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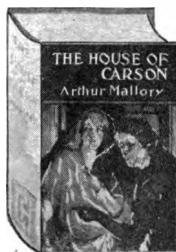
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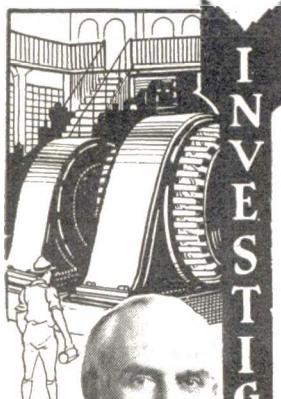
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TWICE-A-MONTH

MAGAZINE

Vol. LXXI

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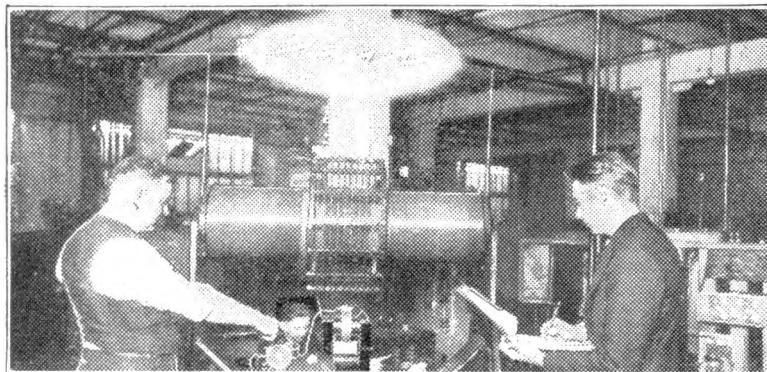
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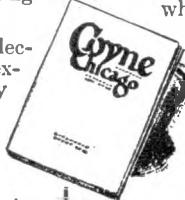
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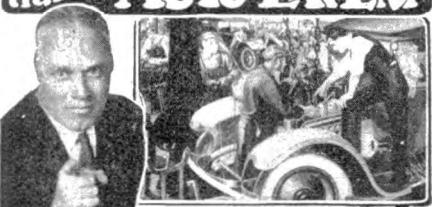
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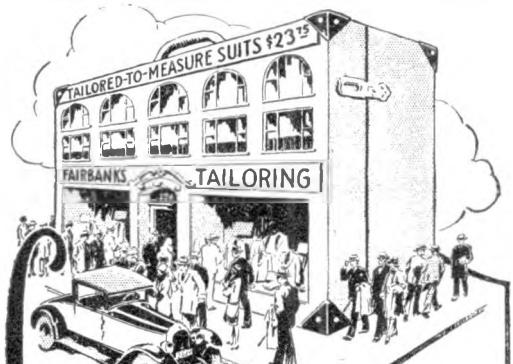
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VOL. LXXI

Published August 1, 1927

No. 1

• A Seward of Sacatone Story •



The Gadfly Trail ~ *By William Wallace Cook*

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

DEVILTRY IN AMBUSH.

IT was a most remarkable state of affairs, and Seward was at a loss to explain it. His faithful old Sandy burro had balked, and would not set a hoof on the Conejuno Bridge.

It wasn't much of a bridge; just a fifteen-foot span flung across a deep, step-walled slash in the desert. There were just stringers and planks without guard rails; and some of the planks were loose and, here and there, misplaced. It had always served the few travelers who came that way, however,

and saved a three-mile detour. Sandy himself had crossed it with cheerful alacrity no less than a score of times in his desert wanderings with Seward; but now he hunched himself at the approach, elevated his long ears, braced back on his forelegs and sniffed defiantly.

"Well, old top," remarked Seward, curiously, "this is something else again."

He came forward, dropped an arm over the burro's furry neck, and stood for a space considering the bridge. So far as Seward could see, the structure looked no different than it had at any time during the preceding five years.

"Why are you quitting on a pal like this?" Seward demanded of the reso-

lute little animal at his side. "Have you a reason, Sandy, or haven't you? If you have, why isn't it apparent to me?"

Sandy sniffed again and nuzzled his master's shoulder; then he turned away from the bridge, moved to the side of the trail and patiently planted himself, eying Seward expectantly. It was as though he had said:

"Say, compadre, if you can't see what I see, then get busy and investigate. You'll find it worth your while."

Seward laughed a little, and started out on the planks. The bridge buckled a trifle under his weight, and there was a slight snap as of rending wood. Seward leaped clear, and once again on firm ground, began to look thoughtful.

Sandy stood with one ear lowered and the other elevated, as much as to say "I told you so!"

Seward continued his investigations, but more cautiously. Twenty feet below the Conejuno Bridge the Conejuno Slash described a turn. Posted at the turn, Seward had a broadside view of the stringers and plank-ends. The whole structure was sagging a trifle, and there was a notch in one of the stringers freshly made as though with an ax.

Seward dropped his eyes to peer into the mirk of the deep Conejuno Slash, and he had a fanciful view of himself and Sandy dropping into that fearsome gloom accompanied by a shower of cross-pieces and planks.

"Our combined weight would certainly have done the trick," he muttered. "And it's at least a hundred feet to the rocks below. Sandy has a sixth sense of divination, and this isn't the first time he has proved it. Deviltry afoot and, more than likely, aimed at me. But who knew I was abroad and traveling this way? And what's the reason for wanting to topple Sandy and me into that hole in the desert?"

He returned to the burro, pulled up an edge of the canvas that covered the

pack and dug into a bag of his supplies —there would be three lumps of sugar for the sagacious Sandy! Then, out of his equipment, he pulled a small hand ax.

While Sandy munched the sugar, Seward cut a pole from a section of ocotilla, sharpened one end and split the other end a short way down. Taking a blank "location notice" from his pocket, he printed on it with his fountain pen:

BRIDGE UNSAFE—DETOUR!

Pushing his makeshift sign into the split end of the short pole, he planted the pole at the bridge approach; then, removing the first few planks of the bridge, he piled them for a barrier.

"That will do for this side," he told himself. "When we make the detour and come around on the other side, I'll do the same thing there."

Travelers were few and far between on that trail, but they did come occasionally, and Seward, in this matter of service to others, was taking no chances. Vastly puzzled, he started Sandy on the detour, and munched along behind in deep thought.

He knew of no enemies who might be lying in wait for him. Nevertheless, that bridge had been tampered with and had been made a deadly trap. If the treachery had not been aimed at him, then it must have been at some one else equally unsuspecting. Seward, however, chose to think the dastardly blow had been leveled at himself.

A dozen or more people knew of his leaving Tres Alamos; and yet, not one of the dozen knew the objective of his journey. That was something he had kept a close secret. If an unknown plotter were trying to trap him, how had it been possible to hit upon the Conejuno Bridge as the place for the trap?

"Something mysterious here," thought Seward, with a foreboding shake of the

head. "If the fellow's persistent, he'll try again; then, possibly, I can get a line on him."

An hour and a half brought Seward, by the detour, to the other side of the bridge. He protected that end of the unsafe span with another sign and another pile of planks, then continued on toward the south and east.

The range of hills toward which he had set his face in the early morning was very close to him when the sun sank into the gray level to the west; and the afterglow was still lacing the sky with quivering shafts of crimson and gold as he came to the spring which he had planned for his night camp.

He removed the pack and the packing gear from Sandy; and he hobbled the burro's front feet and left him to drink and graze on the mesquite beans of the chaparral surrounding the spring. He spread his blankets, built his fire, and quickly had his coffeepot on the fire-jack.

Behind him was the boulder-covered sidehill, purpling in the eastern shadows. Seward scanned it carefully.

"If I have a foe in ambush," he mused grimly, "this fire is an invitation for him to lay another trap. Here I am in my campoody—and the latch-string is out."

That was Seward's way. In a problematical case like this, he invited trouble for no other purpose than that of development and discovery. If he had an enemy in the desert, he wanted to know who it was and why he was being trailed.

The night silence fell peacefully over the desert as the prospector ate his supper. Away in the distance, the familiar yelps of the coyotes arose to the brightening stars. Seward heaved a deep sigh of relief as he lighted his pipe.

"I shall learn before sunrise, I take it," he murmured comfortably, "whether or not I am a marked man. The quicker the better."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DARK.

SEWARD lay on his back in his blankets, naming the constellations in the sparkling inverted bowl of the heavens. From sky rim to sky rim he went over them, and his drowsiness deepened. As a recipe for sleep when his mind was troubled, telling the stars was more potent than counting an imaginary flock of sheep as they jumped a fence.

Andromeda in the square of Pegasus, Taurus, Perseus—his waning faculties lingered with the bright orbs that had most appeal to him. Perseus! Half-forgotten lore drifted through his mind. Perseus, slayer of the Gorgon Medusa!

The head of Medusa, with its snaky locks, took form in his sleepy fancies as the fat face of a Chinaman in blue enamel, the face wearing an enigmatic smile, and the head topped with a cap surmounted with a button red as a crimson poppy—a mandarin's button.

Thus his business of the moment crept into his gathering dreams; and presently the glittering blue-black sky faded from his consciousness, his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

Seward, however, was a light sleeper. The restlessness of Sandy, the whir of night wings, the tinkling fall of water from the spring into its pool, the four-footed prowlers that came to drink—all these sounds were powerless to waken Seward, for they were the usual noises of the desert night. Suddenly he started up in a sitting posture, wide awake, aroused by a noise that was an intrusion upon the peace of his lonely camp.

From the hill slope above, there reached his ears a ring as of steel against stone, and it was accompanied by the heavy breathing as of a man at hard labor. Very faint those sounds were, but the ears of the desert dwellers are sharpened by long acquaintance with the silence of the waste places.

"He's up there," thought Seward exultantly, "the man who notched the bridge stringer. And he's at more of his deviltry. Now, if luck is with me and I can—"

Noiselessly he turned his body, brought his knees under him, laid hold of his revolver and crept into the chaparral. Conning his course toward the slope, he paused on the first reaches of rising ground, lifted himself and peered intently. The side hill was in deep shadow, and he could see nothing of an intruder. He heard a sudden crashing noise however; and what he saw was a leaping boulder, loosened from its bed and falling with mighty speed and momentum toward the foot of the hill. The great rock passed within three yards of him, fanning his face with disturbed air as it went on.

The boulder struck his night camp, raced through it, plowed its way into the brush and came to rest on the level ground below.

A spurt of flame stabbed the night as Seward fired. But it was a random shot, for Seward was still unable to catch a glimpse of the skulker who had released that stone catapult. Springing up the hillside, Seward made a rapid ascent to the crest; there, as he paused and looked and listened, he heard a beat of hoofs receding.

"Adios!" he muttered grimly. "Your little scheme failed, but you gave me the slip. Now I know I'm a marked man," he added, "but it isn't the first time."

He returned to his camp. The boulder had been well-aimed, he discovered, for it had crossed his blankets and pounded them deep into the sand. Sandy had not been in the way of the rushing rock, nor had any of his supplies or equipment; and for all this he thanked his stars.

"Why, you—you pestiferous gadfly!" he exclaimed, facing the south and west and addressing himself to the unknown

who had vanished in that direction. "I'm a peaceable man on a mission that you're supposed to know nothing about. Is it an old score you're trying to settle? Or are you concerned somehow in this mystery of the Blue Mandarin?"

He thought of a gadfly as a bothersome insect; and, in that, his present business had helped him in designating the murderous person, whoever he was, who was setting his traps and springing them from cover.

Philo Gaffley, dead and gone, had been known as "Old Gadfly." Gaffley had lived long in desert country somewhat remote from the region most favored by Seward in his wanderings, and in all his five years of desert experience Seward had never even heard of the hermit. It had remained for others, and for a peculiar chain of events, to bring Gaffley to Seward's attention.

Now Seward was en route to the shack in which Gaffley had lived, seeking light on a mystery that might mean much or little to friends of Seward's. When morning came, a few more miles should bring Seward to Gaffley's cabin—or to the spot where it was supposed to be. Information about Gaffley was so uncertain that Seward was not at all sure whether he was to find what he was looking for.

Seward passed the rest of the night in peace. A refreshing plunge in the pool below the spring, and a five-minute rub with a hard towel, sent a tingling glow into every part of the desert man's body.

He made light of the unknown's attacks. As a matter of principle, he was lacking in respect for a skulker in ambush, for any one who preferred the *con armas licet* of the Spaniard to a manly coming out into the open. The unknown was merely an annoying insect, easily to be brushed aside.

Seward ate his breakfast, packed his supplies, carefully adjusted sawbuck saddle and its lead to the back of

Sandy, and after filling his water canteen, set off along the foot of the hills. The morning was cool, and the pace, for footwork, was rather better than usual. At the end of three hours, just as the heat began to make itself felt, Sandy turned a jutting spur of the hills.

Around that spur, if Seward's information could be relied upon, was the former home of Philo Gaffley. Was Seward, trailing the burro, to see merely a stretch of blank desert, or was he to be rewarded with the sight of a shack?

A minute later the question was answered. What Seward saw was a V-shaped notch in the hills, running back into a bit of a valley. Here there was the green of mesquite with its promise of water; and, fulfilling the promise, a thin little rill, nourishing a grass plot and then sinking from sight in the thirsty sands.

A shake shanty was likewise in evidence. Shakes were missing from the roof and sides, and a section of rusty stove pipe hung crazily from one end of the structure, near the roof peak.

"Check!" exclaimed Seward, in deep satisfaction. "There is the old Gaffley hangout, at all events. The door is gone, and the windows broken, but the shack is there and—" He paused, startled.

At that moment a form appeared in the doorway of the shack—it was the form of a woman, and of a young woman, at that. She had heard the burro, for Sandy, delighted at the sight of green fodder, had scrambled noisily toward the shack and gone to grazing.

"Are you Mr. Seward?" called the girl excitedly, almost hopefully, leaving the door and hurrying toward him.

CHAPTER III.

SUDDEN SUSPICION.

SEWARD knew from dear experience that trouble usually beckoned when a lone woman appeared out of nowhere in the heart of the desert. This was

not the first time such an event had crossed trails with him; and in nearly every case the results had been anything but pleasant. It was usually a surprise in which treachery lurked in some form.

Seward of Sacatone was known to have a chivalrous nature. No woman in distress ever appealed to him in vain. So often had this knowledge been made use of by his enemies that he had developed a wariness in the matter of these lone desert inoharries.

He gave the approaching young woman a flashing scrutiny. She was bare headed and her corn-colored hair was boyishly bobbed. Her eyes were blue; and there was a town bleach in her face only partly hidden by a touch of rouge. She was slender and straight as a dart, in her early twenties as he guessed, and she was dressed as a girl of the city and not of the deserts.

These observations, naturally, merely deepened the mystery of her presence at the ruinous old shack of the late Philo Gaffley. Then, deepest mystery of all, she had called him by name, and there was about her an air of having expected him.

"Who else is here with you?" Seward inquired.

"No one; I am here alone, waiting four days for you and hoping you'd come. That is," she added, peering at him anxiously, "if you are really Walt Seward, the man of the desert who has the reputation of helping others."

A horse on a picket rope had pushed into sight from behind a tangle of mesquite and was considering Sandy in a neighborly sort of way.

"My name is Walt Seward," he told her, "and I am curious as to how it was possible for you to be expecting me here, in this remote spot in the desert."

The anxious look passed from the girl's face, and something like satisfaction took its place.

"If you will give me an hour of your

time, Mr. Seward," she said, "I will explain everything and, I think, give you a little startling information."

"Very well," he answered, "just wait until I turn out my burro."

He had expected to remain at Gaffley's shack—in the event that he was so fortunate as to find it—for a day or two, pursuing his investigations. The presence of this young woman rather complicated the situation, yet he saw no reason why he should not proceed in accordance with his original intentions. If the girl was a confederate of his unknown enemy, then being forewarned he was forearmed, and might find her an aid rather than an hindrance in the work before him.

He selected a site for his camp at a distance from the old shack, and in a sort of glade masked by the rank growth of mesquite. He unloaded and hobbled Sandy, piled his camp plunder in a safe place, and returned to find the girl sitting on the cabin doorstep, patiently waiting. He glanced over her head and into the ruinous hut. A pallet of grease-wood tops covered with a new blanket was in one corner. That was all he could see of her equipment, and his wonder arose at the thought of a girl from the towns subjecting herself to such hardships. It did not appear reasonable, and his suspicions of treachery grew stronger.

Apparently unmoved, he sat down in the shade of the shack wall. "Well?" he remarked tentatively.

"You have a small image in your possession," the girl began, going straight to the heart of the business, "called the Blue Mandarin. Haven't you?"

"Possibly. What has that to do with your being here?"

"Don't be suspicious of me!" she begged. "I am not an enemy of yours, Mr. Seward, but I want you to be my friend, and to give me your help. A man by the name of Folsom met with

an accident and died in Tres Alamos; you went to Los Angeles to secure this Blue Mandarin which Folsom mentioned in his delirious ravings; you got the Mandarin from a man named O'Malley, at Laguna Beach, near Los Angeles.

"The image originally belonged to Philo Gaffley, who once lived in this old house. Your purpose is to discover the mystery connected with the Blue Mandarin. I felt sure that, in your investigations, you would sooner or later come to this place; my only fear was," she added, "that you had been here and gone before I arrived. Still, everything indicated that this could not be the case."

This talk of the girl's was full of surprises for Seward. Her information regarding the Blue Mandarin seemed so complete and accurate.

"Please go on," he requested. "You haven't told me anything about yourself, as yet."

"I shall come to that presently. Landon Kardew, Jerry McHarg, and 'Taranch' Terrill have been trying to get their hands on the image. It was broken, and they fled from you with half of it. Their car tipped from the bank of a river in flood, and Terrill was killed. You thought, also, that Kardew and Jerry McHarg had suffered the same fate. But you were mistaken.

"Mr. Seward, Kardew and Jerry McHarg are here in Arizona; and they have commissioned me to lie in wait for you, here at Gaffley's place, find out from you where the Blue Mandarin is, and so help them to get hold of it."

Seward was not expecting such a frank statement. He gave the girl a quick glance. "You mean to tell me that Kardew and McHarg escaped safely from the flooded river?" he demanded. "You mean that they have trailed me to these deserts, still set upon their original plan of acquiring the Blue Mandarin?"

"It is true," she answered.

He knew it must be true. The identity of his hidden foes was revealed. Kardew and McHarg had tampered with the Conejuno Bridge; and Kardew and McHarg, stalking him like evil specters, had loosened the boulder and sent it plunging into his night camp. Such murderous tactics were strictly in line with methods already employed by the two desperate schemers. And it was easy to believe that they had counted upon this young woman to help them if they failed.

"You got your information from Kardew and McHarg?" Seward asked.

"It was necessary for them to tell me, if they wanted my help."

"And instead of helping them you are informing on them!"

The girl's lips quivered, and there was a mist of tears in her blue eyes.

"That was the crowning disgrace of it all—that they should try to use me in their criminal work! Kardew tried to make it appear that he was a nephew of Philo Gaffley's, and that, now that Folsom is dead, the Blue Mandarin rightly belongs to him. But I know, Mr. Seward, that you are working for the little son of Folsom."

"Nevertheless," replied Seward, "you must have agreed to help them, or you would not be here."

The girl struck her hands together convulsively. "It was the only way in which I could help you—and—and Jerry. You see," she finished, "I am Lottie McHarg, Jerry McHarg's sister."

CHAPTER IV.

REAL SINCERITY.

SEWARD knew Jerry, or "Lefty," McHarg as the able assistant of Landon Kardew, a man notorious in two continents for his subtle villainies. Honest and unfortunate Dick Folsom was the cousin of Kardew, and it was for Folsom and Folsom's boy that Seward

was investigating the supposed mystery of the Blue Mandarin.

The image itself was no more than a toy in blue enamel; but, on the back of it, Philo Gaffley had scratched a design, shaped and veined in the enamel, to represent a magnified insect with spread wings—a tracing imaginatively called the "gadfly" after Old Gadfly himself. In some manner this etching was supposed to indicate the whereabouts of Philo Gaffley's concealed treasure—a treasure which only Folsom and Kardew had considered seriously.

Fables connected with buried treasure were so rife in the desert country that Seward had come to look upon all such yarns as pure myths. If there were a treasure, in this case, he was anxious to find it for the sake of Folsom's boy; and if there were no treasure, he was anxious to settle the doubt finally and pierce the mystery of the gadfly.

His interest in the girl deepened with the discovery that she was the sister of Lefty McHarg. In her features he traced a softened resemblance to McHarg, and he was ready to believe that she was speaking fairly.

"Miss McHarg," he commented, "it is not often that a sister will turn against a brother, as you are doing."

Suppressed excitement filled the girl. Her face paled, she breathed hard, and she went on in quivering tones that amply proved her earnestness.

"I am trying to save Jerry from Kardew, Mr. Seward! Kardew is leading him on and on, making of him a cat's-paw in his crimes. I know what the end will be, if Jerry is not saved from Kardew's evil influence. I want to take him away from Kardew—and I want you to help me. Jerry was honest—until he met Kardew; and he will be honest again, if I can get him away from Kardew."

"I know that they will get nowhere in fighting you. The end of this might easily be that both of them will be sent

to prison. But you, if you will, can help me save my brother from such a fate as that. I can help you, too. Kardew and Jerry are near here at this minute; they are watching us. They have no suspicion that I am not doing all I can to help them secure the Blue Mandarin; and, so long as they believe that, I am in a position to learn their plans and to pass the information along to you."

"That is dangerous—for you," suggested Seward. "I hate to think what might happen to you if Kardew learned you were double crossing him."

"You are the only one who could tell him that. I have placed myself in your hands, and all I ask is that you trust me. Show me this Blue Mandarin! If Kardew and Jerry are watching us through binoculars from some place near at hand, they will observe what you are doing, and it will give them the idea that I am succeeding in what they plan to have me do."

Seward was a man of quick decisions. All this confidential talk of the girl's might merely be a subtle scheme to throw him off his guard. But he had one of his hunches that she was sincere.

Reaching into a breast pocket, he drew into sight the little squat figure of the Blue Mandarin. It had been broken in half, but so cleverly mended with cement that the line of cleavage could scarcely be seen.

"Take it in your own hands, Miss McHarg," he said. "Examine it as much as you please. The point of the whole business is that queer design on the back, scraped in the enamel. It may mean much, or it may mean nothing. Philo Gaffley was the artist who placed that picture on the back of the image. What his purpose was can only be guessed at—and all guesses are running the gamut from treasure to nonsense.

"Gaffley is said to have been a worker in wonders, a 'medicine man,' a pestiferous person whose end and aim in life

seemed to be to mystify and make trouble for others. His excuse for working that design into the enamel of the image is what I am here to discover. I have no personal interest in the outcome except to settle the matter finally."

The girl, with the Blue Mandarin in her own hands, gazed at it intently. She turned the image so that the rude design of the gadfly lay under her eyes.

"Those lines," she remarked, "are believed by Kardew to constitute a concealed map. One of the lines, he thinks, may be followed to a cache where Philo Gaffley concealed a store of wealth."

"One guess is as good as another," replied Seward. "Does this old shack and its surroundings," he asked, "suggest wealth? Would Philo Gaffley have lived a wretched, hermitlike existence in this out-of-the-way spot if he had possessed a large amount of treasure? That is possible, too; but is it probable?"

"No, Mr. Seward," Lottie McHarg answered, "it doesn't seem probable. But Dick Folsom believed in the treasure—and he was coming to Tres Alamos to find you and get you to help him find it when he lost his life. And Landon Kardew believes in the treasure, absolutely."

"Do you happen to know whether Kardew has any accurate knowledge of the treasure that I know nothing about?"

She shook her head. "No, but he believes in it, and he has made my brother believe in it. Philo Gaffley said the wealth was for him who had the shrewdness to find it."

"What Philo Gaffley said amounts to very little, when you consider his propensity for mystery and for making other people trouble. Kardew is banking on an uncertainty if he is allowing anything Gaffley said to influence him. We—"

"Careful now!" whispered the girl tensely. "I just saw a flash of white

on the hillside to the left of this cabin—don't look, don't pay any attention. It is a signal that Kardew and my brother want me to get away for a talk with them. You can go into the cabin, if you will, and I will wander around and finally drift away to meet them and hear what they have to tell me. It may be important. What shall I say to them—about you?"

"Be indefinite," suggested Seward. "Tell them I have the Blue Mandarin, that you have had it in your own hands, and examined it."

She handed the image back to him, got up from the doorstep and moved away in the direction of the spring. Seward, playing the girl's game as she had suggested, went into the tumble-down shack. His plans included an investigation of the place, and he might as well be about it.

It was an odd situation, even for him, who had been the protagonist of many a weird adventure in the deserts. If the girl was sincere, as he believed, in return for the aid she could give him he would see that she was protected; if, on the other hand, she was not sincere, the situation was full of dynamite for both of them.

CHAPTER V.

THE IDES OF MARCH.

THERE was nothing in the old shack, so far as Seward could see, that had belonged to the late Philo Gaffley. Riding gear, evidently the property of Lottie McHarg, hung from nails in one of the walls. In one corner was the rough bed of greasewood tops; in another corner was a heap of what the desert wanderers called "canned goods," a pair of stuffed saddlebags contained Miss McHarg's personal belongings, and a small rifle was balanced across a couple of wooden pegs near the riding equipment.

There was no stove, and the end of

rusty stove pipe piercing the wall from outside, hung in space; and not an article of furniture of any description had been left in the place.

Only a wild flight of the imagination could conceive of a girl from the towns living for four days in such surroundings. Kardew and McHarg, Seward reasoned, must have provided for her wants from a camp of their own somewhere in the hills. All that he saw in the shack was merely a plant, to deceive him with the idea that the girl was really living there, and alone.

The floor and the rear wall of the shack were in a much better state of preservation than the rest of the structure. The floor was of planks; and the rear wall, for some reason, had been boarded up inside the shakes. A large leaf from a calendar was pasted on the boards of the wall. It was the month of March, of a year long gone, and over it was roughly printed in black letters: "The ides of March remember."

"A touch of Shakespeare in that souvenir of Gaffley," mused Seward. "What's it there for?"

He studied the calendar, his interest played upon by his curiosity. If there was really any method in the madness of the Old Gadfly, then this month of a long vanished year must have been left on the wall for some subtle purpose.

"The fifteenth," Seward went on, placing a finger on the date, "and the seven days immediately preceding it, are the ides of the month which Julius Caesar found pretty unlucky. Was Gaffley trying to suggest—"

His thoughts, just then, took another turn. Under the square numbered 15 he felt a slight yielding of paper, and the board behind it to his touch. He passed his finger over the seven squares preceding the 15, and all of them yielded slightly to pressure. As he stood there, puzzled and thoughtful, a square of the plank floor on which he stood gave

way suddenly beneath him. Too late he threw out his arms to save himself. In another second he was projected downward into pitch darkness. It was neither a long fall nor a hard one; and, as he staggered and caught his feet on firm ground, the daylight above faded as the section of floor reclosed of its own accord.

"A trap in the floor!" muttered Seward. "A little pleasantry of the mysterious Old Gadfly's. I am now in his potato cellar, I suppose. No stairway into it—just a plain drop; and the 'ides of March' are the key to it."

It was a peculiar situation, and rather promising in its possibilities. Seward groped in his pocket for a handful of matches and struck one. As the little flame grew, he discovered that he was in a rough pit, but little more than head high and perhaps ten feet square, conforming to the dimensions of the shack itself. With the aid of lighted matches, he made as thorough an investigation of the cellar as possible.

The spring rigging of the trap was in evidence—stout hinges, an ox-hide bucket heavily weighted with boulders swinging from a pulley, and an iron bar that served as a trigger to release the floor section upon the proper pressure of a spring. The weight of Seward's body had caused the trap to drop at one end, and the heavy ox-hide bucket had swung it back into place.

"Simplicity itself," Seward ruminated, "but why all the hocus-pocus? Poor old Gaffley must have been cracked on that sort of thing."

Scraped in the dirt wall, and whitened with some sort of pigment, was a cryptic message. Seward passed his flickering match along the wall and read the text, letter by letter:

Between the two red boulders and straight ahead to the point of beginning.

The little gleam died between his fingers, and he sank to the earthen floor

and crouched there while he puzzled his wits over the words on the wall, written there with so much care.

In the first place, he reasoned, he was proving at the very outset of his investigations that there was no pretense about Philo Gaffley's reputation as a man of mystery. He was running true to the character already exemplified in the little blue image of the Mandarin. This being the case, it was a fair inference that there might be a reasonable objective, and not mere moonshine, at the end of Old Gadfly's trail of mysteries. Was that objective really a treasure—a store of wealth in some portable form?

"He was a hermit," ruminated Seward, "living alone in this little corner of the desert. He had no use for banks. Dying in this solitude, his eccentricity suggested that he protect his hoard. O'Malley, of Los Angeles, was his brother-in-law. Folsom and Kardew were nephews. O'Malley is a collector of curios; and when Gaffley died he left a written request that the Blue Mandarin should be sent to him as a choice piece for his collection; and he also stated that his wealth was for the one who had the brains to find it.

"Gaffley had no love for O'Malley, and he may have been working on his cupidity in the hope of getting him into trouble of some kind. There may be no treasure, but a lot of mysterious trouble lurking at the end of this trail. Even so," and Seward laughed grimly, "I am beginning to find it interesting; and, if possible, I'll run it out."

A flash of white on the cellar floor had struck on his eye in a match flare. He recalled that, and again he struck a light, found the object that had appealed to him, and examined it. It was a piece of white paper, containing writing in a fine, copperplate hand. But it was incomplete. This scrap, and other papers with it no doubt, had been fed to the fire. Only this small fragment

remained—the top of a sheet, the rest of it brown, burned.

Solar heat, focused by a lens into a white-hot element, and that element conserved to be released wherever and whenever it may be found desirable. That is my life work; and experiments, at the Temple of Montezuma, give me the courage to proceed—

That was all the writing that was decipherable.

"Gaffley was working on a method for conserving the sun's heat," pondered Seward. "He might as well have spent his time looking for the philosopher's stone, or trying to invent perpetual motion. He failed—and destroyed his notes—only this fragment escaped the fire. Yes, he must have been crazy. He—"

A light step on the floor above him caused him to break off his reflections. The girl was back from her interview with Kardew and McHarg. "Mr. Seward!" he heard her call. "Oo-hoo! Mr. Seward!"

"Here!" he answered. He could picture her bewilderment at the sound of his voice from below. "Just a minute!"

He pushed aside the iron rod, lifted the ox-hide bucket, and the door in the floor dropped downward. Forcing himself into the widening aperture, he climbed up the lowered section of floor and appeared before the girl's astonished eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRIGIT FACE OF DANGER.

DON'T get excited, Miss McHarg," said Seward, with a laugh. "This isn't such a weird performance as you imagine. You might have found the way into the cellar yourself if you had done a little experimenting."

The girl continued to stare at him with wide, startled eyes. The floor returned to its place when freed of Seward's weight, and the trigger-rod snapped into place below and held it secure.

"There are strange stories about you," breathed Miss McHarg; "one hears them in the towns all around the desert. I can well believe that you are a man of mystery, Mr. Seward. I never imagined there was a cellar under this old cabin."

"Neither did I, until I dropped into it unexpectedly. Wasn't your curiosity aroused by that old calendar on the wall?"

Her eyes moved toward the calendar. "Yes," she admitted, "I had wondered about that—and the quotation from Shakespeare regarding the ides of March."

Miss McHarg was an educated girl. Her language was good, and her book-learning seemed to run deep. All this had impressed Seward in her favor, and had done much to influence him in taking her at her face value.

"There's a trick about that trap door. Go over to the wall, Miss McHarg, and press your finger upon the ides of March."

The girl followed instructions, proceeding just as Seward had proceeded; then, as the floor gave way beneath her, she stifled a scream.

Quick as a flash, Seward had caught her about the waist, swept her from the falling trap, and placed her on the solid planks at his side.

"It wouldn't do to let you take the same tumble that I did," he told her. "But that is the secret of Philo Gaffley's cellar."

"What is there down there?" Miss McHarg asked.

Seward thought it wise, for the present, to keep the little knowledge he had acquired to himself.

"A potato cellar, and that's about all. Gaffley, it seems, had a bent for surrounding himself with mysteries—perhaps it was his only pastime in beguiling the lonely hours out here in the desert. As I said before, one guess is as good as another when you are try-

ing to figure out Philo Gaffley. You saw your brother and Kardew?" he asked, shifting the subject.

Her face grew serious, and alarm rose in her eyes. "You are in danger, Mr. Seward," she said, "grave danger."

"Possibly," he answered, "but that is nothing new. I was in danger on the way here, but nothing came of it."

"Something will surely come of Kardew's present plans, unless you are on your guard every moment," Miss McHarg insisted. "I told Kardew that you had shown me the Blue Mandarin, and had even allowed me to take it in my hands. He asked for a detailed description, saying you were foxy and had once before sprung a Blue Mandarin on him that hadn't proved to be the Blue Mandarin at all. He swears he won't be caught like that again."

Seward chuckled. "He can't be so wise all the time as he is just some of the time," he commented oracularly. "A man who has been fooled once can be fooled again. Did you satisfy him that I had shown you the real Mandarin?"

"Yes, and that is just where your danger comes in. He is positive the lines on the back of that little blue figurine constitute a concealed map, and that you will use the map to carry you to the secret cache of Philo Gaffley."

"That is exactly what I shall try to do," asserted Seward. "After I have my dinner, I am going to make a serious attempt at running out the 'gadfly trail.'"

The girl stepped toward him and laid an earnest hand on his arm. "You will be in danger every step of the way along that trail, Mr. Seward, for Kardew intends to follow you—and at what he considers the right moment, he will strike."

"Those are his plans," replied Seward coolly, "but he will find that executing them is another matter. I have dealt with more subtle scoundrels than Kar-

dew, Miss McHarg—and I am still here."

"But there is Jerry!" exclaimed the girl. "As Kardew goes deeper into this, he drags my brother with him."

"I shall do what I can to protect your brother, just to show my appreciation of what you are trying to do for me. Is your brother familiar with the desert?"

"No, he knows nothing about such a country as this."

"Does Kardew?"

"I cannot tell you about that, but I am of the opinion that he is as unfamiliar with the desert as my brother is."

"Then they will be in more danger than I am. Set your mind at rest, so far as I am concerned, and be assured that I will keep an eye on your brother and do everything possible to break the hold Kardew seems to have on him."

"You can only do that by proving to Jerry that Kardew is merely making a tool of him, and that he does not intend to let him profit by any success Kardew may have in finding this treasure of Philo Gaffley's."

"There are ways, no doubt, to accomplish that." Seward stepped to the door and took a glance at the sun. "High noon," he remarked, "and time for grub-pile, as they say out here. Will you join me at dinner?"

"I have food here, and——"

"Canned, stuff!" Seward laughed. "I mean a real dinner of bacon, fried potatoes, sour-dough biscuits, and coffee?" The girl's eyes sparkled. "I see," Seward went on, "that after four days of stuff in cans the menu appeals to you. Come to the spring in an hour, and we'll have the meal al fresco."

He left her, walked to his own camp and began his preparations; and at the end of an hour, when she arrived to be his guest, he had the meal set out on a blanket in the shade of the high wall of the notch. It was pleasant,

eating there in the open. The girl, if he could judge, thoroughly enjoyed herself.

After the meal, he smoked his pipe and took a short nooning.

"My first try at the gadfly trail will be a short one," he remarked, "and I should be back by evening. I am leaving my burro here, along with my camp equipment—excepting this." He picked up his shoulder holster with its swinging gun, slipped off his coat and buckled on the harness.

The girl blanched. "I hope," she said, "you will not have to use that—against my brother."

"I hope I shall not have to use it at all; but when one is dealing with a man like Kardew, the old safety-first principle applies."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and got to his feet. All he carried with him, besides the gun, was a water canteen.

The girl watched him anxiously as he moved away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIFLED POCKET.

KARDEW had tried, with murderous subtlety, to eliminate Seward, secure the Blue Mandarin, and so experiment for himself with the gadfly map in an attempt to trace out a course to the supposed treasure. Having failed in his tactics, he had decided upon another method.

It was his scheme now to let Seward discover the mystery trail, to shadow him, and then at some point on the way to strike at him from cover, secure the gadfly map, and follow it to the cache along a course already indicated by Seward. In other words, it was Kardew's intention to use Seward as a cat's-paw, and profit by his knowledge of the deserts in finding the mystery trail.

This was the information brought back by the girl from her interview

with Kardew and her brother; and it was a proceeding that tallied so exactly with Kardew's usual methods that Seward was fully convinced of its truth.

McHarg had thrown in with Kardew on a promise of having a share in the treasure they were supposedly going to find; but that Kardew intended to relinquish any part of it, to McHarg or to any one else, Seward did not believe. On this one idea he was building his plans for breaking the sinister hold which Kardew had on McHarg. To be trailed by the two schemers might be made to help him in his work for McHarg, so he was well content to leave the matter as he found it—for the present.

Seward's course, on leaving his camp by the spring, carried him to the point of the V-shaped notch; and there he discovered a passage, in the form of a narrow, steep-sided valley, leading on into the heart of the hills.

The top of this range was a long, broad mesa, broken by perpendicular canyons as though the ground had been split, in some primeval upheaval, into innumerable fissures. In places, the overhanging rock, running in layers, had formed natural galleries, varying between a few feet in extent and as much as a thousand feet in length. It was a strangely contorted stretch of country that greeted Seward's eyes when he emerged from the narrow valley into a small basin where a number of the fissurelike canyons appeared to converge.

This was by no means his first visit to that particular range of hills. He had threaded a few of the defiles, but they were so numerous, and so interlaced, that an exploration of all of them would have been a dangerous task, and have demanded weeks of time. Seward, in the center of the basin, seated himself on a boulder and proceeded to study the tracing on the back of the blue image.

The body of the magnified insect and its spread wings were veined with many lines; but there was one of the lines more pronounced than the others. This heavier mark, beginning at a certain place, led to the left and on into a wing. Seward, centering his attention upon that mark, lifted his eyes to sweep the narrow canyon openings on his left.

What he discovered, almost at once, gave him a thrill of exultation. Two shoulders of reddish rock marked the entrance to one of the gaping fissures. He recalled the message dug into the dirt wall of Gaffley's cellar:

Between the two red boulders and straight ahead to the point of beginning.

He moved into the narrow canyon with its high walls, and at a distance of perhaps a thousand yards he halted at a gravel bench. In the process of erosion, when the earth was young, some long-lost river had deposited that gravel flat at the turn of the little canyon; but what claimed Seward's attention was evidence of placer workings, old but not at all ancient. He climbed to the flat and noted the hole that some stranger had dug there. It was not a large excavation, and bed rock had been bared at the bottom of it.

He went down into the hole and, with his clasp knife, prodded into the crevices of the underlying rock. He studied a handful of black sand, but to his trained eye, it held no traces of color. He filled his hat with the sand, intending to hornscoop it on his return to camp. Then he began prying into the rock crevices again.

After an hour's work, he found what he had hoped he might find—a small nugget of placer gold. Returning to the flat, he rested from his labors, and began consideration of that hole in the bench.

"It's a pocket," ran his conclusion, "and some pocket-hunter hit upon it and rifled it. There may not be an-

other ounce of gold in all this bench, and what was here some lucky stranger discovered and made away with. This is Gaffley's 'point of beginning.' From this spot, it may be, leads the trail to the cache where he concealed the pocket's hoard. That is the logical explanation of the gadfly map; but it remains to be seen whether it works out."

He left his hat, loaded with black sand, at the foot of the bench, carefully placing a small white pebble in the exact center of the sand. Then, bare-headed, he continued his explorations.

The heavy line etched in the blue enamel ran straight north from the rifled pocket, turning sharply east at a point where many fainter lines converged. Here the topography revealed a veritable jumble of fissures. Getting lost in such a maze of natural galleries would have been easy for one less desert-wise than Seward; but he struck out boldly, knowing well that his "bump of location" would see him safely through.

He came now into a section of high cliffs, fretted deeply with overhanging walls; and his wonder grew when he discovered the ruins of ancient masonry in the recesses of the cliffs, high up toward the rimrock.

"Cliff-dwellings!" he mused. "This is prehistoric ground; and it's the first time I have discovered evidences of the ancient cliff-dwellers in this range of hills."

He climbed by a dangerous path to one of the overhangs, killed a sidewinder that was about to jump at him, chased away a small army of scorpions, and on hands and knees, crawled into one of the roofless cliff-dwellings.

It differed in no way from other structures of the same type with which he was familiar. Coming down from the cliff, and back to his original trail as indicated by the scratched line on the blue figurine, he noted that the dusk was deepening in those fissured depths.

"This will do for the first day," he decided; "to-morrow, with the sun, I'll put in a full ten hours, and see if I can locate Gaffley's 'Temple of Montezuma,' where he carried on his experiments with solar heat."

From time to time he watched behind him for some trace of Kardew and McHarg. There was not a sign of them in evidence. However, in such a country it was easy for a pair of trailers to keep out of sight. But when he reached the gravel bench and picked up his hat he discovered that the white pebble had been shifted from the center of the black sand to the edge of the hatbrim. He chuckled.

"Some one has had a look at this hat since I placed it here," he reasoned. "And who could that some one be but Kardew or McHarg? They are giving me plenty of rope. I have not gone far enough to suit them, as yet, and they are waiting with their plans to strike."

At a brisk pace, he made his way out of the fissure between the two red boulders and on into the notch by way of the narrow valley.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT RAIDER.

SEWARD was panning his hatful of black sand when the girl arrived at his camp by the spring. There was a look of great relief in her face as she came toward him.

"You are back safe from the hills!" she exclaimed. "I have worried about you, Mr. Seward."

"You need not, Miss McHarg," he told her. "I'm an old hand at this desert work, and capable of looking out for myself."

"Did you see anything of Kardew or Jerry?"

"No, but I know they were trailing me. They must believe that they are having a lot of luck, for I have found Gaffley's trail."

"Kardew is waiting, then," she whispered ominously, "just waiting."

She seemed more concerned about the actions of her brother and Kardew than about Seward's discoveries.

"You will have supper with me, Miss McHarg," he suggested, "and I will pass on to you some interesting news."

Later, over the meal, he told of the placer pocket. "Philo Gaffley," he finished, "was not such a crackbrain as some people imagine."

"You think he took the gold out of that—that pocket, as you call it, and that this gold is the treasure he has secreted in a place indicated by the gadfly map?"

"Well," he admitted with seeming reluctance, "it is beginning to seem reasonable to me. As a rule, I take little stock in these desert-treasure yarns, but this one is beginning to take on all the earmarks of fact. I shall get away early to-morrow," he added, "and by nightfall I hope to have some correct information. So far, however, everything is working out remarkably well. Gaffley got practically all the gold in the pocket, for I can find hardly a trace of any in the black sand I brought back with me from the bench."

"To-morrow, then," murmured the girl, with a stifled sigh, "I may expect the worst things to happen."

"Or the best," corrected Seward. "You have been very courageous so far, Miss McHarg, and if you will just keep on as you began all will turn out well for you and your brother."

She reached out her hand to him. "My only concern is Jerry," she said tremulously, "and if you can save him from Kardew, before he gets in too deep, I shall never forget what you have done for us, Mr. Seward."

That night, after the girl had gone, Seward smoked his pipe thoughtfully. Yes, he would do what he could for McHarg, solely on the girl's account.

He did not sleep in his blankets, but

he stuffed the upper one with brush to give it a semblance of a form underneath, and then withdrew into the mesquite to doze watchfully on the bare earth.

It was after midnight when he heard a sound of stealthy movements in the chaparral. He started up alertly and remained motionless, silent, and watchful. In the moon and starshine he saw a dark form creeping toward the dummy figure under his blanket. A knife gleamed in the hand of the creeping figure. Arrived at the blankets, the man pulled away the upper covering and reeled backward on his bended knees. He had discovered the hoax.

Like a flash, Seward was upon him from behind, jerking backward and throttling him.

"McHarg!" he exclaimed, both knees on the man's chest.

McHarg swore under his breath. "Foxy, as usual!" he muttered, gaspingly. "Take—take your hands from my throat."

First, Seward removed the knife from the clenched fist; then, his revolver in hand, he released McHarg.

"Don't try to bolt," he warned. "Sit up. I want you to tell me how you got out of that flooded river. Taranch Terrill cashed in, under that submerged machine; and so did Kardew. How did you get out of that mess?"

"Swam out," was the laconic answer.

"And you followed me to Arizona, bent on recovering that treasure Kardew told you about?"

"This is a free country, my buckaroo. You don't own it."

For the protection of the girl, Seward was purposely registering a little false knowledge. It would not do for McHarg to guess that his sister had given Seward any true information regarding himself and Kardew.

"Did Kardew escape from that flooded river, as you did?"

"Maybe he did."

"Then maybe he helped you tamper with the Conejuno Bridge, and roll that boulder across my last night's camp?" returned Seward. "McHarg, why are you such a fool? Kardew is getting you in pretty deep, using you as a cat's-paw to help pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Man, what do you mean by creeping into this camp with a knife in your fist? If you had finished me, do you know where it would have landed you? Kardew would have escaped clear, but you would have paid the penalty."

"Now, listen. There's a young woman in Gaffley's old shack. You and Kardew leave her to herself. She is under my protection, and I shall demand a settlement for any harm that comes to her, through you. Get that straight. If Kardew is with you, as I imagine he is, you two will clear out of these hills at once—if you know when you are well off. Spying on me will not get you anywhere."

"Kardew has as much right to Old Gaffley's treasure as O'Malley," growled McHarg. "And you have no right to it at all."

"I am working for Folsom's boy. Anyhow, the treasure is for the man that finds it. Kardew has no rights, unless he makes them good. If he found a treasure in bullion, or something else, he would drop you cold, McHarg. Turn that over in your mind. Here's your knife. Now get out of here, stay away from me, and be sensible."

"You think you're the boss of these deserts, don't you?" McHarg sneered. "I'll do as I please in this man's country, Seward."

"Then the chances are you will wind up in the hoosegow at Tres Alamos. I am easy with you to-night; but, if you stick around, I may not be so easy the next time our trails cross. Clear out."

The night raider skulked away into the dark, and Seward looked after him, shaking his head forebodingly.

"He's a hard one to do anything with," he muttered. "That sister of his has given me a man's size job. I let him off to-night on her account; but, if he continues in his present temper, there's no telling where the end of this gadfly trail will bring us."

Seward felt fairly secure for the rest of that night; but he had a hunch that the day to come was filled with uncertainties.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DIZZY PATH.

THE character of the country into which Seward's explorations were now to carry him suggested a little extra equipment for his work. Gaffley's trail might lead up some of those perpendicular canyon walls, or Seward might want to investigate some of the more inaccessible cliff dwellings on his own. As a possible aid in such an emergency, he outfitted himself with a coiled reata, an iron picket pin, a two-foot hand drill and a hammer. The hammer, picket pin and drill he made fast to his belt, and the strap of his water canteen and the coil of rope hung across his shoulder. The sun was just showing itself above the mesa's rim as he set out on his day's adventures.

He proceeded at a rapid pace to the point where he had left off his investigations the preceding afternoon, and once more picked up the mystery trail. This led him through a network of deep fissures and finally into a canyon whose bed was as flat as a floor, and whose high, cavern-fretted walls were at least a quarter of a mile apart. The sun, a huge red ball, hung over the eastern end of the canyon, and, from rising to setting, would trail its beams the full length of the great slash the whole day long. The stretch of this wide break in the mesa was exactly east and west.

There was, too, a queer formation in the very heart of the canyon. Seward made note of it from a distance; then,

as he drew closer, he studied the freak formation with growing interest and curiosity.

From the north wall a great ridge jutted into the giant fissure and ended in a steep-sided promontory halfway across the chasm. This promontory was almost as high as the canyon walls themselves, and its crest hung above Seward's head like an island in the air. The heavy line scratched in the blue enamel of the Mandarin came to an abrupt halt at this massive shoulder of rock. Plainly enough, it was the end of the Gaffley trail. An ancient path that would have tried the nerves of a mountain goat angled steeply up the ridge side and lost itself in the twistings and turnings of the cliff's face.

"If Kardew and McHarg are following me now," Seward thought grimly, "they will have a real job ahead of them."

He began the climb, planting his feet carefully and helping himself upward by grasping the stunted bushes that had found a roothold in the rock crannies. The footing was precarious, for in no place was the path wider than a full-grown man would need for a tolerably safe passage; and there were treacherous spots where the foothold contracted to little more than the width of one of Seward's hobnailed shoes. At the more difficult places, Seward was obliged to face the cliff, push his feet into the crumbling rock crevices and find such hand-grips as he could. And all the time, every foot of the way, he was climbing.

"Philo Gaffley," Seward told himself, "must have been a man of considerable nerve if he made this climb very often."

The cliff's face was rough and irregular. Now and again the steep path almost doubled back on itself in negotiating some particularly bluff angles of the course. Occasionally, where the rising path broadened a little, Seward would pause to breathe himself, sitting down

and allowing his feet to dangle in space. At such times he had a wide view of the canyon bed to the west, but a very restricted view of the foot trail below and behind him, and above and beyond. Nevertheless, he was making headway. After an hour of hard work, he concluded that he must have covered at least two-thirds of the way to the mesa top. It was a long, hard trail.

At one of the twists of the path, however, there was a surprise awaiting him. As he came around a sharp corner of the dizzy wall, he found himself abruptly face to face with Lefty McHarg, kneeling on the stones, hugging the cliff at his side and fingering a revolver ominously.

"Go back!" ordered McHarg huskily. "We can't pass on this ribbon of trail, Seward."

"Put up that gun!" snapped Seward, planting himself as firmly as possible, and taking stock of this unexpectedly disagreeable turn of events. "This is no place for a fight, McHarg."

"Then back up!" the other snarled. "You can't go any farther, anyway. Around the turn behind me what little path there was is gone for a dozen feet. That's what stopped me. You'd need wings, and you haven't got 'em, any more'n I have."

"When did you come up here?" Seward asked curiously.

"I was on my way when you started," was the answer. "I saw you, below there, and I kept out of sight. I was aimin' to reach the top, and be ready for you when you came over the brink, but that gap in the path blocked me."

"What clew brought you here ahead of me?" demanded Seward.

"You pointed the way for us yesterday," said McHarg; "we trailed you into this canyon, or close to it, and there ain't a thing beyond here that looks at all promisin'. Somewhere, up above, is Old Gaffley's cache."

"The first man to reach it gets what-

ever it holds," replied Seward; "go on, McHarg, or else make way for me."

"I can't go on, I tell you—and you can't, either. Kardew'll find a way to get by, but it's goin' to take time."

"Where is Kardew?"

"Here!" answered a voice.

Seward turned his head to the right. Another form had rounded the narrow path, clinging with one hand to the cliff's face and, with the other hand, clutching a blued automatic.

Once more Seward had a glimpse of the sinister face of Landon Kardew, rat-eyed and set in determined, murderous lines. He was a clever crook, or he could never have beaten Seward to the end of the gadfly trail; and not only was he clever, but he would go any length in putting over his crafty schemes.

"You know well enough," Kardew went on, "that I am Gaffley's nephew, and his sole heir now that Folsom is out of the way. Just toss your hand into the discard, my buck, and leave the rest of this to me. If you won't," and he made a grim gesture into space with the automatic, "you'll get back to the bed of the canyon a blamed sight quicker than you came up."

"McHarg is on one side of you, and I'm on the other. You can be sudden, with that gat of yours, but not sudden enough to balk the pair of us. Follow me down—that's your cue; and when you get down, get out of these hills. It's a big country, Seward, but not big enough for you and the rest of us."

A moment of silence followed this threat; and then, from the upper reaches of the narrow footpath came a spitting snarl. A terrified yell escaped McHarg. He dropped his revolver, slumped down on the rocks, clutched wildly at space and rolled off the little foothold. A wild oath escaped Kardew, and he turned and began scrambling crazily along the downward path.

"Bobcat!" muttered Seward, as a

tawny form brushed past him and, still spitting and snarling, vanished in the direction taken by Kardew.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT DEBT.

