranda, Endymion and Nancy bringing up the rear. "Captain Hayes," he began with studied ease, "you are welcome to Sourabaya. The honor of meeting you brings a glow of pleasure into these dim eyes of mine."

A malicious grin revealed the buccaneer's strong white teeth. "I saw a glow in the eyes of a German gunner last week," he answered briefly; "about three seconds before he introduced me to his quick firer. Don't think me rude, colonel, for mentioning it."

Boom laughed heartily, and introduced his daughters with the pomp of an English country gentleman. Thereafter he played the host for a whole hour with tact and discrimination, leading the lion-voiced seaman to talk of himself and the little island groups over which he held sway.

Something of the old land madness came upon the buccaneer, with the first scent of garden flowers, the fragrant proximity of Endymion and Nancy Boom. It was months since he had

conversed with people of refinement, or tasted wine with men of his own nationality.

Koltz's rich foods inebriated the senses after weeks of hard living on the pearlimg banks. The good wine flushed him, softened the hurricane note in his voice. It was inevitable that his host's first cigar should turn his thoughts to music, and finally to games.

Endymion preferred banker, a quick, breezy game that every one could enjoy. Boom shrugged disparagingly. Bunker was out of date. Poker was more of a man's game. It had dignity and sweep. But he was not anxious for cards. He would rather listen to another of Hayes's quick-blooded narratives.

The buccaneer was for games, brain-stirring, money-exchanging games. And the heavier the stakes the better. The ladies desired it, he felt certain. Was there a pack of cards on the island?

Koltz produced them, a sterilized, gilt-edged, rose-scented pack, slippery as eels and stimulating to the touch. The play began in a room overlooking the palm-skirted bay where the squal outline of a man-of-war loomed discordantly against the blue. Music, from a full-toned, German piano, filled the apartment, while Hayes lost count of the perfumed aces that raised the ivory chips at Endymion's elbow to a mountainous heap.

"His check is good at der Chinese bank," Koltz whispered to the fast-playing Boom. "Ven you has skinned him properly, we vill hang him in der sun. Get his check."

NANCY BOOM sat sad-eyed and lovely as a dawn flower, between her father and the card-hungry buccaneer. She shrank from games and the voices of players in overheated rooms. She had come like a driven snowflake to this table of money-snatchers and cheats. Something within

her young breast cried against the fleecing of this stormy-voiced seaman with the eyes of a child.

Boom pressed her elbow almost fiercely. "Wake up," he whispered warningly.

Nancy woke up. She had been dreaming of an island where there were neither cards nor talonlike hands stretching across a green-haize table.

Endymion applauded the buccaneer's nerve each time he risked a hundred dollars on a flush or suit of trumps. The play grew hot and furious toward sunset, when Hayes, at the good-humored request of Boom, took back the pile of counters from Endymion by filling in a check for five thousand dollars.

Nancy covered her face as the check fluttered into her sister's hand. Boom's foot pressed her slim ankle warningly.

"No squeals, little passion flower! By the holy, I'll throw you into a French convent, if you look at him with those eyes again!"

WHEN Nancy and Endymion had retired, the buccaneer drew breath and regarded his host a little thoughtfully.

"That check for five thousand dollars represents my limit at the Chinese bank," he confessed at last. "My brig and cargo are worth fifty thousand more. If you'll accept them as currency, we'll go on with the play. It's years since I had my fling at cards."

The buccaneer was well aware that the check for five thousand dollars he had given to Endymion represented many a bloody conflict with Japanese and Arab shell-poachers. It was the price of many pearl cargoes for which his own divers had scoured the floors of a hundred lagoons and shark-infested reefs. All gone in the turn of an ace!

Colonel Boom shuffled the cards broodingly, doubtfully almost. "I hate playing a man for his ship," he said with

a grin. "There might be some difficulty in disposing of her," he added as an afterthought.

"The chink at the bank will allow you my valuation," Hayes urged. "She's brand new, and the fastest craft in the South Pacific."

Play was resumed, and, within an hour, Hayes had assigned the *Leonora* and cargo to the sleek-handed gamester with the pouched eyes.

The buccaneer yawned with the weariness of a caged lion as he flung down his cards. "My brains have been under water too much lately, Boom. Down among those reefs off Sunday Island. Makes a man tired."

Sauntering to the moonlit veranda, he stumbled against a Kanaka waiter carrying a tray of iced water and champagne.

A startled look was in the Kanaka's eyes as he whipped round in response to Hayes's genial greeting. "Belito, cap'n," he stammered, with a lightning glance in Boom's direction. "Belito nari, enski!" he passed on swiftly with his tray of iced water and champagne.

In a flash Boom was at the buccaneer's elbow, alert as a tiger in the track of its kill. "Those native boys are insufferably careless," he said testily. "What does the fool mean by 'belito' and 'enski'?"

Hayes finished lighting a cigar before replying. Then: "Belito is native for bunco," he answered steadily. "Can't think where I met the lad before. Must have been in the Kingstuill group. They get jobs all over the islands. He's been drinking whisky. I fancy."

It came to Hayes in the turn of a thought that the boy's name was Areta Hempa, and that he had once worked on one of his pearl-lugger luggers down south. A little later, he remembered having saved Hempa a beating at the hands of a drunken, half-mad lugger master.

And Hempa had told him something that turned his blood to poison, filled him with devastating thoughts of murder and pillage. Only by a savage effort did he maintain his self-control. Often in the past, he had striven to conduct himself with calmness and decency when faced by the city crook and petty swindler. He could not believe that Endymion had plucked him so ruthlessly. And what of the dreamy-eyed little madonna who had sat opposite him?

Again and again he had met those dreaming eyes, trained to lure and decoy the unwary sailorman! Damn them! He could hold himself with dignity and poise at a pinch. The last trick had yet to be played!

A FEW stars lit the far east, where the pandanus woods leaned seaward from dark capes and islands. Colonel Boom talked volubly, as though eager to fill in the tense minutes that must elapse before the tea gong released him from the buccaneer's society.

Under ordinary circumstances the business of dismissing a plucked pigeon was a matter requiring infinite tact and diplomacy. Usually the skinned bird dismissed himself with apologies. In the present case Boom was dealing with a man whose temperament no one had ever rightly gauged. A word misplaced might set Hayes sulking over his heavy losses until his berserk rage would hurl him in the face of his despoiler.

Boom was too great an artist to allow his victims a moment to dwell on their misfortune. He talked for a space with brilliancy and point until Hayes rose hastily from his chair.

"I'm going aboard the *Leonora*," he announced briskly. "Maybe you'll come with me, colonel, and see that everything is shipshape and square. She's your property, and you'll find her a comfortable craft."

Boom glanced furtively at the gun-

flanked ribs of the distant man-of-war. The sight lent courage to his failing nerve.

"Your daughters," the buccaneer added, searching for his last cigar, "might like a peep at her fittings. It's a clear night, and you can hear the band on that old war wagon quite plain."

Boom did not answer immediately. He was troubled in mind, but with the man-of-war and guard boats lying so close in to the town, it appeared hardly possible that harm could befall him. A sudden feeling of security came upon him as he thought of the slim-throated guns within the grinning barbettes, capable of blowing Hayes and his fighting brig over the sky line, if the occasion arose.

Yes, he would go aboard the *Leonora* with his charming friend, Hayes. He was more than sorry to rob a man of his ship. But debts of honor had to be met. And Endymion was delighted at the prospect of a visit to the *Leonora*. Nancy begged to be excused, and retired to her room in spite of her father's scowling side glances. Boom was now like one treading between blazing coals; yet he could scarcely control his anxiety to view his newly acquired possession, which had yet to be formally handed over to him.

The *Leonora*'s whaleboat took them from the pier to the brig's gangway. Clambering on deck, Hayes escorted Boom and Endymion below to the spacious stateroom, furnished and upholstered after the manner of a private yacht.

There were a hundred things for the curious, souvenir-loving Endymion to inspect, pearl shell and amber from the whalers of Norfolk Island; mats from Tonga and silk stuffs from the looms of Shantung and Delhi. Endymion fell upon the pieces of silk and pearl with the enthusiasm of a born collector. The stateroom of the *Leonora* was a veritable Midas-hole for her searching

hands and eyes. No New York art dealer could show so priceless a collection of deep-sea treasure.

THE unexpected clanking of capstan bars overhead startled Boom. The sound of the deck hands heaving the anchor aboard warned him that something was wrong.

"Rest your mind," Hayes told him from the locked stateroom door. "We're now bound for the Line Islands. Your clever fingers need a rest. It will be a long time before they trim the edge of an ace again!"

Endymion screamed as she sprang to the open port window above her. Her father laughed uneasily as he turned to the grim, sea-tanned master of the *Leonora*.

"I defy you to leave Sourabaya without my leave," he challenged. "I have only to lift my hand and that man-of-war guard boat will——"

"Bunk! The blamed old gun tank couldn't hit us at point-blank. And she mightn't try, even if I allowed a bald-headed crook to wave himself stiff under her guns. Sit down, please, and don't wear out my carpet stamping your patent-leather feet."

Boom sat down limply, and his pouched eyes showed livid in the half-light. The clatter of the yards overhead warned him that every effort was being made to get the brig out to sea. The spirit of the gambler deserted him, leaving only a swarm of fears in his excited brain.

"What do you want?" he demanded at last.

"My check for five thousand strong."

"The check is at the hotel. Endymion has it in her box."

The buccaneer took a turn about the stateroom, pausing to stare at semihysterical Endymion, clutching helplessly at the small round opening above her that revealed the swiftly vanishing shore line.

"I'll put it back, Miss Boom, if you'll promise to get the check. Your father stays with me, of course."

Endymion clenched her hands. "We needed axes, not aces, to play a pirate like you!" she stormed. "How dare you carry us from Sourabaya?"

"I'll carry you to the last reef and atoll and leave you to rot unless you return my check!" He touched her sobbing shoulder lightly with his hand. "I know what you and your father stand for, Miss Boom. Half a dozen banks between here and Darwin will cash that paper. I'll allow you five minutes to make up your mind. After that I'll put you among the sea gulls and the sharks!"

Colonel Boom muttered something about gamblers who balked their debts. But Endymion knew her man. Ashore, a child could lead him. On the deck of his fast-moving brig he knew no rules but one, and that rule was the complete effacement of people who handed him a dubious card.

"You win!" Endymion choked at last. "I'll return your beastly check. Put me ashore at once. And they told us you never hurt a woman in your life!"

"Only once when Lola Montes tried to shoot me over the table wine. I smacked her hard, tied her up with a silk bell rope and put her ashore. And now, that check, Miss Boom!"

A sharp order to the mate in charge of the brig had the effect of bringing them round on the port tack. Half an hour later they were back at their old moorings, where Endymion was put in the whaleboat, followed by the buccaneer. Arriving at the pier steps he pinched her arms playfully.

"Try a double cross on this seaman, and I'll bell-rope you good and hard."

IT was dark now. Endymion, with the buccaneer at her side, hurried up the limestone path to the hotel. The veranda lights burned clearly through

the pandanus palms and wind-shaken passion vines. Koltz's fat shadow beaved across the hotel front warily as they neared the entrance. Hayes released Endymion's arm.

"I'll wait here, Miss Boom, exactly seven minutes. When you come back with the check, we'll shake hands, and then I'll send you a bolt of the finest silk that ever came out of China."

"Keep your silk for the women who need it!" she gave back from the hotel stairs, wrath flaming in her desperate eyes. "One of these days you'll step on a trapdoor. There will be a bully, not a bell, at the end of the rope!"

She disappeared into her room, leaving Hayes standing irresolutely in the half-lit hotel passage below. It seemed a long time before she appeared, all the venom and fury of the disappointed gambler in her movements as she cast the check at his feet.

Hayes picked it up with a laugh, scanned it for an instant and bestowed upon her a mock salaam. "You dear little cheat!" he chuckled, tearing the check into small pieces. "Let me offer you at least a string of pearls for your lovely throat!"

Endymion flung past contemptuously. "Send my father ashore at once!" she commanded. "Do not insult the poor old man further."

Promptly Hayes returned to the brig and slapped the scowling Boom on the shoulder cheerfully. "That girl of yours is a real fighter, my dear colonel. The enemy will never catch her asleep. By the holy, I thought she was going to scalp me, just now!"

Boom consented surlily to drink the buccaneer's health in a bottle of wine before going ashore in the whaleboat. Hayes watched him go, glad that the affair had ended without further parley or recourse to violence.

Late that night he changed his anchorage and ran the *Leonora* into a wooded cove on the lee side of the island.

Here the townspeople could no longer follow his movements, and for the moment, he was free from the everlasting scrutiny of the guard boats in the bay.

It was possible, he reflected, that Boom might stir up the wrath of the warship commander with a self-constructed tale of blackmail and robbery, wherein Boom had been forced to pay up under threats from the notorious desperado, Hayes. To-morrow he would wind up his affairs at the Chinese bank and leave Boom in possession of the town.

THE whaleboat of the *Leonora* put Hayes ashore the following morning, at Barracouta Inlet. A short walk through some pandanus scrub brought him, unobserved, to the rear of the Chinese bank. Entering by way of a side door, he stepped into the presence of Mr. Li Ki Sing, general manager for Sourabaya and the adjacent islands.

Sing greeted Hayes's entry with a deference reserved for visiting mandarins and other affluent customers. In his humble way Li Ki admired this big, strong-voiced man with the slamming fists and challenging eye.

"You lookee well an' fit, Cap'n Haye'!" he stated with Celestial unction. "You findee plenty pearl, plenty oil an' sandalwood?"

"Enough oil to loosen the hinges of Hades, Li Ki!" the buccaneer retorted, helping himself from a box of choice cheroots at the Chinaman's elbow.

"Things were never better," he went on with the gay fury of one who had narrowly escaped ruin and bankruptcy. "The Japs pay toll whenever I catch 'em lifting shell on the banks. There was a bit of friendly shooting and a few throat-cuttings among the Arab divers, last month. The coroner, at Thursday Island, said it's almost wicked the way these shellers behave in their spare time. Hitting each other with razors like surgeons out of school."

Hayes was now anxious to transfer most of his capital from Sourabaya to an American bank in Port Darwin. Li Ki didn't mind. It was all in the day's work.

The Chinaman was staring through the slatted window of the bank at a slim white figure approaching from the beach side of the town.

"But look, O Chuen!" he cried in soft Cantonese. "Here cometh the little sad flower from the hotel of the German, Koltz!"

Hayes almost leaped round to the open window slat, curious as a boy of sixteen. Nancy Boom! His jaw relaxed as though a breath of cool air had blown into his heated brain.

Down the avenue of palms she came, darkly, lovely, shy and wistful as a belated schoolchild. The buccaneer's fingers beat a devil's tattoo on the window slats. A girl like Nancy had no right to wander near the beach, alone! The scrub-covered inlets were alive with pestiferous junks and *praus*. How many white girls had taken their morning stroll on these beaches, to disappear under a Malay shawl into the forecabin of some slave-running Mohammedan!

Old Boom ought to know better.

Straight to the Chinese bank came Nancy, the fragrance of island flowers and the sun-drenched woods moving about her. Hayes fetched a deep breath, for he had been haunted by the memory of this fear-driven girl who had sat between him and her vulture parent at cards.

"Boom has an account here?" he questioned Li Ki.

The Chinaman shook his head. "I do not know Boom," he confessed. "I only know this little moonflower with the aching eyes. The aching eyes of all the children in the world who are beaten and scolded without mercy. See, O Chuen! She is here!"

Hayes withdrew to a small room at the rear of the bank, as Nancy en-

tered. He was loath to be seen by any one from the hotel. When Nancy had gone he would return to the *Leonora*.

The door of the bank opened; Nancy stepped in. Li Ki smiled benevolently as he stood like a startled ghost beside the counter. Then a check slipped from her shaking fingers into his yellow palm. He scanned the signature swiftly, and in a flash his face was a frozen blank.

"One minute li'l' missey," he begged, "while I look at my ledger."

With Celestial serenity of manner he passed from the counter to the back room, where Hayes sat with his chin cupped in his big hands. With no more sound than a dead man he held Nancy's check for him to see.

The buccaneer's glance snapped over the signature. It was his own, and the amount was for five thousand dollars! A swift, murderous rage seized him. Poor, blind fool that he was! The alert-brained Endymion had given him a hastily filled-in check in the dark hallway of Koltz's hotel. And like nine asses out of ten he had merely glimpsed it before tearing it up! His real check was here!

Li Ki coughed at his elbow. "What shall do?" he inquired meekly.

The buccaneer stood up, the muscles of his great body flinching in an agony of mental torment. A drop of moisture fell from his brow.

"What shall do?" again piped Li Ki.

Hayes woke from his torment. "Pay it!" he snarled. "And then stand out of my way!"

SLOWLY and with extreme care, the Chinaman counted the money in notes, placing them in a wad before the ghost-white Nancy Boom.

"You takee money, quick, li'l' moonflower!" he advised in a quaking under-breath. "Oh, please run welly fast when you get outside! Run, run, run!"

She stared blankly into his almond eyes. "Run very fast when I get out-

side," she repeated, her small hand holding the roll of notes uncertainly. "Why should I run? And who from?"

Outside the bank she paused to inhale the dizzy perfumes of sun-heated frangipani and wild limes. Then she saw Hayes standing in the path.

His eyes were bright, but not with danger. For one blinding moment she saw his hand go to his lips as though a drop of blood had welled up from his heart. In that fleeting glance of him Nancy came near to tears.

"They sent you for the plunder," he said quietly. "They hide behind shutters and blinds while little sister gets the money from under the enemy's guns!"

All the heat had drained from his fine face. He was looking down at the madonna features and slenderly lovely figure. He saw how near she was to tears, this fear-driven, fist-bullied little daughter of the card shark.

She was speaking with her eyes full on him. "I half hoped you would come round to the bank. They believed you had gone. I wanted to tell you about the fraud, last night."

He laughed reassuringly. "Your eyes told me everything, little girl!" The fragrance of her hair seemed to drench his heart and brain. In a flash he saw into the tragedy of her daily life, the long nights at the gaming table under the basilisk eyes of Boom, the shifting from country to country with the police ever at their heels.

With scarcely a word he led her gently back to the bank, where the wad of money in her loose fingers slipped mechanically to the counter before the startled eyes of Mr. Li Ki Sing.

"This money," the buccaneer instructed gravely, "you will put to Colonel Boom's account, Mr. Sing! Tell him, from me, it is the price of Nancy's freedom!"

The Chinese bank manager bowed and nodded with the agility of a spring-

fitted image. Then waited, for Hayes was not done.

"Tell Colonel Boom." Hayes went on while Nancy's red lips seemed to frame a litany, "tell the colonel he is at liberty to view the marriage register at Rosary Island, within the mission of the Marist convent, after to-morrow, and he will see that Miss Nancy Boom has married Captain William H. Hayes, of Cleveland, Ohio. And that," the buccaneer added genially, "will be plenty for Colonel Boom."

A sigh of satisfaction escaped Mr. Sing as he thrust the roll of money into one of the bank's big envelopes.

Nancy's heart gave a little twisting leap as she stood outside the bank where the wheeling sunbirds cheeped and cried above the bellowing surf. Hayes was speaking, his hand steady-ing her trembling shoulder.

"We are leaving the cards and the drugged wine behind us, honey. The sea and the thousand islands under the line are good enough for me. And while I'm saying it, honey, there's still time for you to go home if my remarks about the little old Marist mission-house ceremony lacks interest. I'm no preacher myself. But I love you, little one, love you more than my ship or the gold that is stowed in half the Eastern banks!"

It seemed a long time before Nancy replied. The memory of her hateful past with Endymion and her father quickened her resolution. The tender, homely words of this strong man ran like a draft of pure crystal through her young veins. His cool hands were about her trembling body.

"The game of life needs two, honey. Come and play it with me. Shall we make for Rosary Island?"

THE sunbirds followed them in the boat to the *Leonora's* gangway. And before noon the brig was a white cloud of canvas against the sapphire sky.

According to the Log



By Gil Brewer

If you think this is the best of the five skitlets in this number, please say so on the special line in the ballot on page 142. Mail your vote to The Editor.

Skillet No. 11

THE worst of the squall was over. The chief mate of the brig *Salem* cast a weather-wise eye to windward. The forecastle head was a-smother half the time and the lee scuppers were awash with the overlap from racing combers. Tight-clewed yards and tortured rigging slanted against the gray-black sky.

"She's liable to spill another rouser yet 'fore she's through," muttered the mate. He spoke out of a wealth of experience with the treacherous calms and screaming hurricanes of the Horse latitudes. It would be as well to belay topsails and trust to the low-stayed spencers to keep the brig hove to until all danger of another blow had passed.

Such was the opinion of the mate. But he scowled apprehensively at the sight of the *Salem*'s drunken, bully captain hauling his thickset body up the cabin companionway. The smoldering hatred he had suppressed so long glowed afresh in the mate's wind-narrowed eyes. His heavy jaws clamped tightly together leaving his broad lips a thin scar across his weathered face. "Keep 'er up to 'er course, again," bawled the captain as he stumbled out into view. He steadied himself atop wide-spread legs, his red eyes glaring.

"Keep 'er up, sir," returned the mate in a sullen growl. His hate-filled eyes gleamed more balefully as he saw the crew stir uneasily. Right enough sailors when they had left port, they were now like beaten dogs. Tobias Long—bloody, flogging, grog-soaked sea rogue—had broken them.

"Hoist away the to'-gallant yards," roared the captain. "Run up the flyin' jib!"

The mate stared, his eyes crackling alight with the certainty of danger bulging afresh out of the black sky. He had a moment's glimpse of the man at the helm bracing his body to keep the wheel up to windward; a vision of the ordered sails slatting to ribbons and the brig wallowing on her beam's end. He hesitated in passing the word. The captain instantly surged forward with a raging bellow. His heavy boots and sledgelike fists drove the crew into the rigging.

"Lay aloft, you bilge-slashed sopers!" he roared, as he struck about him. "Lay aloft an' loose the royals." He stood weaving amidships, croaking curses.

The rage and hatred of the mate burst all bounds. He bore down upon the captain with doubled fists. "Lay aft!" he rasped. "I'll handle the fo'c's'le!"

It was the first time that the mate

had squarely faced the captain for his infringement upon the time-ordered management of a ship's crew; the right of the chief mate to direct operations from the deck. The crew stared down, petrified, from their safe aeries aloft.

For a moment the captain looked as though he had been shaken from head to heels by a sudden blow. In the next he seemed bent on smashing the mate beneath his ponderous body and ham-like fists. Then he tucked his chin lower against his chest and thrust his bloated face close to the mate's.

"So you'll be crossin' Tobias Long," he grated. "Is that it?"

"I'll be takin' your orders," shot back the mate. "But I'll also be givin' those orders to the crew. Your place is aft."

For a long minute the captain's bloodshot eyes remained fixed upon the face of the chief mate. He hooked his thick thumbs over his belt. He nodded slowly, his face warping into a villainous scowl. "An' I'll be givin' you orders," he snarled ominously.

Without another word he swung on his heel and lumbered aft. A moment later he disappeared below. As his head dropped from sight the mate's voice roared aloft.

"Belay there! Tumble down!"

THE tail-end of the squall struck.

Wind leaped in a booming blast out of the dark skies. It lashed the seas to a foaming fury, and thundered against the *Salem's* weather counter to hurl its burden of spume slashing through the rigging like scattered shot. A mountainous wall of water piled up over the forecastle head and wen' chargin' down over the canteen deck.

Tobias Long, master of the brig *Salem*, paid this bunt of the storm no slightest heed. Snug in his cabin with a tall, brown bottle and a copious mug, he sat nourishing his rage with raw liquor. His scowling face gradually warped into a twisted grin.

He lumbered to his feet and burrowed in a sea chest to exhume his stained and battered personal log. Stroking a thumb across his thick tongue, he discovered the old entry he sought. It recorded the loss of a chief mate at sea. Cause of death: "Slipped on a ladder."

Tobias Long chuckled reminiscently. He downed another mug of liquor to refresh his memory and steady his hands. He tossed the log back into the top of the chest and picked up a handspike. Hefting the implement experimentally, he placed it within easy reach atop the cabin table and turned to mount the companionway.

"Ahoy, there, Mr. Brown," he sang out over the deck. "Lay aft." He waited until the chief mate had started back along the deck. Then he turned hastily to descend to the cabin.

Tobias Long's sense of equilibrium was impaired by liquor. Even so, he might have managed well enough had not the helmsman lost his footing on the wet grating. When the wheel spun free and the rudder chains snarled through their guides, the *Salem* yawned hard away before the wind. The feet of Tobias Long shot from beneath him, and he plunged downward with a jarring thud.

The chief mate came upon the body rolling limply across the threshold of the cabin as the storm-tossed brig wallowed athwart the seas. Only a cursory examination was necessary to determine that death was due to a fracture of the skull.

After the customary procedure for the disposal of the dead at sea, the chief mate of the brig *Salem*—now acting master—seated himself in the cabin and set about making the necessary entry in the log. When he came to specify the contributing cause of death, he paused for a moment to stroke his chin thoughtfully. Then in a tight-fisted scrawl, he wrote:

"Slipped on a ladder."

The Tail of a Dog



By Monty Castle

If you think this is the best of the five skitlets in this number, please say so on the special line in the ballot on page 142. Mail your vote to The Editor.

Skillet No. 12

THIS time I gotta use my head!" decided "Slippy" Crouse, as he wolfed down another chunk of sowbelly. No more killings. He'd been a sap to croak the guy in that last holdup. Here he was—stranded in the foothills of the Rockies, broke, and the Denver police on the lookout for him. Lucky he'd grabbed onto that fishing outfit two weeks ago. Lucky he'd found this shack with the lame old bloke and the dog in it. First off, the old guy had pulled a gun, and the dog had made for him. But now he'd got them both eating out of his hand.

Slippy pricked up his ears. He could hear old Peter Murdoch hobbling around behind that locked door. The crazy loon! Lousy with money, yet hiding himself off awry up here for fear some one would steal that fool invention he was always working on in the locked room.

Slippy bent down to stroke the dog. He'd certainly used his head when he'd made friends with this ugly, mustard-colored brute that had nearly chewed him up that first day. He bet he'd lugged a wagonload of bones to the beast. But it had paid. That dog would only slobber and wag his ropy

tail while he, Slippy, tied up the old man and lifted his roll to-night.

The key grated in the lock. Slippy stiffened, staring out of the corner of one slate-colored eye. Old Peter Murdoch hobbled into view, pausing to fumble in a tobacco can—a tobacco can filled with bills. Slippy licked his lips. Must be a couple of grand!

Murdoch laboriously swung himself across the room. He was having to use two crutches to-day instead of one. But let him hobble: Slippy had eyes only for the greenbacks in those trembling fingers clamped about the old crutch. One of the bills fluttered to the floor.

"Here you are, mister." Murdoch proffered the remaining bills to Slippy. "It's real nice of you to tend to gettin' my supplies from the minin' camp fer me!" He sank into a chair.

As Slippy crossed behind the old man, he scooped up and pocketed the other bill. A fiver! Pure velvet.

"Yep," babbled Murdoch ingratiatingly, "you been a great help to me—might as well stay all summer, seein's you like to fish. Y'see, I know and trust you now. At first I thought you was one of them big capitalists that's been tryin' to steal my invention. Be careful you don't mention about me be-

ing here when you're down at the store. We don't want nobody to find out about us till after we've got our patent, do we, Tag?" At the sound of his name, the ugly brute wagged his tail.

Murdoch needn't worry, Slippy chuckled grimly to himself, as he thought how he'd be clear out of the country before any one found the old man or his hide-out.

SLIPPY dawdled back from his trip to the mine trading post, waiting for darkness to come. He'd bought the supplies, all right: only not for the old man. He'd need them himself on that jaunt over the divide and down into Utah. First, he'd tie up the old coot; then he'd grab the tobacco can, and beat it. By the time the dog's howls attracted somebody to the cabin to let old Murdoch loose, he'd be safe in Utah.

Slippy neared the cabin. From force of habit he walked quietly. He heard a growl inside. Everything was O. K. A word to the brute would be enough.

His hand was already on the latch when his arms were pinioned.

"We got him, boys. Frisk him!"

Slippy's jaw dropped open stupidly. The bulls! For the first time in a long and dishonorable career, he was speechless. He shouldn't have croaked that guy—he'd swing for it now. If only he'd used his head!

"Say, who do you think I am?" he blustered. "Can't a fellow pick up a few trout in season?"

"This your shack?" A flashlight played over him mercilessly.

"Sure!" Slippy drew a deep breath. His face took on an honest, injured expression. "Sure, I been here all summer, fishing the cricks around here!" Pretty neat alibi, that!

"You're just the bird we're looking for, then. You're under arrest for counterfeiting!"

"For c-c-counterfeiting? Say, listen. I never——"

"You passed a phony bill down to the store an hour ago!"

They searched him, and laughed when they examined the fiver. The fiver that had been pure velvet. Slippy snorted in self-disgust. *Him*, taken in by a phony bill after all these years! Then he brightened. They'd never heard of that Denver killing. He laughed shrilly.

"Say, can you beat it? That old geezer having me pass a phony bill to buy his grub with! I've only been stopping here a couple of weeks with him——"

"Oh, so you don't live here, after all? And there's an odd geezer some wheres, too, is there?" asked a cynical voice. "Well, you better call off your dog, because we know you got a counterfeiting outfit in that back room!"

"He ain't my dog, I tell you!"

"No—he's a wolf, that's what he is! We was figurin' out a way to shoot him when you come up now. He won't let us in to get at the body."

"The body?"

"Yeh! Officer Mattern's body. Him that you murdered a coupla hours ago, and that your dog's been guardin' ever since!"

One of the secret-service men opened the door. Slippy's glazed, fishy eyes followed the circle of light that played about the room and came to rest on a figure on the floor—a bulky island in a lake of blood. "He ain't my dog. I tell you! I never killed nobody!" he shrieked.

At the sound of Slippy's voice, something lumbered toward him from the shadows. A huge, mustard-colored brute, only an oversized puppy now, leaped ardently upon him, sniffing for his expected bone. The creature drooled affectionately. His great, ropy tail slipped-slapped back and forth—thumping against the table—hitting an overturned chair—knocking a pair of crutches to the floor. A pair of crutches that clattered like an old man's laugh!

The One Chance



By Philip L. Ketchum

If you think this is the best of the five skiletts in this number, please say so on the special line in the ballot on page 142. Mail your vote to The Editor.

Skillet No. 13

AS Mark Gilroy looked at the two men who had just given their report, his mouth sagged and the wrinkles that lined his leathery face grew more prominent.

"You mean," he asked in a voice that tried hard not to tremble, but that was thin and wavering, "that you can hold forth absolutely no hope? That—that my son must have done it after all?"

The shorter of the two men shook his head. "Not that, Mr. Gilroy. Your son may be innocent, but we have been unable to disclose any facts that will free him."

Gilroy's head dropped forward. For a long time he sat as though in a stupor, then he raised a thin hand and pushed his fingers through his almost white hair. When he looked up, his eyes were wet.

"Sit—sit down," he ordered.

The two men sat down.

Mark Gilroy walked across the room and looked out of the window. He turned back and faced the two men. Quite simply, as though stating a series of facts, he spoke:

"I know that Roy is innocent. No Gilroy was ever a murderer or a coward, and the man who killed Handron was both. I have been estranged from

Roy for years. We Gilroys are stubborn and proud. But when he was arrested I swore that I would clear his name if it was the last thing I ever did. I meant it."

He frowned down at the carpet, then looked up, suddenly.

"Have you given your report to any one else?" he asked sharply.

The two men shook their heads.

"Every one knew that I had employed you two detectives," the old man went on. "Every one will know the result—pretty soon."

He scowled again at the carpet.

"You've told me that two men besides my son might have fired the shot that killed Handron. There are two of you. It—it might work."

The detectives looked puzzled. They were sorry for the old man. They wished he would let them go. But instead, he went on talking.

"The crime was cleverly planned—cleverly executed. But some place the murderer might have made a mistake. On some little detail he might have slipped up. He's worrying about that now. It's only natural, and if we could only uncover that little mistake—"

Mark Gilroy was pacing the floor as he talked. Old and weak, from some

place he seemed to have drawn on a vast store of vitality.

"Even in business deals a man worries lest his enemies discover his weakness. It's the only chance—the only chance left."

He stopped before the two detectives.

"You're not through yet," he told them.

FOUR guests had been invited out to the Gilroy home several evenings later. Two of them were the two men who might possibly have committed the crime for which Roy Gilroy had been arrested. The other two were friends of Mark Gilroy.

And the two detectives were there.

At nine o'clock a telegram was delivered to one of the detectives. He read it and smiled unpleasantly.

"You'll be glad to see this," he said. "It's a wire from old Mr. Gilroy. He's always maintained that his son was innocent, and that the real murderer made some mistake which, if we could uncover, would give us the name of the guilty man. This is what he wires:

"Your tip has produced results stop Roy is innocent stop Will arrive with proof as to who the real murderer is at ten o'clock to-night."

The four men who listened to the reading of the wire expressed their joy. They discussed the case and watched the hands of the clock. At nine thirty, the

two detectives left the room. And a little later, the lights, for some unexplainable reason, went out.

It was just ten when Mark Gilroy climbed from his car at the gate and started up the walk. He moved slowly. Suddenly, the stillness of the night was broken by a shot. The old man uttered a cry, grabbed at his chest, and crumpled to the ground. Then, from the place from which the shot had been fired, came sounds of a struggle, and a moment later one of the detectives dragged a manacled and babbling figure out into the open.

They carried Mark Gilroy into the house and the lights came on as mysteriously as they had gone out. The old man was pale, but his face was twisted into a happy smile.

"It worked," he gasped. "It worked."

One of the detectives, busy giving first aid while waiting for a doctor, nodded.

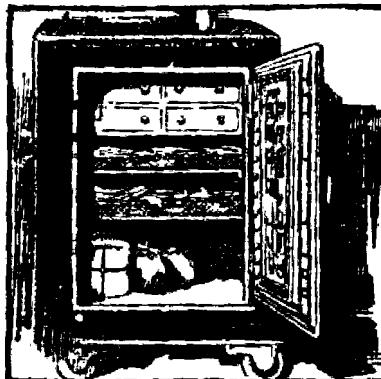
"You were right, Mr. Gilroy. The real murderer was worried. He had killed once. He did not hesitate to try another murder to prevent the first crime from being fastened on him. We have him absolutely dead to rights, Mr. Gilroy.

"No Gilroy was ever a murderer," went on the old man. "I knew Roy was innocent. But if you tell him what I did—"

He didn't finish the sentence, but favored the detective with his most fierce look.



Born That Way



By Claude I. Parker

If you think this is the best of the five skillets in this number, please say so on the special line in the ballot on page 142. Mail your vote to The Editor.

Skillet No. 14

FREDDIE tried to appear interested in the picture, but his thoughts repeatedly returned to the thing he was about to do. "The kid must suspect something," he decided, glancing tenderly at the dark-haired girl beside him.

In all his twenty-four years, he had never met a girl quite like Mary. Casual as their acquaintance had been at the start, in a short thirty days, she had begun to discuss marriage and show a deep interest in his future at the insurance office. To-night, on the way to this outlying show house, she had been particularly inquisitive.

Telephone operator in one of the town's largest hostelleries, pert in manner, and city to her finger tips, not the least surprising thing to him was her desire for domesticity—a kitchen stove, hot biscuits, gravy.

"Anything wrong, Beautiful?"

"Just hot," he replied.

He was sweating freely; his nerves were on edge, and he was striving for calmness. His thoughts were clicking crazily. "After I pull it off, we can get married—maybe to-morrow."

"For her!" His distorted perspective flashed the words again and again.

"Everybody's in the insurance busi-

ness; the same old line of talk every day." His jumbled thoughts brought him always back to the barrier of futile achievement.

"Fast money and for her!" an imp kept chanting.

He looked cautiously at his watch, and gave a slight start. It was ten minutes of ten. "Now for it!"

He turned to Mary. The feature film was just over. "What d'you say, Mary? Let's beat it. Go dancing?"

"All right, Freddie," the girl replied, rising. "Anything you say." Her hand touched his shoulder in a caress.

When they reached the car, which he had carefully parked around the corner from the show house, he helped her in behind the wheel.

"Aren't you driving?" she asked.

He laughed nervously. "You sure have me going, kid. Forgot all about my hat. You warm up the engine. Be back in a minute."

With no appearance of haste, he sauntered back to the theater, and showed the stub which he had retained.

"Forgot my hat," he explained.

Once inside, he slipped quickly up the narrow stairs on the right, leading to the projection room and office. Twice in the past week he had carefully reen-

noitered the place. "If the fat little manager runs true to form," he thought, "at ten o'clock he'll bring up the cash from the last show—and he'll be alone. Better see if my gun's O. K." He slipped behind a curtain to examine the automatic he had bought just that day.

"This is a cinch. Softly follow the manager into the office, make him open the safe, scoop the place, lock him in, and get away before he can sound the alarm!" His dry chuckle held a note of hysteria.

"Why the devil don't he come? Suppose he isn't bluffed at sight of the gun, but yells and puts up a fight! I'll be in a fine mess!" A new and horrible thought struck him. "My God! I couldn't shoot the man—I'm no killer!"

"This is a fine time to be thinking what might happen. If Mary knew the kind of yellow dog I am, to plan a thing like this, she'd sack me to-morrow."

AS the time for action arrived, the fog of unbalanced thought which had blinded him during the past week cleared away. The hideousness of the thing he was about to do stood starkly revealed. When the test came; he found he had no criminal instincts.

Through a chink in the wall behind him, he saw the news reel being run for the last time.

Suddenly cold fear held him rigid.

"Put 'em up and keep 'em up!" came a harsh whisper from behind.

Whirling like a cat, he peered between the curtains and saw the little manager, at the point of a gun, being backed into his office. The stranger was business-like. The door closed softly behind him.

"Just as I planned it!" Freddie ejaculated in amazement. "So darned simple it occurred to somebody else, too!"

Then there surged through him a great joy, and instinctively, he acted. No longer furtive in his movements, he ripped the curtains aside and sprang to the door. It was not locked! With a

jerk, he threw it open. The room was not large, and he took in the situation at a glance. The little manager was perhaps ten feet away, half facing him, in front of the safe, covered by the stranger's gun.