MANY of the desert dwellers, to whom the very name of Seward of Sacatone is something to conjure with, have their own version of that incident on the cliff side. The bobcat materialized, according to these superstitious arabs, for no other purpose than the saving of Seward. There never was a corner tight enough to block the man of mystery.

Nevertheless, the bobcat's habitat is the most inaccessible places everywhere in the desert country. Early morning and late evening are the usual hours for their prowling, but this lynx had been disturbed and had been bent on a wild dash to effect an escape from supposedly human enemies. The animal had appeared and disappeared; a matter of split seconds had told the tale of its coming and going—a startling incident that had left Seward the master of that treacherous, dizzy trail.

Whatever happened to Kardew was of little concern to Seward; but it was the fate of McHarg, solely on his sister's account, that gave Seward a few troubled moments. But only for a brief space; for a terrified call, from over the brink of the path, informed Seward that McHarg had occasion for thanking his lucky stars that day.

"Help!" was the husky call that rolled upward from below. "Kardew! Gi'me a hand here—quick!"

Seward leaned over and peered downward. A stunted bush had stayed the fall of McHarg—that, and the grip of his frantic hands on rock protuberances of the cliff face. But he was in a dangerous plight, for his handholds were loosening, and the bush was yielding under his weight. Below him was a

sheer drop of a hundred feet or more to the foot of the wall.

Quickly Seward uncoiled the reata and dropped the looped end. McHarg laid hold of the life line not an instant too soon, for the brush roots were torn from the rocks just as he transferred his weight to the rope. A few minutes and he was in the path again, his eyes wide and wild and his brown face pallid. He was shaking as with an ague, and his breath came hard and fast.

"I was right on the edge of kingdom come," he muttered huskily.

"And it wasn't Kardew, but Seward of Sacatone who pulled you out of it," remarked Seward, carefully coiling the rope.

That fact seemed to dawn on McHarg for the first time. Evidently he was puzzled. A man from whom he deserved nothing in the way of good will had taken the trouble to save his life.

"What's your—your game?" he asked. "If you hadn't made that play with the rope, only Kardew would have been left to bother you."

"My game, as you call it, is to run out this Gaffley trail for Folsom's boy," answered Seward. "And I'm just saving your neck, McHarg, so you can have a chance to get the low-down on Kardew. It was for the same reason that I let you go with a warning, last night, when you sneaked into my camp with a knife. Kardew sent you over this goat-path ahead of him, didn't he?"

"He was playing safe by letting you do the dangerous work. Then, when I started the climb, he followed me up. With you above, and himself below, he calculated that he would have me between two fires. My thanks to the bobcat for helping me out of that. He's below, somewhere; and, if your nerves are steady enough, you'd better follow him right away."

The face of McHarg was a study. He had lost his revolver, and he was

at Seward's right, on the down side of the path.

"You're comin' down yourself?" he asked.

"I'm for the mesa on top of the big shoulder," said Seward.

"But, I tell you, you can't get over it!"

"That remains to be seen. Look here, McHarg! Has Kardew anything on you, that you're so willing to back him up in his criminal plays?"

"No! I'm helpin' him get what's his, on a fifty-fifty basis. We're out for the stuff Gaffley left, and we've as much right to it as anybody."

"Provided you get to it first," qualified Seward. "Don't overlook that point. I can see that Kardew has you hooked, but you'll find him out before you get through with this. Then, and only then I reckon, will you come to your senses. Go on—join him below: I've got work ahead of me and can't bother with you."

With that, Seward set his face to the up-trail, and was presently around a turn in the climb and out of McHarg's sight. He was also confronting the gap in that treacherous ascent to the mesa top. The narrow footpath had vanished altogether; a rock-slide might have caused it, or the stones might have crumbled and broken away from the cliff. Whatever the cause, the fact remained that eight or nine feet of blank wall lay between Seward and the upward path beyond. He studied the problem with keen, appraising eyes; and then he knelt and began work with hammer and drill.

He was reminded of the time when he had escaped from an old mine shaft by a method akin to the one he was now employing.

The cliff face was soft enough to make drill work easy; and when he had sunk the drill into the rock by half its length, he left it there for a foothold, stepped out on it and found a crevice for the picket pin. A swing from the

picket pin carried him to the ledge beyond, and he caught his footing—and was over the gap. He looked back at the pin and the drill.

"If Kardew and McHarg want to try it," he said grimly, "there's the way, all ready for them—but I'll be first on the mesa."

The path broadened somewhat, and the rest of the ascent was not so difficult. After half an hour of steady work, Seward pulled himself over the brink and stood on the mesa. Bunches of greasewood and clumps of cholla cactus dotted the little plateau, and through it ran a deeply worn footpath, coming apparently from the ridge.

Gaffley, of course, could never have made that path. The ridge-crest had ceased to be a bridge between the mesa and the canyon wall. The weathering of time, extending perhaps over a period of centuries, had eaten away the ridge until its crest had dropped far below the mesa.

The feet of ancient cliff-dwellers, Seward reasoned, must have worn that deep path in prehistoric times. It began at the ridge; but what was its objective? Where did it end? Seward's eyes ranged along the path and were caught and held by a sort of low tower laid up with stone blocks. The masonry was in a ruinous condition, although there were evidences of crude attempts to restore it. The roof of the tower, in particular, seemed to have been reconstructed. It was rounded; and the sun's rays, striking some object in the roof, gave off a blinding, steady flash.

Seward, his curiosity growing, made his way along the path. A doorless opening showed itself in one of the old masonry walls. It was not more than four feet in height, and Seward bent his tall form and pushed on into the old building.

The floor was heaped with drifted sand, but he could see that some of it had been removed. There was a row

of glass-covered openings in the roof; and on a block of stone against the farther wall Seward saw something that caused him to halt, stare, draw a hand across his eyes and stare again. There was gold on that stone block—a little heap of nuggets gleaming dully in the light from the overhead windows!

CHAPTER XI.

THUMBS DOWN.

McHARG'S nerves were badly shaken, and he made hard work of getting back down the path. When he won to the foot of the cliff, he found Kardew posted fifty feet from the ridge wall and studying the upper rocks through a pair of binoculars.

"His luck stays right with him, Lefty," commented Kardew sourly, lowering the glasses and peering at his partner. "We made a miss at the Conejuno Bridge, at his night camp, and now here. This was our easiest bet, too; we had him between us, you on the upside and I on the down, when along comes the wild cat and scrambles the whole layout. Yes, Seward's luck stays right with him!"

McHarg poked around in a clump of greasewood, found a tin canteen, and took a long drink.

"No use fightin' that guy," he grumbled, as he recapped the canteen. "Every time we try it, Landon, we come within an ace of gettin' our gruel. Between you and me, we'll jump him once too often."

Kardew's eyes narrowed. He studied McHarg for a moment, then reached to his hip for a pocket flask.

"About two fingers of that, Lefty, is what you need," said he. "I'll admit it was a trifle unsettling—a six-inch path on a fifty-per-cent grade, the two of us company front with Seward, and that wild cat dropping in on us out of nowhere. The brute went over my head before I could take a shot at it."

McHarg took a long draft from the flask and drew his sleeve across his lips. "And you never waited to see what became of me!" he grumbled.

"Don't be childish, Lefty," argued Kardew. "Wheneva I make a misplay, my first move is to shape around and start something else. That's why I hustled for the foot of the wall. I supposed you and Seward would be following me down—and that we'd take care of him here."

"Take care of him!" jeered McHarg. "Why, it's the other way around. I fell off the path, landed in a stunted tree, and he pulled me clear o' danger with a reata."

Kardew found something humorous in that, and he laughed. "He's a good deal of a fool, after all," he remarked. "He caught you in his camp last night, and turned you adrift; and now he saves your neck—and casts you adrift again. I'm obliged to him, Lefty. Now we've got him right in our hands."

"That's what you've been sayin' right along," grunted McHarg, "but hanged if I can see it. He's workin' his way to the mesa and—"

"He cleared that gap that blocked you," cut in Kardew; "I watched him from here, through the glasses. I might have made a target of him, but figured that he might still be useful to us. We'll let him find the cache; and then, old top, we'll drop him in his tracks and take the loot away from him. He has served us well, so far, Lefty. It was better than having the Mandarin ourselves, for he has run out the trail for us."

"What's your idee, Landon?" queried McHarg. "He's got to come down the same way he went up—and he'll be starved out, if we wait long enough. Is that it? Just sit tight here and play a waitin' game?"

"That might work. On the other hand, he's pretty resourceful, and what he might do with the loot, up there, is a question that's giving me a good deal

of uneasiness. No, I think we'll follow him up and have it out with him on the mesa."

McHarg surveyed the cliff side doubtfully. "There's still the gap," he demurred. "Seward's used to that sort of hill work, and we're not."

"We can get over the break in the path just as he got over it," asserted Kardew, with confidence. "Take a look through the glasses, Lefty."

McHarg adjusted the binoculars to his eyes and Kardew pointed out to him the drill and the picket pin.

"He stood on that lower peg and swung himself across by the upper one," explained Kardew. "Personally, I'll take no back seat for Seward. Whatever he has done, you and I can do."

It required a longer argument than that to convince McHarg. He shook his head dubiously as he listened.

"See here!" went on Kardew sharply. "I picked up the trail from the place Seward left us, yesterday afternoon. How did I manage that? Well, I had half the Blue Mandarin in my hands for a few days, and during that time I studied Old Gaffley's map—as much of it as was on that half of the image. I never forget a thing, once I have it well in mind. I remembered those criss-cross lines, and I drew on my memory for this final end of the trail. Give me credit for as much cleverness as this Seward has, Lefty. Rank on me, can't you?"

"Here's our chance to pick up enough treasure to put us in clover for the rest of our lives. A little nerve now and we'll make a big strike and a clean getaway. Then, if your sister wants to become Mrs. Landon Kardew"—he grinned insinuatingly—"why, Barkis is willin'. Pull yourself together for the big try, Lefty, and we'll make our fortunes within the next few hours."

"And—and Seward?" wavered McHarg.

"It's got to be thumbs down for him.

When we leave this mesa, he stays behind. There's no other way out of that."

McHarg was like a man under a hypnotic spell. Kardew played subtly on his cupidity, and McHarg forgot the debt he owed Seward.

"All right, Landon," he agreed, "we'll go through with it. But I don't know about Lottie. She hasn't helped us a whole lot with Seward."

"Never mind that; she was there, and willing to do what she could. Anyhow, we've got Seward right in our hands, and we're at the end of Gaffley's trail. By noon, we ought to be cutting for a new deal."

Kardew pushed the binoculars into their case and dropped the case into the clump of greasewood. Then he heartened himself with a swig from the flask, and again offered it to McHarg.

"I'll go first, Lefty," he said. "I saw Seward swing himself across the break in the path, and I'll show you how it's done. Will you follow me?"

"Sure!" answered McHarg, yielding to the "Dutch courage" he had imbibed from the flask. "But I got to have another gun, Landon."

Kardew found another weapon for him, then moved again toward the dizzy path that led upward to the mesa.

"Cheerio, old chap!" he sang out, as he started the climb.

The secret of his influence over McHarg would have been revealed to Seward could he have heard that talk at the base of the ridge. It was the "king-slave" problem in psychology over again—that, and the lure of treasure.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RAINBOW-CHASER'S WORKSHOP.

THE sun was no more than halfway up the eastern slope of the heavens. The heat of the day had not fairly begun, but the air inside that old cliff-dwelling was like a furnace. This fact

impressed itself on Seward as he stood and stared at the little heap of glistening nuggets. Crouching downward in the low opening that served as a door, he made the utmost of the cooler air that was wafted in to him from the mesa while he continued to study his surroundings.

Never, in all his desert wanderings, had he encountered anything like this before. Here, certainly, was a reconstructed cliff dwelling; but it was reconstructed only in part. The curved roof, with its circular panes, was absolutely new. Undoubtedly it was the work of Philo Gaffley.

A benchlike projection of the wall, some two feet in height, formed the base of the side walls. That projection was ancient. The row of red-clay ollas, or water-jars, that stood on the bench, were plainly modern examples of Indian pottery. He examined one of the jars and found it filled, not with water, but with a pitchlike substance whose nature was unknown to him.

In front of the stone block on which lay the pile of nuggets, the sand had been scooped away and a stone floor laid bare. The floor, at this point, was sunk into a sort of square basin. To reach the block with the gold, one would have to stand in that shallow aperture.

If the ancient cliff dwellers had been of the Aztec race—and the best scientific minds are not at agreement on that point—then the block might have been a sacrificial stone and used for human sacrifices. This view would account for the grim use to which the basin below had been put.

Seward had his own theories about the ancient cliff dwellers. He believed them to have been a people entirely apart from the Aztecs, who, centuries before the days of Cortez and Montezuma, had builded their dwellings high to escape flood waters. This structure on the mesa might have been a temple for the worship of a pagan deity; but, as Sew-

ard would have it, it could not have been the Temple of Montezuma. Philo Gaffley had found it; and, with his pottery ollas and the glass roof, he had transformed it into a workshop.

He had been experimenting in an attempt to find a method for conserving the solar heat; it was his hope, apparently, to store up the heat in such a way that he could release it later at will. The pitchlike substance in the olla, Seward gathered, was the element that was to catch and hold the sun's heat.

That Gaffley was a rainbow chaser there could be no doubt at all.

Seward, panting like a lizard from the intense heat of the room, passed from olla to olla. Not all of them were filled with pitch. There were three, each marked with a cross, which contained nuggets of gold, but they were only partly filled. Seward judged that there might be fifty pounds of the precious metal, all told.

"It's a start, anyway, for Folsom's boy!" he thought.

That Gaffley had been using the gold in his experiments seemed likely. The nature of those experiments now, however, had become as a sealed book: Gaffley was gone; and the method of his studies of the impossible had passed with him.

The east-and-west canyon lay directly under the sun's rays; and the roof windows allowed the rays to penetrate the single room of the workshop. It was very suitable for such work as Gaffley seemed to have had in hand.

Above one of the benches, concealed by the ollas and only discovered by Seward as he bent over the jars, was another leaf from an old calendar—a leaf for the month of March. And, over it was an inscription similar to the one on the board wall of Gaffley's shack:

The ides of March remember.

"Another trap!" thought Seward. "It must be Gaffley's entirely, for I doubt

if the old cliff dwellers were so subtle. Does it lead to another cache, and more gold from the pocket? Here are fifty pounds, and a few handfuls on that stone block. If there is more, it is up to me to find it for that boy of Folsom's."

He touched the number 15. He sensed the same yielding to pressure that had marked the calendar in the shack. Firmly he passed his fingers over the other numbers, braced himself as a stone block gave way under him; and, as before, slid into a pitch-black pocket. He dropped no more than his full length, came up standing, and watched the block close over his head and shut him in.

Then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, he saw well above his head, little shafts of daylight piercing the upper part of the concealed chamber. With the use of matches, he began making an investigation.

The chamber was not much larger than Gaffley's potato cellar. Walls and floor were of stone blocks; and the slabs overhead rested on cedar rafters—the boles of trees cut in some distant forest.

The underground room was bare, however; not so much as a nugget, or a receptacle in which gold dust might be stored, was to be seen.

"All of the gold," thought Seward, "is in the workshop in the jars."

He had still to investigate the slender shafts of daylight which pierced the gloom at one side of the chamber. A kind of rude stairway of narrow sandstone blocks led upward. He climbed the steps and, at six or seven feet, came to the top landing.

The masonry, on that side of the structure, had been built in a double wall. Seward was between the walls, and in quarters so narrow he could barely turn the width of his shoulders. The daylight was admitted through breaks in the stone blocks. By peering through the holes in one direction he

had a view of the mesa and of the path that led upward to it; by peering in the other direction, he had a view of the interior of the workshop. Instead of the intense heat to which he had been subjected in the outer room, however, the air between the walls was cool and bearable.

"I wonder," Seward hazarded, "if Gaffley posted himself here, in tolerable comfort, while he watched his experiments going forward, out there in the furnacelike heat?" He shook his hand, repeating the old formula. "One guess is as good as another," he decided.

Whether a similar mechanism to the one in the shack dropped and lifted the stone trap, Seward had not yet discovered. So far as his escape was concerned, investigation on that point was not necessary. He could push a few of the sandstone blocks out of the old wall and make a way to the mesa or into the workshop. He set about it—then halted abruptly. Voices reached his ears from outside.

Gazing through the chinks in the stones he saw Kardew and McHarg advancing upon the old building from the direction of the cliff. They came with automatics ready in their hands.

"Blaze away at first sight of him, Lefty," Kardew was saying. "It won't do to take a chance at this stage of the game."

Seward settled back to watch and await developments.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SLIDING BLOCKS.

Of all the wonder tales about Seward, told and retold among the untutored sons of the desert, the plain facts have yielded to fancy in none more completely than in the adventures chronicled locally under the name of the Gadfly Trail. In the most extravagant version, the Temple of Montezuma becomes a palace of brain-staggering mysteries, with an

Aztec priest keeping a sacred fire perpetually burning on the altar of the god Tlaloc.

Jerry Blake, sheriff at Tres Alamos, has riddled most of these wild yarns. His terse comment transforms the "palace" into four ruinous walls almost as near demolition as the famous old Red House at Casa Grande. He laughs at the story of the Aztec priest and the sacred fire, and is authority for the statement that Seward himself laughed at it. Even so, a residuum of mystery remains over which the hard-headed sheriff will shake his head whenever the Gadfly Trail is mentioned. "That Gaffley person was sure ingenious," forms the comment with which Blake dodges the issue.

Kardew and McHarg, having successfully negotiated the cliff path, approached the ancient cliff dwelling warily. They were looking for Seward, and were prepared to deal summarily with him as the only obstacle between themselves and their cherished ambitions. When close to the wall of the ancient structure the two schemers halted, less than a dozen feet from the sharp eyes and attentive ears of Seward of Sacatone.

"He's nowhere in the scrub," said Kardew, "so it must be that he's inside this rummy old ruin. Probably we'll find him planted on the Gaffley loot, intending to hold it by right of discovery. Get inside, Lefty," he added. "When you chase him out, I'll bag him as he runs."

Seward stifled a laugh at that. The remark was characteristic of the over-careful Kardew, who had a way of influencing McHarg to plunge into unknown hazards while he himself stood by as official observer.

"Suppose he meets me with a volley from that .45 of his?" fatlered McHarg.

"He won't—not you, Lefty. He's too careful of you, for some reason or other. Go on, man! Take a chance."

McHarg doubled his body and crawled through the low doorway. Seward turned to the opposite wall and saw him on his knees, alert and staring curiously.

"He ain't here, Landon!" called McHarg. "Phew! It's hotter'n Tophet in this place, and a guy can't hardly breathe."

Kardew forced himself through the hole in the wall. "What have we got here, anyhow?" he queried, curiously. "Looks like the cave of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves with all those jars on the shelves there."

McHarg scrambled excitedly to his feet and dropped a convulsive hand on the other's arm.

"Look!" he gasped huskily, pointing with the muzzle of his revolver. "Gold, Kardew!"

The attention of both men was riveted on the stone block in the farther end of the room. McHarg started forward, but Kardew pulled him back roughly.

"Hands off, Lefty!" he ordered; "I'll do the investigating and handle the gold. Anyhow, there's not enough in that little pile to finance a trip to the Eastern seaboard. There's more—there must be." He started toward the ollas, but paused and turned back. "What in blazes has become of Seward?" he puzzled.

"Maybe he took a tumble from the mesa edge," suggested McHarg, fascinated by the little heap of shining nuggets on the block, and unable to look anywhere else. He's not here, anyhow, and we've got the whole works to ourselves."

Kardew examined the water jars nearest him, and turned away from them with a baffled oath.

"Nothing in them for a white man to tamper with!" he exclaimed.

In his disappointment, he gave the nearest jar a push. It fell over on its rounded base, hit the olla next to it and that struck the third jar. The whole

row careened like a row of dominoes, and one of the jars fell from the shelf, broke in pieces and revealed its store of nuggets.

A whoop of exultation escaped Kardew. "Now we're getting at it!" he exclaimed. "Uncle Philo loaded his hoard into those stone jars. I've landed on the big secret, Lefty—the secret of the Blue Mandarin. If half the jars contain that much gold, I'm made for life."

"We're both made!" gloriéd McHarg.

"Keep back, Lefty!" commanded Kardew. "Don't you lay a finger on that stuff. I'll look it over—but first," and here a worried note crept into his voice, "we've got to make sure about Seward. It must be that he's hiding out in the greasewood. Listen!"

The sweltering heat of the room made breathing difficult. The two schemers fell motionless and silent, choked back the breath in their throats and used their ears. Not a sound came to them, and the mystery of Seward's whereabouts continued to grow and to prove most unsettling.

With Gaffley's secret hoard in their grasp, the one obstacle to their safe possession of it was magnified into a sinister menace.

"I'm going out to comb the brush and see what I can find," announced Kardew. "You remain on guard here, Lefty. Sharp's the word, remember. We're up against a tough proposition."

"What's the use of botherin' about Seward?" protested McHarg. "Let's collect this stuff and make a get-away with it. If he's around, and able to interfere, he'll show himself quick enough."

"Say, listen!" panted Kardew. "Seward has peculiar ways of doing things. You ought to understand that, by now. This may be a plant of some kind. Wait! If anything happens while I'm outside, fire that gat of yours."

Kardew hastily made his way through

the opening, and began beating about in the scrub. The moment he was alone, McHarg, his greedy eyes on the stone block, strode forward, planted his feet in the shallow basin at the base of the block, grabbed a handful of the nuggets and was pushing them into his pocket when—the unexpected happened.

Just what took place puzzled Seward for a moment. McHarg's body went rigid, a wild bewilderment contorted his face and he threw up his arms. Evidently, it was impossible for him to move, strain as he would. Then Seward discovered the cause of his evil plight.

A slab of stone had jumped out from the side of the basin, slid across it and had made McHarg's shins fast in two holes notched in its edge. He was trapped and held helpless in a pair of stone stocks!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

McHARG struggled fiercely to free himself. He wrenched at his feet, while great beads of sweat rolled down his reddening face and his breath came in stertorous gasps. He caught at the stone block and endeavored, with that as a leverage, to tear himself away from the clutching stones. But he was held in a vise. Giving up, at last, he dropped to the floor at the basin's edge, and his whole body went limp.

"Kardew!" he bellowed frantically.

He had dropped his revolver, but he reached for it and emptied the cylinder in a despairing signal for help.

"Kardew! Kardew!" he roared huskily.

Kardew came hurriedly. He brought with him a canvas sack which he had picked up somewhere on the mesa.

"What's wrong here, Lefty?" he demanded.

"I'm caught!" said McHarg, groaning. "Some devilish trap was sprung

on me, Kardew. I can't get my feet out of this hole in the floor!"

Kardew moved gingerly across the uneven floor to his partner's side. Kneeling there, he passed his hands over the imprisoning block.

"Here's a go!" he muttered. "How did you happen to get in such a fix?"

"I just stepped into the hole," puffed McHarg, "and it closed on me."

Kardew glanced at the diminished heap of nuggets on the block; then, running a hand into McHarg's pocket he drew out a handful of the dull yellow pebbles.

"I get you," he observed, sardonically. "You were trying to hold out on me, McHarg. I told you to keep away from the gold, but the moment I was outside you started a little clean-up of your own."

Kardew dropped the handful of nuggets into the bag; then he scooped up the rest of the gold on the block and calmly pouched it.

"You've earned all that's coming to you, Lefty," he said. "See this bag? It's marked on the side with the initials 'P. G.' This sack belonged to Philo Gaffley, my late and highly esteemed uncle. It was hanging in a bush, on the mesa, Lefty. My attempt to locate Seward was fruitless; but this bag was something of a find, all the same."

He proceeded to the broken olla and began scraping up the scattered gold.

"Wait with that, can't you?" wailed Lefty. "Get me out of this jam, Landon, and I'll help you."

"The time has come, I think, when I can dispense with your help. I've availed myself of your services in this Blue Mandarin business right up to this point, Lefty, and now we are at the parting of the ways. You are a good deal of a fool, and always have been."

"What do you mean?" came the despairing cry from McHarg.

"I mean that your suggestion regarding Seward was a good one. Where

he is, I don't know. That fact, though, is not going to bother me. I'll sack all the loot I can find here, and then make a get-away with it. If Seward, somehow, should try to interfere with me, we'll shoot it out—and the better man will leave the mesa with Old Gaffley's hoard. As for you, Lefty," and Kardew laughed mercilessly, "you can stay right here, with your feet in that trap, until the heat gets you, or you starve to death."

Kardew was calmly filling the sack with nuggets. As he scraped up the last of them from the broken olla, the man in the trap caught up his revolver, aimed it pointblank at Kardew, and pulled the trigger. There was a futile *snap* as the trigger fell on an empty cartridge. With a despairing curse, McHarg flung the weapon from him.

"That won't do, Lefty," said Kardew, emptying another of the ollas into the sack. "You forgot that you had exhausted your ammunition. Better make the most of it, old top. You've got a certain amount of nerve, as I happen to know. Draw on it—you're going to need it."

The red face of McHarg was dripping with sweat. A ghastly pallor was slowly creeping into the red, and driving it away. Horror was rising in his eyes.

"And you're—you're supposed to be my partner!" he gulped. "I get into this devil's mess by trying to help you!"

He laid his tongue to a terrific denunciation of the man in front of him, only to be jeered in his helplessness.

"Seward!" yelled McHarg. "If you're anywhere around, if you can hear me, get me out o' this!"

"After helping me notch the Conejuno Bridge and roll a boulder into Seward's night camp," came the cool, unruffled voice of Kardew, "you're a good one to call on Seward for help. He may have been caught in another of Old Gaffley's little traps and be as helpless, this minute, as you are."

Kardew drew a sleeve across his damp forehead as he paused before emptying another of the jars.

"And there's Lottie," he went on. "The only reason I wanted her out here was so that she'd be handy after I made my strike. I think a lot of that sister of yours, Lefty. She hasn't exactly reciprocated my affection, but I'll gamble she will before we're out of this desert. This gold will take her eye; and when I tell her how you missed your footing and dropped to the foot of a cliff with a broken neck, she'll listen to my words of comfort."

McHarg fell back, almost in a state of collapse, on the sand at the edge of the stone trap.

"You've got everything in your own hands," he mumbled. "I've been a fool, all right, and I'm payin' for it. But you can leave Lottie alone. Be satisfied, can't you, with wreckin' just one of the family?"

McHarg turned partly on his side so that he could continue to watch Kardew. There was an imploring look in his eyes now.

Kardew was not looking at him. A lizard was crawling from the rock crevices toward a spot of light on the sandy floor. The lizard, reaching the whitish spot, curled up on an instant and turned into a charred fragment. McHarg, no less than Kardew, was an astonished witness of the sudden blotting out of that bit of reptile life.

"By thunder!" gulped Kardew, lifting his eyes to the arch of glass overhead. "What do you know, Lefty? Those windows, up there, are lenses! Each of them focuses the sun's rays to a burning point; and, as the sun moves toward the zenith and on into the west, each lens in succession catches the rays and the burning point travels across the floor. In an hour or less it should reach you—"

A groan of horror was wrenched from the lips of the helpless McHarg.

"I believe I'll stay for the big demonstration," continued Kardew. "I'm coming to the conclusion that my Uncle Philo was a good deal of a genius, after all."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CREEPING DEATH.

ANOTHER secret of Philo Gaffley's research work was revealed. In seeking some method of conserving solar heat, he had begun by focusing the sun's rays to a burning point. His row of lenses in the reconstructed roof of the ancient building caught the rays one by one as the sun moved through the upper arch of the heavens. The burning point traveled slowly across the floor of the chamber, and its power had been amply demonstrated by the fate of the lizard.

It was impossible for McHarg, shackled as he was, to throw himself out of the path of that creeping death. The stones of the chamber radiated a constantly growing heat as the sun neared the zenith; but this was a minor affliction for McHarg, whose terror-stricken eyes were fixed on the searing point, and marking its stealthy approach toward his own position.

He made a final, convulsive struggle to free himself. It was a fruitless effort. McHarg gave up, apparently. He ceased to struggle and lay quietly on the floor, waiting.

"I was warned against you, Kardew," he said, shakily, "but I couldn't think it possible you'd turn on a pal like this."

"Life is a game, Lefty." Kardew, dragging his bag of gold, had retreated to the door opening in the wall where the air from the mesa slightly tempered the terrific heat of the room. "A good player will make full use of his pawns to help him win. You were a pawn—Taranch Terrill was a pawn."

"You never intended to give me a square deal in this Blue Mandarin business?"

Kardew shook his head. "You wanted too much, for one thing; for another, you know too much about me. So, figuratively speaking, I am letting you walk the plank. Dead men tell no tales, Lefty."

"And it was just for this that you persuaded me into leaving an honest job." There was bitterness in McHarg's voice, the bitterness of regret for one of life's greatest mistakes. "'Come with me, Lefty,' you said, 'and you'll wear diamonds.' I can see now that if it wasn't for the play on this mesa, I'd probably come to the point of wearing stripes."

"Possibly," agreed Kardew; "I haven't any clairvoyant powers, so can't be sure of what the future was holding in store for you. I have always been keen for No. 1, though."

"The worst of it was," continued McHarg even more bitterly, "I got my sister to take a hand in this!"

"If it will make your mind easy, be satisfied with my promise that I will look out for your sister."

McHarg ground his teeth. "You!" he gasped. "You're as heartless as this creeping spot of light here. But I have one hope left, and that is that you'll meet Seward of Sacatone before you get clear of this mesa."

The burning point was no more than four feet from McHarg. A few minutes more and the onward swing of the sun would bring the focused rays within three feet, within two, within one—and then—McHarg closed his eyes for a space. If ever a man was having a lesson, one was being brought home to him then.

"Lottie distrusted you from the start," McHarg went on. "If I had had sense enough to listen to her, or even to Seward—"

"Lottie was eager enough to throw in with us on this Gaffley proposition," cut in Kardew. "She'll make a fine assistant in some of the jobs I have in

mind. With my brains, and her tact, we ought to go far."

There was a hard twist in that for the soul of Jerry McHarg. He writhed inwardly and clenched his teeth.

"My only hope for Lottie is—Seward!" he mumbled. "He's a friend of hers."

"But how long would Seward be a friend of hers if he knew the facts? She was double crossing him in an attempt to help us. I'll admit she didn't accomplish much, but her will was there."

Kardew, breathing hard, drew back through the door.

"This air is too stifling for me, Lefty," he continued, "and I'll have to hunt for a scrap of shade out on the mesa. I'll stick around, though, and look in here from time to time. It can't be much longer now."

McHarg could see him rising to his feet outside and moving away toward the old path with the heavy bag. Then a sound from one of the walls caused him to twist his head around. A block of stone fell inward and struck with a sodden thump in the sand; then another, and another tumbled out of the old wall, and the head and shoulders of Seward were framed in the opening.

"Are you ready now, McHarg, to believe what I told you about Kardew?" Seward inquired. "Has this thing gone far enough?"

A wild hope rose in the eyes of McHarg. He lifted himself to an elbow and reached out a shaking hand in the direction of the broken wall.

"Seward!" he whispered huskily. "You were there—all the time? You saw—you heard—everything?"

Seward pushed out two or three more blocks and crawled through the opening into the room. He watched the patch of light on the sandy floor.

"Yes, luckily for you," he answered. "You are done with Kardew?" he demanded.

How much do you think I have to put up with before I'm done with a snake like that?"

"Where have you and Kardew pitched your camp?"

"On the side hill, back of the notch."

"You have a horse there, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"When you leave here, will you take your sister and clear out of these deserts for good and all?"

"Give me that chance, that's all!"

Seward drew the heavy revolver from his shoulder holster. Lifting it above his head, he fired at the two lenses nearest the end of the arched roof. The glass was shattered into fragments, and the burning point was wiped suddenly from the sandy floor.

"You could have done the same thing, McHarg," said he. "if you had not wasted your ammunition. You——"

"Look out!" yelled McHarg; "Kardew!"

A third shot was fired—by Kardew and from the door opening; but Seward, swift as thought, had hurled himself downward. The bit of lead passed over him. Before Kardew could fire again, the automatic was knocked from his hand by a sliver of sandstone unerringly thrown by Seward. A curse leaped from Kardew's lips, stifled only when a pair of sinewy hands closed around his throat.

CHAPTER XVI.

MASTER AND MAN.

SEWARD had a score to even with Landon Kardew, and in their hand-to-hand fight he was determined to balance accounts. They wrestled back and forth through the greasewood, now down and rolling in a murderous scramble, and now erect and using their fists.

Kardew, in the course of his checkered career, had been the sparring partner of a noted middleweight pugilist; and he had learned jujutsu in Nagasaki, and had become accomplished as

a foot-fighting savateur among the apaches of Paris. But none of his tricks of offense or defense appeared to serve him. At every point Seward met him with a counter for his various tricks of fist and footwork.

So superior were the desert man's strength and skill that the blows of his opponent failed to touch him; but Kardew, on the contrary, was taking the heaviest kind of punishment. After fifteen minutes' of rough-and-tumble fighting, Seward seemed as fresh and fit as when the fight had started, while Kardew was groggy and could scarcely see through his battered and swollen eyes.

The course of the set-to carried the pair to the mesa's edge. There came a sudden lull in the battling as Kardew felt his antagonist's hands clamped upon him and holding him powerless and suspended over the dizzy chasm at the cliff's brink.

"What right has a coyote like you to live?" demanded Seward. "Why shouldn't I drop you to the foot of the mesa wall?"

Kardew caught a glimpse of the swirling depths over which he was poised.

"You wouldn't," he mumbled breathlessly. "It isn't in you to do a thing like that."

"You don't know me, Kardew," Seward answered grimly. "After the way you turned down McHarg, hardly anything is more than you deserve." He pulled him from the chasm's edge and dropped him where he stood. "The Comejuno Slash is almost as deep," he went on, "and I'd have piled up in the bottom of it if you'd had your way. You're a cold, game gent, Mr. Kardew, and I'm not above giving you a dose of your own medicine. Get that straight."

Kardew sat up in the sand and gravel, groped in his disordered clothes for a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"Where do you get all that bag of tricks, anyway?" he wanted to know.

"You surprised me at Laguna Beach, but even then I hadn't guessed the half of it."

Kardew was a matter-of-fact person; living by his wits, as he did, he had to be.

"Let's talk about something of more importance," said Seward. "I've used my hands on you, so far, but I'll fall back on a six-gun if you make any false move from now on."

The crook's battered face twisted into a wry grin. "I've had enough for one day; from this time forward I shall not exactly sing your praises, Seward, but I'll have a healthy respect for you. To show my good will, I'm willing to compromise with you on the matter of Old Gaffley's gold. It's mine, by right, since I am the only surviving heir; for all that, though, I'll make it a fifty-fifty deal and call it a day."

"I'll compromise with you," returned Seward, "by taking it all for Folsom's boy."

"And what do I get out of it?"

"A clear path from here to your next stopping place. That ought to mean something to you."

"Not a thing. Seward. If you take that loot, I shall owe you something; and, whatever I owe I do my little best to pay."

Seward studied the man with a good deal of interest. He was frank in expressing himself and evidently meant what he said—even at a time when Seward could work his own will with him.

"All right," commented Seward cheerfully. "We know where you stand. I happen to have the whip-hand, this afternoon. Get up!"

Kardew slowly rose to his feet. Seward searched him for more automatics, but without result.

"I lost a six-pound hammer somewhere in the brush," said he, "and we'll look for it on our way back to the cliff house. Keep ahead of me."

Kardew started off, limping a little as he walked. He dusted his clothes as

he moved onward, and called back to Seward over his shoulder: "Where were you, if it's a fair question? I mean, while Lefty was getting his in that rummy old ruin?"

"I was listening, watching, and waiting," Seward answered. "And, all the while, I could have picked you off with a bullet if it had suited me. I'm a student of human nature, Kardew, and you were exemplifying a phase of heartless, human deviltry that I found pretty absorbing. You sounded depths that put you in a class by yourself."

"I am in a class by myself. There's something of Gaffley in me, Seward—the old schemer was full of surprises. Roofing a ruin with a row of burning glasses, and then constructing a man-trap below, was one of his jokes. There's your hammer."

Seward picked up the sledge and slipped the handle through his belt.

"Where's the bag of gold?" he inquired.

"If I told you," said Kardew flipantly, "you'd know as much as I do."

Seward reached for his shoulder, jerked him backward, and looked into his puffed eyes.

"Get it!" he ordered, pushing him away.

"You've got a picture of me—" began Kardew. Then he saw a six-gun in Seward's fist, and something in his eyes that caused him to falter.

"I told you a moment ago, Kardew, what you might expect of me," said Seward. "Your crack of doom is waiting for you if you don't obey orders and immediately."

"Oh, well," returned Kardew, tossing his hands, "if you put it that way."

He laid a course into the greasewood, lifted a flat stone and uncovered the old canvas sack.

"Bring it along," said Seward.

"Inasmuch as you hold all the trumps, this hand, I'll have to dance to your music. But wait."

"I'll wait. Now for the Temple of Montezuma and McHarg."

They came to the place in a few moments and Kardew dropped the bag at the door. Seward handed him the hammer.

"Get in there and liberate McHarg," was Seward's next command. "Break the block that holds him. And don't forget," he warned, "that I am watching you."

Here was a proceeding that, plainly enough, was not to Kardew's liking. Nevertheless, he laid hold of the hammer and crawled through the low doorway.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BETTER MAN.

McHARG, trapped and powerless in the old ruin, had been having his evil moments. From long experience he knew the subtlety and resourcefulness of Kardew; but he had only desert gossip, and a very meager personal knowledge, to help him in appraising the abilities of Seward.

He heard from without the sounds of combat, and was filled with a feverish anxiety. What if Kardew were to best this mystery man of the desert? In such an event, McHarg's fate was certain—he would be abandoned, and left to meet a slow death from thirst and starvation.

Life had become a more desirable thing to him, now that he had broken with Kardew. He saw a different future for himself, and it looked good to him. Unworthy though he was, there was something inspiring in the tolerant treatment he had received at the hands of Seward of Sacatone. The preceding night's experience in Seward's camp had given him something to think about; and the way he had been hauled back into the narrow path on the cliff side, had put him everlastingly in Seward's debt.

The third time this man of the des-

ert had come to his aid had brought about a sudden and complete character change in McHarg. He saw Kardew as he was, and himself as he had been—the miserable tool of a master-schemer who had considered him merely as a pawn.

Yes, he was eager to live, to retrieve himself, to be all that his devoted sister wanted him to be. Was it too late? He strained his ears, and followed in his imagination the fight in the greasewood, and over by the mesa's rim.

When he saw Kardew creeping through the doorway with the hammer, his face red and battered, McHarg's heart sank; and then, at a glimpse of Seward closely following Kardew, his hopes rose.

"Kardew is going to break that stone block. McHarg," Seward announced, sitting on the floor, his back to the wall and his revolver balanced on his lifted knees. "If the hammer slips, or anything else goes wrong, Kardew knows what he is to expect. Don't be alarmed. He's too careful of himself to take any chances."

The former pals faced each other with glaring eyes. The hostility in their looks was so deep and unfeigned that it caused Seward the utmost satisfaction. He had been correct in his surmises regarding Kardew's character; he had played the game properly; and never again would there be teamwork between Kardew and McHarg. This young fellow who had taken the wrong road, had faced squarely about and better things were to be expected of him.

This, to Seward, was the high point in his Blue Mandarin experiences. If Old Gaffley's folly and mysticism had led to nothing more than this, Seward would have considered himself well repaid for the efforts he had put forth.

"Get to work, Kardew!" called Seward.

Kardew bowed over the shallow basin and pounded at the stone. It was the

first time, perhaps, he had ever exerted himself on behalf of McHarg. As the stone crumbled under the hammer, McHarg withdrew himself from the basin, lifted himself trembling and then, with a wild yell, fell upon Kardew.

They struggled furiously and, for a time, Seward would not interfere. The greater the gulf between these former pals, the more certain and secure would be the future of Jerry McHarg.

Kardew breathed his threats. "I'm not done with you, McHarg! I'll have it out with you for this day's work!"

"We'll have it out now!" fumed McHarg.

Seward walked over to them and pried them apart.

"That will do!" he commanded. "Can you get back over that cliff trail all right, Jerry?"

"I'm a better man than ever I was—at anything," panted McHarg.

"Fine! Now, go down to the notch, get your horse and your plunder, take your sister and move on to Tres Alamos. Kardew and I will be up here for some little time, and when we finally get back to the notch I want you and your sister to be well on your way to town."

"I want a word with you in private," said McHarg.

Kardew threw an ugly look at his former pal, now his mortal enemy. "Spill everything you know," he said savagely; "it won't get you anywhere with me, McHarg, nor with this desert buttinsky either."

"Who wants to get anywhere with you?" snapped McHarg.

"Never mind him, Jerry," put in Seward. "He has come a cropper and is full of sore spots. You stay here, Kardew," he added, "while I transact a little private business with McHarg."

On his way to the old footpath with McHarg, Seward picked up the automatic that had been knocked out of Kardew's hand a short time before. He took possession of the weapon, walked

on, and came finally with McHarg to the top of the narrow trail down the cliff side.

"Kardew," said McHarg, "is all you told me he was, Seward. Getting his number would have cost me my life, if it hadn't been for you. I'm done with him, and I'm going back to the Coast with my sister Lottie. From now on, as long as I'm on top of turf, I'll play square."

"That's the least you can do, Jerry," approved Seward. "Not only for yourself, but for your sister, as well."

"You probably overheard something that passed between Kardew and me about Lottie. She was double crossing you, but it was because Kardew and I were compelling her to help us. She is—"

"No, she wasn't, Jerry," broke in Seward. "You thought she was, but she wasn't. Your sister is the best friend you ever had, and she'll tell you all about it on your way to town."

McHarg fell silent a space, then he went on: "I'm glad to get that news, Seward. Before we go back to the coast, though, I have a lot to tell you regarding Kardew—it concerns you, and will prove mighty interesting and, maybe, helpful. He's a fox, and you've got to watch out for him."

"Don't stop in town for that, Jerry. Be advised by me and keep on going. Get away from these deserts yourself, and get your sister away from here as soon as you can. If Kardew thinks he can put anything over on me, I want him to try. He's a bad egg; and I want him to get in deep enough so I can land him in the big stone yamen at Yuma. I don't need any of your information, Jerry."

McHarg put out his hand. "I owe you a lot more'n I can ever repay, Seward," he said, "but I'll do what I can to square up—I wouldn't feel right if I didn't. Good-by."

Seward shook the extended hand, and

McHarg lowered himself over the brink and began his downward climb

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAN OR DEVIL?

SEWARD was a man of unusual methods. In this matter of the Blue Mandarin, with all its folly and claptrap of mysteries, he exemplified that side of his character more strongly than in any of his other desert adventures. It is for that reason, perhaps, that Old Gaffley, the blue image, the gadfly map, Folsom's boy, Kardew and McHarg have woven themselves into a yarn that has become a prime favorite among the desert dwellers.

Whenever two wanderers of the wastelands come together, break bread in company and smoke a good-night pipe over a dying brush fire, Seward of Sacatone will somehow come into their talk. The haunting silences form a fitting background for the story of Gaffley's man trap and burning glasses, but the maneuvers of Seward with McHarg and Kardew have a deeper interest for those of the desert breed.

Seward found something worth while in McHarg, bore patiently with his enmity and finally saved him. On the other hand, Seward found nothing of worth in Kardew, coldly calculating and murderous, and proceeded in his own way to eliminate him and cut short his career as an enemy of law and order.

After the departure of McHarg, Seward spent two hours on the mesa with Kardew, subtly piling up Kardew's score against him. Kardew had a sort of pride in his criminal accomplishments and his ability to keep clear of the law. Seward trampled on this conceit and held it up to ridicule. In every way in his power Seward deepened the hate Kardew had for him.

"You're all thumb-hand-side in your crooked work, Kardew," Seward taunted; "you aren't even, so far as I

can see, in the rogues' primer class. You used me for a cat's-paw in running out the gadfly trail; then, when I had obligingly shown you the way and led you to Gaffley's treasure, you lacked the sagacity to best me and take your profit. Your first error was in that low-down play with McHarg, for at a time when you needed friends you deliberately made an enemy. You erred again in making an open attack on me. If you get at me at all, it will be by a subtler method.

"Before I am through with you, this afternoon, you will hate Seward of Sacatone as you have not done since we first encountered each other in Los Angeles. At this moment you are scheming in your mind to haunt these deserts until you get me. You have attempted my life three times since I left Tres Alamos and started for Gaffley's old shack. You will keep on with those attempts; and, instead of getting me, I shall get you, and for something the law can use in sending you up for life. You're a menace to society, Kardew, and you have got to be put behind the bars."

He walked over to the man and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"That," he finished, "is my business. This is my country, and I don't allow any wolves of your stamp to be at large in it."

The battered and swollen features of Kardew twisted with rage.

"I'll show you up, that's what I'll do!" he threatened, between his teeth. "I may be in the primer class, but you'll have reason to know that I'm at the head of it."

"I'm inviting that very thing," said Seward, "and I shall give you plenty of rope."

He forced Kardew to scrape up fragments of treasure he had left behind in his haste to sack the gold from the broken olla. When it was all gathered to the last nugget, he tied the heavy sack to Kardew's back. As he made the final knot in the reata, he laughed.

"This is the first time you ever played the rôle of a pack horse," Seward said, "but I'm on top, and whenever I crack the whip you'll go through your stunts."

Kardew mumbled under his breath as Seward droved him toward the edge of the mesa and the treacherous down trail.

"Think of McHarg," suggested Seward. "Think of the creeping death to which you consigned him under the burning glasses. You were almost hilarious over that, but I doubt if you see any joke in it now. With that load on your back, Kardew, you'll have to show some skill in getting over that gap in the footpath."

Seward was balancing accounts for McHarg. Kardew's face went a pasty white as, over the brink and on the downward climb, his overweighted body threatened again and again to topple him from the narrow trail. Whenever he looked behind, there was Seward with a six-gun, grimly forcing him on.

"If you want to kill me," he shouted wildly, when they had come to the picket pin in the wall, "why don't you shoot and be done with it? No man alive, with such a load, could swing across to that other iron and the ledge beyond."

"You're going to," averred Seward. "Remember, there'll be no chance for you to get even with Seward of Sacatone if you fail to negotiate that break in the path. Isn't that idea worth something to you? Make a jump for that pin, Kardew!"

Kardew jumped, barely caught the pin with one hand, and swayed upon it like a pendulum.

"Swing!" shouted Seward. "It's your only hope! What you need is momentum to carry you to the drill and the ledge!"

Kardew made a desperate attempt, caught a footing on the drill and fell groaning into the path.

"Get up!" ordered Seward, poised behind him with one foot on the drill and

the other planted in a crevice of the rock.

Kardew laid hold of the foot in the rock crevice and wrenched it clear. His purpose, evidently, was to pile both himself and Seward on the rocks at the cliff's foot. But the move failed, and Kardew had a real glimpse of mountaineer prowess when Seward won a foothold in the path with Kardew still in advance of him.

"Go on!" ordered Seward calmly. "It's easier from here on."

"Are you man or devil?" asked Kardew, gulping in amazement.

"You've shown a cloven hoof to-day," answered Seward, "so you ought to be on familiar terms with devils. But go on—hurry up!"

They won to the foot of the cliff, and Kardew would have rested from his labors—but Seward would not have it that way. They traversed the fissures and came finally into the notch by the narrow passage. In his own camp, Seward removed the reata and freed Kardew of his burden.

"I'll be here for the night," announced Seward. "You have no McHarg to send here with a knife—but come yourself if you have the nerve. Now get away to your own place and figure out some scheme of revenge."

Without a word, Kardew staggered into the chaparral.

"And keep right on thinking of McHarg!" was Seward's parting shot.

Half an hour later, there came to Seward's ears the beat of rapid hoofs receding into the flat lands beyond the uplifts. And Seward smiled grimly as he built his fire.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRES ALAMOS.

SEWARD was four days on his return to Tres Alamos. His nights in the open had refreshed his body and cleansed his soul. His happiest reflec-

tions had to do with Jerry McHarg and his sister.

"That," he told himself, "is the biggest thing that has come out of this Blue Mandarin affair to date. There'll be happiness for Jerry and the girl, over on the coast."

He had brushed Kardew out of his mind as something evil. A foundation had been laid for a task which Seward considered unpleasant, but necessary. If Kardew, in the future, should cause himself to be remembered—well, that was a bridge for Seward to cross when he came to it.

In Tres Alamos, Seward halted at the general store. There he weighed up the sack of gold in pounds avoirdupois. "Fifty-two and a fraction," he mused. "And that," he thought, "is the fabulous treasure for which Kardew would have sacrificed a pal! Well, it is something for Folsom's boy, at any rate."

He took the bag to Blake, the sheriff.

"Lock it up in a cell, old-timer," he requested of his friend. "Keep it safe for the little heir of poor Dick Folsom."

"What is it, Walt?" Blake wanted to know.

"Gold, Jerry."

"Yours?"

"I just told you. I'm merely trustee; it belongs to Folsom's boy. I'm sending a wire to O'Malley, the boy's uncle, tonight."

Seward placed Sandy in comfort in a town corral; then, over the wires, he sent this message to O'Malley:

Fifty-two pounds of gold nuggets for Folsom's boy. Will you come for it?

He faded from sight after sending the message. Next morning, McHarg and his sister called at the sheriff's office and asked anxiously if Blake had heard anything of Seward of Sacatone.

"We left him in the hills," said McHarg, "and we're afraid something may have gone wrong with him."

"Nothing ever goes wrong with Walt

Seward," answered Blake, "or not so wrong that he can't manage it. Friends of his?" he inquired curiously.

"Yes, and we've been here for three days, waiting for him. I reckon you don't understand, sheriff. Seward had an enemy, out there in the hills with him. We're worried; and we've got to see Seward—we've got to talk with him."

"Sorry, but I allow it ain't possible. You see, he blew in here last evening and—"

"He was here, in Tres Alamos?" asked the girl excitedly.

"He was; but he isn't here now. He lit out for his Port o' Dreams for what he calls a period 'of rest and refreshment.'"

"Where is this Port o' Dreams?" insisted the girl. "We must go there—we *must* find him and talk with him."

"That's the place where he holes up when he wants to get away by himself," said Blake. "'He's in conference,' as them big captains of industry say when they don't want to be disturbed. Sorry, ma'am, but you see how it is. I know the way to Port o' Dreams, but I wouldn't no more ruffle the waters of that peaceful hangout than I'd play tag with a rattler. Something's happened, and Seward wants to flock by himself."

The girl was not to be denied. She was very sincere, and her disappointment was keen.

"Mr. Sheriff, Seward of Sacatone has done wonderful things for me and my brother. We owe him a debt, and are determined to repay it."

"There's a heap of folks around here that owe Seward a debt. But they've never been able to settle the bill. You'll have to be content with things as they are, I reckon."

He was adamant. He would not tell them the way to Port o' Dreams; to the best of his ability, he would keep Seward from being disturbed in his lonely retreat. When the pair left his

office, grieved and disappointed, he looked after them and shook his head regretfully.

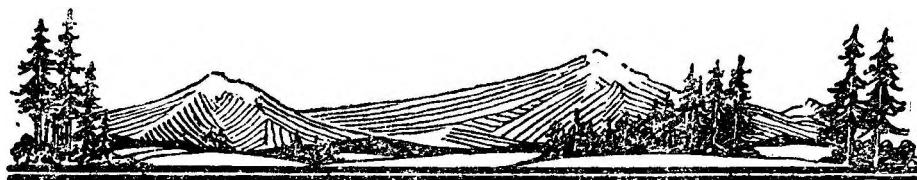
"I had to do it, that's all," he muttered.

An hour later he received a telegram —it was for Seward, in his care, sent by long distance phone from the nearest

railroad point. By a request of Seward's he opened and read the message:

Coming first train; and the boy is with me.
O'MALLEY.

"And there's somebody else who's going to be disappointed in not seeing Walt," thought Blake, of Tres Alamos.



HARMONICA

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

HE ain't so much as a rider,
An' he ain't there with a gun,
While with a rope he's displayin'
How th' thing shouldn't be done,
But, when we're takin' things easy,
An' th' day's toilin' is through,
Say, then Harmonica's showin'
Just what he's able to do!

Though th' big boss sees we're loafin',
Though we are sprawled on th' ground.
Where we are hearin' th' cattle
Munchin' an' movin' around,
Leanin' back lanky an' lazy
With a strange light in his eyes,
He drawls above his mouth organ,
"Now we'll be travelin', guys!"

Then, as he settles to playin',
Though we are young or grown gray,
Though we are wild lads or steady,
Gosh, we are carried away,
Till we are hearin' old voices,
That we deserted to roam,
For in Harmonica's music
Memories bear us back home.

An Unusual Baseball Story.

A Million-Dollar Arm~

By
George F. Peabody~



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING WRONG.

THE gnarled fist of old Jeff Thomas crashed down on the desk top. "I ask you, Mike, can you beat it? Here we started the season without a look-in, according to the experts, and then pull right up to the top! We lick the Lions twice to tie 'em, an' now in the game that would put us over, we got to depend on that addle-pated wild man! Of all the miserable luck!"

Mike Harrigan, the coach of the Bears, looked at the manager sadly. "Well," he said, "maybe 'The Rube' will come through this time. He's got to, for we haven't got another pitcher to put in. That foul ball that caught Jones on the elbow yesterday spoiled our last hope. Well, Rube Grant has pitched some good games this year——"

"Sure he has!" said old Jeff angrily. "That's what riles me! He's got more stuff than any southpaw in the league. but he lets 'em get his goat, and then blows up sky high! He's got a million-dollar arm and a ten-cent head. There's nothin' else to do except start Rube. Have Durkin workin' out in the bull pen, to relieve Rube when the fool hits the ceilin'. If The Rube can last six in-

nings, Durkin may be able to finish out, though he needs a rest after pitchin' yesterday."

"Well, I'll be gettin' out on the field," said Mike. "I'll send The Rube in to talk to you."

Mike hustled out to the field and yelled for Rube, who was slowly lobbing a ball back and forth with "Stub" Hay, second-string catcher. The big pitcher came up in his slow, loose-jointed manner to the door of the clubhouse passageway.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"Jeff wants to see you in the office," replied Mike, and turned to lead the way.

As they entered, the old manager whirled in his chair and glared at Rube. "I suppose you've got it figured, Rube, that you'll have to work to-day?" Jeff tried to keep the worry out of his voice.

"Yes, chief. I reckoned it would fall to me after Jones got hurt. I went to bed at eight bells last night so's to be ready."

"Good boy!" said Mike, as he reached over and patted the big left-hander on the shoulder. "That's the old spirit."

Jeff was peering closely into Rube's face. "What's the matter?" he asked bluntly. "You're white as a ghost! Have those fellows got your goat already?"

A trace of exasperation entered the manager's voice. "Does just thinkin' about it take the tuck out of you like that?"

The Rube's eyes wavered and he swallowed hard. "No," he muttered, "I'm not afraid of 'em. I—I can beat 'em, and I know it. Got to." There was a strange tenseness about the big fellow that puzzled the manager and the coach.

Jeff stared at him a moment, and then probed deeper. "Something's wrong. Your face looks like a piece of boiled tripe. If you are scared stiff, dang it, man, say so! You know as well as I do that this game means more to me than just the flag. It means saving my holdings in this club. That's what the man who goes into that box to-day carries on his shoulders, and that's why I want to know if you're nervous."

"I'm not worried," replied the pitcher, doggedly. "I've trimmed my sails for this game—I can beat 'em."

"All right," snapped the manager. "Get out there now and warm up. Take it slow. You warm him up, Mike—use a plate and call strikes on him. I want his control perfect when the bell rings."

The Lion's had the field for batting practice when Mike and Rube emerged from the clubhouse. Over on the visiting players' bench, Matt Bowers was watching the Bears like a hawk. He wanted to know who was going to work that all-important game.

Bowers was a shrewd manager, and he had it pretty well figured that Jeff would have to send Grant to the hill, but he knew very well that old Jeff was tricky and might pull a surprise, especially since The Rube's tendency to go up in the air was well known.

For the next twenty minutes Bowers got no satisfaction from his scrutiny. Over in front of the grand stand no less than six Bear pitchers were all diligently warming up, and no matter

how closely he watched, Bowers could get no inkling as to which would be the chosen one.

The stands had filled early. Every seat was taken, and the vast throng had overflowed onto the field, being roped off along the foul lines. It was a noisy crowd, too, keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement.

For ten years the Bear team had dubbed around the bottom, but now, unexpectedly, they were right on the edge of immortal glory. So valiant and spectacular had been their fight that these forty thousand fans had taken that team to their hearts and made them mighty heroes all.

Twice the team had risen to the heights and licked the smashing Lion team to tie them for first place, and now every man who could get in the park was there to see the final triumph.

The crowd bellowed and roared, cheered and shouted till the ball park was a veritable bedlam. And as the six pitchers down below worked methodically, the tension grew.

CHAPTER II.

A WAY TO HELP.

A BELL rang. The batting practice session was over and the Bears hustled out to take their infield practice. Tremendous cheering accompanied that. The crowd cheered every stop and throw. The Bear infield was working smoothly and surely—a perfect machine.

Then somebody noticed that five men had left the line of pitchers, and only one, the long, lean Rube Grant, was left before the grand stand.

Mike Harrigan, he of the gnarled fingers and seamed, brown face, was squatting behind a rubber plate, catching and calling strikes and balls as the tall hurler folded himself up, then unlimbered like a coiled spring and whipped the ball into the big mitt.

"It's Grant! It's The Rube! The

Rube's going to pitch!" The great crowd took up the shout and boomed it across the field.

"Hurrah for Rube! You can do it, Rube! Shut 'em out, big boy! We're for you!" The crowd was doing its best to tell the high-strung fellow they had faith in him. And they did. They knew his fast ball was all but invisible, and that his curve was the most treacherous in the league.

They knew his failing, too, but their belief in destiny was strong, just now, and they felt sure of that pennant. If Rube Grant could win it, that would be recompense for the times he had blown up under pressure. So they screamed, shouted, and cheered for the big fellow.

None noticed the grim, rigid set of his jaw nor the pallor of his face. And none knew the agony in his heart. That is, none save one. That one was Carl Taylor, sports writer for the *News*. High up in the press box, Taylor looked over the rail and saw the big pitcher warming up. For a minute or two he watched.

The Rube was about ready, and was shooting a few through with all his speed. The ball seemed to shrink and shrivel up as it left his hand, and then sunk into Mike's big mitt with a crash easily heard beyond the walls.

"He's right," said Perkins, of the *Times*.

"Looks good," agreed Taylor, "but good heavens, Perkins, he won't last! He can't! Is it possible that Jeff doesn't know?"

"Doesn't know what?" asked Perkins.

"What! Say, what kind of a newspaper are you on, anyway?" gibed Taylor. "Didn't you know that The Rube's kid got hit by an automobile this morning, and is in the hospital with a possible skull fracture?"

"No!" Perkins gasped. "What in blazes is he doing out here?"

"That's The Rube. I was over at the hospital and saw him. Saw the kid, too.

Fine little chap, about seven years old. Grant was all broken up, but when they told him there was nothing he could do and no immediate danger, he asked everybody to keep still about it, and keep it quiet so as not to disturb the team.

"The Rube's smart. He knows that even a little thing like that might upset the boys and lose this game. But he must have told Jeff. Good night! It's suicide to start him! It's hard enough to keep him down to earth when there's nothing wrong."

"He won't last an inning. I'm going down and see Jeff. This team has put up too fine a scrap to be handicapped like this in the last game." Without further words, away he went on a run.

Taylor had scarcely gotten out of the press box before the final bell rang. At that moment the tense crowd was observing Mike Harrigan, talking earnestly with The Rube. None could hear the low-spoken words.

"You never had more stuff, big boy. You've got this game in your pocket right now. Go in there now and show 'em the real stuff. And remember this —pay no attention to those coaches. Don't hear 'em. Just pitch ball. If you do that, they'll be lucky to get a foul—that curve ball o' yours is a beauty today."

Mike's tone was confident enough, but there were misgivings in his heart. He didn't like that set whiteness in the big pitcher's face, nor the strained, worried expression about his eyes. But he did like the air of courage with which the lanky southpaw walked out to the box.

A moment later came the umpire's crisp command "Play ball!" and the great game was on.

Two men had popped out to the infield before Taylor arrived at the wire gate close to the home dugout, and managed to attract Mike Harrigan's attention.

"What's wrong?" asked the coach, as he stepped close.

"Heavens, man, don't you know you're playing with dynamite starting Rube to-day?" Taylor's voice was crisp.

Mike looked coolly at the news writer. "We appreciate your interest, Carl," he said, "but a ball team works best with one manager. Jeff is it, and what he says goes. He knows what he's doin'. The Rube is hot. I warmed him up myself, and he never was better. He'll win."

"You're crazy!" snapped Taylor. "He can't win! He won't last three innings, I tell you! No man could, with what The Rube's got on his mind. You've got a kid, Mike. What shape would you be in if he was in the hospital this minute with a possible skull fracture—maybe dying? Think you could keep your mind—"

"What?" roared the coach. "What the blazes are you tellin' me?" He stopped and stared open-mouthed at the newspaper man. And in that brief instant, understanding of The Rube's set white face came to him.

"Well, I'll—" He groaned and turned to look in sympathy at the big left-hander standing in the center of the diamond. Even as he looked, The Rube slowly wound up, uncoiled that long, snaky arm and the white ball fairly leaped from his hand to the catcher's mitt.

"Str-r-ike Three-e!" bawled the umpire. "You're out!"

A vast rolling cheer surged and swelled across the field. Not a man had reached first base. Only eight more times to do it. But Mike Harrigan, watching closely, saw that no pleased smile crossed the white face of the pitcher now walking slowly to the bench.

"He got away with that round," muttered the coach.

"Yes, but in a couple of innings they'll begin to work on him—then what?" asked the news writer.

"This is awful! What the blazes can

we do? We haven't another man fit to work." The coach stood dumbly looking at the distant center-field bleachers, swarming now with excited men and boys.

Then his eye caught a certain sign perched high above those uncovered seats. He started as though some one had jabbed him with a pin.

"The kid's in the hospital, you say?" he asked.

"Yes. St. John's."

"Is he conscious?"

"Wasn't this morning, but he may be by now."

Mike Harrigan stood a moment as a light of inspiration spread over his tanned face.

"I've got it, Taylor! By the eternal, I've got it! If I can put it over, maybe we can save the old game yet! Come with me!" he roared, opened the gate, dragged the startled writer through it, and started on a run for the clubhouse.

CHAPTER III.

RAW NERVE.

MIKE talked as he ran, and by the time the two reached the manager's office, Taylor had the scheme, and dived for the telephone. A minute more, and Mike was back in the dugout, his face tense, his eyes charged with fire, but from his lips came only the usual chatter as he wedged in beside The Rube, and fell to work rubbing that sinewy left arm.

"Got 'em on your wagon, Rube. Breakin' their backs for the hook, an' they can't see the old smoke ball. Lordy, man, that third strike was a beaut! I swear that ball didn't look bigger'n a pea!"

"Shook me loose from my spikes!" chimed in the catcher.

Through it all Rube Grant sat like a piece of stone. Not a word came from him, but Mike noted with concern that the muscles of the arm were flexed, tight and rigid. That worried him.

Those muscles ought to be soft now, relaxed and resting. It also told the shrewd old Mike something of what was going on in the pitcher's mind.

In their turn at the bat the Bears got a man to second, but he died there. It was clear that the Lion pitcher was on edge, too, and that very likely one or two runs would win for whoever got them.

The Lion's manager quickly sized up the situation. "We've got to get rid of Grant, boys," he said. "The big fellow's good to-day, and when he's right he's a tough nut to crack. The way to crack him is to get his goat. Go after him this inning," he ordered the two coaches.

They grinned and nodded.

Starting the second inning, the coaches did get busy. They pranced and danced, shouted to each other things calculated to rile the high-strung hurler. They were masters at it, and under their remarks ran a stream of thinly veiled insults.

For once Rube Grant appeared not to hear them. The first two batters went out on easy pop flies. The third one was a hard man to pitch to. He was short and crowded the plate. Rube took his time and sent over two perfect, called strikes. The batter never moved.

The next offering was the old speed ball, usually Grant's surest pitch. But this one sang through just a little inside. The batter ducked and apparently dodged, but the shooting ball hit him and he dropped like an ox.

Out from the dugout came the Lions like a swarm of bees. Down the base line came the two coaches. Umpire and catcher knelt over the prostrate batter. Rube Grant remained on the hill.

After much rubbing, talking, and other ado, the batter went to first base.

"Fine stuff!" muttered the first-base coach, as he trotted alongside the hit batsman. "That'll upset him, and now we'll get his goat!"

They did, too, covertly accusing The Rube of deliberately hitting the man. Seemingly, it did have some effect on the pitcher. He walked the next man on four straight balls.

Mike Harrigan was plainly worried. He sent three men down to the bull pen to warm up, and all the while he kept looking up on the roof of the grand stand.

Old Jeff sat silently in the dugout, chewing savagely on a cigar.

Grant steadied a little, and the next hitter went out on a long fly to center. The danger was over for that inning.

"We'll get him in the next round," said the coaches, grinning, as they returned to the bench.

"Yep!" said Bowers. "He's on his way right now. Just hold 'em, boys. Tail end up this time."

However, unexpected things do happen in a ball game. "Chuck" Barnes, whose batting average was just .218, was first up. The Lion pitcher was a little bit careless, and steamed over a fast one chest high. Chuck swung with all his might, and turned that fast high one into one still faster and higher.

The ball came down in the center-field bleachers, and as Chuck trotted around the bases, the great crowd roared, screamed, shouted and stamped until the whole grand stand shook. People, blocks away outside the park, knew that something had happened. The next three men went down in order.

"Got a one-run edge, Rube," said Jeff, as the team left the bench. "Just hold that, big boy. One man at a time, you know. Take it easy. You've got 'em in your pocket."

That inning, however, the sharp-tongued coaches got down to real business.

Rube's face went whiter and whiter. He pitched slowly, deliberately, and somehow the great crowd sensed the magnificent battle he was putting up to hold himself down. But in spite of

himself he filled the bases three times that inning without giving up a hit, and three times a spectacular play at the plate saved him.

The Bears were playing like supermen, fighting like demons, and the crowd had gone stark mad.

On the bench, old Jeff clawed at his chin, and knew that disaster was leering at him. He beckoned to Mike to come in from the bull pen.

"How are they?" he barked the question at the coach.

"Rotten!" said Mike. "None of 'em got a thing. If we send one of 'em in, it'll be a massacre!"

"Looks to me as though it would be soon, anyway," growled the manager. And then he noticed the look on Harrigan's face. "Say," he snapped, "what're you grinning at? Think this game's won? Or have you gone loco?"

"This game's going to be won, boss!" replied Mike. "We're going to pull something next inning! Leave The Rube in!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN'S HEART.

AS the Bears ran to their positions for the next inning, the crowd in the bleachers noticed a man perched high on the roof of the grand stand, and wondered what he was doing there. Some laughed and joked about him, thinking an enterprising fellow had found a good place from which to view the game without cost.

Rube Grant had expected to be yanked, and he wondered a little when Jeff said nothing about his wildness. The big fellow didn't know whether to be glad or sorry. He did know that his heart was pounding, and that he wanted to get away from that field.

He didn't see the crowd—hardly saw the players. And for once in his life those sharp-tongued coaches meant not a thing. They thought they were rattling him, but the big hurler knew differently.

Pictures were floating before his mind—the picture of a limp little form being picked up from the sidewalk, a wild ride to the hospital, a white bed with a pitiful little figure under the sheet—a figure that neither moved nor opened its eyes.

The big hurler shook his head violently to dissolve the pictures, and then drew a red sleeve across his eyes to rub away the mists.

The fellow in the drab suit behind the plate was bawling: "Play ball!"

Rube dug his toe into the rubber, wiped the moisture from his palm, and squinted up at his catcher. Stewart had signaled for a fast one. All right, a fast one it should be. Slowly he wound up, and as he did so the two coaches began their tirade.

"Ball one!" boomed the umpire. The pitch had been a foot outside the plate.

"That's all right, big boy!" yelled Stewart, but Rube saw him turn and flash a look at the bench, and then one down toward the bull pen. The big hurler gritted his teeth, and smacked the ball again and again into his glove. The coaches scoffed and jeered.

The next was a curve ball that narrowly missed the batter.

"Going up!" sang one coach.

"Going up!" replied the other.

Another picture of the white bed floated before the tortured man's eyes. A strange stillness settled down over the field. Somehow, even the crowd sensed that a dramatic moment had arrived.

Stewart trotted out and handed the ball to Rube.

"Come down to earth, you big bum!" the catcher growled. "Get this one over."

Back went the catcher, and back went the white-faced pitcher to the hill.

The hush deepened, broken only by a murmur here and there as some one growled because Jeff left the plainly rattled hurler in.

Some few saw Mike Harrigan down in the bull pen making some incomprehensible movements with his arms, and a few, perhaps, saw the man on the roof rise and answer. Then an astonishing thing happened.

A loud, grating, scraping noise came from the vicinity of the roof and those watching saw that the box the man had been sitting on had sprouted some kind of a huge horn. A moment more the loud sputtering faded out into words—words that filtered out across the field even to the far-away bleachers.

They floated down to a dazed man standing in the center of the diamond, a man who stood there with his mouth open and his arms hanging uselessly by his sides. Thousands heard those words, but only two knew what they meant.

The voice that spoke them was thin, and sounded as though its owner was weak and far away. Yet there was something very much alive in them.

"Hello, dad!" came the voice. "I've come to. I'm not hurt much. My head isn't busted, after all. The doctor says I can probly go home to-night. I'm getting the game by radio. I'm glad you're pitchin', dad—I know you'll beat 'em. They can't see your fast one. This is the fifth innin', dad—let's have some strike-outs!"

The vast crowd stared in amazement as the big pitcher leaped into the air, tossed up his glove and his cap, and was finally shaken into realization of what was going on by Catcher Stewart.

"Get back behind that plate, you sawed-off, hammered-down son of a gun! My boy's all right—did you hear? That was him! Him talkin' to me! Get back there! Pitch? Hell's bells, man, they won't see it the rest of this game!"

"That's the stuff, dad—I got that," came the voice from the roof.

The crowd got it, too, and roared out its approval. Somebody had a microphone hidden some place.

CHAPTER V.

WHITE SHADOWS.

A FEW minutes later, ushers were busy in the crowd explaining what had happened. Within five minutes that whole vast throng knew the story, and hushed their noise at intervals to listen to the injured boy coach his dad.

How that wild left-hander worked. The color came back to his face and the cunning to his arm. He used curve balls that twisted and darted like white shadows, fast balls that hummed across the plate like hot bullets.

The Lions fought, and fought hard, but they were licked. Out there on the hill a man was pitching, not for the pennant, or gold, or fame, but for the praise that came singing out of the air to him from a small, broken lad in a far-off hospital.

The Bears won the game, one to nothing, and the Lions got just one hit. In the last four innings the Rube struck out eight men.

As the last one whiffed, and the mighty throng rose to its feet to cheer and rush for its hero, Rube Grant sprinted for the clubhouse, and on through to the street, to a taxi.

"How'd you do it, Mike?" asked the smiling Jeff, as he bit the end off a fresh cigar.

"Easy," said Mike, grinning. "I just spilled the story to Taylor. He knows all those birds. He sat there at your phone and talked faster than any man I ever heard. The broadcastin' station agreed, and they sent a man out with a receiver.

"The ground keeper put him on the roof, and they were broadcastin' the game anyway, so the trick was really easy. I knew if The Rube could just hear his kid once, nobody on earth could beat him to-day."

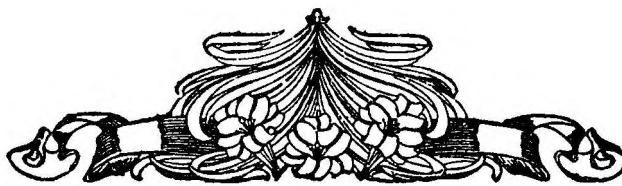
"Wonder what people listenin' in thought?" mused Jeff.

"Don't know. But we won. An' say, if we don't do something pretty handsome for that little shaver, we're lower than a den o' skunks!"

"We'll do something for him—two ways. He's goin' to get a present from the Bears Baseball Club, and then—how

do you suppose that figure will strike that wild southpaw for next season?" Jeff tossed over a sheet of paper with a number scrawled on it. It was a large and interesting number.

"*Phew!*" Mike whistled. "Well, he's worth it!"



MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS

Of all the birds of the open sea, the little Stormy Petrels are the most fascinating. Flitting like brown butterflies in the wake of a vessel, they furnish an endless source of interest to the ocean traveler. It is incredible with what ease these tiny birds skim the rolling swells of the deep. They dip into the trough of a wave, and then seem to walk its snowy crest to slip into the next watery hollow to a floating bit of food.

The most peculiar feature of these deep-sea voyageurs is their constant habit of walking on the surface of the water. When any food is thrown from a boat at sea, the Stormy Petrels gather in flocks. Facing to windward, they spread their slim wings, and with their broad-webbed feet patting the water, enjoy their meal in perfect comfort. It is this trait, this appearance of actually walking the water like the Apostle Peter, that caused them to be known by his name.

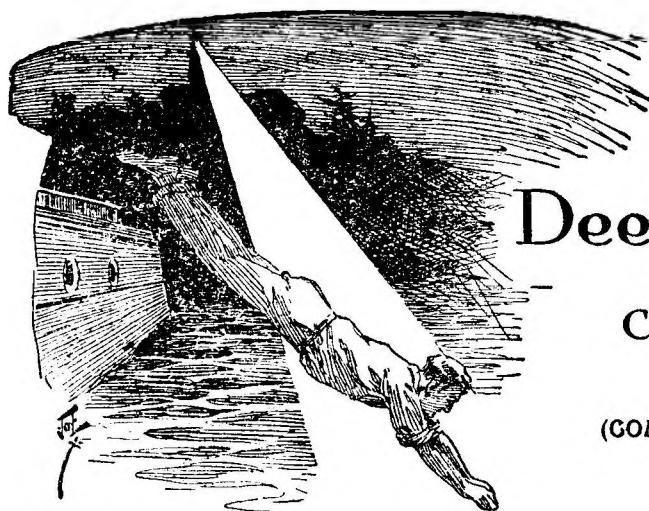
The petrels' bodies, which are only slightly larger than those of the English sparrows, are so light, and their pinions so wide, that they can float for hours without any motion of their wings, drifting like swallows up and down in the air currents.

Many legends have grown up around these tiny strong-winged birds. To many sailors the petrels are birds of ill omen—like the albatrosses, forerunners of storms. This belief is a natural result of the petrels' fondness for rough weather, which brings all sorts of food to the surface.

One delightful, but very foolish legend about the petrel is that it never goes ashore, and that consequently when nesting season comes it lays its one egg on any chance bit of flotsam, and then carries the egg under its wing until the young bird is hatched.

One always marvels to see how these birds can follow a ship all day long, and at night disappear into the dark mists of the ocean; yet when the morning sun "strands upon the eastern rims," they are once more with the vessel, now drifting like idle thistledown with the wind, again swinging like swift-winged swallows above the surge of the sea.

Such are Mother Carey's Chickens—wandering chicks in the far-flung fields of the deep.



Deep Water ~

By
C.S. Montanye~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

MAN office boy with freckles opened the door of Cyrus K. Blauvelt's private office. Delford Murray walked into the charmed atmosphere of the place and looked around curiously. It was the second time since his association with the Blauvelt Tool and Machine Works that he had been summoned into the presence of the company's founder and guiding spirit.

"Sit down, Murray." Blauvelt, old, seamy and withered, nodded affably.

As Murray took a designated chair, he felt the eyes of the man drifting over to him casually. They were shrewd, alert eyes and he met their gaze frankly.

"I understand," Blauvelt said, "you're off on your vacation to-night. Pleasant thing to confront a couple of weeks of freedom. Where are you bound?"

"I'm going," Murray explained, "to Cape Reef."

"Fortunate young man." Blauvelt smiled, then his expression became thoughtful. "When you return," he went on, "you'll probably find several changes in the plant. I'm sailing for Europe in three weeks. Before I go I'll decide definitely upon the new assistant manager for the Fitchburg Division plant."

He turned the conversation into other

channels, discussing the new improvements in the machinery and buildings. The summer sun streamed hotly into the office window. Beyond lay the acres of the plant, glass-roofed buildings, a railroad siding. Over them drifted the black smoke of industry that crept from a hundred tall brick chimneys.

"Deep water," the older man half murmured to himself as Murray stood to take his leave, "a boat and a good wind."

Murray shut the office door and went back to the antechamber. Arthur Lang, Blauvelt's private secretary, sat hunched at his desk engaged with a visitor. Murray glanced absently in the private secretary's direction. For some reason he had never had any liking for Lang. It was strange, for Lang had seemed to put himself out to be agreeable and friendly.

Murray caught a glimpse of the visitor, nodded when Arthur Lang raised a thin, shrewd face, and went on to his own quarters. At that moment his mind was far beyond the plant—beyond such matters of Blauvelt's selection of the new assistant manager who would go down to Fitchburg, though for months the thought of that job had been the thing nearest and dearest to Murray's heart.

Murray heard only the summer call of the outdoor world—the sing of a salt-tangled breeze, the snap of a sail being wind-filled and the purl of riven waters.

Cape Reef stretched a sandy arm out into the blue-green of the restless sea. Except for a red-roofed inn halfway out to its point, a handful of fishing shacks and some boathouses, desolation reigned supreme. Yet the place was not without color and excitement. For a time certain gentlemen engaged in smuggling had used the spot as a landing place to which to bring their wares ashore under cover of the night.

Then the Coast Patrol had stepped in, and for the better part of six months no heavily-laden schooner had dropped its mud hook beyond the Cape.

Delford Murray had been vacationing there for three summers. He had bought a shack among the dunes, he had his boat and he felt nothing more was necessary. His knockabout cat sailed like a witch. He liked to put on a bathing suit and stand off from the Cape, balancing himself on the outrigger, until the land dropped away.

He got a thrill from a baited hook lowered into green depths where big fish prowled. Each season he made sure he was entirely fit by swimming from the Cape across to the Inlet, a distance of three miles.

The knockabout had been put up for the winter at Ames Pringle's boathouse. It took Murray an entire day to calk her seams, get her overboard and hang her single sail. He scraped and polished and painted. He fitted in the rudder and dropped its centerboard. While he worked, Pringle, in filthy white duck, lounged on the dock and watched him.

"I see 'Jap' Coogan's back," Pringle volunteered.

"And who is he?" asked Murray, smiling.

"Don't mean to say you ain't heard of Jap?" Pringle's brows went up.

"'Dude' Coogan, as they sometimes call him. He was the bird that had the runnin' fight with the revenoo bunch last year. I thought he was gone for good, but there he was yesterday sailin' in from the Inlet in that black boat of his, large as life."

Murray listened inattentively while the boathouse keeper went on to recount the nefarious deeds of the person he mentioned. According to Pringle, Jap Coogan was a combined Captain Kidd, Jesse James, and "Relentless Rudolph" all in one.

"And that ain't all, Delford. I know somethin', I do." Pringle laid a wary finger against his bulbous nose. "You needn't tell no one, but you can put two and two together. There was some talk that the *Maria Riesbeck* is comin' up from the Bahamas. If Jap's around here and the *Maria's* due you can figger it out yourself."

Murray finished sandpapering the outboard, and looked up into Pringle's guileless blue eyes.

"You think that crowd intend to run their stuff in again from out there?" He nodded in the direction of the sea.

Pringle cast a cautious glance over his shoulder. "Think it? I know it! Looks like we'll be havin' some fireworks again!"

Murray ran up the sail and put off. The knockabout had lost none of its keen speed. He shaped a course around the Reef, exulting in the salty wind in his face, the golden path of the sunshine and the slap of the sea swell.

By slow degrees his mind roamed back to what he had left—acres of buildings, tall brick chimneys belching black smoke. He recalled his conversation with Cyrus Blauvelt. Whom would Blauvelt decide to send down to Fitchburg as the assistant division manager?

So far as Murray knew there were Arthur Lang and himself to choose between. Lang, through his secretaryship,

knew the detailed routine. But Lang hadn't a forceful, driving personality so necessary for Fitchburg.

Out in the scintillating expanse of churning waters, Murray felt a tingle of hope. He had labored long and hard in the service of the Blauvelt Tool and Machine Works. Would Blauvelt think he was capable enough for the new position?

Somewhere out where the Light was a vague finger pointing to the bending arch of the sky. Murray came about and started in for the shore. It was then that he first heard the drum fire of an exhaust somewhere behind him. He looked back and sighted a low, long motor boat. It was painted a rusty black and was a converted sailboat. She rode the turning tide with graceful ease and her speed was surprising.

With effortless manner the black boat slid into the wake of the knockabout and drew alongside. There were three men in the stern, men who wore sweatshirts and caps. Forward, at the wheel, Murray's gaze dwelt momentarily upon the boat's skipper. As he looked he felt recognition, a surprising thing, for the man turned and presented him with a flat, dead-white face.

It was a countenance strongly marked with Mongolian features, a short nose, high cheek bones, a thick-lipped mouth, and slanting eyes. It was a face that was both cruel and rapacious, and it favored Murray with a long stare as the black boat swept past.

Murray frowned thoughtfully. His conversation with Amos Pringle came back to him. A black motor boat! The man at the wheel was unquestionably the somewhat notorious Jap Coogan. But where, Murray asked himself, had he ever seen Coogan before? His was not a face easily forgotten. Somewhere —some time—

He dismissed the perplexing question with a shrug and rounded the Cape. Off the Pringle boathouse he made the

knockabout fast to its mooring, swam ashore, and went back to his shack.

II.

HE had finished with his kerosene stove and was about to draw a pail of water when he heard voices outside. There followed a knocking on the screen door. Murray dried his hands and opened it.

Two men stepped into the lamplight. One was short and sandy-haired, with a blue tattooing visible at the open neck of his sweater. Murray looked at him last. His eyes moved swiftly to the second man and took in the flat, strangely white face, the penetrating eyes that looked between their slanting lids.

Jap Coogan had come to call upon him!

The black eyes of Coogan darted about the shack before they met Murray's gaze of inquiry.

"Passed you this afternoon out beyond the Cape, didn't I?" he asked in a voice that differed oddly from his appearance. "Pretty nice little boat you've got," he went on, without waiting for Murray to answer the first question. "She was stepping along at a pretty good clip. I'm looking for a cat-rigged knockabout and I'm willing to pay a fair price for one. Did you ever think of selling?"

"No, my boat's not for sale," Murray answered.

"Not even for a good profit?" The man's gaze continued to roam about.

Somehow, Murray conceived the idea Coogan's visit was for some purpose other than the one stated. He could not explain it exactly. It was more a stir of intuition.

"I don't think I care to sell at any price. I only come down here a couple of weeks each summer. I need the boat then, and I'm not looking for any profit."

Jap Coogan inclined his head. For the first time a faint smile flashed across

his white face. "Well, no harm done. I just thought I'd ask. Sorry to bother you. All right, Joe."

The second visitor shuffled after him to the door. Coogan bade Murray good night and disappeared into the starlit darkness.

An interval passed, and then Murray heard the throaty drone of a powerful marine engine out in the silver-shadowed gloom.

The black motor boat again! What was Jap Coogan's real motive in coming to the shack? Murray rested a shoulder against the door and pondered. If Coogan had really wanted to buy the knockabout he wouldn't have given up so easily. Yet, what other possible purpose could have inspired his coming?

Amos Pringle, the next day, went about the boathouse with an air of mystery.

It was so transparent that Murray, dropping in for his usual can of kerosene, spoke of it as soon they were alone. "Who have you murdered and hidden under the dock now, Amos?"

"I know somethin', I do. I might tell you, Delford, if you wouldn't go 'round shoutin' it out."

"Compared with myself," Murray assured him modestly, "you're an ordinary clam looking like the loud speaker on a radio. You can confide in me freely, and your secret, like the Scotchman's budget, will be kept forever."

Pringle, obviously only too eager to share his information, maneuvered Murray into a corner.

"The *Maria Riesbeck* is due to-night! Joe Wallis had liquor in him and was talkin'. Andy Troxler heard him and Andy told me. Yes, sir. The old *Maria's* due to pay a call here any time after moon-up!"

"You mean the pirate ship from the Bahamas?"

"That's what!" Pringle rubbed his fat hands. "And just make out there won't be somethin' doin'!"

Whatever else he knew, the boathouse keeper would talk no more, and Murray took himself back to the shack with his kerosene. He spent the afternoon repairing the roof, and for a time his thoughts went back to the plant.

Who would Cyrus Blauvelt decide was worthy of filling the job at Fitchburg? Would the shrewd and silent Arthur Lang be chosen? While Murray hammered down shingles, he wondered why he had never liked Lang. No one about the plant was friendly with Blauvelt's secretary. Probably it was Lang's manner. He gave the impression of slyness, of still water running in deep and remote recesses.

The afternoon waned in a scarlet sunset, and then came the twilight hour. In the early evening the sea mists began to settle, thickening into an opaque fog that swirled across the dunes. Murray sat in the doorway of the shack and smoked a pipe until after ten. When he blew out the lamp the world was a clammy gray thing that writhed and twisted in fog streamers.

Out over the water sirens hooted distantly. Closer, the infrequent sound of passing boats held an eerie note. Murray was about to kick off his canvas shoes and climb into his bunk when, through the echoing silence, he heard muffled footsteps and then a voice pitched in a cautious whisper.

With his shoes in hand he straightened up and listened. Neither sound was repeated. He shrugged his shoulders. Probably some one who had lost his way in the fog.

Then he turned toward the oblong of the doorway, straining his ears. For half a minute he waited. Once more it came to him—footfalls, the turn of the knob.

Murray dropped the shoe silently and edged away toward the door. Housebreakers, in the metropolitan sense of the word, were unknown at the Reef. There was nothing worth stealing.

Whispering broke out on the other side of the doorway.

Murray turned the key in the lock, and with abrupt suddenness threw wide the door. "Who's there, and what's wanted?" he rapped out.

There was no answer. Nothing moved. The fog wet his face. To the left of him he heard a movement, and wheeled around. Simultaneously something leaped out of the murk and a fist crashed against Murray's jaw with paralyzing effect.

He reeled back into the waiting embrace of some one shielded by the foggy darkness. Stunned momentarily, he was unable to make resistance when his arms were caught and prisoned.

III.

THIS way!" a cautious voice ordered. "Quick, now!"

Murray was propelled roughly forward. Half stumbling, supported and pushed by the one who gripped him from behind, he reached the water's edge, where a rowboat was waiting. Oars creaked in their rusty locks. In another space the colder air currents out on the water swam past him.

In silence broken only by the feathery dip of the oars the rowboat prowled on.

"Hard to the left." The command came from the bow. "Pull on your right oar, Joe!"

Murray, staring ahead, made out the lines of a waiting motor boat. His first confused suspicions deepened the next moment. There was no mistaking the blurred bulk of the black motor boat in which Jap Coogan had passed him the previous afternoon!

Coogan! The visit to the shack! Murray tightened his lips. But what did the man want of him? What was responsible for the attack at his doorstep?"

While he was still trying to make sense of it the shadowy captor back of him growled an order and pushed him

forward. He exchanged the rowboat for the stern of the craft that waited there for them.

"Set down and keep your mouth shut!" his guard snapped. "This ain't no Sunday-school picnic. I got a gat here that's rarin' to go. Try any funny stuff, and I'll drill you!"

There were evidently four people aboard the black motor boat. One was forward, engaged with the mooring line. Another had taken the wheel, the third bent over the cockpit with its engine, and the fourth was Murray's watchdog.

"Turn her over!" Coogan's amiable tones drifted back.

Instantly, the motor coughed and began a rhythmic beating. The man at the wheel spun the spokes and the black cruiser winged a way out through the fog, heading toward the deep water beyond the Reef. Coogan made a way aft.

"Sorry we had to bring you out so late," he said to Murray. "But business is business."

It was evident the man was in the best of humors. He lighted a cigarette, letting the flare of the match show the dead white of his face for an instant.

"You might tell me where we're bound," Murray said, matching Coogan's agreeable tone. "I never did like to travel around blindly—in the dark particularly."

"You've heard of the *Maria Riesbeck*?"

"Who hasn't?" Murray countered, forcing a laugh.

"You're going aboard the schooner," Coogan informed him. "Somehow, I've conceived the notion that a long, pleasant sea voyage down to the West Indies would benefit you. You'll like the bunch on the *Maria*. They're a great crowd."

"Undoubtedly, but what's the idea? Why pick out me for this voyage?" Murray insisted. "What have I done to deserve it?"

They had passed the rocky arm of the Cape. The vague circle of the Light,

floating like a yellow orange without support, marked their whereabouts.

Jap Coogan threw his cigarette overboard and laughed under his breath. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know," he said. "Listen now and I'll put you wise—" He spoke in an amused voice, springing his surprise with gusto.

Silent, immovable, Murray heard, and understood. Through him ran a tide of hot, furious anger. Over and over, while Coogan spoke, Murray assured himself he should have suspected, should have remembered where and when he had seen Coogan before.

One of the men at the bow of the motor boat called back something. The motor was hastily throttled down. Coogan jumped up peering through the fog. Ahead, the white arm of a searchlight sliced the murk like a knife. Its roving beam had a surprising effect upon the four aboard the black boat.

"Shut her off!" Coogan directed. "Joe! What do you think?"

An oath was ripped out forward. "That's a cutter, all right! Can't fool me! Somebody's tipped them off! The whole Reef was wise to it! Even that fathead Pringle knew! I told you the revenue bunch would be on the job! This place has seen its best days—and nights!"

"Shut up!" Coogan snapped.

Across the waters, echoing distantly, came the sudden thunder of a gun. The black motor boat swallowed in the trough of the sea. Coogan sprang to the top stanchions of the cabin roof. The guard beside Murray was on his feet, straining anxiously forward.

For one dizzy instant Murray saw his opportunity. Two steps took him to the damp stern deck. The man who was bending forward turned and saw his intent. With a hoarse bellow, he lunged, but he was a second too late.

Launching himself into space, Murray struck the water. The deep dive

carried him well away from the motor boat. He came up, instinctively sighting the smeared glow of the Light. He struck out for it, certain there would be no pursuit. With a revenue cutter close at hand, Jap Coogan would not risk unveiling a searchlight of his own even if his black craft possessed one.

Through the fog Murray swam, watching the guiding Light ahead, feeling the ingoing tide carry him along on and on through the fog.

IV.

THE office boy with freckles closed the door of Cyrus Blauvelt's private office as Delford Murray stepped out of it. At his own desk, Arthur Lang pushed a sheaf of correspondence aside, raised his thin face and nodded.

"My congratulations, Murray. I'm glad the boss gave you the assistant manager job down at Fitchburg. You certainly deserve it. Though," he added ruefully, "I had sort of hoped I might be picked myself. Still, the best man always wins."

Murray came to a halt beside the desk. The office boy had gone on into another room and they were alone.

"The best man wins," Murray said softly, "if it's a fair game. Lang, I've been waiting to have a little chat with you. You can probably guess what it concerns."

The other's thin face turned colorless. He blinked, and in his pale blue eyes Murray saw the darkening shadows of sudden fear.

Lang forced a frown. "Can't say I do. Has it anything to do with Fitchburg? I'll be glad to—"

"It concerns a certain individual known as both Dude Coogan and Jap Coogan! Dude Coogan, that day he was here sitting at this desk with you, waiting for you to point me out to him! Jap Coogan, down at Cape Reef where he was doing your dirty work!"

For a full minute Lang said nothing.

Then he laughed feebly. "I don't know what you mean——"

"I mean," Murray went on, "that you were overlooking no bets that would make you division manager, Lang! Coogan has supplied me with the details. You thought a couple of thousand dollars would be well spent if I was shanghaied aboard a schooner known as the *Maria Riesbeck*, now in the custody of the government. You imagined that if I did not return here, Blauvelt would send you down to Fitchburg in my place. Quite a romantic, swashbuckling, seventeenth-century idea!"

Lang slumped down in the depths of his swivel chair. His frightened gaze

locked with Murray's in fascinated terror.

"What," he asked hoarsely, "are you going to do—about it?"

"What?" Murray smiled pleasantly. "Two things. I've just had a talk with Blauvelt. He's given me permission to exercise certain judicial powers. I'm doing so by firing you here and now. That's the first thing——"

Arthur Lang licked his lips. "What —what's the other?"

"The second," Murray explained carefully, "is what I'm going to give you. And that, Lang, will be the licking of your life—downstairs—in five minutes or so!"



THUNDERING HOOFS

AN old cowboy, yarning about some of his experiences, once declared that a "beef critter" was the most mysterious animal of his acquaintance. "Never did know when or why they'd go sky-hootin' for the horizon!" he remarked. And then he proceeded to tell the reason for a stampede that had baffled all his companions.

It was a calm and peaceful evening, not a cloud in the sky, the huge herd of cattle was quiet. This particular cowboy, then a youth, was "singing them to sleep." His voice then, as now, sounded like a length of steel chain smashing through a plate-glass window.

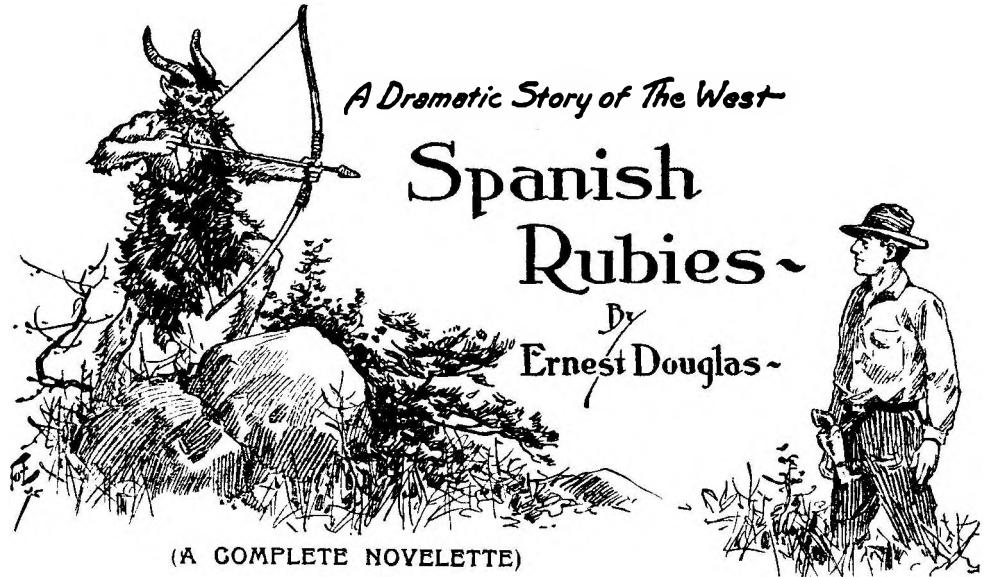
As he circled the herd, he noticed one black milch cow who insisted upon grazing a little apart. Again and again he drove her back to her companions; each time she wandered off again a short distance, grazing. At last she became tired and lay down, about fifty feet from the herd.

The young cowboy, riding beneath the placid stars, wondered how close he could ride to the black cow before she moved. Each time he circled the herd, he came nearer. She let him come within fifty feet, then twenty feet, then ten. She remained quiet.

On his next trip, he wondered what she would do if he touched her. As he rode up, she did not stir. His foot reached out and rested on the black cow's neck.

Whoosh! With a terrific snort, the black cow leaped, hit the ground running, straight for the herd. There was a crashing roar and rumble. The earth trembled beneath thousands of thundering hoofs. The herd, startled, frightened, frantic with terror, went off into the night at tremendous speed.

When at last the herd was brought under control, every one was puzzled. Why on earth did those "beef critters" stampede that way? The young cowboy never told.



(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

A SECRET OF THE DESERT.

LES, that boy knows where the lost mission is."

"Eh?" Lester Beddow, field scout of the Borderland Features Service, an organization on which half a hundred big papers depended for news of the international boundary and the Mexican West Coast, snapped shut the camera that he had been doctoring and looked up into the flushed face of his excited friend.

"What mission, Dick?" he inquired mildly.

"Santa Clara de los Montaños, of course. The one where the old Spanish priests found all those rubies."

"That's only a Mexican fable, Dicky boy. It has been investigated and explored a dozen times."

"Think so, do you? That's your incurable skepticism breaking out again. You never believe in anything until you've seen it and touched it and smelt it and filed away the sworn affidavits of nine other eyewitnesses."

"I believed you when you said that if I'd trail out into this barren desert with you, I'd get a scoop on the biggest

dope-smuggling story of the year, and—"

"Oh, that dope!" Dick Quick snapped his fingers contemptuously. "When we find that mission and the padres' ruby mine, you'll get the biggest story since the World War broke."

"But there isn't any such mission. There's no official record of any Santa Clara de los Montaños; only a vague legend."

"Yeah? Come on over and listen to our patient rave."

Beddow followed Quick over to the next mesquite tree, where a slender, dark youth lay tossing on Dick's own blankets. One foot was swathed in white bandages. The boy's eyes were closed and he was babbling incoherently.

The young newspaper man felt the lad's pulse and listened intently to his words. Now and then he caught a phrase in Spanish, a language that he spoke fluently and Quick indifferently. The name of Elena was repeated.

"It's a peculiar, antique Castilian dialect that he speaks," Beddow commented. "I can scarcely make it out. But he is certainly talking about some '*iglesia sagrada*,' meaning sacred church."

"Of course! See how well that fits into the story? Ever since the King of Spain expelled the Jesuits from his American dominions, in 1767, the Yaqui neophytes have been guarding the mission, keeping its location a secret, and waiting for the priests to return."

"But why the secrecy?"

"Rubies. You know the story as well as I do, or ought to. Just before the expulsion order came, the missionaries stumbled onto a ruby deposit. They didn't want the king or the soldiers to benefit, so they told the Indians not to let anybody come near Santa Clara until they could return. And they never did return."

"Very improbable sort of a yarn. But still, some of the things he's saying sound as though—— I believe he's coming to."

The sick boy opened his eyes. Dark, piercing eyes, they were; and his lips were parted in pain over white, strong teeth. Rich brown color was flowing back into his ashen gray cheeks.

"*Dónde estoy?*" he gasped. "*Quiénes son ustedes?*"

"We are friends," Beddow assured him. "We found you a little way out there on the mesa, where a rattlesnake had bitten you, and brought you here to the spring."

"I remember now. My horse stumbled in a badger hole and threw me into a bush, where my head struck a stone. While I was trying to get up I heard the snake rattle and felt its fangs in my ankle."

"It was a nasty clip you got. That and the rattler's poison would have done for you if we hadn't happened along. Lucky we brought a snakebite medicine kit with us."

"*Mil gracias, señores.* I owe you my life. I shall never forget."

"There, now! Don't waste your strength in talking. Here."

Beddow shook a white sedative tablet out of a phial. The Indian swallowed

it without protest and was soon sleeping peacefully.

"What do you think about it, Miguel?" asked Quick.

Miguel Alvaro, their wrinkled, snaggle-toothed packer and general handy man, had been squatting a few feet away, a silent observer and listener. Now he dropped his corn-husk cigarette and lifted a heavy straw sombrero from thin gray locks that were wet with sweat, for the day was blistering hot.

"*Dios sabe,*" he said. "I have heard the story of the hidden mission all my life but I have never believed it. Now——"

"You've got to believe it," Quick argued eagerly. "There must be something in it. Isn't that right, Les?"

"The boy is no ordinary border Mexican, that's certain."

"We'll get his story out of him. We'll make him lead us to the mission." Quick jerked out his jackknife, opened both its long blades and fell to playing mumblety-peg on an old stump, his invariable habit when thoughtful or excited. As the shining blades flashed through the air, he continued to chatter hilariously.

Beddow laughed doubtfully, but his round, good-natured, sunburned face reflected deep puzzlement and keen interest. "And if the rest of the legend is true, about the Yaquis being fanatical and superstitious recluses, wouldn't such an expedition be rather risky?" he objected.

"Risk? What of that? I thought you were ready to do anything to get the news; and here you've got a chance at a whale of a feature, to say nothing of a million dollars' worth of gems."

"But aren't you supposed to be back at headquarters in Nogales the day after to-morrow?"

"I am, but I won't be. What's the use? My job on the Federal Narcotic Squad is gone, anyway."

"We know that drugs are getting

across the line in large quantities, but how? It was put up to me to find out, and every clew I've run down has led nowhere. Finally I got the hunch that I might learn something by wandering west along the border here, away from the towns.

"The chief inspector let me come, but he gave me to understand that if I failed to dig up some tangible evidence he'd expect my resignation. And you know how much evidence I've collected. We never ran into so much as one human being until we picked up this youngster."

"What do I care about Uncle Sam's two hundred dollars a month now? I'll pay the cabin boy on my yacht more than that, after we lug back a sackful or so of those rubies."

Quick stood erect, a tanned young giant in khaki and puttees, and stretched his powerfully muscled arms aloft. The swelling cords of his neck burst the collar button from his shirt.

"Ye-e-e-e-e-ow!" he whooped. "I've got a hunch, Les, the strongest I ever had. Nothing has gone right with me since I left the army. Nobody would give me a job at my profession, as a mining engineer, and I drifted from bad to worse until I wound up on the narcotic squad; now I'm as good as kicked out of that. But I've come to the end of the hard luck trail and there's a rainbow in the sky."

"With a pot of gold at the end of it?"

"Gold? No mere yellow dross for us, Les—red rubies!"

CHAPTER II.

INTO DANGER.

OLD Miguel Alvaro, ever an irrepressible hunter, was first astir in the desert camp the next morning. With his ancient smooth-bore shotgun he ranged out among the sagebrush, the scrub mesquites and the cacti. Shortly after sunrise he brought in a string of

plump quail. All the birds save one were fried over an open fire for breakfast, and that was stewed into a thick broth for the youth whom they had rescued from death under such strange circumstances.

His name, he stated while Beddow redressed his ankle, was Victorino. He gave no surname, but many Indians of Arizona and Sonora have no family appellations.

The swelling in the injured ankle was almost entirely gone. Victorino declared that he was fully recovered and ready to travel, but his amateur physicians strongly urged that he rest for a day or two.

"But my horse has escaped and I must walk home. Ah, but it will be a long walk."

"Where is your home?" Beddow asked, striving desperately to make his tone sound casual.

Victorino darted a suspicious glance at both the white men. "It is a long way off," he evaded. "It will take me many days to cover the distance afoot, so I ought to be going."

"Perhaps we can spare you a horse," Quick suggested.

The boy seemed surprised. His lips quivered faintly and his eyes misted, but he made no reply.

Miguel, having washed the few tin dishes, took from its case a shiny new guitar purchased with the wages paid him for accompanying Beddow on a recent news-gathering expedition into Mexico. He sat down with his back against a mesquite bole, tightened the strings and began to play a sad, plaintive air that was new in Andalusia a thousand years ago.

Victorino gazed raptly at the Mexican and drank in the music.

"It is beautiful!" He sighed. "May I ask what is the price of such a fine instrument, Señor Miguel?"

"Thirty dollars," the packer told him.

"My horse ran away with a load of

coyote skins that I hoped to trade for a guitar at Ajo. Not for myself, but for another."

"For Elena, no doubt," said Beddow.

"Yes, for Elena. I must have talked out of my head, señor."

"Elena shall not be disappointed. Give Victorino the guitar, Miguel. I'll buy you another in Nogales."

Victorino accepted the gift and fingered it lovingly.

"You are indeed friends," he said, emotion choking his words. "First you save my life, when you could have passed me by and left me to the buzzards. Then you offer to lend me a horse. Now you give me this. Americanos are very different from the way Jefe Rufo warned me I would find them."