At the sound made by the door, the hijacker half turned, firing automatically, but the shots were wild. He was met by the crash of a beautiful diving tackle. Freddie hit him at the knees, and as the stranger went down, was on top of him with flying fists. The manager came to his assistance, but it was unnecessary—the man was completely knocked out.

As Freddie got to his feet, he saw the entrance and stairway crowded with excited people, drawn by sound of the shots. A policeman burst through and set about reviving the hijacker.

Freddie felt it was time to get away. His conscience was none too easy. But the little manager insisted on accompanying him. "A hurricane, folks. This man laid him out like a hurricane!" he repeated the words over and over.

When they reached the lobby, Freddie saw Mary on the outer fringe of people and finally made his way to her, but not until he had been made to give his name to the police and reporters who had collected. He felt strangely weak, but filled with a great calm.

"I heard the shots and came running back to see what had happened," Mary said tremulously, slipping her hand in his. "Oh, I'm so proud of you!"

They reached the car, and when Mary was seated, Freddie slipped in behind the wheel. Then he turned to Mary:

"See this," he exclaimed, reaching in his pocket and displaying a short, black automatic. "I bought this gun because of hijacking, and the first time I get a chance to use it, what happens! I ask you! What do I do? Use my fists like any other dumb," he concluded.

With a swing of his arm, the gun disappeared into the night.

The Pipe Of Death



By Charles B. Stilson

If you think this is the best of the five skitlets in this number, please say so on the special line in the ballot on page 142. Mail your vote to The Editor.

Skillet No. 15

WHAT fifteen years will do to a boyhood friend is unpredictable. Something to that effect was in my mind as I stamped the snow from my feet in Shaine's hall and followed him into his snug library.

Shaine had been handsome in those college days when seven of us, chosen companions, good fellows all, had formed our own secret society and sworn fantastic oaths of fealty and mutual aid in the Crimson Circle. Boyish foolishness. Doubtless. But I still wore my gold ring with its emblematic groove of scarlet enamel. So, I noticed, did Shaine.

He had grown gross. His face was purple. His jowls hung. His blue eyes were red-rimmed as a St. Bernard's.

Nevertheless, when his summons had reached me, couched in the grotesque and archaic jargon of the Ritual, bidding me be at his house at eleven that night, "on an affair of fatal urgency," I had not disregarded it.

"What's the rumpus?" I asked as he settled into a chair opposite me.

"You'll know when the rest get here," he replied, scowling under snarled brows. "Anyway, you came. I knew you would. So will the rest."

I was beginning to wish I hadn't. I didn't like the look in Shaine's eyes. It was unhealthy and sinister. I was minded, too, to remark that the gathering of the Seven would not be complete, and never could be again in this world; but I recalled that Shaine knew more about that than I did.

"The show's to come off at midnight," he volunteered. He lapsed into moodiness. We sat and smoked and waited. One by one the others came.

Mason, the doctor; Corwin and Bell, the two attorneys, a Mutt and Jeff pair; and Meyer, the auctioneer, with the possible exception of Shaine, wealthiest and wisest of us all. Shaine was an unknown quantity. He had gone adventuring in strange countries.

Shaine himself lumbered out to answer the bell. None of his servants appeared, though I had a vague impression, from a long previous visit, that he had a rascally Portuguese butler.

Only to Mason did Shaine unbend. "I'm glad to see you, doc," he said. "I'm sorry to pester you chaps, but this had to be done."

Meyer was last. It was well after eleven thirty when he arrived. And when he had eased into a chair and lighted a cigar: "We're all here—the

old Ring, by golly—only 'Slender' Hicks, and he's dead."

"He isn't!" The negative was Shaine's, and it was violent.

"I thought he was, but—he—isn't." Shaine brought his big soft fist down on the table. We stared at him.

"I met him in Guatemala. He'd turned bug-hunter for museums, you know. We went into the Jivaro country, up the Amazon—after emeralds. Hicks knew where they were. I put up the money. Risked our heads. Jivaros are nasty. We got the emeralds. Then we had a row. Hicks said I cheated him. I didn't. He got his share. Anyway, I had put up the money. I—I heard afterward that he was dead.

"He's been writing to me. He's crazy. The damned fool"—Shaine's heavy voice went unnaturally shrill—"has threatened me. He said he'd kill me—even named the day. Yes, sir, the idiot told me that if I didn't come across by a certain day, I wouldn't live to see midnight. And-to-day's the day!" Shaine knuckled the table and glared.

I THINK we all felt that it sounded fishy. If Slender Hicks said he'd been cheated, it was a bet that he had. He was a man who couldn't lie. Moreover, if Slender Hicks had said that he would kill me, I knew that I would have made my will. He had a steely quality of unswerving directness that was invincible and a little awesome. He made a fetish of his word. He had become a scientist and a fanatic. And now—

I looked at the clock, and shivered. It marked six minutes to midnight.

Shaine must have pressed a bell. That rascally Portuguese appeared.

"Bring him in!" roared Shaine. "Oh, yes; I've got him here—safe and fast. I learned where he was hanging out, and we bagged him. He was going to kill me by midnight, and he's got just five minutes to make good."

Two men carried a big, pale man to the foot of the table. The two were met again. We had to take Shaine's word, though, that it was Slender Hicks, till he opened his eyes. He was yellow, worn to skin and bone, and horrible. But when he opened his eyes, we knew it was Slender. His mouth was shut like a gash, and he didn't say a word, though we were all babbling. He just sat and looked at Shaine, and those familiar eyes in that ghastly, shriveled mask were horrible.

"That's a dying man, Shaine," said "Doc" Mason. "Take off those chains."

I hadn't noticed the chains.

"In four minutes, doctor," said Shaine. "But not for four minutes—and all hell can't make me. Look at his eyes. If a look could kill, by God, he'd make good yet. He won't talk. Hasn't opened his mouth since I got him, day before yesterday—won't talk, won't eat—just sits and tries to hate me to death."

For fear, I suppose, lest we should say too much, we all fell silent. The clock hands crept. Shaine got up and stood over Slender Hicks. "Hicks," he said, "I'm almost sorry for you." The clock clicked and struck.

Hicks's face was raised to meet Shaine's gloating gaze. At the mellow chime of the clock, the chained man's lips parted. I caught a glimpse of a tiny wooden tube clenched between Slender's teeth. I heard a hiss of expelled breath.

Shaine staggered back, clutching at his throat. He plucked away a tiny something that clung to one of his pendulous jowls. "A Jivaro dart!" he screamed. "You——"

He flung himself at Hicks. Big Corwin caught him from behind. He struggled, snarling and frothing like an animal. He was almost a match for all of us. Then, all in a minute, he collapsed. We laid him on the floor, and Doc Mason covered his face.

Down The Tango Trail



PART IV

FRED STRONG, a Texas cowboy, is engaged by an elderly man named Gaylord to take over the management of the vast Gaylord cattle outfit in the Argentine. Strong believes that there is a conspiracy among Gaylord's present employees to keep him from getting to the Argentine and investigating the reasons back of the losses of the Gaylord outfit. His life is threatened during his first night aboard the *Castilian Prince*, bound for Buenos Aires, and later during the voyage some unknown person sneaks up behind him in the darkness and casts him over the rail into the ocean. He is rescued by a Spanish steward, whom Fred rewards with a responsible job. The cowboy falls in love with Mercedes Toral, a beautiful Argentina señorita, and has reason to believe that his affection is returned. When he arrives in Buenos Aires, he learns from his new Spanish servant that his secret enemies mean to murder him cold-bloodedly when he is called into the corridor of his hotel

to answer a telephone call. But, even while knowing that he is to be the direct target of his enemies' bullets, Fred decides upon a show-down, and when the telephone call comes, walks boldly into the corridor. (Back numbers containing previous installments may be obtained at 15 cents a copy by writing Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.)

CHAPTER XX. THE CORRIDOR OF DEATH.

COINCIDENT with the gleam of light on metal ahead of him came a clicking sound from behind, and Fred knew now that it was not the intention of the killers to wait until he should reach the telephone. Safety first! The phrase flashed through his mind. He dropped to one knee, and not a second too soon.

MY RAINBOW OF LOVE IS YOU

WORDS BY
W. SCHNEPP

MUSIC BY
J. ORLANDO

Tempo di Tango

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Till Ready

I FELL FOR YOUR CHARM'S THE MO-MENT THAT WE

MET — YOU ES-CAPE'D — MY ARMS — I'LL

for even as he crouched and whipped a hand to his left armpit, what seemed to be a hot finger touched the parting of his tawny hair. The report of a large-calibered weapon rang out—to be echoed, as again and again, Fred pressed the trigger of the military model .380 automatic he had snatched from its shoulder holster.

The new flat Colt, more useful for

the purpose than the bulkier weapon now upstairs beneath his pillow, served him well and smoothly, vomiting left and right the nickel-jacketed contents of its magazine.

A cry, half sob, half groan, the dull crash of a body falling to the floor, and for a few seconds all was still. Then lights flashed on the scene, and the corridor was filled with people. First to

DOWN THE TANGO TRAIL

47

NEV-ER FOR-GET, BUT STILL I DO NOT FEAR — FOR I'LL

GET — YOU — YET. — WITH-IN YOUR

CHORUS

HAIR — I SEE A ROSE THERE — IT HAS ME

GUESS-ING, MY LOVE CON-FESS-ING FOR MY RAIN-BOW OF LOVE IS

reach Fred's side was Arturo. "You are wounded, señor?" he asked, and would have helped Fred, but that the latter, with seeming curtness, ordered him to fetch the police.

"They have already notified the *comisario* of the police," Arturo responded.

"Then go to my room and wait for

me there," Fred rejoined softly and quickly, for there was information he needed before daring to trust himself another hour on the premises of *El Gallo*, and it was quite likely that the Gallego could enlighten him on certain dark angles of the problem he now faced.

He had replaced the automatic in the

YOU. — YOUR SPAN-ISH EYES — AND THE FAN IN YOUR

HAND, DEAR — ARE SO EN-TRANC-ING THAT I'M RO-MANG-

—ING FOR MY RAIN-BOW OF LOVE IS YOU. — IT'S

TRUE THAT WHERE'ER I GO — I SEE

shoulder holster, and was standing with his back against the wall, mute to all questioners, when two uniformed policemen arrived and pushed their way through the crowd.

"I am Strong—Frederico Strong." Fred informed them without delay. "jefe of the Gaylord *ganado-mayor*. Of course you know Señor Gaylord."

Erect and calm, master of the situation, he wiped away the blood which had been trickling thinly down his forehead, and watched the almost magic effect of his simple statement upon his listeners.

Hostility vanished from the mien of the police agents. Smiles replaced the doubting scowls with which they had

DOWN THE TANGO TRAIL

49

THRU A ROS-Y GLOW, AS YOUR VISION COMES TO

VIEW, MY HEART-FLAME GROWS AS OUR RO-MANCE GLOWS

IN- TO A BLESS-ING, TEN-DER CA-RESS-ING FOR MY RAIN-BOW OF

LOVE IS YOU. EACH LIT-TLE YOU.

at first eyed the tall stranger, and almost servile' now they listened to him while awaiting his pleasure. The name of Gaylord acted like magic.

"Take me to your *comisario*," Fred bade them, "but first let us have a look at these fellows on the floor."

At the curt orders of the policeman, the passageway was cleared and the

TN-4A

three men had the corridor to themselves. Fred, standing at a little distance, watched the officers bend over the motionless form lying crumpled beyond the telephone, and was not surprised when one of the stooping men gave a grunt of recognition as he studied the prostrate man's face.

"I know this fellow," he said, look-

ing up at Fred. "He is Cipriano Diaz, at one time a foreman of gauchos at the *estancia*. I recognize him, even though there is a hole in his forehead the size of a pipit's nest."

"What's that? A hole in his forehead?" Fred's questions were addressed to himself. He had shot low—"low, fast, and just ahead of the other feller," as he had been taught; and well he knew the neat perforations of the .380-caliber, nickel-jacketed bullet. Curious, he stepped closer and saw, just above the waistline of the dead man, three tiny holes edged about with darkening crimson. These were his work, he reflected, but as his gaze went higher and took in the jagged hole between and just above the still-open eyes, he shook his head, but he understood what had happened.

"The other chap, shooting at me, hit Diaz," he explained. "He only fired one shot, as I recollect. And that shot not only parted my hair, but did for his friend. My bullets went into a dead man, but even as he went down he sent a stream of lead in my direction. Let's see his gun."

A wicked-looking Luger automatic rewarded the inspection. Its knurled grip was still held tightly by the fingers of the dead man. Its magazine was empty, and now one of the police agents pointed out the reason.

"Notice the forefinger," he said. "how strongly it is curled around the trigger of the empty pistol. To press that trigger was his last living act. After death came to him the pistol went on serving."

"It is true, *compañero*," the other officer agreed, and with his own handkerchief proceeded to cover an unpleasant sight.

BACK toward the lobby, face-downward, the other killer lay sprawled in death. The police agents rolled him over on his back, and after studying a

face unmarked by bullet, shook their heads. He was unknown to them. And, likewise, he was unknown to Fred. Almost sullenly, the Texan looked down at the low, sloping forehead, the dark hair curling damply over it, the colorless lips, parted as if to ask a question.

It was the first life he had knowingly taken. A little touch of regret came to him—and then suddenly he stiffened at a remark of one of the agents.

"These .41s with the soft nose," he said, examining the big revolver found at the side of the dead man, "would stop a puma of the Cordillera."

Soft-nosed bullets! Used in hunting dangerous game! Disturbed no more, then and there banishing for all time scruples affecting his self-preservation, his right to live and enjoy his full heritage of years, Fred left the corridor of death and proceeded with the police agents to the combination office-dwelling of the *comisario*.

Broadcasting station LS3 of Buenos Aires was on the air as Fred and his two escorts entered the tiny office of the local head of police. Shots might be heard in the night, and murders be done on the pampa within his jurisdiction, but that was no reason for depriving an old man with a withered arm of his dinner concerts from "the city."

Briefly, the agents reported, the *comisario* dividing his attention between them and the seductive strains of a "Canzona Andalusia," issuing from the machine beyond him. But with the first mention of "Señor Strong," the old man rose to his feet and shook Fred warmly by the hand. The concert was forgotten.

"We have been expecting you," he said, all smiles, and turned to snap the switch of the radio.

"I received the note of Señor Gaylord some weeks ago," he continued. "and

I welcome you to Corralitos. Here in my poor office you will find me by day or by night. Call on me for men, for help, for anything I can do to serve the *estancia*."

"It's kind, indeed, of you," Fred returned. "I had your name on a confidential list Mr. Gaylord gave me, and I intended calling on you to pay my respects. But now it seems my visit is an official one. There are two dead men over at El Gallo. I am responsible for killing one of them at least."

A wave of his sound arm, a clicking of his obviously false teeth, and the *comisario* made light of the matter as if it were a common occurrence.

"We have had premature deaths in Corralitos before. We will doubtless have them again. Pray, give yourself no concern over the affair. My younger brother, the coroner, is at the hotel now. He will report to the *juez de la paz*, who is my elder brother. And there the matter will end."

Fred felt that he was free to depart. Mindful of Arturo, waiting in his room over at the hotel, he was about to leave, when with a gesture, the *comisario* halted him.

"A private word with you, señor," he said, and turning to his subordinates, ordered them to depart at once and join the coroner.

Alone now with the tall Americano of the North, the old man sat for some moments buried in thought.

"When do you go out to the *estancia*?" he inquired at length.

"Early in the morning."

"Alone?"

Fred detected a note of anxiety in the voice of the other. "I go alone," he said, "but well-armed, and with open eyes."

Admiration lightened up the rather somber face of the old police chief, but quickly an expression of concern clouded it.

"You are brave, but rash," he said.

"Are you aware that you are taking your life in your hands?"

"I dare say," Fred answered, shrugging his shoulders. Curiously he waited for further confidences from this man, whom apart from George Gaylord's recommendation, he felt instinctively he could trust.

FOR fully a minute the *comisario* sat stroking his snow-white mustache and imperial, his shrunken arm dangling loosely at his side, his gaze fixed owl-like on the blank wall across from him, and then he put a question.

"Have you, by any chance, heard of the *Escarabajo*?"

"I have," Fred answered, somewhat surprised. "And I assume that it stands for some one of power and authority—perhaps Don Pablo Quieros."

"You are partly right, my friend. But *El Escarabajo* is more than that. It is an organization. It is to this province a sort of *Mafia*, or Black Hand. It fattens on the estate and holdings of Señor Gaylord. Don Pablo Quieros is its head—the 'Beetle' himself. The others—the *Escarabajeros*—constitute a gang, many of whom wear small pins. A golden pin represents a captain. The silver pins represent the ordinary gaucho who gets double pay for certain work that I have not yet learned the nature of."

"Stealing cattle?" Fred suggested.

The old man shook his head. "No, my friend," he said, "the days of Indian raids and cattle thefts are long over. All cattle are marked and checked off at the shipping points."

"Then, how—"

"We, of the police," the *comisario* interrupted, "have recently come into possession of information which Señor Gaylord would have had, were he here. In his absence, we can but pass it on to you. He vouches for you. He relies on you. And so far, you are alive. It now becomes my duty to see that you

live as long as possible. If you proceed to the *estancia* alone, however, I doubt if you live long enough to accomplish anything."

"Suppose," Fred suggested, after a few moments spent in thought, "that you tell me what you know of this Order of the Beetle, and how its gets its money?"

"Unfortunately there isn't much to tell. There have been some shootings, and we know that silver-pinned *Escarabajeros* have done the killing. These affairs have taken place, it seems, just as we have been on the point of getting definite information. For instance, there was a boy I have known all his life. He was a fine rider and very good with the *holy*. He was invited to join the Beetles and promised double pay. Privately, he talked with me about it. I advised him to join and learn all he could about the order, and then report to me. Two weeks later the boy rode in at night and very foolishly came directly to this office. He said that he had joined the Beetles and had taken an oath under penalty of death not to reveal any of the secrets of the organization. His pay was to be doubled immediately. He was to take orders from any gold-pinned Beetle, and within a few days was to be sent by Don Pablo to a distant point of the *estancia* for 'special work.' He rode away, promising to return or communicate with me. He never came back. That was two months ago."

"Probably seen leaving your office," Fred presumed aloud.

The *comisario* nodded affirmatively. "They have their spies everywhere," he said, "even here in town. The gold of Quieros has ruined many an honest gaucho and made a murderer of him. And that is why, my friend, I asked if you were going to the *estancia* alone. If you do, I fear that you will never return."

For a little while Fred was silent, his

thoughts dwelling on the possible additional dangers of the night at hand.

"What do you know of Maria Ybarra?" he asked presently. "I happen to be in touch with a fellow who came out from Buenos Aires yesterday, and was given immediate work at the hotel. Is she linked with the Order of the Beetle?"

The old man laughed aloud. "By no means," he replied. "Sleepy, jolly Maria wouldn't harm a fly if she could help it. She's really only a figurehead, as far as the hotel is concerned, for it's a part of the Gaylord estate—as well as almost every other store and building in town. Maria has a lease only. But, of course, she'd take orders from Don Pablo, if he saw fit to give them."

"Señor," Fred said, rising, "I don't want you to worry yourself about my safety. I'm going out to the *estancia* with full knowledge that I'll be watched and waylaid and maybe murdered in my sleep. But I don't think they'll get me. I have a plan, you see. I'll tell you how it works next time we meet. And in the meanwhile, thank you, and adios!"

"May God walk with you," breathed the old man. Peering through the dusk, he watched Fred, and noted with approval that the Texan favored the middle of the street for the short walk to El Gallo. A sigh, a slow wagging of his grizzled head, and the *comisario* returned to his interrupted concert.

Buenos Aires LS3 answered his touch on the radio switch, and for the time being, all thoughts connected with evildoers were thrust into the limbo of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARTURO TELEPHONES.

REACHING the hotel, Fred slipped quietly up to his room, and there, as he had expected, found the Gallego waiting for him.

"Tell me, Arturo," he said, going straight to the point, "just how you

came to be put at work here. This is important."

"There is little to tell, señor. We reached this town last night and came directly here. Diaz brought me to Señora Ybarra, saying, 'It is Don Pablo's wish that you give work to this man. He is a waiter.' The lady gave me a small room at the rear of the kitchen, and found some aprons for me. I served in the dining room during dinner last night, and this afternoon we held a meeting, and I was rehearsed in the plan: how to notify them that you had entered the dining room, and how to call you to the telephone. Diaz was to stay in his room until the last moment for fear you might recognize him as the man who attacked you in New York. Then there was some talk about calling you from your room in case you didn't go in for supper, or calling you from the bar if you tarried there."

"Very well," Fred said, "and now suppose we put our heads together and see what you would naturally do under the circumstances. Your two companions are dead. You are employed here as a waiter. In the morning I leave for the *estancia*. What would you do, provided you were loyal to Garcia?"

"I should do my best to kill you," Arturo responded smilingly.

"True," Fred rejoined. Most admirably the Gallego had reacted to the probing of his mental processes. But another course must be chosen.

"It wouldn't be natural for you to call Garcia over the telephone and report the miscarriage of his plans," Fred reasoned aloud. "You might be overheard. It's a delicate matter. But, on the other hand, I don't see any objection to your telephoning Don Pablo Quieros at the Estancia Gaylord, that there's been a tragedy here, and that the gentleman, who was kind enough to get work for you, is dead, and that you'd be glad of any suggestions or instructions."

"It sounds like a sensible plan." Ar-

turo agreed. "If he wants to see me and hear what occurred, I can tell him that one of Garcia's agents killed the other by mistake, and that you took alarm and shot the survivor. If I report that the agents did too much drinking on the train and all day to-day, this Don Pablo Quieros may be deceived. It will probably end by his engaging me to kill you."

"We'll talk that over later," Fred decided. "And now suppose you telephone. Don't use the one downstairs. Look the town over and find another instrument. Be careful what you say, for Pablo Quieros is the *Escarabajo* you've heard of, and a very shrewd man. I can't foretell just how he'll take your message, but I'll bet a box of cigars that he'll either send in a machine for you, or order you to hire one and drive out there to-night."

A few more words were exchanged. exit by the rear entrance was thought best, and then the ex-dragoon removed his apron and stole softly from the room.

Instantly, Fred barred the door behind him and looked to the refilling of the partly empty magazine of his pistol.

Without and within, the shadows of night deepened, but Fred sat in darkness. He doubted that any further attention would be paid to him that night, but resolved to take no needless chances. Unremitting vigilance was now his watchword.

Half an hour passed, and now it seemed that the town had awakened, for lights streamed from the ground-floor windows of El Gallo, and sounds of lively music filtered up from below. Couples in white sauntered beneath Fred's windows, and presently carefree laughter and the soft patting of slippers feet indicated that dancing was in progress.

"Something like the old West," Fred mused, as he sat waiting for Arturo.

"The guns blaze. The bodies are carried out. And then the dance is on."

A tap at the door broke in upon his meditations.

It was the Gallego. Fred admitted him, again locked the door, and now ventured to switch on a small light near the head of the bed.

"Keep away from the windows," he warned Arturo softly, and drew two chairs to the shadows in an inner corner of the room.

"I found a telephone in a tobacco shop not far away," Arturo reported, "and soon was connected with the Estancia Gaylord. The *administrador* had just gone into dinner. He could not be disturbed. I asked that he be told Garcia's man was on the wire at Corralitos. That brought him quickly. He has a most pleasant voice, and when I told him you had met with a little accident in the corridor where two drunken fools were shooting at each other, he inquired most cordially after your present state of health."

"Very kind of him," Fred chuckled.

"Of course I couldn't say very much over the wire," Arturo continued, "but at least I made it plain to him that I was in the conspiracy, and that now I wanted instructions. Was I to return to Buenos Aires and report to Garcia? Or was it the wish of the *administrador* that I should continue on my job as waiter at *El Gallo*? It took him some time while he thought this over, and then he asked me when you were leaving Corralitos for the *estancia*. I answered that I did not know, but that your horse was in a corral near the station, and that the slight wound in your head would not prevent your riding out—probably in the morning. With thirty miles to cover, provided that you met with no accident along the way, I predicted that midday ought to find you at headquarters. My touching on possible accidents along the way seemed to amuse this Don Pablo, for—"

"You gave him food for thought," Fred broke in.

"I'm sorry, señor."

"Don't mention it. You've done no harm, for I was figuring they'd likely set a trap for me along the road. Go ahead with your story. What are you to do?"

"I'm to keep close watch over you and telephone Don Pablo the instant you leave town, whether by motor or on horseback."

"And then?"

"Within an hour of my telephoning that you have left Corralitos for the *estancia*, a motor car will call at *El Gallo* for me. Don Pablo wishes to see and talk with me face to face. He says he may be able to give me employment at headquarters."

SILENTLY, and for fully a minute, the ex-dragoon and the tall Texan sat eying each other in the dim light shed by the low-powered bulb burning near the head of the bed. Arturo Gonzales, adventurer at heart, was reflecting what a pleasure it was to serve a master so considerate and kindly, a master so self-reliant and unafraid. Plucked so unexpectedly from the drab routine which had been his aboard the *Castilian Prince*, he felt that once again he was a man, and that in his maturity, even as in his youth, a portion of romance and high adventure would fall to his lot.

Fred, brooding over the perils which Arturo would incur, now put his thoughts into words.

"Arturo," he said, "you've been the means of saving my life twice, and I'm grateful to you. In fact, I'm too grateful to ask you to go to the *estancia* and put your head in that lion's mouth. I'm not going to be caught in *El Escarabajo's* road trap to-morrow, and if you show up after they've failed to get me, you're likely to fall under suspicion. Already the Garcia plan has fallen

through, and you were in on the know. If Quieros has even an inkling of suspicion, he'll have you shot down like a mad cur. He's cleaning up a staggering fortune. He's working fast now while the owner's away, and he's not going to take any chances."

A pallor, born of fear, swept across the Gallego's face, but it was fear of being separated from his newly-acquired master. He rose and stood stiffly at "attention," while swallowing hard in attempts to find his voice.

"Señor," he said, presently, in low and husky tones, "when you took me into your service, you opened up a new and wonderful life for me. I know now something of your mission. You need a spy in the enemy camp. I know—I feel it in my breast"—his clenched fist rested over his heart—"that I can make this man believe that I am even blacker and more cunning than he, himself. I don't say that I'm brave. I don't say that I'm clever. But I *will* say that I am glib of tongue and have the gift of presence of mind in emergencies. Let me go to the *estancia*, señor, when I am called for. Else let me continue with you, as your faithful servant; or in any rôle you desire."

The little man finished. His arms, raised to emphasize his impassioned plea, dropped to his side. Hanging on Fred's forthcoming words, he stood soldierly erect, ready for orders—whatever they might be.

Fred was touched more deeply than he cared to admit aloud. He knew something of men. He recognized the type to which Arturo belonged. Freed from the irksome life of stewarding, fetching and carrying for seasick and fussy passengers, here was a fellow who would walk with him and be faithful unto death. He could not find it in him to send him away. Nor could he now take him along with him as a helper. Arturo was known around the hotel. He would be identified as the man who

talked over the telephone with Quieros. Henceforth as a messenger or clerk with Fred, he would be doubly marked for slaughter. It would be a case of protecting two lives instead of one.

The Gallego must go on into the camp of the enemy. There was no other way out. Reasoning thus, Fred turned to the larger and heavier of his suitcases, and bent over its straps. He threw back the lid, and presently came across what he sought. Now he faced Arturo, a flat pistol and a box of cartridges in his hand.

"Are you familiar with the automatic?" he asked Arturo. "You'd better master it before you climb into that *estancia* machine to-morrow."

Eagerly, joyfully, the ex-dragoon admitted his knowledge of the Luger, the Mauser, and then listened patiently to Fred's explanation of the functioning of a modern Colt.

"If you ever have to use it," Fred said some minutes later, "be sure you press that thumb-latch; then shoot fast and low—and ahead of the other fellow."

When Arturo had gone, Fred busied himself for some time with his hand baggage. Certain transfers were effected. His well-worn, leather saddle-bags, stowed in the larger suitcase, were now crammed full of articles needed in the furtherance of his plans for the next day, and hung on a hook beside the door. Some clothing and unimportant papers sufficed to fill but one bag. This, together with the old guitar in its new case, represented all the belongings which must, of necessity, reach him later, when he was settled at the *estancia*.

"Settled!" Fred muttered grimly to himself. He buckled the last strap of the case which would follow him, and then, turning out the light, took a seat near one of the windows.

Here the music was louder, and on the soft, night air the sweet strains of

a tango came floating up to him. The refrain was striking. He had never heard it before. Banished, instantly, were all thoughts of Don Pablo Quieros and his Beetles, for now Fred was thinking of Mercedes Toral.

Always was she associated with music—grave or gay. To visualize the dancers circling the floor below, was to conjure memory of their last night at the Plaza—the night when he had left her so abruptly to keep his appointment with Arturo.

When he sought her the next day, to explain as best he could his seeming rudeness, she had gone with her uncle—perhaps to gay Mar del Plata, the Newport of Argentina—perhaps to her own *estancia*, a day's ride west of Corralitos, where he was now sitting.

What must she think of him? Could it be possible that but forty-eight hours had elapsed since he held her in his arms and thrilled to the bright glances of her dark eyes, the light touch of her white fingers on his sleeve?

The window faced westward, and as Fred sat staring out of it, he noted far to the left of him the brilliant Southern Cross limned against the velvet blackness of the sky. His gaze stole along the invisible horizon until, at length, he was looking due west. A star hung low from a constellation that was unknown to him.

"She lives somewhere beneath that star," he breathed, looking out across the dark stretches of the pampas. "I'll ride to her. I'll find her, and explain all—soon."

A clapping of hands, a tinkling of glasses from below, and the musicians yielded to the demands for another encore. It was the refrain of the new tango. The watcher at the window closed his eyes and listened. A smile hovered around his lips. On the eve of a great adventure, he was moving in fancy with a girl in a wine-red gown. They were dancing "Argentine style"—

slowly, languorously, fused by the fires of love into an indissoluble one.

Violin, and 'cello, harp and guitar, gave each its version of a story sweet to hear, sweet to remember—sweet even in the telling. What mattered it that guns had blazed and men had died but a few hours before? Music would live forever. The Southern Cross wheeled higher; the soft night wind crept over the grasses of the pampas browned by October suns. On and on, whispering, sobbing, hushing with dramatic pause, the instruments sang their story to the stars, to the earth, to the Texan listening at the window above and singing in a low voice.

"I fell for your charms
The moment that we met.
You escaped my arms,
I'll never forget.
But I still do not fear,
For I'll win you yet."

"Within your hair
I see a rose there.
It has me guessing,
My love confessing,
For my rainbow of love is you."

"Your Spanish eyes
And the fan in your hand
Are so entrancing
That I'm romancing,
For my rainbow of love is you."

"It's true that where'er I go
I see through a rosy glow
As your vision comes to view.
My heart flame grows
As our romance glows
Into a blessing,
Tender, caressing,
For my rainbow of love is you."

CHAPTER XXII.

INTO THE SHADOWS.

THE wide-brimmed Stetson felt good to Fred as he jammed it on his head for the first time in many a week. The high-heeled riding boots, a little stiff from disuse, were not so comfortable, he mused, but would limber up before

the day was over. One farewell look around the room and he slung the saddlebags over his shoulder and picked up the filled suitcase.

There was hardly a soul astir in El Gallo as he reached the ground floor of the hotel, for the sun had barely risen, and it was the morning succeeding the weekly "dance night" when half of Corralitos made merry at its hotel.

There were noises issuing from the kitchen, however, and as Fred crossed the lobby and set down his suitcase, Arturo appeared bearing a tray of food and steaming coffee.

"I heard you getting up, *señor*," he said, "and I happen to know you like your morning coffee."

"You're a prince," Fred said, and eased the saddlebags from his shoulder.

Standing by the desk where sleepy Maria Ybarra nodded away her afternoons and evenings, he sipped his coffee and munched a square of buttered toast. He ignored the eggs and bacon, but mindful of Sonora and her fondness for salted food, wrapped a rasher of the bacon in a piece of paper and thrust it into his pocket.

He was done at length, and fished out a small roll of paper money.

"Give these five pesos to the hostess," he said, "together with my compliments. And ask her to be good enough to see that this suitcase goes out to the *estancia* some time to-day."

"It shall be done, *señor*," the ex-dragoon responded, and with mixed emotions stood watching as his friend and employer shouldered his gear and stood facing him—perhaps for the last time.

Something unseen seemed to grip the Gallego by the throat. He would have uttered words of caution, would have implored the Texan to take care of himself, but now almost the identical words issued from the lips of the man he would have warned.

"*Cuidado!* Arturo," Fred said softly.

"*Cuidado* all along the line. Take care the moment you climb aboard that *estancia* car. When we meet hereafter, give no sign that you are interested in me. Trust neither man nor woman to take a message to me. Should we meet alone, don't trust even the walls of the room. When the time comes I'll arrange means of communication. Until then—adios!"

Silently, fervently, the Gallego wrung the hand extended to him. "*Señor*," he breathed after a cautious glance around the empty lobby, "I go to telephone now that the foolish Americano del Norte is riding out from Corralitos, on horseback and alone."

"The naked truth," Fred said smilingly, "but for the 'foolish' part of it. Whether or not I'm plumb loco remains to be seen."

With these words, he turned and swung out of the lobby. A cautious glance right and left, his unhampered right arm lurking near the unbuttoned front of his riding jacket, and he strode across the veranda and headed for the station corral. Head erect, spurs jingling, he walked along the deserted street and turned in at the pen where Sonora was waiting for him.

She had been fed, the grinning gaucho told him, and moreover had been brushed and polished, as her glossy sides bore witness. She whinnied at Fred's approach, and reached eagerly for the piece of bacon he offered her. Carefully he spread the square of Navajo blanket, and threw the heavy stock saddle across her back. It was but the work of a minute to lash the bulging saddlebags behind the cantle. He was ready.

Playfully, the bay mare pranced and caressed as her master swung himself into the saddle, but Fred held her down to a walk and made his way leisurely around the corrals and loading chutes, working toward the smooth, dirty road which ran eastward. Free of the last

building, and free, therefore, from the danger of being potted by some hidden *Escarabajero*. Fred gave Sonora more rein.

LOPING at first, then breaking into a smart trot, the mare covered a few hundred yards. She then begged for her head so strongly that Fred yielded and let her have her way for a mile. Along the smooth but dusty road they flew, the tobacco-brown pampas to the right and left of them, the gray road and telephone poles ahead of them dwindling to an invisible point under the risen sun.

Corralitos was but a toy village when, at length, Fred pulled Sonora down to a walk and looked behind him. Its buildings were only a cluster of shadows picked out here and there with flashes of sunlight reflected from metal roofs.

Now Fred drew rein. It was time for him to prepare for action.

First he scanned the horizon, looking closely at each living thing in sight. He saw short-horned steers nosing about among the still nutritious tufts of sun-cured grass. Farther away were certain specks and dots which to his practiced eye represented other grazers. Thoughtfully now, he eyed the cloud of dust settling behind him, and then tried an experiment. Away from the road and its telephone poles he rode Sonora, and trotted smartly for a hundred yards. Abruptly, he pulled up and looked behind him. There was no tell-tale column of dust now. Knee-high, perhaps, a thin film showed briefly before settling into the sod.

Sonora was reddish-brown, Fred reflected. His khaki-colored gabardine breeches and jacket were a shade of brown. There was no ornamental silver on saddle or bit to glitter in the sunlight and bear miles away the message of his coming.

"I'm a symphony in brown, harmo-

nizing with the pampas," Fred said aloud, and swung out of the saddle.

It was getting warm. He pulled off his coat and went to work. First he tightened the loosened saddle girths, and next he gave his attention to the bags behind the cantle. There was a canvas-wrapped object protruding from one of them, which, divested of its covering, proved to be a blued-steel, rifle barrel. There was a protecting band over its foresight, and near the opposite end a matrix of modeled leather held snugly "the finest telescopic sight money could buy."

With expert fingers Fred fitted the barrel to the stick and filled the magazine with .303s. He tried the ejector. It worked perfectly, flipping the cartridges over his shoulder, to be gathered up and loaded afresh. Now Fred flung himself prone for a test shot.

The butt of the high-power, take-down model at his shoulder, his elbows braced, he applied his eye to the miniature telescope and swung the muzzle until a distant telephone pole was centered against the quartering hair lines of the object lense.

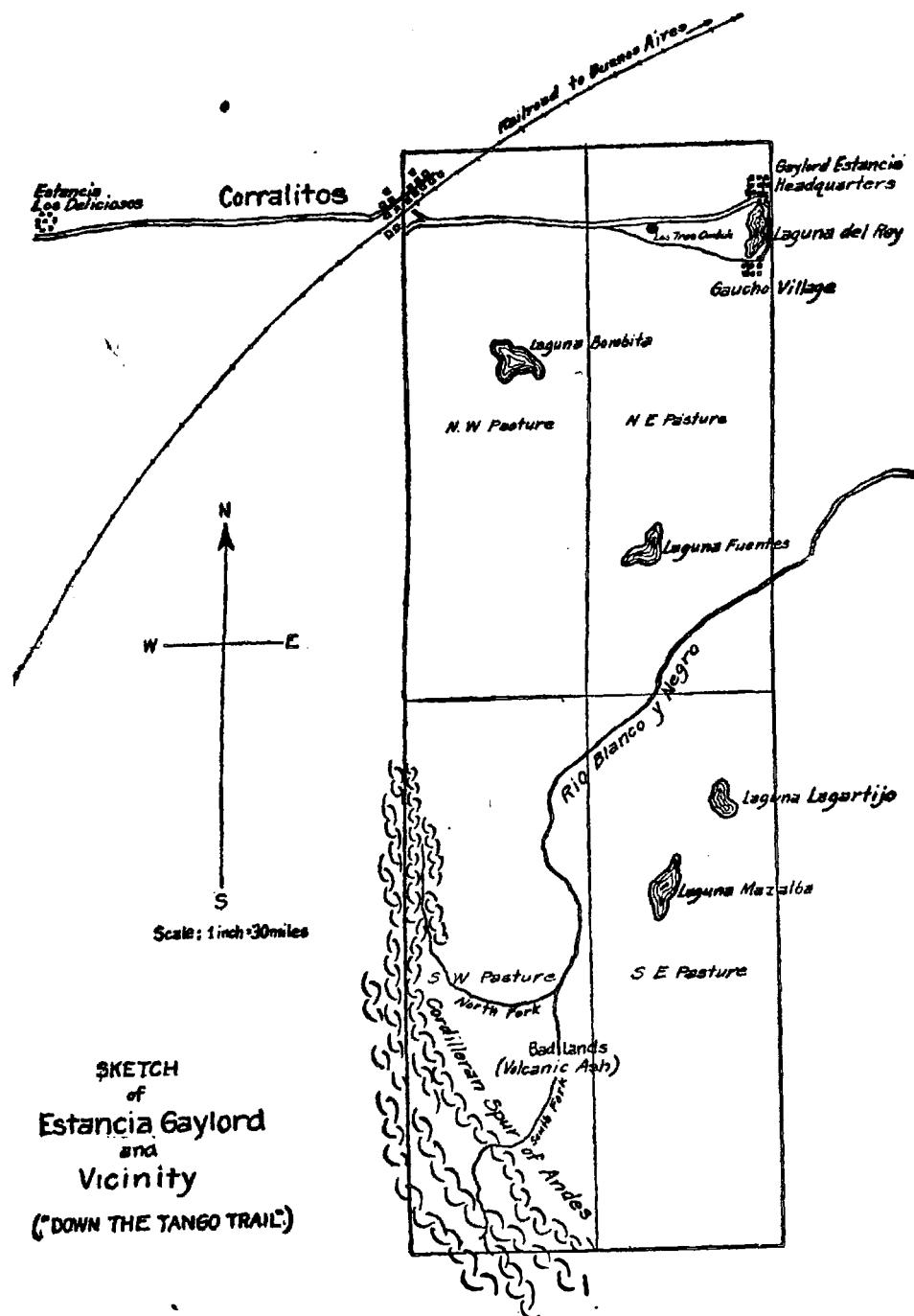
"Steady, girl," Fred cautioned Sonora, and pulled the trigger.