"I shall never forget, señores. A Yaqui never forsakes a friend, nor forgives an enemy. Perhaps God will permit me to serve you some day. No task will be too great. If by dying I could grant you one wish, I would die gladly."

Extravagant as this speech was, it very evidently came from the heart. Beddow glanced sideways at Quick, and nodded.

"Well, Victorino, if you're so anxious to return the few little favors we have done for you, perhaps you can do so without dying. We would like very much to visit the Mission Santa Clara."

The Yaqui started up, then fell back. His face paled.

"You seek the treasure," he accused. "But there's no treasure. Fray Eliseo, the last priest who was in charge, came and took away the golden vessels and the red stones that had been dug and stored in the church. There is nothing at Santa Clara for you."

"Hot dog!" ejaculated Quick. "Hear that, Les. Red stones!"

"We seek no treasure," Beddow hastened to deny. "And your people shall suffer no harm from us if you guide us to the mission. We swear never to

reveal the way without their permission."

"You bet!" Quick affirmed in English.

"Si! Si!" chimed in Miguel.

"I believe you, señores. You have been friends to me, and you will be friends to my people. I will guide you to Santa Clara if you wish. But there will be much danger."

"Danger!" Quick laughed. "We eat that stuff, Les and I."

"Rufo, our chief, will be very angry that our secret has been discovered, and he may try to kill you. But others will be glad. There are many who believe that when Fray Eliseo took away the treasure, he relieved us of our charge to protect the mission from strangers. We are tired of living apart from the world."

"Yet you seem to have some contact with other people."

"Jefe Rufo sometimes allows us to bring out skins and dried venison to trade, but we are forbidden to breathe a word about Santa Clara. He himself is a great traveler and sometimes goes as far away as Tucson. Often he journeys down to Altar, across the Mexican line in Sonora."

"When do we start, señores? I am anxious to give Elena her guitar. It is almost as fine as that of Belita, the chief's daughter."

CHAPTER III.

TRAGEDY IN THE DUSK.

THE start was made the next morning, with Victorino riding one of the two pack mules. It was a tortuous and perilous route over which he led them. They went through deep canyons, around the bases and far up on the slopes of a seemingly endless chain of lofty black peaks; they wound along narrow ridges where the vitreous lava cut the hoofs of their horses, so that once they had to stop a full day before the footsore animals could limp onward.

They saw little wild life on those high, rocky trails and wind-swept plateaus, yet Miguel usually managed to bring down a few doves and rabbits to eke out their scanty supply of provisions.

One day about noon, after abruptly descending two or three thousand feet into a canyon, they came to a little ciénaga where a clump of cottonwoods and willows grew.

Here Victorino left them. The village was only a league or so farther on, he said. He would go ahead on foot and after nightfall return.

It had already been agreed that they should pose as prospectors who had lost their way and wandered around until they blundered into Santa Clara Valley.

"And no hunting," Victorino warned Miguel. "My people might hear your gun and slay you as an enemy before you ever saw them."

"We'll lie low until we hear from you," Beddow promised.

The Americans spent most of the afternoon arguing what course they should take if they actually discovered treasure of any kind.

Quick contended that even though the priests had returned for their rubies, it was unlikely that their mine had been entirely worked out.

"Whatever we run across, the Yaquis must have their share," Beddow insisted. "Victorino trusted us, and I, for one, mean to shoot square with him."

"Oh, sure!" Quick assented readily. "As long as they don't actually scalp us, I'm ready to split with them."

"Think of it, Les. We're about to invade a hidden, savage kingdom, one that no white man has visited in nearly two hundred years. Emissaries of civilization, what? Doesn't it make a fellow's whole soul glad?"

"We'll be lucky if we don't lose our souls before we're out of this," the matter-of-fact Beddow returned dryly.

Miguel grew excited over the evidence

that they were in a veritable game paradise. He found the tracks of deer, puma, and mountain sheep, and toward evening myriads of quail whistled in the brush about them. He could scarcely keep his hands off his shotgun.

After the sun had set, and purple shadows had begun to creep along the reaches of the canyon, Beddow and Quick suddenly realized that the Mexican was no longer with them. Neither could remember seeing him within the last two hours. His gun lay across his saddle, but Miguel had vanished. They agreed that he had probably wandered off to look longingly at the game that he was forbidden to shoot.

"Blame fool likely met up with a bunch of redskins, and got his hair lifted," Quick growled.

It was already too dark to trace the missing packer. They discussed the advisability of firing their guns to guide him back to the camp in case he was lost, but in view of Victorino's admonition, they decided that this must be a last resort.

In sober silence they ate a cold supper, stopping frequently to listen for Miguel's footsteps. Up the gorge a pack of coyotes yowled mournfully; owls hooted and night-hawks croaked. Other than these, no sounds broke the ghostly stillness.

"What's that?" said Quick, throwing up his big blond head.

At first Beddow could hear nothing. Then there was a shuffling noise as though some creature were painfully dragging itself along the ground; then came a hollow, gurgling groan.

"It's Miguel!" exclaimed Quick, as he seized his rifle and plunged off into the gloom.

Beddow failed to keep pace with his tall friend through a thicket of batamotes that lashed cruelly at his hands and face. When he caught up, Quick was stooping over old Miguel.

Through the upper part of the Mexi-

can's stringy arm had been driven an arrow, until the shiny obsidian point protruded a full two inches to the rear. The shaft had been snapped off short as he fell for the last time.

Quick laid hold of the arrowhead and drew the remnant of arrow out of the flesh. A convulsive movement of the Mexican's body proved that life was not extinct. They turned him over until the moonlight shone full upon his agonized face.

"Who shot you, Miguel?" demanded Quick. "Did you see him? Was it that little sneak of a Victorino?"

"No." The voice was so weak that they had to bend low to hear. "Not Victorino. A devil—with horns."

"What nonsense!" scoffed Beddow. "Tell the truth, Miguel. Try to think." Miguel was dead.

"Devil or man, he did a thorough job of it," Quick remarked grimly. "Poison, of course. A wound like that wouldn't kill anybody."

"Could they be following him?" Beddow speculated.

"Probably not, or they would have overtaken him easily. Or he may have shaken them off. Or—say, they may have just trailed along behind, waiting for him to lead them to his party."

Without further discussion they slipped into the shadows of the batamotes and lay motionless for all of half an hour. Having seen nor heard nothing to indicate the presence of Miguel's slayer, they at length emerged. With heavy, anxious hearts they set about burying their servant.

All was as they had left it in camp. They spread out their beds, but neither cared to sleep. In low tones they reviewed every detail of the tragedy.

Quick swore that the next day he would back track the Mexican, and get to the bottom of the affair.

Their melancholy debate was interrupted by a figure gliding out of the trees. It was Victorino.

"Let him talk first, and watch him closely," Quick observed.

"Nothing happened while I was away," the boy reported simply. "My horse had come home without the saddle and the skins, so Elena was overjoyed to see me unharmed."

"I did not see Jefe Rufo, but he is at home and in as good humor as you are ever likely to find him. To-morrow, if you will ride into the village and throw yourselves on his mercy, he may allow you to remain a few days. We must pretend, of course, that you never saw me before. I shall try to warn you if there is any danger."

"We thank you, Victorino," replied Beddow. "But something terrible has happened since you left us to-day."

"Something terrible?" There was no doubting that the Yaqui's surprise was unfeigned.

"Miguel was shot with a poisoned arrow, and killed."

"Shot? Who could have done that?"

"He said that it was a devil with horns."

"Ah-h-h-h! The poor old man! It was my fault. I should have warned him about the demon. But I told you to stay close to the ciénaga until I could return."

"We understood that, but Miguel strayed away. What's this about a demon?"

"Listen, my friends. The mission and village of Santa Clara are in a wide, round valley into which run many canyons. In the next one west of this, the padres found little red stones that they prized very highly."

"After Fray Eliseo returned as an angel and carried the mission treasure up to heaven, a terrible monster took possession of the cave where the priests dug the red pebbles out of the rock. He has horns like a goat and shoots poisoned arrows a great distance. Several foolish young men who did not believe in the demon's power ventured into the

canyon, and they all died from his arrows. So no one ever goes there any more.

"I pray that you will not think of going near the canyon of the demon, my friends. It means death. You have proof of that."

"It'll mean death to your old ogre," spluttered Quick. "Lead me to him."

"Not now, Dick," Beddow vetoed in English. "There's a real mystery here that we must try to solve; but first I think we'd better go on into the village as Victorino suggests. We may pick up a clew there."

CHAPTER IV. ON A KEG OF DYNAMITE.

THE mysterious slaying of Miguel still weighed heavy on their spirits as they made their way into the valley of Santa Clara the following morning. After riding down their own canyon some two miles, they crossed a ridge on the left and invaded a tropical Eden.

A narrow lane, bordered on either side by irrigation ditches, meandered between patches of ripening maize and beans, of pumpkins and melons, of yellow wheat ready for the sickle. Some of the fields were rudely enclosed with poles and logs, others merely with hedges of rank pomegranate bushes. Over most of the fences clambered grapevines laden with purple fruit.

"This sure looks good to me, after all those deserts and hills," sighed Quick, as he sniffed the rustic fragrance. "I expect we could have a mighty pleasant time here, if it wasn't for that demon. That must be his canyon off there to the south."

It was not until they rounded an irregular grove of orange trees that the travelers saw any Indians. They came to a spot where wheat was being threshed by the crude process of driving ponies around and around over grain which plump women in varicolored

calico dresses brought and flung beneath the flying hoofs.

Shrill cries of alarm arose. Squaws threw down their armloads of straw and fled. Two men in charge of the threshing stopped and stared uneasily.

To each of these Beddow presented a package of cigarettes, which they accepted hesitantly. He then told them that he and his companion had lost their way and wandered many days through the mountains until they chanced upon this valley. They desired to see the chief and arrange to buy food and fodder.

The only answer was a grunt and a wave of the hand from one of the threshers. So they continued along the lane, to the demoralization of the busy harvest laborers of Santa Clara. By the time they came in sight of a pueblo of squat adobe houses and brushwood shacks, they were followed at a respectful distance by a small army of men, women, and brown, breech-clouted children.

"There's the mission," cried Beddow. He pointed toward a fairly large adobe building perched on a knoll overlooking the village from the west. At each of the front corners was a crumbling tower in which swung a rusty bell.

"El jefe! El jefe!"

The shouts came from back of them, as a rather tall but gross man hurried out of the largest house, with several yelping dogs at his heels.

It was apparent that Jefe Rufo had not taken time to complete his toilet. His feet were bare and his green silk shirt hung down outside embroidered velvet trousers that were slashed from instep to knee in the Mexican charro fashion. Golden spangles glinted on his high black hat, beneath which heavy brows were drawn together and a puffy face was bunched into a scowl.

He was busy buckling about his waist a cartridge belt bossed with many glittering conchos, and his hand caressed

the white-bone handle of a revolver as he approached.

Beddow, peering over Rufo's head at five or six younger but equally vicious looking Indians armed in the same fashion, wondered if he and Quick had acted wisely in concealing their own revolvers beneath their blouses and their rifles in the packs on the mules. Perhaps a display of preparedness for trouble would have been more judicious.

Preoccupied with this uneasy speculation, Beddow scarcely noted that a woman, dressed in flaming red, darted out into the sunlight behind the chief's bodyguard. She hesitated, then retreated to the shade of a ramada and stood observing the scene languidly.

Quick saw her and his lips pursed as though about to whistle.

Once more Beddow told the story of how they had lost themselves, and strayed many leagues out of their way. He respectfully begged permission to camp somewhere in the neighborhood and offered to pay well for pasture.

Jefe Rufo's red-rimmed eyes rested suspiciously upon Miguel's horse, which Quick was leading. "Where is the other man?" he asked in thick, guttural Spanish.

It had not occurred to the whites to prepare an explanation for the extra horse. They shot puzzled glances at each other. Should they tell this glowering savage what they knew about Miguel's death?

"Tell him Miguel's lost," whispered Quick. "Better not let him know that we suspect him of anything. Lord, but I wish I could jabber their lingo better."

"Our mozo wandered away from us yesterday," Beddow said. "We think he was killed by a panther."

Rufo seemed grimly pleased about something, and started on another tack.

"Do you not know that the valley of Santa Clara is forbidden to all not of our tribe, the custodios of the mission?"

"We know nothing of that," Beddow

denied. "We are merely unfortunate prospectors who desire to stay here a few days and rest, then go peaceably on our way."

A buzz arose from the Yaquis now clustered behind them. "No! No!" some one protested. "They are spies. Away with them!"

Beddow and Quick turned to look. Both were amazed to see that their accuser was Victorino.

"Silence, whelp of a coyote!" thundered Jefe Rufo. "How long have you been chief, descendant of the mighty Joachim who was charged by Fray Eliseo with the sacred duty of guarding his holy church? I shall decide what to do with the strangers."

"Until I decide, the gringos are my guests. They shall be quartered in the empty house next to mine. You of the big mouth shall be their new mozo and care for their horses."

The Americans could scarcely keep their faces straight. Evidently Victorino knew how to handle his headstrong chief.

With a bow that was almost cordial, Rufo invited them to alight. He ordered several young men to help them unpack, then ceremoniously withdrew.

Within half an hour the newcomers were comfortably settled. Squaws brought them ollas of water, melons, grapes, a jar of sour wine. Victorino silently led their animals away.

"This is the life!" chuckled Dick Quick after he had spread his blankets on the earthen floor, stretched out and lit a cigarette. "That little son of a gun of a Victorino! Didn't he work old 'Skeezix' slick?"

"He certainly did," Beddow admitted.

"But don't forget, Les, that the old bird's got us right here under his thumb, and probably figures that he can throw us to the demon whenever he pleases. Likely we'll have to show him different, but until we do, we're sitting on a keg of dynamite."

"Say, did you notice that girl? The one that came boiling out behind the jefe when we showed up?"

"Why no, not particularly."

"Well, she's worth noticing, believe me! Maybe I'll do quite a bit of it myself, if things break right."

"Oh!" Beddow suddenly remembered something. "That must be Rufo's daughter. Victorino mentioned her several times. Supposed to be quite a beauty, I gather."

"She is, and I'll bet she won't object a bit to being told so."

"Better be careful, Dick. A flirtation with an Indian woman might touch off that dynamite."

Quick laughed confidently and reached for a bunch of grapes.

CHAPTER V.

DISAPPOINTMENT, AND BRIGHT DREAMS.

AT noon the Yaquis trooped in from the fields, to disappear inside their cool adobes for the midday siesta. Beddow gazed wistfully at the mission through field glasses. As a newspaper man and a dabbler in archaeology, he wanted to go right up and take a closer look; but prudence bade him wait.

Toward three o'clock, the village began to stir, but still there was no sign of life about the chief's house. It was well along toward evening when a messenger came inviting them to dine with Rufo.

Quick whistled blithely as he shaved the stubble off his chin.

Beddow also made himself as presentable as possible and suggested that as a matter of courtesy they leave the revolvers behind.

"Not me!" declined Quick. "You don't get me parted from Colonel John W. Colt—not until I'm better acquainted around here, anyway. I wonder where Victorino is? Wish he'd come and give us a few pointers on Santa Clara etiquette."

They were wholly unprepared for the barbaric scene that met their eyes when a fat old woman admitted them to the sala of the chief's mansion. It was a little room, not more than fifteen feet each way, without furniture except for a few home-made stools and several shelves that were covered with gilt figurines of animals. The walls were draped with rainbow-hued zерapes, red blankets, festoons of cockatoo feathers, and cheap chromos.

One of the blankets was pushed aside and Jefe Rufo came forward to greet them, clad even more gaudily than in the morning, but apparently unarmed. He could not have been in fear of his guests, yet the hand that he gave them was cold and tremulous.

"Welcome to su casa," he said.

"It is a very beautiful house, and most richly decorated," returned Beddow.

"Ah! You think so? But wait. I shall show you something really beautiful. Belita!"

Through the same door stepped his daughter. Even the unimpressionable Beddow caught his breath at the spectacle of divine womanhood that she presented. Nearly as tall as her father, she was so perfectly formed that she might have posed as a model for a Greek sculptor.

Wonder of wonders, her warm brown complexion was not plastered with powder in the Mexican style. Her eyes were wide, dark and lustrous, and full lips were parted in a smile that was for Quick alone.

The girl herself was scarcely more striking than her costume. She wore a gown of clinging scarlet silk that set off her figure perfectly. Her stockings and slippers were also of silk, and crimson of hue. About her shoulders was a purple shawl. A comb that adorned her high-piled hair was set with many glittering rhinestones, but the four or five large gems on her fingers were unmistakably diamonds.

"Indeed the señorita is lindisima," Beddow murmured to the beaming chief.

Quick essayed to frame a flowery compliment, but floundered confusedly. Belita laughed gayly. They all laughed together, and Rufo bowed them out into the open courtyard, the patio.

At the far end, sitting under a shrub that was laden with heavily perfumed red flowers, were two of the bodyguards who had appeared with Rufo that morning. Their revolvers were in plain view, but they carefully turned their eyes away from the guests.

Beddow felt a quick stab of apprehension. Would the feast be topped off with a pair of murders?

A table of roughly squared timbers with stakes for legs was set with a motley collection of ware ranging from tin plates to silver goblets. The goblets were filled with the acrid wine that the Americans had already sampled. There were dishes of stewed doves, roast beef, corn cakes, tortillas of very coarse flour, beans, and other foods.

Side by side, the Yankees slipped into seats facing down the patio. Rufo, who seemed to have tired of playing the gracious host, fell to with scant ceremony. Again and again he emptied his goblet, which was immediately refilled by a serving woman. He ate enormous quantities of everything, but found little use for his knife and fork.

Belita ate scarcely at all. Her attention was frankly riveted on Quick, who was still trying to carry on a conversation in his sketchy Spanish. Her eyes danced; then she pouted when he guffawed at her attempt to pronounce his name—"Deek Queek."

Rufo fast grew mellow under the influence of the liquor. Beddow's polite questions about the valley he answered with expansive smiles and disconnected sentences that gave scant information. As his amiability increased the newspaper man's uneasiness evaporated.

Beddow decided to take advantage of their host's good humor to ask permission to inspect the mission the following morning.

"Look!" derided Rufo. "Look till your eyes go blind. The door is open. You are welcome to what treasure you find there."

Startled, the white men leaned forward. The chief waved his hand and emitted another raucous laugh.

"Treasure! Yes, gringos, I know for what you came. Lost! You can't pull the wool over old Rufo's eyes. But you are fools. There is no treasure. Fray Eliseo came back for the gold, and as for the rubies——"

Rufo reached into his pocket and threw half a dozen small stones upon the table, where they gleamed a dull brownish red.

Quick caught them up eagerly, peered at them closely. Amazement and disappointment overspread his face. With a twisted smile he dropped them upon a plate, and sat staring blankly.

"What are they?" asked Beddow. "Aren't they rubies?"

"Rubies? Naw! Garnets. Worth about two dollars a quart. Those priests —well, I guess they didn't know much about mineralogy."

"See?" chortled Rufo. "There is no treasure for you. Fools!"

With which speech the chief gulped down another draft of wine, grinned sillily, waved his hand again and slid to the floor, completely out.

Belita shrugged her shoulders as though her father's drunkenness was quite the usual and expected thing. The guards carried their snoring master away. She then called to the servant for her guitar, strummed a few chords, and launched into a love ballad of old Spain.

Her gaze never left Quick, who pushed the garnets aside and listened raptly. A dim smile worked slowly across his features.

Beddow knew that some new plan was being hatched in his pal's impulsive and often erratic brain.

After an hour or so they took their departure. Belita apologized briefly but prettily for her father as she bade them "Buenas noches!"

"Hasta mañana," Quick replied meaningly. "Until to-morrow, no?"

"Hasta mañana," she agreed.

"Too bad, Dick," Beddow sympathized as they made ready for bed. "Of course I never did count much on finding gems, but I expect you did."

"Oh, those rubies! I can get along without any red pebbles now, because I've found myself a red bird."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'm going to marry that girl, Les. I'm going to marry Belita, who is the chief's only living child, and be chief of Santa Clara. Rufo is about through, anyway: I think he must smoke Indian hemp, that weed the Mexicans call *marihuana*. And then I'll open trade with the outside world and clean up a fortune."

"For a minute I thought my hunch was pinching out on me, but that was because I didn't see which way the trail was leading. Watch my smoke!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED BIRD TURNS HAWK.

VICTORINO called the next morning while Beddow and Quick were eating breakfast. With him he brought Elena, a shy, slender, black-haired little maid whose open adoration for her handsome lover caused the white men to smile amusedly.

Timidly she thanked them for the "so splendid guitar" and for saving the life of her Victorino. It appeared that he had confided to her the real relationship between himself and the strangers.

Their horses were safe, the boy said, in a near-by pasture where they could be easily reached in case of trouble.

"There's not going to be any trouble," asserted Quick. "We're in right in Santa Clara. Isn't that so, Les?"

"The chief's daughter has taken a great fancy to Señor Quick," explained Beddow.

"Belita? Then you are indeed safe, as long as she is your friend. Her father grants her every wish."

"It looks that way," Quick commented in English. "All those clothes and doo-dads must have cost a pile of cash, even if a lot of them are junk. Wonder where he gets all the money?"

With Victorino and Elena to guide him, Beddow went to look over the mission. Quick declined to go.

"I've got other fish to fry," he said. "My red bird's expecting me. Go ahead."

There was no one in the dark, musty interior of the church. Dust lay thick over the benches, the altar, the elaborate wood carvings and the images placed in little niches above the walls. Beddow soon found some of the yellowed, almost illegible mission records in a room off the nave, and the hours fled swiftly while he deciphered an interesting story that accounted for the presence of those Spanish-speaking Yaquis far north of their tribal homeland. He did not notice when Victorino and Elena left him.

The light finally grew so dim that he could no longer read. The sunshine that had been streaming through an east window was now only a glimmer. On peering at his watch he was amazed to find that it was already midafternoon. He was hungry, so he closed the books and hurried back to the cabin.

Quick was not there, and evidently had not been there for lunch. But a moment or two after Beddow's arrival his friend stumbled in, breathless, pale under his tan. He jerked off his hat and pointed to a jagged rent in the crown.

"The demon," he gulped, "nearly got me."

"Eh? You've been——"

"Yeah, I'm an idiot, I guess. I was coming swimmingly with Belita and her dad. She thinks I'm the berries with cream. Only trouble is, she already thinks she owns me. But I ought to have had sense enough to let that demon alone for the time being."

"After eating at the chief's house, I came back here and tried to take a siesta, but I couldn't. Somehow I kept thinking of old Miguel. So I started prowling around, and nobody offered to stop me. Then I slipped away and found the demon's canyon."

"And what did you learn there?"

"Not a lot. I'm still in the dark as to what the whole business is about. But I found a trail right up the center that seemed to be used pretty regularly. I followed that to a cave in a high cliff with a pile of rock below that may be an old mine dump."

"There wasn't a thing to stop me until I was within fifty yards of the cave. Then you ought to have heard the noise. A shivery, weird wail that set up a million echoes."

"Next thing a great, big face, all streaked with black and white, as nearly as I could tell in the faint light of that narrow canyon, bobbed up from behind a boulder. Before I could shoot, it disappeared. And then the arrows started to swish through the air. When one of 'em ripped my hat open—well, I came away from there. I don't think I'm naturally a coward, but——"

"I guess anybody would have run from poisoned arrows, Dick. What next? How will this affect your plans?"

"Not a bit. A demon may throw me into a blue funk the first time we meet, but he can't chase me clear out of the country. I've got to figure out some way to meet him on even terms."

For his thinking Quick repaired to a bench outside the doorway, opened his jackknife and started abstractedly to play mumblety-peg.

Beddow set about collecting their scattered belongings. His private opinion was that a crisis impended, and that they would soon have to leave Santa Clara, peacefully or otherwise.

Barefooted, Elena came trudging along, and paused near Quick to ask if Victorino were about.

"No, he's not here. Haven't seen him since morning."

The girl did not move on immediately, but stood with her eyes fastened wonderingly on the flashing blade that plunked into the wood every time the handle was snapped upward.

"Sit down, Elena, and let me show how it's done." Quick reached up, caught her arm and pulled her down beside him. He curled her fingers around the handle, and laughed when she clumsily threw the knife clear off into the sand.

"Try again. You ought to have a smoother board to practice on."

Preoccupied with their game, neither of them saw a crimson storm sweeping from Jefe Rufo's house. The dust was thrown backward in tiny showers from Belita's silk-clad feet as she ran. Her eyes blazed like live coals and her face was twisted by a paroxysm of rage.

Beddow saw her an instant before she reached her goal—saw her fling herself upon frail little Elena, who was sent sprawling.

A dagger rose and fell once, twice, then was dragged diagonally across the child's face.

"My God, woman, what are you doing?"

With a bull-like roar of horror, Quick smashed his fist upon the side of Belita's head. She dropped senseless beside the victim of her insane fury.

Beddow leaped to Quick's side.

Victorino materialized from somewhere.

"Take her away!" Quick directed hoarsely. "There'll be something popping here now!"

The boy stumbled away with his sweetheart in his arms.

The white men turned to face Jefe Rufo, who was literally foaming with wrath. But in his anger and surprise Rufo had forgotten his revolver; he was armed only with a long, keen machete.

"Stand back," yelled Beddow, flourishing his Colt.

With a snarl, Rufo made for the newspaper man. This gave Quick his chance. He sidestepped and his right fist corkscrewed past the machete to land flush on the jaw of the chief, who pitched forward and lay motionless.

Screaming Yaquis scurried from every direction, to flee and duck for cover at sight of two Americanos with drawn revolvers racing eastward toward the pasture where their horses were confined.

The only one who did not retreat was Victorino, whose light-footed speed enabled him to overtake them easily.

"Is she dead?" panted Quick.

"She is dead." Tears were streaming down the lad's cheeks. "Was it Belita?"

"Yes, the red bird. Gosh, what a hell-cat! I wish I'd killed her. I'm going back and do it yet."

Quick stopped short, but Victorino pushed him onward.

"No! I shall return and kill her after you are safe," the Yaqui said.

"All right, boy. She's your meat. Only don't get yourself in bad to help us make our get-away."

"I shall never live with my people again. You are my only friends, now."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CANYON OF THE DEMON.

FORTUNATELY the horses were in a corral. The fugitives chose one each, vaulted upon their bare backs and galloped away.

"Not that way!" called Victorino. "That trail leads to the demon's canyon."

"Right where we want to go. I'm not going to leave until we get to the bottom of this demon business. Are you game, Les?"

Beddow nodded. "We can spare a little time, I suppose, before Rufo organizes his force and starts in pursuit. But it would be suicidal to try to make a stand against the whole village."

"But the demon," Victorino protested. "It will kill us. Men cannot fight demons."

"These men can. You're a gringo now, one of us, and we don't believe in spooks. Yes, I believe in this one. Here he is."

One of Rufo's guards came speeding afoot down the path through some straggling desert willows, doubtless hurrying to investigate the hubbub in the village. At sight of the horsemen he dodged sideways toward a pile of rocks, at the same time jerking a revolver from his belt and sending a bullet over their heads.

Quick was too fast for him. At the instant the Yaqui fired, the Yankee's gun also spoke, and the Indian fell in a heap.

A moment later they were between the gray sandstone walls of the canyon, which were perpendicular in places, and at others so broken that they could be scaled by a man or even a horse.

Quick recklessly plunged ahead, sure now that the demon was merely some trick of Rufo and his confederates.

So it proved, after they had tied their horses and scrambled up to the cavern's entrance.

Their first discovery was a bow with a quiver of arrows. Then Beddow picked up a hideous mask of painted canvas at the end of a short pole. The mask bore a grotesque resemblance to human features, and had a pair of mountain goat horns at the top. Beside it lay a small automobile klaxon.

"Here's your demon," Quick remarked disgustedly, as he pushed down

the plunger and caused the horn to squawk. "Hallowe'en stuff. Rufo had something to hide, so he started that devil story and kept one of his personal gang here to scare off anybody that might try to investigate."

"Let's see what's inside." Beddow proposed. "Here's a candle."

Their next discovery was even more amazing. In boxes and cartons set about the walls were cans of opium, packages of morphine, cocaine, and heroin.

"Well, wouldn't that rasp a road lizard!" howled Quick. "Here's the dope story I promised you, Les. And you thought I was running away from my duty. I knew that hunch of mine had something back of it. It told me to come here, and—well!"

"Now we've got the low-down on old Goofy Rufus. He's the one that's running the narcotics across from Mexico, and delivering them to agents in Ajo and Tucson. This accounts for all his traveling, and for the money he has to spend on that black-hearted daughter of his. He's his own best customer, too. And I thought he was just a *marihuana* smoker— What's that you've found, Les?"

"Looks like a piece of gold candlestick. And here are some more fragments that might have come from church vessels."

"Say, Victorino," snapped Quick, "when was it that Fray Eliseo came back for the mission treasure?"

"It was five—no, six years ago."

"Eh? Why, we thought it was a long time back. Must have been the padre's spirit, then. Who saw him?"

"No one except Jefe Rufo."

"Hear that, Les? Just a ghost story to account for the disappearance of the treasure from the church. That old savage was a whole lot slicker than I gave him credit for, and likewise a lot more crooked. Of course he melted down the gold and sold it; but I'll bet

he was sore when he tried to sell those garnets for rubies."

"Here they are, a whole sackful of them."

Quick emptied the bag and pawed over the stones. He cast aside two or three, and closely inspected another.

"Say, Les, I want to pick out some souvenirs. While I'm doing this, please burn up that dope."

"But those pebbles are worthless. What do you want with them?"

"Never mind, pardner. I may be wrong, but—"

As he spoke, Quick sorted over the stones with nervous fingers. Most of them he rejected—a few he thrust into his pockets.

There was a pile of wood just outside the cave. Beddow had a bonfire going in a moment. He and Victorino carried the packages and dumped them into the flames. A stinking smoke arose that drove them back.

"They're coming!" Victorino shouted suddenly.

"Come on, Dick, we're in for a real fight now. Leave those silly garnets alone."

Perhaps seventy yards down the canyon was Rufo, machete in one hand and rifle in the other. He was swaying drunkenly as he ran.

Close behind him came Belita, her garments glowing vividly in the roseate rays of the setting sun.

Farther back, and proceeding more cautiously, were six or eight members of the chief's bodyguard.

"The crazy old hop-head!" sputtered Quick. "Rushing straight at us, wide open. The others know better—they're scattering already. Well, nothing to do but stop him with one in the leg."

The first shot was a clean miss. At the impact of the second bullet Rufo spun around and slumped to the earth.

From his hand Belita caught the rifle. She streaked up the slope to her left and dropped behind a flat rock. From

this vantage point she poured lead into the cave.

"Hell hath no fury——" began Quick, as he and Beddow crouched under a boulder. "Let her waste her ammunition. Where's Victorino? Hey, kid, come down from there."

The Yaqui was poised on the pinnacle of the stone that gave them cover, calmly fitting an arrow to the string of the long, powerful bow that they had found beside the demoniac mask. He paid no attention whatever to the leaden hail that whistled about him.

From where he stood, Victorino could see Belita as she lay prone upon the ground. He drew the bowstring taut. Straight to its mark sped the arrow, and buried itself deep in her back.

Abruptly the firing ceased. Belita writhed just once, then lay still.

The party behind her broke and fled.

Soberly the defenders of the cave made their way down the canyon. One glance at Belita told them that she was dead.

"Good-by, red bird," quavered Quick, a queer twitching about his lips. "I'm sorry you didn't turn out to be the sort of a girl I thought you were. But I wonder—I wonder if you ever suspected what a scalawag your old daddy was?"

Rufo was dead also. Quick's bullet had struck higher than he intended.

At the first break in the eastern wall the fugitives climbed to the mesa above. They rode hard and did not halt until dawn.

Beddow was puzzled when Quick pulled off his shirt and spread upon it the garnets that he had carried out of the cavern.

"What in the world do you want with those things?" the newspaper man asked petulantly. "You told me yourself that they have practically no value."

"I'd forgotten then, Les, that where rubies are found they're always associated with garnets. When Rufo tried

to sell a few of his prettiest, and got laughed at, he supposed they were all worthless.

"These are rubies, and at an offhand guess, I'd say they must be worth at least a hundred thousand dollars—enough to fix us all three pretty comfortably when we divide. Even if I didn't fall down on that dope-running case, I'm afraid the narcotic squad will have to get along without me from now on."

Making It Better

THE magazine artist found himself in rather a difficulty while illustrating a certain story, so he called on the author.

"It's a shame this happens to be a love story," the artist remarked, "'cos the only thing I can draw really well is a charging rhinoceros."

"That's all right," replied the author. "I'll put that right in a minute."

He picked up the manuscript and penciled in a few lines and then handed it back to the artist. The latter, with a puzzled expression, read the new passage. It ran thus:

"He, who had often faced a charging rhinoceros unmoved, now——"

At Cross Purposes

IT was a very heavy packing case, and a passer-by had volunteered his help to the perspiring truckman. It was warmly welcomed.

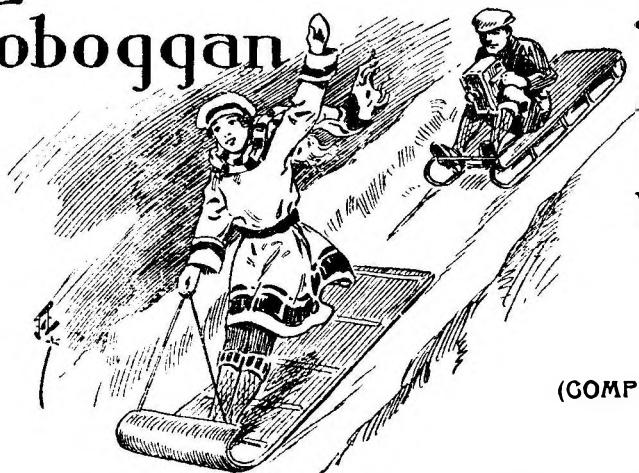
They commenced to struggle with the heavy box, but after ten minutes of hard pushing and shoving the case remained in its original position.

"Well," said the truckman, desisting from his furious efforts and wiping his streaming features, "I don't know what's the matter with us, or the case either, but we'll never get it out at this rate."

"Get it out!" exclaimed the other. "Why, I've been trying my hardest to get it in!"

A News-Reel Photographer Story

Tobooggan Thrills~



By
Walter A. Sinclair~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A VINDICTIVE RIVAL.



ITH a grinding crash, a recklessly operated switch engine bumped a string of standing gondola cars. The shock was so violent and unexpected that Eric Carver was hurled from his footing on one carload. Hands outflung, the ace of Midworld News Reel's cameramen pitched blindly over one side to the gritty, hard-packed cinder roadbed in a stunning, breath-taking plunge. Instinctively, the dazed cameraman rolled out of reach as car wheels creaked past, grazing his legs.

"Look out!" a voice had yelled, as Carver was thrown.

The speaker was Louis Zanff, star cameraman of Globewide News Film, and Carver's bitterest rival. The two had been working on the same car when the bump came.

Zanff, however, had been looking back expectantly, and saw the locomotive approaching. He could have warned in time to save his rival, hence his shout when it was too late was merely "for the record." Zanff could say he warned. He grinned evilly.

Carver lay for a moment while the cars creaked past on a spur track beside

the immense grounds of the Hotel Grandiose, that enormous suburban New York hostelry set up in a region famed for its wealthy country estates. Both cameramen had been shooting from the top of the strangest freight imaginable.

Every car was loaded with snow.

Loaded with it—not snow which had fallen into cars, but consignments of "the beautiful," freighted there from the Adirondacks. Snow brought there for the entertainment of the hotel's rich guests.

Set in a great suburban tract, this hotel catered to the wealthy who inclined to sports. It offered everything from bridge to polo. Just then, winter sports were in demand but the weather had not coöperated. Ice skating was provided easily on an artificially frozen rink in the hotel, but there had been no snow all winter, or only feathery falls which melted promptly. Winter was nearing its end with no snow, and guests craving snow sports were going to Montreal.

"We must do something big to stop these people from leaving," decided the manager, in despair.

Desperate and ready to spend liberally to hold the patronage, he eagerly seized a suggestion of Kenneth Thomas, his press agent, to build a wooden toboggan slide and pack it with snow.

A trainload of snow had arrived that morning, and Thomas had called together the news reel and still photographers to record the biggest publicity stunt attempted since hotels began hiring press agents. They had to act promptly, for the weather promised to melt the snow quickly. Tobogganing would begin as soon as the snow was spread, to continue until midnight. Four-minute illumination by magnesium flares set along the entire course had been promised the reels as a night thriller.

Big motor trucks were transferring snow from railroad to toboggan when Carver and Zanff arrived. Only a half dozen cars remained to be unloaded, so the cameramen began work at once.

In order to tell the story in movies, Carver set up his camera on top of a carload of snow, and shot downward to show at a glance what was being transported. To his annoyance, Zanff imitated him, setting up on the same car. When the bump came, Carver was busy, while Zanff was looking backward, crouched on the snow and holding tightly to his tripod, which he had jammed deeply into the freighted drift.

"Why did you do that?" Carver demanded sharply, scrambling up as a small switch engine puffed alongside.

"That other movie feller told me to," gasped the worried engineer. "Said it would liven up the movies for you."

"Back up, same speed," ordered Carver, without wasting time in scolding this railroader who had acted innocently.

It was plain that Zanff, smarting under many defeats at Carver's hands, had taken this way to remove a rival—injuring him enough to prevent his working that day, or wrecking his camera. That would put Carver out of commission—and he had left his picture box stuck in the snow on that car. Zanff had created an opportunity to smash his rival's camera unnoticed, and then claim the accident caused the damage.

Unmindful of cut hands and torn clothes, Carver swung to the nearest gondola as the train backed again. As his head popped over the top of the snow load he saw Zanff, four car-lengths away, steadyng his own camera while he aimed a kick at Carver's picture box, to send it crashing from the train.

"Stop that!" yelled Carver, as he sprang to the top of the snow. Zanff had intended to knock down the camera before his act could be witnessed, but he waited too long. Even now he could do it, and then claim that the jolting train threw him against it.

Fearlessly leaping forward, Carver ran across the top of that packed snow as recklessly as any brakeman. He never stopped to consider slippery footing, for stopping to be cautious would ruin a news-reel cameraman's usefulness. Running like a chamois on an Alpine glacier, he leaped from car to car in a race to save his working outfit.

Fast as he was, Carver realized that he could not reach his rival in time to stay the act which Zanff's tensing leg predicted. Two car-lengths separated the men. For an instant Carver's hands clamped together on the snow he had scooped as he climbed aboard. Then his right arm shot forward and a snowball streaked through the air, hitting Zanff's ear. While the other man, swearing angrily, dug snow from his ear, Carver sprang past and seized the endangered camera.

"Why'd you do that, when I was holding your box?" asked Zanff angrily.

"Just to let you know I was coming," replied Carver.

Without further words, he completed his shooting from the car. Then he shot footage, showing trucks carrying the snow to the toboggan, where he cranked film picturing the spreading of the imported slide.

"Eric, are you introducing novelties in winter-sports wear?" asked a bantering voice.

Fern Estabrook confronted him, a poster girl in natty wool tam, colorful scarf, sweater, windbreaker, knickers, wool hosiery, and sports shoes. The daughter of Payne Estabrook, eastern representative of a big motor company, was the winter girl personified as she cast a pretended shocked glance at Carver's bruised knees, which peeped through rents in his torn tweed knickers.

He always wanted to look his best when his dearest friend came to see him work. Fern took more than casual interest in the good-looking young cameraman with the athletic figure, fair hair and merry blue eyes. Despite the ravages of his accident, he was a young man to intrigue the interest of a lively brown-haired, brown-eyed girl who found in the cameraman's daring and interesting work something to admire. Frequently Fern gave him important help in his work.

"I fell off a hopper car while shooting the snow transfer," he explained. "Afraid I'm not dressed for high society here."

"I'll fix you up, Carver," offered Thomas, the press agent who had hustled up in time to hear the explanation. "You're about my size. I've got a half a dozen knicker suits. Put on one of mine, and I'll have the hotel valet rush repairing your clothes. Let's hustle so that you'll be fixed up to meet society, especially the countess."

Carver accepted, introducing Fern while they walked to the hotel. Fern was his loyal friend and aid. An ardent sports devotee, she had hurried to the Grandiose that day after Carver had telephoned her about the trainload of snow. She enjoyed tobogganing—and she enjoyed being near Eric Carver when he was in search of news-reel footage. Invariably that had meant interesting adventures for both.

Fern offered to point out the real society girls who would coast down that expensive snow slide.

CHAPTER II.

COUNTESS ZITZI'S PEARLS.

KEN THOMAS had summoned to his aid some chorus beauties to furnish pictorial attractions for the various scenes to be shot, although his big headliner was the countess. It seemed that, when tobogganing was assured, Thomas had been approached by a foreign young woman who registered at the hotel that day.

"She's the Countess Zitzi, of Zarzycz," he said enthusiastically. "Says she's one of the tobogganing headliners at St. Moritz, and all that. Showed a half-tone from some foreign paper with her in a tobogganing group. At least, she said it's she, although the cut's so blurred I'd never know it. You ought to see that group. In bathing suits on the snow! Absolutely. That gave me an idea, and I put it up to her. What do you think? She'll pose for you fellows, sitting in a bathing suit in the snow. I bet your customers will love that."

Fern sniffed delicately, and Carver did not look at her. He knew that Thomas had studied news reels and gravure sections correctly, and knew what "the customers" were supposed to like.

At the hotel, Thomas paused only long enough to scan a thermometer anxiously before obtaining a room for Carver. In view of the prospective news-reel publicity, the hotel cheerfully provided a fine second-floor room where the cameraman could dress and also could leave camera case and extra trappings—added burdens he did not wish to carry around.

His room was overheated, and he raised a window looking down on the hotel lawn. Below this window he saw Zanff talking earnestly to a dark-haired, dark-eyed young woman, whose exotic beauty was heightened considerably by white and red make-up. Thomas was hastening toward the pair.

"Hurry down and join us, Carver!" shouted the press agent.

Zanff and the young woman looked up, following the press agent's gaze at the man in the open window. Carver saw Zanff whisper to the woman, while she frowned in indecision. Then she nodded curtly. Carver changed clothes hurriedly, and went downstairs.

"I imagine you won't want me along while filming that vamp," said Fern pointedly, as Carver hurried past her at the hotel entrance.

"Sure. Come along," he urged, shifting his camera to his shoulder. "I didn't ask because I thought you wouldn't care to be near Zanff."

"Quick thinking," applauded Fern calmly. She didn't like Zanff, who had offended her the first time she met the two cameramen. "Run along."

She stared thoughtfully after him as he walked over to the waiting group. Fern's expression betrayed more than an interest in Carver's adventurous professional activities. Together they had been through experiences which had drawn them close to each other. Fern liked him tremendously. Hence she was startled and dismayed by what she saw when Carver reached the trio on the lawn.

The strange young woman suddenly hugged Carver's free arm.

"Ah, thee famous cameraman!" said Countess Zitzi, almost purring, when Ken Thomas voiced introductions. She twined her arms with undue fervor around his arm, and most surprisingly turned around until her carmined lips smiled ingratiatingly up at him. "You will help me get thee fine publicity, so that the cinema producers will offer me one fortune? Yes? No?"

This was some of Zanff's fine work, Carver told himself. Surely this woman would not have thrown herself at him so unreservedly unless she had been coached. Even Slavic or Latin temperament did not explain her warm demon-

stration. Evidently Zanff had told her that she would have to vamp Carver in order to induce him to film her in motion pictures.

"No—Yes! I'll be glad to shoot you, but you don't have to be so—" Carver began uncomfortably, pulling loose from her grasp and looking backward.

Fern was staring at them, but she turned away. The harm was done.

"Countess Zitzi hopes—er—intends to go into the movies," explained Thomas. "First she may do a little ice dancing if she can get the right salary, but her heart is set on Hollywood."

"Movies?" echoed Carver. "What does a countess need—"

"Ah, those communists!" mourned the countess, tightening her kolinsky coat around. "First thee war, then thee terror. Thee nobility must live, Mr. Carvaire. We learn that here thee cinema magnates offer thousands—millions in gold for beauty. And—tell me truly—am I not beautiful, Mr. Carvaire?"

She pirouetted in front of him, balancing on her toes and thrusting forward her face, upturned piquantly for his inspection at close range. Then she flung wide her arms, for an instant throwing open the rich fur coat.

This act revealed her to be clad in a fancy, vivid, one-piece bathing suit, such as Carver had seen only on the stage or in bathing-beauty contests. Guiltily he glanced around in time to see Fern again turning away and leaving.

"You'll do," said Carver ungraciously, wishing the countess had remained in the unpronounceable place whence she came.

The press agent relieved a strained situation by putting them all into a limousine. After another pessimistic look at the thermometer he climbed in beside the chauffeur. The countess insisted on sitting between the two cameramen in the rear seat. Zanff was silent throughout the ride, suspiciously com-

placent, while Zitzi was lavishing her smiles and blandishments on the unapreciative Carver.

"Mr. Thomas told me about your clevaire idea for thee tobogganing picture," said Zitzi. "You will sit at the front end of one toboggan, yes? And coast down, making thee film while all is illuminate' wiz thee—eh—flambeaux?"

"It is getting hot," interrupted Thomas, avoiding the scowl Carver shot at him for betraying his plans. The publicity man realized that the cameraman intended that as an exclusive.

Footage of tobogganing by flare light was common enough, but that was usually taken by cameras set at the bottom of a slide. Carver wanted to experiment with one made from the front of a toboggan flying down at top speed, between the garish lights, something for a news-reel thrill, something with a punch.

"The weather bureau telephoned me that there would probably be rain tonight," said the press agent gloomily. "This snow probably won't last another day. I've arranged to have flares set up and touched off as soon after dark as you want. In the meantime, daytime tobogganing begins as soon as we make these shots of the countess in her one-piece, playing in the snow."

The car had reached the slide's far terminus. There the men got out, while Zitzi followed when the news-reel men had set up their cameras. These were pointed up the toboggan slide, which showed in perspective, a half-mile strip of white snow on a drab country setting, foxily arranged by Thomas to keep the hotel in focus.

Zitzi permitted Thomas to help her out of her big fur coat, and then she skipped airily into the trough of snow. Shivering deliciously, she sat on the drift for her first close-up.

Before cranks turned, Zanff, for no apparent reason, crossly ordered: "Take off those pearls. They make you look overdressed."

"They cost ten thouzand dollar," said the countess, pouting, as she reluctantly removed the string of baubles from around her neck.

"Carvaire, you hold zem," she said, and without waiting for acquiescence, tossed the beads to Carver, who fielded and pocketed them.

Directed by the publicity man, Zitzi somersaulted down the snowy slide, threw snowballs at the cameras, tossed handfuls of snow in the air and shivered exaggeratedly under the self-aimed blizzard. When enough of this footage had been filmed, the countess resumed her fur coat and then watched the rivals work.

The cameramen moved back when tobogganing began.

Carver was sighting through his finder, using both hands to adjust his lens, when Zitzi's fur coat rubbed gently against him, and her voice purred a soft request for the pearls. Without taking his eyes from the finder, he thrust the necklace into a hand cold from shaping snowballs. Without a word she glided aside.

Whooping joyously, the tobogganers swooped down the slide. Gayly clad parties of six, packed on the sleds, whizzed down at express speed. Merry screams shattered the air when toboggans threatened to dive over the edges, but there were no accidents. To liven up the scenes for the cameras, several parties ended their slides by upsetting sideways with a great flourish of arms and legs.

This made great news-reel stuff, and both cameramen cranked busily, without paying attention to anything else, until they had taken several hundred feet of film.

Fern tobogganed past several times with her friends, but she did not stop to speak. Instead, she glanced coolly at Zitzi, who stood near the working news-reel men. When the three men rejoined the countess, she turned to Carver, and

asked clearly: "If you please, nice man, my pearls."

"Why, I gave them to you," replied Carver, surprised.

"But no, you make thee joke," she cried anxiously. "Nevaire did you give me back my pearls."

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL FOR HELP.

CARVER stared, seeking a look or gesture which would explain whether this were a joke or not. Every one looked accusingly serious.

"I gave them to you just before the tobogganing began," insisted Midworld's ace. "Thomas, didn't you see me hand them to her?"

Thomas had not. He had been signaling up the toboggan at the moment in question. Zanff asserted that Zitzi had not gone near Carver.

The countess stared pleadingly, shaking her head and making sad sounds. She threw her arms wide in an appealing gesture, one hand still absent-mindedly clutching a snowball.

"Search me," she demanded, peeling off her coat and throwing it to Thomas as she slowly rotated. "You could see them if I hid them under thees thin bathing suit."

True, the slight, snugly-fitting one-piece offered no hiding place. Thomas vainly searched the kolinsky and passed it over to Carver, who made a perfunctory investigation. Then Thomas politely insisted on being searched, as a diplomatic way of getting return offers from Carver and Zanff. Nothing was found. After searching the bare ground, they all climbed gloomily into the limousine. This time Carver rode with the driver.

At the hotel, Zitzi and Zanff withdrew to one side, while Thomas hovered unhappily between them and Carver.

Carver waved to Fern, who stood near the entrance and who, at sight of his

serious face, met him halfway. In a few words he told of the missing pearls.

Just then Thomas approached, accompanied by a bell boy.

"Our valet sent word that your clothes are repaired and back in your room," said the publicity man uneasily.

"Guess he's afraid I'll steal his suit next," whispered Carver to Fern, after thanking Thomas. "Please take care of my camera while I change. Keep an eye on Zanff—and that woman."

He hurried to his room to change back into his own suit, which he found mended and pressed. Returning downstairs, he was about to step outdoors, then he turned back abruptly to the telephone booths. When he emerged into the open, the countess and Zanff were talking with a large, keen-eyed man, who, seeing Carver approached him at once.

"I'm the hotel detective," the man said. "Countess Zitzi feels she can't let this matter pass without reporting it. Of course, I understand you're no crook. Now, possibly, wasn't this a prank to get even with her for queering you with your girl friend?"

"That's out!" snapped Carver. "Omit any references to her. I didn't take the pearls! What do you want next?"

"The others let me search them again," said the sleuth, hesitating. "If you're willing— All right, eh? Wait, though. I won't embarrass you out here. I understand that you've been to your room, and also that you have a camera case there. Suppose we go there, quiet?"

"All right," agreed Carver. "But I want a witness along. Hey, Thomas! I trust you. Come along while the house dick frisks my room."

Just as they reached the top of the stairs, Zitzi raced after, calling for them to wait.

Dramatically she announced: "As victim, I demand thee right to be present and witness."

"Now, countess, you only can stay while I search the room," impatiently parried the detective. "When I go through his clothes it won't be any amateur frisk, and then it'll be no place for ladies."

"Enter," invited Carver, with mock ceremony, although he had secret misgivings as he threw open his room door. Crowding inside, the four of them halted, staring fascinated.

In a tiny puddle near a radiator lay the missing pearls.

"Gosh, Carver, this must be a joke!" said Thomas. He did not court the ill will of a news reel. No press agent does.

"It's no joke," assured Carver, coolly. "It looks to me very much like premeditated action, though not on my part. If I turn crook, I hope that I'll do better than to spread the loot out on the floor so that even a house dick couldn't miss it."

"Just for that I'm going to ask you to stick around," snapped the hotel detective sourly. "I notice your camera case stands right near there. A hasty throw from the door intended to land in that case, could drop the pearls there. Something to think about, if there's a complaint. Thomas, you'd better phone our engineer that this radiator is leaking badly—see that puddle?"

Carver snorted gentle disdain. With a frown, the detective turned to Zitzi and continued:

"Countess, you know we don't like to do anything, because it gives a hotel a bad name to have such things made public. But, of course, if you insist on making a complaint, we'll call in the authorities."

"I don't know what to do," moaned Zitzi, hugging her retrieved gems to her breast, and staring reproachfully at Carver. "He seemed such nice man. I am deceive'!"

"I suggest we go down and talk it over with the manager," advised the

hotel detective. "You won't mind accompanying us and answering a few questions, Carver? Not now?" he added meaningly.

"Just respect my constitutional rights," replied the cameraman, shrugging. "Don't do anything you'll regret, and I'll do my bit."

"You may do your bit quite near here," muttered the sleuth, with a not-too-subtle allusion to the big prison situated not far away.

"Careful!" said Carver sharply.

Whistling "The Prisoner's Song," he jauntily led the way downstairs. In the lobby, he remembered that he had left his camera with Fern, and explained that he wanted to look outdoors for it. The house detective acquiesced, but remained close beside him while they looked around. Disappointment awaited Carver.

Fern and the camera had vanished.

Mystified, yet confident that Fern would not desert him in his hour of need, Carver searched porches and lobby. A touch on the arm reminded him that the sleuth was waiting impatiently. With a shrug the cameraman walked toward the hotel office. At its door they were met by another big-shouldered, suspicious-eyed man.

"What's the case, Flint?" demanded the newcomer. "Somebody here telephoned the sheriff's office, and they sent me."

"Say, Keegan, I didn't phone," protested Flint. "We haven't decided that we want you in."

"Well, I am in," announced the other positively.

With a despairing shrug, the house detective turned to Zitzi, and introduced Deputy Sheriff Keegan.

"Who could have been butting in with the telephone" asked Flint.

Carver could answer that with one guess. He knew that Zanff would not pass up such an opportunity to hamper his rival.

"We recovered the stuff," continued Flint. "The countess is complainant—if she decides to complain, which she hasn't yet."

"Maybe she'll have to," said Keegan grunting. "We can't allow this dropping of cases, with all the newspaper clamor going on about crime up here. Who's the guy?"

"I'm Carver of Midworld News Reel, if you refer to me," replied the cameraman. "The stuff was found in my room."

"Wait!" implored Thomas, bursting out of the manager's office, where he had been pleading to drop the case rather than to offend a powerful news reel. "If you officers and the countess will go in and talk this over with Mr. Reamer, maybe we can fix it up. You won't mind waiting outside here a few minutes, will you, Carver?"

"Is that so?" demanded the deputy sheriff. "What's to prevent his running out on us if he's left alone?"

"I'll take the responsibility for his not leaving," snapped Thomas. "And I'm speaking with Mr. Reamer's authority."

Satisfied by this assurance, the others filed into the manager's inner office, leaving Carver smiling alone on a bench in the outer room. For five minutes he waited, unable to overhear the conference in the private office.

Suddenly from the lobby rushed a loutish young yokel, panting heavily, "Bell boy said Mr. Carver's in here," he said, between gasps.

"I'm Carver," said the Midworld ace, rising. "What is it?"

"Toboggan jumped off slide, down near the end," said the fellow. "I'm working there, see? Girl riding on it got hurt awful bad. They think she's dying—her back or sump'n. She was crying for Mr. Carver—says go to the hotel for Carver. So I run here and hurt me ankle running, to tell you. She says come quick to Fern—"

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED BY TREACHERY.

CARVER waited for no more. He dashed wildly out into the growing dusk. Fern had been injured, and she had sent for him. That was enough. Reason flew to the winds. His one thought was to reach her as soon as possible.

The slide's terminus was more than half a mile away, but the raised take-off platform was only a few hundred feet from the hotel driveway. In the dim twilight Carver could see toboggans coasting, and could hear gay shouts. How could they make merry when there had been a tragedy?

Drawn by the shouts, he ran toward the slide. Here was the quickest way to reach the far end of the toboggan. Carver leaped up the wooden stairs and burst out upon the launching platform just as a toboggan crowded with young men and women was about to be started downward.

"Let me on," he demanded brusquely. "I must get down there."

"Who the devil are—" asked the steersman, as the toboggan edged toward the dip-off. He said no more, for with a queer cry, Carver jerked the man from the sled and flung himself down in the vacant place. His toe spurned the take-off, and the sled dived abruptly down the white streak.

Many times in his youth Carver had steered a toboggan down the snowy hills of his native State. But here was a mere ribbon of snow, with only a few feet margin on either side of the sled. The slightest deviation from a straight course would send them crashing into the foot-high wooden sides or even leaping that low barrier for a tumble. Nevertheless, his back-flung leg steered true as they rushed down that steep incline. One breathless dip, and it was done.

Straw was spread at the finish to act as a brake and also as a cushion for

upset tobogganers. Carver capsized the sled and sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean, flopping on my back?" asked the man upon whom he had dropped so unceremoniously at the start.

"Sorry," apologized Carver, tearing away. "Had to rush to the girl who was hurt!"

"What the——" began the angry tobogganer, but another man hastily seized Carver and drew him away, whispering:

"Come on. The hotel don't want it known. I'll take you to where she is, mister. Over this way—hurry!"

"Is she badly hurt? What d'you mean, don't want it known?" asked Carver harshly, as he hurried along, scowling over his shoulder at more toboggan parties gayly sliding down the long incline. How could they act that way when a girl had been injured?

"Spoil everything if folks knew," said his guide, a stocky fellow in sweater and overalls who trotted ahead of the cameraman, leading the way. "Bad for business. The grounds superintendent had us hustle her out of sight right away so it wouldn't spoil the fun."

"Spoil the fun!" mocked Carver bitterly. "Where is she?"

"Over in that tool shed, waiting for a doctor," puffed the man, pointing through the fast-descending twilight toward a small shack used by the workmen while building the toboggan.

Without a glance at the man, Carver sprinted madly across the links to this shed, followed by his guide, who panted hints for a tip. Disregarding this mercenary appeal, Carver rushed to the shed door which stood open, revealing a darkened interior. Unhesitatingly he plunged indoors. And as he did so, he was knocked reeling across the room.

From behind the door leaped the shadowy form of his assailant, brandishing the short timber he had clubbed down on Carver's head. The camera-

man had landed with a crash against a work bench from which he recoiled, groggy but game.

Before the clubber could spring outdoors, Carver seized him by the collar and intercepted the club as it was smashed down again. Wrestling it from the man's hands, the Midworld ace threw it aside and tore into the fellow, a big blond giant with a small, close-shaven head on his broad shoulders.

A natural bruiser, this fellow swung heavily at the active, hard-hitting cameraman as they clashed. Scientifically parrying a haymaker, Carver smashed a drive to the jaw which sent his opponent to the floor. As he went, the bruiser clinched and dragged down the cameraman with him. Caught in that bearlike embrace, Carver rained punches on the fellow until he howled:

"Hold on! That feller didn't pay me to fight you. He said it was just a joke on you——"

"What fellow" asked Carver harshly. "Speak or I'll——"

A terrific blow from behind crashed down on his head and the cameraman sprawled unconscious.

When his senses returned, he found himself locked in the pitch-dark shed. It had no window, but through the cracks he could see that night had fallen. His head ached painfully.

"That other fellow sneaked up behind me and whammed me," he decided, thinking of the man who had guided him to the place. Carver had been too busy subduing the fellow who had lain in wait for him to look out for the one he had left behind when he ran to the shed. "I was taken in—Zanff hired these thugs to lure me here and keep me out of the way until the flares burn out. But I'd do it again, if I thought anything had happened to Fern."

Stirred to action by thoughts of his assignment and the danger of missing the night illumination, he staggered to the door. It held firmly. He shouted.

There was no answer except the merry tries of the tobogganers.

CHAPTER V. ANOTHER THRILL.

SEIZING the stout timber which had been used on his skull, he hammered furiously against the door, raising a din that filled the small shed. With a crash the door flew open, and he staggered out as three men rushed toward him. One of them, a grounds attendant, was pointing and crying: "I heard somebody in there."

"The kid himself," exulted Keegan as he turned a flash light on the battered cameraman. The deputy sheriff and Flint had been driving around the grounds, searching for him. "I knew he couldn't get far away. Come on, feller. This time we won't trust your honor."

Too dazed to resist, Carver let them put him into their flivver. Assured they were driving back to the hotel, he remained silent, his mind active and satisfied. He declined to answer questions there, preferring to explain to all concerned at once, and not piecemeal.

As he entered the lobby with Keegan, he saw Zanff arguing with Thomas, while in a secluded corner sat Teddy Yost, Midworld's assistant cameraman and handy youth, who nodded guardedly.

From a corridor Fern Estabrook glided into Carver's path. Ostentatiously snubbing him, she walked haughtily past, so close that her hand brushed against Carver's.

Despite the snub, Carver smiled. Into his hand she had slipped a note. Then his smile faded as Zanff spoke:

"There's no use waiting for him. I want to get this done and go. Order those flares lighted immediately."

"All right," agreed Thomas, nervously. "In ten minutes."

"Right now," snarled Zanff. The

flares would burn out in four minutes—and the illuminated tobogganing would be over without Carver getting any pictures of it. The time for a show-down had arrived.

"Hold everything," commanded Carver, masterfully drawing free of Keegan and addressing Manager Reamer, who appeared unhappily escorting Zitzi. He glanced quickly at the note and went on: "This has gone far enough. You can't afford to offend Midworld by countenancing this fake charge by a—"

"This notoriety would be very distasteful and hurtful to us," admitted Reamer, drawing them aside. "The countess is willing to be reasonable, but Sheriff Keegan insists on pushing the charge, especially since you ran away after we trusted you."

"I was tricked away," replied Carver, staring steadily at Zanff. "I can prove to you in a minute that you also have been tricked. My friends and my organization have been busy. You have a projecting machine. Come, see our proof."

The hotel had a projecting machine for private showing of motion pictures in a dining room. Fern and Yost had already arranged with the hotel projection operator, and Carver calmly led the mystified group into the room, which then was darkened. Promptly the machine whirred, and on the screen appeared a subject from Midworld News Reel's library. In big letters the title announced:

St. MORITZ—Winter sports sway gay resort. Countess Zitzi of Zarycz, champion tobogganer.

On the shimmering sheet leaped a close-up of a big, smiling blonde in winter sports costume.

A frightened gasp broke from the darkness. Instantly Carver snapped on the lights as he pointed accusingly at the dismayed brunette cowering before them.

"This woman's an impostor," Carver charged. "The real Zitzi was injured permanently in a toboggan crash three years ago. I remembered the film and had it brought from our library. The countess is bed-ridden and unable to prosecute this woman who is notorious on the continent as a hotel beat who 'loses' her valuables and then lets the hotel settle to avoid notoriety, so my office tells me."

"She sure looks guilty," growled Flint. "But she never was out of sight of Thomas or me after the pearls disappeared, until we went up to your room and found 'em. How do you explain that?"

"A gentleman"—Carver drawled the word—"who was abroad last year for one of our rivals met her here to-day. I imagine he threatened to expose her unless she helped put me in bad. Their meeting was quite accidental, and he probably scared her so that she agreed. They had to make up something as they went along, in a hurry, but it wasn't bad. When I handed this lady the pearls, she hid them in a snowball right before our eyes. After I changed suits and left my room, my kind rival threw the snowball through the open window."

"A fine story!" grunted Zanff. "I don't know her."

"Miss Estabrook cranked footage of his doing it—with my camera I left in her care," pursued Carver calmly. "We can develop and show it later, if you still want proof. The radiator wasn't leaking—it merely melted the snowball and left the pearls."

"And now, Zitzi, or whatever your name is, if you want to escape trouble, answer truthfully. What hold did Zanff have on you?"

"He recognized me and threatened to expose me, as you guessed," said the fake countess, sobbing. "He made me vamp you to keep you from making the cinema of thees illumination, make jealous thee sweetheart——"

"Stop him!" shouted Carver, as the door slammed.

Zanff had slipped away.

"I'll yank him to the sheriff for making me this trouble," growled Keegan, as Reamer nodded agreement.

Carver ran into the lobby where Fern was waiting with his camera, which she had hidden in her room for safety during the unsettled hours. Seizing it, Carver ran with Fern to the toboggan. They might be too late to thwart the Globewide man, who was bellowing as he ran.

"Light those flares!"

"Don't do it until I give the order," shouted Thomas.

Zanff had planted his camera in the front end of a toboggan, poised to slide, when Carver swooped upon him. Seizing the Globewide man by the collar, Carver dragged him from the sled and faced him triumphantly. With a mighty heave, he threw his rival into Keegan's arms.

"Keep him and his camera, too!" Carver shouted. "Now, let's go! Lights!"

Suddenly the streak of snow was illuminated blindingly by blazing flares. Down through this lane of brilliance dashed a sled on which Fern Estabrook rode standing. Right after it raced another toboggan, in which was Carver and his camera, shooting another thrill for Midworld News Reel.

On the Receiving End

A MAN out walking one day ran across a friend, a playwright, who was heavily bandaged and looked much the worse for wear. He stopped to speak to him.

"Good heavens," he said, "you've just come out of a hospital. How did it happen?"

"Well," replied the other, "when that play of mine was tried on the dog last month, the audience called for the author at the end—and I never realized how much they wanted him."



False Face-

DJ

Albert M. Treynor



(A SERIAL—PART II.)

CHASED by bloodhounds and a posse of man hunters led by Doad, an evil-looking prison keeper, "Bat" Wilkins, murderer and noted criminal, stumbled half crazed through a terrific blizzard to an all but inaccessible forestry lookout station in the high Sierras. He peered through the window to find a young girl alone in the room, then vaulted inside and threatened her with an automatic.

Wilkins told the girl, Gail Sommers, who was a forestry lookout, that he was going to kill her in order that he might have a clear field for action when his pursuers arrived. A man stepped in from an adjoining room, but the desperado instantly covered him with the automatic. Wilkins was almost insane with exposure and fear. He told the man, Daniel Bristol, that he, too, would have to die.

Bristol, a famous young surgeon, had lost his way in the storm, and had taken refuge in the forestry station. He was extraordinarily cool, but could do nothing. Finally, he made the criminal an offer—to change Wilkins' face by an operation so that it would never be recognized, if the murderer would spare the girl's life. As the storm had barricaded the one trail, no one could enter or leave the lookout station for some time. After much haggling, the strange bargain was made.

The operation was performed, and during the criminal's convalescence the girl and Bristol taught him proper English. When at last the bandages were removed, Wilkins was overjoyed, but dismayed when he remembered that his finger prints would remain the same. Bristol asked to see the fingers, and suddenly thrust them against the red-hot stove. That changed the prints, but the letter M was branded indelibly into one finger. That letter, part of the name of the stove, had been raised in the metal side.

CHAPTER VII. THE RECKONING DAY.



Na few days Wilkins was permitted to take the dressings from his hand, and it could be seen that the tissue of thumb and finger tips would always remain so scarred and puckered as to defy recognition under the recording system of the police.

There were still left certain cranial and digital measurements by which the old "Bat" Wilkins might possibly be betrayed, but such chances were remote. As long as he kept out of trouble in the future, there would be no occasion for the police biographers to reckon angles and count millimeters. He would be presumably safe for any term of good behavior.

Bristol thought up a story for him to tell, a commonplace, uninteresting fabrication that would not be apt to arouse curiosity. "Born in the slums, family dead, no friends," he invented. "You've been a tramp laborer and roustabout all your life, wandering from one job to another—the wharves, wheat fields, construction camps.

"You were working your way afoot through the mountains this time, hoping to find something to do in one of the lumber camps. And the snow caught you at this place. It isn't likely anybody will bother to check up on you.

"For a name we'll call you Joe Adams," Bristol suggested. "There are so many Adamses that nobody's apt to wonder which branch you came from. Suit you?"

"It's a good enough name," said Wilkins.

"As to the future, what sort of work would you like to do?" Bristol's glance was so searching that the other man shifted his eyes away. "I'm assuming you're willing to work."

"Sure," replied the outlaw, after the briefest pause. "I don't know, though, but—well, maybe I'd just as soon be a chauffeur."

"Can you drive a car?"

"I've driven 'em." The man shuffled his feet and looked self-consciously at the floor.

It did not need an especially morbid fancy to visualize Wilkins at a driving wheel—a dark night, extinguished headlights, an ill-omened car gliding through the shadows.

Bristol could only hope that fear, if nothing else, would keep his man from a return to the old ways and habits. "We can probably place you as a chauffeur," he promised. "Meanwhile you can be a wood chopper. Your hand's well enough to grip an ax, and our fuel box is empty."

Without hesitation or any hint of sullessness, Wilkins—or Adams, as he thereafter called himself—picked up the ax, paused for just a second to admire his face in the mirror, and then went out of doors to tackle what presumably was his first honest bit of toil.

In the days that followed, Adams, the recreated, took his share of work with seeming willingness and gave his companions no trouble of any sort. His docility may have been due in a measure to his fear of the man who held the whip hand, who might be able to undo his own skilled surgical work with a pair of equally skilled fists.

Adams knew that his future security

depended entirely on the forbearance of Bristol and Miss Sommers. A word from either of them could ruin him.

On the other hand, it may have been that the man had undergone such a strong reaction of feeling after his night of terror that he really wanted to travel a straighter path in the future. As he no longer looked like a thug, the mirror might remind him not to act like one. He was always looking into the mirror with the evident satisfaction of a man who thinks he is handsome.

Instead of slinking, he was learning to stand with his head up and his chest out. In fact, he was beginning to develop the vanity of self, which, in a moderate degree, is good for the soul.

Bristol, however, remained skeptical and watchful. Adams was still in the trap, still on probation. The test would come later, after he had passed the scrutiny of the prison guards and when he began to feel safely masked in his new personality. His reformation might be all on the outside. And although he behaved himself well enough at present, he was not the most pleasant of companions.

They had tabooed the subject of his past, but in spite of his attempts to make himself agreeable, it was not easy to forget what he had been. He was too humble half of the time and too bumptious the other half, and neither Bristol nor Gail felt altogether friendly toward a man who never looked straight at them, whose eyes were a flat, leaden color, and who said nothing whatever.

On the whole, the passing days proved to be rather irksome for Adams' companions after he was able to be up and about. There was every reason for them to feel greatly relieved when one sunny morning they heard a shout from the gully below them, and looked down to see the figures of men creeping around the goat path behind the drifts of snow.

The shoveling had reached the lower

end of the gully. There were a half dozen workers and two others who at the distance were seen to carry rifles slung over their backs. Great masses of snow still remained to be cleared away through the length of the choked gully, however, and it was three days later when the rescue party reached the foot of the cliff where stood the lookout station.

The first man up the high ladder was Miss Sommers' chief, the head forester of that district; the second was an armed man, who said he was a keeper from the prison and that his name was Jack Doad. He was looking for an escaped convict who, he had reason to believe, had been driven in this direction last fall by a trailing pack of bloodhounds.

Save for the harsh manner of authority with which he invested his speech, Doad might have been mistaken for one of the prisoners whom he mistreated. He was a Neolithic throwback, a type of man to remind his more civilized fellows of the race's brutish ancestry.

He was a short-legged, coarse-bodied individual, with swinging, powerful arms—thick-necked, thick-skinned, and probably thick-witted, too, judging by the slope of his bulletlike head. He had a red face, eyes like two chunks of greenish ice, and a jaw shaped like the bottom of a flatiron, and as hard.

All in all, he was a man fitted by nature for the herding and harrying of other men.

Acting under Bristol's instructions, Adams walked up to Doad the minute the keeper had climbed to the high point of the rocks. The one-time convict tried to look the prison official in the eye, tried to act natural and careless. The surgeon was watching and sensed the fear and hatred behind the outlaw's effort of casualness.

"Got a match?" Adams asked.

"Naw," said Doad impolitely. He sized up the man with a stony regard,

and then turned away without a flicker of an eyelash.

Brought face to face with his former prisoner, Doad did not know him. He could reach forth his hand to take his man by the collar, and he never even suspected.

Adams put up an unsteady hand to twitch at the points of his newly grown mustache. A dull flush spread across his forehead, and then suddenly a look of exultation flamed in his eyes. The dreaded ordeal was over, and as he gazed across the mountains his nostrils expanded, as though he had caught a scent of pleasant things beyond. He had escaped from the past, and life once more invited him.

Bristol was aware of Doad's insolent stare. "The day you was snowed-in up here," said the keeper, "did you see a runaway convict anywhere, a plug-ugly named Wilkins wit' a busted nose?"

"This man is the only one I saw that day, or have seen since," replied the surgeon. "He calls himself Adams."

Doad turned away with a half-smothered imprecation, muttering something about nine wasted weeks.

"The officers were certain that they had their man penned here on this mountain," said the forestry chief. "It's too bad, because he was a dangerous murderer. He got away clean, evidently, and they've been sitting on the lower slope, holding an empty bag."

The forester brought a packet of letters that had accumulated in his office for Gail Sommers, and while preparations were being made to leave the lookout station, the girl was opening envelopes, renewing her contact with the outside world.

Bristol happened to notice her a few minutes later, seated alone on the step of the shack, an opened sheet of paper in her mitten hand and a bewildered, almost frightened look on her face.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Bad news?"

She nodded slowly in reply, and her eyes were sadder than he had ever seen them. "Samuel Sommers—the uncle I told you about—died of pneumonia—three weeks ago. His attorneys have written that the bulk of his fortune is left to me."

"It's nothing to grieve over," Bristol said. "He didn't treat you so well during his life."

"Oh, he never meant anything to me one way or another. I hardly ever saw him. But, it's a shock—the money, I mean. I didn't expect it—to have millions, just dumped in my lap."

"It's the kind of a shock most people recover from. I don't suppose it would be quite respectful to your uncle's memory if I were to congratulate you, but just the same I'm glad you're through with this sort of business—living alone or mountaintops."

"For all I know, it may be worse. I don't know just why he picked me out, except I'm his nearest relative, about the only one, I guess. His lawyers say he wanted me to live in his home—it'll be mine now—an estate in the hills back of San Francisco. There are servants and gardens and stables and a half dozen cars."

"I know, it's terrible," Bristol said. "But cheer up. You may survive it."

She sat quiet for a moment, a moody line drawn between her straight brows, but at length she threw up her head and her expression grew somewhat brighter. "Anyhow," she said, "I can give a job to Joe Adams. I'll let him drive one of the cars."

"You're crazy!" he protested.

"Yes, and no." She sighed. "It's part of the price I've got to pay for my life. Wilkins would have killed me that night if you hadn't stepped in and promised his salvation. It was done for me, and now I've got to do my part. He's been saved from the law—and let us hope, from himself—and if I can, I've got to help keep him saved."

Bristol regarded her thoughtfully, but did not attempt further to dissuade her. Knowing her as he did, he realized that if she had made up her mind, it was useless to argue with her. "You're right, of course. He's my responsibility, and he's yours. We've tampered with the law of man and the law of nature, and heaven only knows what we have started now."

"I've been thinking it over lately, now that it's too late, and I'm not so sure we wouldn't have been wiser to let him shoot us that night and had an end to the whole business. There are things you have no right to meddle with."

"I know," she agreed. "But it may turn out all right."

He was not listening to her. "The old Bat Wilkins was a dangerous man," Bristol mused, "but he carried a stop-look-listen signal on his face to warn people what to expect. But the new Joe Adams has a face that doesn't betray the devil that probably still lives inside him. That's what I've done—I've given the wolf a presentable exterior. People won't suspect the danger until the teeth have got them."

"Perhaps," she suggested hopefully, "he'll try to be worthy of his face. So far he seems to want to behave."

"So far," admitted Bristol. "But later it may turn out that I've loosed a monster in the world, a Frankenstein." He shook his head and groaned. "I've got to give up work and become a watchdog. Adams is my creature, and if need be, I've got to give up the rest of my life to him. I owe that much to society. As I'm the one man who knows the truth, so I alone am responsible for his future acts."

"Mine also," said Gail Sommers. "Ours! And furthermore, as Adams is your creature, so am I. You have given us both our lives." She stood up and her eyes soberly met his. "What you have given, you have the right to take. And to that extent you may call upon

me at any time, in anything. I will be ready."

CHAPTER VIII. AT THE CRISIS.

TO Bristol's surprise, Joe Adams, chauffeur, fully lived up to the professional recommendation that had been given him by Bat Wilkins, convict. He proved himself to be a skilled and careful driver, and also he discovered a mechanical turn of mind that seemed to afford him an actual interest and pleasure in tinkering with automobile engines.

During his first month in the employ of Sam Sommers' heiress, Adams overhauled one after another the seven cars in the garage, and after he had taken them down and put them together again there was not a knock or an off-key sound to be heard in a single one of the motors intrusted to his care.

Gail Sommers would have much preferred to use one of the smaller roadsters and do her own driving, but to make Adams believe that she had confidence in him, she usually sent for the limousine and chauffeur when she went out. She was a small and lonely figure in the gloomy mansion, which still seemed to her as big and ugly and unnecessary as an elephant left in her unwilling custody.

A trifle dazed by what most people would have considered her good fortune, she was still trying to gather her wits, wondering what useful occupation she might find for her time and talents and money, and meanwhile not doing a great deal of anything.

On the day he returned to civilization, Bristol resigned his place on the Mount Holly staff, gave up his work, and sat back glumly to watch the result of his experiment in plastic surgery. He was cynical enough to doubt the sincerity of Adams' attempted reformation. The criminal instincts in the man might break

out at any time, and Bristol felt like a fireman, on duty day and night, waiting for an alarm call.

The ex-convict would have to prove himself by at least a couple of years' good conduct before Bristol's conscience would relieve him of his present responsibilities. And in the meantime the surgeon was grimly prepared to act as judge and executioner if need be, to kill his man rather than allow him to harm anybody.

The grounds of the Sommers' estate were surrounded by a wild stretch of woodland in the hills a few miles back of San Francisco Bay. Bristol found a little vacant cottage on a side road not far distant, which he rented for an indefinite term, and in which he installed his library and a small experimental laboratory to occupy his leisure time.

There was much reading and a certain line of research work that he had been wanting to do for a long time, and the notion of living in hermitlike retirement for a year or so was not distasteful. He had a telephone put in, and Gail Sommers had promised to call him at the first sign of trouble with the man whom they considered a mutual charge.

As he never left his premises, he thus was able to keep watch and ward over Adams, without the need of seeing the man or letting him know that he was under surveillance.

When Gail Sommers first moved into her new home, Bristol went to see her two or three times, and he was mildly amused at her attempts to appear natural before her servants and to adjust an active mind to a life of idleness.

She had no friends, and after she had worn out the novelty of having unlimited money to spend in the shops when she drove to town, she began to find the hours weighing heavily on her hands.

She had thought of taking a course in nursing and going in for settlement work, but Bristol dissuaded her from

making hasty plans for the future. "You've got enough on your mind just now with Adams," he said. "Let's go slow for a while till we see how he turns out.

"If by chance we should make a regular citizen of him, we could consider ourselves experts in that line. You and I then might take on some others of his sort, endow a fund between us, and start a hospital for maimed souls. It would be a great thing if it works, which I very much doubt."

After his first few visits, Bristol pointedly stayed away from the Sommers' home. The girl called him up after a couple of weeks' absence and seemed to be a little hurt at his neglect. He explained that the moral effect on Adams would be better if the man were allowed to think he was his own free agent without restraints of any sort.

If he, Bristol, were too much in evidence, there was danger of creating the impression that he was acting as a bailiff and a spy. If he had other reasons for remaining at home, he did not mention them.

Of the people involved in one way or another in the escape of Bat Wilkins, Jack Doad, the head keeper of the penitentiary, alone suffered ill consequences.

Bristol saw an item in the papers stating that Doad had been brought before the prison board on charges of carelessness and incompetence. He had been blamed directly for the momentary negligence that had given the convict the chance to run for it, and for the failure later to recapture the fugitive.

The descriptions and records of the runaway had been broadcast across the continent, and the police were confident of picking him up again some time, somewhere. But in the meantime the prison board had acted on the evidence against Doad, and let him out of his job.

The papers did not state what had become of the former keeper. To the

great joy of the few hundred prisoners whom it was his wont to bulldoze, he had been kicked out of his place, and whence he had disappeared nobody seemed to know or care.

Bristol felt a slight twinge of conscience in the knowledge that he in a measure was to blame for Doad's discomfiture, but he could salve his small qualms with the thought that the man probably deserved dismissal, and that he would find occupation somewhere else for his gloomy talents.

As for the man who was the object of a country-wide search by the police, and who now lived under a new name and in a new character, the reports that came to Bristol from time to time were most encouraging. Adams not only was quick, almost eager, in his response to the not very onerous duties of his employment, but he had bought books on automotive engineering and was studying diligently, in the hope, he said, of fitting himself for a higher-paid profession.

Such faith as Bristol had, pinned itself on the possibility that self-respect might grow up behind a respectable-looking face. People must have shrunk visibly from the Bat Wilkins that was, afraid of him, repelled at sight and letting him see how they felt. The effect was certain. Tell a man often enough that he looked like a mucker and he would be sure to act like one. Would the equation work the other way around?

So far, at any rate, Adams was behaving himself and showing no sign of backsliding. In appearance he no longer was a surly bulldog, and people had no reason to shun him.

Miss Sommers said that the servants and the few others with whom he came into contact treated him decently; that, in fact, one or two of the maids in the household had gone a step or two out of their way to let him see that they thought him quite a fellow.

Adams, however, without seeming unfriendly, kept to himself and attended strictly to business. He could never reveal himself to his old acquaintances, and he appeared to be in no hurry about making new ones.

"You wouldn't know him yourself," the girl told Bristol over the phone at the end of the second month. "He keeps his hair as shiny as a parlor sheik's and his mustache neatly pointed, and the muscles around his mouth are learning how to smile. He wears his chauffeur's uniform as though it belonged to a colonel of cavalry. He seems to be getting a lot of confidence in himself."

"You think he'll stick it?"

"Yes. He's improving every day. I'm sure—"

"What's wrong?" asked Bristol, who had caught a dubious note in the girl's tone.

"I don't know," she answered. "It's something—queer in the way he has of looking at you when he thinks you don't see. I—can't tell you just what it is, except— Well, it may not be Adams at all. It may just be in my own mind. It's hard to forget some things."

"You can't explain any better than that?"

"No."

Bristol scowled at the telephone. "I think it would be a good idea if we found Adams another place," he said.

The girl, however, would not listen to such a suggestion. "We can't ask anybody else to risk him," she said, and as far as she was concerned that was the end of the discussion.

She telephoned a couple of days later in some uneasiness, to tell the surgeon that a man whom she believed to be Jack Doad, the former prison keeper, had stopped at the house that morning and had seen Adams.

"Recognize him?" Bristol asked.

"He didn't seem to. He and another man stopped at the house in a touring car, said they were going to a town

farther back in the mountains, and asked if we could put them on the right road. They only stayed a little while, and they went on, and if they suspected that Adams was the old Wilkins they gave no hint."

"What was the other man like?" Bristol asked.

"He was a lank, pasty-faced person with thin, sandy hair and little reddish eyes. I didn't think much of him."

"You can't expect a man of Doad's stamp to be running around with very nice people," said the surgeon. "Doad was kicked out of his job a while ago. Maybe he's hunting another one. Did Adams see him?"

"He had just brought the car around to the front door when the two men drove up. It was the look of his face that made me notice Doad and remember who he was. Adams' complexion went a sickly gray for a second. He thought as I did, I guess, that he had been found out.

"Then I saw him stiffen at the wheel in a physical effort to buck himself up. It was like a deliberate trying out of his new-found nerve when he suddenly climbed out of the limousine, walked across to the other car, put a foot on the running board and told the two men how to find their road."

"Then what?"

"Then," said the girl, "Adams did an astonishing thing. He pushed his face close to Doad's and remarked something about their having met before. Told him he'd been on a visit to the penitentiary one time, and that he remembered seeing Doad there in a keeper's uniform. Asked him if he wasn't the same man."

Bristol's repressed whistle sounded in the transmitter. "Did Doad recall him as the man who had been snowed-in at the lookout station?" he asked, after an interval.

"Didn't seem to. He just growled something unintelligible and drove away."

When Adams walked back to the limousine, there was the jaunty swing to his shoulders and the carefree, triumphant look about him of a man who had found himself."

"Either of you mention the occurrence afterward?"

"No. Adams was the stone-visaged chauffeur again when he turned to hold the door open for me. We drove to the village, and I'm phoning from there."

"I think we have reached our crisis," said Bristol. "Adams got through one meeting with Doad, but he probably has been dreading a second. It has come, and he carried it off with a high hand. He'll feel sure of himself after this. His last fears have been removed, and now the real test has come. Phone me instantly at the first warning of trouble. And please be on your guard."

CHAPTER IX.

BROKEN FAITH.

THREE days passed before Bristol heard from the girl again, and this time she did not telephone, but came to his bungalow alone at night, driving her roadster herself and carrying consternation in her lovely hazel eyes.

The surgeon had been working late in his laboratory, and he answered the doorbell in his shirt sleeves, without stopping to hunt for his coat. From his absence of surprise it might almost have seemed that the visit was expected.

"All right," he said grimly at his first sight of Gail's face. "Let's hear it. The worst, I suppose!"

The girl was breathing quickly, as though she had walked the distance instead of driving comfortably over a good road. "I don't know what you call the worst. This isn't, I don't suppose. But—" Her cheeks suddenly went scarlet. "Adams proposed to me this evening," she blurted out.

Bristol's tense mouth relaxed in a crooked grin. "Why not?" he said.

"After all, my dear, who wouldn't want to marry you?"

"Don't laugh!" she cried. She looked up at him with stormy eyes. "That convict—murderer—" She checked herself with a shudder.

"Also your chauffeur." Bristol shrugged a hard shoulder. "It would be too much to expect Adams to appreciate the distinction in social lines. He's an elemental person who's learned to take what he can get in life in the most direct way.

"In his new career, I don't suppose his employer would seem farther beyond his reach than a cold-steel bank vault with all its fine safeguards. As for his falling in love with you, who can blame him? Well, what did he say to you?"

"He wasn't disagreeable," she admitted. "If it had been anybody else I could have taken no offense. He said he couldn't expect me to think much of him in his present job, but that he was going to get a better one—was sure that he'd amount to something some day. The horrid part was his seeming to forget what he has been—as though that didn't matter in the least."

"There must be a blank spot in a criminal's mind that keeps him from seeing the ugliness of crime," said the surgeon—"anyhow, his own misdeeds. Adams is full of egotism now, pleased with himself, vain of the face he sees in his mirror. You can't wonder that he's carried away, when he thinks back on what it used to be. It wouldn't occur to him that others might not be quite so entranced. I presume you told him to go chase himself."

"I stood there like a dolt, too flabber-gasted to move or speak."

"Allowing him to see just how horrified you were?"

"I couldn't help it. I told him that after this it would be impossible to—keep him on the premises."

"Fired him?"

"He didn't give me the chance. Said he was quitting. But said I'd see him again—in a year or so, maybe. Told me that I'd change my mind by then." Gail shivered. "Remember the night he came to the lookout station with the dogs behind him? There was something about him to remind me of that night—the restless way he had of balancing first on one foot and then the other, the nervousness of his hands, the not-quite-sane look of him. I got away from the house and came here with the accelerator on the floor."

"I'm just as well pleased that he's leaving," said Bristol. "Never quite liked the idea of his living at your place. When does he go?"

"At once. To-night."

Bristol had been leaning at ease against the back of a chair, but he straightened abruptly, shot a rueful glance at his companion, and then turned without a word and left the room. In two minutes he came back with his coat on, a hat on the back of his head, and a topcoat over his arm.

From his trousers pocket he fished up a fat roll of bills, thumbed them over, nodded to himself, and thrust them back where he had found them. Then he jerked open a desk drawer, and drew out a heavy army revolver. He inspected the weapon with obvious dislike, and shoved it into his back pocket.

"I'm ready," he said.

The girl had watched him in growing uneasiness. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"I don't know. Where Adams goes."

She held back as Bristol started for the door, but his hand closed over her elbow and he walked her along with him. He snapped off the light switch in the hallway and left the bungalow in darkness. He fastened the front door latch and sighed as he put the key under the porch mat. "We can write the landlord where to find it. I'm not likely to see the place again."

"What are you going to do?" Gail asked in dread.

"How do I know?" He strode across the lawn to a gray mogul of an automobile that had overrun his driveway and had been left with the forewheels parked in a flower bed. "Get in." He opened the door on the right side, and as the girl hesitated he moved around to the opposite side and slid in under the steering wheel.

Bristol started the motor, and as Gail slipped into the car beside him, he backed around and drove out through the open gate. A fast trip across the hills brought them in less than half an hour within sight of the old Sommers' mansion standing amid its landscaped terraces.

The windows of the house were brightly alight, and between the orderly clumps of shrubbery they also saw twinkling lights in the direction of the stables and garage.

The big house looked friendly and welcoming in the surrounding gloom of the woods, but the cheerful lights found no reflection in Gail Sommers' eyes. She was gazing anxiously through the windshield.

"I wonder what it means?" she said. "The place was almost dark when I left."

Bristol did not reply. He took the curve at the foot of the hill and the car glided through the stone portals at the gate, and swung around the gravel driveway, to be brought up with scarcely a sound under the portico at the front of the house. After setting his brakes, he jumped to the ground. The girl followed.

They mounted the front steps to find the massive door standing ajar. There was no need to ring, and they entered the foyer and passed into a large room, which was illuminated by a blazing chandelier overhead.

There was nobody visible, no definite sound to be heard, but as Bristol shot

his glance toward a closed door opposite, a sudden presentiment tightened the muscles about his heart and drew tenser the abrupt line of his jaw. Perhaps Gail's sense of disquiet had communicated itself to him. Without knowing why, he dreaded to look beyond that wall.

The girl kept close beside him as he crossed the room.

"What's in there?" he heard himself asking.

"It's the library," she whispered.

He opened the door, and then stopped dead. The inner room was a spacious chamber, curtained heavily at the windows with faded brocades, shelled almost to the ceiling for the tiers and tiers of books that belonged to the old Sommers' library. There were chairs and tables in abundance, massive, leather-seated monstrosities of carved oak and walnut.

At the far end of the room were grouped five people, obviously servants—two men and three women. The silence of the place was disturbed by the murmur of frightened voices, and Bristol saw that one of the women was crying.

He passed into the room to see a third man in the shadow behind a reading table, stretched full length on the floor. "Well?" Bristol inquired.

The group separated nervously at his approach, but no one was ready to answer him.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"Oliver," one of the women ventured to say.

"Oliver?"

"The butler, sir."

Bristol was vaguely conscious of Gail Sommers' ashen face peering over the table, but he avoided her eyes and went down on his knees. The man lay flat on his back, his seamed, pallid visage showing expressionless in the shadow. He did not seem to breathe, and the open, glassy eyes held no flickering of life.

This was a familiar business for the surgeon, and his manner was tranquil and impersonal as he bent to examine the staring pupils and then listened for a beating heart. His fingers searched gently under the graying hair at the base of the butler's skull, and then he stood up again and with a pocket handkerchief absently wiped the red stains from his hand.

"Who hit him?" he asked, addressing the housemaid who had replied to his first question.

"I—I don't know," the young woman faltered. "Is he—"

"No!" Bristol growled emphatically. "Certainly not. Supraoccipital cracked—slight concussion, I fear. He's alive." He turned to Gail Sommers, whose face was ghastly under the chandelier. "I won't have the time to do much for him myself, but I'll phone to Mount Holly for Danton and Craig, two of the best. They'll pull him through." For the first time his burden of feeling broke through the professional mask. "He'll weather it—thank Heaven!"

"What—happened?" Gail asked in a stifled voice.

"Where's Joe Adams?" Bristol said to one of the men, who, by the grubby look of his fingers, was the gardener.

"W-we don't know, sir," the gardener stammered. "He's— We went to his room to see if he could tell us where Miss—where to find Miss Gail, and the drawers were pulled out of his bureau and his clothes gone."

"The big car was in the drive early in the evening, and it's gone too now," volunteered the housemaid. "I thought I heard it drive off, just a little while ago."

Bristol looked at Gail Sommers. "Did you send the chauffeur anywhere this evening?"

She faced him, speechless, and shook her head. Adams had left without her knowledge or permission, and evidently had taken the limousine with him.

Bristol swung around to question the maid who, apparently, was in more complete possession of her wits than the rest of the servants. "Tell me all you know," he snapped out. "Quick! Who found Oliver like this? How long ago?"

"I found him, sir. Not—— Maybe it was twenty minutes since."

"I think somebody slugged him with the butt of a gun. Who?"

"It was the burglar. Oliver, he must have caught him."

"Burglar? Why do you think it was a burglar?"

The woman glanced apprehensively at her employer, and nodded her head toward a door at the farther end of the room.

"In there," she said. "You'll see."

Bristol had not noticed before, but now that his attention was drawn in that direction he saw that the heavy door was splintered and half torn from its hinges. He walked forward to look into a small windowless alcove adjoining the library, which the late Samuel Sommers evidently had fitted up as a strong room. At the far end of the chamber stood a ponderous black safe, the biggest one that Bristol had ever seen.

There was sufficient light to reveal the safe door hanging outward from its shattered fastenings. It needed but a moment's investigation to show that the crevices had been soaped; an explosive charge had lifted a ton of steel off the locking wards.

It was a nitroglycerine job, undoubtedly the work of an expert "boxman." There were a few books and papers in the metal compartments and scattered over the floor, but nothing of real value was left in the safe.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLIND SEARCH.

A CLEAN sweep!" said Bristol, as Gail came in to look. "Anything much?"

"The family silver. There was some jewelry and quite a bit of money. I'd have to look it up to tell you the amount."

"A big haul."

She nodded indifferently, thinking of Oliver and the missing Adams, little concerned over anything else.

"I suppose so," she said vaguely.

Bristol was about to turn away, but checked himself, caught by a metallic glint in a corner of the room. He crossed the floor and picked up a sterling-silver bowl which the thief, presumably, had dropped in his haste to pack up and leave. For a second or two the surgeon balanced the beautifully polished thing in his hand, and then, instead of returning it to the safe, as he first intended, he moved back into the other room and paused under the light.

Gail, who had followed, saw him examine the surface of the silver bowl, and then she was aware that his mouth had hardened and that a steely luster had taken the human warmth from his eyes. She pressed nearer.

"What have you found?" she whispered.

Without a word the surgeon showed her a smudge dully outlined against the gleaming side of the little silver bowl. The mark was the size and shape of a human thumb tip, but instead of the usual arches and whorls that are known to the finger-print biographers of the police, the impression had a warped and shriveled appearance, save for a single smooth spot in the center which, in outline, was singularly like a letter "M."

Bristol slanted the cup in the light until she had caught the mark at the proper angle of reflection. She saw and understood, and there was a drawn, sickish look about her eyes.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

Bristol took his handkerchief from his pocket, slowly wiped away the smudge, and then deposited the cup on the table.

"There's only one thing I can do—that I've got to do."

Her eyes sought his, wide with horror. "Oh, no!" she gasped.

"I'll send the medicos to Oliver," he said. He met her glance fleetingly, and then turned his head aside, as though unwilling to have her read his mind. "You'd better notify the police. Let them see what's happened. Tell them your chauffeur is gone. Let them go after Adams."

"And you?" she said, and could not stifle the sob in her voice.

He answered so quietly that only she could hear. "I'm the one who turned the wolf loose," he said. "I'm going after Wilkins."

There were crooked, narrow pavements debouching from gloomier alleyways, dingy and squalid under the faintly gleaming arc lights; shuttered windows and forbidding, dank hallways, queer, fetid smells confined by hot walls. Muffled voices rose and fell as skulking feet passed by. Vague figures went slinking through the shadows, faces blurred in the yellow fog. Everything was dimness and furtiveness. This was the meanest and the ugliest, the most unsavory vista of streets in the over-crowded city. It was here that Bristol had hoped to find the man.

On the night that the butler was assaulted and the safe robbed in Gail Sommers' home, Bristol had set out immediately on a blind search for Bat Wilkins. He no longer thought of the man as Adams. That part of a grim farce was ended. The probationer had succumbed to his other self. A dangerous murderer was at large.

Bristol had been vouchsafed a single definite clew to aid him in his hunt. A crossroads policeman remembered seeing a big, foreign-built limousine, without passengers, driven down a main highway in the direction of the city. By the description, the car undoubtedly

belonged to Miss Sommers. But after that one glimpse of it no further reports had come to the police. The automobile and the driver had vanished in mystery.

Nevertheless, Bristol was confident of meeting his man. The successful still-hunter discovers a frequented trail, and watches beside it. Some time or other the quarry must come along.

In Bat Wilkins' case it was almost inevitable that he should return to the old familiar haunts. Here he would know of secret hiding places and crooked byways of evasion, here, in need, he might find friendly help. Here also one might turn dubious property into cash—monogrammed silverware and pieces of jewelry too easily identified. The former Bat Wilkins would know where to find purchasers of such articles who would take what he had to sell and not ask foolish questions.

A search of two-year-old newspaper files promptly discovered the outlaw's former stamping grounds. An acquaintance at the hospital, an interne who rode an ambulance, showed Bristol the hang-outs where one might reasonably expect to encounter the traffickers in almost every branch of crime.

For two days and nights Bristol had been lurking in this wretched neighborhood, which lay in the fringes of Chinatown, not far from the wharves. So far he had not seen Wilkins, but he was still hopeful.

Bristol was wearing a shabby looking brown coat, frayed trousers of a darker color, and heavy shoes with broken laces. His shapeless hat was kept tilted on the bridge of his high, aristocratic nose. It was nearly three days since he had shaved.

In appearance he was quite as ignoble as any of the men he passed in the dark alleyways or elbowed in the cheap restaurants where he took his meals. Nobody had offered to molest him, or even had sized him up with a curious look.

The least inviting of the underworld resorts which the surgeon had visited was a basement rendezvous called The Coffee Cup. Here, if one insisted, one might be served muddy, lukewarm coffee in a stone cup; otherwise the cup would contain a raw and fiery beverage.

The place occupied the entire cellar under an unclean delicatessen store. A vaulted, smoke-filled room, shut in by bare brick walls and reached from an alley by a flight of moldering, sagging stairs, it did not seem a sort of retreat to attract many customers. But perhaps there was a charm for certain people in the rathskeller's inaccessibility and its dungeonlike atmosphere.

In the evenings there were usually thirty or forty people in the room—shifty-eyed men and women—drinking at the tables or getting up to dance when somebody thought to drop a nickel in the laboring piano.

It was in The Coffee Cup on the third night of his search that Bristol's patience at last was rewarded by his first glimpse of Bat Wilkins.

The surgeon had entered the place unchallenged a few minutes before midnight, ordered ham and eggs and coffee, and found himself at a greasy, clothless table in a dim corner, whence he could catch snatches of conversation from the other tables and observe any newcomer who slouched in through the arched doorway.

Wilkins made his appearance at what might have been termed the height of the evening. The tables were mostly occupied, the restricted area in the middle of the floor was jammed with fox-trotting couples, the piano was banging away merrily.

Bristol had settled back with a newspaper, keeping one speculative eye above the sheet. The instant the murderer stepped into the room Bristol saw him.

The outlaw was alone. He was dressed in a decent-looking blue suit and a new pearl-gray hat, neatly dented on

the sides. In discarding his chauffeur's uniform, he retained the traces of his late respectability. His face was clean-shaven, his features were still the features of the man who had called himself Joe Adams.

Neither his walk nor the expression of his eyes recalled that other individual, the sullen, cowering desperado whom dogs had driven. And yet there was something about him—an indefinable something of spirit or personality—to remind Bristol disagreeably of another night, and of a man who came with a pistol in his guilty fist, ready to kill.

Wilkins walked to a vacant table, sat down and called to a waiter. With the crowd still on the dance floor, Bristol likewise could move from his place without inviting notice. He stood up, edged around the sides of the room, and then pulled up a chair and seated himself negligently at Wilkins' table.

CHAPTER XI. ON THE LEVEL.

CLEARLY enough, the outlaw was not expecting company, did not want anybody sitting with him. He looked sharply across the table, his jaw out-thrust, as though he were about to make some unpleasant remark. And then speech stopped and his mouth stayed open as he stared in sudden recognition.

"Hello," said Bristol, with his hand in his coat pocket.

"What do you want here?" the startled convict managed to ask at last.

"Where's Miss Sommers' limousine?" inquired the surgeon.

Wilkins eyed him aslant. The knuckles of the man's hand were white as he gripped the edge of the table. His legs had drawn back astride his chair and the weight of his stiffened body was planted on the balls of his feet. A quick spring might carry him forward across the table, or backward into the midst of the dancers.

"As I told you once before, I have practically never fired a weapon," Bristol spoke in his natural voice, knowing that the din of the piano would prevent any one from hearing, except Wilkins. "That is still true, almost. The point to bear in mind is that nobody would be likely to miss at this distance. Anyhow, you'd hardly want to take the chance."

Wilkins' nostrils were pinched in so tightly that breathing must have been difficult. "What do you want of me?"

"What have you done with the limousine?"

"It's in a shed not far from here," said the ex-chauffeur, with a sulky mouth. "I was going to have it sent back to Miss Sommers."

"When?"

"When I get good and ready, if that's some more of your business."

"All right. We won't need the car where we're going," said Bristol, ignoring Wilkins' snarling outburst. "Let's get out of here."

"What do you mean?" The convict's chair slid back from the table and his glance wavered suspiciously, right and left, before focusing itself, half fearful, half defiant, on Bristol's inscrutable face.

"I want you to take a walk with me."

"Where to?"

Bristol had not misread the look in the man's eyes. "Not the police station," he said. "You can understand why I don't want to tell our little story to the police. You and I are going to keep away from them."

"Is that on the level, doc?"

"Have I ever lied to you?"

"No, you haven't," said Wilkins promptly, as his lungs seemed to resume their normal function.

"We're not going to see the police now," Bristol pursued. "But keep this in your thoughts: if I'm forced to it I'll call an officer and make a clean breast of everything. If I were to tell them

how I have helped a fugitive to outwit justice, they might make it a bit disagreeable for me. But they would take you and hang you, Bat Wilkins!"

The convict flinched as though a fist had struck at him, and he shot a terrified glance at the waiter who was idling at the neighboring table. "Not so loud!" he pleaded in a hoarse whisper. "Somebody'll hear."

"Furthermore," Bristol went on in a voice so utterly lacking in emotion that the convict stared with jaws agape, "if need be, I'll kill you myself, just as soon as not."

The surgeon got up from the table and picked up the check that the waiter had left at Wilkins' elbow. "Ready?"

The eyes of the two men met and held, Bristol remorselessly calm, the convict sullen and resentful. Wilkins was fairly caught, and his wits, sharpened by harsh dealings, were keenly alive to his danger. This cool-spoken surgeon was not a man who would put up with trifling.

"Where?" Wilkins asked, and by the question he betrayed his weakness of resolution.

"I don't want to hurry you," said the other. "But I'll be pleased when you decide to come."

Wilkins sent a hasty glance around the room. No doubt there were men of his own breed in the place who would rush to his help if he sent out the call. But there was no knowing what to expect from this man who could wield a scapula with such nerveless precision.

It was obvious that Bristol carried a pistol in his pocket, and his hand was on the pistol. But even more acute than the fear of being shot was the fear of having the name of Bat Wilkins shouted aloud. Death by shooting is accomplished quickly and unexpectedly, but death in the hangman's noose, the waiting for the moment, is a hideous, long-drawn-out affair.

The convict's morbid eyes were full

of such reflections as he looked up at the man standing over him. He yielded helplessly in the end, and with not the best of grace. "All right, damn you! Go ahead," he muttered, and stood up from the table.

They walked abreast across the room, and no one paid them the slightest attention. Bristol stopped at the cashier's counter with Wilkins' and his own checks, and after he had pocketed his change, he pushed his companion up the outer stairway into the dark alley above.

Here the surgeon paused with a searching glance into the gloom. There was nobody to observe, so, in most casual fashion, he turned and passed his left hand up and down the outlaw's clothes. It was very quiet in that dim corner of the alley, and Wilkins' quickened breathing was distinctly audible.

He said nothing, however, and did not resist. Bristol found a revolver in a holster under the man's arm, and took possession of it without a word of comment. Then he linked arms with his companion and walked him down to the street.