At the crack of the rifle, the mare raised her head for an instant, and then went on searching for a succulent tuft. Fred, squinting through the sight, was not quite satisfied with the results of the shot, for what might have been a hole in the middle of the pole, might also be a protuberance or tiny knot.

Smiling, he went on to reflect that he had the means of making certain.

CAREFULLY, he laid the rifle down on the canvas which had been stripped from it, and then drew from the nearer saddlebag a pair of field glasses. They were "the finest money could buy," and when he had drawn them from their case and focused them on the distant pole, he found, to his

DOWN THE TANGO TRAIL



satisfaction, that his aim had been true to the fraction of an inch.

There was little left to do before pressing on, and soon Fred had the rifle scabbard lashed "lancer fashion" to the right skirt and stirrup-leather of his saddle. Now he "bucketed" the rifle, slung the cased binoculars over his shoulder, and mounted. He was ready for what might come.

Leisurely he rode at first, bearing to the right until the telephone poles bordering the road were hardly perceptible to the naked eye, and then he shifted to a parallel course and pressed on faster.

He had little to do beyond keeping a lookout ahead of him, and mile after mile the bay mare loped on across a flat terrain boasting not so much as a shrub, or a stone the size of a man's fist. Here was no hiding-place for those who would lie in ambush. In fact the large-scale map of the Gaylord holdings Fred carried in a saddle pocket showed but one logical place along the road itself. This was at a water tank named for the three trees which grew from the earth embankment of the tank. Los Tres Ombús, ten miles from *estancia* headquarters, was the only practicable spot where ambuscaders could expect to surprise their victim.

On the other hand Fred thought, Don Pablo might order out a litter of his best Silver Beetles, to ride boldly down the road and shoot him when they should meet about halfway.

"Quién sabe?" Fred growled to himself as he rode along and wondered just what steps Quieros would take.

In any event, he reflected, it was comforting to know that he was prepared either for an ambush or a running fight in the open. The high-power Savage at his right stirrup-leather was sighted up to two thousand yards, and would kill at thrice that distance—farther than the unaided human eye could discern an object the size of a man.

If he wished, he could pick off his enemies at long distance unseen; perhaps, if the wind were favorable, unheard. And, thanks to his "ten-power" Zeiss binoculars, while he himself was to others but a speck on the horizon, he could distinguish their arms and legs, in some instances their beards and outlines of their features.

Comforting also were the thoughts of the old-fashioned .45 buckled around his waist, and the newer Colt .380 in the shoulder holster beneath his left arm pit. It was awkward to be obliged to pack around cartridges of three different calibers. It was awkward to feel compelled to ride thus, "armed to the teeth." And yet, he owed it to himself and to George Gaylord, who had honored him with a sacred trust.

It was while stopping for a peep at the map, and at the same time giving Sonora a breathing spell, that Fred's attention was attracted to what seemed to be a yellow point pricking the horizon far to the left and ahead of him. Immediately, he folded the map and got out the binoculars.

Sonora's back afforded a good arm rest, and when the focus was right the yellow point became a pillar of dust. At its base he could make trees and shrubbery out of the speck he had taken for a grazing steer.

"Los Tres Ombús," he murmured, replacing the glasses in their case. "I reckon the killers are gathering there now."

Mounting he rode, on, fully twelve hundred yards from the road and its telephone poles. The yellow point dwindled, and as the dust settled, vanished. But the green spot representing the ombú trees took shape and deeper color. Again Fred stopped and used his glasses. Now he could count the men. Two of them still sat on their horses. Two others stood besides their mounts. Presently the two mounted gauchos led the riderless horses behind

the embankment and out of Fred's sight. A flash of sunlight on metal, a brief glimpse of the four gauchos standing close together, apparently in consultation, and then they disappeared in the mimosa thicket growing around the bases of the big *ombú* trees. The trap was sprung!

A WAVE of righteous indignation swept over the Texan as he lowered the glasses. For an instant he was tempted to give them battle. With his long-range rifle he could rake the thicket and drive them into the open. One at a time he could bowl them over, especially if they should charge him and come within twelve hundred yards. He had plenty of cartridges. Under the deadly precision of his fire there would be four less to battle and outwit in future.

But such a fight was not a part of his plan for the day. Don Quieros might leap to the conclusion that Arturo had betrayed him. Rather than complicate the future, it would be far better to swallow his anger and ride away.

Reasoning thus, Fred mounted Sonora and moved off in an oblique direction which constantly increased the distance between him and the men who were lying in wait.

A mile was covered at a smooth lope, and Fred then veered slightly to the left. According to calculations based on his watch, he was within an hour's ride of the gaucho village nestling at the foot of the Laguna del Rey. There, within two miles of the *estancia* administration buildings, the riders of George Gaylord were quartered in huts of brick. There dwelt certain stout-hearted fellows Fred needed sorely.

A glance at his wrist watch showed him that it was but a few minutes after ten. He was a little ahead of his schedule—had ridden faster than he had supposed. He had calculated on find-

ing the gauchos at their midday meal, and with reasons of his own for not desiring to ride into the village before noon, now reined Sonora in and held on leisurely.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT LAGUNA DEL REY.

THE waters of King's Lagoon lay sparkling under the light of high noon. A school bell clanged among the algaroba trees, and dark-eyed youngsters trooped forth and romped homeward. Under the green and feathery willows the red-brick huts of the gauchos stood, each surrounded by its tiny garden. Saddled horses, alone and in strings, were tethered everywhere, and as Fred rode into the wide street and headed for the community store, scores of felt-hatted riders pulled up before their dwellings and flung themselves from their sweating mounts. Curious eyes followed the Texan as he rode slowly along, and every now and then a horny hand went upward to a hat brim, saluting one who was so obviously a strange *señor*.

At the store, a roomy structure with a roof of galvanized iron, Fred pulled up and dismounted. Inside he waited until the *tienda* keeper finished weighing out rice for a brown-eyed maiden who stood staring at him, thumb in mouth.

"I am looking for the gaucho under-foreman, José Garriga," Fred said by way of introduction. He had mentioned the name standing first on the confidential list George Gaylord had given him.

The storekeeper pursed his lips and shook his head. "He is not here, *señor*," he answered. "He is working in the south pasture, thirty leagues distant."

It was disappointing news, but the list was a long one.

"The Lopez brothers, Patricio and Antonio?"

"Yes, señor, they are here," the storekeeper replied, his face lighting up. "You will find them in the fourth little house on the left—the lagoon side."

"*Gracias*," Fred thanked his informant, and strode back to the rail where he had left Sonora.

Scores of eyes were on him as he rode slowly along the curving street which bordered the banks of the lagoon, and Fred was conscious of the probability that even now a Beetle or two was looking him over. Yet, he had no fear of being attacked. *Laguna del Rey* was off the main road which skirted the opposite side of the lagoon. His presence would not be anticipated there. And broad daylight and many potential witnesses precluded the likelihood of any trouble.

Therefore, feeling safer than at any other time since landing from the *Castilian Prince*, Fred drew up before the designated hut and left Sonora rubbing muzzles with two saddled and bridled browns, in which Fred thought rightfully he detected a strain of Morgan.

There was neither gate nor fence in front of the thatch-roofed brick hut toward which he strode, and it was but a few paces to the open door through which an appetizing odor issued. At the clink of his spurs on the beaten earth of the walk, a woman in calico appeared in the doorway.

"I am looking for Patricio and Antonio Lopez," Fred told her.

"My sons," she beamed, and straightaway from behind her came a scraping sound of benches being pushed back.

Two men arose from their *puchero* of stewed meat and corn, and Fred was bidden to enter.

"No," he told them, noting with approval their sinewy build, the frank curiosity in their level gaze. "I have to keep an eye on my horse. I come from *Señor Gaylord*. I am the new *jefe* of the *ganado-mayor*. You are

to be my two helpers. When you have finished with your food, roll your blankets, say your farewells and join me where your horses stand."

"*Servidor!*" the wondering two brothers chorused in unison, but made no move toward the table.

Fred, standing guard over his precious rifle, the precious contents of his saddlebags, had but a short time to wait. Eagerly, the two brothers came toward him, and stood drinking in his words.

"You are needed for very important work," Fred said quickly, for a time was now a factor. "Mount your horses and follow me to a spot where no man can overhear us."

OBEDIENTLY the gauchos climbed into their saddles and followed Fred to the far end of the village. Ahead, the curving road led to the *estancia*, two miles northward and westward. Now Fred turned from the road and urged Sonora into a gentle lope. In the open country, a hundred yards from the lagoon, he drew up.

"Men," he said, looking first at one and then the other of the brothers; "Señor Gaylord needs your help. Crooked work has been going on here. He is being robbed and defrauded. He hired me to get to the bottom of the matter and put a stop to the thieving. I can do this, but I need help. Already, attempts have been made on my life. Unless I am guarded in my sleep and protected when I make certain tours of inspection, I'll almost certainly meet up with death."

Fred paused to survey the effect of his words. Patricio, the taller of the brothers, sat mute, his burning eyes fastened on the new *jefe* as if he would search his very soul. Antonio also had no word to offer. Calm and stoic, he sat erect in his saddle, motionless, but for a slow opening and closing of the fingers of his right hand.

"You have heard," Fred went on. "Your names are among others handed to me by Señor Gaylord. He has peculiar faith in you. Are you ready to serve?"

The tall Patricio was the first to answer. "*El Patrón*," he said, making the sign of the cross, "can have the blood of my heart—freely."

"The work will be dangerous," Fred added, glancing at the other brother.

Antonio's moving fingers had closed on the rolling pommel of his rawhide saddle. His knuckles whitened as he gripped hard while struggling for words to fit the occasion.

"I feel," he said at length, "as my brother does."

Satisfied by this simple declaration, Fred led the way still farther into the open pampas. He had now to arm and drill his bodyguard. At a selected spot, he drew up again and dismounted. Now he gave his attention to the capacious saddlebags, and took from them a pair of pistols and shoulder holsters matching the one he wore himself. The brothers watched with sparkling eyes. Both of them, it developed, had hunted in the foothills of the spur of the Cordilleran Andes which marked the western edge of the Gaylord properties, and were therefore familiar with firearms.

The automatic .380 was a novelty, of course, but both of the gauchos were above the average in intelligence, and under Fred's expert tuition soon mastered the functions of the powerful weapons.

"Now we'll try a few shots," Fred suggested presently.

They found the whitened skull of a steer, and ten paces away from it, Patricio blazed away. Four out of the seven shots drilled holes in the sun-bleached skull, and Fred noted with approval that the tall gaucho reloaded the magazine before he stirred from his tracks.

Antonio, shooting a little slower, did even better. Now Fred drilled them in the manner of wearing the holster and adjusting their clothing so that their draw would be free.

"In the daytime," he told them, "around *estancia* headquarters, I'm not looking for an open attack. But, of course, an 'accident' can always happen. So never permit any one to get behind me. From now on, for many weeks, perhaps for months, one of us must remain awake at night. Gradually, we will pick other faithful fellows to join our ranks, and the strain will be lessened."

All was now ready for the visit to the *estancia*. Three abreast, the riders gained the road and headed for the upper far end of the lagoon, where in the '60s of a bygone century, the pioneer father of George Gaylord had laid the bricks of what was now a mansion.

A mile distant from the gaucho village, the riders passed the first of the huge corrals and branding pens. Fred looked curiously at the railed inclosures, the shelters and buildings beyond. Here were no windmills, but to his ears came the rhythmic pur of gasoline engines pumping water from the lagoon. Presently a dairy was passed. Pedigreed Holsteins lay in the shade of the willows around it, chewing on their noonday cuds.

A GATE was opened, and the three passed along a lane bordered on one side by the shelving beach of the lagoon, and on the other by a green field of alfalfa. Far off to the right, other cultivated fields made a checkerboard pattern in yellow and green.

Abruptly, a windbreak row of eucalypti appeared, and here Fred drew rein, a murmur of admiration and astonishment escaping his lips. For, spread before his eyes, a parked expanse of green turf and noble trees lay ahead of him. Winding roads dressed

with crushed stone swept here and there, and directly facing the head of the lagoon, a broad avenue ran straight to a white-pillared, stately mansion which might have graced some county seat of the old South. The scent of magnolia blooms was in the air. Birds twittered and called from tree to tree. All was peaceful.

The strange trio rode on up the avenue, and soon Fred saw other and smaller brick buildings nestling in clumps of carob and smooth-boled talu. He knew that one of these was his combined quarters and office, and wondered which.

Onward, slowly, they walked their horses along the tree-bordered road dappled with sunlight and shadow, and, at length, drew up at a long hitching rail within a dozen paces of the few broad and shallow steps at the foot of the towering pillars.

"Wait here," Fred ordered his men. "Keep close to your horses and allow no man to touch my rifle. I'll not be gone long."

Dismounting, he left his reins looped over the pommel of his saddle, and then, head erect, spurs jingling, he climbed the steps and strode along the widest veranda he had ever seen.

Straight to the massive and paneled double doors he walked and thrilled as he lifted the heavy knocker. For, at last, he was to stand face to face with Don Pablo Quieros, *escarabajero* and wholesale thief.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

A MAIDSERVANT answered Fred's knock, and listened to his request that he be taken immediately to *Señor el Administrador*. The girl nodded understandingly, but instead of admitting him into the house, led the way along a side veranda to an embowered retreat at the rear. Here a bronze fountain

played, and tiny crimson ramblers flowed, a red cascade, across an arched lattice. There were chairs of cushioned cane, a table and a hammock, and in the latter, a girl of striking beauty. One glance only, Fred gave her, for now the man, rising from the table, claimed his undivided attention.

About his own age and height, without an ounce of fat on his wiry frame or clean-cut features, Pablo Quieros was of the *rubio* type of Spaniard, with curling, fair hair and bold, blue eyes. Indolently though he moved, a panther-like grace attended his every motion. When he willed it, Fred judged at first glance, this slow-moving fellow in white flannels could leap like a tiger, and with neither useless oaths nor lost motions, put up a man-sized battle.

"I am Fred Strong," the Texan said, and could not but rejoice at the puzzled frown which, for an instant clouded the face of the *administrador*.

But quickly the mask fell and an engaging smile lighted up the mobile features. "We have been expecting you," he said in agreeable tones. "Welcome to the *estancia*!"

It went against Fred's grain to take the extended hand, but for reasons of diplomacy he shook it once and let it fall.

"My secretary, Miss Ysabel," Don Pablo breathed, turning for a moment to the girl in the hammock.

A glimpse of glossy hair with the brown of chestnut in it, a coquettish flash from hazel eyes, and Fred turned. Stetson in hand, to take the chair Don Pablo indicated.

His back against the brick wall. His men were at the front. He was in no immediate danger. He relaxed. Don Pablo's gaze roving over his person from foot to head, taking in the Chihuahua-pattern spurs, the high-heeled boots, the bulging at the waistline, where beneath the gaberdine of his loose riding jacket the Colt .45 lay holstered.

"A glass of sherry? Perhaps a whisky and soda?"

"No, thank you." Fred declined, but helped himself to the tin of imported cigarettes which Quieros proffered him, and accepted a light from the wax match struck and held for him by the host.

"You speak splendid Spanish," Don Pablo remarked after a few commonplace words about the weather and the respective states of their health.

"I had an excellent master," Fred replied shortly.

"I heard from Corralitos," Don Pablo said presently, "that you had a narrow escape there last night."

With grave concern the speaker studied the lengthening ash of his cigarette.

"Yes," Fred said evenly. "Two drunken fools got into a gun duel and blazed away at each other while I was almost in their line of fire. I thought at first they were shooting at me. In fact I sustained a scratch. I've been in the habit of packing a gun—I still do—and so I cut loose with it. It's all over now. They'll never shoot again."

Grimly, Fred finished, his finger on the red line along the parting of his hair. Intently now he studied the *administrador*.

"It is too bad," the latter said unctuously. "Had I known you were coming on last evening's train, I would have met you with a machine."

Don Pablo's smile was most amiable. His soft tones had the flavor of a benediction.

"Thank you," Fred returned, playing his own part; "but I would have refused your kind offer. I had to ride my horse out here."

Again Don Pablo studied the ash on his shortening cigarette. "A long and dusty road at this season of the year," he commented thoughtfully.

"Yes," Fred said gravely, watching the other narrowly. "I found it so hot and dusty that I turned aside and

took to the grass. Eventually, I came out at the gaucho village, where I picked up a couple of riders whom I think will be useful to me."

DON PABLO displayed but a languid interest in Fred's movements since leaving Corralitos. It was quite natural for a rider to take to the turf, escape the dust of the road, and strike the foot of the lagoon. If his thoughts dwelt on his men lurking at Los Tres Ombús, he gave no sign.

"We take luncheon in half an hour," he said, the perfect host. "You will join us?"

But Fred shook his head. "If it's just the same to you," he said, "I'd rather be excused. I'm rather anxious to get settled down and at work. Mr. Gaylord has written you, and I dare say my quarters are ready for me to move in?"

"Quite so. I will show them to you."

Don Pablo left off the gentle stroking of the waxed end of his shaved-down mustache, and without so much as a glance at the girl secretary, rose and led the way along the veranda. One glance at the flashing hazel eyes, and Fred followed.

Don Pablo glanced casually at the gaucho brothers sitting their mounts at the hitching rail, and whether or not the look embraced the rifle-butt protruding from the scabbard, Fred was unable to form an opinion. With a motion of his arm he waved the brothers to follow with Sonora, and down a curving side path sweeping obliquely toward the head of the lagoon, he proceeded with the *administrador*.

Some three hundred yards distant, standing in a setting all its own, Fred noted the one-storied villa of brick which George Gaylord had described to him as the personal quarters of the chief of his *ganado-mayor*. It was an establishment complete in itself, comprising not only a room fitted as an office, a

kitchen and screened porch, but a small brick stable at one side.

"What became of my predecessor, Emilio Rodriguez?" Fred asked as they walked along unhurriedly, the three horses close on their heels. It occurred to him, that in anticipation of his own scheduled death, the removal of the former *jefe* would not have been effected.

"Emilio is now working in the southwest pasture," Don Pablo replied. Fred thought he detected a touch of embarrassment on the words which followed. "It may be that he has left some of his belongings behind him. If so, I will give orders to have them moved out of your way."

"Please don't trouble yourself," Fred said, amused at the expected disclosure that Emilio Rodriguez had not entirely vacated the villa as directed. And now he spoke of the suitcase and guitar which he had ordered to be forwarded to him at the *estancia*.

Absent-mindedly Don Pablo listened and replied mechanically that he would see to it that the articles would be sent to him on their arrival. Quite obviously other matters were on his mind, for now as they reached the villa and stood on its shaded porch, he turned to Fred, displaying for the first time, a touch of irritation.

"We might as well have an understanding," he said softly but firmly.

"That suits me," Fred declared. Grimly, he eyed the man whom he knew would give a fortune to see him fall dead at his feet.

"You're sent here to put the *ganadomayor* on a paying basis."

"Correct," Fred affirmed.

"Well, such action reflects on me and my management. I want you to know here and now, that I've never been given a free hand. As long as Señor Gaylord insists on unloading his wool clip on a falling market, as long as he insists on paying these rascally gauchos fancy

wages, and as long as the hoof-and-mouth disease and the *carbunclo* ravages his herds and flocks, just so long will the *estancia* continue to lose money."

The hoof-and-mouth disease! The dreaded *carbunclo*! Fred had never heard them mentioned in connection with the Gaylord properties. He didn't believe Pablo Quieros. The *administrador* had not correctly appraised his intelligence. He was attempting, with plausible excuses, to lull his suspicions, and thereby gain time for plotting afresh.

"Mr. Gaylord is an old man," Dón Pablo continued softly, misjudging Fred's silence. "During the last few years he's not been physically able to take to the saddle and ride over the vast estate. He looks on from a car, perhaps twice a year at the cattle-marking periods. He looks at the footings of the quarterly balance sheets, and never stops to think of the fancy wages he pays and the overdue rents he forbids me to collect in Corralitos."

FRED had heard enough. This suave person would have his underlings kill him in cold blood, and failing in that, would attempt to soothe him with honeyed words. It was maddening. His apprenticeship at the poker table served him well now.

"Suppose you lead the way," he said, a forced smile crinkling around his cool gray eyes. "We'll talk business another time."

Don Pablo, again the perfect host, led on.

They passed from room to room, and lastly entered the kitchen, which was spotless.

"I'll send you a cook," Don Pablo suggested. "Or maybe you will honor me by taking your meals at the house. I occupy the west wing of it. My cook is an excellent one."

"It's very good of you," Fred said,

forcing another smile while wondering if Quieros would go so far as to attempt to poison him.

He went on to make it plain that he was habitually an eater at irregular hours. Not for the world would he disturb the equanimity of the Quieros ménage.

"In fact," he concluded, "I'm not going to be around here very much after to-morrow. I have quite a bit of riding to do. On a big place like this, it'll take me quite a while to get the lay of the land."

Little remained for Don Pablo to do but to take his leave. On the porch facing the lagoon, he paused only long enough to express a desire that the new *jefe* would find all to his liking. Then, with a friendly smile for Fred, and a lingering glance at the Lopez brothers still sitting their horses, he turned and sauntered slowly back along the path.

"Dismount and fetch your blankets inside," Fred called, and immediately his precious saddlebags and rifle were disposed of for the time being, he proceeded to raid the kitchen.

With crackers and a sweet paste made from the wild algaroba he had to be content, but soon Antonio was off to the store with a list, and a dinner for three was in the offing. Now Fred looked over the premises which were to be his home.

The stable was ample of room and well-stocked with grain and loose alfalfa. There was neither hedge nor awkward fence to complicate the watch by night and day when he was at home. The bedroom was a problem, but eventually he worked it out. Two cots well away from the window would serve. The large bed would remain unoccupied. Thoughtfully he sorted out the remaining contents of the saddlebags.

An hour passed, and Antonio returned with the food supply. On the porch facing the lagoon, the tall Patricio stood guard. Another hour passed.

Savory smells were issuing from the kitchen, and Fred was delving into a ledger in the office, when through the open doorway Patricio's call came.

"A visitor, señor."

Quickly, Fred put the book aside and stepped out. A vision in burned orange was approaching, a dainty parasol over her head of chestnut brown.

It was Ysabel, secretary to the powerful Don Pablo.

A pout on her full red lips, she snapped shut the parasol and took the chair Fred offered her.

"I am honored, señorita," he said, concealing the surprise he felt.

"I am *not*," she declared. "I've been ordered here to make love to you—deliberate, cold-blooded love."

"And why not carry out your orders?" Fred asked, both concerned and amused.

The girl glanced at him sharply. "I'm not in the mood," she returned, "and besides I prefer to pick my own conquests."

"What does Don Pablo expect?"

"He wants me to win your confidence—to learn certain things he will coach me about later."

Here was food for thought—a woman held too cheaply. For fully a minute Fred stared at her delicate profile, her glossy brown head, now bent over a silver cigarette case attached to the handle of her parasol. And then he put his thoughts into words.

"Very well," he said, a quizzical smile playing over his features, "suppose you stay here for half an hour or so and then go back and report that I was *easy*—that I'm crazy about you."

"You, too, pick your own conquests?"

Fred bowed gravely and held a match to her cigarette.

The fifth installment of this theme-song novel of the pampas will be in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, on the news stands October 15th.

What Would You Do?

The central character of this story is confronted with a most perplexing problem. What would YOU do in his place? Make your answer finish this story. Prizes of \$10.00, \$5.00, and \$2.00 will be awarded for the three best conclusions. Answers must be received on or before November 1st.

EDWARD LANNING leaped from the roadway to the curbing, then glanced reproachfully over his shoulder at the motorist who had all but run him down. The sporty, low-hung roadster was turning the corner into Harmiston Avenue at a dangerous and illegal rate of speed, but Lanning caught a flash of brushed-back blond hair, wet and shining, and an insolent and autocratic profile. Anger flamed in his eyes as he stood and watched the bobbing tail light dwarf to a mere twinkle as the car continued to streak down the avenue.

"Julius Clark!" he exclaimed. "Out for another night of fun. Late for a heavy date, probably, and if a pedestrian's in his path, well, it's just too bad!"

That was Jule Clark, all the time! Imperious, high-hat, heedless of the rights of any one but himself. And always getting away with it, too!

Ed Lanning disliked few persons—but Julius Clark was one of the few; headed the short list, in fact. And Lanning's thoughts were none too charitable as he continued to walk down Harmiston Avenue, toward the Harmiston Trust Company.

He had started out to try to like Julius. Not for the sake of Julius—that would have been entirely too sweet. But Julius Clark was one of his own associates at the bank. As employees of the trust company, they had to work

together at times. It made the job more pleasant for everybody when the fellows got along well.

And there was still another, even bigger, reason why he had tried to like Julius Clark. For Julius was the brother of Marjorie Clark. And Edward Lanning just knew that he could never fall out of love with Marjorie Clark. No, not if she had a dozen Julius as brothers; not, in fact, if she had had Attila and Benedict Arnold and the Borgias for direct ancestors, and the latest hammer murderer for a cousin. When he looked into Marjorie's dark-fringed gray eyes, he always thought of some beautiful, tree-shadowed pools with the late afternoon sun striking them, and—

But Edward Lanning promptly forgot his poetic phrases. For the actual poem was before his eyes. Marjorie herself was walking toward him, along Harmiston Avenue. She was only three or four paces away. Lanning stopped. But his heart went on more speedily than ever. This was a shock, a decidedly pleasant one.

"Marge!" he said. "Ah—are you out for a walk?" It sounded "sappy" to his own ears. It was obvious that Marge was out for a walk. But somehow Ed Lanning could never think of just the right thing to say in the presence of the gorgeous Marjorie. He was in that particular, magic stage of love.

"Am I out for a walk?" Marjorie said. "I am," she added, with mock grimness. "I assure you I am!" she had an air, and that ineffable Clark poise about her. "I planned to take the roadster to-night," she continued. "Dad has the limousine—he went to a company meeting. He said I could take the roadster and go out and pick up mother. Mother's taking a special treatment out at Doctor Harley's house. But Jule beat me to it—ran off with the roadster. I'll hoof it out, and bring mother back in a taxi. Oh, yes, I'm out for a walk!"

"Somehow it sounds like Julius!" Lanning said acidly.

The words had popped out. And now Marjorie Clark's dark-gray eyes were more like the tree-shadowed pools long after the sunset. The warm glow was out of them.

"Edward!" she chided. "How can you say that? Jule's really a sweet boy—just a little thoughtless. And he's going to do big things some day. He works hard at the bank during the day, and naturally he wants to play a little at night. He's like a big boy!"

Edward Lanning stammered something, and then shifted the subject as rapidly as possible. "If I weren't working to-night," he said, "I'd ask you to let me run home and get my little car out and run you up. But I'm expected on duty."

"Run right along, then," Marge told him. There was no stiffness in her tone, either. Edward Lanning believed with some reason that it was his earnestness and industry that caused her to like him better than she liked certain handsomer, more wise-cracking fellows who yearned to be her slaves.

There was a great difference in families, he reflected, as he continued on toward the bank. Marge so regular, Jule such a dud. His lips curled. "He works hard at the bank during the day!" Huh! All the fellows knew that if Jule Clark hadn't been the son of Colonel

Clark, solid citizen of Harmiston and vice president of the wire works; he'd never have been kept on. A staller and a bluffer. Didn't want a job at the wire works with his father, who'd have made him start right out in the shop. A flat tire in business. Snooky, too. Just had a genius for getting away with things. Oh, if he could only get something "on" Julius Clark—show him up for what he was—take him down a notch or two! He felt, somehow, that it would be good for Jule's soul—maybe make him a regular human being.

And then, about one hour later, Edward Lanning ran smack into a discovery that should set Jule Clark's many enemies squeaking with joy. And after he had made the discovery, he wished—oh, how he wished—that he hadn't!

LANNING had felt proud when the president of the Harmiston Trust had singled him out as one of the special employees to help out on the continuous audit of the bank, to clear the decks of the heavier, time-consuming work for the public accountants called in from time to time. There was no extra money in it, but it was just such special jobs as these which would earn him rapid promotion, and put him in a position where he could ask Marge Clark the most important of all questions.

It was fun, as well as work, sitting there in his snug office, his pipe aglow, the ease of after-hours in the air, his dinner paid for by the bank, and Charley Hobbs in the next office, preparing the mail items for the regular working staff. The bank was doing a good business by mail, and Charley, also ambitious, frequently worked nights to sort and prove the mail in good time for clearing next day. And there was joking with Dan, the night guard, and all in all, to a person of Edward Lanning's tastes, it was great stuff.

And it was exciting, sensational,

"stuff" on this particular evening. The discovery had been due partly to accident. Lanning had gone over a certain ledger once. H'm! Slipped that time! Must be wrong! He had gone over the ledger again. The sheepish little grin had left his face now. He realized, without ego, that he was something of a master at figures. And the third addition had brought the same result. There was an irregularity here in Julius Clark's department. Julius Clark was the only man who could be directly responsible. That might have been enough for most men. But Edward Lanning studied, analyzed, checked back, found out *how* Julius Clark had done it, and covered it up. *Why* he had done it was obvious enough—to get money in addition to his moderate salary, and possibly a small allowance from an indulgent father, to keep up his sporty night life.

Julius Clark short about \$10,000! Well, \$9,762, to be exact. More than he could earn in three years. More than he would be apt to save in thirty-three years. Diabolically clever, too, young Julius. But the cleverness of the crook, that was all—the crook who thinks up ingenious schemes, cashes in on them, and finally goes to prison while even the lout, if honest, is a free man.

H'm! Yes, Clark would be clever enough for that. A genius for bluffing and trickery, a smooth worker, no doubt of it. The public accountants would catch it, but they would not be in for several weeks. The examiners of the Federal Reserve or the Clearing House would catch it, of course, but they would not be in for even a longer period.

Edward Lanning looked over at Charley Hobbs. Charley hated Julius Clark—had good reason to hate him, too. A dramatic announcement was on Edward Lanning's lips.

He held his speech, though, sat back in his chair, got his pipe going again. It had gone out in his excited hunt over those pages. Ten thousand dollars

short! Yes, it took big money to play the sport these days. Those who danced had to pay the fiddler. Why not Jule Clark? Jule Clark had always treated him with lofty condescension, high-hatting him on all occasions. To think of it! A dirty crook high-hatting a fellow who was plugging along trying to be a regular guy and do right! And besides, Jule Clark objected to having his sister go around with him. It was all right with Marge; he sensed that. But Jule had prejudiced old Colonel Clark and Mrs. Clark against him. He had proof that, on more than one occasion, he had even descended to lies in order to discredit him.

But did he, Edward Lanning, want to make a rat out of himself? Did he want to kick a man when he was down? Or would he, after all, be a rat? Didn't he owe an allegiance to his employers? Didn't he owe something to Mr. Sayre, the president, who was giving him every chance to get ahead? His mind shuttled back and forth. He made judge and jury of himself, looked at both sides, accepted certain bits of evidence, threw out others. He knew that Jule Clark was guilty as well as he knew that Marge Clark returned his love. Judge and jury. But did he want to be executioner, as well?

He supposed he ought to call up Mr. Sayre this very minute, and make the report. But Julius Clark's father was wealthy. He *might* give his son the money to square himself before discovery. He *might* not, too, Lanning considered. Clark, Sr., was an ex-army man—*might* have stern ideas on letting a transgressor take his medicine. His own son, a trifle spoiled, might be one thing. His own son, a crook—that might be quite another! And what would Harmiston folks say? It would leak out that Ed Lanning had been the man to expose Clark. Most folks would say that he had reported the matter because he and young Clark were ene-

mies. They would say that he should have given Clark or his father a tip-off—a chance to have his father make good for him; that the bank would not really have been the loser by such a human method.

And Marjorie? Marge had a good deal of her father in her. She was fair-minded, and would probably say that Edward Lanning had done right in reporting the irregularity. Yes, and there would be tears in her gray eyes when she was saying it. She and her mother—considerable of an invalid, Mrs. Clark—fairly idolized the weak and rascally Julius. It would not be too much to assume that the shock might prove the death of Mrs. Clark. Could a girl ever marry a man who denounced her brother, and brought dishonor and sorrow upon her family? Lanning could vision Marjorie's gray eyes gazing up at him. She might respect him for reporting the shortage. Might she not

love him, even more than she did, for not reporting it, for trying to find some other way out?

And Mr. Sayre? A square man. A banker. Without sentiment in business, couldn't afford it. He had depositors' interests to look after. Wasn't he taking a chance in not reporting this matter to Mr. Sayre immediately? Wasn't that part of the very preliminary audit work he was doing? Suppose Sayre found out that he was weak in this matter. Sayre had peremptory methods with wishy-washy employees who would rather be good fellows than good bankers. Discovery by Mr. Sayre would mean his job, the chance to get ahead, save money, and claim Marge as his own. At this minute, Julius Clark might be squandering still more of the bank's money. A delay might get him in much more deeply. What should he do?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

THE CONDITIONS

Give your answer in a statement of not over one hundred words. A committee of three editors will award the prizes. Common sense will rate higher in their judgment than mere heroism or dramatic value. They will consider the style and preparation of the answer, the personal philosophy and moral principles of the writer, and the practical good sense and humanity of the solution of the problem. \$10.00 for the best—\$5.00 for second best—\$2.00 for the third. Prize-winning solutions will be published in an early issue. Another problem story will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH.



GOLF BALLS ON ICE

SOME New Yorkers claim that this summer of 1930 is the hottest one in half a century, but no one has yet reported that the icing of golf balls has been necessary, as it was when Willie Park, Jr., the English golfer, was matched with Willie Dunn, the American in 1896.

It was the time of the great heat wave in New York, and on the day on which the match was decided, the heat Mr. Park described as being "somewhat terrible." The thermometer registered one hundred and one degrees in the shade. Notwithstanding this, there was a large following, many of whom sought to overcome the effects of the heat by bathing their heads under running-water taps on different parts of the course. It was almost impossible to keep the balls in a playable condition, as the heat softened the gutta-percha. To prevent their melting, they were placed on ice and carried along by a caddie, who deposited a ball at each tee, while the old ones were replaced on the ice for preservation.



Arthur Duffey Says—

SPEED, is what the sporting world is craving nowadays. It makes no difference what the sport. Whether it is on the diamond, gridiron, track, in the ring, on the water or what not, if the athlete hasn't the necessary burst of speed, and the ability to call on his reserve power at the psychological moment, he might just as well forget all about getting to the front.

Never did we seem to be having such sensational feats or so many record performances slipping by the board. Gradually many of the old-time world's records will be no more. Never did the exponents in the various sports appear to be showing such remarkable speed.

"I don't know what is the limit of all speed and endurance," remarked Coach "Dink" Templeton of Stanford University to me recently. "The way the athletes are traveling, on the track and in the field events, have many of us puzzled. Where they will stop, it is hard to say, but there is no question about our being in a real record-breaking era."

Coach Templeton never said a truer word. Especially have the track and field men been performing in miraculous fashion. I can recall, when the time of 10 seconds for the 100 yards, 21 1-5 seconds for the furlong, or a 2-minute half-mile or a 4.15 mile were thought to be the limit of all speed. But such feats to-day are only mediocre performances. An athlete would stand but little chance of winning any championship event with such a performance.

Particularly was I impressed with the remarkable sprinting of Frank Wykoff of the University of Southern California in the outdoor season now rapidly drawing to a close. Yes, there were other sensational performances. George Simpson's wonderful sprinting over the century and 220-yard distances; George Bullwinkle's wonderful running in the half and mile runs, both in this country and abroad; Paavo Nurmi's great six-mile record performance in which he shattered Al Shrubb's former record by 20 seconds. All these and many more. But Wykoff's feat of running 100 yards in 9 2-5 seconds at the National Collegiate A. A. games at Chicago easily eclipses them all for a real world-record achievement.

If *Top-Notch* readers will recall, in a recent article under this department, in naming my selections of the greatest athletes of all time, I selected Frankie Wykoff as the premier sprinter. This selection was made before Wykoff accomplished his remarkable feat of running the century in the new world's-record time of 9 2-5 seconds.

I had plenty of reason for naming Wykoff. I felt that sooner or later he would get down to these unheard-of figures. And what was my reason for feeling that way? Well, it is easily explained. I saw Wykoff run his memorable 100 meters in 10 3-5 seconds in no less than four different heats in the Olympic trials of 1928 at the Harvard stadium.

After seeing this young, rawboned

youth—for he was only a youngster out of his teens—I said to myself, "Well, if there ever is a 9 2-5 second runner on the athletic horizon, certainly this young Californian is the one." And young Wykoff lived up to the great confidence reposed in him.