Bristol turned left at the corner, holding tightly to Wilkins, marching him along. There were many people still lingering on the streets, but anybody who noticed those two would have supposed them to be a couple of friends, strolling arm in arm.

The fog seemed to grow denser as they threaded the maze of the narrow streets, and they left the foulness of the slums to breathe the fragrance of a wet, salty breeze.

Once, under a corner light, Wilkins unintentionally brushed against the coat of a policeman who stood by the lamp-post, but the officer was intent on some shadowy movement across the street, and did not even look behind him.

In a grim silence they strode along side by side, past rows of dark warehouses, and finally came to the end of the cobbled pavement to find wooden

planks underfoot. All was blackness before them, but they could hear the uneasy surge of water, and the whistling of steamboats sounded loud in the fog.

At this point Wilkins seemed for a moment inclined to hold back, but the surgeon gripped him firmly and together they walked through an echoing shed, out upon the staging of a long, dark pier.

There Bristol halted. He drew his companion to the side of the wharf, and they looked down on the deck of a little boat, moored without lights against the piles.

"Here we are," said Bristol.

The outlaw stared in wonderment. "Where are we going?" he asked, gasping.

"We're taking a little cruise—you and I."

CHAPTER XII.

TARRED WITH THE SAME BRUSH.

THE boat was a decked cruiser of thirty or thirty-five feet, a tiny, toy yacht of varnished wood and polished brass, the trim and pretty type of play ship such as landsmen navigate around inland waterways. This vessel rode very low in the water, and if Wilkins had been anything of a mariner he might have observed that she was too heavily freighted for any ordinary pleasure cruise.

"It's Miss Sommers' cruiser, the *Nepenthe*," said Bristol. "She was kind enough to lend it to us. Jump down."

"Not until I know where we're going," said the outlaw, in a sudden fit of stubbornness.

"I wonder if you're familiar with the bay," said the surgeon in a mild voice. "Across the way are the Oakland ferry slips, farther up, Goat Island, farther still—you can't see the lights from here—the walls of San Quentin." He laughed under his breath. "But we're not going there."

Wilkins shivered as he turned to stare into the fog.

"Behind us," Bristol mused softly, "is the city with its hundreds of policemen; here, this boat and open water, and you and I alone. You can decide which is best."

For five seconds the convict wavered morosely at the edge of the dock. Bristol stood quietly beside him, a tall, dominating figure, immutably waiting.

The overstrained silence was broken at last by Wilkins' grating voice. "Just as you like, doc," he said, and jumped down onto the deck of the boat.

Bristol followed with a catlike leap. From his pocket he produced a key and unpadlocked the door leading into the little, stuffy engine room. He snapped on a light switch, revealing a coffin-shaped inclosure, with padded seats running the length of gleaming mahogany bulkheads. From an oily pit over the keel loomed the head of a powerful gasoline motor.

"Know anything about marine engines?" inquired Bristol, amiably.

The ex-chauffeur was looking around with reluctant interest. "Guess I could figure them out," he vouchsafed.

"You'll have plenty of opportunity."

Bristol turned on the ignition switch and buzzed the starter, and an instant later the little boat was vibrating with the pleasant hum of a smoothly firing motor.

He ran outside to cast off the mooring lines, and a couple of minutes later dodged back into the companionway to take his place at the control lever. Shoving his gears into reverse, he backed away from the pier, and then swung the vessel sharply and headed out into the bay.

There was the usual confusion of night traffic between shores—ferries, and tugs with barges in tow—and in the fog it was impossible to pick up the traveling lights any great distance ahead; but the horns and sirens kept up a continuous tooting around them, and by careful steering Bristol managed to

avoid the shadowy hulks that moved in his path.

Bristol stood on balanced feet at the wheel, peering through the port that gave an unobstructed view over the roof of the sunken cabin forward. The tide was flowing with him, and after he had veered into the main channel, he followed the open shipping lane that swung around the city and swept outward to the portals of the sea.

For a long time nothing had been said. Wilkins sat moodily on a locker, hugging one knee, stealing a ferreting glance now and then toward the man at the wheel. Clearly he was chafing with anxiety, wondering where they might be going, but still the surgeon offered no enlightenment.

The cruiser had been plowing along through choppy waves that broke across their cutwater and rambled alongside with pleasant little slapping sounds, but as they forged onward in the darkness a sudden change took place in conditions outside. With scarcely a moment's warning the vessel heaved up on a high swell, and then plunged downward sickeningly, while a thumping weight of water splashed across the bow.

Wilkins caught at a stanchion to save himself from rolling off his seat, and then he dragged himself to his feet and peered out the nearest porthole. In the fog he was unable to make out any sign of a shore line. With a startled jerk he hitched around to face the steersman.

"We're in the ocean!" he declared, aghast.

"Not yet." Bristol stood with feet spread apart, swaying to the pitch of the boat as he held her on her course. "Presently. The Golden Gate is dead ahead."

The outlaw gulped and tried to steady himself against the stanchion. "Where—where are we going?"

Bristol glanced at the dial of the glowing binnacle. "The needle says almost due west."

"What?"

"We're headed straight out into the Pacific Ocean," said Bristol.

"You—— Wait a minute!" Wilkins' eyes had opened so wide that the rims showed white. "I don't—get you."

"Sit down," advised the surgeon. "Sit down and take it easy."

The outlaw's mouth opened and shut tight again. He glowered at the other man, and for a moment it might have seemed that he entertained some wild notion of leaping forward and grappling for the wheel. But whatever he thought of doing, his mind was changed by a big wave that threw the cruiser on her beam end and hurled him backward against the seat, where he subsided limply and clung to the cushions.

Bristol observed him with tolerant eyes. "I wonder," he said, after an interval, "if I could make you see this thing as I see it?"

There was no answer from the huddled figure on the cushions.

"I've been thinking it out," Bristol said. "First of all, I want you to know that I have no feeling against you one way or another, no animosity, no active dislike, not even a sense of righteous indignation. What you are, you are."

"I don't suppose you can help it. It might have been different if you'd your chance earlier, years ago. But it's too late to worry about that now. All that concerns me now is the fact that you and I are tarred, in a way of speaking, with the same brush, that I'm bound up with you and your acts as helplessly as a Siamese twin."

"In assisting you to evade the punishment," Bristol went on, "or rather, the restraints which society for its own protection had the right to inflict on you, I made myself a copartner of yours. When you assault a man or steal from a woman, why the crime is chargeable to the firm of Wilkins & Bristol." He looked at his companion with a melancholy smile. "Do you see?"

Wilkins raised his head with a rather dazed expression and wiped his damp forehead with the back of his hand. "No. I don't know what you're talking about."

"I was afraid you wouldn't. So as the responsible member of the firm, I've got to do the thinking and make the decisions. I thought for a while that we were going to branch out and make something of ourselves. But it was not to be. The firm has gone bankrupt. So as I see it, there's only one thing to be done about it."

"Yeah?" said the outlaw, with a puzzled scowl.

"Sell out!"

"Huh?" Wilkins started up on the locker to gaze at the other man in chilled questioning.

"I'm not going to let myself in for the guilty knowledge that I'm half a thief or half a murderer just because I'm to blame for your being at liberty and alive. Your future crimes shan't recoil on me, because I shall make certain that you never commit them."

"The simplest way out would be the quietus for you," Bristol mused aloud; as the convict watched him somberly. "A lethal shot of morphia would do the trick neatly, or I might have stepped-up the lighting current in my bungalow and rigged a very efficient electric chair. But I don't think that way would be quite fair—for you, yes; but not for me. The thing might haunt me afterward."

"So," continued the surgeon, with a deep sigh, "we'll just go on with the partnership. We'll stick together in the future, so if one of us starts to go wrong the other will be there to stop him."

"But——" Wilkins stared in consternation. "This boat ain't big enough to take to sea. We're——" He stopped and tried to swallow something in his throat. "Where are we bound for?"

"I don't know. It's up to the gods now. We're headed west, and we're going on. We may wind up in the China

seas, or maybe the coast of Gehenna." Bristol smiled wearily. "But what happens to one of us also will happen to the other. The rest doesn't particularly matter."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STOWAWAY.

FOR the next half hour Bristol's attention was held solely by a tiny smudge of light that appeared and disappeared in the mist off the starboard quarter of the plunging cruiser. In that direction lurked the menace of the rocks. The surgeon stood with his weight thrown to the wheel, grimly silent as he peered off into the darkness, ignoring the huddled figure on the locker.

The boat was fidgeting in the welter of heavy cross seas under the weather side of the cliffs that guarded the harbor approach, and Wilkins could do nothing for the present except to cling to his unstable seat, his face looking sick and grayish beneath the bulkhead light.

From time to time he rolled up a shocked and horrified glance at the ruthless man who faced the fog and the night and steered an absurd cockleshell out upon the open Pacific. To the convict whose crimes merited death, it must have been revealed in that hour that the fateful sentence from which he had fled on land awaited him yonder in the darkness.

The winking light slipped away over the taffrail, grew dim and dimmer and vanished behind them. As they cruised onward, the side-swiping motion of the rip tide gradually lessened, and Bristol was presently aware that the vessel was riding the longer, heavier, smoother swells of the open sea.

For a long while Wilkins had kept limply to his seat, swaying with the dizzy lurches of the boat, but as Bristol relaxed at the wheel and turned a contemplative glance toward the locker, the convict furiously flung himself to his feet.

"You!" stormed the man. "You can't—you've got no right to drag me off into this! You get me? Turn her around—turn her around and go back, I tell you!"

"Your rights and my rights ceased to exist that night on the mountain," said the surgeon. "All we have left is the decency to keep out of the way of honest people."

"I know what you think—that automobile—that I stole it. But I didn't." Wilkins was fairly screaming. "I was goin' to take it back."

Bristol smiled, and peered through the steering port into a wall of blackness. Ahead of him were thousands of miles of this, the sea and nothing else. He gave no heed to the outlaw's raving.

"You told me," said Wilkins, "you was goin' to give me my chance. What do you call this? You don't call this givin' me any chance, do you?"

"I gave it to you."

"You did like—" Wilkins stopped and slanted a morbid glance across the compartment. "I got it now!" he said. "You think I'm the guy that bounced that box at Miss Sommers' place. You think I swept out that safe, don't you?"

"The butler will live," said Bristol. "But it was a beastly thing to slug poor old Oliver. It's the greatest luck that he wasn't killed."

"I didn't hit him. I tell you it wasn't me." Wilkins' jaw pushed out and his stare was insolent. "You're too smart. You're such a wise guy, you are. Well, I'm tellin' you, somebody else pulled that racket. See? You don't know so much, do you?"

"I suppose there are plenty of places where stolen property can be sold, in the neighborhood where we met to-night?"

The boat lifted up to the crest of a long roller and dodged downward again in a *whoosh* of breaking water. Bristol glanced at the compass dial, and humored the wheel by a quarter-point.

"So that's it, eh?" exclaimed Wilkins. "That's why you were down in that joint? Lookin' for somebody. Well, so was I, too." Wilkins drew up his shoulders and contrived to look virtuous and misunderstood. "Fences? Sure. You'll find 'em down there—where stuff like that can best be sold. But I didn't have nothin' to sell. I wasn't lookin' for no fences." The convict's careful lessons in grammar were forgotten in this moment of excitement and distress. "I ain't done a thing wrong, I keep tellin' you."

Bristol was humming a little tune between his teeth as he looked out across the careening deck. He had nothing further to say.

"Listen, doc. Please." Wilkins was growing humble again and there was a whining appeal in his voice. "I was down there myself lookin' for those yeggs, see? I figured I might run across 'em and get Miss Sommers' junk back for her. See, doc, I swear this is the straight dope. I was out to get the stuff back an' to find those guys that bumped poor ol' Oliver. That's why I was down in that joint."

Bristol shook his head hopelessly. He did not think it worth his while to say anything of the silver cup with the smudge and the telltale thumb mark which he had found by the looted safe. What was the use? The direct accusation would lead only to further denials.

The convict had taken his stand, and he would brazen it out to the bitter end, no matter how damning the evidence stacked up against him. There was no sense in starting a wordy controversy in which Bristol would say one thing and the outlaw would stubbornly say another.

It was even possible to think up a plausible explanation for the thumb mark. Wilkins could insist that he had found the cup on the floor, after he had stained his fingers trying to succor Oliver, and then had tossed it aside in

his haste to chase a fictitious band of robbers. But he wouldn't be able to prove his statement, and the surgeon couldn't believe the unsupported oath of a man to whom such an oath meant nothing.

If Wilkins knew where the stolen property was hidden, there was no way of forcing the truth from him. But Bristol really was not much disturbed over the missing valuables, no more than Gail Sommers had seemed to be. What were a few trinkets, more or less, to a woman of her means.

Bristol's only concern was the man himself. In the future he was a keeper with a single obstreperous charge upon his hands. He would never know an easy moment with Wilkins back on shore among unsuspecting people. There was nothing for him to do but to steer ahead.

"Let's forget what happened in Miss Sommers' home," suggested the surgeon. "That chauffeur's job was a mistake in the first place—driving a lady around in a plush limousine. Too soft!"

"I'd already quit that," said Wilkins.

Bristol didn't remind the man that if he hadn't quit he'd have been fired. There were reasons why the surgeon didn't wish to talk about that affair.

"The voyage is the thing for us," he said. "If you want to toughen the moral fiber go up against something tough!"

Wilkins apparently didn't know what the surgeon was talking about. "We'll get drowned! That's all that's going to happen!"

"There are worse things than drowning," said Bristol.

The convict lurched across the compartment to push his flushed face over the spokes of the wheel. "You can go ahead and cruise yourself to the bottom for all I care, but first you're going to turn around and put me on shore. I'm tellin' you, brother!"

The surgeon's eyebrows arched a

trifle, but he did not shift his position. "I've got your gun and I'm a bigger and stronger man than you," he replied. "I don't just see what you expect to accomplish by that threatening look."

"You gotta sleep!" Wilkins said it with a leer of triumph. "You can't run this boat across the Pacific without sleepin'."

"Oh, that's it." Bristol laughed comfortably. "Listen! I won't need to sleep for twenty hours or so. I'm steering away from the usual lane, and when I finally lock myself in the cabin for a snooze you and I'll be all alone on the ocean. We'll be too far from shore by then for you to make any port before I waken. So you can drive on our course, if you like, or shut off the engine and let us wallow in the waves, or scuttle the ship. Take your choice."

The convict's jaw dropped weakly. "But—but—" he stammered. "You're kiddin' me, ain't you? Honest, you ain't figurin' on runnin' right out into the ocean?"

"But—wait a minute!" A faint hope gleamed for a moment in the outlaw's face. Our gas'll run out before we get very far."

"If you'll look at our load under the deck you'll find we're carrying almost nothing but gas drums. There's more than enough to take us where we're going." Bristol nodded. "And if by chance," he added in afterthought, "some one should happen to puncture those drums and spill out the gas, why it would simply collect in the bilge, and we could pump it to the engine from there—if the boat didn't blow up in the meantime."

Wilkins drew a harsh breath and stumbled back to slump down on the locker. He was beaten. There was no way of circumventing this man who forestalled his every thought, who never lost his temper, and who apparently didn't care what happened to himself.

The silence of the little compartment

thereafter was disturbed only by the purring of the engine and the seething of water along the hull. Wilkins was cowed for the present, and by the drawn and ghastly look on his face it would seem also that the motion of the vessel was making him a trifle ill.

Bristol could feel sorry for the man, but there was no wavering in his calm resolution. For a long time he kept his position at the wheel, unable to see twenty yards ahead, but steering by the compass and driving at a fair ten knots straight out to sea. At intervals he passed his fingers into his pockets, absently searching for something, and finally he glanced at Wilkins.

"I want a smoke," he observed. "I'm going to the cabin and get a cigar. Would you like to take the helm?"

The convict answered with a shake of his head.

Bristol threw a lashing becket over one of the spokes, and, leaving the vessel to steer her own course, he turned without a word and left the engine compartment. Groping his way along the wet rail, he reached the forward companionway and descended the three steps that led to the small decked-over cabin.

The darkness of the cramped compartment smelled of must and sea water. He found the lighting button and snapped on the bulkhead electrics. He started forward as the lights flared up in the little cabin, and then stopped short on balanced feet. There were four bunks, arranged in tiers of two, starboard and port. On the nearest bunk lay a small, curled-up figure, covered over with a checkered steamer rug.

Bristol blinked in the dazzle of light, and as he gazed uncertainly the figure cast aside the rug and sat up. The stowaway was a woman. She opened her eyes and laughed.

It was Gail Sommers.

The concluding chapters of this fascinating novel will appear in the August 15th issue of TOP-NOTCH.



Stark Courage -

By
Harold de Polo -

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

MAKING THINGS AWKWARD.

THE two shots echoing over the lake on the crisp January air told Whitcher Bemis that they had come from an automatic rifle of powerful caliber—a .351 Winchester, perhaps.

"Lawsy," he mused aloud, "there goes Gabe ag'in, I reckon. Mighty close t' home, too."

The sheriff of Noel's Landing blinked his big blue eyes slowly, and pulled out his great lower lip with a gesture that was almost a caress. As he let it snap back, he seemed to come to a decision, for he walked straight to the nearest pickerel tip-up and started to haul in his line.

Sheriff Bemis was fairly certain that Gabe Lawtrie was the man who had done the shooting. Besides the fact that the sheriff felt sure as to the type of rifle, the reports had come from over Farrington Cove way, and it was common knowledge that deer had yarded in that particular vicinity. Lawtrie, the chances were, had gone out and gotten himself another buck.

From a custom of long standing, the sheriff left cases of this sort to the

game warden. Lem Warren, who held this position, was housed up with one of his occasional attacks of sciatica, and it was because of this that Bemis was worried. Deputies were liable to be appointed, and deputies, if unwisely chosen, might make things awkward.

Bemis did not condone this out-of-season and illegal killing of game, so unfortunately prevalent in this back-country section of the Maine woods. He was rabidly against it, and he had been known to give evidence against several men who had slaughtered for market purposes.

Lawtrie, at least, had never shot game out of season in order to sell it. He was the kind of man who simply could not get it through his head that wild things must be protected. If he wanted meat, he was going to have it, that was all.

Warren, however, had sworn that he would get Lawtrie this season.

"Shucks, too bad he ain't up an' able t' handle it hisself," murmured Bemis sorrowfully. "Oh, well——"

He let his voice trail off, then, and exhibited added rapidity in taking in his gear. He was not tremendously chagrined at having to do this. Troutng in the spring and summer was his favor-

ite hobby, and after that came bird shooting, but now that the season for these was over, he had to content himself with pickerel fishing through the ice. A man had to have some sport.

"I wish they was another .351 automatic around," he told himself, when he had pulled up the last of the five lines the law allowed, "but they ain't!"

Still ponderously shaking his head, he placed his tackle in the basket on top of the eight choice fish he had caught, and waddled his two hundred and sixty pounds off across the ice.

It took him more than two hours to reach Del Noel's general store and post office at Noel's Landing, for the snow on the ice was thick. He kept to the lake in preference to chancing the road where all the drifts might not be packed. Also, by traveling this route he could view every approach to Farrington Cove, in back of which Gabe Lawtrie lived in his solitary cabin.

There were few loungers at the store when the sheriff arrived. It was still too early for the daily noon mail, and most of the male inhabitants were out cutting or hauling pulp for the Jewel Match people. Nevertheless, a pert youngster barely out of his 'teens, belonging to the element that found it good fun to quiz the sheriff, was hugging the pot-bellied stove in the center of the huge room.

"Say, Bemis," he drawled nasally, "pity you wa'n't here 'bout a' hour ago—might 'a' learned somethin' regardin' how quick some o' these real officials gits into action."

Like most of the North Country backwoodsmen, he did not finish what he had to say. According to unwritten law, he had now passed the buck to the sheriff.

"Shucks, Ralph," Bemis said haltingly, his china-blue eyes becoming very round, and his ponderous lower lip seeming to sag disconsolately. "I ain't professin' to know nothin' 'bout these

modern ways. What—what's the trouble?"

Young Ralph Morrow, who had spent several years down in the big cities of Bangor and Portland, winked at two stolid old-timers who were sitting over by the sugar and cracker barrels.

"Wa'n't much more'n two hours ago that two shots was heard—over Farrington Cove way—an' I reckon already Lem Warren is fixin' to appoint dep'ties to go an' git the man."

Whitcher Bemis, who was more and more twitted every year by the younger generation, again took refuge in pulling at his lip.

They wanted a more youthful man as sheriff, but whenever election came around the graybeards somehow flocked down from the farther hills and Bemis was retained. His "dumb luck" was proverbial, but they claimed that it could not last forever. Certainly, now, he showed no signs of keenness.

"Ain't a man 'lowed to shoot no more?" he inquired vaguely.

Del Noel came out from the glass-and-metal-barred inclosure where the mail was attended to, and stood listening idly.

"Sure a man's allowed to shoot," replied young Morrow, "but I reckon us up-an'-comin' fellers is gittin' tired o' havin' men like your friend Gabe Lawtrie eat too much venison out o' season."

The sheriff opened his eyes wide, and they took on a baffled expression of wondering what it was all about. He blinked, shifted his great weight from one foot to another, and said dazedly: "Lawsy, poor Gabe—poor ol' Gabe!"

Bemis' eyes got dull and sleepy, and they rambled aimlessly about the room. He appeared to be groping for thoughts. Apparently they eluded him, for he glanced down at the pickerel in the basket and smiled rather sheepishly, aware that his hearers could see he was using the fish as an excuse.

"Shucks," he said, grinning, "it comes at a wrong time, this trouble o' Gabe's. I was jes' gettin' all het up 'bout ice fishin', an' now it seems—— Say," he added, more cheerfully, "see them eight nice uns I took this morning."

The two older men, by the stove, exchanged significant glances. Was the old sheriff, after all, showing his age? Lots of 'em changed, when they got around fifty.

Young Morrow smiled with the superiority of youth. He was waiting until the two lumbermen outside, just alighting from their team, were present to hear his twitting.

Del Noel, however, looked a trifle puzzled. He knew that the sheriff had never been of the type to boast about his game or fish—and he also knew that Bemis could have gotten to his own home, up on the east shore, fully an hour sooner had he not stopped off at the store.

"What's this 'bout Gabe? An' Lem dep'tizin' the Holcomb boys t' go an' git him?" One of the lumberjacks hurled the direct question as he came through the door.

"Lawsy," said Bemis, "was it them Holcomb boys? They sure be tenacious cutters, like they call it. Git Gabe, once they start, for certain."

"You're right they're up-an'-comin' fellers," said Ralph.

Bemis was silent in the discussion of the Holcomb brothers that ensued.

So was Noel. The postmaster, in fact, was still busy studying the sheriff. Finally Noel spoke. "Well, Lem ain't sent for me, yet. Got t' swear 'em in 'fore a not'ry, too." He looked almost belligerent as he made the assertion.

Bemis allowed an infinitesimal sigh to escape him as he reached down and seemed to be admiring his pickerel.

"Be 'round any minute, I reckon," said Morrow. "Waitin' for them t' come down the road with a load o' Jewel Comp'ny pulp, prob'ly."

"Better had," growled Noel. "Law says dep'tizin's got t' take place 'fore a not'ry, an'——"

"Goin' t' git Gabe, I hear!" a woman exclaimed, as she entered the store.

In the conversation that followed, Witcher Bemis took up his basket of fish and gear and waddled along toward the exit. He paused by the last counter.

"Reckon I am 'bout due to r'tire, boys—both ways. R'tire from here, 'cause I got nothin' t' say; an' r'tire from sheriffin', 'cause I guess I got learned a lesson on quick actin' the way Lem handled this here Gabe business! Oh, well——" he went out abruptly.

"Can you beat it?" Ralph Morrow waved an arm at the company, the sneer in his voice and on his lips seeming to travel to his hand. "That's the sheriff we're supportin', is it? That's the man we place our confidence in?"

Somewhere, he had presumably listened to a political orator—and he gave out everything he had heard.

CHAPTER II.

DEEP PLANS.

UP in his scrupulously kept little home on the east shore, Bemis stayed in the kitchen that commanded a view of the lake and the road. He finished cleaning his pickerel, and retaining two for the evening meal, buried the others in the snow for future consumption.

The two Holcombs, he judged, would soon be either going across the ice or coming along by sleigh. Knowing them as he did, he figured that it would be the latter. In that way, it would be easier for them to get to the Lawtrie cabin—and the Holcombs had always somewhat favored ease.

They came into sight presently, making the big, raw-boned mare travel at too fast a clip for the slight up grade. They always did, Bemis mused angrily. He did not show this emotion, though, when he went outside and hailed them:

"Goin' t' git Gabe, I hear? Lawsy, you boys ain't lackin' in courage, you might say!"

Jim, the elder, flashed a smile—a smile that lit up his eyes with an ugly light. "Some o' the Lawtrie tribe ain't allus thought so, Bemis," he said.

"Learn diff'ren' now, we're cal'latin'," said Tom Holcomb, as he patted the .3-30 between his knees.

"Hum'm'm!" The sheriff nodded. "Bein' dep'tized 'lows a man to protec' hisself, don't it? But, shucks, boys," he said, laughing, "it comes t' be a right crisp day t' traipse up t' Gabe without a little warmth inside, don't it?"

He chuckled heartily, as if he greatly enjoyed the way he had phrased the invitation.

A glance of anticipation passed between the brothers. They never had been known to show hesitancy when it came to hard cider—nor did they now.

"Well," said Jim, stepping out of the sleigh, "I hear it said as how you still got some o' last fall's pressin'."

"Oh, I allus keep a gallon or so—for special 'casions."

"Judas Priest, Bemis," said the younger Holcomb, laughing with extreme friendliness, "we can't keep it! Never can, somehow!"

Inside, by the big box stove, the sheriff offered his guests chairs, and told them to remove their mackinaws. As they were doing so, he went down to the cellar, returning almost immediately with a two-gallon jug that was plainly full.

The sight of it brought cheer to the faces of the two brothers, for good cider was scarce in the latter part of January, and most men hoarded it for themselves. They told Bemis what a good fellow he was, and how much they had always liked him, when he filled the glasses.

"Drink hearty, boys," the sheriff said hospitably.

They did not need further encouragement. They were notorious as men who put in more cider than any one else, and yet their barrels were always empty before the old year was out. After that, they ingratiatingly visited their neighbors, and they had never been known to stop as long as drink was offered. This, indeed, must have been glorious for them, for Whitcher never let a glass stand without filling it.

The talk soon turned to Gabe Lawtrie—and all the Lawtrie breed. Between them and the Holcombs, for years, there had been a feud.

Lem Warren had chosen his representatives wisely—from his point of view—for it was known that Gabe had vowed he would never be arrested for taking venison when he was hungry.

"He'll be taken this time, all right, all right," said Jim Holcomb, with an ugly laugh.

Bemis made no comment, soothing or otherwise. Instead, he poured out more cider, which the boys now somewhat thickly agreed was the finest they had ever tasted, bar none.

"Right kind o' you t' say so," said the sheriff, beaming, as he placed two seasoned oak logs in the immense stove.

"S-some stove," said Jim. "Hot—hot 'n'—'n' com-comf't'ble, B-Bemis!"

"Right kin' o' you t' say so," repeated the sheriff, as he deftly handled the jug.

It was not necessary for him to do much more pouring. Hard cider is always a potent beverage—but it is particularly potent when imbibed before a crimson-hot stove, after having come in from air that is below zero.

The Holcomb boys, assuredly, gave evidence as to this. It was reported that they had strong heads, but these same heads, presently, began to droop.

Jim's finally sagged completely, falling onto his chest and then over against the side of the high chair back. He slept, soundly and snoringly.

Tom gave a futile, sickish sort of

grin, and then he, too, joined his brother in slumber.

"Good for two hours—maybe three," decided Bemis, after carefully and thoughtfully nursing his lip.

Then the sheriff moved with remarkable agility for one of his apparently cumbersome build. Donning a sheep-lined waistcoat, he covered it with a heavy mackinaw, and took from the closet his muskrat cap, pulling the ear tabs down and tying them under his chin. From the old roll-top desk in the corner, he extracted his pair of worn handcuffs of the vintage nineteen-hundred. Slipping these into his pocket, he went outside and climbed into the Holcombs' sleigh.

"Lucky I ain't a drunkard, 'n' can keep cider on han'," he told the roan mare, as he headed her for Gabe's.

CHAPTER III.

A STERN STALKER.

WHITCHER BEMIS drove up the road to Brown's Sporting Camps, bleak and bare under snow and ice. He tied the mare to a pine by the shore, and walked out onto the ice of the lake. From here, he could make the best speed to Farrington Cove, for the shores narrowed.

"Reckon Gabe ought t' be right in the mids' o' skinnin' the critter, by now," he said to himself.

Half an hour later—and it would have taken another man forty minutes at the least to have made the journey—Bemis found that he had been correct. As he stepped off onto the opposite shore, and threaded through the clump of pines before the clearing on which Gabe's cabin stood, he saw Lawtrie openly and brazenly skinning a buck that had been trussed up to the limb of a big beech by the dwelling.

"Lo, Gabe" Bemis called out.

Gabe Lawtrie, a gaunt man with a black-bearded face and hollow black

eyes, dropped his hunting knife and spun about with a snarl on his lips.

"What you want, Whitcher? Ain't like you to come a-spyin' on a man! What you want?"

"Don't want nothin' but t' take you back t' the Landin', Gabe. Sort o' what you might call a—a un'ficial arrest. Like t' git you t' Lem Warren 'fore others tries it!"

"Whitcher Bemis," cried out Lawtrie. "I've knowed you since you was born, 'n' you've knowed me, 'n' that's mighty close t' fifty year back. Notwithstandin', Whitcher—notwithstandin' that, 'n' that we've allus been frien's—I'll shoot you down jes' as quick's I would any other man 'fore I'll let myself be took. An—an' by cripes, Whitcher—I mean it!"

"Never did doubt your word, Gabe," replied the sheriff simply, his eyes widening as if he were hurt at the thought that the other should suspect him. "Notwithstandin', Gabe—like you yourself put it—I aim t' take you to Lem Warren. I ain't armed, neither."

He paused for a moment, removing his heavy mittens of fleece-lined horse-hide, and pulled out the ancient pair of manacles from the pocket of his mackinaw.

"Yep, I on'y got the reg'lar tools o' my trade!"

With the words, he started to walk slowly up the snow-trodden path toward the cabin. There was a certain firmness to his step, a certain inexorable determination, that suggested the progress of some great bulk that could never be stopped.

The woodsman left the carcass of the buck and stepped into his little house. He came out instantly, the .351 automatic rifle gripped in his hands. His face had hardened and his eyes had narrowed, and there was the sincerity in his voice of a man who did not have the habit of lying:

"Whitcher Bemis, you move one step an' I shoot!"

Whitcher moved—two steps—smiling.

The rifle sang, and a bullet kicked up the crusted snow not six inches from the tip of the sheriff's boot. Gabe Lawtrie, it was said, could place his lead as well as any man in Maine.

"Nice shootin', Gabe." Bemis spoke admiringly, but there was not the slightest vestige of hesitancy in his approach.

"Whitcher Bemis—I don't want to do it! Git back, you ol' fool!"

The woodsman's tone was almost hysterical, and, with the words, he sent another message from the automatic that threw snow over the sheriff's right foot.

"No need t' do it, Gabe," called out Bemis softly, soothingly. "I ain't armed!"

As if to prove the assertion, he awkwardly stuck his hands into the air—and continued plodding ahead.

Gabe Lawtrie's voice rose to a shrill shriek, and the skin over his nose tautened and whitened as his eyes burned fiercely.

"I won't be took, Whitcher! I've allus said it, an' I meant it! My pap took venison when he wanted it—an' my gran'pap an' great-gran'pap an' all the Lawtries did—an' I cal'late t'——"

"So've I allus took men when it was needed, Gabe!"

There was perhaps a hundred feet between them, now, and Lawtrie, when he raised his rifle this time, seemed to take more careful aim than formerly.

"You would have it, would you?" he cried, simultaneous with the report of the rifle.

Whitcher Bemis did not even wince. His left arm, for a fraction of a second, spasmatically dropped—but it immediately went up in the air again.

"Jes' a mite o' a flesh wound, Gabe," he said. "Put a hole through a sleeve o' a mack'naw I give Del Noel fourteen-fifty for, though. Good un—thatthy ounce m'ter'al, all wool. Reckon——"

With a wail that showed a strong man was going through mental torture, Gabe Lawtrie cried out incoherent words as he took his rifle and savagely flung it from him. In desperation, and as if he were not quite sure of what he was doing, he ran blindly on toward the man he had just shot.

Bemis did not increase or slacken his pace, nor did he lower his arms. Stolidly he continued his firm step, the sense of inexorable determination now being positively tremendous.

Gabe Lawtrie, at last, came up to him—came up to him and flung out his hands.

Whitcher moved forward and grappled with him, and the two crashed down onto the snow. They tussled, all in a heap, for a moment or two, until the sheriff casually rose and brushed off his face. Gabe was still on the ground, with the pair of worn handcuffs fastened to his wrists.

CHAPTER IV.

A SUDDEN LIGHT.

YOU see, Gabe," Bemis was saying some ten minutes later, as he bathed and bandaged his comparatively harmless wound in the woodsman's cabin, "it makes you feel mighty low-down, don't it, you shootin' me that a way with my han's in the air, an' without no gun? Don't it, Gabe?"

His voice was soft, lulling, having that droning quality to it that was somehow as impressive as when he used firmness.

Lawtrie, sitting in a chair with his chin resting on the fists of his manacled hands, shuddered.

"I—I didn' jes' reckon what I was doin', Whitcher. I——"

"Well, Gabe," went on the sheriff quietly, "you shootin' at me the way you did, unarmed like I was, is the low-down way it strikes me a man is behavin' when he takes game an' fish out o' sea-

son! Gabe, it happens they're unarmed, too—they ain't got no protection, neither! Lawsy, Gabe," he ended, with a certain vast simplicity. "they're more helpless'n I was!"

Bemis paused, pulling at his lip and regarding the woodsman with wide and unblinking eyes.

Gabe Lawtrie was still going through his mental suffering, but now his eyes shone with a sudden light, a light of dawning understanding—of understanding that seemed hard to grasp.

"I never thought 'bout it that way, Whitcher; I never thought 'bout it that way," he kept saying hoarsely, his eyes evading those of the sheriff.

"Knowed you'd see it right, soon's it was explained right," said the sheriff, smiling. "You see, times ain't like they was, back when we was little shavers. Plen'y o' deer an' everythin' else, then—an' that was the trouble. Your pap an' my pap an' *all* 'em, 'n those days, went an' reckoned it 'ud go on f'rever, an' they jes' killed an' killed whenever they had a min' t' eat—an' sometimes when they didn't need t' eat.

"They done so much slaughterin', Gabe, that they made it necessary for each State t' put laws onto the wil' things, if your chil'ren an' my chil'ren an' our gran'chil'ren—did we have any —was to get any huntin' at all! See what I'm aimin' at, Gabe?"

Gabe Lawtrie, dropping his head further, resorted to his former phrase. "I—I never thought o' it that way, Whitcher! I never did!"

The sheriff finished tying up his bandage.

"Gabe," he said kindly, "I aim t' show you. I do, that it ain't jes' the capturin' o' men that kills game out o' season—I aim t' show you that it's the gettin' o' men that don't shoot fair! Lookit here. I'll take off them handcuffs, I will, if you'll come an' promise that you'll trail down peaceable with me t' the settlemen'. What say, Gabe?"

Gabe Lawtrie rose from his chair. As innocently as a child might have done, he held out his hands. His face was working, and there was no doubt that he had come to a tremendous decision.

"Take 'em off, Whitcher—an' take me wheresoever you got a min' t' take me!"

Whitcher Bemis, at the words, went over and unlocked the handcuffs. "Gabe," he said, "you can come with me, or you can tell me you ain't feelin' like travelin'. Which?"

The veteran woodsman looked at the sheriff once—once only—and then he slowly nodded his head. "Goin' with you, Whitcher," he said.

CHAPTER V.

GREAT TRIBUTE.

WHITCHER BEMIS, after the late-afternoon stage had left for East Chatham, was standing about the stove at Del Noel's store. Gabe Lawtrie, repentant, had been shipped down to the county seat to meet the so-called just dues that were coming to him. Bemis, after having taken some light twitting from the younger element, was explaining.

"Well, it was this a way," he was saying, as he nursed his lower lip. "Lem, bein' laid up with this here sciatica, wanted t' make a rip-roarin' hit—an' what better mark could he have than Gabe? Whole trouble is, you see, that Lem Warren don't go an' figger on consequences.

"He dep'tized them Holcomb brothers. Well an' good, 'cause they git what they go after. Didn't figger, howsoever, maybe—maybe, r'member—that Gabe Lawtrie an' the Holcomb boys was hell an' halleluyah en'mies. Mos' likely, did they come t' meet, either Gabe or one o' the Holcomb boys 'ud been dead—complete dead! Unnerstan'?"

The sheriff did not wait for a reply. Instead, he pulled out his lip and let it

snap back. At the same time, he began his blinking—and then he waved his arms, palms outstretched, and held them so for a moment.

"Lawsy, boys, I'm confessin' maybe givin' hard cider t' dep'ty wardens ain't exac'ly right, but it strikes me that a sheriff's duty is to avert murder—an' not t' count'nance it! Why, had I gone an' let Jim an' Tom an' Gabe mix it up, jes' as sure as the best troutin' is in the spring they'd have gone an' done some killin'! Hones', boys, don't I speak the absolute truth?"

The audience about the comfortably hot stove was silent—until Del Noel himself spoke. "Puttin' all that aside, Whitcher," he said gruffly, "we ain't denyin' it took courage on your part t' go an' take Gabe!"

A slow smile broke over the face of Whitcher Bemis, and he pushed back his muskrat cap and scratched the sparse fringe of hair that still remained.

"Courage—courage?" He brought

out the two words with a chuckle, and his whole wholesome body shook. "Lawsy, Del, he's the man that had courage—Gabe's the man that had it!"

"Why, I remember, I do, way back when him an' I was young uns. Up in the big woods, it was, close t' Canady. Panther—we had more o' them in them days—was attackin' me. Gabe come up, he did, an' with a little mite o' a pen-knife he went an' fit the cat off. Got tore up an' scratched some, Gabe did—but he dragged the beast offn me!"

"Courage?" Whitcher Bemis paused. He opened his eyes wide—he blinked them, and caressed his monstrous lip—and then he slowly nodded his head as he spoke:

"It don't take courage, boys, t' face a man that's got courage. Was I goin' up agin' a coward, now, I— But, shucks, I wouldn't 'a' gone up agin' a coward! No, boys, Gabe's got courage—an' no man with courage can shoot down another man unarmed!"



HILL CALL

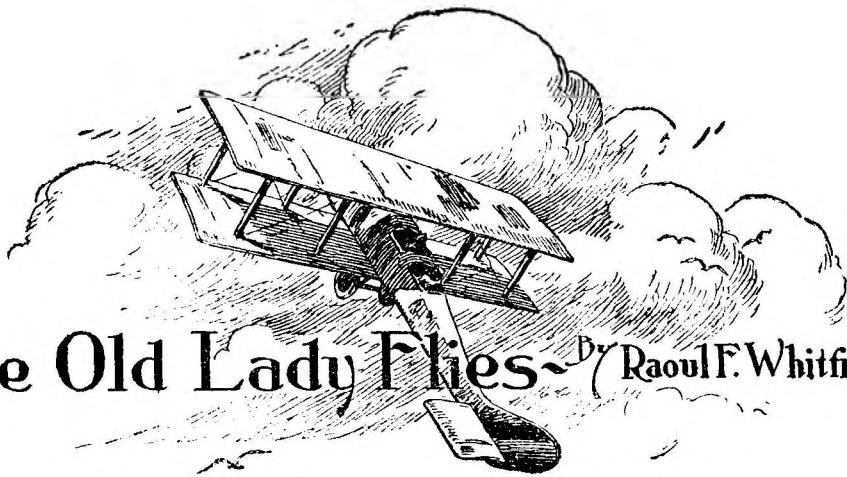
By Cristel Hastings

DO you hear the blue hills callin'—
Callin' softly in the night,
With their outlines etched in silver
Where a western moon hangs bright?

Do you hear the high hills sighin'—
Sighin' as the winds fly by,
With their feet among the meadows
An' their summits in the sky?

Do you hear the blue hills singin'—
Singin' plaintive melodies,
With your heartstrings sort o' achin'
To be hearin' one o' these?

Do you feel the high hills reachin'—
Reachin' for you, heart an' soul,
Till you start out, pack an' pinto,
Where the notched horizons roll?



The Old Lady Flies~*By Raoul F. Whitfield~*

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

STICKING TO HIS PLANE.

RUSS HEALY always insisted that the old girl understood. But Russ was that rare sort of creature—a flyer who was sentimental. Of course, on the face of things, it was sheer rot. A plane is an inanimate object, theoretically—and therefore incapable of understanding. But Russ didn't look at it that way. There was no doubt about the fact that he loved the Jenny.

He'd picked her up right after the war, on a government sale. She hadn't been flown at all, and Russ had worked with her ever since that time. He'd joy-hopped her, taken a chance on air advertising, smoke writing, stunting. He'd even done some air surveying with her, and I think he chased boll weevils, down South, at one time—spraying from the Jenny.

She'd cracked up with him more than once, but Russ would just patch her up—and patch himself up. She wasn't a pretty sight. She was dirty—oil-stained, her wing fabric of varied colors, her struts lacking varnish. She sagged a bit on her under carriage. But her flying wires were right; she was rigged properly for the air. She was

slow, of course—powered by an old Hall-Scott engine, and sluggish on the controls, compared to the new ships. Just an old lady, that was all she was—an old lady, still turning a prop and taking the air, but pretty far out of date.

We had eight ships in the circus, and five pilots. That is, we had five fliers who could do more than get off and land. A couple of the grease monkeys could qualify—indeed, had qualified—for a license, but that doesn't make a flyer—not by about a thousand air hours and considerable natural ability. However, when we made the jump from the outskirts of one town to the outskirts of another, the two mechanics each flew a ship, and Bob Brooks, who ran the Brooks' Flying Circus, flew the other. That got the eight ships around, and made a nice showing in the sky.

It was Bob Brooks' wife who started the thing. She was a peach, and Bob was crazy about her. I didn't blame him.

We ran into a streak of tough luck. Charlie Ryan crashed on a landing, and both he and his mechanic, riding in the rear cockpit, were badly smashed up. Then Duke Conroy got in a spin, out of a side-slip—and we had to leave him at the hospital pretty badly hurt.

It was then that Bob's wife had her little say. It was, in effect, that her good-looking husband keep both feet on the ground.

We stayed around Los Angeles, picking up a few movie jobs, and looking at the mountains and the Pacific from the air until the boys came out of the hospital. We lost a little money.

Then Bob Brooks called us into the big tent we slung up on the field in which we were parking, and gave us a little talk. "I'm giving the air the air," he said. "I never did do much but ferry. I've got too much brain." He grinned, and so did we. "And now I'm not even ferrying. So we've got to cut down a bit. We'll drop two ships. Vance Bailey has bought that Standard. Now, about the other—"

Brooks' eyes went to those of Russ Healy, and we knew right away what was coming. It gave me a jolt, because I knew Russ—and I knew the way he felt. And I guess it gave the others a jolt, too.

"About the other," Bob repeated uncomfortably, "I guess we'll have to let the 'Old Lady' go, Russ."

Well, there it was. Russ Healy blinked a couple of times. He's tall and lean, with gray, squinted eyes—and usually there's a tight little smile playing around his lips. But the smile wasn't there now.

Healy shook his head slowly. Then he got a pill from the pack. "If you do," he said very slowly. "I'll just go along with her."

Bob Brooks frowned. "You can have the new Waco, Russ. You can do anything with her. She's got power, climb, dive. She's an easy rider—"

"I'm sticking with the Old Lady," Russ said quietly. "When do you want me to cut loose?"

I saw then that Brooks was getting sore. Russ Healy was a sweet stunt flyer; in fact, he was a good man all around when it came to air stuff. There

wasn't much that Russ couldn't do, or hadn't done.

"Look here!" Brooks said. "We can't fly a ship around if there's no one to climb inside and get at the stick. You don't expect me to let a new plane drop—and hang on to a rambling wreck? Why, that Jenny is liable to fall to pieces in the first spin you get her into, and—"

Russ Healy's eyes narrowed. "Think so?" He spoke grimly. "Well, I'll just take her up there now—and loop you ragged, and then I'll come down in the tightest spin—"

"Yes you will! Not with *me!*" Brooks' face was flushed.

"That's right," Russ said grimly. "I forgot you were quitting the air."

It was his tone that did it. And they had both flared, were both pretty hot.

Bob Brooks glared at Russ. "I'm not quitting the air until we hit Tia Juana," the boss said slowly. "I'll fly the Waco down. You can take that wreck of yours—and cut loose, any time you like. What do we owe you?"

Russ Healy smiled. "Not a cent," he said. "I owe you fifty bucks—the final payment on that last wreck replacement material for the Old Lady. I'll see that you get it by dark."

Then he turned and walked away.

CHAPTER II.

QUICK ACTION NEEDED.

BOB BROOKS looked at me, shook his head slowly. I was frowning. The boys were talking together in low tones.

"Not so good, Bob!" I said. "You're cutting loose the most popular guy in the outfit—and just because he sticks by his old bus."

Brooks didn't see it that way. He spoke to the rest of the gang: "We're losing money. I can't fly all the ships we've got. Why should I get rid of the new ones—just because I'm senti-

mental? This is a business—not a sob factory!"

There was common sense in that. We could see Brooks' side of it. And the sky-riding game hadn't been so good lately—something had to be done.

"I think a lot of Russ Healy," Brooks went on, looking at each one of us in turn. "Even if he did hint that I was showing yellow by sticking on the ground—I like him. Some of you boys talk to him. He could store that ship up at Al Garvin's hangar. Then every month or so I'll give him a day off, and if he's close enough he can come back and get it."

With that final sarcasm, Bob Brooks walked out of the tent. I chased after him, having just had an idea. They don't come very often, but sometimes they're good when they do come.

"Russ is sore, Bob," I said, "and he owes you fifty bucks. He's going to try to get that fifty. I happen to know that he hasn't got it. And he's going to try to show you up—show you that the Old Lady can still do her stuff. Now—how's he going to do it?"

Bob frowned. "He isn't! He's just talking."

"You know better than that," I replied. "He isn't that kind. I'll tell you what he's going to do—he's going to tackle the 'War Aces' job!"

That got Bob. That job happened to be one which had been turned down by three flying outfits and a half dozen joy-hoppers who were going it alone. A fellow named Conant was directing a picture of war-flying days, and he wanted some crash stuff. He was willing to pay for it, and he didn't expect the pilot to kill himself. But he wanted a crash—and some tight, low spins that wouldn't be easy.

"Russ wouldn't do that job," Bob said. "He's too wise for that."

"But he's sore," I repeated. "It gives him a chance to show you what the Old Lady can do—in the air. And it

gives him a chance to hand you the fifty and tell you—"

An exhaust roar cut me short. We both stared toward the dead-line. There was only one ship out of the canvas hangars, and it was the Old Lady, the Jenny.

I swore softly. "Stop him, Bob! Stall him off. He's going to fly over to that field where they're doing the air-shoot on—"

"Come on!" yelled Brooks, and ran toward the ship. I followed. We dodged through the wash of the Old Lady's prop; her engine was being tested with blocks under the wheels. We both climbed up on a wing as Russ Healy cut the throttle and eliminated most of the exhaust roar.

"Forget about that fifty, Russ." Bob Brooks grinned. "We'll call it square. Where are you going—" Brooks stopped.

There was a faint smile playing about Healy's lips; his eyes were narrowed.

"Get off that wing, Brooks!" Russ' tone was hard. "I'm going to put the Old Lady through some stunts that you'll pay coin to look at! And you'll have your fifty, all right. This old girl has made plenty for you—she'll make that fifty—."

"Forget it!" Bob said. "If you try to do picture stuff with this—"

"Get off that wing!" Russ shouted, his face white. He knew what was coming—what *would* have come. "Get off—or I'll bounce you off. Take those blocks away, Bud!"

"Russ," I yelled desperately, "Bob didn't exactly mean that about the Old Lady. Cool down and—"

The ship rolled forward from the dead-line. I jumped off the trailing edge of the wing. The prop wash caught me and bowled me over a few times. Something battered against me. I sat up to find Bob Brooks sitting beside me. The Old Lady was climbing off the field—cross wind.

We got up and watched her climb. I thought, for a few seconds, that Russ might just take her up a few thousand and do some stunts. But he didn't. He headed her northeast, and flew in a straight line. He didn't even bother to get altitude.

I groaned. "He's heading dead for that field in the hills—where they're making 'War Aces'! He'll kill himself, sure as—"

Bob Brooks swore softly. Then he smiled. "He owes me money on that plane! It'll take time to get cameras set up. They may not be working to-day. Anyway, it'll all take time. We'll climb in the D.H. 6 and fly over. I'll talk to Conant—he can't use Russ—"

"He'll hand you the fifty and tell you to clear out," I interrupted. "And Russ'll raise the devil if you try to cut in on him."

Bob Brooks groaned. "They'll say I rode him into being bumped off! He'll get all smashed—we've *got* to do something!"

I nodded. "What?" I asked simply. And that was the question.

CHAPTER III.

TRROUBLE AHEAD AND BELOW.

WE wasted about five minutes talking the thing over. Al Rodgers and Dave Simmons joined us. Charlie Ryan and Duke Conroy came up. It was Conroy who hit on the idea.

"Russ is a good guy, boss," he said. "He gets heated up easily—but he's all right. I'm not going to stick over here and see him kill himself for the chance of showing you up, and getting fifty bucks. I know this fellow Conant. As long as he shoots the crash—he won't care about Russ. When that fellow Donnelly, who made a living by pulling off crashes for the film gang, got his, did they do any prolonged weeping? They did not. Just business—and he'd signed a paper releasing them from any

responsibility, of course. I won't let Russ get hot-headed and bump himself off that way!"

"How," I asked, "are you going to stop it?"

"Not *me*," Conroy said. "*Us!* I could lick Russ if I hadn't just come out of the hospital, maybe—but there would still be the movie gang. There's only one thing to do. We'll *all* fly over there—and raise merry—"

"Great!" I interrupted, and grabbed Bob Brooks by the arm. "But first let's call the Mammoth Film Company—and make sure they're working on air stuff to-day. They've been shooting some mild flying, even if they couldn't get the crash stuff."

Bob nodded excitedly. "Get the ships out! You call up, Mac. We'll fly five ships over—I'll ride with you, Mac. Hurry it up! They might just happen to be set for the stuff."

There was a gas station about a half mile down the road which ran past the field, and I trotted toward it. The other boys were moving toward the hangars. I chuckled. Russ would be sore, furious—when we flew in and busted things up. And six of us could do it.

It was the only thing to do. I'd heard about Conant. He was an aggressive chap, and he knew his air. He'd flown during the war, and then he'd quit, which showed me that he had brains. It was his job now to get crash scenes for "War Aces"—and he was up against it. It isn't easy to crash a ship, and get away cheerfully.

Donnelly had done it—for about three crashes, wing-overs and stalls. And then the engine had come back on his chest—and he was through.

"War Aces" was a thriller—I knew, because I'd read it. It wasn't exactly highbrow, and it wouldn't take much acting, but it would take some crashing, and some bang-up air stuff. If the movie bunch were working—and I had

a hunch that they were—Conant would grab Russ and the Old Lady. And Russ was so sore that he'd forgotten all about himself. That was a cinch. He was like that.

It took me five minutes to get somebody at the picture outfit that knew about the shoot. And they gave me a straight answer. Conant had five cameras out at the field, in the hills back of Hollywood. He had two ships. He was shooting stuff. And the company was still looking for a thrill-man. Did I know of one?

I groaned and hung up. When I got back to the dead-line the ships were out, and being tested at the blocks. I gave Bob the cheerful news. He swore a couple of times.

"When we hit the field we'll set our ship down," he explained. "Look out for holes—they may have been doing some war-time shell-hole stuff. Mac and I will go after Russ—and hang on to him. You fellows get down as soon after us as you can, in case this fellow Conant gets rough with us for breaking up the party. I'll do the talking. If things look tough, you ease up to the Old Lady—and break a connection, Duke."

Duke Conroy grinned. "I'd rather talk with this Conant, but you're the boss."

"Well—let's get up and over there!" Bob said. "I started this mess and I'll finish it! And believe me, when I get Russ Healy back here—"

"I'll feel a lot better!" I interrupted—and meant it.

Then we climbed the five ships, and taxied out. Sixty seconds later we were off the earth—and heading for the field from which they were shooting the "War Aces" stuff. As the D.H. climbed, and I held the joy-stick back a bit from the neutral position, I shook my head slowly. Knowing Russ Healy as well as I did, I could figure trouble ahead and below.

"Unless we wreck things generally," I thought to myself, "the Old Lady flies!"

CHAPTER IV.

READY TO FIGHT.

IT wasn't hard to spot the field on which they were making "War Aces"—or at least a part of it. It was a level stretch, between rolling hills. There were shell holes, home-made but real warlike, at one end. At the other end of the stretch there were three ships. Two of them were small, single-seaters. One, I guessed, was a baby Nieuport. Ed Seeley had one of those, but he wasn't doing any crash stuff with it, I knew that.

As we circled over, I saw that they were working on the Old Lady. Probably they were rigging up a couple of dummy guns, or trying to make her look like a D.H. or a bomber of some type. It was hard to figure just what they could make the Old Lady look like—but they do queer things in the movies.

I cut the throttle, and glided down.

Bob Brooks yelled at me above the whistling of wind through the flying wires: "We'll be in time! They're trying to camouflage the Old Lady!"

I nodded, and brought the D.H. down into the wind. We made a fair landing, and I taxied around and rolled back toward the three planes.

The crowd was watching me come up, and some of the bunch on the field were staring up at the other boys.

We rolled fairly close to the parked ships, and I cut the switch. Bob and I climbed down, and we were met at the wing tip by a scowling Russ Healy. Beside him was this fellow Conant, short and stocky—and dolled up as though he were going to play a round or two of championship golf.

Brooks grinned. "Hello, boys!" he greeted them. "Just paying you a little visit. Sort of a social call. How's the picture coming along?"

Conant smiled. "It'll be all right now," he said cheerfully. "Healy's going to do some crashes for us—and some warm air stuff. If we could work you boys in—" He stopped.

Bob Brooks was shaking his head slowly. "Russ isn't going to do any crashes for you—not in the Old Lady! And you can't work us in, Conant."

Russ Healy swore softly.

Conant looked sort of amused.

There was a crowd of picture people around us by this time, but the other boys were setting their ships down on the field. I wasn't worried much.

"If it's a matter of money—" Conant said.

"It isn't," Brooks interrupted him. Then he grinned.

I could see that Brooks was trying to get out of it peaceably, if he could, and I had my doubts about that.

"You see," Brooks continued, "we sort of like Russ around the outfit. Sometimes he has careless ideas, but he's not doing any crashing for you—get that straight!"

Conant stiffened and smiled in a rather superior manner.

Just then Al Rodgers and Dave Simmons shoved their way to our side.

Bob Brooks grinned. "Did Duke go over to the Old Lady?" he asked Simmons.

Simmons nodded. "With his best pair of pliers," he said cheerfully, and I saw Russ Healy straighten up and his face get hard.

Brooks nodded. "Russ," he said slowly, "suppose you come along back with us. You can ride me back in the Old Lady. Maybe I was a little hasty about that ship. Maybe we can frame some way of taking her—"

"Not a chance!" Russ interrupted hotly. "You fellows clear off this field. If they don't clear off, Conant—"

Conant nodded his head slowly.

I looked at the director, but I spoke to Bob Brooks. "I'll take this little

runt," I told him. "And I won't need that set of brass knuckles unless they get to piling on me too thick."

Dave Simmons chuckled. Dave's about the biggest pilot in captivity, and he likes a good, uneven scrap. "I'm glad we came over," he said cheerfully. "Better shoot this stuff, Conant. It'll make good war stuff."

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING UP.

I COULD see, by that time, that Conant wasn't a scrapper. He just smiled in a sort of apologetic way.

"If it's any of your business," he said, addressing Brooks, "perhaps it might be advisable to talk things over."

Healy didn't like that. He glared at Bob Brooks, and said: "I owe him fifty dollars, Conant. Give it to him, and take it off my stunt pay."

I expected that.

So did Bob. He shook his head. "I'll have to look up some papers," he replied. "Don't know the exact amount. and, anyway, Healy is under a contract to fly for me—not for himself. We'd have to—"

"I've busted the contract!" Russ Healy exclaimed. "I'll fly any way that I want to fly. The Old Lady's my ship. You say she's no good. I'll show you how good she is—and you'll pay money to see her in the movies—"

"Steady!" Bob interrupted him. "Maybe we'd just better grab him, Mac—what do you think?"

I looked at Russ. He was pretty white around the ears, but he was still able to use his head.

"Better come along, Russ!" It was Simmons who spoke. "If you and your friends hop us, Duke'll clip a few wires with his pliers, and you never will get the Old Lady off—not for a few days, anyway."

Healy glared at Simmons. Then he looked at the director. Conant was

smiling cheerfully. There was a peculiar expression in Russ Healy's eyes suddenly. He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he said. "But I'll be back in a few days, Conant—just as soon as I work out fifty bucks' worth of air stuff for the old miser, here."

Conant nodded. "We'll shoot some other scenes in the meantime," he replied, and kept right on smiling. "Don't get hurt, Healy."

I laughed out loud at that one. Conant telling Russ not to get hurt! It was pretty rich.

"I'll ride back with Russ, Mac," the boss told me. "You boys stay down here until we take off."

I nodded and lighted a pill.

Russ followed Bob Brooks along toward the Old Lady.

Conant shrugged his shoulders. "Just one delay after another," he declared. "It's beastly!"

"Sure it is," I agreed. "Times are getting tough when you can't get fellows to kill themselves by crashing planes for a few hundred dollars."

But Conant didn't get sore. He kept right on smiling. And remembering that expression I'd seen in Russ Healy's eyes, I figured that something was up. I tried to dope out just what it would be, as I walked over toward the D. H., but it had me baffled.

The Old Lady's appearance side-tracked me. They hadn't had much time, but already they'd mounted two guns on the old Jenny, and there was camouflage paint on her—not yet dry. There wasn't very much of it, but enough to make her look like a different ship. She'd do for a crash, anyway.

Russ was climbing into the front cockpit, and as he squirmed into place back of the stick, he looked at me. He was grinning. Bob Brooks was already seated in the rear cockpit.

I waved a hand and went on toward the D.H. The other boys were already in their planes, or moving toward them.

I hadn't more than snapped the self-starter and let the prop turn over a few times, when the Old Lady, gaudy in her new disguise, took the air. I stared at her. The dummy guns were still in place. I wondered why Bob hadn't raised the devil about that, but I figured he was glad enough to get Russ away so easily.

"He'll have to do *some* talking to keep Russ from coming back!" I thought, as I advanced the throttle a few notches and taxied out into the wind. "Something's funny in this deal. I'm sure of that!"

I'd heard a lot about this fellow Conant, and I *knew* a lot about Russ Healy. Neither of them, from the way I figured it, had run true to form. They'd let us set the ships down there, and deliberately bust up their little party.

They'd taken it pretty calmly, too. Then, there had been that exchange of glances between Conant and Russ Healy. That had counted for something. As I lifted the DeHaviland off the field, following the Old Lady, I shook my head. "Something's up—besides some joy-hopping ships!" I said to myself. "But *what*?"

CHAPTER VI.

TRICKED INTO A CRASH.

THE answer came when I got up to four thousand feet, and it came so suddenly that I almost let the D.H. slip into a tail-spin. We'd been climbing in a wide circle—the five ships—following the Old Lady. And I guess we'd all been getting a kick out of those two dummy guns and the slapped-on war paint.

All of a sudden the Old Lady stood right up on her tail in a sweet zoom—and laid over on her back! Then she came down in a pretty fair loop!

I had the D.H. out of her way, banking off vertically. As I came around,

in a position to get a good look at things, I saw plenty.

There were about a dozen ships in the air. At least four of them were stunting—looping, doing wing-overs, Immelmans, and spins! From two of them came sulphurous trails of yellow, streaming off at an angle. They had guns—and were shooting them!

The Old Lady was going down in a spin, and two planes were following her down, both streaming out yellow trails from their exhausts and spitting red from guns shooting between the synchronized propeller blades! Diving near by was a fourth ship, with a bird standing in the rear cockpit—and turning a crank in a boxlike affair!

Then I got it. Conant and Russ Healy had framed us! They were shooting from the air and from the ground—shooting stuff for the picture! And they were using our five ships!

A screaming, wire-whistling shape dove past the D.H. on the right, and instinctively I banked away. But even as I did so, I got a glimpse of a helmeted figure using a camera. He wasn't cranking it—but I guessed that he had one of the new, electrically driven ones that didn't need it.

I had the D.H. in a spin. Bob Brooks, riding with Russ, being let in for all this frame-up! And the Old Lady doing all of her stuff! No wonder Russ had exchanged glances with Conant!

At three thousand feet I got the D.H. out of the spin, leveled off, and gave her the gun.

There were white bursts in the air, and on the ground below there were more of them. I banked over, looking for the Old Lady. I saw one of the circus ships going down in a steep glide, with a strange plane on her tail. A ship was looping a few thousand feet above me, white bursts on her right. Smoke was drifting all across the sky.

Then I spotted the Old Lady. She

was going down toward the field, at the shell-ripped end, with one of the Nieuports I'd seen right behind her. I caught sight of two camera men, shooting up at her as she came down.

I dove the D.H. I was too surprised and too excited to get sore. Anyway, it wouldn't have done any good. The whole thing was plain now. I'd always given Russ credit for having brains, but I'd never given him credit for having this much.

They'd had ships waiting on some other field of course, and Russ had guessed that we'd come after him. When Bob Brooks had said he'd fly back with Russ he'd played right into that pilot's hands. Two birds with one stone! Not only would Brooks sit in on the sky shoot, but he'd be right there for the crash—the big scene that Conant wanted!

I groaned. The D.H. was down pretty low now. I could see a ship diving off to the side of the Old Lady, and in the center of the shell-holed area were two more camera men, waiting to shoot the crash from the ground.

The Old Lady was slipping off on a wing now, and I knew that Russ was trying to hit the spot near the camera men. There was the fellow grinding away from the plane at one side, too—still shooting the fake battle.

I thought of Bob Brooks in the rear cockpit. He was helpless—it wasn't a dual-control ship. Russ had put the Old Lady through every air stunt—and Bob had had to sit there and take it. Now he was in for the crash!

It was a beauty! The Old Lady nosed right into what looked like a fairly deep shell hole. Her propeller splintered, her tail came up. I could hear her wings crackling, with the engine throttled down. Then she tumbled over, upside down—and I groaned and dove the D.H. for a landing.

"The old fool!" I said, and wasn't at all sure that I really meant it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ONLY WAY TO SETTLE IT.

WHEN I got up beside the Old Lady, Russ Healy was leaning against a wheel and smoking a cigarette. Bob Brooks was limping around, trying out his left leg, and muttering to himself. Conant was standing near by, and scribbling on a piece of oblong paper with a fountain pen.

"Hello there, rough boy!" Russ greeted me cheerfully. His head was bandaged, and a medical-appearing gentleman was putting more white stuff around his left wrist and hand. "Can the Old Lady fly?"

I grunted. She wasn't as complete a wreck as I'd expected to see, and there was a reason. The shell hole was filled with nice, soft sand!

"She *could* fly!" I replied.

Bob Brooks limped over my way. "They put one over on us, Mac!" he said. "They shot all sorts of stuff. They used our planes, their planes—and then even used *me*!"

I couldn't help but grin.

Then the red-faced, golf-togged Conant came over and waved a check toward Bob. "This should help," the director said. "We *had* to have your planes. Can't use all of it, of course. You weren't rigged with guns and stuff. But it'll help—in the flashes. Is it all right?"

Bob took the check, and I looked over his shoulder. We both gasped together. As a check it was a masterpiece.

"It's—all right!" Bob managed to say.

Conant chuckled. "Had to have the stuff!" he said. "Needed our ships—all I could scrape together—for the cameras. Most of them, anyway. Of course, I'll take care of Healy——"

Russ grinned. Then his face sobered. He glared at Bob Brooks.

"How about it?" he asked. "Can the Old Lady fly? Does she get fixed

up—and do I sky-ride her with the outfit?"

Bob Brooks looked up at the sky, and I could see that he was thinking back about four and a half minutes—to those stunts. He looked down at Russ Healy again, and nodded his head.

"The Old Lady flies!" he said slowly, and that settled it.

A Mild Request

A MAN had invited a business acquaintance to play a round of golf with him. The guest, who was a very pompous individual, was also a poor player, and hacked up the turf with each stroke.

After he had carried away an unusually generous portion with his iron, he turned to his host and said:

"You know I don't care particularly for the game, but I like the glorious open country hereabouts."

"Ah, quite," replied the other, as he surveyed the scarred ground, "but do you mind closing up the open country as we go along?"

Very Surprising

THIS is a story of a superb six-cylinder car that had broken down on a hill. The owner of a car about the size of a perambulator stopped and asked:

"What's your trouble? I'll tow you to the top of the hill."

The owner of the big car smiled condescendingly, and said:

"All right. But if you try to take me to the top of the hill with that toy it is at your own risk."

The small car towed the big one up.

At the summit the owner of the six-cylinder asked:

"What is all that smoke coming from the back of your car?"

"That?" was the answer. "Well, would you believe it! I've had my brakes on all the time."



The Soaring Danger —

By Paul Chadwick ~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

THE sun rose above the eastern hills, and now as the fingers of light reached out into the shallows of the winding creek, a great, dark shape detached itself from a hummock which stood in the center of the marsh.

It rose into the air on widespread pinions, up, up, up—mounting against the glowing disk of the sun until it was poised in the sky far above the marsh, far above the green sea of cat-tails where the morning breeze rippled in long billowy undulations.

For several seconds it hung there, tremorless, the head with its powerful beak turned earthward and the keen eyes flashing in the sunlight like twin jewels. Then, with a piercing cry, it swooped down toward the reeds from which it had arisen.

Down it dropped toward the brisk activity of the marsh—the whistling, red-winged blackbirds and the thousands of silvery water beetles that zigzagged to and fro in the basinlike pools. Its descent was as swift as a falling arrow, and it seemed on the point of striking the ground.

At the last moment, however, it checked itself, poised an instant, and then skimmed along above the reed tops as lightly and noiselessly as a piece of wind-blown thistledown. It was one of the great marsh hawks or blue harriers, and the dark-brown wing coverts edged with gray told that it was a male. This first skyward flight was made to limber the cramped wing muscles before the day's work began.

The bird was out early for the hunt, for this morning there rested upon him a great responsibility. The day before, his mate had been slain by a prowling mink, and now he alone was accountable for the care of the four fledglings in the nest on the hummock.

He must feed and protect them until they were old enough to fare for themselves. The great hawk kept this in mind as he flew above the marsh in his search for the spotted frogs, whose tender flesh was the best food for the young birds.

Even in the press of caring for the motherless young, he could not forget the loss he had suffered—the death of the beloved mate who for four years

had come with him every spring to the nesting ground in the marsh. With that strange, silent affection of wild creatures, they had worked together in an indissoluble partnership, rearing their broods each season, taking turns at the hunt and roaming the great blue spaces of the air.

Now this happy time was over. Never again would he fly to the nesting ground with his mate. He could not repair the loss, but one thing he might do—he might punish the animal who in a moment of ruthless ferocity had destroyed her.

There seemed to be no justice in her death. She had been merely hunting for food, merely taking what nature intended her to take—for the hunting ground was large and there was game for all. But the mink, stealing through the reeds, had sprung upon her as she alighted in a little clearing with a frog in her beak.

His attack was so sudden, so unexpected, that she could not defend herself, and the mink's teeth found a vital spot before she could open her beak to scream for her mate. Even if she had tried to defend herself, however, it was doubtful if she would have been able to withstand the onslaught of the wiry mink with his steellike muscles.

The male hawk had come to the scene with an intuitive sense that something was wrong. But he had come too late, and only in time to see the killer slinking off among the reeds.

He remembered all this now as he circled above the cat-tails. He was larger than the mother hawk by several inches. His wings were broader and more powerful, his claws longer. He wished the mink had attacked him instead of his weaker mate. The outcome then might have been different.

With the realization of this a plan began to take shape in the bird's alert brain. The desire to square accounts, to avenge the death of his mate, burned

deep within him, and with it came a courage born of desperation—for the plan that the hawk was beginning to formulate would take courage out of the ordinary.

He flew low to the ground now, just above the pools, and soon caught a frog. He went back with it to the nest and divided it among the hungry brood. Three times he duplicated this maneuver, until the fledglings were comfortably gorged and their little, yellow, mawlike mouths had ceased to open at his approach. Then he sailed forth again and followed the course of the winding creek that eventually led into the broad expanse of the lake.

He had not gone far, when suddenly his sharp eyes detected a movement among the reeds, a stealthy shifting of the green stems close to the water's edge. Then for a moment he got a glimpse of a sinuous form that glided from sight almost as soon as it appeared. But the bird recognized it, instantly as a mink!

It was one of the brown killers of the creek and marshes, who in the sheer wantonness of their killings are not even outdone by their cousins the weasels. And as Fate had decreed it, it was the very one who had slain his mate the day before.

The hawk knew this with that seemingly uncanny sense of wild things, which is really nothing but the result of extraordinarily acute powers of observation. Even in that brief glimpse, there was a familiarity of movement, shape, and color which the hawk's sharp eyesight recorded.

He snapped his beak with a hissing intake of breath, and for a moment felt a furious desire to dive straight into the reeds in pursuit of his enemy. Then he realized the futility of this. In that veritable forest of sheltering stems he would not have the slightest chance of coming to grips with the mink. The wary animal would slip away without even showing his coat again.

There was one way only, and that was to lure him out into the open. And now the hawk's cunning manifested itself. He had fought down the impulse to try an immediate attack. Instead he rose higher into the air and his eyes roved down the creek.

There, a hundred yards farther on, was an open space where the reeds gave way in a semicircle and left a miniature beach. The mink was moving downstream, and in all probability he would at least skirt around this clearing. If there was something to draw him out, some enticement, he would probably enter it and leave the shelter of the reeds behind!

He had done this to attack a hawk before, and why not again? To be sure it had been a weaker, female hawk he had attacked previously, but there was no great difference in the birds' appearance, and if circumstances were the same would not the mink, always cruelly destructive, attack again? So the hawk reasoned, and, making a broad circle, he flew toward the little patch of open beach.

II.

ON the way the hawk dropped for one flashing instant to catch a frog in his powerful talons and lift him into the air. He reached the open space a full hundred feet before the mink, who was making his way through the almost impenetrable reeds.

The hawk landed in the very center of the gravelly beach, and prepared to make his meal with a cool indifference that belied his triggerlike alertness. He faced downstream, with his head slightly turned and one eye taking in the semicircle of the reeds. While seemingly preoccupied with his meal, he noticed that where the reeds ended and before the sand of the beach commenced there was a strip of low, dry grass.

There was a certain daintiness about

him as he ate. He swallowed the morsels with little backward tosses of his head. He seemed too engrossed to hear the faint rustle, or see the shifting movement which was presently observable in the grass behind him.

It was hardly more than a fleeting shadow, but there was something significant about it, something vividly sinister. In a moment a head parted the grass blades and peered out. It was a wicked-looking little head, set low upon stubby legs that supported a sinuous, snakelike body. A pair of evilly glittering eyes fixed themselves on the hawk's back with cold intensity. The mink was planning another kill.

The muscles of his body grew tense. He crouched, and almost imperceptibly began to move forward. Now, more than ever, he looked like a snake as he crawled on his belly through the grass. There was a terrible purpose in that stealthy advance, the promise of death.

Slowly the mink moved out of the grass, out into the open, and still the hawk continued to eat, seemingly unaware of his imminent peril. The mink's feet made not the slightest sound. He placed them with infinite caution, careful not to disturb a pebble.

His eyes never for an instant wavered in their malignant fixity. He had already chosen his spot to strike—there at the base of the bird's skull where the bone was thin. When the hawk raised his head to swallow, he would slash into his brain with teeth that had the sharpness of needle points.

The distance between them lessened. Fifteen feet, twelve—ten, and now the time had come for the killer to strike.

No eye could have followed that last movement. Half spring, half run, the mink bounded forward—a streak of brown lightning full of deadly calculation. But cunning as had been his approach, and swiftly as he had made that rush, the hawk made a movement which saved him from instant death.

Just before the mink struck, the bird's muscles responded with the quickness of a steel spring. He half turned, and the mink's teeth instead of meeting at the base of his brain as he had planned, struck the side of his breast and snapped their way through the feathers until they closed over the breastbone. His jaws clamped down, he clutched with his claws and the hawk could not well reach his antagonist with his beak.

He tore with his talons, but the mink twisted and turned like an eel, and his skin, under its velvety sleekness seemed indestructibly tough. The animal hung on viciously. He had failed in his first attempt but now that he had come to grapples with his victim he had no intention of letting go.

Neither had the hawk, and so the two fought there on the sand with a deadly, silent fury. The bird fought to avenge his mate, and the mink to make his kill and for sheer joy of killing. He was furious now at being balked.

Then he felt one of the hawk's claws wrap around his haunches in a viselike grip, and terror seized him. At this moment, being the coward he was at heart, he would have given up the battle to turn and flee, but he dared not. The only possible chance for safety lay in attack.

Neither, in that close grip, could conquer the other. With the mink clinging to his breastbone, the hawk was unable to strike a death-dealing blow with his beak, and the mink was too handicapped by those gripping talons to find a vulnerable spot. He dared not let go his hold for an instant, for fear his opponent would get the advantage. It was a terrible deadlock.

The hawk in his anger and excitement was influenced by the force of habit. He was a creature of the air, of the wide open spaces, and so in his extremity he instinctively turned to the air. With a fierce effort he righted himself, and his great wings struck out.

The mink trailed after him, clutching at the sand and gravel with his hind claws, but little by little the hawk raised him bodily. The bird's great wings strained as they had never strained before. He breathed through his open beak in quick gasps.

Up, up into the air he pulled himself and his clinging antagonist. A gust of wind aided him and he beat upward and outward over the open lake. He struggled in mid-air, snapping and hissing, trying to reach down and strike the mink's evil little head, but he could not with those clamping jaws so near his throat.

They were out almost over the center of the lake now, a hundred feet above the water. Still they fought silently, but the sight of the two interlocking forms, the spectacle of this terrible battle in mid-air, had stilled the marsh.

The blackbirds had ceased their whistling from the reeds, and even the spotted frogs had stopped their guttural croaking. A brown feather from the hawk's beating wings loosened and drifted down toward the lake in spirals. He was tiring fast now. The weight of the mink was too much even for his powerful muscles to bear.

He realized that he would not be able to sustain it much longer. He would have to let go, let his enemy fall into the water and escape—let the cruel death of his mate go unavenged. With a burst of indomitable courage he tried again desperately to reach his enemy, but he could not.

He began to sink toward the lake with his wings beating the air futilely. Then he relaxed the grip of his talons. For one startled instant the mink hung there by his jaws, then, realizing that this was his chance to escape, he released his hold and plunged toward the lake like a plummet.

Almost without a ripple his snaky body slipped into the water. He struck out instantly for the nearest point of

the shore, swimming with the assurance of one born to the water.

The hawk started to swoop down upon him, but checked himself in mid-air. For the mink's beady eyes were upturned, and with the first glimpse of that descending feathered form he dove beneath the surface in a swirl of bubbles. He had no intention of being caught again.

III.

THE hawk was not at home in the water. Dive he could not or he would have followed that dark sinuous body down into the depths, to destroy it as it had destroyed his mate. As it was he lofted his wings and sailed upward, and from the air he could clearly see the mink swimming under the surface and leaving a trail of bubbles behind.

Even under water the mink was an expert swimmer, but he would have to come up to breathe and this the hawk knew. He hovered overhead snapping his beak and ready to drop any moment the mink showed himself on the surface. But when after an interval which seemed incredibly long, the mink came up to breathe the crafty animal outmaneuvered his pursuer.

He made a quick backward turn of his body which carried him to the surface behind the hawk, and he took his breath, and dove again before the bird could reach him. He was in his element now. The bird could do nothing more than slightly alter the course of the mink's progress toward shore, and he soon realized this. He realized that the ruthless killer of his mate was about to go unpunished, that his efforts had all been futile.

He rose into the air again, ready to make a desperate effort and even plunge into the lake after his hated enemy. Yet he knew that this attack would fail even as his former ones had. Then suddenly, as he hung poised and ready for the plunge, his glance, roving ahead,

saw something in the water which stirred him with quick interest.

It was over toward the left where the channel, hollowed out by spring freshets, skirted the shore. He pivoted for a moment and focused his sharp eyes—and in a flash of perception his keen brain registered. He recognized what he had seen, recognized it from former trips across the lake, and in that instant the hawk planned a master stroke of cunning.

An electric thrill seemed to pass through him. He swooped toward the surface of the lake again, but now with a set purpose. He did not plunge into the water, but instead he waited for the mink's snatched breath and backward dive, and he managed it so that the animal unconsciously changed his course a little to the left.

He did this again and yet again, and the mink, sensing no purpose in this maneuver, was quite ready to shift his direction so long as he kept safely out of the hawk's reach. Owing now to the bird's deliberate cunning, the mink was headed directly toward the channel, and the swooping, poising hawk kept him on this course with expert craft.

They reached the deepest part of the lake, where the channel skirted the shore. The bottom here was nearly twenty feet down, hidden by green water plants which swayed and twisted in the sluggish current and moved long arms like ghostly dancers.

Plants were not the only things which lived down in those shadowy depths. Here also was the home of the lake pike, the great predatory fish which sometimes attained a length of five feet or more and were the ruthless masters of the underwater kingdom. It was one of these, lazily poised some ten feet under the surface, that the hawk had seen from the air.

Now as the mink passed over the channel, swimming under water, he turned his head and looked down to

ward the bottom, down into the vague and shadowy depths. Then it was that a sickening fear took possession of him, a fear that made his pulses hammer until it seemed that they would burst.

His sight was not affected by the pressure of the water, and now, looking downward, he saw a great scaly shape, a pair of yellow-green eyes gazing up at him with cold deliberation—and in that instant he forgot about the hawk above him, forgot about everything save this hideous and sinister thing lurking below.

It seemed that something was clutching at his throat; terror, the like of which the mother hawk had felt in the moment of his own cruel onslaught. He did not wait to see what the pike would do. A killer himself, he had not misread the message in those coldly intent eyes beneath him.

He turned his head toward the surface and propelled himself upward with frantic strokes of his powerful feet, sending the water away in white swirls. He had no clear notion of what he was doing. To get away as far as possible from that scaly form was his only thought.

The air seemed like a haven of refuge, and as his head came out into the sunlight he had a momentary sense of safety. The shore was near at hand now, he was on the surface, in the air. And then—a hissing snap—a swish of great wings! He turned his beady eyes upward in startled recollection. The hawk!

He remembered now what he had forgotten in a greater terror, remembered and desperately attempted to dive—but it was too late. The bird's clever stratagem had succeeded. Something grasped the mink around his body—something which was like the grip of a steel band. There was a blinding concussion behind his ear, a devastating pain which obliterated all things.

Once—twice—thrice the hawk drove

his beak down upon the mink's head, spurred on by the will to vengeance, his eyes alight with a fierce determination. A tremor passed over the sinuous body in his claws, the wicked little eyes dulled, the wiry muscles grew limp. Another blow and the hawk released the grip of his talons. He hovered for a moment, then with a shrill scream of triumph he wheeled into the wind and flew toward the nest on the hummock and the four motherless fledglings.

In the waters of the lake a brown, snake-like body turned slowly over and over in its descent toward the bottom and toward the great scaly shape which rose hungrily to meet it.

Feminine Insistence

CLARENCE: "Aren't you nearly ready, dear?"

His Wife: "I wish you wouldn't keep asking that question, Clarence. I've been telling you for the last hour that I'll be ready in a minute."

What He Replied

THE prosecuting attorney asked the witness: "Where were you between ten and ten thirty on the morning of August 9th?"

"I object," protested counsel for the defense.

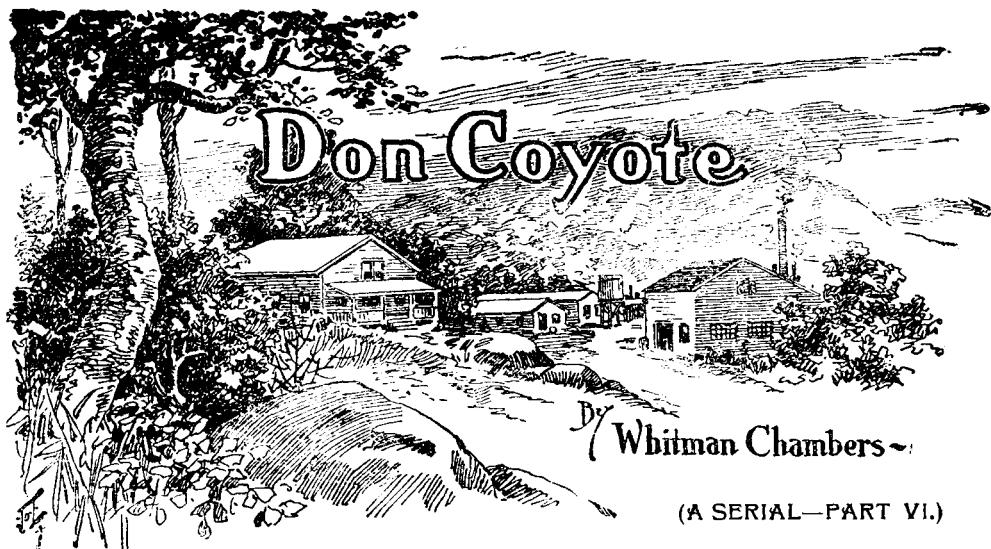
"Let him ask me," the witness said excitedly.

The relevancy of the question was argued and finally dropped, but not by the prosecuting attorney. He soon got back to the debated question and the defense objected. Again the witness cried: "Let him ask me! Let him ask me!"

The third time the question arose, the judge stepped into the breach and ruled that it was material.

"Where were you between ten and ten thirty on the morning of August 9th?" asked the counsel.

"I don't remember," said the witness.



(A SERIAL—PART VI.)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SNEERING ONLOOKER.

HERE were many thoughts in "Don Coyote" Lawrence's mind as he left the small cabin where he had taken up quarters. He strolled toward the Buckaroo Mine, thinking of Gayle Dorrington, the one girl in the world for him, of her father, whom Don Coyote admired so heartily, and of Wilcox Chandler. Chandler, in Lawrence's opinion, was behind the efforts to wreck Dorrington—and he had some reason for this opinion.

Crossing the clearing before the Buckaroo, Don Coyote entered the bunk house. He found "Soapy" Gourd engaged in a heated poker game. He tapped him on the shoulder and nodded significantly toward the door. Soapy turned to one of the onlookers:

"Take my hand, will you, Joe?"

"Better cash in," Don Coyote advised.

Soapy, who hated the taking of an order above all else, nodded obediently and shoved his chips over to the banker. He pocketed the money he had coming, shoved back his chair with a sigh and joined Don Coyote.

"Want to take a walk, Soapy?" Lawrence asked.

"Right-o!" the little man responded readily, though walking was far from his idea of a good time.

They strolled out across the clearing and up the canyon to Don Coyote's new home. The evening was chill. Lawrence built up the fire in the old stove before he opened the conversation. Then, with Soapy sprawled comfortably on the bed and Don Coyote leaning back in the one chair, Lawrence stated his plans.

"Soapy, I got a job for you," he began.

"'Nother crib?" the little man asked eagerly.

"No, not this time." Don Coyote laughed. "On the contrary, I want to try you out as a detective."

"What? Me? A dick? Aw, listen, big boy! Listen!"

"That's just what I want you to do." Lawrence smiled. "Listen. You've heard the boys talk about Ben Burke, who used to be superintendent here? You've heard how he went loco the night of the fire, when Dorrington made him go into the tunnel after me?"

"Yeh, I heard all about dat." Soapy nodded.

"Now Dorrington and I know pretty well that Ben Burke set that fire and that he tried to bump me off an' wreck the Buckaroo at the same time. Burke just the same as admitted it. O' course, he didn't have anything partic'lar against me nor against the Buckaroo—not enough, anyway, to make him pull a trick like that. Dorrington an' I figure that he was workin' for Chandler. Understand?"

"Yeh! I got you!"

"Now Burke is in a private bughouse down in Sacramento. Chandler put him there an' Chandler is payin' the bill. Now this bird Chandler ain't any philanthropist—not him! If he's payin' the bill, he's got a blamed good reason for doin' it. What do you make of it, Soapy?"

The little man lighted a cigar and blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling. "Ask me somethin' hard," he grunted. "Chandler's leary dat dis Burke'll get out an' shoot off his mout'."

Don Coyote eyed him narrowly; very casually he put the question: "But why should anybody be afraid o' what a crazy man says?"

Soapy blew another ring and answered calmly: "Maybe dis Burke ain't loco no more."

Don Coyote leaped to his feet. "That's just the way I doped it out, Soapy," he declared triumphantly. "If Burke was still loco, if he was hopelessly off his nut, Chandler would turn him over to the State to take care of. The fact that he's payin' for keepin' him penned up shows that he's afraid Burke is sane again. Don't that follow?"

"Like a tender follows an engine," Soapy agreed. "Now where do I come in?"

"You're going to find out if this Burke is still cracked," Don Coyote told him. "You're goin' down to Sacramento tomorrow mornin'. Burke is in a sanitarium by the name of Las Palmas. It's up to you to get to him some way.

"It ought to be a lot easier to get into one o' them joints than out of it," he went on. "Anyway, that's your business, breakin' into places. Talk to him if you can an' find out if he's still bugs. Think you can do it?"

"Huh!" Soapy grunted with great disgust. "Think I can do it! Say, can a family o' cooties make a guy scratch? Not much! If I can't do dat, I'll promise to buckle down an' peel spuds fer the rest o' my life."

"Fair enough! You borrow a horse from Dorrington in the mornin' and catch the noon train out o' Chandler City. I'd go with you, only I think I better stay here an' sort o' keep my eye on things. No knowin' what Chandler will try to pull next, an' I reckon I ought to be on hand in case the old man gets into trouble. Soon as you find out anything, gimme a ring at the Buckaroo. Dorrington'll call me."

"Suppose dis bird ain't cracked?"

"Then I'll grab a train and come down to Sacramento. Between the two of us, we'll get him out an' drag him up here. I think he could tell us a lot of interestin' stuff about Chandler. He not only *could* tell us, but I think he *would*. Him an' Chandler have busted up, for some reason that I don't know yet. Burke is willin' to talk, otherwise Chandler wouldn't be so blamed skeered of him gettin' out. See?"

"Yeh, I see."

"O' course, this whole blamed business is just a hunch. I may be off on the wrong foot right from the beginnin'. Burke may still be crazy an' Chandler may be as big-hearted as a Salvation Army lass."

"Yeh, an' the moon may be made o' green cheese," Soapy scoffed.

Don Coyote opened his wallet and handed his little friend a hundred dollars in bills. "That ought to see you through. If it don't, wire me an' I'll send you some more. You got everything now, have you?"

"Right-o! Las Palmas Sanitarium. Ben Burke. Find out if he's still cracked an' let you know."

"That's the dope, Soapy. Now clear out an' get to bed. You got a hard day to-morrow."

"I'm on my way. So long, big boy."

"So long, Soapy. An' good luck."

Don Coyote watched the little figure out of sight over the brow of the ridge. Then, for some time, he stood looking out over the dark depths of the canyon, drinking in the crisp air. His old confidence had returned. He felt almost light-hearted. Give him a week, just one week, unmolested, and he'd remove the menace that hung over the Buckaroo —the menace that, too, hung over Gayle Dorrington.

During the three days that followed, Don Coyote kept very much to himself. He loafed, for the first time in many months, and found it to his liking. He fished, and learned that he had not lost the knack of casting a fly. He sat before his little cabin and smoked, and watched the changing colors in the canyon.

It was pleasant there on the steep hillside. Many times he told himself that when the trouble was all over, when the Buckaroo was safe and taking out the pay, when he was again installed as superintendent, when the threat of Wilcox Chandler had been removed, he'd build a little home on the very spot for himself and Gayle.

And, strangely, the day did not seem so far distant, the path ahead seemed straight and sure and safe—for he had reckoned without Wilcox Chandler and without Gayle.

On the morning of the fourth day after Soapy's departure, Don Coyote was washing up his breakfast dishes when he heard a knock on the door of the cabin. It was Gayle.

"Good mornin', ma'am!" he greeted her airily. "Won't you come in?"

"No, thanks. I just came over to tell

you that you are wanted on the telephone."

Don Coyote's pulse leaped. It would be Soapy, of course. No one else would be calling him. He jammed on his hat and hurried out of the cabin, taking Gayle's arm as they started back to the mine.

"I got somethin' I want to tell you, Gayle," he remarked, when they had taken half a dozen paces.

She glanced up at him quickly. "Please don't!" she said.

Don Coyote chuckled softly. "Oh, it ain't that. I ain't goin' to say a word about lovin' you. O' course, I still do. I love you like the very—— But there I go again. I said I wouldn't say no more about lovin' you, didn't I? An' I won't. Still, I do love——"

"Don! Please!"

"I'm squelched," he said hastily. "What I was goin' to say was how much I appreciate you fixin' up my cabin for me. It was mighty nice of you. Fact is, it was damn nice!"

The girl looked up at him and then glanced away, a slow smile twisting the corners of her mouth. "I'm afraid you have jumped at conclusions, Don Coyote. I rather suspect that it was Soapy who cleaned up your cabin."

"Soapy!" Don Coyote sighed. "'Nother fond dream gone up in smoke! Might have knowed it, too. Just like the little rat." He halted, his grip on her arm tightening. "Ma'am, I don't like to contradict anybody, much less a lady. But Soapy never knew I was goin' to move into that cabin. When I spoke to the cook about it the mornin' I quit, Soapy was out in the storehouse."

"Maybe the cook told him," Gayle suggested.

"Maybe he did," Don Coyote laughed softly.

They were before the house now, but Lawrence did not realize it. He had eyes for nothing but Gayle, ears for nothing but her words.

"Soapy might have cleaned up that shack an' he might not," he went on. "It's my own personal opinion that he didn't. The work had—well, you might call it a woman's touch. An' I think it was done by them two little hands right there."

He took the two little hands in his own large ones. Bending low, he kissed them tenderly, reverently. Then he straightened up and met her eyes. He saw, with an odd flutter of his heart, that they were wide and staring. Her face had gone white. Slowly he turned around.

Leaning casually against the door of his automobile was Wilcox Chandler. He was smiling faintly, a smile made sinister by its nonchalance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SHERIFF APPEARS.

FOR several seconds the gazes of the two men clashed—Chandler smiling at ease, perfectly poised; Don Coyote startled and angry. It was chagrin, more than anger, perhaps. He felt like a child caught with his hand in the cookie can. And it maddened him.

For a moment he saw red. The distance between the two men was a dozen feet. Don Coyote almost cut it in half with one step. He opened his mouth to speak and realized he had nothing to say. He paused, inarticulate, writhing with fury. Then he whirled on his heel and mounted the steps.

He found the telephone behind the door and dazedly told the operator who he was. "Reckon there's a call for me from Sacramento," he said.

"Just a moment, please."

The moment lengthened into minutes, while Don Coyote shifted his feet nervously and grew hot and cold by turns. Of all the fools! Of all the addlepated, brainless fools, he had won the prize! Why couldn't he have used his eyes before pulling a stunt like that?

Now he'd probably spilled the beans for fair. Chandler had thought he'd cleared out. Lawrence had shown him he hadn't. He not only hadn't cleared out, but he was hanging around Chandler's intended wife—and kissing her hands!

Don Coyote shuddered at the memory. In front of Wilcox Chandler—
"Here's your party."

Then Soapy's familiar voice sounded, cheerful, characteristic: "Dat you, big boy?"

"Yes, this is me, Soapy," Lawrence answered wearily. "Only I ain't so big no more. I feel smaller than a nickel."

"What's dat? What you talkin' about?"

"Nothing, Soapy. What did you find out?"

"I found out dat you're the best little fortune teller west of N' York."

"Did I have it doped right?"

"I'll say!"

"How is he?"

"Sore as hell, an' rarin' to go."

"Good! Where are you?"

"Taylor Hotel."

"I'll catch the noon train or break a leg tryin'. See you about midnight to-night. G'-by."

Don Coyote snapped the receiver on the hook and dashed out of the house. His embarrassing encounter with Chandler was forgotten as new plans surged through his head like water through a mill race. Indeed, he was only vaguely conscious that Chandler still stood by his car and that he was talking casually with Gayle. Racing around the brow of the hill to his cabin, Don Coyote burst in the door and started to change into his most presentable clothes.

Five minutes later he was riding across the clearing in front of the mine. Chandler's car was still standing before the house, but the mining magnate and Gayle had disappeared. Don Coyote gave the machine hardly a glance as he headed down the road toward town. He

rode swiftly, busy with his plans for freeing Burke and bringing him back to confront Wilcox Chandler.

A half mile from the town he glanced at his watch. It was half after eleven—he'd have plenty of time to stable Cleopatra and catch the train. He slowed the mare to a walk and noted casually that a car was approaching him from town. He pulled over to one side of the road to allow it to pass.

Instead of passing, the car slowed and came to a stop in front of him. There were two men in the front seat. Don Coyote's heart sank as he scanned them. They wore no stars; there were no guns visible. But he knew the type. He recognized the lean, sun-brown faces and the steady, alert eyes of the man hunter.

Double crossed! Chandler had phoned in from the mine! Don Coyote cursed softly.

"You Don Lawrence?" the driver of the car asked casually.

Don Coyote nodded. "That's me, I reckon. What's the charge?"

"Burglary. We've had the warrant for three days, but we didn't get orders to serve it till just now. Better hop in here with me and let my deputy take your horse in."

Don Coyote slowly dismounted. The world was whirling about his head. The ground seemed to roll beneath his feet. Plans! Plans! What a fool he'd been! What use would his precious plans be now? Chandler had the goods on him—witnesses, too. The sky darkened.

Lawrence stumbled over to the car and climbed into the seat vacated by the deputy, a tall, gangling individual who seemed all arms and legs.

"Haven't got a gun, have you?" the driver asked.

"No. Never carried one in my life."

"All right. Take your word for it. You don't look like a gunman. Want to see the warrant? I'm Sheriff Boylston."

Don Coyote grinned sheepishly. "I don't mind tellin' you that I ain't glad to meet you, sheriff. And the warrant can go to blazes. Let's get to town. I got some tall thinkin' to do."

The sheriff, a heavy-set man with piercing brown eyes that were friendly for all their intentness, swung the car around and started back to town. Don Coyote carried away only one pleasant memory of the incident of his arrest. It was the sight of the lanky deputy, a whirling mass of arms and legs, thrown high into the air by Cleopatra.

Lawrence found the Chandler City jail to be old-fashioned and obsolete, but fairly comfortable. The sheriff was unusually considerate, for a sheriff, and unwontedly friendly. Under other circumstances Don Coyote felt that he would like to know Boylston; he seemed like a regular fellow, a man one would be proud to call a friend.

"Aren't you the hombre who recovered old man Dorrington's bullion?" Boylston asked, as he unlocked a cell and waved Lawrence into it.

"Yes, I reckon I am," the prisoner answered, a bit wearily.

"Didn't you used to hang out down in Goldfield? And aren't you known down there as Don Coyote?"

"Yeh, reckon I'm the feller. Only I ain't so proud of it now as I used to be."

The sheriff lounged against the door and scanned him critically. "This is a funny proposition. You aren't any burglar."

Don Coyote smiled as he dropped onto the cot, the only article of furniture in the cell. "That's what they got me charged with," he remarked. "Wouldn't be surprised if I'd plead guilty, too. Might as well. They got the goods on me."

The sheriff grunted, his brown eyes very thoughtful. He did not speak for some time. At last he glanced around the corridor, saw that no one was within hearing, and moved a step into the cell.

"Listen, feller!" he began. "I can smell a rat as far as the next man. And when the rat happens to be Wilcox Chandler, I can smell him a lot farther. I'm not stringing you now. I'm not trying to talk you into convicting yourself. Whatever you say *won't* be used against you. I am a sheriff and I'm also a white man. And I know another white man when I see one. Give me the low down on this thing and I'll do all I can to help you. That's straight."

Don Coyote looked at him, met his brown eyes for a brief instant and believed him. Forthwith, with as much confidence as though he were telling it to his own mother, he narrated the whole story of the Buckaroo. He told of his suspicions of Chandler, the burning of the mine, the insanity of Burke, the attempted recovery of the map, his agreement with Chandler and his mission to Sacramento.

The sheriff listened to it all with furrowed brow. "It isn't the first time Wilcox Chandler has played a game like that," the sheriff told Don Coyote, when he had finished his tale. "Though what his game is in this case is more than I can see."

"I've got a hunch," Don Coyote said, "but it's kind of a personal matter."

"I get you. It isn't important anyway. The fact of the matter is, he appears to have the goods on you. But when he tries to get a conviction, it may be a different matter. It may prove pretty hard to get a jury that will convict you, considering everything."

"You broke the law, but on the other hand there were extenuating circumstances. Chandler was holding certain property illegally and there was no other way to get it except to go and take it. Then again, it may prove difficult to get that angle of it admitted as evidence. It will take a clever lawyer."

"But I don't know any lawyers, clever or otherwise," Don Coyote put in.

"There's none around here good enough for this kind of a case. I have a friend up in Reno, however, who is as good as they make 'em. Want me to drop him a line, state the case, and ask him if he'll take it?"

"Say, now, that would be right fine of you, if you would."

"Be glad to. In the meantime, sit tight. If the district attorney tries to draw you out, keep mum. Don't tell him anything. He's a good gun and he don't like Chandler—but he's a conscientious sort of a duck and he's working for reëlection. So keep clear of him."

"And how long will it be before my case will come up?" Lawrence asked.

"Oh, a month or two. Maybe longer."

"What'll my bail be?"

"Ten thousand, probably."

Don Coyote winced. "Too much. I'll never raise it. And yet I can't stay here. There's no tellin' what that hound will do to old Dorrington in a month or two. The old man's on the right track now. He ought to open up that ore body in no time. Still, he's too old to have to buck a crook like Chandler. And then there's Soapy Gourd waitin' for me down in Sacramento. I gotta get out o' here!"

"I'll telephone your friend Gourd and tell him what has happened if you want me to," the sheriff offered.

"I wish you would."

"I'll do it right away. In the meantime, sit tight. Chandler may decide not to press the charge; you can't tell. Just sit tight for a few days and see what happens. I'll keep it dark about the arrest, too. None of the newspaper boys have seen you, and I won't tell anybody, outside of Gourd. No use giving you a black eye. Sit tight, keep your mouth shut, and we'll get you out of this."

"You're the whitest sheriff I ever met in my life!" Don Coyote exclaimed gratefully.

Boylston chuckled. "Just because a man is elected to the office of sheriff doesn't mean that he has to turn into a yellow dog."

Don Coyote nodded. "You're right. O' course you're right!"

The sheriff walked out. The steel door clanged behind him. Don Coyote shuddered. With Boylston, a sure-enough white man, in his cell, it hadn't seemed so bad. Now, alone, penned in by concrete walls and barred door and window, Don Coyote came to his first acute realization of what it meant to be in jail. It was not a pleasant sensation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JUST JAILED.

DON COYOTE's first visitor came the following afternoon. It was Soapy Gourd, a furtive, half-frightened little creature who showed plainly his horror of jails.

"Say!" he grunted, when a deputy had thrown open the door of Lawrence's cell. "What's the lay, big boy?"

"He double crossed me, Soapy. Had the warrant waitin' all the time. Had the sheriff pick me up when I was comin' into town yesterday."

"Cheese an' crackers! What we goin' to do about it?"

"Nothing much right now. The sheriff is going to get me an attorney from Reno. He says he may get me off, if we can get the whole story admitted as evidence."

"I ain't got much faith in sheriffs, big boy," Soapy growled.

"But this one's different, Soapy," Lawrence returned, with enthusiasm. "He's a regular guy, an' no mistake. Don't like Chandler any too well either. I'd trust him with my eye teeth."

"But we gotta get you out o' here. There ain't no time to lose. Dis guy Burke is goin' crazy. He's almost bugs, I tell you!"

"Did you talk to him?"

"Sure I did. T'rough a window couple o' nights ago."

"Did he seem sane?"

"Sure. Sane as you an' me. He says he was only out of his head for a couple o' days. Thinks it was the gas that got him. Didn't remember nothin' after goin' into the tunnel, till he woke up here in the hospital. Him an' Chandler had it out. He didn't tell me de details. An' Chandler railroaded him to get him out of de way. An' he's sore, what I mean!"

"Then he wasn't insane at all?"

"I dunno. Temporary, maybe. Or maybe it was de gas. I dunno much about dem things. But he's sure goin' loco now, cooped up in dat bughouse wid all dem woozey guys. Whew! It gimme the willies just to hang aroun' dere an' hear 'em yellin' an' moanin' an' screamin'. Terrible place! We gotta get him out an' I gotta have you to help me."

"I—I don't know, Soapy," Don Coyote hesitated. "I don't quite see how I'm goin' to get out very soon."

"How about bail?"

"Ten thousand. Too much. Dorrington would help. But he hasn't got that much, an' I'm blamed sure he couldn't raise it."

"Does he know you're in de jug?"

"No, I don't think so. Not unless Chandler told him. The sheriff agreed to keep quiet about it, and I didn't see no use in worryin' the old man. He's on the track o' that ore chamber now, an' I want to leave him alone."

"Huh!" Soapy grunted and glanced around. He looked hard at the lock on the cell door, cocking his head thoughtfully to one side. "Caledonian," he mused. "No tumblers. It's a cinch!"

"What was that, Soapy?" Don Coyote asked suspiciously.

"I was just talkin' to me. Keep yer shirt on an' yer mouth shut, will you?" He lowered his voice. "You sleep in your clothes to-night. Get me?"

"But, Soapy——"

"Dry up!" He rattled the cell door sharply; a deputy appeared and threw it open. "See you in church, big boy." And Soapy was gone.

Don Coyote thoughtfully rolled a cigarette. Soapy's inference had been plain. He meant to get Lawrence out of jail, by just what means, Don Coyote did not know. But he did know Soapy. He had known him long and under far more trying circumstances than the present.

He had never known Soapy to fall down on any kind of a job, whether it was bombing a machine-gun nest or peeling a sack of spuds. Soapy was little, and he looked like a rat. But he had brains, Soapy had, and he had courage and resourcefulness. What more was needed to get a man out of jail?

The ethics of the matter were open to question, of course. The sheriff had treated Don Coyote mighty fine and it wasn't exactly right for him to escape from his jail. On the other hand, he had a hunch that the sheriff wouldn't care greatly if he did.

He was a white man, that sheriff was, and if he hadn't been an officer of the law he might even have helped him to get out himself. As Boylston had said, the circumstances were extenuating. Don Coyote didn't belong there in the first place, and in the second place somebody had to get Ben Burke out of that bughouse before he went crazy for good and all.

Don Coyote made up his mind. If some one came, and opened the door of his cell, and said he was free, and told him to get out as quietly as possible, he'd get out. Who wouldn't? He could make explanations to the sheriff afterward.

Soapy Gourd appeared. It was nearly four o'clock in the morning, and Don Coyote had about given him up. He came so silently, too, that he was in the cell and had his hand on Lawrence's

shoulder before the prisoner knew the door was open.