YOUNG WYKOFF'S career on the cinder path reads like a page from fiction. Never was there an athlete who burst forth on the sprinting firmament like this young Lochinvar from out of the West. Wykoff, to-day, is just twenty years old. He first came into prominence as a student at Glendale High School, California. Hardly had he reached his senior class than he defeated Charley Paddock in a special 100 yards at Berkeley, California.

At the time, many of the wiseacres declared that it was a fluke performance, that Paddock was not in shape, and that a return meeting between the pair would soon show the real caliber of the Glendale High School boy. But again did this same high-school lad come to the fore with a real world-record-equaling performance and defeated the erstwhile "fastest human."

Charley Paddock, in that memorable race, could not help but extend the congratulating hand to the youngster. Paddock was a runner, perhaps as fast, if not faster, than the world had ever known.

After the test the former sprint champion remarked: "Well, I thought that I would be returned a winner in the second meeting. I showed everything that I had, but Wykoff was able to go one better. If there is any flier who will do 9 2-5 seconds for the century, Wykoff is the one."

Paddock's words rang true. Young Wykoff subsequently proved that he was the new "fastest human."

Yet, no budding world's champion has had his path beset with more hardships and setbacks than this young Cali-

fornian. A year ago or after his return from the Olympic games he was besieged with an attack of infected sore throat which promised to end his sprinting career. Even his faithful trainer had about given up hope of his ultimate recovery. Finally, Wykoff's general condition stood him in good stead. He overcame his illness, and rapidly came back into his own as a full-fledged top-notch performer.

He started this season in a blaze of glory. He has been consistently clocked in 9 3-5 seconds and even a 9 2-5-second sprint before he came to the East. He met one reverse by Hector Dyer of Stanford University in the West, but he has made up for that defeat since by defeating Dyer on different occasions.

Naturally, when Wykoff came East with a record of 9 2-5 seconds made on the coast, Eastern sprinting critics were skeptical. They immediately declared it was not an authentic performance; that it was another case of Western timing, and that all were from Missouri.

I might say that Wykoff's showing in the intercollegiate championships at Cambridge was somewhat of a disappointment. In fact, I must admit that I doubted his ability to do such time, from what he showed in the sprint on that particular day.

Pitted against one of the fastest sprinting fields, with weather conditions and track perfect, the best the young Trojan flier could show was 9 7-10 for the century. Good time, true. But after a runner had consistently showed 9 3-5-seconds and a 9 2-5-second race on the coast, it was only natural to assume that he would at least do 9 3-5 seconds, which he was unable to do.

Immediately the cry went up from the Eastern critics that Wykoff's 9 2-5 seconds on the coast was just another one of those fast bursts from the coast that would hardly stand muster. They were even willing to admit that the Californian was capable of doing 9 3-5

seconds for the distance, but as for 9 2-5 seconds—never. They didn't think it possible of him.

Yet the Eastern athletic followers forgot to take into consideration just what Wykoff was up against. He had made a long trip across the continent—practically shut up in a train for days. He hardly had a chance to stretch his legs, and there was no question about this disadvantage working against him in his first race before he had a chance to limber up.

Trainer Jean Cromwell, coach of Southern California, in talking of the long trip across country, stated: "Few Eastern athletic college athletes know what it is to take a college team some 3,400 miles across the country and then expect them to win. I have made the trip on many occasions and I can truthfully say that no athlete is subjected to a more severe test. In the case of Young Wykoff, I watched his diet carefully. I allowed him to eat a little more than the other athletes, simply because he had a high-strung nervous temperament and could afford to put on a little weight, for he would quickly work it off when the actual training was at hand."

And to Cromwell must be given considerable credit for the way he handled Wykoff. He was a youngster who could easily be upset. He had to be cared and watched almost like a young Gallant Fox, or a Man-o'-War, yet he came through in glowing style.

WYKOFF'S memorable sprint at the National Collegiate A. A. A. games will go down in athletic history as the greatest sprinting performance of all time. I can look back to the days when the first 100 yards in 9 4-5 seconds was run by John Owen, Jr., of the Detroit A. C. in 1890. At that time, such a performance was thought to be just about the limit of all speed and endurance over the century distance. The

critics stated that many a day would elapse before we would see that time equaled.

Yet it was only a short time before Bernard J. Wefers, when running for Georgetown University and the New York A. C., came along and equaled Owen's remarkable performance in 1895. This performance, in turn, was equaled by J. H. Maybury and Rush of Chicago, and it was only a couple of years later, too.

From 1895 many budding sprinters came along and promised to better the time, but all seemed to fail. Other runners who were credited with the time of 9 4-5 seconds included W. A. Schick, Harvard; Clyde Blair, Chicago; W. D. Eaton, Boston; C. L. Parsons, California.

The time of 9 4-5 seconds originally made by John Owen lasted from 1890 until May 31, 1902, when the writer was credited with running the distance at the intercollegiate games in 9 3-5 seconds. And now we have 9 3-5 lasting from 1902 until 1930. Or in other words, just twenty-eight years have elapsed.

The question that now remains is—How long is Wykoff's remarkable time going to remain as a real world's record performance? Many have said that 9 2-5 seconds will last just as long as 9 3-5 seconds, and I would not be surprised if this turned out to be the case. It certainly is a remarkable performance.

Yet, on the other hand, with the new electrical device in timing, and the splendidly constructed tracks, and with new training methods developed, the time may come when this performance will be lowered. I have often contended that the time of 9 3-5 seconds could be broken. And so it is with 9 2-5 seconds. We will see that mark erased some day, for it certainly is possible for a sprinter to get down even under Frank Wykoff's remarkable feat.

The Devil's Mill

By Jess Bullard



HAL REYNOLDS frowned, running a tanned hand through his sandy hair. He had leaned forward slightly, and the full glare of a desk lamp fell across the stiffened bronze of his face. The curved lines of a good-natured smile were drawn out by the tightening of his lips. The usually pleasant baritone of his voice was suddenly harsh as he demanded:

"You mean you think he was murdered, Miguel?"

The young Cuban nodded. He stood opposite Reynolds and his black, liquid eyes were fastened on the open window behind the American's back. He replied slowly:

"I *know* he was, Mr. Reynolds. And

I'm just as certain you will be too, if you stay. Any one who takes the job of superintendent here will be."

Reynolds ignored this sinister prophecy as he blurted out: "But they told me in Havana it was an accident!"

Miguel shrugged.

"Of course," he said. "They want an American in charge here, and if they told the truth who could they get? This mill has a bad name anyhow, because of all the trouble there's been in operating it since the War. We call it the Ingenio Diabólico."

"Yes, I've heard that name for it. The diabolic mill." Reynolds's frowning blue gaze was studying Miguel's olive-skinned countenance closely as the American asked. "Why do *you* stay?"

For a moment the young Cuban was silent. Then he said quickly:

"There's something else I haven't told you yet, Mr. Reynolds. I'll be the only assistant engineer you'll have after tonight. Arton, the last American on the job except you, resigned yesterday. He's leaving in the morning."

If the reply was intended as a bald-faced evasion of Reynolds's question, and calculated to divert the American's mind to other things, it served its purpose admirably.

Reynolds's frown deepened, and the fingers of his right hand drummed on the desk as he muttered, half to himself, half to Miguel:

"I don't believe I'd have taken the damn job if I'd known that."

He was thinking, with some bitterness, of the elation he had felt three weeks ago when he was first offered the position as chief engineer and superintendent of this sugar mill. He was only twenty-nine, and such posts were rarely given to young men. The isolation of the place—it was in the wildest section of Cuba, nearly five hundred miles from Havana—had not appealed to him. Nevertheless, he had jumped at the opportunity and the big salary it offered, thinking that since there would be at least one other American on the job the loneliness would be bearable.

"Why is he quitting?" he asked Miguel.

Miguel's dark gaze bored directly and somberly into the American's blue eyes.

"For the same reason that I'm advising you to leave, Mr. Reynolds. Arton will be killed if he stays here another week—and he knows it."

"I think, Miguel," Reynolds said, smiling suddenly, "that you're probably superstitious. Even if the last superintendent was murdered, it doesn't follow that I'll be. And that engineer probably has a fit of blues. Anyhow, I've signed a contract to take charge here for the season, and I'm going to

stick it out if the devil himself starts making things unpleasant at the Ingenio Diabólico. If you're intending to stay, I'll make you my first assistant. You look pretty young for the job—but that's more or less mutual."

Miguel sighed, and there was sincere regret in his voice as he gave a final warning.

"I see you don't take what I've said very seriously, Mr. Reynolds. Since you're going to stay, though—carry a pistol on you all the time."

"I will," Reynolds agreed readily enough. "And we'll talk over the whole situation some more later on. I want to look at these blue prints now. Can you come back in about an hour, and bring Arton with you?"

Miguel glanced at his wrist watch and nodded.

"I'll make a round of the mill," he said. "Everything was running well when I left to go to the station for you. But there's never much time between trouble at the Ingenio Diabólico. I'll find Arton and tell him you've arrived."

He disappeared into the adjoining laboratory, closing the door after him. Hal Reynolds immediately became engrossed in his study of blue prints, while the discordant tones of the mill were hissing and grumbling, roaring and shrieking through the thick shadows of the night outside.

Beyond the open window behind him, those shadows were pressed back for perhaps a yard by the light streaming out. Still farther, past the limit of the electric rays, earth and sky seemed to have fused in darkness. There was no moon. A mile away, across the big plaza that ended just behind the office, a few twinkling lights marked the nucleus of the small pueblo attached to the Ingenio Diabólico. They were like stars low in the heaven, and offered no clew to show where dark land joined jeweled sky.

While Reynolds worked, his absorp-

tion in the papers before him complete, there framed in that open window the heavy face and shoulders of a man whose skin was very dark. The only positive color in his face was the gleaming white of his eyeballs. The eyes were large, but narrowed lids half obscured them as their owner fastened a predatory, vicious gaze on Reynolds's back.

TWO arms of Herculean strength were raised and two enormous hands grasped the window sill. Slowly, cautiously, with as little noise as a creeping python, the unseen visitor hoisted himself through the window and crouched inside, unfastening from his belt the weapon secured there.

Reynolds did not turn. Whatever noise the intruder made was swallowed up in the strident shrieks from the mill. Had the American's mind been detached he might have sensed the sinister presence behind him. As it was he continued to stare at the papers on the desk.

The visitor advanced one stealthy step. He wore a tight-fitting pair of cotton jeans and a ragged, armless shirt. Beneath this scanty clothing, muscles that could have battled a gorilla strained and bulged. He was abnormally tall—nearly six and a half feet of animal strength. In his right hand he now gripped the *cuchilla* he had unbuckled—a long, flat knife commonly used in cutting cane. It was double-edged and heavy. As he moved cautiously forward another step, he slowly raised the weapon.

Suddenly Reynolds reached for a paper lying on one side of his desk and in doing so turned his head slightly.

The giant native hesitated, knife upraised, not more than five feet behind the unsuspecting American. A white beam of electric light was reflected from the broad blade of the *cuchilla* and glinted with dazzling brilliancy across the corner of Reynolds's left eye. Involuntarily, he twisted round in his seat.

The native sprang forward, his right arm tensing for a blow. In the same instant every muscle in Reynolds's body responded to the death danger signal flashed by a whirling brain. He leaped to his feet, crashing his swivel chair backward by the movement. The native, hurtling toward his prey, stumbled against the overthrown piece of furniture. The sudden lunge of his torso caused by that impact gave added impetus to the downward sweep of his big knife.

Steel sang and wood parted with a snapping crack as a terrific blow landed on the desk. The blade of the *cuchilla* cleaved through the thick oak and was three quarters buried in the split it had made.

In the next second's swirl, while the native strained to jerk his knife from the clutching hold of the desk, Reynolds acted on a lightning-quick plan. He had jumped aside, putting the width of the table between himself and his attacker. Now he snatched up an inkstand and hurled it with all his force against the native's face.

The blow had the expected effect. It did not stun or even daze the man it had hit. Reynolds had known it wouldn't. But the pain of that glass smashing against his thick lips and wide nose made the wild blood leap in the native's veins. He had been remarkably self-controlled for one bent on murder. Now he roared out an oath in Spanish, and crashed around the desk for his prey, his knife forgotten.

Reynolds felt, rather than estimated, the odds against him in the native's gigantic build, and knew he should shout for help. One of the chemists was probably in the adjoining laboratory, and would have heard such a shout. But something stubborn and Anglo-Saxon in Reynolds made him want to save himself unaided, now that the native had abandoned his weapon. So the American did not try to avoid the gorilla-

like rush of the other man and the pair closed in a wrestling lock.

The glaring eyes and snarling mouth of the native, the hot fire of his breath, and the steely clutch of his hands, seemed to tell with grim force that he would break that lock only when the white man relaxed in death.

II.

HAL REYNOLDS was above the average in height and weight. He was athletic, and his fighting powers had been put to severe tests more times than he could remember. But to an impartial observer, it would have seemed that only a cessation of the murder-impulse in the giant native's brain could save him now.

Reynolds had stooped as they clinched. His hold was around the giant's right leg, his head boring into the thick muscles of his antagonist's stomach. The native struggled to straighten him, evidently thinking to get a back-breaking grip. For a moment they stood there motionless, each straining with all his strength and neither gaining an advantage. Then the native abandoned his first hold. His enormous hands sought and circled Reynolds's neck.

The native's back was against the desk now. On the wall before the fighters, his shadow was silhouetted in a distorted enlargement that spread up across the ceiling. In ominous outline a grotesque reproduction of his head hung above them, like a hovering menace.

The black fingers were tightening their choking clutch. Reynolds's breath was coming in gasps, and his tongue was beginning to protrude. There was a sound like the dry hissing of live steam. He was sucking in the last atom of air he would ever get while those sinewy hands retained their grip. His bent body sagged, as though the lassi-

tude of death had slackened his muscles. His head slid down under the pressure against it.

The native's eyes were duplicate orbs of gleaming viciousness when he felt his victim relax. The next instant those bloodshot eyeballs rolled wildly as his entire bulk was lifted clear of the floor and crashed back over the desk.

Reynolds had purposely allowed his head to slip downward until he could work it between the black man's legs. Then he had heaved up with every ounce of strength he could drain from his neck and back muscles. In the same movement he had twisted and pulled at the native's right leg. As the would-be murderer toppled, Reynolds sprang clear, for the hands around his throat had been suddenly flung apart.

The overthrown native's head struck the blade of his own knife still buried in the desk over which he sprawled backward. When he staggered to his feet his hands were pressed against the nape of his neck and between them a scarlet stream gushed. He swayed for a moment bellowing with pain, then collapsed to the floor.

Reynolds flashed to a door opening into the laboratory, vaguely wondering why the noise of the fight had not attracted the chemist. Flinging open the door, he understood. There was no one in the big room beyond.

The native was still conscious, but he was writhing in agony, and a pool of blood was widening rapidly around his head. Unless he was given medical assistance immediately, Reynolds thought, he would die.

That was the last thing the American engineer wanted to happen. Dead, the native would be nothing but a menace overcome. Alive he could be forced to tell why he had attempted this murder.

But he was patently helpless and harmless for the time being. So Reynolds rushed from the room and to the outer door of the laboratory in search

of some one to send for the company doctor.

There was no one in sight, and Reynolds raced for the mill, which loomed into the night about a hundred feet away. Light glared from the openings in its sheet-iron walls, like eyes of a monster. White, murky clouds of steam hissed and billowed at regular intervals from an exhaust pipe near the ground—breath from a fiery mouth. And the still night air reeked with the smell of the mill. Fumes from boiling sirup mingled with the peculiar, scorched smell of steam, the penetrating acridness of sulphur and the heady sweetness of fresh cane juice.

Reynolds flashed into the mill through an opening near the endless conveyor and stood gazing about, hoping to catch sight of Miguel or of some unemployed man. There were workers near him, but they were busy at their various posts. And in a sugar mill every post is important—none can be left idle for more than a few minutes at a time.

MMOVED slowly but continuously forward by the conveyor chain, an endless procession of jointed cane stalks was being fed into the triple iron jaw of the three-roller primary crusher before Reynolds. Prior to entering that jaw they varied in thickness and in length. Some of them were straight as arrows, some curved like scimitars, and other crooked as twisted staffs. But when they emerged on the other side, the stalks had attained an evenness of appearance, for all were mashed to the same stringy pulp. On they moved to a second crusher, and a third. Then, squeezed dry of their sugary juice, they disappeared toward the furnace room as bagasse.

Reynolds's hasty glance passed along the length of the crushing machinery, then turned toward the upper part of the mill. If he couldn't locate some one who was free immediately, he'd have to

take one of the men from his job to send for the doctor. Perhaps up by the centrifugal pans—no, no one there. By that open heating tank—only a solitary and occupied man there. Then, still higher up, by the vacuum.

Where his gaze had fastened it remained fixed with such straining intensity that his eyes bulged forward in their sockets. For the fraction of a second he stared without moving, then sprang forward, unconsciously shouting a mad warning. His voice, unheard even by himself, mingled with, and became part of, the raucous voice of the mill.

Up there by the vacuum tanks a man had been leaning across the low railing, peering down toward the main floor of the mill. Just as Reynolds's roving eyes focused on him another form appeared from behind a vacuum tank—a form that stepped swiftly up behind the man at the railing. Reynolds could not distinguish the features of either, and even the outlines of their bodies were vague, like wavering shadows.

The one who had been leaning precariously over the railing, suddenly flung out his arms and half-twisted his body. Then he completely lost his balance, toppled and plunged downward, somersaulting in air.

Directly below him was a great, open heating tank in which a thick, sirupy juice steamed and bubbled, throwing up a heavy scum. The Cuban who attended that tank, pushing the scum off with a long paddle, suddenly sprang back as something dark shot into the boiling liquid before him.

Scalding drops of cane juice splashed out in every direction. A few of them struck the Cuban's face, but he was unaware of the pain. He was staring, as though into hell itself, at the gruesome brew in the heating tank. In the center of it a screaming, living man writhed and leaped for an instant, then sank from sight.

Reynolds reached that tank at a dead run, and shouted in the ear of the paralyzed Cuban standing there. Other men were running up now from every direction. The wheel of a big valve was spun madly by two of them. Another shut off the steam that heated the coils of the tank. Still others pressed stupidly around, some merely staring, some jabbering frantically.

In spite of every effort on the part of Reynolds and the workmen who instantly obeyed his terse orders, five minutes flew by before the tank was emptied and the body lying in it lifted out.

Of course the man was dead—hideously dead. The raw, boiled flesh was coated with a slimy, sticky juice. The mouth sagged open grotesquely, and from it a stream of the same nauseous mess flowed.

The body had just been stretched on the mill floor for a hasty examination when Miguel came running up. He forced his way through the circled group of workers, and stood staring down at the dead man.

All blood drained away from under the rich olive of the young Cuban's skin, leaving his face the color of death.

"Who is it?" Reynolds demanded at Miguel's ear.

Miguel's voice had lost its smoothness, and was harsh, almost coarse, as he answered.

"It's Arton! He should have left sooner—but I didn't think—"

He broke off abruptly, biting down on the words he had been about to utter. Then his dark, melancholy eyes turned from the body to Reynolds, and he added:

"Now do you take my warnings seriously? Are you going to stay—after this?"

Reynolds stared at him for a moment, conscious of unpleasant suspicions creeping into his mind. Why was Miguel so anxious that he, Reynolds,

should leave the Ingenio Diabólico almost before he had thoroughly arrived? After all, they had only known each other for a few hours. Then why should the Cuban be so concerned about danger that might threaten the American?

Then Reynolds remembered that Miguel had promised to find Arton—the man who lay dead at their feet. A picture flashed through the American's mind of the stealthy form he had seen emerge from behind the vacuum tank to plunge Arton to his terrible death. It had been impossible to identify that form. It *could* have been—

Sliding the thought into a question, Reynolds demanded:

"Where were you when this happened, Miguel? Did you see any of it?"

Miguel shook his head.

"No," he said. "I had gone back to your office. You weren't there, so I returned to the mill. Then I saw these men and came running up."

Again Reynolds stared.

"You went back to my office?" he repeated. "Did you see anything—unusual there?"

He was thinking suddenly of the giant native—half stunned, bleeding profusely. If Miguel had really been to the office he couldn't have failed to notice the wounded black man.

Miguel's reply came evenly, a trifle puzzled.

"Why no, I didn't see anything. The office was empty. That was all."

III.

REYNOLDS made no further comment for the moment. But the warning Miguel had given him suddenly took on a new meaning that was half a question, half a certainty. Miguel had prophesied death for the American if he remained at the Ingenio Diabólico. *Was the prophecy founded on criminal*

knowledge or criminal intentions on Miguel's part?

Forcing into the depths of his mind everything but the immediate present, Reynolds turned to the excited group of workmen and began questioning them in the corrupt Spanish lingo that is the universal language in Cuban sugar houses. They were a motley gang, varied in color and race. Each answered Reynolds's questions concerning the tragedy according to what he had seen of it, and with the emotional restraint of abandon of his nature.

The Cuban Negroes replied stolidly and briefly. The men with Latin blood in their veins almost shrieked out hysterical replies. The Jamaicans rolled their eyes until the whites gleamed, stammering at Reynolds, and at each other. One of them had sunk to his knees and was rocking to and fro, moaning. Two Chinese who worked near the vacuum tank had witnessed as much as Reynolds, and they told what they knew clearly, though at some length.

But none of the information was of any value. There could be no doubt that Arton had been murdered—deliberately plunged from the platform above the heating tank. Both Reynolds and the two Chinamen had seen that form materialize behind Arton, but none of them had been able to distinguish the murderer's face.

Reynolds had sent a man for the company doctor and now he arrived, excited and voluble. He had been roused from bed and wore only pajamas, not having stopped to so much as grab a bath robe.

He examined Arton hastily and exclaimed :

"Madre de Dios! The agony! The horror! And it is much better that he died at once. How he would have suffered had he lived! He fell into the tank, no?"

"No," Reynolds responded tersely. "He didn't fall. He was thrown. Murdered."

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"Por los clavos de Dios!" The doctor stared as he rose, making the sign of the cross. "Who would do such horror? You are certain? The murderer—have you taken him?"

"No," Reynolds interrupted dryly, "we haven't taken him. He's undoubtedly slipped away into the night—and we might as well look for a grain of salt in a sugar sack as try to track him. And for that matter," his eyes were boring into Miguel's averted face, "he might be right here in this bunch of men. There's no way of telling. Anyhow, that's a matter for the Cuban authorities to investigate."

"Yes," the doctor agreed quickly. "Yes, you are right, señor. I suppose you are the new superintendent—Señor Reynolds, no? I am Doctor Rodrigo. I am happy to know you. Yes, you must wire to Santiago for officials to come investigate, señor. And this body must be left here until they arrive. Our Cuban laws are very strict in such matters."

Reynolds nodded, then said :

"I'd almost forgotten in the excitement, doctor. I've a patient over in my office whom you can probably fix up unless it's too late."

Both Miguel and the doctor stared at him, puzzled. Reynolds told Miguel to set two men as a guard over Arton's body, and send the others back to their jobs. This was done. Then, led by Reynolds, the doctor and Miguel hurried out of the mill, through the still deserted laboratory, and into the office beyond.

The doctor looked around and began. "You were joking, no? You said there was a patient. Is it that—Ah!"

He broke off suddenly, staring at a pool of thickening scarlet on which he had nearly stepped, then at the blood-stained *cuchilla* buried in the desk top.

"Por Dios!" he ejaculated. "Another murderer!"

"I was supposed to be the victim," Reynolds cut in, "but I managed to save myself. I thought the man who attacked me was still here, and needed your attention, doctor. Maybe you," he turned toward Miguel, who had frozen in the doorway, "can tell us what became of that native, since you said you came here to the office after I left?"

"Native?" Miguel repeated stupidly. "You mean—Jorge?"

"Perhaps." Reynolds's tone was dry. "I didn't get his name. In fact my acquaintance with the fellow was brief, though exciting while it lasted."

And he quickly recounted the story of the mysterious attack on his life, and the fight that followed. He finished with a description of the native's wound, as accurate as his knowledge of it permitted, then asked: "You think a man with a wound like that could have gotten out of here by himself, doctor? He seemed half stunned when I left, and you can see for yourself how much he bled."

"*Si*," the doctor answered, studying the pool of blood. "But it is impossible to answer your question, señor. The bleeding, of course, would not stop such a man. And even if the skull was fractured—a primitive man is apt to be astonishingly virile. But I can say nothing definite, not having seen the wound. At any rate, señor, since he is gone I will not be needed. *Buenos noches, señor, y tu*, Miguel. And may the saints keep the remainder of the night peaceful!"

He hurried from the room. Miguel stepped inside, closing the door. His dark gaze fixed on the cold blue of Reynolds's eyes. For a moment there was silence, then Miguel said slowly:

"I see that you're very suspicious of me now, Mr. Reynolds. Of course I lied about having come here to the office after you left. I would have seen the blood, the knife, had I come. It is no good to lie any more."

"Then where were you when Arton was murdered? Was it *you*?"

"Ah, no, no, señor." In the vehemence of his denial he lapsed into his native Spanish tongue. "Why should I kill Arton, who was my good friend? But I knew of the danger to him, and I had warned him as I still warn you. I knew—"

"You knew, and you still know a damn sight more than you'll tell," Reynolds interrupted with sudden fierceness. "If the last superintendent was murdered, and I don't doubt it now, you know who did it. And you know who killed Arton! Is it not true that you know?"

"No, señor, no. If I knew beyond doubt I would tell. I suspect—but that I can't tell. But by the Virgin Mother, señor, I swear I do not know. And why I lied to you to-night—that I cannot explain even now. But señor, look at me, listen to me. You cannot believe I did those murders?"

THE passionate intensity of his tones, the luster of his big dark eyes fixed unflinchingly on Reynolds's suspicious orbs, the quiver of his full, generous mouth, disarmed the American. Reynolds said to himself that if this was acting it was wonderfully well done, without being carried too far. There was enough restraint in the Spaniard's denial to stamp it as genuine.

Reynolds flashed a sudden smile and admitted.

"Well, no, Miguel, I can't really suspect you of murder. And besides, I've no legal right to question you. That will be up to the police authorities when they come from Santiago to-morrow. I'll have a wire sent at once. Of course I'll have to tell them everything I know—including how you lied."

"*Si, señor*," Miguel's voice was low. "I will explain that to them."

"And," Reynolds continued, "I don't think it's fair of you to warn me, then .

refuse to tell me whatever you know. Why not come clean, Miguel? What's the mystery of the Ingenio Diabólico? Why is it dangerous for an American to come here?"

"You are wrong to think that," Miguel answered quickly. "It would make no difference if you were a Spaniard or Cuban. Your life would be in danger just the same. Whoever holds a responsible position at the Ingenio Diabólico is doomed. Their nationality makes no difference."

"Then why aren't *you* in danger?" A quick return of suspicion sharpened Reynolds's voice as he shot out the question.

Miguel looked past him into the night and said slowly:

"I am, señor. But I—well, I simply *must* stay!"

Reynolds was about to voice another impatient question—this mystery was rubbing the fur of his practical engineering mind the wrong way—when the office door was flung violently open. Through it rushed a Jamaican who addressed himself to Miguel in a torrent of corrupt Spanish intermingled with English.

The gist of his frantic speech was that a rider had just come galloping in to report a tremendous fire in the cane fields. Every available man must be sent to fight it at once.

"Run to the fire bell, you fool!" Miguel shouted. "Ring it and keep on ringing it. Vamose!"

The Jamaican fled to carry out that order. Miguel turned to Reynolds, despair in every line of his face.

"You see," he cried, flinging out his arms in a gesture of helplessness, "it is always so at the Ingenio Diabólico. Always trouble? This is the third fire in ten days."

"Well, that's a type of trouble common to all sugar plantations," Reynolds commented lightly. "Are the cane fields company property?"

"No. They belong to Don Guido de Alcanzar y Serapio. But he supplies, under contract, all the cane we grind. And of course, if it burns the loss falls on our company unless—"

"Unless the burned stalks can be rushed to the mill and ground before they sour, eh? Well, I'm an old hand at fire fighting, Miguel. I'll ride out and take charge. You stay here and look after the mill."

Miguel started to protest, checked himself, then said:

"I'll get a horse for you, then." He paused at the doorway to add: "Don Guido will probably be at the fire, Mr. Reynolds. He will introduce himself to you. He is always cordial to the superintendents of Ingenio Diabólico. And he does not like me."

With which cryptic and apparently incoherent remark, he left.

Fifteen minutes later Hal Reynolds was mounted on a fast horse and galloping through the night at the head of a large band of riders, most of them hastily recruited from their beds. For in Cuba, cane fires, though almost invariably the result of arson, are frequent, and all the men connected with an *ingenio* must be prepared to join an impromptu flame-battling organization without delay—and at any hour of the day or night.

They thundered along a road that plunged them into flanking fields of tall, growing cane.

The night was like a black, enveloping cloud all about them. A light wind rustled through the leaves of the cane stalks and they whispered through the shadows with a dry, low-pitched voice that was like the death rattles from a thousand throats.

The horsemen headed north, toward the coast mountains, the road rising in a barely noticeable grade. Their beacon was a lurid glow against the northern blackness—a red radiance that burned a monstrous hole in the night.

IV.

WHEN they reached the fire, Reynolds found that a large number of men were already fighting it, although in a haphazard and ineffective way.

Feeding upon a matted dry mass of leaves and stubble that had accumulated for years on the ground, fanned by a breeze that was much brisker than it had been on a lower level of ground, the devouring flames were sweeping acre after acre of ripe cane. They could not burn the juicy stalks, but curled round them, seizing avidly on their lower, dead foliage to gain fresh strength that would enable them to lick up and wither the spreading green tops. In the fields, through which the fire had already passed, the stalks were stripped naked and scorched—spoiled, unless they could be gotten through the mill within twenty-four hours.

Reynolds took charge at once, ordering his men to cut a fire lane and start a backfire ahead of the raging inferno. On the west the flames were already stopped by a road. One of the Cubans, who had been there when the party from Ingenio Diabólico galloped up, informed Reynolds that Don Guido de Alcanzar was directing a crew of men about half a mile to the east, and had the fire in that sector well under control.

This information puzzled Reynolds, for the absence of flames in the east told that the wind had already driven the fire away from that point, where it had evidently originated, and where this man said Don Guido was. Why should the owner of the fields be wasting his efforts and keeping some of his men where they could do no good?

With a shrug, Reynolds answered that question for himself. It was like one of these pompous Spanish dons to do things that way! Reynolds grinned over his own mental picture of a stately,

bewhiskered old gentleman in velvet riding clothes, sitting on a statuesque horse with picturesque trappings and directing a bunch of indolent Cubans who would be working, perhaps, with wet sacks, or something equally as effective, against flames that were only an afterglow of the fire that had left them far behind!

Reynolds saw that the fire lane his men were cutting could not be opened across the whole front of the flame unless another crew began working on the opposite side of the field. So, after shouting a few final orders and putting the likeliest-looking Cuban there, in charge, he requisitioned the fellow who had spoken to him as a guide, and together they galloped off to the east in search of Don Guido. Reynolds meant to have the Spaniard put his crew to cutting a fire lane from that side.

When Reynolds reached Don Guido, it was to find one part of his preconceived picture verified. A gang of about twenty-five black and white laborers were lazily beating out flames that could just as well have been left to burn down of their own accord, and this was being done under the personal supervision of Don Guido.

But the man himself would not even approximately fit into the mental picture Reynolds had drawn of him.

Don Guido de Alcanzar y Serapio, both in his person and in his dress was much more like a Mexican vaquero than a Spanish grandee. He was tall, yes. But his thickset, muscular frame, skin so dark that the casual observer might have been in doubt as to his race, heavy features and coarse black hair seemed alien to the pure Castilian blood he claimed. He sat his horse with the ease of a man who has ridden all his life. His clothes were plain and unpretentious—a corduroy riding suit, high boots, a broad sombrero hanging against his back, secured by a leather thong under his chin.

Reynolds, considerably astonished by the upset to his preconceived notions, introduced himself and immediately liked the unusual Spaniard. For Don Guido accepted the introduction simply, cordially, without any trace of the rather *grandiose* manners which Reynolds had expected and which invariably made him uneasy and contemptuous.

Here was a Spaniard who talked and acted like an American! A man you could be friendly with and have no fear of a cold response. A man, too, who impressed you as having a great deal of the efficiency and capability in practical matters, which were Reynolds's creed.

Because of this impression Reynolds said bluntly:

"Looks like the excitement's all over at this end, Don Guido. Your men are wasting their time here." And he urged that the crew be set to driving a fire lane through at a point beyond the flames.

If Don Guido resented, as most Spaniards would have, the American's curt advice, he gave no sign. Instead, he crisply told his men to do as Reynolds suggested. Then he said, his teeth flashing in the dark: "I suppose I wasn't directing my fire brigade with much judgment. But these damn fires generally have to burn themselves out in the end, anyhow. We've had a number of them lately, and I'm sick of fighting them. Still, I'm glad you came along, Reynolds. Maybe your plan'll work, and we'll save a few acres."

The two crews, working from opposite sides of the fire, soon had a broad swath cut before it, and a good counter blaze under way. After that it was only a question of watching and beating out any flames that jumped the lane.

DON GUIDO, who had been silent for some time, turned to Reynolds.

"Have you heard, Reynolds, that your mill is called the *Ingenio Diabólico* around here?" he asked.

Reynolds started slightly, and glanced searchingly at the dark face before him. The question was evidently a lead to something. What? Another sinister warning? More advice along the line of that already offered by Miguel?

"I've not only heard it," Reynolds replied thoughtfully, "but I've found out in the few hours since coming here that there are good reasons for that name."

Don Guido manifested no curiosity. His gaze had returned to the burned cane as he said:

"Indeed?" Then he was silent once more.

It flashed through Reynolds's mind that the Spaniard was a combination of modern, American, friendly directness, and the good breeding of his Castilian ancestors. For it was evident that Don Guido had no intentions of pressing questions that Reynolds might not wish to answer. That forbearance increased Reynolds's liking of the older man and prompted him to tell everything that had occurred at the *Ingenio Diabólico* that night, including Miguel's warnings.

Don Guido listened with deep interest, but never interrupted with questions. He exclaimed in horror at the description of Arton's murder. And when Reynolds told how he had saved himself from the giant native, Don Guido's "Bravo!" seemed sincere.

"So you see," Reynolds concluded, "I've learned for myself that Miguel's warnings aren't hot air, and that the *Ingenio Diabólico* isn't misnamed."

"Reynolds," Don Guido's voice was low now and seemed to have in it a somehow dangerous note, "did that fellow, Miguel, did he tell you anything about me?"

Reynolds hesitated for a second. Then he said bluntly:

"Yes, he did, Don Guido. He said you didn't like him."

"That was all?"

"Yes."

"Well, he didn't lie. I hate him! And you will, too, Reynolds, before you're through with the Ingenio Diabólico. Watch him as you'd watch a man you thought might knife you in the back. No, I can't tell you more now. Perhaps when I know you better. You'll visit me at my *hacienda* some day?"

"Be glad to," Reynolds accepted gratefully. "But, Don Guido——"

"No, you mustn't question me, my friend." There was an edge of harshness on the Spaniard's tones now. "I must start home. I'll leave some of my men to watch the fire. You can take yours back."

"How about the burned cane?" Reynolds asked, suppressing a volley of questions about Miguel that crowded to his lips.

"Well," Don Guido replied, "I'll put all my crews on the burned fields tomorrow. We'll rush it right in. Can you handle it at the mill? Is everything running smoothly?"

"Yes. We can run it through ahead of the rest."

"Then there'll be no loss from the fire. *Hasta la vista*, Reynolds."

"Adios," Reynolds called after him, for the Spaniard had already wheeled his horse and cantered off.

V.

DAWN broke, and the glaring tropical sun had burned through an hour of its daily life, before Reynolds reached the Ingenio Diabólico again.

During the long ride back from the fire he had turned the past night's events over and over in his mind until his thoughts seemed like a whirling turbine, traveling endlessly in the same profitless circle.

Don Guido and Miguel. Which was the honest one, which the liar? Was one of them the dark spirit whose crimes had fastened such an ominous

name on this sugar mill? Each had warned him against the other—Don Guido openly, Miguel indirectly. Miguel had said that Reynolds's life was forfeited if he stayed—Don Guido had declared that Miguel was the kind of man who would knife another in the back.

But such a man would never give warning of his intentions, surely!

The native giant—he could have been forced to clear up a good deal if he hadn't escaped. Who had sent him to commit murder? It was impossible that he'd done it of his own volition. Reynolds had never seen him before. His type hated and killed on slight provocation—but in this case there was no possible motive except that of being hired by another.

The murder of Arton was another matter. That *might* have been done by a personal enemy—any of the workers around the mill. And if the last superintendent had really been killed, his murderer, too, could easily have been some surly laborer. But an attack on a newly arrived man—there could be no doubt that some mysterious reason made the superintendent's position at the Ingenio Diabólico a precarious one.

Well, there was nothing to do but "carry on," as the English put it, with an eye alert for trouble and a hope that the prophecies of Miguel and the warning of Don Guido would prove groundless.

The native quarter of the pueblo was seething with life when Reynolds passed through it. It lay behind the mill, across a spur track belonging to the company. There were three general *tiendas*, each having a bar as its most prominent attraction, and each carrying a variety of stock that would have done credit to a city department store. They were patronized by families from miles around, whose members rode in on horseback, in wagons or in oxcarts. Men who worked in the mill traded

there when they had money—at the company *almacen* when they needed to charge their purchases. Outside each store was a long hitching post, and these were crowded to capacity as always in the early morning or late afternoon.

Brown children and black children rolled and played, fought and luxuriated in the thick dust between the palmetto huts of the natives. Up to about twelve years of age all went naked, except for ill-fitting, clumsy shoes, which were invariably worn. These were a protection (in the eyes of the natives) against the plentiful tarantulas and scorpions apt to be lurking in the dust. But as the children were frequently sprawled in the road, with nearly every inch of their healthy young bodies exposed to poisonous bites, while their feet, the only protected part, kicked hilariously in the air, the shoes were rather superfluous, Reynolds thought, smiling.

Reynolds left his horse at the stables and hurried toward the mill, suddenly aware that the great mass of machinery was idle and silent. During the grinding season an *ingenio* never rests except for imperative repairs, and Reynolds said to himself, grimly, that Diabólico's evil spirit was at work again.

He soon found the trouble. Something had gone wrong with the primary crusher, and the huge machine was being torn to pieces under the anxious direction of a worried Miguel.

The breakdown had occurred just before the night shift went off. Miguel had been at home asleep at the time, but from what he had learned, criminal negligence, on the part of a workman, was responsible.

Reynolds took charge of the job and found Miguel an excellent assistant. But it soon became apparent that at least twenty-four hours would be lost. And, in the meantime, burned cane from last night's fire would be piling up by the carloads and souring on the tracks outside.

But with the present problem of repairs before him, Reynolds forgot everything else. His fatigue and sleepiness passed away as though he had had a night's rest. Machinery was his passion, and if there was any possible way of speeding up the repairs he would discover and utilize it.

HE was so engrossed in the work that a tableau, enacted almost at his side, went unheeded.

Miguel was standing near Reynolds, directing the operation of an overhead crane that was hoisting up the top roller, when a Jamaican came up, touched the young Cuban and handed him a note.

Miguel took the paper absently and started to stuff it into his pocket. But the Jamaican arrested that movement with a few half-whispered words. Miguel frowned, unfolded the note and began reading it. Twice he stopped to ask a sharp, low-voiced question of the messenger. Each answer and each word he read knitted his brow in deeper crevices. There was a bloodless line around his tightly drawn lips when he finished, and the hand that crumpled the paper, balled so fiercely that the knuckles stood out sharp and white.

He darted a quick look at Reynolds, who was stretched on a board before the crusher, unaware of anything but his inspection of some steel parts. That glance of Miguel's was venomous with hate. His dark eyes were dilated and gleamed with an intent viciousness. Then Miguel turned and hurried from the mill unnoticed by Reynolds.

Although he had come directly from the fire to the mill and had gotten no breakfast, Reynolds worked steadily on until noon. One of the Cuban chemists made some coffee in the laboratory—coffee like brine for bitterness and like a powerful hypodermic for revivifying strength. Reynolds gulped down a large cup of this, and felt no hunger until midday.

He first missed Miguel about an hour after the young assistant engineer left. Reynolds supposed, however, that Miguel must have gone to another part of the mill and thought nothing of it.

When the twelve o'clock whistle blew, Reynolds decided to hurry over to the house that he and Miguel were sharing, for lunch. Miguel had established a Chinese cook there, and a meal would, undoubtedly, be prepared. And Reynolds expected he would find his young assistant there also.

The better houses of the pueblo, including that toward which Reynolds now hurried, faced along three sides of a large plaza, and were about a mile from the mill. Some effort had been made to convert this plaza into a formal park. But the work had not progressed very far, and the square was overgrown with weeds, interspersed with a few trees. Improvements had been carried farthest on the northern end, which was bordered with a line of magnificent palm trees. High and stark their trunks rose, to branch at their apexes into luxurious, gracefully-curved clusters of dark-green branches.

The company houses were all of white stucco, with roofs of red tile. Their windows were shielded from the sun by awnings of brilliant hues. All were built along the same general lines, and differed chiefly in size. Deep front piazzas running the width of the house, cement-floored patios, flanked by the front and two sides of the building and open in the rear, a multitude of windows—these were common to all.

Toward one of these houses, that was somewhat withdrawn from the others, Reynolds hastened. He had nearly reached it when he stopped suddenly, staring toward a cumbersome vehicle creaking along the dust-laden road that ran around the plaza.

It was an oxcart, clumsy, heavy, wooden-wheeled, drawn by two sluggish bovines whose heads sagged dejectedly

as they plodded along. Evidently it had just delivered a load of cane at the mill and was returning now to the fields. A few twisted stalks littered the board floor of its body.

This vehicle, though picturesque enough, was no uncommon sight in Cuba, and Reynolds would never have stopped to gaze at it so intently, had it not been for the driver.

On the front seat of the oxcart, indolently prodding the beasts before him with a bamboo stick, lounged a gigantic native. Reynolds's gaze swept across the dark face, which glistened with sweat. He thought he recognized the features, but could not be sure. He tried to conjure up a picture of his assailant of last night. But his memories of the fight centered around the bulk and muscles of the native he had overcome.

Well, this fellow on the oxcart was indisputably big enough and powerful enough to fit into his memory-picture. And there was a means of positive identification.

Reynolds hurried up to the cart, calling out:

"Oye—hombre!"

The native halted his beasts and flashed a wide smile at Reynolds.

"Buenos días, señor."

Reynolds, standing at the side of the cart, asked some hastily devised questions while he studied the fellow's face. Only a brief glance was necessary to show that there was no raw scar on the dark neck. But the man's right hand was bandaged with a dirty cloth. It flashed through Reynolds's mind that perhaps his attacker of last night had thrown his hand back in falling and had taken a cut there instead of on the neck as it had appeared. He could not remember distinctly. He demanded, using the familiar form of speech customary when addressing inferiors: "Thou hast cut thy hand—the bandaged one?"

"*Si, señor.*" The native was, or pretended to be, flattered by the attention.

"How?"

The native hesitated, was visibly embarrassed. Then he said hastily: "With my *cuchilla*, señor. While cutting cane".

Reynolds was still undecided. But there seemed to be no way of proving anything, and certainly the fellow hadn't seemed alarmed when Reynolds first approached him. Finally the American demanded:

"Dost thou work for the company or for Don Guido de Alcanzar?"

"For Don Guido, señor."

"*Y como se llama*—what is thy name?"

"Jorge, señor."

"*Bueno, Jorge.* That is all." Reynolds turned toward his house, determined to ask Don Guido about the fellow at the earliest opportunity. The oxcart creaked on its way.

Not until he was halfway through the meal which the Chinese cook had prepared did Reynolds's memory connect that name, Jorge, with any previous events.

VI.

MIGUEL was not in the house, nor had Sam Lee, the cook, seen him since early morning. Reynolds, still thinking the young Cuban was somewhere around the mill, sent the second household servant, Sam Lee's son, to fetch him.

But Reynolds, impatient to be back at the mill himself, did not wait. He began his lunch immediately. It was a cold meal, consisting chiefly of fruits, obleas, guava jelly and its invariable accompaniment of white queso.

Sam Lee served with quiet obsequiousness. His yellow face was impassive and bland, but his slit, oval eyes watched Reynolds with a narrowed fixity that might have set the American to wondering, had he noticed it.

Reynolds, however, was scarcely aware of the Oriental's presence. The engineer's mind had suddenly gripped on the name, Jorge, and linked it with Miguel. There the thought stopped, groping. How were the two connected? Hadn't Miguel mentioned that name? Yes—but when? And what had he said? It must have been some time last night, of course. Reynolds's connection with the Ingenio Diabólico and his acquaintance with Miguel had only started then. But the crowded hours of rapid-fire events between made it seem like years had passed since his arrival here!

Jorge—Miguel—had it been—yes—the connecting link in his memory chain was rising from his subconscious mind. But for a tantalizing moment it refused to become a conscious process—as when a forgotten name is "on the tip of the tongue."

"Will the honorable señor have his coffee now?" Sam Lee spoke in Spanish, but always adorned his speech with flowery adjectives, regardless of the language he was using.

Reynolds restrained a desire to curse the fellow for having broken through his rapidly connecting memories. But he took the proffered cup and began sipping the coal-black, fragrant liquid. Behind him Sam Lee watched with eyes as sinister, as gleamingly bright, as attentive as the orbs of a tarantula watching its prey.

Reynolds finished his coffee, rose, stretched his arms wearily then sank into a wicker armchair, muttering:

"Damn sleepy! I'll rest a minute."

The humid heat of a tropical noon is enough in itself to make a man languid and somnolent. Added to a preceding twenty-four-hour stretch of wakefulness, it was stupefying. But Reynolds fought the overpowering drowsiness doggedly. He must get back to the mill. That repairing job had to be pushed right through. Another cup

of coffee, he thought, would rouse him, brace him up.

He forced his eyes open and gazed straight into the sloe-black orbs of Sam Lee, who turned hastily. Something he glimpsed in those eyes partially cleared Reynolds's numbing brain. But only partially. Unable to account for the brief wave of uneasiness that had swept over him he muttered: "Another cup of coffee, Lee. Black. And no sugar."

SAM LEE nodded, and vanished into the kitchen. He returned in a moment with the ordered drink. Reynolds took the cup and stared stupidly at it. The thick liquid was whirling slowly round, as though it had just been vigorously stirred.

"Didn't want sugar," Reynolds muttered. "Said so, too."

Sam Lee was volubly apologetic.

"Doesn't matter," Reynolds assured him, and gulped down the contents of the cup.

Three minutes later he sagged in his chair and the hand, holding his emptied cup, relaxed listlessly. Sam Lee's eyes gleamed. His thin lips parted and curved crookedly, exposing teeth as yellow as his skin. He removed the cup and saucer, then slipped into the kitchen.

When he reappeared he was not alone. Behind him slouched nearly six and a half feet of bulging muscle coated with a glistening dark skin.

Reynolds was deep in a drug-induced sleep, and would be so for hours. Over him now hovered the two forms, one slight, the other gigantic, but strangely akin in the lines of cruel satisfaction on their faces.

The native grunted as he gazed, feeling a dirty *bonda* that was wound slantingly around his head, covering the nape of his neck. Then his huge right hand slid to the machete stuck in his belt.

Sam Lee noticed the gesture, and placed a clawlike hand on the native's arm.

"Remember!" the Chinaman warned in Spanish. "Your exalted master will be terrible in his vengeance if you do not follow his heaven-inspired commands."

The native, whose primitive vocabulary included no more than half the Chinaman's words, nevertheless understood the warning and nodded. Sam Lee added:

"You must hurry. Some honorable fool may blunder in here."

The big native stooped and lifted the relaxed body of Reynolds as easily as though it had been a sack of straw, flung the American over one massive shoulder, and strode after Sam Lee.

The Chinaman, who wore sandals laced around sockless feet, padded noiselessly through the kitchen, signaled to his black follower to wait there a moment, and slipped out onto the patio.

Behind the house there was a wide lawn on which a few children were tumbling in play. Beyond were the interminable cane fields, flanked by a narrow road between them and the lawn. In the road two lethargic oxen attached to a wooden wagon, waited in stolid patience.

Sam Lee hurried across the patio and returned, dragging a big wicker clothes hamper. In the kitchen he hastily dumped out the soiled linen, then set the hamper upright once more. The native came forward, stooped and slid his human burden into the emptied container.

At the cost of a few moments of straining and pushing, the native arranged Reynolds's body so that it fitted into the hamper without projecting above the top. Sam Lee clamped on a wicker lid. The native bent his back to the big basket with its strange contents, grasped one handle with a hand passed over his shoulder, and rose easily. Without another word being exchanged between himself and Sam Lee,

he strode from the house, across the lawn and to the waiting oxcart.

Jorge was sitting on the driver's seat. Could the unconscious Reynolds have seen the two natives together, he would have realized that their similarity was confined to the mutually Herculean proportions of their bodies.

"*Como se va, Hunfredo?*" Jorge's greeting was casual.

Hunfredo responded with a grunt as he slid the hamper into the cart. Jorge prodded his oxen when the other climbed up beside him, still silent.

Two Cuban ladies, watching them from the patio of a house next the one from which Hunfredo had come, commented briefly on the clothes basket.

"Miguel," said one of them, "is lucky to be able to send his clothes to that good *lavendera* at Don Guido's *hacienda*."

"Thou hast reason," the other replied with a shrug. "The washerwomen here at the *pueblo* are all lazy *holgazanas*. But as to Don Guido and Miguel—we all know they are like father and son. What belongs to one belongs to the other. Even the services of a *lavendera*."

The first speaker smiled enigmatically.

"Even real fathers and sons do not always love each other as the good God meant they should," she remarked.

"What dost thou mean?"

"Oh, *nada* (nothing). But there are rumors."

In the distance, the oxcart slowly melted into the clouds of dust raised by its own ponderous wheels. On it creaked, and all about it stretched the fields of cane. They widened away in level monotony to the south. They billowed and rolled upward along the hilly country to the north. All of a height, all of the same rich green coloring in their spreading upper leaves, the jointed cane stalks grew in level, serried ranks—tall, straight and fat with the juice

that would help to sweeten or preserve the world's food.

Jorge and Hunfredo were both silent as their vehicle moved along. The sultry air was silent, too, except for the faint hissing whisper of the cane leaves.

Everywhere there was color, and always the color was vivid. The rich blue of a soporific sky, the agatelike variety of hues marking the distant mountains contrasted like the brilliantly opposed colors of a bright shawl.

Presently Jorge exclaimed, half turning in his seat:

"Listen!"

He had caught the sound of a groan from the basket behind. Now he stared at that hamper, round-eyed, and cried:

"*Por Dios!* It—"

A snarl from his companion cut through the words.

"It is nothing! Mind thy oxen!"

Jorge's startled gaze flew to Hunfredo's suddenly sinister face, then to his hand gripping the machete at his side. Jorge, whose own *cuchillo* lay out of reach in the rear of the oxcart, made no further comment.

VII.

WHEN Hal Reynolds opened his eyes again, he was lying on a comfortable rattan couch. For a moment his gaze rested sleepily on the low, white ceiling above. Then as full consciousness came flooding back, he sat up abruptly.

The room was small, and lighted by a single, iron-barred window that stretched nearly from floor to ceiling. Through this filtered a dull beam from the late afternoon sun, revealing the bare, white walls and lack of furniture, except for the couch, in the place.

Reynolds stared about him, pressing his hands to a head that was not altogether free from the effects of the drugging dope he had swallowed.

"Sam Lee!" he muttered, his disori-

ented mind groping through fogged memories. And then: "Where in hell am I?"

The air in the room was cool and damp—a fact which hastened the clearing of Reynolds's mental processes. He began to recall distinctly that feeling of overpowering drowsiness which he had been fighting when consciousness slipped from him. Had he fallen asleep from the heat and weariness alone?

"No, by God!" he growled aloud, rising to his feet abruptly. "That coffee—that damn Chinaman!"

He hurried over to the barred window, and stared out. There he commanded a view of a luxuriant garden that attained beauty by the abundance of its flowers and shrubs rather than by any formal arrangement of them. Under different circumstances Reynolds would have been interested in the wealth of tropical flora. Now it served only to further confuse him as to his whereabouts.

The garden was inclosed by a high, stone wall, smothered with vines. Just over the lip of this, directly behind the window from which Reynolds stared, a swollen, fiery-red sun was spewing its scarlet across the sky.

The position of the sun made Reynolds realize, with a start, how late it must be. He'd been unconscious for hours. And what had happened in the meantime?

A sound from behind made him whirl. There was only one door in the room, and it had been thrust suddenly open. The person who stepped swiftly through the opening, pushed the door shut again and stood near it, staring fearfully at Reynolds with widened, dark-brown eyes shadowed by the brim of a low-pulled straw sombrero.

Apparently a boy of about sixteen, the newcomer was slight in build and with a delicately modeled face of almost girlish beauty. The eyes, which sud-

denly dropped before Reynolds's penetrating gaze, were shaded by thick, curling lashes of silken fineness. The full, red lips quivered as they faltered out a question in a voice pitched so low that Reynolds could scarcely catch the words:

"You are the Señor Americano—the prisoner?"

Reynolds stared, amused and puzzled, as he answered:

"Well, I'm an American all right. But I really don't know if I'm a prisoner or not. Who are you?"

"My name is Carlos, señor."

The young Spaniard seemed to gather courage from Reynolds's quiet, friendly voice. Reynolds noted that the newcomer wore a riding outfit of coarse material which seemed sharply out of keeping with the obviously aristocratic face. The American also noticed that Carlos was still trembling slightly.

Not yet having any clew as to his real whereabouts, and anxious to gain an ally in the event of a dangerous captivity, Reynolds said reassuringly:

"You needn't be afraid of me, Carlos. Am I a prisoner here?"

"*Si, señor.*" came the low-toned reply. "You are a prisoner. And I, too."

"Where are we?" Reynolds demanded. "Who's holding me here? Who brought me?"

"I do not know, señor." Carlos made the sign of the cross as the denial came falteringly out.

Reynolds laughed, commenting:

"You're not used to lying, *chico.*"

CARLOS'S head hung. Small white teeth bit in vexation on a trembling lower lip. Reynolds placed a reassuring hand on the Spaniard's slight shoulder. But Carlos drew away hastily, shivering.

"Why did you come in here?" Reynolds was still amused. "Surely you can tell me that much?"

"*Si, señor.*" Again the low voice was

barely audible. "I came to show you a way to escape."

"Really? Why?"

"Because, señor"—Carlos had evidently found sudden courage and spoke in firmer and more distinct tones now—"because I wish to escape, too, and I'm afraid to go alone. But you mustn't question me, señor. See, I give you this to show my good faith."

The Spaniard fumbled for a moment in a trouser pocket, then held out toward Reynolds a gleaming Colt automatic. Reynolds grasped the weapon eagerly. He examined it, found that it was loaded and in good condition, then thrust it into one of his own pockets, saying briefly:

"That's all I could ask, *chico*. I see you're in some kind of mess, and don't want to lie about it. So I won't ask any more questions. Show me how to get out of here and back to the *Ingénio Diabólico* and I'll do what I can for you."

Carlos nodded and with the monosyllabic command, "Come!" he turned, opened the door and slipped into the passageway beyond. Reynolds kept close behind.

They soon came to a flight of stairs, but the guide hurried past these, unlocked and opened a door beyond them, then sped on into the dim depths of a narrowing passage which Reynolds suddenly realized was dipping downward. He demanded in a cautious whisper:

"Where does this take us?"

"To the stables, señor. I have already saddled and bridled two horses."

"Will there be guards there?" Reynolds fingered his recently acquired automatic as he put the question.

"No, señor. The stable is far from the *casa* and only the *casa* is guarded."

Ten minutes of groping through the constantly thickening shadows of the passageway brought them to its end. There the guide mounted a short ladder, thrust open a trapdoor above, and

scrambled out. Reynolds was soon beside the Spaniard, who hurriedly closed the trap.

The long stable in which they stood was deserted as far as men were concerned. Half a dozen obviously fine-blooded horses stamped or stood quietly munching grain in as many stalls.

Through a near-by door Carlos hurried, leading the way to where two mares, equipped for riding, were tied to a corner post of the stable. As he mounted, Reynolds's gaze swept across the surrounding scene. Several hundred yards away, and at an elevation somewhat higher than that of the stable, was a high stone wall which the American knew must inclose the house from which they had escaped.

Both house and stable occupied a knoll of grassy ground which placed them well above the surrounding cane fields. The wall-inclosed house was at the top of this hillock, and the stable about halfway down, on a shelved part of the knoll.

Reynolds found himself puzzled over the utter lack of caution on Carlos's part. They were within good observation distance of the house, but the young Spaniard did not so much as send an uneasy glance in that direction.

In a moment the two were mounted and moving swiftly off to the south. Reynolds saw that they were heading for a range of low mountains not far distant and demanded:

"What you going to do—go up in those mountains?"

"*Si, señor*," Carlos answered. "Up there is a hut where I shall meet a friend of mine. He will help me to get to Santiago."

"What about me? Which way is the *Ingénio Diabólico*? I have to get back there at once, Carlos." Reynolds's tone was sharp. It had suddenly occurred to him that his youthful guide might be indulging in either a practical joke or a romantic desire for adventure at his ex-

pense. But Carlos's reply was reassuring:

"The Ingenio Diabólico is on the other side of the mountains, señor. You will be able to see it when we top the range."

THE sun had nearly set when the two riders, at a signal from the guide, halted before a small native hut high in the mountains. It stood back in a tiny, natural amphitheater in the mountain-side, as though shrinking away from the road which was its sole contact with the outside world.

They had just topped the mountain range, and for the first time during the ride Reynolds was able to orient himself. For now the road swept downward at a steep angle and a far-flung panorama of the country below was visible.

Although dusk had set in, Reynolds's keen eyes could make out, in the distance, a dark bulk that was like a black blemish on the even, green fields of cane. From that dark spot two pillars rose and were silhouetted against the crimson sky behind them. Instantly, Reynolds knew that they were the smokestacks of the Ingenio Diabólico.

With that knowledge came an insistent desire to cover the miles between himself and the mill as quickly as spurred horseflesh could carry him. So he demanded impatiently:

"What do you want to stop here for?"

"I do not go any farther," the guide replied. "This is where my friend will meet me—at this hut."

"Well," Reynolds said promptly, "I guess you've done all you can for me, *chico*, and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do in return. I'll be able to find my way back to the Ingenio Diabólico alone now."

"But señor," Carlos's tone was frantic, "you'll not leave me yet—before—before my friend arrives?"

"You're afraid to wait alone?" Reynolds asked, hesitating. After all, he owed the boy something, he thought. Just how deep his gratitude should be, he had no way of knowing. Perhaps his life had been saved—or perhaps he had been rescued from some Cuban bandit, who had intended holding him for ransom.

Carlos answered his question with a tremulous, "Ah, *si*, señor. I am very much afraid. It is nearly night. Please, señor, do not go yet. My friend will be here—soon."

With a suppressed impatience, Reynolds agreed. The two dismounted, tied their horses, and at Carlos's suggestion entered the cabin to wait in there.

Inside the one-room shack, Carlos found and lit a kerosene lamp, for the tropical dusk is brief and when the black dark comes it blanks out everything with disconcerting suddenness.

Reynolds sat near the door on a box that was the hut's one piece of furniture that even approximated a chair. The American found his mind fluctuating between anxious remembrance of the breakdown at the Ingenio Diabólico, and profitless puzzlement about the mystery of his own kidnaping.

The latter he soon dismissed as utterly unsolvable at present, and his thoughts centered about the mill. Had Miguel resumed charge of that repair job?

Two sounds that rang on his ears in mingled discord smashed through his thoughts. A shriek from Carlos, a growled curse from the open door of the hut.

Reynolds sprang to his feet and spun round to face the door. Framed there, was a man whose blazing eyes turned away from the cringing, screaming Carlos to dart a glance of living hate toward the American.

For a moment, Reynolds stared, too astonished to speak. Then he blurted out:

"Miguel!"

"Yes, me, Miguel! You did not expect me here, no?" The venomous voice snarled out the words in Spanish. "You thought to be here alone, undisturbed, with—"

"No, no, no!" A lithe form rushed past Reynolds, screaming out the denial, and threw himself on Miguel. "It is not what you think, Miguelito *mio*. I brought him here. He thinks I am a boy. Ask him my name if you do not believe. He will tell you it is Carlos, because that is what I told him. He didn't know!"

Miguel laughed as he threw the clinging form from him. Reynolds felt his brain whirling as he stared. Carlos—his guide—a girl! She had thrown her hat off, and a mass of black hair tumbled in wild disorder about her face!

But only for a second was Reynolds concerned with the startling revelation. Miguel was advancing into the hut with a drawn knife. As he came he hissed:

"I will kill you, Americano! I will kill you!"

VIII.

THE instant that Reynolds realized Miguel was in deadly earnest in his intent to kill, the American's right hand flew to his hip pocket to grip the automatic lying there.

The girl, who was huddled on the floor where Miguel had thrown her, saw the movement and screamed warning.

"Cuide, Miguel! The Americano has a gun!"

Simultaneously with that cry, Reynolds's right arm shot forward and the automatic winked in the yellow kerosene light. But the American had no intention of shooting. Why Miguel was here, the possibility of his having been involved in the kidnaping of Reynolds, himself—there was no second in which to consider these things.

Reynolds was thinking only that Miguel was probably acting under the

drive of an insane jealousy caused by his discovery of the girl here. If she was his sweetheart, and apparently she was, Reynolds knew that a man with cooler blood in his veins than the Cuban's might have been maddened to the point of murder by the thoughts that must be racing through Miguel's mind.

So Reynolds, in drawing his gun, hoped to force the infuriated young Cuban to listen to an explanation of what had actually occurred. But he reckoned without knowledge of the fact that Miguel could use his knife from a distance.

Miguel stopped in the face of the automatic. His knife hand lowered slowly and he fumbled with the weapon, shifting his grip to its point, as he muttered:

"*Bien, Americano.* You have covered me and I can do no more."

"Listen, Miguel—" Reynolds began.

He got no further. In sinister answer to his unfinished words came the whine of a steel blade flashing through air. Too quickly for the eye to accurately observe in the uncertain light. Miguel's right hand had raised, flexed at the wrist and sent the knife hurtling toward Reynolds. As the blade found its mark, the automatic in the American's hand spat unseen lead and orange flame. Then it clattered to the floor, falling from spasmodically opened fingers. With two inches of steel embedded in his left shoulder, Reynolds had fired involuntarily and then relaxed his hold on the gun.

His shot was harmless. The bullet passed over Miguel's head and sped through the thatched roof of the hut.

For a moment Miguel did not move. His gleaming eyes sought Reynolds's body, seeking proof that the knife had inflicted a mortal wound. The American had clapped his right hand across his chest and staggered where he stood. Now that hand jerked outward, the scarlet stained knife coming with it.

Miguel snarled out an oath in Spanish. The revealed wound was gushing blood, and it was bad enough. But it was high up, in the fleshy part of the shoulder just under the bone. Obviously that knife had not touched a vital organ.

As he realized this, Miguel rushed the American with a reckless fury that took no heed of the fact that Reynolds was now armed with the very knife that had sought and missed his heart.

But Reynolds dropped his weapon as the Cuban sprang forward. The first blinding pain of his wound passed immediately, and Reynolds knew he could fight, at least until loss of blood made him faint. That would be long enough! He could knock out this hot-headed young fool!

THEY clinched and swayed together for a moment. The red stream from Reynolds's wound dyed Miguel's woolen shirt as the two men strained against each other. Then Reynolds broke the clinch. As he came clear he jabbed a vicious right to the young Cuban's throat.

The blow was well timed and found its mark. Miguel crashed to the floor, where he lay as still as though Reynolds's fist had been a bullet that had found a vital spot.

The girl ran, shrieking, from the corner where she had watched the fight in wide-eyed terror. She flung herself down by the sprawled body of Miguel and sobbed brokenly:

"Miguelito mio! Art thou dead? Ah, no, no! It cannot be. Speak to me, Miguelito. It's me, Dorotea. Ah, thou canst not die so!"

A moment longer she moaned. Then, apparently still believing the unconscious Miguel to be dead, she sprang to her feet and faced Reynolds. He was busy trying to stanch the free flow of blood from his wound with a bandage hastily ripped from his own shirt.

"You," the girl cried in English, "you have killed him, Americano. And now I will do as much for you!"

"Don't trouble yourself, *bruja*. I will see to that."

The voice, low but heavy with menace, came from the open door of the hut. Both Dorotea and Reynolds spun toward it. The girl was plainly neither astonished by the intrusion nor angered by the name, "hell cat," he had applied to her. She hurried to the newcomer, crying in Spanish:

"Yes, yes, kill him—kill the Americano and I will forget all that you have done to me, Don Guido! He has murdered my Miguelito! So kill him, kill him, kill him! But Don Guido, why did you send Miguel here? I did all as you told me. And you have promised—"

"Hush, you young fool!" Don Guido thrust her behind him and stood eying the body of Miguel. Then he focused a cold, level gaze on Reynolds and said slowly, "So! You have murdered him, eh?"

Reynolds tried to curb the runaway thoughts that were racing madly through his brain. The succession of bewildering events was beginning to have the effect on his mind of a nightmare. He seemed to be living in a world of grotesque unrealities from which he could never escape. Impatiently he struggled away from the thought and said briefly:

"If you'll take the trouble to examine Miguel you'll find that he's nothing worse than knocked-out. I didn't even hit him very hard. Guess he'll be around in a minute."

"So?" Don Guido put the monosyllabic question harshly. It suddenly flashed through Reynolds's mind that the newcomer had expected, and hoped, to find Miguel dead.

Don Guido turned and spoke to some one in the shadows of the night behind him. Two Cubans stepped into the hut.

Both were armed with revolvers and both leveled their weapons at the astonished American. He demanded, watching Don Guido with narrowing eyes:

"What in hell is this all about? I'm fed up on this damn mystery, and I'm bleeding badly! Get one of your men to help me tie this wound."

Don Guido made no reply. He advanced swiftly and stooped over Miguel. Then he straightened up, a heavy scowl on his dark face.

"You American dog!" he snarled. "I might have known you would use your fists! I might have known you wouldn't kill him! And he—the bungling fool—he missed your heart with his knife, no?"

REYNOLDS stared. Don Guido turned and spat out an order to the two men behind him. One of them clutched the terrified Dorotea by an arm and dragged her from the hut. The other remained where he was, gun still steadily leveled toward the American.

Guido de Alcanzar said slowly, so that each separate word slid through the heavy silence in the room and burst like exploding shells in Reynolds's mind: "Well, Americano, what I planned did not work out. But it is no matter. This pig here," he kicked the inert body of Miguel. "shall die by a bullet from your gun, which I see there on the floor. And you shall die by a more surely-aimed blow from his knife, which I see is also lying yonder. Then, who shall know that you did not kill each other?"

"You mean," Reynolds's voice was hoarse, but his face was a rigid mask, "you mean that you sent Miguel here. You planned that I'd kill him?"

"Quite right, Reynolds. Of course, I didn't send the young fool myself. He would have been suspicious. But I managed to get a message to him saying if he was interested he would probably find you and Dorotea here at this hut. The girl is his *novia*, or fiancée, as you

Americanos call it. *Por Dios*, he was interested beyond doubt!"

"But how in God's name did you know that I *would* be here?"

"Please, Reynolds. One question at a time. I really don't mind explaining, though. Ten minutes from now you will have forgotten everything you've learned in this life."

Reynolds felt a chill dampness breaking from his pores as those words of doom were so lightly spoken. He read the real threat in the Cuban's steady, menacing glance. He knew that he was slated for death, whatever the reason. Yet, except for the cold sweat on his body his chief sensation was a deep curiosity. It would be, he thought grimly, some slight satisfaction to know *why* he was being murdered.

Guido de Alcanzar continued in an even voice:

"It was from my *casa*, Reynolds, and at my orders that you escaped. You were brought there by my good servant, Hunfredo, after being doped by your own Chinese cook. The scheme was rather complicated, I admit, but the only one by which I could get you and my ward, Dorotea, together in such a way as to make Miguel attack you. I knew, of course, that you would have the gun Dorotea gave you. And I hoped you would kill Miguel."

"Seems to me," Reynolds said with dry lips, "that you could have killed us both without such elaborate preparations."

"That is true in your case," Don Guido answered. "Your death I could have arranged in a much simpler way. Miguel's was the difficult problem. But now, after all, it seems that everything is arranged very nicely. You can both die here and, as I've said, it will be supposed that you killed each other."

He turned away as he stopped speaking, seeming to consider the explanation satisfactorily ended. For Reynolds it had only begun.

"Why?" he blurted out. "Tell me why, damn you! Tell me!"

Don Guido faced him again and observed coolly:

"It is a wonderful thing to me—the effrontery of you Americans. You order me to tell you something, and give the order with an oath! And you stand there alive at this minute only because I've seen fit to withhold for a while the command for your death. This is not courage, Americano. It is the bravado of a fool! We shall see you sing a different tune presently."

He raised his voice and called in Spanish, "*Ven aca, Hunfredo!*" Then he laughed cruelly.

Reynolds started as a man stooped through the doorway into the hut in answer to that summons—a dark-skinned native so tall he could not stand erect in the room, so powerful-limbed it would not have been difficult to believe he could wedge his way through a solid wall. As he advanced, Reynolds glimpsed the bandage around his head and neck.

"Hunfredo," Guido de Alcanzar commanded in Spanish, "take that knife there on the floor and kill the Americano—with it. Plunge it through his heart!"

Like ordering a pig to be butchered, Reynolds thought, setting his teeth! He knew that his second fight with this gigantic native could not have a sequel as fortunate as the first. He was already weak from loss of blood. And this time he was covered by a gun in the hand of the man there by the door—and now by another that Guido de Alcanzar had recovered from the floor of the hut.

Hunfredo bent, grasped the knife still wet with Reynolds's blood, and then crouched three paces in front of the American. There was a sinister gleam in the giant's eyes, a vicious twist to his mouth, that told how pleasing his task was to him.

IX.

REYNOLDS'S fists balled and his whole body tensed. He would sell his life dearly! But he knew beforehand that death would have the best of the bargain in the end.

Suddenly he forgot himself, and felt a pang of pity for Miguel. It was something to be able to die fighting. Miguel would be shot while he lay there unconscious.

The giant native lunged forward. Reynolds sprang back and to the side. Guido de Alcanzar laughed. The American was in a corner now, trapped. In the next try, Hunfredo would get him.

But before Hunfredo had time for a second move, a high scream from the black shadows outside of the hut rent the air. And in its wake came hell.

Something dark and heavy hurtled through the doorway, something that still cried out in mortal agony as it crashed against the table where the kerosene lamp was placed. In the fraction of a second between the first scream and the smashing of the lamp by the hurtling body, Reynolds had a startled view of a second gigantic native framed in the doorway.

Then the hut was plunged into darkness that became a maelstrom of seething, fighting bodies. Flames spurted from two points as two guns barked in rapid succession. Reynolds sprang forward, hoping to plunge through to the door. But he collided with a live body, and the next instant was struggling with his unseen adversary.

The blackness in the hut was of short duration. The overthrown lamp had spilled oil on the floor, and flames were soon spreading out in a widening circle. By their flickering light Reynolds saw that the man he was fighting was Guido de Alcanzar, and that the Spaniard was struggling to raise his pistol arm.

Behind them two giants were batter-

ing each other with blows that would have killed lesser men. Then they locked, kicking and gouging.

Reynolds managed to twist Don Guido's wrist in such a sharp wrench that the Spaniard dropped his gun. Reynolds broke his hold, and stooped as though to snatch up the weapon. The Spaniard, instead of leaping aside, planted his foot on the automatic. Reynolds grappled him around the legs, just below the knees, and sent him crashing over backward.

When Reynolds straightened up he had the automatic in his hand. He crouched above Don Guido, waiting. But the Spaniard did not move. Evidently he had been knocked unconscious in his fall.

Reynolds turned just in time to see the end of the fight between the two giant natives. The one with a bandage around his head—the one whom the American recognized, beyond doubt, as his assailant of the previous night—was on the floor, his black head near the licking flames. There was a knife in his throat. From the wound blood vomited down to form a pool against which the fire hissed. His opponent was rising, sweating and grunting.

THE single room of the hut was a red shambles, lit with scarlet fire. By the overturned table lay the body of the guard who had been thrown through the door. The other Cuban had disappeared. The victorious native, looming high over his victim, turned, glared at Reynolds, then shifted his gaze to Miguel, who was beginning to stir. With a cry of affection as tender as a woman's, the man stepped swiftly forward, lifted the young Cuban and bore him out into the night.

Reynolds turned and tried to drag out Guido de Alcanzar, for the flames were becoming a menace. But with the tension of the fight over, Reynolds soon found that his still bleeding shoulder

wound had left him too weak for the task. He swayed for a moment, fighting a feeling of faintness, then staggered from the hut, hoping to be able to make the big native carry out, at least, the one live man left within.

Outside he found the native and Dorotea supporting Miguel, who was completely conscious now. Reynolds said sharply in Spanish:

"Get the bodies out from the hut. One of the men in there is still alive. I'll help with Miguel here."

Evidently accustomed to obeying when spoken to in tones of authority, the native turned mechanically. But Miguel stopped him with a vicious:

"Wait, Jorge! This Americano——"

"Do as I say," Reynolds interrupted. "I can really explain to you now, Miguel—about Dorotea. Don Guido de Alcanzar is in that hut."

"Don Guido!" Miguel cried. Then: "Is he dead?"

"No. But he'll be burned alive if he's not gotten out. And he's the one responsible for my being here with this young señorita. Get him out, Jorge, since that's your name."

"Yes, get him out," Miguel repeated, still sullen but plainly mystified.

Don Guido was brought out, and also the bodies of Hunfredo and the Cuban guard, whose back had been broken by Jorge. While this was being done Reynolds tried once more to bandage his wound.

Dorotea, so thankful that her lover was alive that she felt charitable toward all, meekly asked Miguel if she might assist the Americano señor with his bandages. A growled consent was given, and with her aid, Reynolds managed to make a tourniquet that stanchéd the bleeding and would serve for the time being.

Don Guido de Alcanzar was not long in recovering his senses. And the second he opened his eyes he was in full possession of his mental faculties.

Reynolds was covering him with his automatic, Jorge loomed menacingly over him, Miguel stared viciously with Dorotea clinging at his side.

Reynolds said, in level tones:

"You'll tell me and Miguel what this is all about right now. Or you'll never tell any one anything again."

"You—an Americano," snarled Don Guido, "you would not dare shoot me here. You would be hung, no matter what your justification."

"I think," Miguel said slowly, "that it does not matter whether he speaks or not, Mr. Reynolds. If you or Dorotea can explain about—about being here, I'm willing to listen to it now—"

"Si, si," Dorotea interrupted eagerly. "I can explain, Miguelito. And you will be sorry that you were angry. This señor," she pointed to Reynolds, "was brought as a prisoner to the Casa de Alcanzar, where he was keeping me, as you know. Then De Alcanzar came to me and made me dress like this—in boy's clothes. Ah, what will the father confessor say?"

"He will forgive," Miguel assured her. "Go on, querida."

"Don Guido," she continued, eying that man scornfully, "then made me go to this señor and offer to show him a way to escape, and bring him here."

"Made you?" Miguel was quickly suspicious again. "How could he?"

"Through you, Miguelito! He told me he had taken you prisoner, too. And unless I did as he commanded he would torture you, kill you. Ah, you will not understand, *chico*. But to save you I would do anything. Anything!"

"Si, querida." He drew her into his arms. "I understand—and forgive, as the father confessor will."

PRESENTLY, Miguel turned to the still bewildered Reynolds and said: "And now, Mr. Reynolds, you will hear the secret of the Ingenio Diabólico. This man, this Guido de Alcanzar y

Scrapio, has had officials of that Ingenio murdered, has fired his own cane fields because the loss fell on the mill, has done everything he could to force our company to abandon that mill."

"But why, in the name of God?"