"Quiet, big boy!" Soapy cautioned. "The deputy's asleep in the outer office, but we ain't takin' no chances. Follow me."

Don Coyote followed, out the door, along the corridor and through another door into the sheriff's office. Here they found the lanky deputy whom Don Coyote had seen when the sheriff had arrested him. The deputy was breathing heavily, his feet propped up on the desk, a dead cigar clasped tightly between his lips.

Don Coyote noticed that his nose was skinned and felt immediately repentant. If this skinny feller was anything like the sheriff, he wasn't a bad sort. He should have been warned that Cleopatra didn't take kindly to strangers.

Soapy's hand was on the knob of the outer door when Don Coyote was struck with an idea. Crossing to the desk on tiptoe, he picked up a pencil. Though he saw out of the corner of his eye that Soapy was motioning to him frantically, he calmly wrote on the desk blotter:

Sorry I had to leave you. Don't bother to look for me. I'll be back. LAWRENCE.

Then he was at Soapy's heels. The door opened noiselessly and was as softly closed, and they were on the deserted street.

Don Coyote took a deep breath of the cold night air. "How'd you do it, Soapy?"

"Cinch! Watched through the window till he went to sleep. Knew he would. They always do, 'long about four. Dat's when the sawbones say de ol' vitality is lowest. Soon as he was asleep, I picked de lock of the outer office, walked t'rough into the corridor and picked de lock o' your cell. Cinch! Nothin' to it!"

Don Coyote shook his head; he did

not understand this business of picking locks. It was all a mystery to him. But he was thoroughly alive to the results of Soapy's efforts and he was grateful.

"Soapy, when I'm back at the Buckaroo again, you're goin' to get the best job I can give you—and at the highest salary I can make the old man pay. I won't forget all you've done for us—and he won't either."

"Aw, dry up, will you?" Soapy answered characteristically. "We got a long ride ahead of us. We're goin' to Sacramento to-night."

"To-night!"

"Yeh! You don't t'ink we're goin' to sit down on the curb in front o' the sheriff's office till mornin', do you? Dat sheriff may be a good gun, but if he sees you hangin' 'round outside when you ought to be inside, he might get peevesh."

The little man led the way down two blocks and around a corner. They came upon a heavy touring car parked at the curb, a driver slumped behind the wheel.

"Wake up, 'Slats!'" Soapy cried, thumping the driver over the shoulders. "We're makin' tracks in a hurry." The man roused, blinking. "Slats, shake hands with Don Lawrence, de only sergeant I ever knew that I didn't want to stick out my tongue at. Big boy, dis is Slats Monohan, the best little stick-up dat ever pulled a rod. Met him down in Sac, where he's tryin' to go straight by gyppin' the public in de garage game."

Don Coyote shook hands with mingled feelings. He didn't know exactly whether he should feel flattered or otherwise at meeting the "best little stick-up dat ever pulled a rod." He had a hunch, however, that he should feel very grateful. The circumstances, as has been said before, were extenuating.

The three men arrived in Sacramento shortly before noon and went to bed

immediately. They were all dead-tired and there was nothing that could be done until dark. Don Coyote had at first been in favor of appealing to the authorities in an effort to effect Burke's release. Soapy, however, would have none of it.

Burke had been declared insane by a supposedly competent commission, Soapy pointed out. To get him declared sane again, to run through the reams of legal red tape that such a course would necessitate, would probably take months. And for more than one reason there was no time to be lost.

"You lemme do dis my way, big boy," Soapy advised. "If I don't get him out, den you can try."

Don Coyote nodded, somewhat dubiously as was usually the case where ethics were involved, and they went to sleep.

Around ten o'clock that evening, with their car parked a short distance from the Las Palmas Sanitarium, Soapy narrated his plans.

"Here's de lay. Dis place is just like a prison, see? Guards an' cells an' bars an' everyt'ing. At night dere's two men on guard in the office. The rest o' the gang is asleep. Dese two birds have got the keys to all de cells, see? Aw right!

"Slats, here, stays in de car. Me an' big boy, here, goes up an' rings de bell. We stick up dese two guards wid our rods an' take deir keys. Big boy keeps guard over 'em when I sneak down de hall an' let Burke out. Den we all make our get-away in the car. Got dat?"

Slats and Don Coyote nodded.

"Got a rod, big boy?" Soapy demanded.

"No."

"Give 'um yours, Slats, an' we'll get movin'."

Don Coyote felt the gun thrust into his hand. Every nerve on edge, he followed along behind the slouching, stealthy form of his little friend.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DANGEROUS BUSINESS.

CROSSING the darkened grounds which surrounded the sanitarium, Soapy boldly mounted the steps, pausing before the door. "All set?" he asked.

Don Coyote nodded, clutching his gun. He wished it weren't loaded. He certainly had no intention of using it, save as a threat. And if some one called his bluff—well, he'd learn what the inside of another jail looked like.

Soapy rang the bell and after a wait that seemed interminable, the door was opened by a white-coated attendant. "Put 'em up!" Soapy ordered, thrusting his gun into the man's ribs. "Let out a peep an' I'll put daylight t'rough you!"

The attendant took Soapy at his word. The color drained suddenly out of his face and he raised his hands hastily. Soapy shoved him back through the door, along the wide hall and into the office. Here another man, receiving the same order, likewise raised his hands.

"Now gimme yer keys," Soapy commanded.

One of the men motioned to a heavy ring attached to his belt. Soapy took it. Which one opens Burke's room?" "No. 4."

"Good! Keep 'em covered, big boy. I'll be back in a minute."

Don Coyote thrust out his gun and tried to look businesslike. He hoped they wouldn't see that he was a rank amateur at this game. The thought worried him. Anybody with half an eye, he reflected, ought to be able to perceive that he was masquerading under false colors. He put on his fiercest mien, scowling angrily.

One of the attendants laughed. "Put away your gun, pardner. You wouldn't shoot anyway."

Don Coyote started. He didn't quite

know whether to make a dash for the door or to shoot a hole in the ceiling, just to show 'em.

"It's no skin off our teeth what you do with Burke," the attendant went on, casually lowering his hands and thrusting them into his pockets. "Of course, we got our orders and we got to obey 'em or lose our jobs. But to be frank with you, I'm glad to see you get Burke out of here. He's not insane, but he will be if he stays here much longer."

Don Coyote sheepishly pocketed his gun. "You're the second white man I've met in as many days," he said. "Sorry we had to bother you. But we just had to get Burke out o' here. It ain't only for himself. There's others mixed up. White men, too."

"I know. Something about a mine, isn't it? He's told me. Seems as though he got mixed up in a crooked deal and got in so deep he couldn't get out. Got railroaded to this joint. Oh, I know what you're thinking, pardner. But"—he shrugged—"a man has to make a living, hasn't he? I got a family and I can't afford to mix up—"

"Cheese and crackers!" gasped some one. It was Soapy, standing in the doorway. Behind him loomed the huge form of Ben Burke.

"It's all right, Soapy," Don Coyote remarked, with a grin. "These boys are regular fellers, same's you an' me. But I reckon we don't want to stretch 'em too far. Let's get out o' here."

The attendant who had talked to Lawrence walked with them to the door. "I'll give you five minutes before I give the alarm," he said.

"Thanks," Don Coyote answered, and surprised himself by thrusting a fifty-dollar bill into the man's hand.

"Wait a minute. I don't want—"

Don Coyote and his two companions were already speeding down the path to the street. They did not speak until they were in the car and rolling through town toward the open highway.

"Well, we done it!" Soapy grinned over his shoulder to Lawrence and Burke, who were in the back seat.

Oddly, Don Coyote felt a certain pride at the use of the plural pronoun.

Burke did not speak. Thin, wasted, a shadow of his former self, he sat in the corner of the tonneau in silence. From time to time Don Coyote stole a furtive glance at him. He didn't know exactly whether to hate Burke or pity him. The man had tried to murder him, had almost succeeded in wrecking the Buckaroo. Still, Burke had had a pretty bad deal. All in all, Don Coyote felt sorry for him.

Sacramento was far behind them, Soapy was sound asleep in the front seat, and the powerful car was roaring into the foothills when Burke broke the silence of an hour or more.

"I guess it won't do any good to apologize, Lawrence," he said suddenly.

Don Coyote considered. Burke was humility itself; his voice showed that.

"Forget about it, Burke," Lawrence answered. "I reckon we all make mistakes. It ain't what you've done in the past that counts so much, it's what you're goin' to do in the future."

"I know! I know!" the big man groaned. "I'm not a murderer at heart. I'm not a crook at heart. That's why I went batty for a while. Of course, the gas had something to do with it. I was in the Bellingham Mine disaster nine years ago, and I'm scared to death of that white damp. But that wasn't all. It was the thought that I'd tried to kill a man. That's what got me."

Quietly Don Coyote asked: "Why did you do it, Burke?"

"It was that or jail. Chandler has the goods on me. A high-grading job in the Lady Ann, where I was shift boss for a couple of years. He found out about it. Put me into the Buckaroo as super. He wanted to wreck Dorrington and he made me help him. That's all."

"But why did he want to wreck Dorrington?"

"Haven't you guessed?"

"I have a hunch. Was it the girl?"

"Sure. Of course, at the beginning I think he had some plan up his sleeve for bustin' the company. That'd give him a chance to buy in the property for nothin', you might say, and go ahead and develop it."

"It's sure to be a rich mine, if they can ever find that ore chamber," he went on. "They tell me that the original company left thousands of tons of high-grade ore untouched. Stuff that'd run a hundred or two hundred dollars a ton, but wouldn't pay to ship all the way to England to smelt. If Dorrington can find that ore chamber, he'll be a rich man."

"And that was what Chandler wanted to keep him from doin'. At first, like I said, he wanted to get hold of the mine. But later it was just the girl that was botherin' him. You see, Dorrington is a pretty old man. If that mine flivvered, he'd be in a bad way to make a living for himself and the girl."

"Knowing the kind of stuff Miss Dorrington is made of, Chandler knew that she'd marry him before she'd let her father go out workin' at day labor. I ain't sayin' that she didn't like Chandler, neither. But she'd never marry him if it wasn't to help out her dad. I know that, an' Chandler knows it. That was what was behind the whole business."

Don Coyote considered for a moment. "You know, don't you," he said at last, "that both you an' Chandler are open to charges of attempted murder?"

"Sure we are! Murder an' arson, both of 'em. Don't I know it? Ain't that what caused the trouble between me and Chandler? When I was in the hospital after the fire, I was pretty shaky in the head. Guess you knew that. But I wasn't so shaky that I didn't know I was through with Chandler an' all his dirty work."

"I told him so when he came to see me. He argued for a while an' then he beat it. Then the first thing I knew they had me up before some kind of a commission. Before I realized what'd happened, they had me declared insane and railroaded to that private asylum. Ah! Another month or two in that place and I'd have been crazy for keeps."

"Are you willin' to come clean now an' do what you can to square accounts?" Don Coyote asked.

"With Chandler, you mean?" Burke asked angrily.

"With everybody!"

"Blamed right I am! You tell me what to do an' I'll do it, if they send me to jail for life. The worst jail in the country would be better than that crazy house. Lord, I can hear 'em screamin' yet! Long about five in the evening was the worst. One of 'em would start to howl an' then another'd take it up. It got so——"

"I'll see what I can do for you," Don Coyote interrupted quietly. "The sheriff is a pretty good friend o' mine, or was. They say the district attorney is a good gun, too. You and I know that Dorrington and the Buckaroo ain't safe as long as Chandler is in the country.

"Even if Dorrington strikes that ore body," he continued, "Chandler will be so sore that he's liable to make it hot for him. But if you'll come clean, we may be able to run the hound out o' the country. Are you game?"

"I'm game for anything that'll square my account with Chandler," Burke said firmly.

"Good! Now let's pull these hyar robes over us an' get some sleep."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FATE TAKES A HAND.

AT eight o'clock the following morning, Don Coyote presented himself at the sheriff's office. Boylston had just

arrived and was busy at his desk. Lawrence entered without knocking. The sheriff did not glance up at once.

"Sheriff, I'm back," Don Coyote announced, a bit sheepishly.

Boylston started, but did not turn around. "Your room is ready for you, Lawrence. You can go right on in."

Don Coyote's shoulders drooped. "Aw, listen, sheriff! I got somethin' to talk over with you. It's important as the devil. I'm sorry I pulled out on you. But I just had to do it. If you'll listen to me a minute——"

The sheriff whirled around in his chair. "Lawrence, if you'll tell me how you got out of that cell, I'll listen to you till doomsday."

"Aw, that was a cinch," Don Coyote answered, mimicking Soapy. "Caledonian lock. No tumblers. A cinch."

"Cinch my eye!" Boylston came back. "If you can pick an outside lock from the inside of a cell, you're doing something that I never heard of being done before."

"Who said anything about me pickin' it?" Don Coyote parried.

"Oh! An outside job, eh?"

"Right!"

"My apologies. You're not as clever as I thought you were. Don Coyote. You've taken a load off my mind, anyway. So I'll take a load off yours. Out with it."

"I got Ben Burke outside. He's as sane as you are. He's willin' to make a confession. He's got the goods on Wilcox Chandler. Attempted murder an' arson. We can get him right. Are you with me or agin' me?"

"I'm with you, of course. You say Burke is willing to turn State's evidence if we'll grant him immunity?"

"There ain't nothin' been said about immunity. Burke is willin' to take his medicine if he can see Chandler take it too."

"Fair enough! Drag him in. Only I warn you, Lawrence, that you'll have

a mighty slim chance of convicting Chandler on the testimony of Burke. Burke has been adjudged insane, you know. Though he may be sane enough now, it would go against him with a jury, particularly if he was the only witness against Chandler.

"However, arrest and a trial of any kind would ruin Wilcox Chandler. He's not the kind who could stand a thing like that, even if he came off clear. It would break him, ruin him, virtually run him out of the country."

Don Coyote laughed without humor. "Aw right, run him out o' the country an' see if it breaks my heart." He started toward the door. "I'll get Burke now."

"And I'll get the district attorney," the sheriff said, reaching for the telephone.

The consultation that followed was long, lasting well into the afternoon. It was held behind closed doors, with only the district attorney, Sheriff Boylston, Burke, and Lawrence in attendance.

There were many angles to be considered, many points to be settled. Burke came clean, as he had said he would, and told the whole story of the part he and Chandler had played in the fight against the Buckaroo.

The conference had three results. First, Burke was lodged in a cell until Dorrington could be notified and come to a decision about swearing to a charge of arson—this despite the fact that Don Coyote refused to swear to such a charge and was of the opinion that Dorrington would not do so.

"Burke wasn't himself when he pulled that job," Lawrence explained his stand, "and I ain't the man to hit a feller when he's down. Personally, I think three months in that bughouse was enough punishment for him, an' I reckon Dorrington will think the same. However, o' course you got to hold him."

Second, Lawrence swore to a complaint against Wilcox Chandler, charging conspiracy, arson, and attempted murder. "Sounds pretty bad," he said, with a grin, "but I reckon it won't mean much if he ever comes to trial."

A justice of the peace was called in and a warrant for the arrest of Chandler was issued.

Finally, the same justice of the peace reduced Don Coyote's bail to one hundred dollars on the burglary charge. The district attorney assured him that if Chandler did not press the charge, the county authorities would not do so. The sheriff, being a white man and also having a strong inclination toward running his office as he saw fit, refused to press any charge of jail-breaking against Lawrence.

"After all," the sheriff remarked, smiling, "I guess it isn't such a terrible crime to walk out of a jail if somebody comes along and open the door for you. And as for this Soapy friend of yours, the little fellow with the rat-face and the close-set eyes—well"—he chuckled softly, his eyes twinkling—"I don't know his name, I don't know what he looks like or anything about him.

"So how can I go out and arrest him? Only get this straight, Lawrence." The twinkle went out of his eyes and he was again an officer of the law. "If he strays from the straight and narrow again, I'll lock him up and throw the key away."

Don Coyote laughed happily. "He's cured, sheriff. I give you my word for that." He reached into his pocket, drew out his wallet and handed the sheriff a hundred dollars. "Now I'm free, ain't I?"

Boylston shook his head. "No, you are out on bail. If Chandler insists on pressing that charge, you'll have to go to trial."

"I got a hunch I can take care o' Chandler, provided I can have a free rein for a while."

"Just what do you mean, Lawrence?"

"Here's the dope. If you arrest Chandler, you'll cost the State a lot o' money bringin' him to trial and the chances are ten to one that you won't get a conviction. You'll disgrace him, o' course, but that ain't no money in the taxpayers' pockets."

"I'm beginning to get you." The sheriff nodded.

"Suppose you hold off serving that warrant for a day? Gimme a chance to make a dicker with him."

"What kind of a dicker?"

"I'll offer to withdraw the charge I've sworn against him if he'll do the same for me an' clear out of this part of the country."

"You're generous, Lawrence."

"Generous be darned!" Don Coyote stormed. "That crook was generous to old man Dorrington, wasn't he? He was generous to me, double crossin' me and sending me to jail, wasn't he? No, suh! I got him over a barrel, and I'm goin' to squeeze him so small that he'll slide into the bunghole."

"Will he leave?"

"That's up to him. If he wants to go to trial, have the whole story come out and be disgraced, he can stay. If he wants to save his face an' start over again in some other place with a half-way decent reputation, he'll go. Personally, I'm inclined to think he'll go."

Boylston nodded quietly. "I won't be at all surprised if he does."

"Now gimme a telephone," Don Coyote demanded eagerly. "I got some heavy telephonin' to do."

The sheriff motioned to the instrument on his desk. Don Coyote took up the receiver and gave the number of the Buckaroo. While he was waiting, he asked over his shoulder:

"Does Dorrington know that I been arrested?"

"Not unless Chandler has told him. I kept it pretty quiet."

"Does he know anything about this

business of gettin' Burke out and gettin' the goods on Chandler?"

"Not so far as I know," the sheriff answered.

Then Don Coyote heard Dorrington's familiar voice. "This is Don Lawrence, Mr. Dorrington," he began.

"Yes, Lawrence?"

There was something in the old man's voice that startled Don Coyote. Something was wrong at the mine—or—he had at last made the big strike.

"You've made it!" the younger man exclaimed. "You've hit the old ore chamber. I can tell by the way you talk."

"Yes. About an hour ago!"

"And it's rich."

"Millions, Lawrence, millions!"

Words of enthusiasm, they were, words that would ordinarily have set Don Coyote's pulse to racing and his eyes to shining. But they did neither. Instead, his lips tightened and his firm jaw hardened. For those words of victory and triumph and success had been uttered in the lifeless tone of a beaten man.

"Mr. Dorrington! Something's gone wrong. Tell me!"

"It's Gayle. She's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes. With Chandler." Dead and lifeless were the words.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN TREMENDOUS HASTE.

WHITE of face though he was, Don Coyote recovered quickly. "What happened?" he demanded. "Tell me about it."

"There is nothing much to tell. I came out of the tunnel just a few minutes ago. I found a note, saying she was going away to marry Chandler."

"But she doesn't love that scoundrel!" Lawrence objected heatedly.

"I know. That's what hurts so much. She did it for me. She has never said

anything much, but I know she has been worrying. She has hated to see me working so hard and having so much trouble. She thought I was going broke. I never told her about the new drift in the tunnel.

"She had no idea we were so near the ore chamber," he went on. "She had lost heart, that's all, lost faith in the mine. She was afraid I'd be beaten and have to go to work at day labor to support her. So she did this—for me, never dreaming that I knew why she did it, never dreaming that it will—break—my heart!"

Don Coyote groaned.

"Chandler came this afternoon while I was in the tunnel," Dorrington continued. "They had a long talk together. The cook told me. Then they drove off in Chandler's car. It was—just about the time—we were breaking through into that ore chamber."

"But where did they go?" Don Coyote demanded.

"To Carson, Gayle said in her note. They're to be married there."

"The devil they are!" Don Coyote shouted. "You sit tight, Mr. Dorrington. I'll knock that marriage higher'n a kite. I'm off."

He snapped the receiver onto the hook and, unmindful of the questioning stare of the sheriff, rushed out of the office. In a hotel a block away were Slats Monohan and Soapy, resting up after the long trip of the night before. Don Coyote covered the distance in nothing flat, bounded up the stairs, dashed into the room. He found the two men lounging on the bed, smoking.

"What's up, big boy?" Soapy demanded.

"Everything! The devil's to pay!"

"Let's pay him, then!" Soapy grinned, jumping to his feet. "Where to?"

"Come on! The car! Carson! Tell you later!"

Don Coyote's voice and actions were

enough. Slats and Soapy followed him down the stairs in a tremendous hurry. They leaped into the car, the powerful motor purred; Slats threw in the clutch—they were off!

Slats Monohan might not be called a model driver. When he was in a hurry, he took the right of way over one and all and he knew now that haste was required of him. Neither Don Coyote nor Soapy took a deep breath until they were clear of the town's traffic and roaring over the rutted highway that led in a winding white ribbon to the north. Then Soapy turned round in his seat and faced Lawrence, who was in the tonneau.

"What happened, big boy? Are the dicks on our trail?"

"No, nothing like that. Everything is squared. We're after Chandler. He's got—well, damn him, he's got my li'l lady!"

Soapy's eyebrows raised. "An' we're goin' to get him?" he queried.

"Right!"

Monohan did not spare his car nor his passengers. He knew that he would be paid and paid well. Besides, the spirit of the chase was on him. He opened the throttle and held it open, ruts, chuck holes, deep sand and jagged rocks notwithstanding. Don Coyote's heart was in his throat. But he said not a word. And had he spoken, it would have been only to urge greater speed.

It was about sixty miles from Chandler City to Carson, sixty miles of poor road, a part of it over heavy grades. Ordinarily it would take a car three hours or more to make the trip. At the speed Slats Monohan was traveling, he would make it in an hour and a half—if they had good luck and no blow-outs or breakdowns.

"If he's got an hour-an-half start on us, we'll still be able to catch him," Lawrence told himself. "Maybe if he's got two hours' start, 'cause it'll take him

some time to get a license and get married. Now what time did they leave the Buckaroo? Dorrington never told me. Prob'lly didn't know, anyway. But we ought to get 'em. We *got* to get 'em!"

Then a disquieting thought. Suppose they had changed their plans? Suppose they had decided to go to some other town? Or even get married in Chandler City.

There was no law against that. People got married in their home towns the same as in any other place. Course, when they eloped they usually went some place else. Why, Don Coyote didn't know. People did it, that was all. The thought comforted him.

The miles reeled by. An hour passed. Don Coyote caught a glimpse of a sign: Carson nineteen miles. They overhauled half a dozen cars. Each time they sighted one, Don Coyote rose in his seat, peering ahead eagerly, only to drop back again as they drew closer.

His pulse was racing with the agony of suspense. The perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead. Had they played the wrong hunch? Had Chandler and Gayle been quietly married in Chandler City while they tore off over the country on this wild goose chase?

Then, just as they started up a long grade, Don Coyote caught sight of a big car ahead of them. He knew it instantly, beyond all possibility of error.

"That's it!" he cried triumphantly, standing up in the tonneau. "Catch it, Slats! Give her the gun!"

The car leaped forward, and Don Coyote sat down abruptly. He rose again at once, clinging to the back of the front seat, his heart singing, his tanned face beaming happily.

Chandler's car was less than a quarter of a mile ahead of them, traveling along at a leisurely speed. Though it threw up a heavy cloud of dust, Don Coyote was certain that he could see two

figures in the tonneau and a man at the wheel. The distance between the two cars shortened swiftly, as Slats held the throttle open and raced up the long hill. Two hundred yards, a hundred, fifty, then twenty—

Don Coyote was trembling with suspense. Though still uncertain as to the occupants of the car, due to the great clouds of dust it left behind, he could wait no longer. When they were within fifty feet of the machine ahead, he shouted to Monohan:

"Give him the horn, Slats! Pass him and block the road!"

Obediently Slats blew the horn. Almost before the echo came back from the opposite hillside, Don Coyote knew that he had blundered. The big car ahead speeded up.

Valiantly Slats sought to catch up to it, to pass it. His efforts were in vain. Chandler's car held its own; indeed, it began slowly to draw ahead. Slats blew his horn again, insistently. The machine ahead showed no intention of slowing down.

Don Coyote sighed and sat down. They'd have to wait till they got to Carson now. The big car ahead might beat them in, but not by more than a minute or two. No harm had been done by his false move. He had only delayed matters.

Then he saw something that chilled his heart. Very vaguely through the dust, like some phantom, he saw the man in the rear seat of Chandler's car swing around. Though he heard nothing above the roaring exhaust, he saw a red dagger of flame leap through the clouds of dust.

"The hound!" Don Coyote cried. "He's shootin' at us."

He could distinguish no features through the pall of flying particles, but he knew instinctively that the man was Chandler. Vaguely he realized that Soapy had drawn his gun.

"Let him have it, Soapy!" Lawrence

shouted. Then, as Soapy eagerly trained his gun around the wind shield: "No! No! You can't shoot! You might hit Gayle. Wait! Let him go. We can catch him in Carson. Take it easy, Slats. No use takin' chances."

Soapy lowered his gun reluctantly. "I could pick dat bird off like nuttin'!" he growled. "Cinch! Nuttin' to it!"

"No, you can't do that, Soapy." Don Coyote's anger was dying fast. "You can't blame him for shootin' at us. He prob'ly thinks we're bandits, tryin' to hold him up. He can't see us through the dust, not enough to recognize us."

"Huh! He'd prob'ly shoot all the more if he recognized us," the little man grunted.

"Well, maybe he would. But it's ten to one he don't know who we are. I hardly know him, the dust is flyin' so bad. Let him get ahead, Slats. No use takin' chances o' gettin' shot."

There was a low, hissing sound, as of boiling water poured on hot metal.

Monohan cursed sharply. "Damn him, he's plugged my radiator. We won't be able to go five miles with a dry radiator."

Don Coyote gasped. "What—what was that, Slats?"

"He drilled my radiator. Motor will freeze up without water. We're sunk!"

Still the import of their predicament failed to dawn on Don Coyote. They could get into Carson some way, if they had to walk. And after what had happened, Gayle would never marry—

Then it dawned on him. It came like a crushing blow, overwhelming, stupefying. Gayle did not know who had chased them. She did not know it had been Don Coyote. She could not have recognized him through the dust.

Now the car in which she rode was drawing ahead. Thrilled, perhaps, at what she thought was an encounter with bandits, she was riding on to Carson, unaware of the identity of the man who had sought to stop her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TAKING A BIG CHANCE.

IF Don Coyote was to act, he knew that there was no time to be lost. Chandler's car was rapidly drawing ahead. If it got away, it might beat them in to Carson City by hours. He came to a decision abruptly and barked an order to Soapy:

"Let him have it, Soapy! His tires, if you can! His gas tank! Anything, only stop him!"

The fleeing machine was not nearly a hundred feet away. Don Coyote knew that only an expert marksman could hit a tire at that distance, particularly in view of the speed of their own car and poor visibility. But he felt suddenly confident as Soapy leaned over the side of the automobile and took aim.

He'd seen Soapy shoot before. There was that enemy sniper in the tree at St. Mihiel. Two hundred yards away, he had been, and Soapy had got him with a pistol. It had taken three shots, but—

The little man's revolver barked. "Got one of 'em!" Soapy exclaimed proudly. "See it go flat?"

Don Coyote couldn't see. His eyes were blind with dust. He wondered that any one could see. Wonderful eyes Soapy must have! He'd thought his own were pretty good.

The cars roared up the grade. Soapy shot four more times and flashed Lawrence a triumphant grin.

"Got both rear tires an' de gas tank. I'll save de last shot. If he don't stop, I'll let him have it where it'll do de most good."

"No, no, Soapy! You can't shoot him. You're square with the law now. You got to stay that way."

For a hundred yards or more Chandler's car bumped along on two flat tires. Then it slowed down and came to a halt at the side of the road. Chandler's hands were in the air.

"What's the meaning——" he began angrily, then broke off as he recognized the dust-smeared face of Don Coyote. He stared hard at the younger man for a moment and then said calmly: "I think you'd better explain yourself, Lawrence."

"Don't worry, I will! Plenty!" Don Coyote cried, as he leaped out.

He was not looking at Chandler; he had hardly heard the man's words. His eyes were all for Gayle. He had never seen her so beautiful. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement; her brown eyes were wide and sparkling. There was relief in them, too. For she must have read something in his confident, deliberate manner.

Don Coyote bowed. "Sorry to bother you, ma'am," he said, with a smile, "but I got somethin' to say to Mr. Chandler, and I'm afraid you'd hamper my vocabulary. Would you mind gettin' over in my car? I won't be long. Please?"

It thrilled him to see how she accepted his suggestion without comment, without question.

"See here, Lawrence, this is going too far," Chandler began angrily, as Lawrence started to help the girl from the automobile. "This lady is not going to leave my car."

Chandler put out his hand to stop her and received a sharp blow on the wrist for his pains.

"You keep your shirt on!" Don Coyote growled.

"I have no intention of taking it off!" the other snapped. "But I'll be damned if——"

"You are already! But there ain't no use in tellin' the world about it," Lawrence came back.

Graciously he helped Gayle into the tonneau of Monohan's car and ordered Slats to turn around and drive down the road a hundred yards.

"Get plenty far away," he said. "I don't want to shock this li'l lady if I happen to let loose."

Very calmly he stood in the road, rolling a cigarette, while Monohan swung around and drove down the hill. Then he turned to Chandler, lighted his cigarette, and announced coldly:

"Chandler, we got the goods on you. Ben Burke is out."

Beyond a faint drawing in of the lips, the mining magnate displayed no emotion.

"What's more," Don Coyote went on, "he's sane and he's made a complete confession. An' that ain't all. I been in conference with the sheriff an' the district attorney all morning. There's a warrant out for your arrest on charges"—this very slowly—"on charges of conspiracy, arson, and attempted murder."

Chandler's eyes narrowed. "You're bluffing!"

"Am I?" Don Coyote snapped. "All right. I dare you to come back to town an' face 'em. I dare you!"

Chandler's jaw snapped shut and he made no reply.

Don Coyote took a puff on his cigarette. "You got one chance of keepin' this thing under cover. I happen to know that if you pull out o' here and don't come back, the charges won't be pressed."

"Pull out! You're crazy! I have thousands of dollars invested around Chandler City. Do you think I am going to desert my holdings? Do you think——"

"I ain't thinkin' anything," Don Coyote interrupted coolly. "That's up to you. Your attorneys can dispose of your holdings or they can handle 'em for you. Suit yourself. But if you do come back—it means a trial sure as shootin'."

"The whole story will come out. You'll be disgraced, whether you go to the pen or not. An' I might say that the evidence is pretty strong, when you consider what Burke knows an' a few other men, like Johnson, might be in-

duced to tell. Seems to me you're gettin' off easy, just clearin' out an' nobody the wiser."

Don Coyote knew his man, knew the pride that was his, the pride of race and family and social position—and he knew that Chandler could come to only one decision.

"What about Miss Dorrington?" Chandler demanded at last.

Don Coyote smiled. He could tell from Chandler's tone that he was already beaten, that he was trying to recover one last chip from the wreck of his fortunes.

"Miss Dorrington is goin' to marry me this afternoon," Lawrence answered casually. "You don't reckon she'd have any more to do with a rat like you, do you?"

Chandler stiffened and immediately relaxed. For several moments he stared at Don Coyote, and there came at last into his eyes a light that might almost have been admiration. He laughed bitterly, and slowly shook his head. He spoke quietly, addressing his remark to the immobile back of his chauffeur:

"Lawrence, a man would go to hell and back again to win Gayle Dorrington, wouldn't he?"

There was humility in Don Coyote's voice, humility and understanding, as he answered: "I reckon he would, Mr. Chandler."

Chandler sighed deeply and turned away: "Baxter, get to work on those tires. We've got to make Reno tonight."

That was all. Don Coyote stared down the road. He had won. But, oddly, he felt few of the emotions of the victory. Chandler had been right. Almost any man, even the best of 'em, would go to hell and back again to win Gayle Dorrington—and who could blame 'em?

Don Coyote climbed into the tonneau and took his seat beside Gayle.

"Slats plugged the hole in the radi-

ator." Soapy grinned over his shoulder. "We can make it to the nearest farmhouse an' fill up wit' water an' get back to town. Let's go, Slats!"

Then, very obviously and deliberately, he turned his back on the two in the rear seat. The car moved off down the hill. Don Coyote sought the small hand that rested on the seat beside him. The answered pressure on his own left him inarticulate with happiness. For miles neither spoke—there was so little that needed to be said.

"Chandler has gone for good an' all," Lawrence remarked casually at last. "We got the goods on him. He's been fightin' your dad all along. He wanted —" Don Coyote checked himself. After all, he had won. Why shouldn't he be magnanimous? "He wanted to bust your dad an' get possession of the Buckaroo. It's a rich mine. Millions! I was talkin' to your dad. He hit the ore chamber this afternoon. Millions!"

"Don!" It was almost a cry of anguish.

He looked at her for the first time in miles, smiled gently into her eyes and pressed her hand very hard. "Yeh! S'fact. Honest. Millions!"

There were tears in her eyes now. "Oh, Don Coyote! You dear boy!"

"Me? I didn't do anything."

"You've done everything!"

"No! I ain't done nothin' at all. Just been havin' a good time, playin' hunches an' buttin' into things that wasn't none o' my business, like that feller I been named after. Pickin' up that li'l ridin' gauntlet, for instance."

He reached into his breast pocket and slowly drew forth a small, worn glove. "Know it?" he asked.

"Of course! You took it when you left the mine. I knew all the time."

He nodded, gazing tenderly at the bit of leather in his hand. "You been a right kind li'l ol' glove, you have. They's been times when I cussed you out, li'l glove. They's been times

when I wished I'd never laid eyes on you. They's been times when you've made me think I was all kinds of a fool.

"They's been times when you made me wish that blamed name of Don Coy-

ote had never been pinned on me. They's been times—but aw, what's the use? Next to this li'l lady sittin' here at my side, you're the nicest li'l thing that ever drifted across my trail. You are that, li'l ol' glove. Yes, ma'am."



NO PLACE LIKE HOME

By James E. Hungerford

I'VE sought for thrills in wooded hills,
Beneath the balmy sky;
The rolling sea has lure for me;
Also the mountains high!
Through silver sands in desert lands,
I've found it joy to roam,
But pleasure real is what I feel,
When I get "Home, Sweet Home!"

In arctic snow, where Eskimo
Dwells in his ice igloo,
I've hunted whales, and followed trails—
Adventure to pursue!
In blighting cold, I've sought for gold
From Ketchikan to Nome,
But just the same, those thrills were tame,
To coming Home, Sweet Home!

In tropic lands, through blazing sands,
I've wandered in my quest;
On South Sea isles, where nature smiles,
I've hunted thrills with zest!
From Mexico to Callao;
From Argentine to Rome;
But all their sights were tame delights,
To getting Home, Sweet Home!

Through space I've whirled, and viewed the world,
From lightning-fast airplane;
In submarine, strange sights I've seen,
But now I'm home again!
And here I'll stay, no more to stray—
No matter where you roam,
I'll tell you, Bill—there is no thrill,
Like getting Home, Sweet Home!

A TALK WITH YOU

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers

AUGUST 1, 1927.

*An Advertisement of the Contents of
the Next Issue of This Magazine
Will Be Found at the End of
This Department.*

AUTHORS are fascinating people, human, likable. They have their moments of depression, as well as of joy. They come in to see us occasionally, sometimes just for a chat, sometimes to bring in a story.

The other day, Erle Stanley Gardner, who writes the "Speed" Dash stories for us, breezed in. We discussed Speed, and other stories, and Gardner told us of the way he tests his yarns.

"I get so caught up in the whirl and action of a story," he remarked, "that I don't know what time it is, or anything. I work like a demon! All peped up with enthusiasm, I pound away furiously.

"When it's done, I have a moment of doubt. Is the story really as good as I think it is? I decide to read it critically. I'm going to find out if it's up to the mark. I don't want anything of mine to appear in print unless it's good.

"Well, when I begin to read it, I find it's wonderful. My enthusiasm for the story mounts. Before I know it, the story catches me up in its whirl—and my critical judgment vanishes."

"What do you do then?" we asked.

"I turn the story over to my stenographer. 'Look that over, please,' I say, 'and catch the mistakes in spelling and so on.'

"Well, she reads it, then returns the manuscript to me. If she's caught the mistakes in spelling, I know the story

is not as good as it might be. But if she misses mistakes—doesn't make any corrections at all—I'm delighted! Then that story is really interesting. The action has caught her attention, she's carried along so by the whirl of the story—and that's what I want to do—interest the reader so he'll forget everything but the story."

WE'VE heard of other authors who test their stories in similar ways. One has his work read by his wife, whose judgment of fiction is good, then waits until just before dinnertime. Then he gives the story to his son, a youngster about ten years old. If the boy answers the first call to dinner, the author is not very happy. But if the youngster has to be called twice, or three times, or even more, then the author is jubilant.

One writer we know has all of his stories read by a university professor. Another puts them aside a week, then reads them again.

All of these men know the value of having an outsider's advice and opinion. They all learn how to improve their work by the comments of others. We find them always willing to listen to sincere, disinterested criticisms.

That's why writers read all of the letters from readers we print in this department. Each author glows with pride when he learns that a story of his is liked. For the author writes for you, the purchaser of this publication. He's anxious to know what *you* think of his story.

THE editorial staff of this magazine selects stories for you to read. Like the authors, the editors are keenly interested in what you think about the stories. If you like them, we dig in harder, determined to make our next

issue better. If you don't, we dig in anyway, determined to make you like our next issue.

Now, what do you think about this issue of "our magazine?" Did you miss any misspelled words? Did you have to be called twice or three times to dinner? Honestly, now, what do you think of it?

F. H. B. Broadcasting

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading what others have to say about your good magazine for years, and have been sitting back, just content to "listen in."

Now I will try and broadcast my little piece, for the benefit of the readers and the writers.

I have traveled from coast to coast, and have never missed reading every story in every issue from the first one published. When "we"—the magazine and I—sit down together, it means we're not to be disturbed until I've read from cover to cover.

My favorite writers are Gardner, Standish, Chambers, and Hughes. But I enjoy best of all Cook's stories about Seward of Sacatone. Let's hope for more of them.

I pass all my copies along after reading them, and note that a number of people, to whom I have given magazines, have written letters to the editor.

Wishing you many years of prosperity,
Very cordially yours,

Brooklyn, N. Y. F. H. BOURBEAU.

(Thanks for your letter, and for handing on your copies of this magazine.—ED.)

A Real Necessity

DEAR EDITOR:

As we all know, there are some things that every human being must have. In my opinion, "our magazine" is one of them.

After reading the June 1st issue, I just had to write and express my thanks for such splendid entertainment. I'm going to get the next number—certainly!—for it seems a hummer, and those that follow, too!

Keep up the good work.

A Regular Reader,

VERNE C. ANDERSON.

Jamestown, N. Y.

(Turn to the ad at the end of this department for an idea of what's in our next issue.—ED.)

How It Happened

DEAR EDITOR:

I may not be your oldest reader, but I claim to be one of them. I started reading your magazine when it cost just five cents. It happened this way. I asked for another magazine, at the news stand. But the man who ran the news stand was near-sighted, and picked up another one—yours.

I've been reading it ever since!

Thank you for many years of good reading.

Sincerely yours,

Worcester, Mass.

H. A. REIMAN.

(Thanks for your letter. Now, readers, tell your story of how you happened to start reading this magazine.—ED.)

About Western Stories

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading this ole magazine for over a year now, and sure do enjoy it. All but the Western stories. I think Western stories are out of place in this day and age. Don't you agree?

I'm in favor of two serials, and if one of them has to be a Western, please let the other be a detective tale.

Saugus, Mass.

W. S. KNIGHT.

(That's a question we'd like to dodge answering, if we could. For we like Western stories tremendously—if they're good stories. We're of the opinion that it doesn't matter a great deal where a story takes place—the main thing is that the story should be interesting. However, we're giving our readers an opportunity to answer Mr. Knight's letter. The question is, are Western stories out of place in this day and age? Are you, the readers of this magazine, tired of the sort of Western stories that we print?—ED.)

A Request

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been a constant reader of your magazine for the last two years, and I can truthfully say that I have enjoyed the stories very much. My favorites are Burt L. Standish, Cook, and Chambers. Please print some more stories by Burt L. Standish.

Yours truly,

Philadelphia, Pa.

JOHN MALFARA.

(As you know, there's a yarn by Cook in this issue. Both Standish and Chambers are now working on stories for us.—ED.)

Best of All

DEAR EDITOR:

Just finished reading one of your recent "Talks," so am coming through, as you requested, with my opinion of your magazine.

Your publication cannot be improved upon. I am in favor of your two-serial policy. Being a linotype operator, I'd like to see more stories about the printing business. You have the best authors of them all!

Sincerely yours,

Bohemia, L. I.

E. C. CEJKA.

(Here's a tip for authors! We'll try to get some yarns about printing business.—ED.)

A Westerner Writes

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been "not so good" for a few days and have been reading to beat the band.

I am an Irisher, and like good baseball

stories. Am working on a ranch, so come along with some ranch stories, as well as those about baseball.

Yours truly,
"FRIDAY" EARL HIGGINS.

Chowchilla, Calif.

Wants War Stories

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been reading your magazine on and off for the past thirteen years. For the last two years, I haven't missed a copy. No use trying to tell you what stories I liked best as they're all good.

I do wish you'd print some more World War stories. I am sure you have a number of ex-service men who are readers of your magazine, and like myself they would appreciate stories of action in France.

Yours very truly,
Brooklyn, N. Y. L. MILLWITZ.

(We received a splendid war story that we could not manage to include in the coming issue. It will be scheduled shortly. How about it, ex-service men? Do you want more war stories?—ED.)

On August Fifteenth will appear a brilliant issue of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

The Phantom Peon - - - - - by Nels Leroy Jorgensen

A story of "The Broadway Kid" in Mexico, replete with splendid action.

Slashing Zero - - - - - by Chart Pitt

A grim, stern story of a dog of the Mounted Police in the Far North.

Faith, Hope, and The Good Egg - - - by John Miller Gregory

A horse racing story filled with human interest, and told with an amazing depth of feeling.

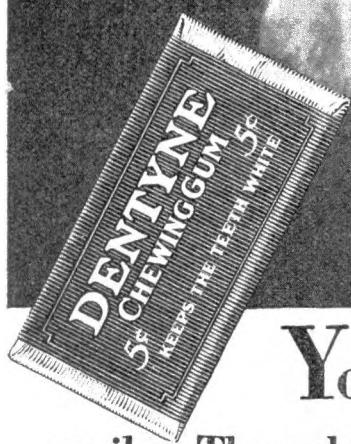
Ribbons of Light - - - - - by Erle Stanley Gardner

"Speed" Dash enters an unusually gripping mystery where time is precious.

Other stories of more than usual worth make the August 15th issue exceptionally interesting.

Good Stories Always
Top-Notch Magazine

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There's something doing all the while in a "CH" book. These books which have never before been published were written for men who love the sweep of the great West, the mysteries of big cities, the conquest of man over his environment.

RONICKY DOONE'S TREASURE	David Manning
FAST MONEY	Eugene A. Clancy
THE GREEN BAG	John Paul Seabrooke
LENNISTER OF BLUE DOME	James Roberts
TWO-GUN GERTA	C. C. Waddell and Carroll John Daly
RAINBOW LANDING	Frank Lillie Pollock
THE PHANTOM ALIBI	Henry Leverage
MARK TURNS WEST	Mary Imlay Taylor
ON THE TRAIL OF FOUR	David Manning
STRAIGHT CROOKS	Howard Fielding
POISONOUS MIST	Gordon MacCreagh
THE LOOTED BONANZA	E. Whitman Chambers
JUST BUCKAROO	Robert Ormond Case
THE PURPLE LIMITED	Henry Leverage
MASQUERADE	William Morton
SPANISH NUGGETS	Emart Kinsburn
THE AWAKENING OF ROMOLA	Anne O'Hagan
MARClA	Anne O'Hagan
COWGIRLS—PLUS	George Gilbert
THE INCA'S RANSOM	Gordon MacCreagh
THE CRIMSON BLADE	Madeleine Sharps Buchanan
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The mouth is the source of many troubles, among them being Pyorrhea—a foe that penalizes 4 out of 5 after 40 and thousands younger.

Discourage This Enemy

Play safe! Have your dentist give your teeth and gums a thorough examination at least twice a year. And start using Forhan's for the Gums today.

This dentifrice is more than a tooth paste. It is health insurance that provides protection against grim Pyorrhea. It contains Forhan's Pyorrhea Liquid, used by dentists everywhere. Forhan's firms the gums. It keeps teeth white and protects them against acids which cause decay.

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Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
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Forhan's for the gums

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We make this promise

Everybody wants a sweet, fresh breath. If you try this new, sparkling Forhan's Antiseptic Refreshant once, you'll never go back to ordinary mouthwashes that only hide bad breath with their tell-tale odors. Forhan's Antiseptic Refreshant is a success. Try it.

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AGENTS: 90 cents an hour to advertise and distribute samples to consumers. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Company, 9260 Monmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS \$300 MONTH. Sell guaranteed silk hose. Must wear 7 months or replaced. New selling plan. We furnish auto silk hose for your own use. Write for samples. Betterkint Textile Co., Silk 335, Greenfield, Ohio.

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INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

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MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

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EARN \$120 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. We secure position for you after completion of 3 months' home-study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunity. Write for Free Booklet, CM-28, Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN, GET FOREST RANGER JOB; \$125-\$200 mo. and home furnished; permanent; hunt, fish, trap. For details write Norton, 249 McMann Bldg., Denver, Colo.

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START YOUR OWN BUSINESS; remunerative, interesting; little capital, learn privilege trading. Paul Kaye, 149 Broadway, N. Y.

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What did you do yesterday? "What's on" for to-morrow? And the next day? How about making "a date" to sell us some of your spare hours, say about three hours a day?

You can earn extra dollars every day

Here's how: Just send us the coupon below with your name and address, so we can send you details of our surprising offer, by which you should earn up to \$2.00 or \$3.00 a day—and, of course, you can easily earn more.

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make money by forwarding new and renewal subscriptions from your neighborhood for Sport Story, Picture Play, Far West Illustrated, and Complete Stories. You've nothing to lose; you're almost sure to win--here's the coupon.

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Please show me how I can profitably sell you my spare hours.

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Set with 3 diamonds, \$22.50; 5 diamonds, \$32.50; 7 diamonds, \$42.50; 9 diamonds, \$52.50; 11 diamonds, \$62.50.

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"He's the only one of the old gang who made good"

THAT'S Bob Thompson, sales manager for Fink & Snyder. They say he makes \$15,000 a year.

"Yet it hasn't been long since he wasn't making more than \$35 a week. I know, because he used to belong to our crowd. There were six of us and there was hardly a night that we didn't bowl or shoot pool or play cards together.

"Lots of times we would sit down and talk about earning more money, but that's all it ever amounted to—talk! Bob was the only one who really did anything.

"I'm through wasting my spare time like this," he said one night. "I'm going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and try to make something of myself before it is too late."

"We didn't see much of Bob after that—he'd always laugh and say he was 'too busy' when we'd ask him to join a party.

"Look at him now. A big man in a big job. Making five times as much as I'll ever make. Oh, what a fool I was not to send in that I. C. S. coupon when he did!"

How much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that you know will bring you advancement and more money? Aren't you tired working for a small salary?

It takes only a moment to mark and mail this salary-raising coupon and find out what the International Correspondence Schools can do for you. Surely it is better to send it in today than to wait a year or two years and then realize how much the delay has cost you. "Do it now!"

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

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L-1203-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X in the list below:

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- Spanish French
- Salesmanship
- Advertising
- Better Letters
- Show Card Lettering
- Stenography and Typing
- English
- Civil Service
- Railway Mail Clerk
- Common School Subjects
- High School Subjects
- Illustrating Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- Electrical Engineering
- Electric Lighting
- Mechanical Engineer
- Mechanical Draftsman
- Machine Shop Practice
- Railroad Positions
- Gas Engine Operating
- Civil Engineer
- Surveying and Mapping
- Metallurgy Mining
- Steam Engineering
- Architect
- Architects' Blueprints
- Contractor and Builder
- Architectural Draftsman
- Concrete Builder
- Structural Engineer
- Chemistry Pharmacy
- Automobile Work
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City.....State.....

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What Use

1. Do tourists have for Sterno?
2. Do mothers have for Sterno?
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4. Do students at college or school have for Sterno?

FORTY such questions to test what you know and try your power to think. Answer them correctly and become better acquainted with this inexpensive "friend-in-need" for a hundred walks of life. Ask your dealer for a contest blank, or write to us for one. Get your friends to help you answer the questions. Win one of the following prizes:

1st prize \$100.00 2nd prize \$50.00
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given for the most complete set of correct answers mailed to us not later than midnight, August 31, 1927. In case of a tie, each tying contestant will receive the full amount of the prize.

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Stove Complete, Combination Extinguisher and Can Opener, Can of Sterno Canned Heat and "The Barnswallow's" Cook Book — all for 25¢

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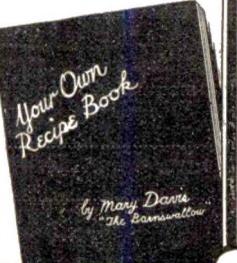
The stove is light and compact; sets up anywhere instantly; folds flat, easy to carry; made of sheet steel.

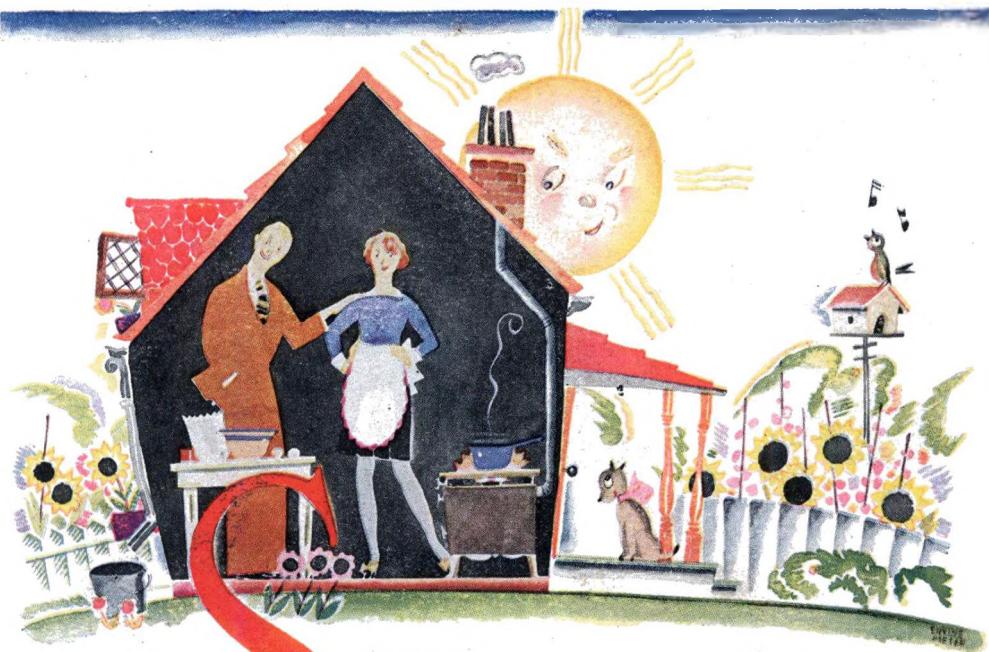
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'course she can! — the finest
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and
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FUDGE CENTER: 1½ cups
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creamy butter; 1 cup rich,
full cream milk; 1 cup corn
syrup; white of one egg.

CARAMEL LAYER: 4 tea-
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cups corn syrup; 3 cups rich,
full cream milk; ¼ teaspoon
salt.

PEANUT LAYER: 3 cups
prime No. 1 Spanish whole
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Melt one pound pure milk
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And the reason Oh Henry! tastes just like
home-made candy, is that it is made on this
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times for the folks who know what's good! —

Oh Henry!



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