"I will tell you that," Don Guido offered in even tones of venomous hatred. "It is because that mill is owned by Americanos—gringos, like yourself, who are liars, cheats, thieves. And they—"

"They refused to pay the exorbitant sums demanded of them for protection," Miguel interrupted dryly. "That is why he calls them such names, Mr. Reynolds. This Don Guido has, of recent years, become what I suppose a good American would call a racketeer. But he works under a mask. To the public, he is a respectable citizen. His sins have been laid to bandits who are supposed to have their headquarters in these mountains. In reality, those headquarters are at the Casa de Alcanzar."

Guido de Alcanzar put the next question to Miguel. He asked suddenly: "You are, no doubt, what I have thought since the first—an agent of the fools in Havana who call themselves our government?"

"Si," Miguel nodded. "And soldiers of those fools, as you call them, will shortly shoot you, my friend."

Reynolds demanded: "Then you're not an engineer, Miguel?"

"Oh, si. That, too. You see, I came here as an engineer to mask my real job of government agent."

"And the Señorita Dorotea?" Reynolds asked. "If I'm not being too personal, how does she figure in all this mess?"

Miguel's teeth flashed in the glare from the burning hut behind them.

"She figures, Mr. Reynolds," he said, "as the beautiful flower set in a bush of thorns. She was the ward of this Don Guido, who is her distant cousin. I met

her at his house when I first came here. Don Guido suspected what I was, but he dared not kill me. And for reasons which I can only guess, he encouraged the love between Dorotea and myself."

"You say he dared not have you killed?" Reynolds was puzzled again. "And, yet, he was the man who caused the murder of the last superintendent and of Arton? The one who put that black devil after me?"

"Si. It is a shameful thing to be true. Nevertheless, señor, where Americans were murdered he could count on bribes to prevent a careful investigation. Murder of a Cuban, especially of one with high government affiliations, would have been a different matter."

"Well," Reynolds said, "the solving of the mysteries is all very well. But it seems to me we owe our lives to Jorge here. He didn't arrive any too soon! I wonder how he happened to come at all?"

"He is my faithful servant," Miguel explained. "I met him with his oxcart on my way up here, and he came with me. But I made him wait with the horses down the trail. I suppose when he heard the fighting he came on up. Is it not so, Jorge?"

"Si, señor." Jorge grinned widely.

"And now," Dorotea smiled, "now we will be happy, Miguelito."

Reynolds drew away from them, and with the help of Jorge, bound the hands of Guido de Alcazar. Before long the small party was riding under the pulsing stars toward the distant lights of the Ingenio Diabólico.

Reynolds was very fatigued and weak from his wound, but his mind was at rest for the first time in forty-eight hours. He was thinking that the sugar house, over which he ruled, would need a new name now. And he was hopeful that "Mill of Peace" might prove an appropriate one.



BIG SPENDING

IN these days of high cost of everything, it is cheering to hear that some things ran into real money in the good old days.

In 1635, when the entire Dutch nation was crazy upon the subject of tulips, a single bulb was sold for two thousand two hundred dollars. At such prices it would pay better to raise tulips than to own the most valuable gold mine in the world.

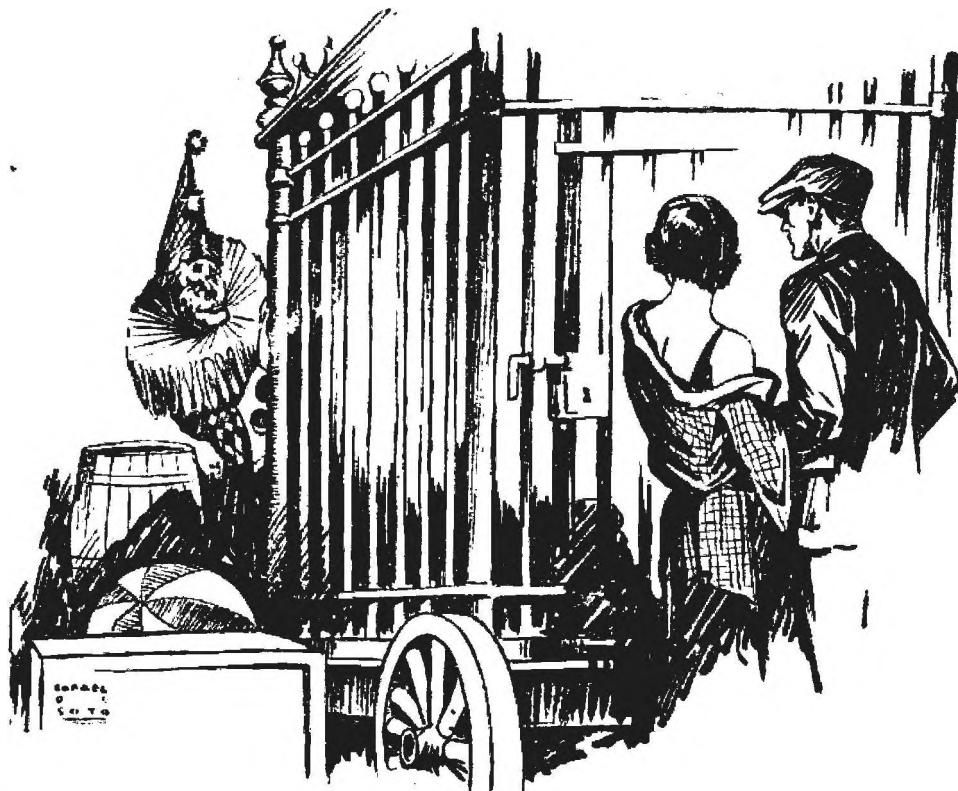
The Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Turkey, before the World War, each possessed a prayer mat, or rug, made of diamonds and pearls, and valued at something over two million five hundred thousand dollars apiece. The largest and most expensive rug in the world, made of the ordinary materials of which such things are manufactured, is owned by the Carlton Club of London, and is said to be worth a quarter of a million.

Speaking of gold mines, where do you suppose the most valuable bit of ore ever smelted in the world so far as is known, was found? In California or Australia or India? No, indeed. It was a lot containing two hundred pounds of gold-bearing quartz at the rate of fifty thousand dollars per ton, and was found in a mine at Ishpeming, Michigan.

Think of paying two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a single meal! That is what a wealthy Roman once did, when he wished to impress a dozen guests with his disregard for riches.

Greatest Show On Earth

By Anthony Shelton



A SIX-PART NOVEL—PART V

WILLIAM FENTON STURGIS is taken to task by his wealthy father for some extreme escapades, and told that he may prove his worth by going to work for a living. He is given the alternative of leaving for Europe and living on a meager allowance. He chooses the former, and joins a circus, starting as an usher at six dollars a week. He is merely tolerated by the more seasoned employees, but fights his way, and is given slight advances from time to time. He falls in love with Cathie, one of the performers, and incurs the wrath of Duffy

Conway, a clown. Conway lays various plans to discredit him with the girl, but Sturgis, now known as Bill Fenton, saves the girl from a stampeding elephant, and wins her admiration, and later her love. He is living in an atmosphere of jealousy and danger, and Conway finally determines to go to extreme measures to drive him from the circus outfit, and even do him serious bodily injury. (Copies containing previous installments may be obtained at 15 cents a copy by writing Street & Smith, 79 7th Avenue, New York, N. Y.)

CHAPTER XIX.

SURPRISES.

SUNDAY morning came, clear and beautiful, with a slight tang of autumn in the air. The show train made a good run, and got into town early. The routine unloading proceeded, but in a more leisurely way than on week days. And in a leisurely way the troupers straggled along to the hotels for their day and night of rest.

Long before the wheels of the train came to a final stop—when the flats were spotted at a street crossing, the elephant car and the stock cars on a second track, and the coaches were parked in another section of the railroad yards—Bill was up, shaved, and dressed in his best suit of clothes, a suit that was worn and shabby, but clean and pressed. He had his breakfast in the privilege car and lingered there afterward for Cathie, they having agreed the night before to meet in it and go together to keep their appointment with Mr. Catherwood. He smoked many cigarettes while he waited, for his mind was filled with disturbing thoughts of the probable outcome of the impending interview with the manager of the circus. Finally, Cathie came into the car.

She was wearing a heliotrope-colored dress of some flimsy material, and a flowered summer hat. Both the dress and the hat were decidedly becoming. Bill silently gazed at her with such deep admiration that she flushed with pleasure.

"What's the matter, Bill?" she cried gayly. "Can't you say good morning to a fellah?" And to the old man behind the lunch counter. "Grape fruit, toast and coffee, 'Grandpa.' And make it sna-pv, please."

Standing in the passageway that ran the length of the lunch counter, she leaned back against the wall of the car, between two of the windows, and looked

happily at Bill, who, though he was still gazing dreamily at her, had not moved from where he had been sitting for some time, beyond the end of the counter, with his chair tilted back, and with his feet on a window ledge.

"Snappy, is it, Cathie?" sourly retorted Grandpa, punctuating his remarks with a carving knife in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other. "If you're in such a hurry why didn't you get up earlier? Here you keep this First-of-May," waving the knife toward Bill, "sputterin' around like so much grease on a hot griddle, and then want me to make it snappy with your breakfast because you're late. You 'broads' are all alike. No idea of time. You'd keep a fellow waitin' around all day and think nothin' of it."

"Why, Grandpa!" Cathie exclaimed, coloring prettily, "what makes you think Bill has been waiting for me?"

"It's true, ain't it?" he asked over his shoulder as he turned toward a bread board.

"How absurd of you, Grandpa! How did you ever get such an idea as that?" asked Cathie.

"Listen," replied the old man, leaning his elbows on the counter and holding aloft the bread and the knife. "I've been married three times, an' I know all the signs. I know 'em by heart at this stage of the game."

He paused for a moment while he looked from one to the other of them, and then, although there was no one else in the car besides themselves, he lowered his voice when he spoke again.

"Come here the both of you," he said mysteriously, beckoning to them with the bread and the knife, and when Bill and Cathie were standing close together in front of him, he leaned over the counter toward them.

"It's that Joey that does the white-face with the butterfly," he hoarsely whispered. "Duffy, they call him. He's no good, and he's got it in for Bill.

here," indicating with the knife, "for stealing his girl. Watch your step the both of you."

"What do you mean, Grandpa?" asked Bill.

"Now, I'm telling you," answered the old man, "but if any one should ask me, I don't know a thing. Remember that. I've got troubles of my own."

"But what is it all about?" Cathie wanted to know. "Don't be so mysterious, Grandpa. Tell us."

"The Joey an' that Slater guy were in here late last night with a bottle of hooch. The Joey had it, an' him an' the Slater guy were drinkin' an' talkin' low, down there at the end of the counter.

"I didn't pay no attention to 'em, an' didn't hear what they said until they both got mad an' had an argument. They'd had several drinks, an' I guess they didn't know they was talkin' louder.

"The Joey wanted the Slater guy to do somethin', I didn't catch what it was, to Bill. An' when he refused, the Joey told him nastylike that he was afraid Bill would put the slug on him. That's what the row was about.

"They started to callin' each—Look out!" he warned, and drew back from the counter, and began to cut bread, as two members of the band, in trousers, undershirts and slippers, came into the car. "Do you want that toast dry or buttered, Cathie?" he asked sourly.

"Oh, buttered, Grandpa," she answered, assuming a gaiety she didn't feel.

Bill and Cathie remained thoughtfully at the lunch counter. Standing near them were the two men who had just come in. The latter gave their orders, and the old counterman busied himself with his work. A switch engine, hissing steam and with its bell ringing, rolled past on the next track.

Under cover of its noise Bill said to Cathie:

"Dearest, go sit down, and I'll bring your breakfast to you. We're evidently in for some trouble with the boss anyway, and I might as well start waiting on you now as later."

She flashed him a smile that set his heart thumping.

When Cathie was seated at her breakfast at a small, circular, movable table by a window, which overlooked rows upon rows of tracks holding broken strings of freight cars, and Bill had hesitatingly sat down there with her, they carried on a perfunctory conversation for the benefit of the two musicians and to still the perturbation which filled their hearts.

There were many things which they wanted to say to each other, further pledges of their love, and surmises and conjectures about their approaching interview with the manager of the circus. They both thought that when they were on their way to the hotel they would be alone, and that these confidences could then be exchanged. But as they left the pie car, they were joined by a group of troupers, some ten or a dozen and comprising both men and women, who were also going uptown to the hotels, and their chances of being by themselves became remote.

ALL of them walked in single file up the rough pathway between the track holding the circus coaches on one side and a track on which a freight train was being made up on the other. Conversation of any kind was difficult here because of the noise of the moving freight cars, the loud puffing of the engine doing the work, and the clouds of smoke and falling cinders. Besides, there was the lurking danger of being hurt, or even of being killed, through a misstep, and every one of the group had to be on his or her guard against just such an accident.

As neither Cathie nor Bill even considered breaking away from the group—such a course of action on the part of a featured woman performer and an usher on a Sunday morning being certain to cause unkind gossip—they plodded on with the others. Their last shred of hopefulness of having a few words together before they faced Mr. Catherwood vanished when, at the street crossing on which the flats had been unloaded, Cathie was joined by one of her intimate friends, a young woman who was in a wire act.

At this point, too, the group of circus troupers turned and followed the road across the tracks. A block beyond the railroad yards they came to a trolley line that would take them uptown. While they all stood there on the corner waiting for a car, Duffy Conway, immaculate, as usual, in a well-tailored business suit, joined the group.

The clown gave no sign of recognition of either Cathie or Bill, except for a quick glance. But the glance was more expressive of what was in his mind than any words could have been, for it glittered with hatred. Added to Grandpa's warning, it gave the two lovers a vague sense of foreboding.

But the peacefulness of that beautiful Sunday morning in early autumn, the ringing of distant church bells, the enigmatical object of their approaching joint interview with Mr. Catherwood, soon dispelled their feeling. So, by the time they boarded the street car the subject that was uppermost in their minds was this soon-to-be meeting with their employer. Its significance of mystery, the as yet unknown outcome of it, held their nerves taut.

Zebede Catherwood himself opened the door in response to their knock.

"Fenton," he said, "I want to speak privately to Cathie. You go to the next room and wait. Just open the door and go right in."

He drew the door wide open as Bill

turned away, and closed it when Cathie had stepped across the threshold.

Cathie found herself in the sitting room of a large suite. Forepaugh Jimmy was there with his inevitable Sunday papers. He got up and greeted her, and then resumed his seat and his papers.

"Sit down, Cathie," said Catherwood. "I have a surprise—both for you and for Fenton. And I don't just know," he added, "which one of you is going to be more surprised."

A SURPRISE?" Cathie asked. "A pleasant surprise, or an unpleasant one?"

"I think it would be called pleasant in many ways," Catherwood said, smilingly. "Fenton has gone to meet his father, in the room I pointed out. Of course, after what happened, it is best that they should meet in private. But his sister Enid will be here presently. Do you know who and what Bill's father is?"

"Only that his name is Sturgis."

"He is William Sturgis—one of the wealthiest men in the country."

Cathie looked her astonishment. "Oh!" she said. "Bill told me his name was William Fenton Sturgis; but I didn't associate the name with *that* Sturgis."

She sat thoughtfully for a moment, and then with a little laugh: "We were sitting in the rain on the pole of one of the canvas wagons when he told me." She laughed again. "He had just proposed to me. And my dears! it was too romantic for words!" Then with another little laugh: "Then the boss hostler yelled at us and drove us away! And what he called us for sitting on the pole of that wagon!"

"It's time for Enid to be here," spoke up Forepaugh Jimmy, looking over the top of his paper.

"Have you met her?" Cathie wanted to know. "What is she like?"

"We haven't seen her," replied Catherwood, "since she was a baby."

"Are you glad, Cathie," asked Forepaugh Jimmy, now laying aside the newspapers, "that Bill has all that wealth back of him?"

Cathie was thoughtful for a moment. "Yes, and no," she replied. "Of course it's nice to think about having money again. But Bill has got to succeed on his own. My views about money and work have changed greatly, since my father lost his wealth and I had to go to work." And then still more seriously, she asked, "Do you think that Bill will succeed as a circus man?"

"He will," spoke up Forepaugh Jimmy, "if he is let alone and continues to work as he has since he has been with us. But it is going to take years of hard work. Wouldn't you rather have him go with his father, where he will advance quicker, than remain with the circus?"

"That depends. I think every young man should work at something that is not only profitable, but also appeals to him—something that he likes, because he will then stand a better chance to succeed. But what do you mean by saying 'if he is let alone'?"

"I mean his father. Bill Sturgis is a peculiar man. He——"

"I think he made a great mistake," interrupted Catherwood, "in the way he brought up his children."

"What do you mean?" asked Cathie.

"Well," replied Catherwood slowly, "in not telling them certain things. And I'm afraid he may be in for a bad time when he does tell them. He's all right, Bill is, but——"

There was a knock. Forepaugh got up and opened the door.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed gayly. "It's Enid! Of course you couldn't be any one else! Come in, my dear!"

"My father, William Sturgis; is he here?" was the cool response.

"He's with Bill. But they'll both be

here presently. He wants you to meet him here," he said, with a broad happy smile. "Come in, my dear." He took her by the arm and led her into the room. "This," he said with a flourish of the hand, "is Zebede Catherwood."

Catherwood came forward and shook hands. "The likeness," he exclaimed, "is remarkable! It's uncanny! Have you noticed it, Jimmy?"

Forepaugh Jimmy exploded: "Have I noticed it? Hell! Do you think I'm blind? It's the most extraordinary thing I've ever encountered."

Enid stood looking coolly from one to the other of these strange men who were so effusive in their greetings. She was auburn-haired, about twenty years old, and was of striking beauty, with a slender, perfectly formed figure. She was simply but expensively gowned. Every move she made was made with unconscious ease and grace.

She had come from her father's private car to the hotel with a feeling bordering on resentment. It was aggravated by the familiar and ambiguous references of the two men. But they, so far, were blind to it.

"And this," said Catherwood, leading her across the room to where Cathie was standing, "is Cathie Beresford. She is——"

"Charmed, I assure you," interrupted Enid, languidly offering her hand, but without any other visible indication of that sentiment. "It's really a novel experience for me to meet a circus woman. One always thinks of elephants and clowns and peanuts, you know, when the circus is mentioned. However, you don't look like a circus woman—or should I say, circus lady?"

"Don't I?" Cathie exclaimed with mock seriousness; "I must repair the omission. Perhaps you will tell me what a circus woman is supposed to look like."

"Really, it doesn't make any difference, does it?"

Cathie laughed. "Nothing you say," she replied, "makes any difference, Miss Sturgis. Your brother seems to be very fond of the circus."

"Oh," Enid shrugged, "Bill, as usual, made an ass of himself. It wasn't necessary for him to get himself mixed up with a smelly circus. If he had only let me——"

"Smelly circus!" Forepaugh Jimmy wrathfully exclaimed. "Your mother would never have made a crack like that. She was one of us!"

"What do you mean?" Enid quickly demanded.

"Here's your father. Ask him." He turned and walked across the room.

CHAPTER XX.

FLASHBACKS.

THE door into the hall had been quietly opened. William Sturgis and Bill stood just inside the doorway. One look at them told Zeb and Forepaugh Jimmy that the fires of affection now burned brightly between father and son.

Bill came forward with hands outstretched to Enid, and brother and sister embraced, while William Sturgis strode forward and grasped the hand that Cathie held out to him. He gazed at her silently for a long moment, his piercing eyes like cold, highly tempered steel, seeming to dissect every lineament of her features and to lay bare her mind. Then his look softened.

"Cathie Beresford," he said feelingly, "from what my two old friends, Zeb Catherwood and Forepaugh Jimny, have told me, I think a great deal is due to your good influence that my son is restored to me. I welcome you as my prospective daughter-in-law." He drew her to him and embraced her.

"I am not acquainted with your father," he continued, "but I know about him from Zeb and Forepaugh. They have told me all about you, and

how you struck right out to support yourself upon his financial collapse. You and I, my dear, are going to help him get on his feet again."

He turned smilingly toward Bill and Enid, where they stood with serious faces, talking earnestly in low tones and said, "Willie May-the-First," and laughed as Willie looked at him with a startled expression, "you didn't think when you wrote to me that I would understand that purely circus nickname, now did you?" He chuckled as Bill turned a silent look of inquiry at his sister.

"Father!" spoke up Enid. "What is the mystery about mother, that these men," with a disdainful inclination of her head toward Forepaugh Jimmy and Catherwood, "have been hinting at? I want to know immediately."

She was imperious in her bearing, and her beauty and grace were commanding, as she advanced a few steps toward her father and faced him.

"Is it anything to be ashamed of?" she asked quietly.

William Sturgis met his daughter's gaze with a gaze as steady as her own. For a moment or two he made no reply, and the silence in the room became tense. Then he said in a low, calm voice: "Your mother was Enid Fenton, a famous bareback rider. Now you know."

Enid drew back as if some one had struck her. She saw, or at least she thought she saw, the wreck of everything that she held dear.

"Why," she demanded, with ill-suppressed anger, "weren't we told about her before? Why have you let us grow up in ignorance about her? A bareback rider! Oh!" Her tone was the tone of a person deeply wounded.

"It was my better judgment not to do so!" replied her father with acerbity. "You don't know all the circumstances and are not qualified to take me to task."

"Your better judgment to let us grow up in ignorance of the fact that our mother was a common bareback rider!" Her tone was bitter. "What," she demanded sarcastically, "are the circumstances that have made snobs, yes, snobs, of us? What are they?" And then she wailed: "Oh-h, if you had only told us. How could you be so cruel?"

"Enid! Daughter!" he pleaded. And then as she stood before him, her eyes blazing, he said quietly: "How like your mother you are!"

"I want to know about my mother," she demanded again, with a gesture of impatience. "Are you ashamed to tell me?"

"Sit down," he said, in the same quiet tone, "and I will tell you." And when she had seated herself: "No, I'm not ashamed."

He paused, and seemed to gaze dreamily into the far-distant past. Zebede Catherwood and Forepaugh Jimmy sat thoughtfully smoking. Cathie sat with her hands folded idly in her lap, but her eyes were more often on Bill than on his father. Bill and Enid, recognizing a new timbre in their father's voice, looked at him with strained, intent interest. He remained standing.

"When I was a boy of twelve," he began, "living in one of the tenement districts of New York, my parents died within a month of each other, and I at once ran away from the city to escape being placed in an orphan asylum.

"I sold papers, shined shoes, worked on farms, in racing stables, and did many other kinds of work to support myself. For three years I drifted about, being on the move from place to place for fear of being picked up and put in an institution. During that time I grew tall and strong for my age, but I had very little education, and manual labor was all I could do. I had many ups and downs of fortune.

"Early in the summer of my fifteenth

year, I was in a small town in Ohio. I don't believe I ever knew the name of it. Work there was scarce for a boy, and I was having a hard time of it.

"The Walter L. Main Circus was billed to exhibit there and the posters about it fascinated me. It was a wagon show, or more familiarly a mud show, and was hauled from town to town over the country roads by horses.

"Besides having the circus fever the day the show came in town, I was hungry, too, because I had not eaten anything for over twenty-four hours. I applied for work with the show and was given a job as pony punk. The day I joined, I made the acquaintance of Zebede Catherwood and Forepaugh Jimmy, or plain Jimmy Bradley as he was then called. Zeb was a pony punk, too, and Jimmy was with the Fenton troupe of equestrians, learning to be a bareback rider. We three boys were about the same age. Our friendship began the day we met.

"We were with that show for three years. Jimmy riding and doubling in other acts, while Zeb and I gained experience in several departments of the show. At the end of that time, when the Fenton troupe went to the Sells-Forepaugh Circus, which was a railroad show, Zeb and I secured employment with it, also. Here, too, we worked first in one department and then in another, both of us seeking as much knowledge as we could get of the circus business.

"Our experience during the four years we were under old Adam Forepaugh's banner was varied. We had many clem's, but we got a liberal education in the business. We three were working with but one object in view—to go into partnership and have a circus of our own. We slaved and saved our money, and at the close of our fourth season with Adam Forepaugh we had enough money among us to buy the Anding Brothers' Circus. It was a mud

show, and we got it at a ridiculously low figure because the owner of it had gotten into financial difficulties through too much hard drinking.

"Love, also, had come into our lives during those eight years of troup ing, and—"

William Sturgis stopped speaking, and once more that dreamy look, that retrospective look, came into his eyes, and he seemed to live again those days of youth and love, of struggle and sentiment, of hardship and happiness.

CATHIE BERESFORD sat entranced. Zebede and Forepaugh were lost in reflection as their memories of those days were revived. The faces of Bill and Enid were white and strained, and they stared at their father as this secret chapter of his life was revealed to them. Then Zebede roused himself to the present.

"Bill," he said, "let me tell about our next few years." And without waiting for Sturgis to reply, he proceeded with the narration.

"Your father, at the time we bought the Anding Brothers' Circus, was twenty-three years old—a year younger than you are now, Bill. The eight years of troup ing had developed him into a tall, wiry, very strong man. He was quick in his movements and was a wonderful fighter. He had developed too, in another way, a way which seems unbelievable, as I look back into the past and think of the hardships we suffered, for troup ing was full of hardships in those days.

"On Sunday afternoons of the summer when we three boys became acquainted, your father and I, being pony punks, would take the ponies to a stream, if we happened to be camped near one, and wash them. Jimmy would come along, too, and sit on the bank of the stream so that we could talk about the circus we were going to have, and build our air castles. Or, if there was

no stream handy, we would sit in the shade of one of the wagons.

"He was always accompanied by a long-legged, red-headed little girl of about ten years. She was the only child of Silas Fenton, who headed the equestrian act with the show, and was the fifth generation of a family of bareback riders.

"Your father had the care of the pony she rode in the act, and, with the pony as a center of common interest, it was not long before a strong bond of affection was established between them. We used to call her 'Little Red.' She would take that name from us, but from no one else.

"Like all circus children of those days, she was being trained to follow in the footsteps of her forefathers. On week days, she had to spend part of the period between shows at practice, which included acrobatic work as well as riding with a mechanic fastened to her, and part of the period at her books, so that her general education would not be neglected.

"She was a lively little thing, and very talkative. She was interested in her lessons, and used to delight in asking us questions to test our knowledge of the subjects she was studying. Many of the questions the ten-year-old little girl asked the fifteen-year-old boy were too much for him, because, though your father was smart, and his wits had been sharpened by the hard knocks the world had given him, he had had very little of what was then familiarly called 'book learning.'

"The little boy being devoted to the little girl, it embarrassed him when he couldn't answer her questions. Jimmy and I had had much better advantages in schooling than your father, and when your father, in the strictest confidence, told us of his intention to get an education, we gladly agreed to help him as much as we could.

"I remember the day he told us this,

because I was strongly impressed. It was on a Sunday afternoon. Your father and I were knee-deep in a little stream, washing the ponies. Jimmy and Little Red were seated on the bank. To one side of us some zebras were being washed. On the other side the three elephants the show owned were frolicking in the water, and behind us were the baggage stock and the tents, with the wagons scattered about the lot as they usually were.

"In agreeing to help your father, Jimmy and I helped ourselves by having to apply ourselves to studies which we would never have bothered about otherwise. You can have no idea of the difficulties we experienced trying to study while we were with that mud show.

"The country roads in those days were usually bad, and a circus traveling over them had many obstacles to overcome. There were days and nights of rain, and mud, and mired wagons; there were fights with the townspeople and opposition fights; and there were days and nights when we were so tired, so worn with fatigue, that we could have cried from the pain of it.

"Jimmy and I lagged in our studies. But your father's ambition was so determined, so strong, so deeply rooted, that nothing could stand in the way of it. He soon outstripped us, and we have never caught up with him.

"When you think about his early life and wonder why he didn't go to school, you must remember that he was wholly dependent upon his own resources, that he was a young boy, and that the fear of being placed in an orphan asylum always hung over him.

"By the time we were ready to buy our circus, Little Red had become a young woman, and the childhood bond of affection between herself and your father had grown into love. Jimmy and I, too, had fallen in love, and our girls were performers, or kinkers as per-

formers were called in those days, and were friends of Little Red's.

"When we spoke of marriage, we met with bitter opposition from the girls' parents, because we three young men were classed as roughnecks, and it was considered that the girls would be marrying beneath them if they married us. Besides, the acts they were in would be weakened if the girls left them. So we kept our engagements a secret.

"Your father and Jimmy and I spent the winter at our winter quarters repairing and painting our property. We did almost all the work ourselves in order to save as much as we could of our meager capital.

"Those three girls who shared our hardships and encouraged us with their love are gone. But without their interest and love and companionship, I doubt that we could have succeeded. If we worked hard before we were married, we worked harder afterward to justify their confidence in us. They and Forepaugh Jimmy were the features of our performance.

"In you, Enid, I see Little Red as she was in those days—young, lithe, graceful, vivacious, beautiful. She was Enid Fenton, your mother, a bareback rider of rare ability."

WHILE Catherwood was talking,

Enid sat bolt upright, with her fingers interlocked and her gaze fixed on a point in the carpet. Now, when he paused for a moment, she turned her tawny eyes full on him. There was fire smoldering in them. She said nothing. Then she returned her gaze to the point in the carpet.

"I am trying to impress you," Catherwood continued, after looking thoughtfully at Enid. "with a picture of your parents as they were then, so that you may understand your father's later action.

"The Anding Brothers' Circus, a one-ring wagon show, started out on its first

season under our ownership. Your father was general agent, and as such, had charge of the advance.

"We prospered during our first two seasons, and enlarged our show. We bought Old Babe. She is the first elephant we ever owned. She was an old elephant even then.

"Lean years followed, and we barely skinned through. Then came a bad season, during one of the financial panics that hit the country, and we were forced to close early. Ruin, with the loss of everything we possessed, stared us in the face.

"We got our show into winter quarters and held a conference. At this conference it was decided, in order to save expenses and with the hope of getting financial assistance, that your father should accept an offer of a position in a bank, which Lloyd Gibson, president of the institution, had been urging upon him.

"You see, as general agent of our show, your father came daily in contact, and had dealings with, many of the business men of the towns where we played. He would drive a hard bargain, but he dealt fairly, and when his word was once given it was as good as gold. He was respected and had friends in every town where we exhibited.

"When your father left our winter quarters, your mother accompanied him. She rejoined us, however, in time to get in practice and go on the road when we went out again. She tramped with us for four seasons more, spent the winter months with your father, and then, after you were born, Bill, she retired from the business.

"Lloyd Gibson had given us the loan we needed, two thousand dollars, which was a large sum of money in those days. He gave it on his estimate of your father's character, and on the condition that your father remain with the bank.

"Your father took naturally to banking and high finance. His ability to

make money and to make it work for him is remarkable. Each year he has invested a percentage of the profits from our circus, and has made Jimmy and me very rich men.

"During those early years in the bank, he took an active interest in our circus and visited it frequently. But upon Little Red's death, a year or two after Enid was born, he moved to his present home in the East, and his visits then became further and further apart. Time failed to heal the wound that had been given him.

"But whenever we played your home town, he always sent you children with your nurse to see the show. It was on one of these visits, Bill, when you were a very small boy, that you cried because you couldn't take Old Babe home with you.

"To him, our circus was symbolic of Little Red. Everything about it was significant of some tender incident of their closely interwoven lives, and brought to your father anguishing memories which dated back to the days when the little girl sat on the bank of the stream and watched the young pony punk wash her pony, while she plied him with questions, and made observations out of her little store of newly acquired knowledge. It was for these reasons that your father stopped visiting us, except when some master connected with the finances of the circus made it necessary for him to come to the town where we were playing.

"His last visit was over a year ago. You, Bill, had passed out of his life for the time being, and he was more quiet and reserved than ever before.

"Shortly before this visit, Jimmy had lost his only child, Sturgis Catherwood Bradley, who was following in his fathers' footsteps as a bareback rider. Jimmy's loss broke him up, and that is why he is not at present taking a more active part in the operation of the show."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPOTLIGHT.

DURING the narration, William Sturgis had sat inert, and seemed scarcely to breathe as those intimate days of his youth were reviewed for the benefit of his children. When Catherwood stopped speaking, he got up slowly, took a step toward his daughter and stopped, as if undecided. Then the telephone rang and Catherwood answered it.

"It's Martin Hillsdale, the press agent back with the show," he said, turning to Sturgis. "He says there are some reporters downstairs who spotted your private car and want an interview with you. He says he can't hold them in check any longer—they're getting impatient and think he is stalling them so that you can get away without seeing them. What do you want to do about them?"

"What kind of a fellow is Hillsdale?"

"Smart fellow. But like most of his tribe he hits the booze now and then. I had to give him a good bawling out a couple of weeks ago for getting cock-eyed. He said he was entertaining newspapermen. I told him to wait until the wintertime to do his entertaining. He's all right now. Do you want him?"

"Yes, tell him to bring the newspapermen up. I might as well give out the story now and have it over with."

At the same moment that Catherwood turned back to the telephone, and her father stood looking thoughtfully at him, Enid gave a little gasp of horror and made as if to rise from her chair. Then as the message was given, she sat back again and, for a moment, looked pleadingly at her father. But he didn't see her expression, for he was looking at and listening to Catherwood. The color rose in her cheeks.

But Cathie had caught the meaning of her look, and she sympathized with the stricken girl, whose pride was about

to be held up to the ridicule of her most cherished illusions. She said nothing, however, nor made any move to express her understanding, the whole matter being she knew, one in which a stranger's interference would be resented.

MARTIN HILLSDALE came in with the newspapermen, and they were given a brief outline of the story. They were told who Cathie was, and that she and Bill would not be married until the close of the season; that they would then live at the winter quarters, for Bill was going to work his way up with the circus.

During the interview, Enid stood at one of the windows, with her back to the room, and curtly refused to say anything at all.

When the reporters were leaving, Hillsdale was told to remain for a moment.

"Martin," said Catherwood, "you seem to be taking all this very much as a matter of course."

"I've known who Bill was since he joined the show, Mr. Catherwood. I recognized him the day he joined us," replied Hillsdale. He took some newspaper clippings from his pocket and handed them to his employer. "You will find some pretty good pictures of him here," he said, "Pete, the stake-and-chain man, recognized him, too, from his name and the strong likeness to his father. We used to talk, Pete and I, about Bill, and what he was doing at various times."

"I could have sold the story for a good price if I had wanted to. But Bill has seemed to be so much up against it, and has been trying so hard to make good, that I haven't had the heart to do it. But this reunion and finding him working as an usher in a circus, is going to make a peach of a story and the show will get a lot of publicity about it. We ought to do a turn-away business to-morrow. Oh, by the way," turning

to Bill, "your friend Slater has been arrested as a pickpocket. Mr. Ramsey refused to spring him and told the police sergeant to go as far as he liked with him. I don't believe I can keep the story out of the papers, but I will try. It will probably be buried in the bigger story about Bill and his sister and Cathie." He left the room.

"Now we'll go to the car for lunch," said Sturgis, "and then we'll go out to the lot."

On the way to the car, during the luncheon, and afterward while they were at the lot, Enid's brain was numb. She was capable of mechanical physical movement, but was wholly incapable of coherent thought. She was dazed, as a person would be, who had been struck on the head and was struggling back to consciousness. Her answers to the few questions that were asked her were vague in the extreme, and were spoken in a tone so low that her voice could scarcely be heard.

While she and her father had never been chummy, or demonstrative in their affection, she had secretly adored him. And now he had done this cruel thing to her. Recovery from her surprise and humiliation could not be immediate. When they at last started for the lot, she clung to Forepaugh Jimmy, sensing in him an understanding and sympathy that was denied to the others. And the peppery, irascible old man did understand her and sympathize with her. Speaking in a tone almost as low as hers, he told her about what, unconsciously, she wanted to know—her mother. And then one clear thought began to ring through her brain—"My mother was a circus woman, a bareback rider. I must remember. I must remember."

As they drew nearer and nearer to the lot, the crescendo roars of the lions came to them together with the occasional trumpetings and rumbles of the elephants.

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THE bare poles of the big top stood upright, supported by the main guy ropes, with the canvas spread out on the ground and ready to be raised at an early hour in the morning. The sideshow top was up. A few groups of townsmen were the only persons on the midway. Over at the horse tents, too, there were several groups of townspeople. They were admiring the splendid-looking baggage stock of the circus; and there were other groups passing in and out of the pad room, where the rosin backs and other ring stock was stabled.

In the menagerie, the cages had not been carefully spotted because they would be taken out in the morning for the parade. But the doors of the cages were down, and the animals could be seen in their dens. With the exception of the cats, they had all been fed, and most of them were now resting, glad, perhaps, to be free from the stares, laughter, pointing fingers and criticisms of the thousands of curious persons who thronged them on show days.

Sunday being a fast day for the cats—the circus men having found, as the result of years of experience—that not feeding these jungle beasts one day a week kept them in good health—the lions, tigers, leopards, and pumas dozed under the beneficial effects of their abstinence. But now and then, for no apparent reason, a lion would raise its head and begin to roar. All its mates would then reply, and for a few minutes the menagerie tent itself would seem to tremble from the rolling thunder of those ominous sounds.

The elephants and zebras were contentedly munching hay. The camels, having finished their evening meal, gazed about them with the sneering expression which is habitual to their faces. The seals splashed in their tank and barked. The monkeys chattered, the parrots called and squawked, and the hippopotamus slept. It was a peace-

ful and restful late Sunday afternoon for these prisoners from the jungles.

Sturgis and Catherwood walked ahead through the menagerie, looking it over and talking about improvements and changes to be made for the next season. Bill and Cathie stood by the cage of a saddle-backed tapir, talking earnestly, but neither looking at nor discussing the sad-eyed animal in the den beside them. Forepaugh Jimmy was piloting Enid around the menagerie, trying to interest her in the animals and thereby rouse her from the state of apathy which the stupefaction of her sensibilities had placed her in. His efforts were without avail.

The news having spread among the troupers that Willie May-the-First was none other than William Fenton Sturgis, about whom so much had appeared in the newspapers during the past year, and that his sister Enid, the famous beauty, and his father, the multimillionaire, who was part owner of the Anding Brothers' Circus, would be with him at the cookhouse, almost the entire personnel of the show was present at the evening meal. Those who had already finished their repast, by the time the party arrived, were grouped about the lot at points of vantage.

Among the spectators there was an observer whose interest transcended that of every one else. He was Duffy Conway.

DURING the past twenty-four hours, the clown's malignity had burned more and more fiercely. Outwardly calm, laconic and soft-spoken when addressed, inwardly he was seething with homicidal mania. It was now fuel to this fire to hear Bill and Cathie laugh together, to see happiness sparkling in their eyes, and to know that Bill was no longer the penniless usher, but was one of the two heirs to a vast fortune and the son of one of the owners of the show.

He was standing by himself. He grimaced and his hands twitched when he saw the party coming from the direction of the menagerie toward the cookhouse. He heard Cathie and Bill laugh. His face contorted. After tomorrow night— He chuckled.

It all sounded so improbable to him; so like a fairy story; something which he would have dismissed from his mind as mere fiction had he read about it and had not himself been one of the principals in the drama. But the truth of the matter lay before his eyes.

There was William Sturgis, whom anybody could recognize from the pictures of him that had been published time and again in the newspapers. He was strolling with Zebede Catherwood and they were talking and acting like old friends. After them with Forepaugh Jimmy came this gorgeous auburn-haired beauty, and then Cathie and Bill.

And all went into the performers' side of the cookhouse and seated themselves at the staff table. Further, there was the friendly attitude of Zebede Catherwood and Forepaugh Jimmy toward Bill and Cathie.

Covertly, from his place at a table not far away from them, Duffy Conway overheard enough of their conversation to remove any doubts as to the truth of the extraordinary story, which was again being recounted in a low voice by a man at his own table. The clown volunteered no comment, and no expression of opinion was asked of him, for he was cordially disliked by the other members of his profession who were with the show.

There was a sinister gleam in Duffy Conway's eyes and there was the curl of a malevolent smile about his thin lips as his imagination pictured the way his vengeance would wreck, would utterly destroy, whatever plans for future happiness that Bill and Cathie might be counting upon.

Many were the expressions of goodwill for the young lovers that he had to listen to at the table that night. And again in the morning, when he was in the dressing room putting on his make-up for the parade, good wishes for them were tossed back and forth among the performers who were similarly occupied on Fifth Avenue, Broadway and Clown Alley, as the three rows of trunks in the pad room were called. Now, however, the story was new, and no one talked of anything else. And there was even much speculation going around as to the size of the checks which Mr. Sturgis would give to Martin Hillsdale and to Pete, the stake-and-chain man, for keeping Bill's secret.

Duffy Conway's plans for the execution of his diabolical plot for revenge, and for his escape from the consequences of the heinous act, were as nearly complete as he could make them. The night before, he had surreptitiously removed from his trunk in the pad room such of his possessions as he wanted to keep, and that very morning, under an assumed name, had mailed them by parcel post to a distant point.

The intense pain he had suffered from the rage which had burned in him for days was gone. Through his veins there now coursed a joyousness which was anticipatory of the gloating satisfaction that would be his after his vengeance had exacted its price from Bill and Cathie. And he laughed to himself, a fiendish laugh, when he saw the two he hated drive away with the others of their party after they came out of the cookhouse. He laughed the same laugh many times during the night; but in the morning, for fear of making himself noticeable, he confined himself to silent chuckles. The revenge he planned was very sweet to him.

First call for parade had sounded, and the dressing room was filled with men who were getting ready for the long ride through the streets. Duffy was not

in the clown band. He rode by himself in a small cart that was drawn by a donkey. His place in the line was between the rear of a string of cages and the head of a group of equestrians, the latter being led by Cathie.

He worked dexterously at his make-up while he listened with knowing and amused interest to the snatches of conversation that drifted to him from beyond the strip of side wall—where the grooms and pony punks were getting the ring stock ready—and to the comments that were made by the performers with him in the dressing room. The talk was entirely about the big news story that had broken about the show. And as he listened, his eyes glittered and his shoulders shook with silent laughter. As soon as he was dressed, he got his cart and donkey and started for the street.

FOR many blocks the street bordering the lot, there was a congestion of cages and tableaux wagons, with their four, six, and eight-horse teams, and of elephants, camels and zebras, and scores of mounted troupers. All were waiting for the parade to start and the line to straighten out. Cathie was already there.

She waited and looked about expectantly, for she had been given to understand by Mr. Sturgis, the night before, that Enid would ride in the parade with her. But she didn't know that when Enid left the lot after her dinner in the cookhouse, she had refused to return to her father's private car and had taken a room in the hotel, and that after leaving a note for her father stating that she was going home immediately, she had boarded a train some time in the night. But she didn't go home. And where she went and what she did is a different story. But Cathie sat astride her horse and waited.

When Duffy drew near and stopped, the noisy rattle of his cart was drowned

by the strident notes of the steam calliope, and Cathie was not aware of his approach. A moment later she saw him a few yards ahead of her.

Cathie and the clown looked at each other. Then the clown smiled what he intended for a deceptively propitiating smile, but he was unable to conceal the vindictive hatred that lay behind his glittering, baleful eyes. And as he read the poisonous gaze in that fantastically made-up face, with its hideous grin, an intuitive chill of apprehension raced along her spine. This feeling remained with her all during the parade, and she wore a serious, thoughtful expression as the result of it. The route was a long one, and by the time she returned to the lot, the flag was already up and she had to change quickly to her street clothes and hasten to the cookhouse.

Cathie's foreboding had temporarily disappeared by this time, and she was bright and gay. And she laughed when Forepaugh Jimmy told her that Bill had refused to come to the staff table under the plea that he was still an usher, and would remain an usher until the end of the season, and that he would continue to live with the other ushers as before. She grew thoughtful when he told her about Enid.

CHAPTER XXII

A CLOWN'S JEALOUSY.

UNCHEON was over. Bill waited for Cathie, and they strolled together the short distance from the cookhouse to the back yard, and then into the big top. They chose seats near the band stand, and were joined there presently by Forepaugh Jimmy.

"Your father," said the old showman, "after he had taken a hasty glance through his newspaper, "has asked Zeb to give Charlie Mansfield a job at the winter quarters and Zeb has said he would be glad to do so. He likes Charlie."

"Charlie is all to the good," replied Bill. "He has been mighty fine to me."

But Cathie was restless. She looked at her watch, and then stood up.

"Come, Bill," she said. "It's time for you to get into your uniform, and if you don't hurry, you'll be late."

She stepped down the few rows of seats to the ground, and then said to Bill as they turned toward the back door:

"I can't get that clown out of my mind. An intuition, I suppose. It makes me nervous."

"That's absurd," Cathie. "What can he do? I'm not afraid of him."

"I know you're not. But he is full of low cunning, and I want you to be careful. I've had intuitions before. Now run along and change."

With a thoughtful expression, she stood in the back yard and watched him disappear under the side wall in the direction of the stake-and-chain wagon. While sitting just now in the big top, she had seen Duffy Conway seated on the opposite side of the tent. Though the distance had been too great for her to be sure, the clown had seemed to be chuckling every now and then, as if he had found something highly amusing in his own thoughts, and she sensed again an inexplicable dread. She was thinking about it now. Then Charlie Mansfield, in his uniform and ready for work, came in under the side wall to await his call for duty.

Cathie liked Charlie. He was a sturdy, reliable chap, and he and Bill were great friends. She would speak to him, confidentially of course, about her fears in regard to Duffy's threats. She beckoned to Charlie.

But by the time Charlie had taken the few steps necessary to join her, she felt that the cause of her disquietude was too vague and silly, and she said something quite different from what she had intended to say. She merely congratulated him on his being selected for work

at the winter quarters. Then she went to the dressing room.

The doors were open, and a turn-away crowd was pouring into the big top.

The band concert was over.

Straw was brought in and spread on the ground for people to sit on in front of the blues and along the track in front of the reserve seats. A narrow space was left on the track for the grand entry and for such displays as worked there.

After the grand entry, the show proceeded, smoothly, snappily, for several displays, and then the equestrian director, with a blast of his whistle, signaled the band to stop playing. A hush came over the big top and the audience held itself in expectation.

The announcer, standing in the middle ring, and with clear diction, told about the wonders of the Wild West show, which would immediately follow the big show.

"The price of tickets," he cried in conclusion, "is twenty-five cents! One quarter of a dollar! Gentlemanly ticket agents will now pass among you! I thank you!"

The equestrian director blew his whistle. The band started to play; but the sound of the music was lost in the shouts and cries that rose from the audience.

FROM one end of the big top to the other, from thousands of throats, there came vociferous calls for Willie May-the-First.

The audience rose to its feet. The shouts and cries became a roar. The band was signaled to stop playing.

At the entrance to the connection where they were standing, William Sturgis and Zebede Catherwood were joined by Forepaugh Jimmy, and the three owners of the show held a ten-second conference.

Across the connection from them, by the blues, stood Bill. He was pale. His

forehead was bathed with a nervous perspiration, and his throat was dry. They summoned him to them.

"Go out there with Forepaugh Jimmy," peremptorily ordered the manager of the circus, "and show yourself before this mob breaks every seat in the tent! Take some bows when you get there!"

Shame, bitter and remorseful shame swept over Bill, and his face burned with it as he walked toward the middle ring with Forepaugh Jimmy.

For here was a staggering outcome of that condition of his own making which had occasioned his expulsion from his home. His silly affectation and inordinate conceit, his willful neglect of, and supercilious indifference to, the opportunities that had been before him, the scrapes he had gotten into, and the money and influence that had been required to get him out of them—these were the causes of that condition. He sensed them as such, and he was now experiencing their effect as he walked that short distance.

On both sides of the big top, and at both of its rounded ends, there was a dense mass of sweating humanity that stood or sat in the seats and even extended out on the hippodrome track. There were the varied colors of the summer dresses and hats of the women; there were hundreds of coatless men; there were the grinning and shining faces of men, women and children; there was the ceaseless motion of clapping hands and waving hats and handkerchiefs; there were craning necks and bobbing heads.

Cries and shouts and yells and shrill whistling came from all quarters of the tent. They died away and rose again, but in greater volume.

High above the arena, the performers in an aerial display, who worked without nets, sat motionless in their trapezes, the equestrian director's whistle having automatically stopped their disconcerted

efforts to proceed with their act when it signaled the band to stop playing. The next display, in order of its number after the aerialists, would be the big elephant act, and the bulls were now waiting restlessly in a line from the connection back into the menagerie. Standing by the band stand were the tumblers and acrobats whose display would follow the elephants. And grouped there with them were other performers, half-dressed or in hastily thrown on dressing gowns, who had run to the back door to learn what was happening.

Bill's heart was heavy with shame. His head was bowed. It was only by exercising all his will power that he forced himself toward the middle ring.

The announcer saw him coming with Forepaugh Jimmy, and held out his arm with an indicating gesture.

Catching the meaning of the gesture, the audience applauded, and then it shouted:

"Atta boy, Willie May-the-First! Atta boy!"

Forepaugh Jimmy and Willie stepped into the middle ring. A spotlight was turned on them. The audience again cried and shouted.

"What the hell shall I say?" the announcer asked. He had to shout in order to make himself heard.

"Cripes!" Forepaugh Jimmy shouted in reply. "Say anything! But say it quick! The bulls are getting restless!"

The announcer held up his hand for silence. A hush came over the audience. An elephant trumpeted shrilly. Bill looked toward the connection at that sound, and saw that trouble was brewing there.

"Ladies—and—gentlemen!" the announcer cried. "The Anding Brothers' Circus takes great pleasure in presenting to your kind attention Mis-ter William Fenton Sturgis whom you have read about to-day as Willie May-the-First!" He stepped aside with Forepaugh Jimmy, and pointing with a dramatic

gesture at Bill, cried out: "Willie May-the-First!"

Bill was in a daze. He tried to bow to the reserves and to the blues, and he succeeded but awkwardly.

And no one knew better than he that he was awkward in this new rôle. Back in the old days of his glory he could never have felt like this. He could have faced a drawing-room filled with discerning people, could have addressed them with calm and ease. But this was different. He was trying to be a professional now, and lacked the practised stage presence of even the most lowly performer.

The audience applauded and laughed good-naturedly. Then it set up cries and calls for Cathie. The shouts again became a roar. The elephants trumpeted.

Cathie came out and took her place beside Bill. She was in her scanty costume which she wore for the swinging-ladder display.

Aloft, from one end of the tent to the other, the aerialists sat in their trapezes and looked down from their dizzy height. Workingmen who had ducked under the side wall stood in the passageways between the ends of the reserve-seat sections and the ends of the blues.

At the back door and around the band stand were the performers, some of them made up and ready for their next act, and others still half dressed and in dressing gowns. Among them was Duffy Conway, in white-face and wearing his immaculate white costume. So great was the interest of the troupers in what was going on in the middle ring that none of them observed the look in the clown's eyes. It burned like a live coal, and was the only sign of his now disordered mind.

The final installment of this novel of the circus will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, on the news stands October 15th.

You-And Your Career

A Department of Interviews with Successful Men and Information and Advice for Ambitious Men.

By John Hampton

BERNARD M. BARUCH, Financier

THE one man on the Street who can lose a million without turning a hair."

This is the way Bernard M. Baruch is spoken of by financial men who have reason to know his abilities as a trading genius on the stock market. Many have spoken of him as a gambler, but he was not that. He was a great speculator. There is a world of difference between the two designations.

This man who could win or lose millions so coolly began his financial career as a \$3-dollar-a-week mailing clerk in a Wall Street brokerage office. But he was never intended for a clerk. He had too much individuality, too much push and too much natural curiosity about the meaning of things and what made the wheels go around.

Baruch was the son of a Southern doctor, Simon Baruch, who was one of the famous surgeons of the Civil War, and who later won renown as a writer on medical subjects. Baruch was born in Camden, S. C., and got some of his early schooling there. Later, his father moved to New York City and the boy continued in the public schools, later going to the city college.

He might have been a physician or a lawyer. In fact, his early training was aimed at a medical career. But some whim of fate, which even he cannot explain, sent him into a broker's office.

As a clerk, Baruch was not a startling success. He was studious, and seemed to have developed a passion for statistics of a financial nature. He studied avidly the records of cumulative preferred stocks, equipment bonds and dividend tables, things which the normal youth does not know exist. So given was he to this, that even his employers were concerned.

The story is told that one day a member of the firm went to the owner of a chemical laboratory. The laboratory owner was a friend of Baruch's father. The financial man is reported to have said despairingly: "For heaven's sake, give Baruch's son a job in your works, for he's no good in my office." But this attitude of the youth who later was to startle Wall Street was typical. He continued his prying into the why of things financial.

Soon, however, he developed a skill in speculation that was uncanny. He was about twenty at this time. Little by little he began to accumulate money. His abilities in figuring the trend of the market impressed the members of his firm, and in 1896 he was made a member.

This ability for getting on "the right side of the market" was the direct result, however, of his study. He pried into the most intricate phases of finance. What many regard as gambling was the result of careful preparation. Baruch never risked a penny until there was a

sound business reason for doing so. He was, in reality, an economist whose market activities, when understood, were based on conservative opinions.

Baruch's view was that no one could make money in market speculation as a side line. He scoffed at men who "played the market" while continuing with their other business at the same time. Risking money on "tips" sometimes was successful, but more often a failure.

It is worth while dwelling on his views as to what is the necessary equipment of a successful speculator. So many people are interested in getting rich quickly, and have a notion that the quickest route is through the stock market. This is sometimes true, but more often the casual gambler comes out at the bottom with the family fortune lost.

One of Baruch's principles is that you must give all your time to the business of stock speculation. Another is that you must have a vast store of information that apparently has little connection with the market. His "system" was a system of knowledge. He knew what he was doing at every move of the game. His success shows that he outguessed the market more times than it outguessed him. There was nothing of the haphazard gambler about him.

A REAL speculator must have an intimate knowledge of manufacturing and its process. He must know something in general about the cost of production and the cost of selling and something about the general supply of the commodities of corporations whose stocks are dealt in on the Stock Exchange. He must watch the sources of supply and know about new methods of production that might affect the standing of the corporations.

He must know, also, about transportation and new methods of getting products from one place to another. He

must know about distribution of commodities, too, another factor that might affect the companies in whose securities he is dealing.

In addition, he must go into a wider field and understand politics and how political issues affect business. It is necessary for him to know something about sociology, also, and keep watch on problems bearing on the relations between workmen and employers.

This sounds like a life-time job, and it is, in fact. Baruch's keenness of mind enabled him to grasp principles quickly, and his studious habits enabled him quickly to prepare himself to become the stormy petrel of Wall Street. He kept traders constantly on the alert for his newest move. His operations were daring and on a large scale. When he went into the market he went in deep, and won more times than he lost.

Many have tried to find the secret of his skyrocketing success and his uncanny faculty for guessing the trend of the market. The only explanation is the store of information he had in many widely differing fields, and his ability to turn it to his use. His operations demanded a clear head, quick thinking and the ability to separate essentials from the mass of information.

Baruch knew how to put two and two together. Many people know how to do that as well. But he knew the particular set of twos needed by him at a special moment. This explains how he was able, in a few years, to amass a fortune. By the time he was thirty-two he retired from the brokerage firm where he had made his success with a fortune estimated at \$1,000,000. He then became an independent operator.

Baruch's striking ability to grasp essentials led him to the highest point of his career when he was appointed head of the War Industries Board by President Wilson. He was selected from the hundreds of financiers available, many of whom probably had greater experi-

ence in general business than he had. But he was able to get things done quickly without a great deal of red tape, and that was what the War emergency demanded.

One of Baruch's ideas was to keep himself fit. In his youth he was a regular attendant at a gymnasium, famous in those days as a center for lovers of athletics. Physicians, writers, actors, policemen, and also pugilists and "tough guys" visited it. The young man became proficient as a boxer and was fond of telling, in later years, of the famous fighters with whom he had been in the ring.

One day while he was in Washington in the War period he was walking out of a restaurant when several college boys came in. They thought it funny to trap him in the revolving door, and for several minutes keep him trotting around while they pushed the door. When they released the dignified man, he was anything but pleased. He began to lecture them and one of them, who looked like a football player and who had been drinking, declared: "Now you needn't get mad. If you're looking for trouble, you can have it."

It began to look very much like a fight when a bystander, who had known Baruch for years, took the college boy aside and said: "Young fellow, you'd better let that gray-haired man alone. He's got a punch like a mule, and I've seen him hit a man so hard once that—well, I'd lay off him if I were you." The young collegian noted the glitter in Baruch's irate eye and decided to take the advice. He walked off with the remark that there was no occasion "for anybody to get sore."

Baruch, while rather frail of physique, is six feet four inches tall. He had gray hair even when he was a young man. He is highly strung. Many of his most spectacular market operations were carried on solely on his nerve. He has the soft, pleasant drawl of the

Southerner, but at times a different man shows through the surface demeanor. Then appears a sharp, decisive man of action.

THREE are many points worth noting in the career of this man. Early in life he was undecided just what to do, a position most young men find themselves in sooner or later. Some small thing turned him to a financial career. He began at the bottom. You probably think of the captain of industry as a huge, overbearing decisive fellow. Here, however, was a student, who turned the traits he possessed to supreme advantage in his chosen field.

So it was, that a small event or remark or opinion may turn you into a line of work for which you appear to be unfitted on the surface. Yet, if you like the work and apply yourself to it with the determination to put all your ability into it, there is no doubt that you will succeed.

The only thing that any man can do is to make the most of the abilities he has to start with. No matter what the job, no matter whether you like it or not, you can make a success of it if you have energy and the ability to think and determination to go up the ladder. Determination is the great thing. Many men have won success by doggedness alone.

If you look about you, you will note that it is not often the brilliant chap who is getting ahead quickly, and who has money in the bank. Think of the boys you were in school with, pick out the ones who, in your opinion, were most likely to succeed. Where are they now? Have they got to the top, or are the boys who you thought were plodders the ones who have forged ahead?

Think about your job. Find out its possibilities. There is hardly a position in any field in which a little study would not help. Are you merely doing the day's work automatically and for-

getting about it at night by going to a movie? It can be done, and you may hold your job for the rest of your life. But it is a certainty that you won't go much higher.

Success come to few easily. It is something that has to be thought about and worked for. Don't merely dream about getting along, about money in the bank and a new automobile that you would like to buy. Get to work and make all these things come true.

If you are in difficulties about your work, if you feel that you are up against a stone wall with no way in sight to get further along, write to me about it. There undoubtedly is a way out. A disinterested opinion may help you to find it. If your letter is of general interest, it may be printed here, using only initials, to help others. If you don't want your letter published, say so and it won't be. Address all inquiries to JOHN HAMPTON, care of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

MY DEAR MR. HAMPTON: Believing you are the very person I have been looking for, write to you for advice.

I am a young man, twenty-one years of age. My father died when I was eighteen years old, leaving a family of seven children, my mother and an invalid aunt. For the last two years I have managed to support them with the aid of two of my younger brothers.

At present I am employed as a clerk in a wholesale dry-goods house. During the last two years I have received four raises in salary. While I do not dislike this business, I feel that I am wasting my life in this direction. This particular house is soon to go out of business, and because I do not hear very well, I feel that my next job should be in some line where this defect will prove less of a hindrance than in the wholesale business.

Now, my hobby, my thoughts, my very soul is centered in the making and decorating of beautiful art objects. I have a chance to take a course in this line, but hesitate because I am afraid that the things I make will find no market.

Now, Mr. Hampton, do you happen to know if there is a market for this kind of work, enough for a hard worker to make

something more than a bare living, so that he may have something to lay aside for the future? Most of the fellows from my neck of the woods have little jobs and are content to drift along, but I cannot bring myself to this.

W. S. F. A.

Your situation seems to me to require much thought and careful planning. It is not a time to make a hurried decision about changing your job for, at present, with business not so good, there are not many other jobs to be had. In addition, the line of work you wish to go into might be classed as turning out a luxury commodity and, as such, might not go well in a time of trade depression.

The first thing for you to do, in my opinion, is to determine whether, in addition to your desire to go into art decoration, you have the ability to get along in it. It is a great asset to be keenly interested in the work from which you earn a living, but keen interest does not always mean aptitude in a particular field. This applies especially to the arts. It is not, of course, too late to become a good craftsman, but your aim should be to stand out in that field. If you have not this assurance, it would be better to try something else, more profitable, and leave your art work for your avocation.

Now, the course you plan is a good idea, but I am inclined to think that, as a beginner, you will need more personal training than that. Some kinds of trades, and the one you are interested in, falls into this class, must be learned from teachers. Would it be possible for you to take such a course in a night class? Undoubtedly, there are such courses given in your city. At least inquire about them. The teachers, after a period of training, can give you an expert opinion whether your abilities are such as to give you a good chance to make a success of the work.

You speak of making and decorating beautiful art objects. I do not know

precisely what you mean, for "art objects" is a very inclusive term. You will have to narrow your ambition down to one class of art object. Do you like to make pottery and decorate it? Or do you like metal work or wood carving or what? You see what I mean, of course. There are scores of divisions in the creation of beautiful things. Painting, sculpture, etching, water coloring are some. Think it over, and decide what definite line you are to pursue.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I am a boy of seventeen. I am also interested in collecting street-car checks in which I have an even twenty-five in number from all different places, the farthest being Honolulu. I do not like sports very much, but I am an ardent cyclist.

Ever since I have been little, I have always wanted to work on a ship, but it is almost impossible for me to obtain a job on a ship because of the simple reason that I have not had any experience. If such is the case, how am I ever going to get a job and experience if I never work at it to experience it?

W. H. S.

I am inclined to think that you lack enterprise, and that you have not tried very hard to get the kind of job you want. Or have you tried at all? You did not say, and rather seemed to have give up because you realize your lack of experience.

Every boy lacks experience when he starts out in the world. He has to get it somewhere. Some one gives him a job. The first step is to get to know the men at the water front, be friendly with them, do things for them in the way of small errands, let them know your interest in ships and that you want a job on one. Eventually your chance will turn up. Also, by staying around the docks, you will learn a great deal about ships and commerce that you don't know now. Be interested in everything and remember all you are told.

Are your parents interested in your idea? If they are on your side, the job will be easier and it is not wise, at your age, to do anything they would not ap-

prove. The thing to remember, if you are going ahead with your idea, is to stick to it until you land something. Perseverance wins many times when nothing else will.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I am fifteen years old and would like to be a naturalist. Do you think the field for naturalists is good? And also the pay and opportunities, and is a college education needed?

I spend most of my time in the woods studying the habits of birds, animals and fish. I have chosen this ambition because I love the great outdoor life.

M. B.

Your ambition is rather unusual for a boy of your age, but an excellent one. There is nothing better than the out of doors, and study of animals and plants is one of the most interesting of pursuits.

To become really expert in your field, I think it is almost necessary for you to go to college. You see, there is a great deal of scientific information you must have to carry on such work. I take it that you already are going to or have finished high school. If so, you already have had some science. In college you would have to study botany, biology, geology and related subjects. You would also study history and geography, for plants and animals have had a great influence on the life of men and their progress. You would want to know all about these things.

I suggest that if you have a library in your town or near by that you get books on some of the subjects I have mentioned, starting perhaps with botany. You will then get some idea of the size of the field and some of the many things you must know. I should mention languages also, most of all Latin, since all plants and animals have Latin names. I do not mention these things to discourage you, but because they are essential to you. If your interest is keen enough and your energy good, you can learn all these things eventually.

Now, as to opportunities and pay. These depend on your abilities and knowledge. If you should become a teacher you would make an excellent salary and as your reputation grows your income would advance. There is also the possibility that you might become connected with a museum and through it with expeditions of one kind or another to many parts of the world. If I were you, however, I should not dwell too much just now on the money end. If that field is the only one you can be satisfied in, go into it with all your will. The money will take care of itself.

R. W. M.—I find your letter a very difficult one to answer. If you have kept a carbon copy of it, read it over, and I think you will find you have diagnosed your own case. Your chief difficulty at the moment is mental, arising partly from physical causes. Your problem, therefore, is to get yourself into the right mental state. How to do that is the question.

You are obviously bitter, perhaps with good reason. You are discouraged and, as you admit, a bit sorry for yourself. None of these things is good. In addition, if it does not sound too harsh, I detect a little of the spirit of the quitter, who finds the world just a bit too much for him. You are on the point of admitting you are licked, in spite of your expressed determination to get going again. Understand that this is not critical. The underlying causes without doubt are excellent reasons for your situation.

Now, I think, if you are ready for a battle, your outlook is not at all hopeless. But you must overcome hopelessness. If you cannot become optimistic, you must be dogged enough to fight it out as if you were confident of the outcome. If you are not optimistic, try to be. The mere effort stimulates you to get up against the world and prove

yourself. Pick your job, whatever that may be, and make a go of it. Don't ever admit defeat. Make your mind overcome your physical disabilities. Nerves are terrible things when they get the best of you, but determination will make you a success in spite of them.

It may seem to you that what I say is platitudinous. That is readily admitted. But think about it. Apply what I say to yourself. Get the inside out of what I have said. All the rules for success, either in business or personally, are platitudes. But they work. Get over feeling low. Forget inferiority. If I may say so, much of your trouble is due to family difficulties. I have no advice to give about them, except to suggest that you straighten them out at all costs. Nothing is more ruinous to all concerned.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I am ambitious to obtain a bit of information, which I believe you can supply. Since I am extremely interested in anything dealing with geography and travel, I should like to know just where I can get more or less detailed information as to the following subjects, their possibilities, requirements, kinds of work, and remunerativeness: Commercial geography, foreign trade, National Geographic Society, and dealing in stamps and supplies for collectors; also, any other subjects you might suggest along the same line.

A. K. R.

I am not quite certain what you wish me to do, exactly, but I assume you want to know whether it will pay for you to get a job in one or other of the fields you mention.

Commercial geography is a study, so I will deal with it in connection with foreign trade, to which it is applied. I suggest you write to the department of commerce, Washington, and ask for literature on our foreign trade, its possibilities, and its need for competent men. If travel is what you want, you might then see about getting a job with some large oil concern or other exporting company. It would be necessary for you to get nearer the coast. As to

pay, this depends on your work. Your questions are too general for me to give a specific reply.

The National Geographic Society is concerned mainly with publishing the magazine, *The National Geographic*, and, so far as I know, has no commercial possibilities to offer.

I'm afraid I can give you no information on stamp collecting and dealing in supplies. It is too specialized a field for me to have general knowledge. A talk with a stamp dealer probably will give you the information you want.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I am twenty-two years old, and graduated from high school four years ago. Since then I have worked in a shoe factory. The work does not satisfy me, and I want to make a change to something in which there is a future. I have become interested in several different pursuits, especially in writing, both fiction and journalism. I would like it very much if you would advise me how to get ahead in this field. I have had no experience, except for writing a few stories in the school paper. I like the work, and think that I could make a success of it if I could get a start.

I also like music, can play several instruments by ear very well, but never studied it because I felt that there was small hope of earning a good living at it. I have also inquired about several radio courses which interest me, but I do not know if I have the technical mind which this would require. Your articles interested me very much. They made me realize that it was time for me to get started if I am ever to. I hope you can start me on the right path. R. D.

I agree that it is time you thought seriously of what you are going to make of yourself. Of course, I do not know the possibilities of your present job; but, since you are dissatisfied, it is time to think of something else.

There is a future, of course, in writing and journalism if you have the ability. If you have a fertile mind and have the knack of writing fiction interestingly, then that is your field. It sometimes is a hard struggle to get a start. You often have to write many, many stories before you break in, but

it pays in the end if you have enough confidence in yourself to stick to it.

On the other hand, journalism offers a somewhat easier course. The work is difficult, but success of a mild kind and an adequate salary are more quickly achieved. You seem, moreover, to lean to newspaper work, so I assume that is what you are more interested in at the moment. Journalism also is a stepping-stone to fiction writing for many young men. There is nothing to stop you from going into it later if your ability to write develops.

My suggestion is that you try to get a job on a newspaper in your city. It is better to get a start in your own city, if possible. You know the place and its people well. That is an advantage to any newspaper man. The more familiar you are with your city, the easier you will find it to get news. In a large, strange city that is almost impossible, and the chances of failure are multiplied.

Do you know any newspaper editors? If so, or even if you do not, go to the newspaper office and ask if there is any opening for a reporter. Don't be afraid to ask. And stick to it, if you are turned down the first time. Persistence will win for you in the end. Once you get a job, do what you are told, and don't forget that you have a mind that should be working. Don't make it necessary to be told the same thing twice. Keep your eyes open, keep keenly interested in all phases of newspaper making, read the news, not only in your city but of all the world. Read magazines, study, do anything to get a fund of information about men and affairs. That is the only way to make a first-class newspaperman.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I happen to be one of the many who seems to be unable to settle in a satisfactory way. Have tried the following jobs, newspaper, drug, garage, theater, stage, railroad, and lumber camp. Now the thing I like best is the music profession, hav-

ing a good voice and being turned that way. Won a scholarship at a music school in a distant city. I, however, do not have the means to continue my music. Another thing I enjoy is color work in photography. Doing this is a sort of hobby. Would, as second choice, like to line up with some studio, but have been unable to do so. Most studios do not seem to be in a position to use much outside help.

However, I would appreciate anything you may offer in the way of advice. You know I have arrived at the stage where I would like to settle down, but seem unable to use or sell the talent or craft I now have.

J. B.

As you no doubt are aware, voice culture should begin very early. I judge from the tone of your letter and from your handwriting that you are well beyond the age when such training should begin, so it seems that a musical career is out of the question.

It seems to me that there are many possibilities in color photography, provided that you are expert in that medium. There is now, and has been for some time, a demand among the better magazines for color work of that kind. The way to go about it is to submit some of your work to some of the good magazines. Nature subjects, I should say, are the most in demand. Look over some of the higher-priced periodicals and see the type of work that is done for them. There is a field that can be cultivated, in my opinion.

Another possibility is the advertising agencies. If there are any in your city submit some of your work and see if they cannot find a use for it. Or very likely, they may have some special work that you can execute for them.



DOGS OF THE ORIENT

THE observations of a traveler lately returned from extensive tours of Asia and Africa should interest admirers of Paul Annixter's fine dog story, "Tiger Hound," which appeared in the first August number of TOP-NOTCH.

In the East, he declares, nobody loves the dog. He is the outcast, the pariah. To touch one contaminates a man, in the belief of the natives. The dog of the East looks like the wolf or the jackal, and all he is supposed to be good for is to clear up the refuse thrown into the streets. But for all that, he is a very wonderful animal in his own way; for he divides any city in which he lives into districts, and each district is inhabited by its own set of dogs. If a dog of one district dares to cross his own boundary, it costs him his life; and yet these boundaries are invisible to human eyes. Dogs of one district will not associate with those of another; yet they have some secret means of communication, so that one set of dogs can send any news to those of another set without any trouble.

For example, if a visitor should be kind to one of these dogs, the animal will attach itself to him, will follow him in his walks, and will not allow any other dog to annoy his patron. Should the walk be extended beyond the boundary, the animal will not dare to cross it. But he will hold a sort of conversation with the leading dog of the strange district, and, so to speak, give his friend a passport, and letters of introduction to the canine officer in command. He, in his turn, acts as an escort, and thus the traveler is enabled to traverse the entire city without suffering annoyance from the dogs.

Love My Dog!

By Worth R. Stewart



TWO faces pressed against the iron-barred window of a dobe shack on the Lazy A Ranch, inside looking out. Even in the semidarkness of a starlit night it was noticeable that one of them had a black eye of magnificent proportions and the other one had a bloody nose that would have made Dempsey wince. They were staring through the darkness at the Lazy A corral fifty yards away. Occasionally they paused from their intent observation to glare malevolently at each other.

In the corral, several waddies were hurriedly throwing saddles on nervous horses. They worked with practiced speed, but fumbled now and then as a snorting horse jerked away from them in the blackness of the night.

One of the prisoners at the window,

"Happy Jack," turned bitterly to his companion. "It's all yore fault we're bein' left behind!" he growled. "You and yore mangy cur."

He of the battered nose, Hilow Jack, flushed. "Is zat so?" he snarled. "Well, when we get outa here, I'm goin' to decorate that thing that yuh mis-call a face, an'—"

Happy gave a hitch to his belt. "Try it now," he advised.

Hilow released his grip on the bars. They had fought twice before that day, and it looked as if they would continue. But at that instant there came a sound that made them both pause. A sound that will hold a man's attention anywhere.

Beyond the corral, from across the mesa to the north, came faintly the rattle of gunfire that quieted, then burst

out anew. At each repetition of the firing, the punchers, saddling their horses, cast hasty glances northward, and then, with mouths drawn tight, started cinching up faster than ever.

The two Jacks, imprisoned in the dobe building, could see that one man stood apart from the rest, leaning on a crutch and with his right leg bandaged. This was "Old Man" Purdy, owner of the Lazy A. He was urging the others on in a low voice and with worried gestures.

Hilow Jack strained closer against the bars of his window. "Mistuh Purdy, suh," he called pleadingly. "Let us out so we kin go help the rest of the boys. We won't fight each other any more. Honest! Let us out, Mistuh Purdy."

The boss turned impatiently toward the dobe shack. "No!" he bellowed.

The punchers in the corral were ready. They swung into the saddle and headed through the corral gate that the Old Man held open. Every man gripped a rifle. Spurring their horses to a run they disappeared into the night, headed toward the north where the muffled sound of shots still told of a battle being fought.

FOR two months the Lazy A and the Z K outfits had been at each other's throats in a range war that threatened to become the bloodiest in history. Old Man Purdy was peacefully inclined, and had kept out of it as long as human patience could endure; but when his men were shot down, his stock stolen by the hundreds, he had taken up arms in self defense.

The men who were riding out now were going to help the punchers on night herd, who were evidently standing off a raid. The Old Man could not go, for he was already badly wounded in the thigh.

He methodically closed the corral gate and hobbled toward the dobe shack,

where he was met by a storm of protest. The Old Man calmly leaned on his crutch and waited until Happy and Hilow had finished their tirade against him for locking them in the dobe store-room. He even allowed himself the shadow of a grin, for the two youths were angry to the point of violence. Loudly, they demanded to know why he had kept them from going with the rest of the men to help stand off the murderous Z K outfit. Did he think they wouldn't fight?

"It's just because yuh will fight," interrupted the Old Man emphatically. "I never seen such pesky fightin' fools. But you're just as liable to fight each other as the enemy. I put yuh on night herd together and yuh fight. I send yuh to town for grub, and yuh bung each other up so bad yuh can't hardly git back. Yuh fight in the bunk house and yuh fight in the corral——"

"Well," mumbled Hilow Jack, the taller of the two youths, "he keeps pickin' on my dawg."

Happy Jack's freckled face darkened. "Yore blamed dog bit me on the laig this afternoon," he snapped. "Some day I'm goin' to kick that cur——"

"Don't yuh call my dawg a cur!"

They faced each other fiercely, ready to start scrapping for the third time that day.

The Old Man sighed wearily. "See," he growled. "What kin I do? I like both of yuh, and I hated to lock yuh in there by a trick; but you're goin' to stay right there until yuh git all the fight out of yore system—and come out friends."

"That'll never be!" barked Hilow.

"I'll say it won't!" Happy was equally positive.

The Old Man shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the two-story frame ranch house a hundred feet away.

"Wait!" Hilow thrust a hand desperately through the bars as though he would pull the Old Man back. "Mistuh Purdy, suh, the ranch ain't protected,

what with you crippled and all the men away. Yuh better let us out, suh. What if them Z K scoundrels was to make a raid here? They hate yuh like poison and they wouldn't stop at murder."

"Cain't help it." The Old Man was stubborn. "I got to cure yuh both of fist fightin', or yuh ain't never goin' to be any good." And with that ultimatum, he hobbled off to the house.

They saw him enter, light a lamp and make his way upstairs. They turned from the windows and eyed each other. Hilow, the taller one, gave a customary hitch to his belt and stalked over to one end of the room where, by a pile of odds and ends, there was a heap of gunny sacks the Old Man had thoughtfully provided for their comfort. Sitting in the midst of the sacks was a scrubby little yellow pup that looked as if his ancestry might have combined every kind of dog in New Mexico. As Hilow approached, it wagged a stubby tail and barked. He stooped down and patted the upraised head.

"Good ol' Hondo," he said, and squinted threateningly out of the corner of his eye at Happy.

That individual was watching disdainfully. "Just a mangy little cur," he mumbled audibly, as though merely stating his thoughts. There was no actual malice in his voice toward the dog, but, rather, an apparent desire to rile Hilow. He succeeded admirably.

The lanky youth straightened up and glowered. "I give yuh two lickin's to-day—" he commenced.

Happy's freckles grew red. "Yuh mean I licked you!"

"Didn't I give yuh that black eye?"

"Yore nose don't look any too good. Git yore cur off of them sacks. I'm goin' to bed."

At the word "cur" Hilow waited for no more but leaped forward, fists drawn back. Happy stepped in to meet him, and the fight was on. They were evenly

matched, broad-shouldered, hard-fisted and with the toughness that comes from living in the saddle.

Hilow caught Happy with an uppercut that jarred the freckled youth back on his heels, but Hap came back with both arms flailing and landed to ribs and face. With heads ducked down and shoulders weaving, they shifted back and forth, shooting in pistonlike blows that would have felled any one not in condition. Each was trying to decide, once and for all, who was top man. Each was determined not to give in.

If they had not been so engrossed in their feud battle, they might have heard, over the shuffle of feet and the thud of blows, the neigh of a horse somewhere outside and a hoarse command. If they had looked through the windows, they might have seen the dark shadows of horsemen silently surrounding the ranch house.

But each had little time to think of anything except flying fists. Hilow grunted as Happy smashed in a right to the solar plexus. The blow forced him to bend forward. *Slam—bang*, Happy caught him with left and right to the jaw. Hilow went down.

But Happy fought fair. His broad chest heaving from exertion, he stepped off to let his opponent recover. Hilow pulled himself to his knees. For a moment, he stayed there, letting his head clear. Then he lurched up like a madman, and rushed. Happy met him head-on. They both swung their right with all their shoulder behind it, and each landed flush to the jaw with a crack like a pistol shot. They swayed, lurched limply against each other, and sagged to the floor in a double knock-out.

They were out at least five minutes, Hilow was brought back to his senses by the frantic barking of the dog, Hondo. He sat up weakly, and looked around him with bleared eyes. Happy

was sprawled beside him. Hondo, with the yellow hair on the back of his neck sticking straight up, was trying to claw his way through the door.

Hilow struggled to his feet, rubbing his jaw with one hand.

"What's the matter, Hondo?" he demanded dazedly.

The pup paid no attention, but kept up his frantic attempts to get out, growling all the while deep in his throat. The noise brought Happy around, and he, too, sat up.

Suddenly the quiet night outside the dobe storeroom was split wide open by the roar of several six-guns.

The lanky Hilow was first to grasp the significance of the firing. He jumped to a window and stared out through the bars.

"It's the Z K gang," he announced in a tense whisper. "Somehow they've slipped away from our men. It looks like they're rushin' the house."

Happy jerked himself to his feet. "We gotta git out!" he grated. "They'll kill the Old Man sure." The eyes of the freckled youth shifted rapidly over the small room, searching for a possible means of escape. There seemed to be none, and his gaze came to rest on the heavy door.

"I'll try this," he grunted. Tensing himself, he hurled his bulk forward. Although he weighed close to a hundred and eighty pounds, the door refused to give. The storeroom was built for safety. For this reason the one entrance was of thick oak, and the windows were barred.

Again and again, Happy used his body for a battering-ram; but it was no use. He turned heatedly toward Hilow. "It was you and yore dog got us in here," he accused. "Now get us out!"

But Hilow wasn't listening. He was over in one end of the room rummaging through a stack of junk.

Both of the Jacks were unarmed, for

the Old Man, when he got them into the storeroom by a ruse, had foresight enough to lift their guns. They always seemed satisfied to fight with their fists only, but you never could tell, and the boss was playing safe.

Now Hilow was in hopes he could find some sort of a weapon. Presently he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, and hauled out two spades. He pointed mutely at the dog who had given over trying to get out the door and was busily engaged in digging a hole next to the wall, in the hard-packed earth floor.

"Dawg's got more sense than either of us," muttered Hilow, and, spade in hand, he attacked the dobe wall.

Happy Jack followed suit, and, side by side they set to work to dig their way out. Even then, with their mutual desire to save Old Man Purdy, each found time to give the other one an occasional dirty look or gruff threat.

The sound of gunfire was duller now, as though the raiders had forced their way inside the house. The two Jacks pictured their boss, crippled and alone, standing at the top of the stairs, fighting off a villainous crew. With sweat pouring down their faces, and breath coming in labored gasps, they redoubled their efforts. The dobe wall was thick and baked hard.

Suddenly Hilo drew back and snuffed the air. "I smell smoke!" he gasped. Dropping his spade he leaped to the window. What he saw caused his blood to freeze.

In one of the upstairs windows of the ranch house three figures showed clearly by the light of the lamp. Two of them had a long rope and they were winding it around and around the other man, tying him to the tall post of a bed. As they moved to one side, Hilow recognized the third man. It was Old Man Purdy.

The other two had black neckerchiefs covering the lower part of their faces.

Even as Hilow watched, they finished binding their victim. One of them drew back and then, without warning, drove his fist into the face of the helpless man.

Hilow gave a choking cry of rage. Again the smell of smoke came to him and his eyes shifted to the base of the ranch house. The Z K gang were firing the house. Little tendrils of flame were licking eagerly at the old, dry timbers. The fire was just getting started, but already it was creeping up the wide veranda. In its reflected light could be seen more members of the gang, piling greasewood against the side of the house that the fire might get a better start.

Hilow whirled away from the window and grabbed for his spade. At the same time Happy, who had been working all the time as if in a frenzy, uttered a surprised yell of triumph. The last chunk of dobe had broken away, leaving a hole big enough to crawl through. Like a shot, the two Jacks were on their knees. "C'mon, Hap," snapped Hilow, his antagonism momentarily forgotten, and he started wiggling his way through the small opening, dragging his spade along with him. Happy followed.

Once on the outside, Hilow rose stiffly to his feet. It seemed pitch dark after the light of the candle inside the shack. They had kept this candle on the floor to work by, so that the enemy would not suspect the presence of any one in the little-used storeroom.

Hilow felt sure that they had been unobserved. He squinted his eyes, trying to focus them to the darkness. Happy was still on his hands and knees, just crawling free of the hole.

And then, on the other side of Happy and standing by the door of the storeroom, Hilow made out the vague shape of a man. The candlelight had been seen after all, and a guard stationed. The Z K raider had his back to the two escaping youths, but at that instant, attracted by the noise Happy

made as he pulled himself out, the man whirled around. In his hand there gleamed, in the faint starlight, the metallic barrel of a six-gun. The gun jerked upward.

HILOW moved with the speed of a panther. He still held the short spade in one hand. He swept it forward in a flashing arc and hurled it at the guard. It whizzed over the kneeling Happy, just missing his head and caught the guard in the stomach. At the same time Hilow threw himself forward, encircling the astonished Happy in a bear hug and carrying him flat to the ground.

Happy knew nothing of the guard, and he thought that Hilow was taking unfair advantage to renew their feud. Kicking and hitting with both fists, he tried to tear himself loose from the other cowboy.

But before he had fairly started a gun roared, almost over them, as the Z K man recovered his balance and fired. But due to Hilow's swan dive the shot went high. With the report, Hilow rolled clear of Happy and swept out clutching hands. One of them encountered the guard's legs. A heave, and the man was tripped to the ground, with Hilow on top of him.

By the time the astounded Happy could join in, the guard was knocked cold.

"Quick!" Hilow rapped out. "Take this hombre's gun and come on. The gang must have heard that shot. They'll be after us."

Happy never stopped to question, but did as he was told. The two of them raced toward the ranch house, circling to the right so as to come up by the back door. As they leaped forward, a little bundle of bristling fur shot past them, directly toward the front door of the burning house. Hilow's dog was going straight in.

As they ran, stumbling and lurching

in the darkness, Happy found time to voice a reluctant apology.

"I reckon," he admitted, "that yuh saved my life back there by jumpin' on me, dang yuh."

"Yeah?" panted Hilow. "I didn't save much, did I?"

Happy's only reply was a snort. They reached the far end of the house and began cautiously to edge around it.

The fire was gathering headway now with a crackling roar, sending up long spurts of red that would soon ignite the roof. The veranda was burning fiercely. Over to one side, in the crimson glow, could be seen a group of horsemen, watching. Two of the bunched horses were riderless, and it was apparent that the burly pair that had taken the job of tying up the Old Man had not yet got clear of the house. The men on horseback were leaning forward nervously in the fear that they had started the fire too soon for their own men to get out.

"Zeb! Rufe!" one of them shouted. "Git a move on, or yuh'll burn up along with ol' Purdy!"

The others laughed coarsely. "Plenty o' time!" one of them said. "Let 'em cinch the old galoot up good, so's he'll roast without wigglin'."

They were so engrossed with watching, that they failed to see two flashing figures that darted around the corner and dived in the back door.

"Made it!" gasped Happy, and side by side, the two Jacks leaped up the stairs, three at a time. The fire, as yet, was not burning badly here, although the smoking walls gave evidence that they would burst into flame at any time.

At the top of the stairs they paused to get their bearings. A hall ran the length of the house and it was filled with billowing smoke that stung the eyes and caused the youths to choke for air.

"This way!" panted Happy.

They plunged into the seething mass

of smoke. The room in which they had seen the men roping their boss was at the far end of the hall. At the same end were two stairs, one leading down, the other climbing up to the attic.

The smoke was getting so bad they had to feel their way along the wall. When they were halfway down, a voice rose above the furious crackling of flames.

"I tell yuh, Zeb," it growled, "we waited too long! We better go back tuh the winder and jump!"

There was no question in either Happy's or Hilow's mind who the voice belonged to. They knew, although they could not see them, that they faced two of the worst cutthroats of the Z K gang.

"Now!" yelled Hilow. "Let's get 'em!"

Happy let out a warwhoop, and both charged blindly forward through the swirling haze. They were met by a fusillade of roaring lead. Happy spun half around as a slug took him in the shoulder. He transferred the gun he held to the other hand, and opened up. A shriek of agony told that he had scored a hit.

Hilow was without a gun, but, in his headlong rush he smashed into Rufe Adley, foreman of the Z K. They went down in a fighting tangle.

Happy stumbled into the man he had plugged, and closed with him. The fellow was still able to put up a fight. Guns were useless except as clubs, for it was so difficult to see that the wrong man might be shot. Swaying and hammering, they fought it out, while around them flames crept up and the hallway became as hot as an oven.

From somewhere at the other end of the house there came a crash as charred timbers gave way and part of the roof caved in. With a croaking cry of fear, the Z K foreman broke loose from Hilow and leaped into the room where Old Man Purdy was bound and

gagged. It was not so smoky here, and Hilow fumbled his way to the door in time to see the foreman leap wildly through the window, carrying the sash with him. There was a dull thud as the man's body hit the ground below.

"Git the boss loose!" Happy was dragging his erstwhile opponent into the room.

Quickly Hilow unwound the lariat that strapped the Old Man to the bed-post, and tore away the gag. Purdy was pale and his face glistened with beads of sweat, but his voice was calm as if he were directing a round-up.

"Good work, boys," he said simply. "Yuh'll have to carry me out; I'm wounded pretty bad." And before Hilow could catch him, he slumped to the floor.

While Hilow lifted the Old Man gently in his arms, Happy looped the lariat around the wounded Z K man, hoisted him over the window sill and lowered him to the ground. As he did so, he noticed that one leg of the man's overalls was torn as though a dog had ripped it. He remembered seeing Hondo darting into the house; but there was no time to ponder on it. Bit by bit, he lowered his wounded enemy to safety. It was hard work, for his bleeding shoulder only allowed him to use one arm, but he made it by winding the end of the rope around the bed-post and letting it slip.

Turning back to Hilow, he took hold of Purdy's legs with his good arm, and between them they carried their boss to the hall door. When they peered through they were met with a sight that made them shrink back. Where there had been rolling masses of smoke there was now flashing jets of flame.

"We—cain't make it that way!" Happy hesitated.

"Got to!" barked Hilow. "Cain't let the boss through the window. Rope's gone. C'mon!"

Heads down and shoulders hunched

to protect their faces, they pushed into the crackling inferno. Eager flames flared and licked out at them, scorching their faces, singeing their hair. Their clothing began to smoke dangerously. Still they lurched on, shielding the Old Man with their own bodies. Somehow, they fought their way to the head of the stairs and started down. Although the walls were burning, there was still enough leeway to keep them from the actual fire.

And then, at a turn in the stairs when the worst of all was before them, a seething mass of roaring fire, Happy stopped, his head cocked on one side as though listening.

"I—I'm goin' back," he said in a dry, strained voice. And before Hilow could stop him, he wheeled and darted back up the stairs.

Hilow, left alone with the dead weight of his boss in his arms, drew his heat-blistered forehead into a furrowed scowl.

"Quitter!" he snarled. "Goin' back and jump from the window! The yellow quitter!"

The stairs trembled ominously, warning him that they were likely to sink at any moment. It looked the height of folly to try and battle through the red torrent below; but that was the one way out with his unconscious burden. Reeling from the effect of smoke-filled lungs, he plunged downward.

THERE was a fleeting moment of agony as the flames closed in on him, sending needles of pain shooting through his burned face and arms. Then he was on the floor. It still held, and with a heart-bursting effort he leaped on and won the door. He was out.

With sombrero and blistered hands he beat out the sinldering fire on the Old Man's clothing and his own. Both men were burned, but not so badly that healing lotions and time would not cure

them. Hilow ran across the yard, which was now as light as day from the doomed house, and filled his sombrero with water at a trough.

Back again to the Old Man, he bathed his face and forced a little water between his lips. The Old Man shuddered and weakly sat up.

Then, for the first time, Hilow looked around for Happy. He had expected to find him there ahead of him; for a man, letting himself down carefully from the second-story window, should make it easily.

But Happy was nowhere in sight. Hilow stood up, indecision written on his face. Had Happy fallen somewhere and failed to make the window? After all, he was a quitter, and Hilow's sworn enemy. Was he worth the almost certain death of a second trip back into that roaring furnace?

"What is it, Hilow?" The Old Man was resting on one arm, looking up at the tall youth beside him.

"It—it's Hap," Hilow said huskily. "He's still in there. I'm goin' in after him!"

And with the words, he sped toward the house.

The Old Man watched him, pride and fear mingling in his face. But, just as Hilow reached the door, a wild figure burst out of it. It was Happy, with his coat off and a bundle in his arms. His

eyebrows were singed off, his face blistered and blackened, his clothes charred. But his cracked lips twisted in the semblance of a grin. He opened the coat that he held so carefully, and out of it half fell, half leaped a yellow midget of a dog that might have been a combination of all the dogs in New Mexico.

"I went back—after Hondo," Happy wheezed. "Heard him—caught—in the attic!"

Half an hour later, the Old Man and the two Jacks were lying side by side in the bunk house like the star patients of a hospital. Swathed in bandages, they were still able to talk. Around them were grouped the Lazy A punchers who had arrived, bringing as prisoners the fleeing Z K raiders, shortly after Happy Jack's dramatic exit from the house. At the foot of Hilow's bunk was Hondo, a bandage on his stub of a tail.

"I reckon," the Old Man was saying, "that when yuh boys git healed up yuh'll be at each other's throats ag'in."

There followed a moment of very still silence. Happy was the first to speak.

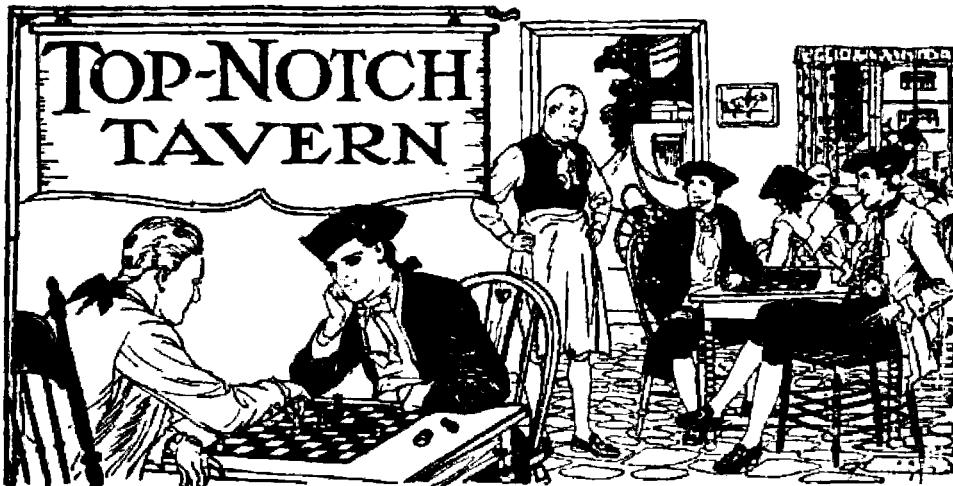
"Shucks," he observed, "we've been a pair o' Jacks—the kind with long ears." He jerked a bandaged thumb toward Hilow. "I've always sort of liked that hombre. I even like his dog."

"Our dawg!" chimed in Hilow. "Yuh saved him, and he's half yourn!"



MAMMOTH NEST

A STORK'S nest of huge proportions was discovered recently in the little village of Grünwald, Germany. While repairing the village schoolhouse, naturalists had an opportunity to examine the nest, which was more than six feet in diameter and not much less than three feet high, larger by half than an ordinary stork's nest. It could contain four men sitting on chairs around a table. Sticks as thick as an arm had been built into its walls, moss, straw, hay, and reeds also being used by the birds. In odds and ends of space not needed by the storks, upward of fifty sparrow families lived.



BACKGAMMON GOING STRONG

BACKGAMMON seems to be the vogue almost everywhere these days, according to letters received from as widely-separated points as Tucson, Arizona, and Boston, Massachusetts, and Walla Walla, Washington, and Miami Beach, Florida. The fact that, in backgammon, there is excitement, and plenty of it, is doubtless the main reason for its tremendous popularity.

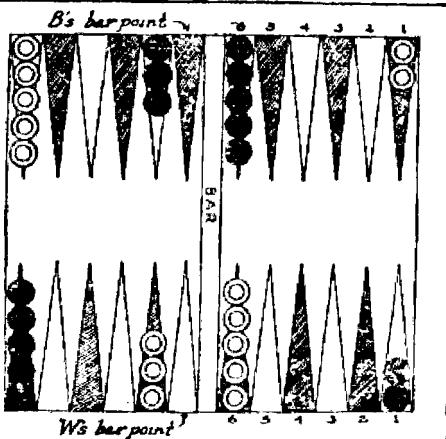
Just the other day, the *National Geographic Magazine* showed a picture of the Byrd Expedition grouped intently around a backgammon board. Here, then, was proof indeed that backgammon was being played everywhere, for there, at the bottom of the earth sat an illustrious circle of men engaged in this absorbing pastime, with the laughter and the merry clatter of the dice drowning out the howling of the antarctic gales.

And so wherever we may chance to go, we are apt to find this entertaining game in progress. Newport, Palm Beach, and Tuxedo have eagerly accepted this fashionable diversion into its most exclusive inner circles, and no prophet is needed to predict its coming supremacy over bridge and contract.

As earlier chapters extended an elementary knowledge of the game, we continue on further with an explanation of the various styles of play.

It must be remembered that in leaving blots to secure additional points, it is essential to run the risks early in the

B's outer table **BLACK** *B's inner table*



W's outer table **WHITE** *W's inner table*

game and so determine quickly whether or not you should play a forward or backward game.

If one's early game is strengthened by the possession of any of the advantageous points, the logical policy would be to adopt a forward game, striving to bring your men rapidly into your

home table while avoiding leaving any blots. Without control of these principle points, the uncertainties of a forward game are greatly increased.

Assuming that your opponent has occupied a number of vantage points and has cast several high throws with the dice, your best chance of regaining an equal position would be to employ what is known as the back game.

The success of the back game is dependent upon its immediate adoption early in the play, as only then is it possible to employ this formidable strategy with telling effect.

The chief feature of the back game—which will be described in detail in later installments—consists in leaving numerous blots in order to be hit and have to start as many men over as possible. It will be apparent that these men, having to reenter in your opponent's home table take control of a number of points, hindering him in bringing in his men, and always threatening an attack on any men left uncovered on his outer table.

Accordingly, as a player becomes experienced, it will be found advisable to employ early throws to risk reaching important points and a 5 and 3 should then be played by bringing over one man from the adversary's outer table and advancing him to one's 5 point. Although this leaves this man exposed to a 4, the chances against your opponent hitting you are 21 to 15, and if you are not hit on the next throw you have a number of chances of bringing another man to this point to cover the blot. Players who are more cautious could play the 5-and-3 throw by bringing over 2 men from the adversary's outer table, leaving the blot in your outer table where it is less liable to being hit.

Many inexperienced players might employ the 5 and 3 to make the 3 point in their inner table, but this would be to their disadvantage for two reasons, first because the men advanced to the

3 point are practically out of play, being almost at the finish of their home table, and secondly by allowing the adversary a numerical superiority in active playing pieces.

In playing your men into your home table, it is best policy to strive to occupy the high points, as the 4, 5, and 6 points, in conjunction with the bar point, can form an effective block to the advancement of your opponent's two pieces on your ace point.

It is hoped the reader will follow closely the various features of the game as taken up in each installment, and so build up consistently a general knowledge of its fine art of play.

CHECKERS

Problem Department conducted by
MILLARD F. HOOPER

CHECKERS, or "draughts," as it is termed in England, is a mathematical game wherein the scientific player shows a marked superiority over his unlearned opponent.

The average person playing checkers does so on a sort of mechanical basis depending merely upon luck, and the opportunity of picking up an opponent's man for not jumping as the medium of victory.

In this type of game, interest is necessarily lacking, and a few games suffices to terminate the contest. However, to those wishing to delve below the surface, there will be found an abundance of clever strategies, any of which, when mastered, enables the ordinary player to win game after game from players who had previously held their own against him.

The scientific playing of the game develops the mental faculties considerably, and in this respect we may well quote the words of Edgar Allen Poe, who said: "The unostentatious game of checkers is superior to all."

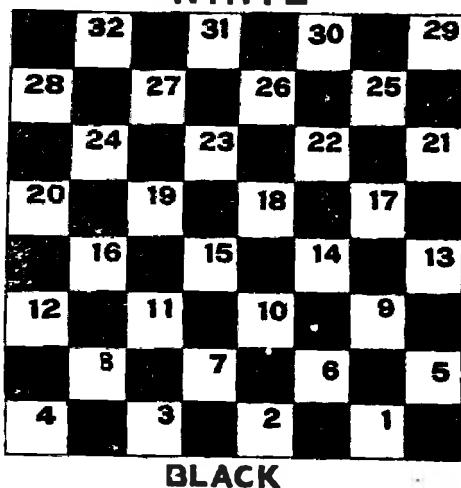
To assist all those wishing to improve

their playing at checkers, we are giving instructive problems each showing some different form of artifice or trick of frequent occurrence. These problems have been simplified to give a clear insight into the maneuvers embodied in each, in order that they can be remembered and played against your opponents.

If interest is manifested in these studies we will try later to give instructive games and a review of the various openings.

THE board should first be numbered as in diagram below, the black checkers occupying the low-numbered squares from 1 to 12, and the whites the squares from 21 to 32.

WHITE



BLACK

The solution to each problem will be given in the following issue, and it might be found interesting to study the preceding week's problem, No. 5, which accompanied by its solution is appended farther on.

PROBLEM No. 6

Black men on 1, 6, 9, and 15.

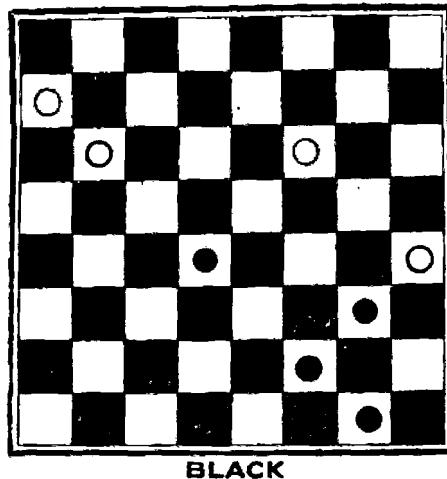
White men on 28, 24, 22, and 13.

Black to play and win.

A fine example of the stroke problem, pretty and decisive.

Black wins in but two moves.

WHITE



Answers to correspondents will be given as space permits.

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM No. 5

Black men on 11 and 21. Kings on 29, 30.

White king on 27. Men on 19, 22. White to move and win.

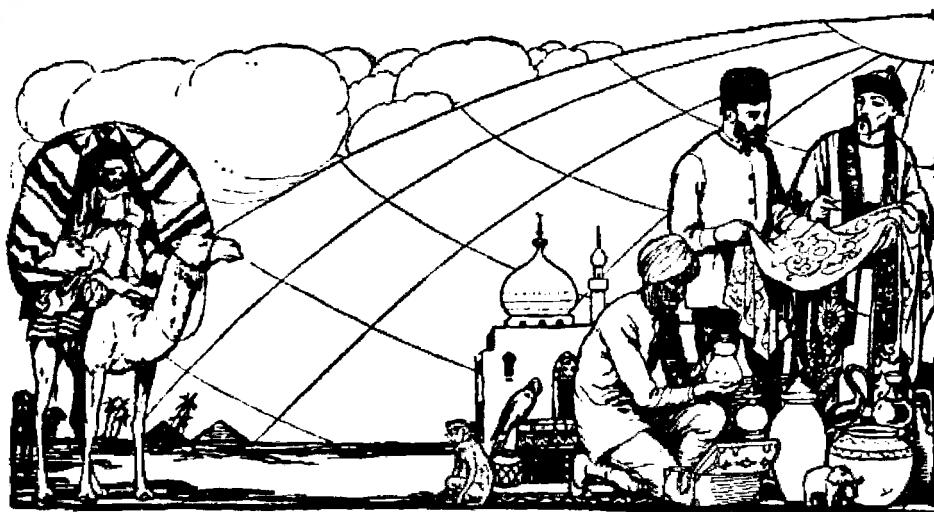
Solution—White moves 19 to 15. Black jumps 11 to 25. White king moves 27 to 23 and wins.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. B. W., Chicago.—You may find what you want in almost any of your local department stores. In New York, the larger stores have a corps of men demonstrating how the new game is played.

L. V. C., Fostoria, Ohio.—Your best bookstore should be able to get you either "Robinson's Manual," or "Lee's Manual." However, in case your quest is not successful, you could secure either in Toledo.

J. B. Lynch, Ridgefield, Ill.—Your solution to Checker Problem No. 2 is correct and well worked out.



BUSINESS is good with the Top-Notch Bazaar these days. Satisfied customers. Some enthusiastic. Many who have thanked me for quick service. A few, I fear, who may be a little impatient, for trailing about town to locate some of the rare articles often consumes much time. But I am going to continue to make the service just as speedy as possible.

Usually it's comparatively easy to locate articles desired by Top-Notch readers. Naturally, there are some exceptions. For instance, I have fine-combed about twenty New York bookshops in an effort to trace a certain rare volume for a California reader. I have written to several other booksellers out of town—shops which go in for rare books. And so far without results. But now I have an advertisement ready to send to the London *Times*, and I think this should ultimately locate the volume desired.

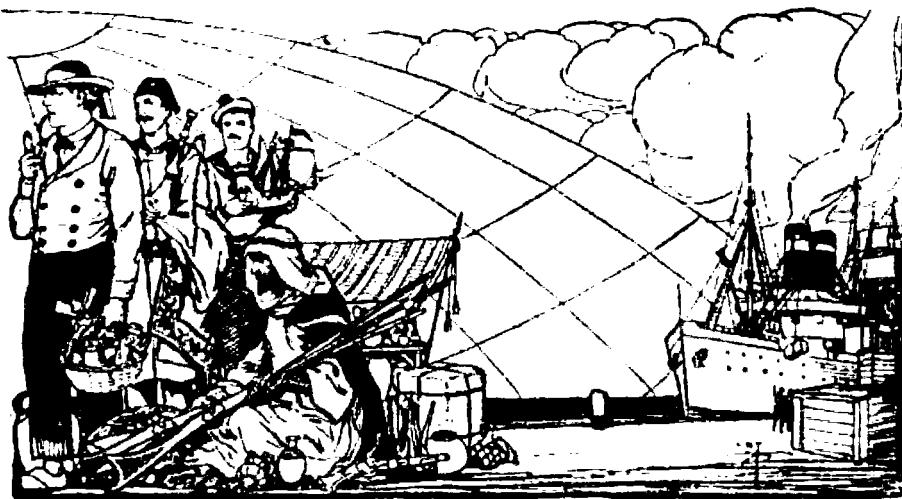
IDON'T know whether Yerba maté is becoming generally popular in North America as well as South America, or whether the interest of readers is the result of a previous note on the beverage printed in this depart-

Top-Notch

ment. But within the past month I have received a great many letters asking where maté may be bought.

Those readers who may have been to South America will recall the Yerba maté plantations of evergreen trees, usually very tall and very straight. It is said that the rich soil in these sections is frequently fourteen feet deep, and some say that this rich soil is the secret of maté. It will not grow in any other part of the world, and consequently a maté plantation is worth a fortune. The leaves are picked from the trees once every four years and shipped down the river to the modern Yerba maté mills in the ancient city of Asuncion, Paraguay, where the leaf is roasted, cleaned and milled, and packed in sanitary containers for export.

JAUNTS about New York to try to find where the best maté could be bought at a reasonable price have uncovered some new facts about the bever-



Bazaar

age—new to me, at least, although I first drank maté in the harbor of Callao a good many years ago. A large downtown maté distributor has called my attention to the following passage from the *Encyclopediæ Britannica*:

Mate acts as a restorative after great fatigue. . . . The Gaucho of the plains will travel on horseback for weeks asking no better fare than dried beef washed down with copious draughts of maté, and for it he will forgo any other luxury, such as sugar, rice or biscuit.

SEVERAL readers have asked about the gourds and the *bombillas*. The *bombilla*, as many readers may know, is the hollow-handled spoon with the sieve-like bowl through which maté is taken. In a Washington Street establishment I found a "Gaucho Maté Set" made up as follows: One attractive hand-decorated maté gourd fitted into a pewter stand; one hand-made, imported, silver-plated *bombilla*; one large tin of Gaucho

Yerba maté, enough for a month's use, on an average. This set was priced at \$5.00.

THOSE readers who have written in asking where to get manuals on United States army regulations, charts for army color-vision tests and general army data may save time by writing to the Army Information Service, White-hall Street, New York City. I am only too glad to continue to send any information which I am able to give, but I include this note here for those who may be interested.

A TOP-NOTCH reader in Minnesota writes me as follows, in acknowledgement of a little service I was able to perform in his interests:

DEAR COMMANDER: Received your letters and I sent for the hat-stretcher to the firm you suggested, and I have received it, and everything is O. K. I want to thank you for the wonderful service you are doing. It is a great service. Many thanks.

Your friend,
Cedar Mills, Minnesota.

H. L.

It has been a pleasure to coöperate with Mr. H. L. His letter is appreciated, and I wish also to thank A. L. G., San Antonio, Tex; R. D. B., Portland Ore.;

J. R. LeB., New Orleans, La., and G. T. B., Olean, N. Y., for their kind letters.

MORE and more it is being made plain to me that it is very hard to rate 100 per cent in anything. A man in Newport Oregon, has quite unwittingly spoiled my previous record of perfection. He wrote me a long and interesting letter. "I am almost afraid," he said, "to tell you what I want, as you might think I am trying to 'kid' you, but I am really serious." My correspondent then described a pseudo-scientific article that he had read about in a detective-story magazine. It is my opinion that the article was a figment of some writer's fancy, and somewhat removed from practicality. While nothing would be too much trouble to try to locate for a TOP-NOTCH reader, I am afraid I cannot unearth this article just at present, and I feel confident that a man of the intelligence of my Newport friend will be easy on one who cannot turn up something which we are not at all sure exists except in the mind of a fiction writer. But we won't cry surrender just yet. H. G. Wells' "War in the Air" was a writer's fancy in 1907. Some of us, since then, have actually known war in the air, and all of us have thrilled at the peace-time feats of a young man named Lindbergh. And if Jules Verne were alive to-day to examine the inner workings of the latest "V" type of fleet submarine, he might decide that his romancing had not gone far enough in "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." I certainly don't think the Newport man is trying to "kid" me at all, and I should be glad to make a serious search for the equipment he describes if I thought it would do either of us any good.

L. V. B., Council Bluffs, Ia.—An executive of a large paper company informs me that the name of the paper

you mean is "mulch" paper, and as soon as I can get a sample I will mail it on to you.

This is a durable grade of paper, impregnated with asphalt. When used agriculturally, it is laid over the ground as an agent for increasing soil temperature, and thus hastens the development of plants. The increased temperature makes earlier planting possible, hastens the germination of seeds and the development and maturity of crops. The additional heat obtained with mulch paper is said to be particularly effective in stimulating spring, fall and winter crops when the cooler temperatures prevail, and is especially so with such crops as melons, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant and tomatoes. It is also claimed that the use of this special paper for agricultural purposes has an important effect on plant diseases and insects, since the period when the crop is subject to infection is appreciably shortened. The paper is also effective as a winter covering for the roots of semihardy plants.

Space prohibits answers to the following, who have been mailed, or will be mailed, information on articles:

D. W., Erie, Pa.—Antique reproductions, solid brass sconces.

Mrs. A. E., Woodsfield, Ohio.—Used photographic equipment.

O. C. W., Covington, Ky.—Antiques.

O. E. MacD., Los Angeles, Cal.—Ship models.

J. R. D., Quebec, Can.—Mesh fire screen.

Please address all communications to
• The Commodore, TOP-NOTCH Bazaar,
Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Avenue,
New York City.

*Yours for Service,
The Commodore*

Top-Notch Talk

BY
THE EDITOR

THE magazines of STREET & SMITH, during the past seventy-five years, have given the reading public more popular and well-beloved fiction characters than those of any other publisher, and now we find that *Kroom, Son of the Sea*, a mere infant in the great galaxy of heroes, has already won for himself a vast following of admirers—a discovery most gratifying to us and to his talented creator, Valentine Wood.

How did we find it out? Well, this was the way of it: Valentine Wood, you must know, is a confirmed wanderer—an incurable vagabond, and we have found it hard to keep in close touch with him, even my means of all the magical systems of communication with which this super-scientific age has provided us. Reviewing our agreeable acquaintance with him, we find that we have scarcely heard from him from the same place twice, and he is always sending us remote and peculiar addresses from which he can be reached by a messenger on horseback or in a canoe. So, you see, he's an elusive sort of person, and twice already, he has slipped up on sending in his stories according to the scheduled time.

It's an ill wind that blows no good, and one of the results of our losing *Kroom* for a whole month was that we were deluged with letters from indignant readers, all demanding what right we had to treat them so shabbily. Letters are still coming, censuring us for that first omission; and when *Kroom* is found to be absent from another number, we expect bushels of letters and a flock of telegrams, full of sizzling inquiries and rebukes.

There! We've given you the low-down on it. It's all up to that inveterate gadabout, Valentine Wood; and we have told him a few things—in as strong language as we thought he would stand for. Incidentally, we are mighty glad to know that so many readers find *Kroom* indispensable to their happiness, but why didn't they let us know all about it before they got so excited? Then we should have taken more pains to send our nomadic author all manner of peremptory messages by pony express, by water, by airplane, and by radio.

Unless he's lost in the big woods, or in the desert, right now, he knows what we think about his disappearing acts, and we're hoping that *Kroom* will answer the fortnightly roll-call promptly hereafter, without going a. w. o. l. again.

We believe that you will heartily enjoy "Motor Mavericks," a long novellette by Robert Osmond Case, which will appear in our next issue, for the yarn deals with the adventures of "Windy" DeLong and "Lonesome" McQuirk, those two amusing waddies whose previous adventures have long since given amusement to a large following of readers. It is our opinion that "Motor Mavericks" does not suffer in comparison with even the best of Mr. Case's earlier stories about these devil-may-care Western characters.

FRED LINDQUIST.—The stories I liked best in the September issue are first, "Kroom of the Sea"; second, "Hawk of the Desert"; third, "Greatest Show on Earth." I would like to see in your magazine more about the science of backgammon and checkers. Hope your magazine will always be successful in

obtaining good stories as we have been always getting. Yours until Niagara Falls.—*Jersey City, New Jersey.*

So there's still another booster for *Kroom*. However, *Kroom* seems "not so hot" to Robert E. L. Hood of New Orleans, whose letter is printed below:

When I read a magazine I want to read about the same kind of a fellow that I am myself. I don't mean necessarily a fellow having the same identical experiences, but I mean some one who's human and has human shortcomings. I have been interested now and then in the "Kroom" stories in your magazine, but his long-distance swimming is too much for me. For the same reason I could never get interested in the "Tarzan" stories which were run by some magazine some time ago—and which may be running now, for all I know. I like your theme-song stories because believable things happen in them and they are not crowded with unbelievable action, such as we know seldom if ever happens in real life. Give us more stories of these average real-life happenings and you can keep me loyal and interested.

DAVID ZIMMER.—I have just read another of Earl Marvin Rush's stories in this latest issue of *Top-Notch*, entitled "Fresh Every Morning," and it certainly was great. I hope Mr. Rush will keep on writing for *Top-Notch*. His stories are very entertaining, especially "Albert Was Different," which appeared about five or six months ago. I believe that *Top-Notch* would be better off if it omitted serials and used complete stories instead.—*Bronx, New York.*

We can promise Mr. Zimmer some more Earl Marvin Rush stories, and in a comparatively early issue, too, but we are afraid we can't agree as to eliminating serials. Judging from letters received, always too numerous to wedge into our small space, more than ninety per cent of our readers want serials.

M. FLOYD.—Thank you for two splendid stories in August 1st issue, "Kroom the Hunted," by Valentine Wood, and "Tiger Hound," by Paul Annixter. Both stories are full of clean, fine adventure, and the courage that is an inspiration to us all.—*Washington, D. C.*

To vote for one of the authors of the prize-contest skitlets in this issue, write in the number and title on the line indicated in ballot just below, and mail to the Editor.

TOP-NOTCH READER'S BALLOT

Best story in this issue.....

Next best.....

-Third choice.....

Best skitlet.....

Remarks and suggestions.....

Name and
address {

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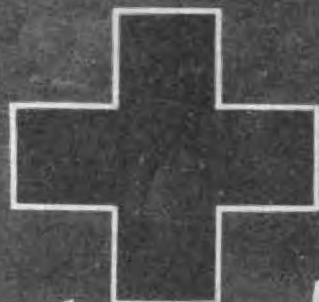
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